From Russia With Love

by TeaseMe2

Summary

Controversy surrounds Bella's decision to play in the Olympic Games in Russia, as a star player for the US Women's Hockey team and an out and proud lesbian. Along her quest for Gold she will meet Rosalie, a Slavic beauty who wants to do her country proud but never expected to meet anyone in Sochi, much less a US player.

Notes

I own nothing but my ideas and words. Everything else belongs to its rightful owner. Enjoy and thanks for reading.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Davai Sochi

The controversy started on a silly gossip website. At first, it was only a few disappointed posts here and there, claiming she was unfit to represent her community, a bunch of angry people spewing hate at her via anonymous comments left on bitter blog posts. Then, it got national coverage amidst alarming reports of beatings inflicted on several members of the Russian LGBT community and people went from resentment to outrage. Politicians from both parties were invited to debate the question on every major news show, wondering if the country should not boycott the Olympics altogether.

When she understood how far it went, Bella decided to speak up publicly- no matter how much she hated it, she wouldn't allow people to speculate and voice their opinions on her behalf. Her PR staff set up meetings with various medias, both newspapers and TV networks to get her feelings on the issue out there, national coverage, with few interventions on her part.

She chose to be truthful, explained her position, how she felt it was unfair to put such a political weight on athletes whose sole focus the past years had been the games. Most of them had dreamed about the day they could compete in front of the whole world since their childhood. She conceded there was undeniable political ties to the Olympics since their creation, but the International Olympics Committee should have chosen another country to host the event, more agreeable to the IOC's principles in the first place then. Not ask athletes to give up their dream, the only goal they had in the past years, barely a few weeks before the games started.

"Maybe then we would not be having this conversation" she said firmly, keeping her voice as steady as her convictions, unwavering in front of the seasoned journalist interviewing her live on TV.

She had been used to the media frenzy for a few years now, ever since she'd been branded America's best female hockey player. It was nothing unusual for her to speak to the press by now, yet they had never been as vicious as they were today. Fuck they were nicer with her when she came out, contrary to her agent's belief...Sure, things had been tense for a while, she received her quota of threats in the mail and insulting letters for a while, but most people had been supportive and really nice to her. She received many letters from struggling teens thanking her or explaining how life was tough for them with their family sometimes, their classmates and how it helped them to see someone famous- who was recognized as a star player by every sports anchor- come out.

She was glad to make such a positive impact on young lives and made a point to answer each and every one of those letters personally. Yes, her agent had told her repeatedly that he could assign someone to do it for her but she liked the idea of helping those teens and hey, if she could give them five minutes of her time to make their day a little bit better, it was actually the least she could do. Besides, she understood very well their struggles, their doubts, the fear some of them lived with on a daily basis. She had been toying with an idea recently, something that came up on her mind every single day and which could help those kids have a better life; she wanted to build a haven where they could get safety, information, support and understanding but wasn't sure how to do it alone so she asked her PR team to set up a meeting with the first USA LGBT organization in the country and lawyers among others. Unfortunately, her training took up most of her time these days and it would be delayed until she came back from Sochi, hopefully with a gold medal to show for it.

"Yes, but surely you understand why people wonder about it? And why the LGBT community would feel betrayed, right?"

"Disappointed? Sure. But betrayed. Frankly, no. I mean, think about it this way...Would you ask the same defection of a straight athlete? No. And if you were lucky enough to get a spot on your national
team for a worldwide event which happens once every four years, would you give it up?"

"I can't say if I would-" started the woman before Bella cut her short, anticipating her answer, she had done it enough to know what came next: hypocrisy. Those people didn't have a clue what it was like, yet they sat and talked on and on about what athletes should do, how they should act, what they should think. She thought it was such utter bullshit, and as usual, they all asked the same fucking questions over and over again.

"Look, I love my sport, I've been passionate about it ever since I was a little kid watching it on TV with my dad and brothers, trying to be one of the boys and playing the game with them on Sundays. I breathe hockey, I live for it...I wake up with it in the morning, I'm still thinking about it all day long with my team, hell I bleed for it regularly on the ice-

"Of course, we all love to watch you score, Bella, nobody is denying your talent out there. But people don't understand how could you go to Russia when the government is persecuting gays. What do you want to answer to them? I understand your coming out was rather well received, I'm told you get dozens of letters every day from every part of the country..."

"They are the reason I am here with you tonight, Leslie, if it had been just a matter of throwing me under the bus I wouldn't have minded much" she replied calmly, smiling at the journalist.

"I care. A lot. I've been surprised with the amount of mail I got from people. Now don't get me wrong, it hasn't been all rainbows and unicorns, some people hate me...And it's fine, even if I wanted to, I couldn't please everyone so you know, whatever. But those kids, teens and families who reached out to me, thanking me, asking me for advice or just to tell me their struggles? Those are the ones I don't want to disappoint, which is why I wanted to speak up. I don't want them to feel betrayed or offended- believe me, that's the last thing I want. Still, I don't think my sexuality has anything to do with my participation in the Olympics. Besides tabloid fodder, of course and maybe giving people something to talk about on their coffee breaks-which is fine by me" she winked to the woman who watched her as she spoke.

"I won't give up on my dream just because I'm a lesbian. I want equality for me and my fellow gays and you can count on me to continue to be vocal about Russia's anti-gays laws, the oppression they suffer from- both physically, vocally and mentally. Just as I did when they passed the bill on gay propaganda." She took a deep breath and settled her growing nerves, waiting for the journalist to strike back with a witty comment.

"Yes, you have tweeted several times on the issue. Don't you think that is precisely why people focus their anger on you-"

"Yeah, probably, 'cause I'm sure as hell not the only gay on the team" Bella winked again, at the camera this time, smiled and reached for the bottled water at her side. She unscrewed the cap and took a gulp of sparkling water before the interview continued.

It went on for a few more minutes, she talked about her sexuality at lengths and how her coming-out impacted her sport, the reactions she got from her teammates- they put a few pictures of their tweets on display, as well as the male hockey players and athletes from other sports or tweets from celebrities. She thanked people for their support once again, gave her predictions regarding the medal she hoped Team USA would bring back home- "Gold of course, Leslie. I want to win that medal, whether I have to battle against the Canadians for it or the Swedes, I'm not leaving Russia without it"- before they let her go.

She was barely out of the studio, walking to her car as she checked her emails on the phone when her older brother called. As much as she wanted to swipe ignore the call, she knew it was pointless
with Edward, he would just keep trying until she picked it up. Today was an important day, with her live interview and she had known all along that he would most definitely reach out during the day. *No point in delaying the inevitable*, she thought as she answered.

"How did it go?"

She chuckled and teased him. Even though he never missed her TV appearances, he always had to ask first.

"Fine. Did you see it?"

"You have to ask, little sister?" Both siblings loved to pester each other and her brother never missed an occasion to nudge her.

"So? What did you think?"

"It was good, Bells. People loved it, I've been monitoring twitter and so far you're trending-"

"Trending Eddie, really?" She couldn't help but laugh at her geek of a brother.

"Shut up, I'm cool. My kids told me so."

"Oh Eddie, wait 'til they grow up and you become the biggest embarrassment of their lives. Listen I have to rush, I'm late for practice. We're still on for dinner tonight?"

"Yes, my minions await your arrival anxiously..."

"OK, I'll be there, you geek. See you tonight, E"

"Be careful on the ice, Bells. I'm serious, the games are in two weeks so don't strain yourself."

"Always am, you know that. I won't. Bye." She loved her brother but he worried too much. Always had, as their mother who couldn't help but still cringe every time a player shoved her daughter against the glass and she injured herself. She stopped counting the time she went home with bruises a long time ago. It came with the territory in her sport and she bruised easily.

As soon as she hung up, she went to practice with her team, not stopping until they were wiped out. Training was rough on her team, with barely a few weeks until their first Olympics game, their coach pushed them harder as the games approached. He yelled at them to be faster, more clever in their plays and to communicate efficiently with each other. Her brother's words came back to her as she trained and yes, maybe she went with a softer touch for once when she barreled into the other players to steal the puck and score a goal, but there was no freaking way she was missing on the games for a fucking injury a few weeks before the opening ceremony.

On that day, she would stand besides her teammates and parade behind the US flag in front of the whole world. It would be her first Olympics but she was ready for that, had been preparing for them a long time and she wasn't going to settle for anything but the gold. Of course, the team wanted to make their country proud, but more than that, they wanted to achieve the goal every player strives to attain in their career. Each team would be in Sochi to get the holy grail for themselves, every member in her team knew that. Yet they firmly believed in their chances as their team was better this year than the last five years, they had the best player in the IHF championship and their star center player was on the verge of making hockey history. Bella had started to play exhibition matches for a NHL team and sports anchors were speculating on her post Olympics draft to the top teams, making her the second woman player to be drafted by an official NHL team ever and the first woman in her position-the only other one had been Canadian legendary goaltender Manon Rhéaume in the 1990's-
if everything went according to plans.

Hence why there was such an inspiration to victory in Team USA's ranks and Bella knew deep down that the media circus would never abate before that. Sports anchor all over the country would continue to speculate on her sexuality in the Russian games, whether the NHL should draft a woman player and use her in official games and on the whole, her performances with her team would be under high scrutiny.

She didn't particularly mind the attention, sure it was annoying as fuck, but she was used to it so really there was nothing new under the sun.

Leaving the ice for the day, the coach had them gather in the rec room where they watched past games of every team they could be up against in Sochi. He drilled them on tactics for the rest of the afternoon before they were free to go home.

She was happy to go see her family that night. They would not come to Russia as the officials had advised them against it, which sucked for her, Bella loved having her relatives watching her games and supporting her but her mom had promised a long distance call before and after her games and it would have to do. They were going to host Olympics nights in her parents house with the whole family gathered around the flat screen to support her.

Her brother greeted her at the door with Seth, her youngest nephew, toddling behind him to hug his aunt before bedtime. The dark-haired little boy threw himself at Bella who bent over to lift him.

"Hi, little man, why are you still up?"

"I waited you, aunt Bee"

"Oh you did? Thank you, sweetie" she grinned at his toothless smile when he nodded at her.

Yawning, he asked in a soft voice, "when are you back with my medal, aunt Bee?" She laughed at the cute kid, ruffling his brown hair and kissing his forehead, "soon, little man, soon".

"Good", Seth replied, closing his eyes as he sleepily laid his head against her shoulder.

Her brother took Seth from her arms, telling her to join his wife in the kitchen while he settled the toddler in his bed. Tanya was humming happily as she cooked for them, looking as beautiful as ever with her venetian blond hair cascading around her back. If there was one thing she and her brother could always count on to agree, it was women. Her brother's wife was the picture of the homemaking beauties of the 1950s with a wild streak to boot. One day she'd be lucky to find someone that beautiful-inside and out, with a fierce heart and witty mind like Edward had, someone she'd want to share her life with. Someday...maybe.

"Hi Bella"

"Hey, where are your other kids? Sold them to the highest bidder?" she asked with a smirk to her statuesque sister-in-law.

She laughed and waved her wooden spoon at Bella, "I wish. They're with your parents, they should be here in thirty minutes or so."

"Oh, OK, need any help?"

"No, I'm almost finished, thanks Bella" she answered as she stirred the sauce pot.

"Alright, I can set the table, then?"
"Yeah, sure, your brother was supposed to do it but Seth wanted to watch the Special Olympics feature the local TV did on you."

"Yeah, they told me it was airing today but I was at practice. Was it any good?"

"You'll have to ask Edward for specifics, but they liked it" Tanya turned back to her and smiled, "I could hear Seth cheering for you all the way from here. He's so excited, sweetie, he talked all about it in school yesterday. He's so proud of you. They all are, you know that, right? No matter what medal you bring back."

Bella smiled gratefully at her and sighed, "yeah I know, still, I don't want to disappoint them."

"And you won't, B" her brother added when he entered the kitchen, "you're gonna do your best, right?" he asked as he hugged her.

"Of course I am."

"Then no matter what happens, we'll be proud of you."

"Thanks, but mark my words brother, I'm coming back with the gold. Can't disappoint my nephew right?" She smiled at her older sibling, bumping her fist with his as he smirked, "that's my sister!"

"Alright you two, set the table before your parents get here, please."

"Yes, ma'am" Edward mock saluted his wife, earning a laugh from both women.

Later that night, after the family had eaten diner, Alice, her 8 year old niece and Jasper, Bella's 12 year old nephew took her aside their family to give her their good fortune token for Sochi.

"Here, so you don't forget about us, when you're in Russia, Aunt B" told her Jasper. Both were so cute, almost solemnly performing the ritual as they each put a star in her hand to add to the lucky charms necklace. Their father had bought it for Bella last Christmas, to make up for a game he would not be able to attend, so it seemed only fitting for the kids' gift to complete her brother's.

"Thanks guys, I have a feeling these babies are gonna get me all the luck I need to win the Games" she winked at the kids and hugged them tight before they went back to the table.

Her parents gave Bella another star,"for all of us, so you know we're with you and we love you, sweetheart." Another teary round of hugs later, she was out the door. She felt her heart clench at the thought that the next time she'd see her family, the games would be over.

The coach wanted them to travel a week before the opening ceremony, to have time to train on the local ice rink and to cut his team off from the media circus. God knew she was grateful for that these days. Last thing she needed right now was to blew off her concentration for a bunch of gossip crazed people hiding behind their keyboards to criticize her and her lifestyle.

The days before they flew to Russia were spent training, packing, reassuring her crazy mom that she had everything she needed,- "yes, mom, I have enough underwear for two weeks"- rehashing game strategy with her father, and in essence getting her head straight in the game while paparazzi were waiting outside her apartment building to shout questions at her and watch her squirm. Fun times indeed. Her intervention had calmed things a bit but those vultures wanted to see her squirm.

As she rode in the taxi to the airport her head kept running over every possible team they'd have to beat, every stat or player move she had memorized to pass the time. She greeted her teammates when she arrived in the airport and together they boarded the plane, a joyful circus of their own. Her fellow
players were excited, chatting with each other or listening to some music on their phones. Bella settled in her window seat, sighed and laid her head back. She closed her eyes, hoping to get some rest on the flight and was almost there...Unfortunately for her, Angela, their goaltender, had another idea in mind and yelled "Davai Sochi, ladies", to which the whole team started chanting "USA, USA, USA". They were progressively joined by fellow Team USA athletes from the ski team, and her dreams of sleep evaporated just as quickly. Hopefully with their hard work, cunning moves and a bit of good luck, their return flight would be just as enthusiastic. She fell asleep with nothing on her brain but dreams of victory and gold, so close she could almost taste it.
Their team was on the way to their hotel after a long flight from home. Bella had finally been able to get some rest after the über enthusiastic members of the US team had stopped cheering. Most of the athletes had boarded the same flight for convenience, with more agents for their security than she had ever seen. Tensions were still running high between the USA and Russia...Sure, the Cold War was over but the relationship between both countries was still frosty at the very least and mistrust arose amidst struggles in neighboring Ukraine. Neither its parliament nor its people had appreciated their president's refusal to sign an association agreement with Europe in favor of Putin's Russia and its gas produced billions- scoring a record financial aid package which only infuriated the Ukrainians citizens. President Yanukovych might have hoped the money would soothe his people but far from that, those who aspired to a pro-European policy in opposition to the still very traditionalist Russia, or those who had simply enough of the corruption in their country and wanted things to change felt slapped in the face. Protests continued and escalated in a loud, shady and complicated background to what was supposed to be a celebration of sport, fair play and ideals. Hence the heavy security, the government had decided to take precautions, strengthening the security team who worked discreetly to ensure the athletes safety. Bella was glad they were here, there was supposed to be a truce between countries during the Olympic Games, but being on Russian soil felt weird to her. Call it American stereotype, too much history or hell, even stupidity on her part but it made her jittery.

Besides, the Olympic Truce was an ancient Greek tradition, revived by the IOC true, but still, there were no guarantee either parties wouldn't use the occasion to make a stand. She definitely did not mind the watchdogs. Some of her fellow US athletes had voiced their discomfort with the agents but she wasn't one to spit on extra security measures. Some of those guys were actually nice, nothing like the James Bond-y agents she had been expecting. They were mindful of her space, polite and could probably shoot their guns from a crazy distance...What's not to like? And that's coming from a lesbian so bear in mind she had absolutely no intention whatsoever to get any of those guys between her sheets. Maybe she'd make a wingman out of hers, just to have some fun...The players who had been in the last Winter Olympics in Vancouver had told her how crazy it could get in the Olympian village. The organization splurged on condoms to keep the athletes clean instead of trying to avoid what could not. The equation as she saw it was fairly simple yet with many possibilities. Handsome man plus sexy female equals lots of sex...Sexy female plus sexy female equals (still) hot, dirty sex...And even if you went with handsome man plus handsome man, the result would still amount to hot, dirty fucking.

Such was the "curse" of athletic, beautiful people thrown together in an adrenaline packed event where you can know your greatest joy one day and your biggest deception the next. Though she felt her sarcastic streak vibrate, it was just basic human nature. People meet, they intertwine, share and feelings arise...whether they be sensual, lustful ones or of the loving kind. Humans need connection, we thrive with it and long for it sometimes, it only makes sense that this need would be heightened by high emotions.
She'd keep her options open during the Olympics but she was definitely not the kind of player who fucks all night long before a big game. She liked focus, clarity and peace before games. She needed to put herself in a little bubble with no phone, no social media or anything like that. She would listen to music, read a book and draw to relax but she tried to stay clear of the TV- only indulging in Netflix to watch an episode or two of series she liked...No binge watching sessions of House Of Cards either before a big game, she knew her limits and Frank Underwood's shenanigans rendered her powerless to stop at two episodes.

Her games would not be as orgasmic as her fellow athletes, too many games for her to screw everything with a pulse and a vagina. Other than her games schedule, there was also the matter of Russia's blatant disrespect and intolerance bordering on pure and simple hate towards gays and the already fueled gossips back home. Last thing she needed was to be caught on camera or by a journalist eavesdropping on her. It would only lead to reports of scandalous behavior, on her part, another hassle she definitely did not need on top of everything else. She wanted to make a good impact on society, show them that being gay- and from the LGBT community in general- was okay. No, they were not sex crazed maniacs who were unable to hold a steady relationship. No, their actions were neither immoral nor shameful. And no, she didn't want to fuck every female she encountered.

For starters she wasn't that desperate, and though Bella was not exactly the poster child for commitment, she didn't fuck a different woman every night. Her schedule was much too crazy for that. Not to mention that she actively tried to keep her sex and love life from the media, which needed a bit of trust to work, drastically reducing the number of her actual conquests. Of course, if you read any online gossip sites or the tabloids, she was supposedly seen left and right with celebrities she had never even met and allegedly leaving a trail of broken hearts in her wake but those rumors never stick.

Most times the claims were so ridiculous she wouldn't even bother address them and her game was so far besting itself seasons after seasons, making her untouchable in the eyes of many hockey fans and yes, many gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders as well.

Her fans were quite vocal about their support in the wake of her coming out and that outweighed any hate mail or death threat in the world. Bella still had trouble getting the concept that she had actual, human beings to call fans. She tried to be active on the social media when she could, tweeting a pic here and there, posting a link to music she liked...She pimped out her relatives' businesses and causes who were dear to her, or just retweeted the funny shit people said about her, she gave a shout out to fans sometimes as well. Today she tweeted a selfie in front of their hotel with the words "Sochi,Krasnodar Krai,Russia.

Can't wait to play for #TeamUSA in #WinterOlympics" before going towards the lobby to join the coach and get her room key.

Like everyone on the skating team, both men and women's hockey team were housed in a compound on the Olympic village, close to the ice rink location, to avoid unnecessary commutes and allow the teams to stay focused on their objectives. The ski teams, Alpine and Nordic alike- including the wild child that was Freestyle- shared an hotel as well, up on the mountains in Krasnaya Polyana, near the Roza Khutor mountains where ski and snowboard events where held.

The team had previously agreed on sleeping arrangements as their roster was composed of twenty one player, divided in ten groups of two and one odd man out. She was the lucky one who had won the coin toss and the single room. Her teammates had tried to bargain with her and offer favors in exchange for the room but Bella did not budge, she would love every minute of silence at night and enjoy the peace too much to trade it for anything else.
Team life was too intense for her sometimes. She got along quite well with most players- they had to if they wanted to win, at least to some extent. They were petty bitches in the team as well of course, though she was good friends with a few dozen of her fellow players- still, she liked the privacy the single room would afford her.

"Swan, get your head off the clouds and your ass in your room" Jacob, their coach, interrupted her daydreams as he shouted from the reception desk. It seemed the man had no other mode than the shouting one, nevertheless she liked his abrasive personality. He gave no bullshit talks, was skilled in tactics and understood when to give them a little leeway- both on and off the rink.

"Yes, coach. Which floor are we on?"

"Second. Room 22 for you, Swan. Listen up, everyone" Jacob tried to get everyone's attention and gathered us around him, "you have two hours of free time. I would advise sleeping, with the jet lag, you'll need all the rest you can get. Those of you who don't need beauty sleep can take a walk but I don't want anyone in the Olympic village or outside of my sight without security with them. Be responsible ladies, no need to flaunt our flag. We meet here in two hours for lunch and I will know what our schedule for training will look like if I can find the goddamn translator we were supposed to get...Never mind, get going and be safe." He turned towards the Team USA officials after dismissing his team, engaging in what seemed to be a battle of will. Jacob had a short fuse and he wouldn't be deterred so easily if he wanted something.

Her room was nice, with a small balcony overlooking a garden in front of the Canadian compound perhaps...she couldn't tell for sure, though she thought she saw a Canadian tracksuit on one of the players who had just entered. No flags for her team, sadly, they had been instructed to lay low by an official email after the two consecutive attacks in Volgograd last December. The morning following the bombings, every athlete received it to advise them on security measures and precautions they could take to be safe while in Russia. Her parents had been afraid for her safety, as were many other families who had a child competing in the Winter Games for their country. They were reassured when the US government announced that they would be provided with FBI agents and private security to ensure their safety at all times. Still, her first Olympics were somewhat tainted right from the beginning. First, it was security concerns, then the overwhelming background of Russia traditionalist views and outrageous anti-gays policy, not to forget the controversy it had sparked for her. It felt weird, she was anxious to play for her team and compete for the gold yet uneasy with the circumstances and the weight people tried to put on her shoulders.

After a quick shower, she called her mother who berated her.

"How come the twitter knows where you are before your mother, sweetheart? Your brother just called me to tell me something weird about you tending on it-"

"Trending, Mom, it's when people talk about you. I'm sorry, I didn't think. We arrived thirty minutes ago-"

"How was your flight, baby? Did you sleep?" Her mom, Esme, ever the worrier, just had to cut in and ask.

"Yeah, two hours maybe? I have another hour and a half before we have lunch."

"Alright, I won't bother you much then sweetheart. Be safe, baby, please be careful out there."

"It's Russia, Mom, not a war zone, besides we have plenty of security, you know that" she answered lightly despite her reservations. No need to fuel her mother's anxiety any more with her own.
"I'm your mother, darling. I will always worry about my babies, it can't be helped. Carlisle said to tell you he loves you. Oh and you need to work on your Howitzers, whatever that means."

"He's back in coach mode huh?" She laughed. Her father had a tendency to think he was still coaching his little girl. He would actually debrief most of her games with her afterward, by phone if he had to, never missing an opportunity to tell his favorite player what she could improve in her game. She loved him for it, even if some of her teammates sometimes teased her with it, "tell him I will and I love you both, Mom. Don't worry too much and we'll talk sometimes tomorrow, OK? I'll try to call after practice, whenever that is."

"Perfect. We love you Isabella, be safe."

"Yes, me too. Bye, Mom." She retrieved her headphones from the bedside table to put some music on her phone. She thought briefly about her sightseeing plans but those would have to wait, with the jet lag hitting her again, she was in no mood for a grand tour. Bella crawled under the sheets and set her Keaton Henson play list on to lure herself to sleep. His songs always soothed her; his music seemed almost dreamlike on some notes, haunting, soft and childish at the same time. She put both albums on repeat and set her alarm before closing her eyes, slowly lulled to sleep.

After a brief struggle to wake the fuck up, Bella met with her team barely on time. They ate lunch in the compound's cafeteria. Their coach's choice of typical meal for his team consisted of steamed rice with chicken and beans. Not her favorite, but good enough to sustain her body during competition, she'd give him that. Lunch was timed- as was her whole life these days, it came with the territory for competitive athletes regardless what sport they played. They had thirty minutes to eat before grabbing their gear in their respective rooms and heading to the bus waiting for them -it damn sure beat walking to the ice rink with a heavy bag like she did back in high school. The damn thing weighed a ton with her helmet, gloves, pads, custom skates, stick and team jersey. And yes, she said jersey and not sweater, no matter how offensive it could be to some purists. The feud opposing ancients to moderns was alive and well in hockey. She had personally witnessed countless fights involving fans, anonymous or people she knew arguing for hours on the terminology debate sweater versus jersey. The traditional lingo was fervently praised by some- a ritual of sorts, something that was not to be questioned- the word was firmly ingrained in them. Players still proudly called it by the same name is had first been dubbed- historically, hockey was played outdoors and players would sweat in their warm sweaters, hence the name- as if to honor the ancient garment worn originally. There was the idea that a tradition passed down from generation was alive to this day, perpetuating the glory of their sport. Most of those ardent fans typically ended their rant by declaring it was blasphemy to do otherwise, period. Jerseys were to be left to basketball, baseball and the likes; the marketers and basically the Americans.

If at all possible, one should always frown condescendingly at whoever dared to utter such sacrilegious word. Ridiculous, right? It went a bit far sometimes, but sports make people irrational every now and then. It gets their adrenaline rushing when their team score a goal, their heart pumps faster and they feel happy through proxy. Despite the risk of offending the Canucks and traditionalists alike, she would continue to call hers a jersey.

Their coach had been able to secure the last training spot of the day, right after the figure skaters from whatever country ended their practice. On the menu was basic training, a bit of skating around to familiarize themselves with the 15 feet longer rink than the barns they were used to back home, in compliance with the international regulation. They would also shoot some goals and divide their team in two to play a quick game. Nothing but a regular day for Bella. In addition to every one of her regular team practice, she'd tack one hour of solo shoots on the ice after the team left, which she credited for her sniper talent. She had no secret weapon but strength, hard work, bravery along with a fierce competitiveness coupled to imagination. And yes, maybe she'd plead guilty on the cocky
she'd dialed it down but knew perfectly well how good she was, and her confidence shone in her game. She put some of the more creative moves out there and got more attention each day. Hockey specialists did not hesitate to compare her stats to her male counterparts anymore which thrilled her father.

The team regrouped in The Room after practice, dressing before the coach explained they would debrief practice, game tactics and what they knew so far about their opponents back in the US compound. Jacob always got paranoid as the competition approached and he wouldn't let anyone non essential to their staff get access to any of their team briefings. They jokingly mocked him for it, because there's only so much originality one can input to hockey tactics but it served them well so far...and to his credit, the man did have some unheard before strategy sometimes.

Slightly frustrated to be heading back with no time to spare for her extra training, Bella had talked to him and asked that he set up something for her with the organization to allow her to come back later that night. The man was only too happy to oblige, no coach in their right mind had ever forbidden more training for their athletes and Jacob Black was no exception. He was pleased to see the length she would go to achieve her goals and her commitment to help the whole team succeed.

They were going towards their room when someone bumped into her. Startled by the impact with a foreign body, Bella could barely make out a shape underneath a red hoodie adorned with the Russian flag. The person, probably expecting to hit the ground after their collision, let out a girlish squeak as her hood fell down her back. She was beautiful; one of those women who made every head turn with her full lips, button nose and deep blue eyes. Those baby blues could most likely get her anything, she thought as she gazed at the alluring woman Fate decided to dangle, so cruelly, in front of her face. Bella's quick reflex helped the slender woman regain her footing as her hands captured her arms, pulling her in close to steady the Slavic picture of perfection. Though she couldn't see past all those winter layers what she saw was enough to convince Bella that luscious curves got along just fine on that lithe body.

"Sorry, didn't see you. You OK?" Shaking off her horny thoughts, apologized to the other woman who was now watching her, a deep frown marring her face. She tried again after a minute of silence when the expression on the Russian's face turned to one of anger. Her blazing eyes glared Bella down. There was a hint of curiosity laced with contempt and indignation in there, perhaps a touch of aggressiveness as well as an unspeakable heaviness radiating from the woman.

Intrigued as fuck, Bella tried to recollect the few words she had learned in Russian for the occasion. "Pri`vet, I'm Bella" she said, pointing towards herself, "I'm sorry...huh...izvi`nite?" Clearly, she was not that impressive in the language if the blank stare she earned with her effort was any indication...

"I'm pretty fucking sure you don't have a clue what I'm trying to say, right?" She sighed at her own ignorant ass. She had tried to learn a bit of Russian before Sochi. In her defense though, the language was so freaking difficult to grasp, with a whole different alphabet and unfamiliar sounds to pronounce. Unfortunately, she didn't have enough time to delve deeper into it, hockey took precedence in every aspect of her life, that was the cost she paid- gladly- for her spot in Team USA's roster.

That did not leave much time for any other hobby, hence the piss poor attempt she had just made. The woman looked at her curiously and grunted, before she sent her a deadly glare assorted with a quick string of Russian words Bella could not understand and went on her way.

Well okay, then. Apparently Russia was still not their number one fan...
Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback...Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
B’lyad'!

Chapter Notes

Enjoy & thanks for reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She was going to let it go, really she was. Bella figured she'd be the adult there and let the ice princess go on her merry way, but at the last moment, she decided otherwise.

"Wouldn't have killed you to answer me, Princess," she shouted to the Russian's retreating back. There. Childish, true, but satisfying nonetheless. And come on, she acted as if she couldn't be bothered to be nice when really, it was her own damn fault they collided in the first place. If she had looked where she was going, then maybe she wouldn't have to talk to Bella, who had just been too well brought up by her parents not to be polite.

Yeah, OK, so maybe the fact that the blond was easy on the eyes hadn't hurt. Still, she had apologized nicely because that was the thing to do. That was the thing civilized, normal people did. But hey, one could dream...Maybe a death glare and a grunt was Russian code for "apology accepted".

Angela, who had jogged back to her side, teased her, "well well well...Look at you, Swan, making friends already?"

Both of them had been friends since high school, attending the same dreary place in bumfuck, USA. They had trained together for years and Bella was glad to have her there. While she held no doubts about her abilities as a player, she relied heavily on her friend on the ice. Every player did; a hockey team is only as good as their goaltender, and she knew that old NHL saying to be true. She could score all the goals in the world, if Angela did not back that up with solid saves, her efforts would be in vain, and their team nowhere near that good.

They had shared a lot of firsts together- among which their junior days, championship titles and of course, making the National Team; wearing their country's colors on their jersey for the very first time. All those had been glorious, humbling, rewarding and incredible adventures they had been fortunate enough to be a part of; and figured prominently in both player's top five life experiences. Yet none of those could ever compare to their first Olympics. They had worked so freaking hard for it, and were glad to be able to share it with each other once more. If she hadn't won that coin toss, they would probably be rooming together; though as things stood, Angela had gotten lucky enough to agree with Kate, their best left wing defense player, upon housing arrangements.

"Yeah, yeah, mock me...Not everyone has a significant other, some of us actually have to work for it" she berated Angela.

"Ah, but I do have to work for it! Do you know how many goddamn pole dancing lessons I took last year just to give my man a freaking show and a lap dance?"

Bella could not help her laughter, "I do remember actually, and I'd say a dozen off the top of my head?"
"Exactly. If that's not love-

"Sure, if love is a cheap whore in a dingy bar on the Las Vegas strip," she cut her off.

The whole thing was hilarious. Angela's boyfriend, Ben, had declared after a long night of drinking, at Bella's house, with a few friends; that he'd never had a lap dance even though it was on his bucket list. Long story cut short, her friend had drunkenly promised him his wet dream, and they ended up shagging in her guest room, while she cleaned up the mess and had a last drink with an ex. Problem was, the next morning, poor Angela had found out her man could be extremely attentive while wasted and very much lucid while hungover.

Decided to own up to her bragging about giving him everything he'd ever dreamed of- her words, however slurred- she had taken the lessons to give him a killer routine for his birthday. He hadn't seen it coming, but Ben was still in starry-eyed wonder the next day, she could attest to that.

"Shucks...Stop spoiling my fun. What did you do? Can't you try to be nicer when you meet people?" Angela asked in an exasperated tone.

"Well fuck, don't hold back huh? I didn't do anything. The Russian bumped into me, I apologized, she was rude. End of story-"

"Oh come on, Swan, can't you see I'm living vicariously through you? I need some sparks, a little something to whet my appetite...Was she hot? Did she find you hot? What did you say to her?" Angela grabbed her arm and dragged her along as she enthusiastically questioned her.

"First of all, she's Russian. And she was OK," Bella did not want to throw the bubbly goalie a bone. Angela was her friend, one of the best she had in fact, but the woman was a terrible gossip. She couldn't help it, things just slipped out of her mouth as if she had no control over it. Come to think of it, she probably lacked a regular brain-to-mouth filter, sometimes babbling endlessly without realizing what she revealed- unlike Lauren, a bitter, aging player on their team who was plainly vicious and would literally do anything to outshine people, on and off the ice. The woman was a bitch, there was no other word for it. She took a particular pleasure in demeaning others, which Bella thought said a lot about her own self confidence. She had to know that she was a lesser player- barely a few steps beyond average these days- than some of their roster's girls, most of them couldn't even comprehend why Coach Black would even bother putting her on the team at all. Rumor had her alternatively fucking a Team USA executive, an IOC member or the head of their PR staff.

Bella didn't particularly care, that was their private life. But if it impacted her team, then that was another matter altogether. Their team was very competitive, mostly due to their nation's international rank in hockey and the love people had for it. There was no shortage of players to choose from for the Olympics roster, so every spot had been fought for, well maybe most of them...

"Yeah, true, but she looked pretty damn fine to me. And I only got a glimpse. Wouldn't that be romantic? You could get back from Sochi with a gold medal and a wife. Not bad for two weeks, huh?" Angela eagerly interrupted her train of thoughts, making her chuckle at her friend's never ending excitement.

That was one of the reasons she loved her; she could get on with anything, see the positive in most things. Her teammate was a vibrant woman, she brightened everything she touched, and was friendly with everyone...hell, the woman probably never had an enemy in her whole damn life, while Bella could come off as more feisty, opinionated, to put things mildly. She had a sarcastic streak a mile wide and a slight temper that could not be helped any more than her friend's lively, babbling ways.

"Right, absolutely...And what, live happily every after with my Russian mail ordered bride? Not to
burst your bubble Angie, but for starters, I'm practically sure she's not gay. And again, she's Russian. How cliche would that be? I can already see the headlines. *Shockingly treacherous love affair in Winter Games,* or something along those lines...So yeah, I'll pass."

"You're such a fucking downer. OK, so maybe I was too enthusiast, but-"

"You think?"

"As I was saying," she started again, with a bite, "maybe I went a bit overboard, but think about it. Don't you want to settle down, B?"

"With the woman I know nothing about and had about 2 whole minutes of actual human interaction with? Are you out of your goddamn mind?" Bella stopped walking in front of their compound to gape at her friend while their security detail warily observed them.

"Quit being so fucking dramatic, Swan. I meant in general. In a keep your options open kinda way, not in a get her back kicking and screaming; drag the woman by her hair to throw her over your shoulders, and lock her in your cave for a shotgun wedding, Jesus." Angela smiled at her, with an exasperated look on her face and a wagging finger.

"Thank fuck for that. Why didn't you say so in the first place? I figured too much happiness had finally killed your common sense," she replied as they entered the compound; agents still on their tails as most of their teammates had already gone into their room to put their gear away.

"Ugh, you-" Angela's phone rung, interrupting their friendly little squabble. She took out her phone to see her fiancee's name flash and turned towards her. "It's Ben, I have to take it before debriefing. Meet you here in ten?"

"Sure, tell him I said hi."

Literally saved by the bell, Bella went upstairs to her room. She took a quick shower, dressed in jeans, a white tank top and her warm Team USA sweater- no debate on that term, it was their official, Ralph Lauren designed uniform. Though she had mixed feelings about it at first, she had to admit that the sweater was warm and comfy. And there was something kind of cool about having an actual fashion designer tailor their outfits, or at least most of their fellow American athletes thought so, her included.

Obviously, there was the matter of the design itself, which many had deemed ridiculous and much too conspicuous. One thing was for certain however, no one could mistake them for any other country delegation but the blind. White stars dotted the entire thing; the rear was more plain than its front- in dark blue color with *USA* written in big, bold red letters circled in white and stars sprinkled all over it. The other side was another story entirely...At first, she had thought it might be her, that she was just not fashionable enough to appreciate such a style. But no, the outfits had been ridiculed quite a bit all over the country.

With their patchwork of red, white and blue, its strangely shaped stars and red pocket lining, not to mention anything about the blue *Sochi* written on it; the design made for a flashy garment. The right side breast pocket emblazoned with their flag above the Olympics rings didn't help and neither did the year, 2014, sewn underneath it. Overall, there was a lot of criticism around them, though some people did find them fantastic. She figured a sweater was a sweater, no matter what color or shape it was and the only thing she really wanted out of it was warmth. Obviously, she was thankful they weren't neon green or something; still, it mattered very little in her opinion.

The team met for debrief a little while later. Coach Black drilled them for two hours, highlighting
their opponents strengths and weak points, with great accuracy. The man had a good eye for the game and could spot a play from a mile away. Due to their second place in the IHF World Ranking, Team USA received an automatic berth into the Games. Although that was a relief, it also meant that their first games in the Olympics would have lower stakes; and players sometimes let that cloud their judgment. Either they could forget to take their first game, and each one following, seriously and lose to a lesser team; or they could do well in their first game but be too cocky and crack under the higher pressure in the next ones.

There was a million other scenarios that Bella could run through her head, and their coach could input whatever tactics to their plays; it wouldn't matter if they were not strong, maybe even much so mentally, when the day came. There was no exact science to sports, and Olympics were a special brand of competition. There were favorites, sure, but an outsider could surprise anyone in such a rare, international event. Some of those players would not compete in the next one, whether it be because of their age or the injury that hadn't happened yet. Everyone knew that, there was this overwhelming sense of a one-shot opportunity in the Games, the chance of a lifetime to grab a medal and make history. And Bella knew quite well that no one is as dangerous as someone with nothing to lose. Regardless, she listened to her coach attentively and participated actively to their debrief.

Finally dismissed by their coach afterward, she went back to her room, booted up her computer and tried to launch Skype. Operative word being tried. The connection was pretty bad, but it would have to do. She was hoping to speak to her younger brother, who couldn't make it for their last family dinner. Emmett was studying to be a lawyer at Harvard, and he could not take any time off in his busy year to take a trip home. Bella understood, he had his priorities, much like she did and after all, her brother was achieving his life long dream as well. She could remember when they were young, Edward and her would fight to play pretend and be a criminal or a cop, while the youngest of their family would want to argue their innocence and set them free. He had been adamant he would be a lawyer when he grew up, a call to action TV shows had probably raised.

Their brother was a weird child, a perfect mesh of their parents personalities; he could be extremely rambunctious, astute in his observation of the world that surrounded them- a trait all three of them had picked up from their father- although their brother was the one with the most empathy. Edward was a jerk, she could be a bitch too, but Emmett? Never hurt a fly in his entire goddamn life. Edward was easy going, she had a feisty temper and Emmett a gentle soul.

The most funny and awkward thing had been during his teenage years. He had a spur of growth and suddenly caught up to Edward's height; taller than her 5ft9 at that time, in less than a year. He had buffed up too, thanks to their mother insisting they all take self defense lesson. Both boys had hit the gym more than ever after that, sweating away the testosterone that wracked havoc on their mind and body alike.

She wasn't oblivious, Bella knew they-or at least Edward; as their younger brother mainly followed in his elder sibling's steps- had realized women liked men with muscles. Well, most women that is. Her? She had waited a bit for that magical boy. The one she would want to make "kissy faces” with as a child; only to grow up and lust after said young man. He, so thoroughly advertized to her by Disney, romantic comedies and silly books since her childhood, seemed to elude her. Oh, she had plenty of friends in the male gender category, but none whatsoever to entice her.

Bella listened to her friends talk about boys like the most precious thing on Earth. They wanted to kiss them, hold their hands, pass notes with them during class, and all the stuff little girls can dreamily imagine at a certain age. But none of those things held any appeal to her. Bella would cringe in disgust every time she'd think about one of those gross, disgusting, lizard chasing little boys planting one on her. Back then, the kid she was figured it just wasn't her thing; that maybe she'd end
up as a nun or something. She vowed never to let any boy touch her lips, her hand or get near her in any other capacity than as friends.

Her revelation came in the form of Sue Clearwater, a petite brunette she went to school with. That girl, she was the one who made Bella understood why people talked about butterflies in your stomach, tied tongues and dumbstruck expressions. At ten years old, she thought the brunette with the cute pigtails and pink bows was everything she could ever want. No need for a knight when she had a princess. Of course she tried to kiss her, after her brother had told her she needed to take the initiative with the enchanting little lady. He had caught her doodling their names in her notebook, one time at recess, as she gazed at the object of her affection from afar. He had teased her endlessly, but promised he wouldn't say anything to either their parents nor their older brother- only too happy that she had confessed to him, the baby of the family, first. Bella got a broken nose, courtesy of Sue, and a wounded pride.

The next day, in a show of bravery to distract the gossip from his older sister, Emmett had kissed Sue's twin brother, Sam. Turns out her little brother had liked it just as much as her heartbreaker's twin. And while she had nothing but a sloppy kiss, bruises on her face and a slight, permanent deviation on her nose to show for her life changing revelation, Emmett had met his soul mate. Go figure.

Both boys had been together for such a long time, she had trouble remembering a time before that. They shared an apartment near the Harvard campus where Sam had followed Emmett, to study criminal science, in the hope of becoming a cop. As they had been a steady couple for so many years, their parents easily approved their move together and found them a great place to start their life away from home.

She logged into Skype, put her sound on and checked to see if she had any emails while it booted. She was interrupted by a call popping on her screen, with her brother's better half as an avatar. Sitting with her legs crossed on her bed and the laptop across her knees, Bella accepted the call.

"Hi, Bells" Sam waved at her from his couch, in much the same position as she was, his smiling face brightening her day.

"Hey you, how's life in the good ole US of A today?"

Sam laughed, "not that grand I'm afraid. We had a shitty weather all day long and I'm so fucking tired it's not even funny anymore. How are you? Did you see the ice rink yet?"

"Oh, poor thing, we all know how much you love the rain," she replied to her future brother-in-law. "I'm good, yes I've seen it, it's like any barn back home but longer. Still freezing cold and still hurts like a bitch when you fall though. And if you're so tired, I'm sure a Doctor would advise you to cut back on your extracurricular activities with my brother, cut him off or something," she smirked at the dark-skinned Native American young man her brother loved so much.

"Ah ah, smart ass-" he was cut off by Emmett yelling, "I heard that. And fuck you, Bella, don't give him any idea." The voice got progressively louder as her brother came into the frame to throw his arms around Sam from behind he couch. He kissed his boyfriend's head and greeted his sister, "hi B, how's sochi?"

"Well hello to you too, brother mine. One might have thought you'd call your only sister earlier-"

"You didn't call? You idiot," Sam hurriedly said, "I told him to call you," as he whacked her goof of a brother in the back of his head, "that's rude, even for you, Em."
"But, but...I wanted to, I swear I meant to call you Bells, I just forgot," he whined, making puppy
dog eyes at his lover.

"It's cool, bro, really I was just teasing. I know you're busy so-

"I'm gonna watch all your games though, B, scouts honor." The idiot looked at her through the
camera and held three fingers up, straight in front of him, taking the most earnest expression he could
muster.

"You've never been a scout, Emmett, but I appreciate the support," she winked at her younger
brother. Sam turned to his lover with a glazed, lustful look in his eyes, "but you could be..Can't we
buy those sexy uniforms online?"

"Anything for you, baby," he replied in a sultry voice, smirking at his boyfriend.

"And that's my cue. I'll talk to you guys later. Have fun," she chuckled at the men on her screen,
deep in their love bubble or something similarly hazy; she was nothing but noise to their background.
They snapped out of it long enough to say goodbye and tell her to be careful, along with a request to
call them whenever she could.

Grabbing her gear, Bella headed downstairs to find an agent to accompany her to the ice rink,
notifying Coach Black by text in case he came to check on them, later that evening. Aro, her
assigned security detail for the night drove them in an unmarked black SUV, so typically FBI she
could have sworn they were back home. He lead her safely towards the dressing room, his eyes
sweeping the perimeter before giving her the all clear.

She put her skates on her feet, not bothering to change her jeans or put on her official outfit- with the
exception of her jersey and gloves. When she came out of the room with her stick and puck, the
agent sat on a bench, in front of the door leading to the ice, playing with his phone. He nodded at her
as she went in.

She entered through the double doors, ready to work on her killer aim when she heard music,
followed by what sounded awfully like a crash. As she looked around to find the source of the noise,
she heard a voice she recognized; screaming among other words she couldn't distinguish, "b'lyad!"

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback...Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have
to say.
She approached and was greeted by a glorious sight, confirming her suspicions. The bitchy Russian beauty was right in front of her, flat on her ass, in the middle of the ice rink - the same ice rink her coach had supposedly cleared for her. Slinking down the side towards the bench, not making her presence known just yet; she watched the blond swear again and hit her forehead in a show of utter frustration. Bella figured the athlete had been dispatched by the organization to train here, and they must have somehow fucked up their training slots, mixing them together or double booking them.

'So, she was a figure skater huh,' she thought, 'should have known.'

The woman glided to the far left, getting up after what looked like a minor slip despite the noise. She leaped into the air to make what looked like three successive jumps to Bella's profane eyes. There was a weird moment where she tapped her toe on the ice, shocking the blade on her skates to the ice, in a very strange take-off.

Bella thought it was kind of awesome, in spite of her initial opinion of the sport. The movement was very graceful, the spiteful little Russian looked literally as if she was leaping from the ice to the air, with a smile on her red painted lips. Her eyes seemed to be scanning the area to ensure her safety once she landed; her concentration reflected on her face, but there was something else there. Perhaps an inherent softness to the woman, a little something that told her audience she was an amazon; soft yet strong, brutal yet gentle, a warrior her performance was fast and quite impressive, she'd have to admit that.

She had never been one to marvel at figure skating before, it fell into what she recognized as a girly sport. A true tomboy at heart, she wouldn't have liked it a bit, as a little girl, if her parents had thrown her into figure skating - like so many of her friends in preschool. Sure, it was graceful, nice to watch and one could not deny the competitive aspect of the discipline; yet to her, it had always embodied what she would never do or be, to her mother's dismay. Bella would never be a damsel on distress, she just didn't have it in her to be a soft, fragile little female. And although her Mom would have rather put her daughter in a tutu to dance on the ice than have her be one of the boys; the little girl was undeterred, she would be a warrior on the ice, sweaty and bloody in the span of an hour, not a charming, delicate little flower, the picture of grace and womanly wiles.

Of course, since then, she had realized one could be many things and had evolved into her own kind of woman. Back in the days of her childhood, the world was simple, seen through the prism of her innocence, black and white; one could either be this or that, not a complex blend of gray areas, shady spaces where contradiction was a common denominator. That was what growing up did to you, she supposed.

The Russian did look good out there, she would gladly admit that. Her body was squeezed in a tight little outfit, showcasing her limber figure for everyone to see. That was another point she would never have been able to comply with, those damn things looked too damn tight. She'd wear her
jersey any day over that.

The blond was doing some kind of tricks with her feet, but she had no knowledge sufficient enough enabling her to identify them. It looked like a dance step, light and sensual as she threw her arms gracefully from side to side, curling her fingers like an enticing Mata Hari, charming but lethal to her audience. The music was epic, leading crescendo into her delicate battle as she skated around the rink.

Wow, she thought, *now that is a great form of entertainment.* Slightly creepy, sure, albeit in a lurking pervert kind of way, maybe...But Bella wasn't complaining, and she had not moved a muscle, trying to blend to the background as she witnessed the incredible performance the Russian put on for her eyes only. Jesus, she needed to get in touch with her hormones and tell them to calm the fuck down. She could feel herself getting hornier as she was treated to a first class view of the Slavic vision's glorious ass. And it was glorious, no other way to put it. She had one of those perfectly curved behind with just the right amount of curves and muscles, bouncy yet firm. No one could expect her not to look at the damn thing, she wasn't a deviant but was only human. And very much attracted to the rival country's athlete. There, she said it. It didn't matter much, she had no intention to act on it, other than enjoying the delightful show a little while longer before alerting the woman to her presence.

She had to think about what mattered, and did need all the training she could get. Besides, there was no point in tempting the devil with beautiful, and apparently quite skilled, little temptresses she would never get to know. Her lust rooted her feet to the ground a few more minutes, letting her bask in the glorious body, along with the expressions on the Russian's features as she twisted her body in a series of jumps, twirls, and steps—each one more alluring than the other.

Fingering the helm of her jersey, she let herself be ensnared a little longer by the woman who attempted to execute another series of complicated jumps. To Bella's untrained eyes, it looked perfect, but on the third one, she lost her equilibrium and dropped in the middle of her figure. Her body hit the ice, the crash resonating all around them as she screamed faintly, not foreseeing her mistake until it happened.

Bella let out a small cry of surprise, it seemed to be going smoothly until the Russian girl twisted a bit too much. The fall was just as violent as some of those the hockey player had experienced along the years out there; she had fallen her fair share on the ice, everyone did, and practice does make perfect. There was no trial without errors, both sayings were particularly true regarding sport. Hers, just as figure skating, involved frozen water; most commonly known as ice, which hurts. A lot, especially when one's body connected forcefully with it.

However, the other athlete didn't get up; did not even move in fact, prompting Bella to action. She took off her skates guards and jumped onto the barn, running on the ice to join the blond, kneeling before her unmoving frame. She assessed her body quickly, looking for any visible injury. There was no trace of blood anywhere, either on the Russian or on the ice, and the spill might have been more impressive to watch than it actually felt. That was not that uncommon with their sports; yet Bella had this irrepressible upsurge of concern for the Russian, gnawing at her guts.

"Hey, wake up. Come on," she shook the other, trying to get her to regain consciousness.

She checked her pulse, suddenly afraid she'd have a dead Russian on her hands. She most definitely did not need that kind of incident or the unwanted attraction it would bring her. Still, even if the woman had been a bitch to her, she was not the kind of person who left another human being on the side of the road while she continued on her way. Not even her sarcastic ass was that cruel. The Slavic woman's pulse was perfectly steady, confirming her first impression. Hopefully, she wouldn't
have a too long spiel and avoid a word Bella knew only too well, the dreaded *concussion* which came with it.

She had vomited countless times after a fall, their helmets did protect them, but could only do so much when opposing teams were battling with each other in impressive shows of strength and speed. Accidents were bound to happen, humans hadn't been designed to skate on ice, it was just a fancy of theirs, a silly little hobby turned international competition which came with its fair share of controlled risk. She laid the Russian's head on her knees after shaking her once more without eliciting any coherent response from the athlete, not even a fluttering, nothing.

Close to a minute later, perhaps two as adrenaline made time hard to appreciate, she figured she should bring the injured woman out of the ice. That wasn't normal, Bella thought, and she should have woken up by now. Determining the woman couldn't weigh all that much- what with the whole leaping in the air thing, she gathered the figure skater in her arms. She went with a traditional lift, putting her hands under her arms and knees to help her support the Russian's body.

Struggling a bit under her weight, she got up and waddled off the ice. She laid the woman on the bench seats, trying to shake her again. Never getting an answer, she screamed for Aro, surmising he wouldn't have left his vigil near the door.

The man did not disappoint and immediately rushed in, looking alarmed as his eyes checked the perimeter- only to find her hovering over the Russian's body.

"Shit, Ms Swan. What did you do?" He gawked at her, springing into action at her side.

"I didn't do anything. For fuck's sake, what is it with you people?" She retorted to the stunned agent, her cheeks turning a deep shade of red while the anger over her Aro's accusation washed over her.

"Of course, of course...It was an accident, I suppose? Don't worry," he said quickly as he checked the unconscious woman's pulse for himself. "We'll cover it. No problem. OK, here is how we're going to proceed. You're gonna go back to your room, act conspicuous and stay in there until-

"What the fuck, Aro? I didn't do anything. I was watching her, she tried to jump and fell. On. Her. Own. I wasn't even on the ice when she fell. I did bring her back here. She's been unconscious for a minutes or two maybe," she cut him off, outraged by his insinuations.

She was rough sometimes, and a bitch for sure, but she wasn't a coward nor was she a murderer or whatever the fuck went through her detail's mind as he saw her above the unconscious woman.

"Ah, of course Miss Swan, I never meant-" Aro started, embarrassed by his assumptions.

Somehow, she insulted by his quickly drawn conclusions; though she had to concede to the man that her position could have looked ambiguous to an outside perspective.

"Whatever. We need to help her, call the Russian 9-1-1 or something. Is there someone we can reach out to? In our staff maybe?"

"I'm not certain what the protocol is. I suppose we should either find someone from the organization, her team or yeah, we could call someone but I'm not sure it is wise, Ms Swan," the man frowned at Bella, trying to come up with a solution to their current Russian problem.

The woman had still not moved a muscle, not even a twitch indicating she was about to wake up. They had to do something, they couldn't leave her there. Sure, she was from Russia, their main competition in these games, but she wasn't going to be deterred in her mission to assist the injured athlete by politics- whether it be geopolitics or sports wise. Running on instinct, she instructed her
agent to reach out to their team's medical staff and ask for the hockey player's medic, the only one she knew and dealt with regularly, Charlie.

Within five minutes, he had joined them in the ice rink; his medic bag slung over his right shoulder, still slightly panting after his sprint down from their compound. He examined the woman thoroughly as she bit her nails, something she had the disgustingly annoying habit of doing every time she was thrown into a high stress situation, to her mother's consternation. She had picked up the habit as a child and was usually able to avoid it. Unless she felt particularly stressed, she did not let it get the best of her anymore.

Charlie took her vitals and wrote them on his notebook, checked the athlete's pupils before turning towards her and Aro. The agent hadn't moved a muscle either; she had to hand it to him, he had the mode still down to a pat, not even tapping his fingers as the events unfolded. She, on the other hand, was broadcasting her anxiety to everyone with even a twinge of knowledge in body language.

"So?" She asked, impatiently, to her favorite doctor, eager to hear his prognosis.

"Nothing much, she hit her head pretty bad, I wouldn't be surprised if she had a commotion when she regains conscience. She already has a little bump on the back of her skull" explained the black haired, mustache wearing, middle-aged man.

"OK, when will she wake up?"

"Any time between now and fifteen minutes, but that depends. People rarely lose it for more than thirty, forty minutes, if her spill wasn't that bad-"

"No, she was not even fully in the air yet, she just-"

"She'll be alright, Bella, her vitals seem stable enough. Don't worry kid, the blond shouldn't stay out for the count much longer."

"Ah ah. What are we supposed to do with her?"

"You tell me, you're the one who brought me there," answered Charlie, smirking at her.

" I should bring her to the Russians, guys," interjected Aro, " we don't know how long she was supposed to be there, and last thing we need is to get them on our backs for kidnapping their star skater-"

"Star skater?" It never occurred to her that she'd be that good.

"Well yeah, don't you know who she is?" Aro gaped at her.

" A better question yet would be how in the fuck do you know who she is?" She asked her agent, not so surprised by the fact that the beautiful blond was such an accomplished athlete in the end- they all were, albeit more or less known, sure; but still, they had to be to get their ticket to the Winter Games, so that wasn't as much a novelty as the fact her security detail was apparently well versed in the art of figure skating. Now, that was a shocking thought. There wasn't anyone on their security team that looked more creepy than this man. He had this aura about him, something that made people aware of the danger he could represent if he was so inclined. And while he had been nothing but nice to her, she wouldn't want to push him too much. He had a deep frown on his face as he weighed the different possibilities their situation afforded them.

Aro decided to call their head security first, while Charlie took care of their team staff. After debating the issue for more than five minutes, they decided to bring the Russian to their quarters, unless
someone on their staff could reach a member of the organization or her team before hand, as none of
them could come up with any other kind of plan. They couldn't in good conscience leave her right
there, she needed to be monitored for a while- as per Charlie's orders and there was no one in sight.

Aro took the Russian in his arms as they walked back to the compound. They were trying to be
discreet, neither of them wanting to be in the middle of a commotion anymore than they wanted to
endure the ire of any of the player's team. While they were trying to be helpful, distrust was still very
prominent between both countries and there was no guarantee their story would be believed by
Russia's officials, until the injured skater regained consciousness. Bella had barely time to rush to the
dressing room to change her skates for her boots and they were on their way. Charlie was still talking
to the head of their PR staff, explaining their little debacle, which earned him James' ire, before she
reached out and asked him to pass her the phone.

"What the hell were we supposed to do, James? Leave her out there, unconscious and alone? Would
that have been a better option for you? Shit, James, try thinking like a human for once, instead of a
fucking press manager."

"Yes, of course, Bella, I'll reach out to the Russians. Will she corroborate your story? It's not a-"

"What? You think I need to rape women to get laid? Holy fuck, you guys are unbelievable. She
didn't even know I was there, it happened maybe five minutes after I got there. She fell, I went on the
ice, shook her up a bit then got her out of there. That's it. Not much of a story there." She understood
the stakes were high, but these people were unbelievable.

"OK, OK, Jesus, don't get upset, I had to ask, you know that. Tabloids could spin it-"

"I'm perfectly aware, thank you, James. You'll try to get a hold of her team? Aro says she's the star of
their figure skating team-"

"How the fuck does he know that?" Asked the man, about as incredulous as she had been. Big,
creepy men did not exactly scream figure skating fan, hence both of their astonishment at his
apparent knowledge of the sport.

"Beats the hell out of me."

"Never mind, I can work with that. Just come back with her and we'll deal with it here," he reassured
her in a no nonsense tone of voice.

"Good. We're almost there," she said as she hung up on the bewildered man.

They walked a bit faster, Aro seemed more anxious than he had been before their call, uneasy about
the turn things had taken in the evening. Bella didn't much care, weird things happening made life
interesting. Besides, the man had been quite efficient, hell he'd been prepared to cover up a murder-
or an unfortunate accident at the very least- if his initial assumptions were anything to go by. That
would probably fall into the realm of things that were funny when you thought back on them much,
much later on; the day every people she got in contact with pegged her as an accidental murderer...

They met with James at the door of the compound. He was speaking on his phone, hissing
something she couldn't understand at his interlocutor while he paced back and forth, waiting for their
arrival. When he saw them, he rushed outside and ushered them into the compound, demanding a
thorough explanation. Again.

"Not now, James. We need to lay her down." Bella cut him off in the middle of his version of an
interrogation, directing Aro towards the second floor and her room, to lay down the injured woman
while they waited for her team to pick her up.

She took the time to observe the other woman, much like she did earlier when Charlie was examining her, and strangely enough she did not experience the same decrease in attraction that sometimes happen in second meetings. That moment, when one understands that they've built up this whole image of a beautiful creature they had the good fortune of meeting, only to be faced with their flaws. Parts of them seemingly less perfect than it was, missing that first meeting glory.

Of course, she had to still feel attracted to the gorgeous woman; it had been barely a day, but she could feel the Russian bombshell get under her skin. It must have been her bad karma, for no matter how much she wanted to indulge in her own weakness, she had to stay focused on her goal. Perhaps the Russian had been thrown into her path again, to confuse her and dazzle her a bit, to test her strength or some shit like that. Yeah, not likely, she knew that and was not particularly religious, nor did she believe in fate all that much. Where many people viewed signs from God or fate, she saw coincidences her mind tried to make sense of.

Looking at the feisty Slavic woman, she was stricken by the innocence she displayed unconscious, her facial features softened by peacefulness, just resting. Their short, previous encounter had not mattered, and neither did her nationality. In the spur of the moment, Bella had acted without thinking, spurned by her instincts to rescue the fallen beauty, the zvezdu, padshuyu. That wasn't the markings of Fate, it was decision making in the heat of the moment, along with attraction and a smudge of foolishness.

There was still that nagging, this annoying as fuck start of a feeble thing in her she felt no control over, but Bella didn't have much more time to dwell on it. Barely a minute later, the Russian's eyes started fluttering, she mumbled and moaned a bit as Bella watched besides her and waited patiently for her to regain full consciousness.

The blond looked around, trying to regain her bearings and focus on the wall in front of her, before fixing her confused stare on Bella.

"Ya sebya nekhorosho chuvstvuyu-" she mumbled agitatedly, shaking her head from side to side.

"Whoa, slow down a minute, princess. You fell, you're in the US compound," she answered as she pointed to the team sweater she was wearing with the US flag on it.

Apparently realizing the predicament she was in, the Russian sighed and, to Bella's astonishment, softly uttered- in full blown, albeit heavily accented, proper English; "why am I here?"

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback...Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
Set the fox among the chickens.

Chapter Notes

I own nothing but my ideas and words. Everything else belongs to its rightful owner. Enjoy and thanks for reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dismissing her initial shock, Bella looked at her as she got closer to the bed, both of her hands submissively raised in front of her, to show the Russian she meant no harm.

“You were training at the ice rink-”

“I don't remember,” interrupted the woman as she put her palms against her temples and closed her eyes.

Bella briefly touched her arm, “it's alright, I'm sure it's only temporary,” she reassured softly.

“How do you know?” Asked the other woman, boring into Bella's eyes, frustration seeping through her stare.

She smiled mischievously and answered, “because it's happened to me before,” she calmed down the laugh bubbling inside of her at the Russian's childish behavior.

She sat up, scrunching her eyebrows like a kid about to throw a tantrum, her cheeks getting redder as the second passed, throwing Bella such a heated glare a lesser woman might have cowered. Too bad she was used to conflict, had to be in her sport. Besides, her skin had been thickened over the years as the only girl in between two teasing brothers. Not to mention anything about all the media attention she received for a few years now.

“You're gonna have to do better than that little glare you got going there, kitten” she told the intimidating little blond on her bed.

“Humph,” she snorted,”why did you bring me here?”

Bella sat on a chair besides the bed before answering the million dollar question. “You fell, like I said, and you remained unconscious for a while. I had our medic take a look at you and we brought you here since we couldn't find anyone from the security or the organization.”
“You shouldn’t have done that. I need to go,” she panicked and started to stand up, only to stumble. She fell back against the bed, barely avoiding the floor as Bella, who had jumped from her seat to help her, guided her into a sitting position.

“Hey, it’s OK, relax. My people are trying to get in touch with your team and figure this shit out,” She saw the Russian flinch as she tried to comfort her.

“Niet! I need to-”

“What you need, Princess, is to chill the fuck out and settle down. You’re in no condition to storm out anywhere,” she interrupted the near frantic woman.

If she didn't calm down, Bella was afraid she'd start hyperventilating or something. She was about to speak again when the door opened to reveal Charlie's smiling face. He realized the Russian was finally awake and agitated as soon as he stepped inside. He calmed her, telling the Russian to breathe deeply, in and out.

Then, he explained to her his assessment of her injury while his patient shifted nervously on the bed, her eyes going back and forth between Bella and the medic. Her cornered expression struck the hockey player who was watching the different feelings play out on the woman's face. Embarrassment, anger, frustration, fear and anxiety battling inside her mind. While Bella couldn't say she had the best poker face there ever was, the Slavic beauty seemed to broadcast her emotions on her face for everyone to watch.

“I would advise against any strenuous activities for the next forty- eight hours and you should be monitored tonight. Other than that, you're good to go,” Charlie told her before taking his leave. The other woman thanked him, they shook hand and he was on his way.

He closed the door behind him after telling Bella both he and Aro had cleared up what happened with James.

“Thanks, I appreciate that, Doc,” she answered truthfully, glad to be spared from the head PR's inquisition for the time being.

“You're welcome, Isabella. He's still on the phone with the Russians reps, but I'm positive he'll be by as soon as he's finished.”
Once the man was gone, Bella sat again in her chair, facing the Russian.

“You got a name, Princess?” She teased, trying to play nice.

“Yes. Rosalie. Not Princess,” testily replied the bitchy Slavic woman. It was good to know the events of the night had not been sufficient enough to tamper down her shiny personality.

That accent, though, now that was perhaps one of the most sexy things she’d ever had the pleasure of listening to. Her voice was soft, sultry, and she rolled her “R’s” in a heavy tone, much like the dramatic inflexion it gave her sentences, a sort of lilt tinting her speech.

Picture that, on on a little feisty blond with a perfectly tight body, with curves to allure people and ensnare them with her stunning features and those full, voluptuous lips of hers, begging one to bend to her will...It sure as hell wasn't her sunny dispositions which drew Bella to her. Although she had to admit, that fierce, feisty little temper she had going on was such a fucking turn on. Easy meant boring to her, and she knew very well that some things in life are worth the fight. It's a complicated equation between risk and worth, leaping or not, to live life to the fullest or forever stay safe but lonely, that people were attempting to solve every day.

She smiled at the spitfire in front of her and couldn't help but laugh at the ridiculousness of their situation. Her brothers were gonna have a field day with that...On the bright side though, it would make for a good Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner story.

“Why you laughing?” Asked the aggravated woman whose name she now knew.

“Because I think it's funny-”

Rosalie interrupted her, snidely retorting, “Amerikos have no good sense of humor.”

Bella contracted her abs to the best of her abilities, barely refraining her second bout of laughter at the way she had said it, so matter of fact, as if it was a widely known trait of character every last one of her fellow Americans shared.
“We do, actually, Princess-”

“Rosalie,” she corrected in a stern tone and a raise of eyebrows, setting the mood for the glare she leveled at the US player.

“Right. Well, Rosalie, humor is-”

“Will you not introduce yourself?” demanded the little ice queen in front of her.

“Sure, I'm Bella,” she answered, dialing her sarcasm down for the moment.

She would have elaborated more on this little get to know each other thing they were having, had it not been for James rudely barging in.

“Bella,” he began, arching his brow at both athletes' heated stare and sudden silence as he came in.

“What, James? Got a hold of the Russians yet?”

“Of course, they're sending a Miss Anna-”

“Anya”, corrected Rosalie.

“-to retrieve her along with bodyguards and one official or two.” The man appeared to be on the verge of a pretty serious case of burnout if the dark circles under his eyes were anything to go by. With his agitated demeanor, he was the picture of your run of the mill PR team leader- worn out and overworked, exhausted yet frighteningly alert; he must have been one of those men who could sleep on and off without trouble, something quite baffling to the sleep loving, over indulging, hockey player.

“Alright,” she began as James was fiddling with his phone once more, “let's go then.”
As they got down to the ground floor, Bella saw many heads turn their way. While she didn't know personally every single athlete on their delegation, she was familiar with their faces at the very least, and that went both ways. Her fellow team members spotted her, many of them scattered in their rooms after training earlier, but she could see Jessica, Angela and a few others talking animatedly as they played cards on the couch a few feet away. James left them to sit while he waited for the Russian delegation near the door.

“Hey B, who's your friend?” Prompted their goalie, eager to meet a new face. Bella turned to Rosalie, quickly introducing the Russian to a couple of her teammates. She seemed awkward, but then the hockey player supposed she wouldn't be much better off if their roles were reversed.

“Why would you bring the enemy to our home?” Lauren snottily asked, looking down on the Slavic athlete, obviously offended the Russian would dare be here. Angela elbowed their eldest player, cutting off any other acerbic comment she could make.

“Seriously, Lauren? The enemy? Is it 1962 again and no one told me?” Bella responded sharply, glaring at the slutty, ignorant tramp they had to endure in their roster.

“1962? Like, how is that relevant?” The malicious woman wouldn't back down, unknowingly embarrassing herself with her lack of basic historical knowledge. They had talked about President JFK and Khrushchev enough in high school to know a thing or two about the Cuban Missile Crisis, that led the world into thirteen frightening days of anxiety at that time. Hell, academics were never her stronger suit but still, there is a minimum even for her and those who lived to be near the heater, in the furthest corner of the classroom, had perfectly understood. Lauren must have been attending other important matters- i.e. painting her nails or gossiping with her fellow airheads - to miss that lesson.

Angela laughed at their dimwitted teammate while Rosalie couldn't help but glare at the woman who blatantly insulted her.

“You are ignorant, American girl,” she barked at Lauren, who squirmed under her heavy stare.

Ah, so the glare was efficient, Bella noted with a smile. Lauren spluttered at the Russian blond before getting up dramatically; pushing past them to get away, draped in her self indignation and anger at the woman she regarded as an intruder in their house.
“Fucking russki bitch,” she muttered as she left. Trust the tramp to use the old derogatory term many people employed, back in the day, to refer to the Soviets. Obviously, the stupid cunt did not realize the word wouldn't offend any Russian citizen as it literally meant Russian in their language.

Quite happy to get rid of the annoyingly closed mind of her fellow team player, Bella looked to her side, watching Rosalie's furious stare coupled with a few choice words of her own.

“Заткнис, по'shyol 'na hui,” were amongst the few she recognized from the dictionary's swear words section.

To the best of her recollection, those literally meant 'shut up, fuck off and fuck you', quite a colorful vocabulary for a prim and proper little figure skater; though she knew that since their very first encounter. Russians were prone to dirty mouths it seemed, or at least that Russian was.

She smirked at the other nation's athlete-a bit proud of her for catching a part, however small, of the language- and watched as she scrutinized the entrance of the compound, presumably waiting for her team to arrive. Bella figured she would know soon enough, there was no fucking way the security agents stationed besides the sliding, double doors, would let anyone they did not recognize, into their home away from the motherland that easily. Besides, those Russian colors were not exactly conspicuous and would probably be spotted from a mile away- if the boys were doing their job right.

Hopefully, both country would keep the bubbling tensions at bay; at least long enough to retrieve their injured skater, and fix all the diplomatic bullshit the encounter had caused in ripple effect.

She was pretty sure there was no diplomatic relationship a few contracts, or empty promises could not mend, if History was to be trusted. Despite any front they might put up publicly, it was common knowledge that both countries had a few shared interests and had maintained their commercial exchanges, even weathering the pressure of the Cold War. Idle threats reduced to meaningless intimidation if one did not follow through.

“Ето пиз`дёз, right?” She attempted to question the still fuming blond, figuring she would earn a few points to counter the effects of her rude, offensive, fellow player.

“Your accent is not good,” was all she got in return from the arrogant Russian, “where did you learn ruski?”
“I didn't, I just picked up some swear words and a bit of basic sentences to get by, that's all,” she explained to the woman who regarded her with such a shocked expression in her deep blue eyes that she had to laugh.

“No need to be so surprised, Princess, not all of us are fat, uneducated, junk food lovers-”

“Most-”

“Now who's the prejudiced one?” She cut her off before she could get started on a rant of her own, about Americans and all the stereotypes she could form against her fellow countrymen and herself in her head.

Years of distrust had instilled a deep dislike in each country's citizens. Something that almost run through their veins, that was passed down from generations; full of ancient, biased, preconceived notions each one had for the other- full of contempt and chauvinism, something both countries seemed to have down to a pat, and perhaps the most important thing they had in common.

There was still something ridiculous, profoundly rooted in their collective unconscious, the everlasting belief that the other constituted, perchance, their worst enemy. One would think that, with the world as it was today- globalized, with intricate ties all around the planet- that it was bound to change one day or another. Although so far, no signs pointed towards any ease of the tensions; on the contrary, with the Games a week away from opening, it appeared the opposing visions were liable to awaken with a renewed vigor.

For her part, Bella hoped that someday, at some point, under the right terms for everyone, that they could bridge the gap between their nations. Sure, maybe not today, especially not today. Nothing good would come out of the Ukrainian crisis for the animosity between the two super powers of yesterday.

Visibly deflating, the Russian glared at her but never protested her claims. She seemed content to continue sweeping the entrance with exhausted eyes, eager for her staff to exfiltrate her from the sticky situation she had gotten into unwillingly. Angela, bless her, kept the conversation light and away from any awkward topic, asking the Russian skater what sport she competed in, and other meaningless questions she seemed happy to answer.

It appeared the ice cold Princess could be perfectly civil and well-mannered when she wanted to. Obviously she'd rather make nice with her teammate than her, but that was fine with Bella. Using the lack of attention on her, she watched the Russian animatedly speaking about her sport, explaining to their interested goalie how the competition would unfold and which countries had her biggest contenders.
“But I will win,” Rosalie was the picture of poise and strength, proclaiming the words as a prophecy of sorts, something she was intimately convinced to be the truth. She knew the feeling, doubt was allowed and healthy; but there was a point in one's career where athletes had to acquire a sane amount of self-worth, confidence, that they would prevail, whether it be due to their work or raw talent, often a combination of both.

“I'm sure you will,” replied quite diplomatically her longtime friend. Ever the mediator in their team, she would have made a great politician, but was probably too soft-hearted to be at Frank Underwood's level of machiavelism.

As both women bantered together, she noticed a commotion in her peripheral vision and slightly shifted to her left, to have a better angle and confirm her suspicions that the Russians might have approached the US security check point. Squinting her eyes, she saw their agents block the Russian staff from the doors; executing custom surface body searches, on each member of the delegation, mandated to retrieve their wounded athlete.

They fussed a bit longer- probably contacting their superiors through their communication devices, awaiting due approval- prior to letting the Russians go any further.

She cleared her throat and nudged the Russian who still stood by her side, much less anxious about being behind enemy lines after a cordial chat with Angela.

“Your team is here,” she told the foreign woman, pointing towards the buff bodyguards, along with the two unknown bald men accompanying a lithe, older, lady.

All of them were decked out from head to toe in their national colors, flags proudly displayed for every hostile US player to sneer at, a petty provocation she found unnecessary but inconsistent. Besides, if she’d have to play Devil's advocate; she might argue that, perhaps, they had rushed there without any time to spare for a change of outfits, to rescue their star skater from the corrupting crutches of the West.

Nevertheless, the small delegation was attracting as much attention in their compound as a celebrity without panties would on any given day back home. Some of her fellow Americans were furiously scoffing at the brazen Russians breaching their territory, other were heckling them as they made their way towards their wayward athlete, while the rest of them acted as their audience.
The whole atmosphere seemed surreal to rational people such as Bella, a silent observer of the battle unfolding in front of her very own eyes, as the Russians sneered in return, not to be outdone in their contempt by mere Amerikos. One could feel the mutual hatred seeping through every pore of each participant in the childish war of insults and taunts. There stood the good old blocs, Westerners against the East, Russia resisting the Occidental pull it had so often accused the USA of trying to exert on the world. It was all there, in their looks, the way they held themselves, clearly the disgust was mutual.

There was a kind of morbid fascination forbidding anyone to avert their eyes from the train wreck waiting to happen. James ran to the Russian officials, greeting them courteously before escorting them to their athlete. Assessing her quickly, they determined she would escape her American nightmare relatively unscathed before they proceeded to a conference room not far from the break room adjoining the ground floor's main area.

She surmised years of distrust, tensions and plain, basic and simple hate would need a bit more than a fortuitous encounter to be overcome. Rome was not built in a day, and it became evident after years that neither would repairing their relationship; the construction would need solid foundation, a bit of risk taking thrown with charismatic leaders and minds open to the possibility of change, as well as the will and faith necessary to such an ambitious diplomatic agenda. Needless to say such groundbreaking progress wasn't on the menu today, if the latent wariness between both countries representatives was anything to go by.

It felt like a reenactment of a Cold War round table, with Russians and Americans sitting opposite each other in a terse silence, observing the enemy up close for once, judging each other and gauging their rival's next move.

The tense meeting did not last more than the necessary time, no civilities were exchanged beyond the initial greetings, straight to business for both nations. She explained what happened, their official translator giving the abridged version of her account, Rosalie interjecting in her own language whenever she felt was useful, until their PR reps came to terms with an agreement regarding the communication they would put in place, if any journalist got a hold of the incident and came sniffing around their teams.

Not a global detente yet, but still a small step in the right direction.

Once both parties were fully satisfied with the terms of their negotiations, they parted ways; the Russians escorted back outside by their agents and both athletes barely acknowledging each other, covertly nodding to each other while their staff remained none the wiser. Bella felt a sense of deja vu, as she watched the Russian blond's retreating back through the compound's glass windows; before going back to her room to rest.
I always appreciate feedback...Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
The next day, Bella woke up to the blaring music of her phone. She took a second to calm down her pounding heart and breathe, while she reached across the bed to get her phone off the bedside table. She missed the call, not a surprise since her fuzzy brain couldn't get her limbs to cooperate fast enough in the dark. Checking for missed calls, she saw her brother had been the one to call; the moron must have forgotten about the different time zones they were currently in.

Seeing 4:30 flashing on her screen, she tried to clear her sleep fogged brain as best as she could, slowly coming to her senses while she listened to the message he left her, hearing her brother's and Sam's voices, telling her to check her mails, pick up a local newspaper or better yet, check out the US newspapers online.

She called them back, already awake anyway, and their vocal message had spiked her curiosity.

“Holy shit B,” curse Emmett as he picked up, “have you seen it?”

“It's 4:30 in the morning here, asshole,” she answered the booming voice on the line.

“Fuck, the different time zones, right?”

“You're so smart, bro, Mom would be proud-” she joked back to the moron she called her little brother.

“Shit, sorry,” he cut her off as she heard some shuffling on his end.

“You're never going to believe what Putin said on TV,” yelled Sam through the phone not a minute
later.

Apparently, Vladimir Putin had seen fit to grace the media with his presence earlier this morning, and couldn’t refrain the homophobic slur that came with it. Asked by a local reporter to address the issues of gay rights, which shocked so many people in countries throughout the world; Putin had said that *gays were more than welcome to come to Russia, provided they leave the children alone*. His verbatim statement almost a plea, imploring the sick, perverted people who engaged in such immoral behavior.

*Welcome to the world according to Vladimir...* Much like the controversy generated by the so called anti gay propaganda bill, which had infuriated LGBT associations and supporters worldwide—with celebrities campaigning for their fellow citizens to boycott Russian products such as Vodka; various public figures (gay or straight) in different part of the world were still striving for a pure and simple snub of the Sochi Games, now a week before the Opening Ceremony. Never one to care about the world's leaders opinions, President Putin's latest statement was sure to start another wave of Occidental indignation.

“Can you believe it?” Asked her brother after giving her a summary of the intervention made by the Russian President, still in complete shock and disbelief.

Just like many citizens of Western countries, he had watched this surreal moment where the President of the largest country in the world, spewed bullshit in a press conference, fully aware of the repercussions his intervention would have. He knew, of course he knew it would be another controversial sentence to add to his never ending rap sheet of offending comments.

Truth is, Putin held no regard whatsoever for the westerners and their politicians opinion, one might even point out that not only the man did not care, but he despised them- those leaders he saw as unnecessary reminders of the fall his country had been precipitated into, worthless remnants of a past he wished to erase.

Still shell shocked, Emmett and Sam had forgotten all about trivial things like times zones to call her. Bella had a very close relationship with both her siblings, loved one as much as the other and she shared different things with them. Their sexual preference was something Emmett and her had in common, but their older brother had always been there for them. He made it his mission in life to protect them against everyone, though he sometimes went overboard.

Her younger brother and his lover had been her most fervent supporters, in the debate inside her family, over whether she should come out or not to the public. Edward had been adamant it was a mistake, arguing that hockey was a man's world; and while female hockey attracted a younger crowd as well, she could not afford to offend people by putting her sexuality out there- for everyone to know and judge. Not if she had any ambition of crossing the bridge over to the NHL one day.
Her little brother and his partner had disagreed, arguing that hiding was ridiculous and she shouldn't have to feel ashamed of anything. Furthermore, it would be pointless- with all the media attention she had started to receive, it was only a matter of time before someone snapped a picture of Bella in a heated lip-lock or something, with a woman, when she would least expect it.

“Of course,” she answered her brother's rhetorical question.

“He's a narrow minded piece of shit,” interjected Sam, backing up the feeling they all had.

“Why are you surprised, Sam? It's not any different than the shit he's said before,” she observed sleepily, “hell, we should be amazed he waited this long to say something!”

She wasn't that shocked when she heard the comments he had made at his press conference via her brother. As expected, the man wouldn't refrain his instincts to provoke, much less infuriate the US and its allies with his vision of society.

Obviously, there was no gay people in Russia. They just didn't swing that way. No, they were good, religious people who abide by God's words and His rules, and it wasn't the Patriarch of Moscow who would tell anyone otherwise.

A mistake US and Europeans alike often made regarding Putin, was thinking he would not go for it. That he would stop before crossing an imaginary line drawn by those he loathed. This analysis was so far from the truth, it was almost funny, the man was ex KGB for God's sake; he had even acted as the director of the FSB- its rightful heir.

All things considered, Bella thought there was no telling what he wouldn't do to regain his country's prominent place in the world. The man had been a front row spectator, silent and powerless, to the great downfall of the grand empire that had been the USSR. Watching as Russia slowly lost any say in the world order and was callously regarded as an inferior, a kind of embarrassing third cousin one never valued- neither for himself nor its input on anything.

“Maybe,” retorted her brother's lover, pulling her back to the present.

“Are you gonna say something, Bella?” Emmett asked, “you should. And if you don't-”
“I will,” she cut him off before he could go on a rant. As a law student, he could make grand speeches like nobody else- he didn't need his diploma for eloquence, and he was a fierce advocate of gay rights already.

“Good,” he replied, “gotta put the motherfucker back in his place!”

Viewed from the USA- and her brother was no exception- the man was a cold blooded bastard who knew no bounds, someone who would go to great lengths to restore its country's forefront standard in geopolitics- by any means necessary. Without a care for the rights of those he stepped on, as he held his country in a vice grip- laying his pawns in strategic places around the Russian power while he kept the nationalist fire alive.

The man tended to scare its opponents, with his expressionless face, that ever present sardonic twitch in his mouth, to remind his enemies of the contempt he held for them. There was no mistaking his stiff posture, tightly controlled mannerism, the man was ruthless- a scarecrow reminding every American that they never were really that far away from a heated blow up with their old foe, always toeing a thin line between frosty relationships and simply cutting them off altogether.

It happened a few times in the past since the partition of the world in two blocs had been put to rest in 1991, officially buried by the Belavezha Accord between Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Unsurprisingly, its legal basis had been contested by Gorbachev, arguing that those who signed the agreement were not fit to represent the USSR.

Less than twenty days later, on Christmas Eve, it was definitely backed by his televised resignation as the President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the subsequent lowering of the USSR flag. He had been prompted to action by the Alma-Ata Protocol, signed by 11 of the 12 remaining soviet republics, removing any doubt about legal technicalities.

Nowadays, in the classrooms of every high school throughout the country, young Americans were told that it was a great victory for the free world, that it would get better from now on, with the world restored to its rightful order etc- depending on which teacher one had, and the bias they infused to their lessons.

However, reality was never that simple, and the first thing Bella could remember thinking when they finished the chapter, was how it must have felt for Russians, to be that humiliated in front of the whole world. What she forebode by instinct was that there lied the core of their problems.

For many Russians at that time, the end of the USSR was a tragedy- the end of a great era. It didn't help that people tended to over simplify things and reduce a whole country to a fraction of their
history, foregoing its best parts entirely, or the many cultural aspects that made it one of the world's most prolific provider of classics in Literature, not to mention anything about the huge contribution Russians had made to the Arts in general.

No wonder Russians were so offended when they had hundreds of glorious years and suddenly were dethroned from their pedestal, schooled by such a young country as the United States. Putin was amongst those who felt forever struck in their dignity, humiliated deep down inside their proud souls by a country who viewed them as half of what they truly were. Treating them like pariahs, nothing more than losers, shunned from the world by their most formidable foe. Bella presumed they would have found the pill hard to swallow as well, if they had put themselves in their shoes for a second.

Putin bid his time, lying in wait as a lion, waiting for a prey to pounce on when watchful eyes wouldn't be trained on his tail. Ready to take the first occasion that would present itself to dominate once more and reestablish the prestige of the past, the Great Russian Empire. If not in territory, then at least in term of public perception.

Being on Russian land, the hockey player felt compelled to think about those issues and she knew humiliated, wounded men who felt they had nothing more to lose nor fear were the most dangerous species.

She supposed the world would realize that sooner or later, and she wouldn't be surprised in any way if that epiphany came simultaneously to the climax of the last days tensions.

She talked a bit more with her brother and his lover, elaborating her answer with them and the frequent input of her personal PR team through phone calls and texts. She told them how much she appreciated their heads up on the issue, and logged on various social media to let the world know what she thought about the Russian President's latest tirade. In a few words, she indicated her position on the subject, as always, never mincing her words. She kept it short and sarcastic but light, not wanting to pour oil on the fire yet still be heard.

She supposed not every Russian out there felt the same way, most of them were probably not the extreme nationalists some right wing US media wanted to portray, much like there wasn't only tolerant people in the USA.

She had seen plenty of anti gay people on US soil, had been the object of death threats after her coming out, and encountered those who wanted to take the gay out of her from time to time. She wouldn’t blame her whole country for those ignorant bastards, there would always be assholes on every part of the world no matter the country or its people.
So, the little autocrat could slur against gays as much as he wanted, it would only earn him the anger of the *free world* he loved to vilify and their disdain. Her posts were quickly retweeted, liked and gained all the attention she was expecting when she decided she would never let herself be gagged— not even when she was representing her country in the Games.

Of course, she wanted to compete, it had been the dream of her life ever since she could remember, but that did not meant that she had to silence herself and comply with every fucking thing that happened during the event and every shitty parallel he found fit to draw.

Homosexuals and pedophilia—really Vlad?!- that was so last century of him. Sadly she had come to realize ever since she came out that homophobia was still alive and well, despite the relatively easy ride she had up until her public speech on the issue. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, as tragic as it is, there remained many persistent stereotypes and misconception about gay people. Was it necessary to remind people that no, homosexuality is not synonym for sexual deviants, much less pedophiles? One would think that particular idiocy would be more associated with priests than gays but hey, never mind the fact that pedophiles had nothing to do with homosexuality, gay, they were just sick people who held an unhealthy desire for children—no, by all means, one should always put everyone in the same boat, let's lump it all up together and call it gay.

Needless to say James wasn't thrilled with her, for less than a half hour after she had put her little rant online, the man was calling her to yell at the hockey player some more. He was livid, angered that she would go over his head, reach out to her own people and react on the record like that—without his previous approval—and stray so much from their global communication strategy.

It had been decided by the big wigs in Washington that they would adopt a low profile and keep their communication to a minimum, to avoid infuriating the host country and try to not worsen a situation already almost explosive with the state of neighboring Ukraine.

The USA had wholeheartedly supported the protesters in Maidan since the first sign of trouble. Most of her fellow Americans were perhaps not aware that their country was putting all its weight in a transition towards the European Union ever since 2004. Back then, the US funneled money through various NGO, much like it had back in the day post World War II, to accelerate the creation of the UE.

Money meant power, and her country knew that very well, but power was also found in knowledge, regrouping countries to bar another and such diplomatic maneuvers. Nothing new under the sun, Washington wanted to isolate Russia while the Slavic country aimed towards its expansion. It was said that the Americans had even chosen the orange color that protesters would wear and brandish as a token of freedom and change later on. Meanwhile, Russia was trying to motivate every dominion it
still held- if not in reality, very much so backstage.

There was a whole world behind the world, and things or events most people would never hear about regarding history, with back channeling and diplomatic efforts made covertly. It required a whole lot of scheming, great intelligence and carefully planned, military strategies Sun Tzu would have been proud of.

Sometimes, people could forget that the core principle of diplomacy is to avoid wars, true, yet very much a waging war itself. Bargains were taken; risks and worth evaluated; sometimes leaders would get angry publicly and poke at the other's loss of this or that, or create the context necessary to pressure them into pursuing the path they preferred.

Angry over the James debacle, the threats he made and his stance on her public slam of Putin’s anti gay slur, Bella was walking through the alleys of the Olympian village. It was weird to see a crowd with almost no one but athletes. Some of them were trailed by security details like her while others were just strolling without a care in the world, going from one house to the other, getting food here and there and just sitting around with their team members; seemingly less inclined to mix together than it had been the case in Vancouver.

According to the Olympics veterans she had on her team, the previous edition had been such a success it would be hard to top. Back in 2010, it had been a joyful mix of nations blending together to meet, share and just paint the town red while they were in and out of competition. By all means, she had been told the Canadian Games were a crazy succession of international parties held successively in the different nation houses. Such a stark contrast to the tense atmosphere in Sochi.

She was deep in thought, walking along lazily, when she noticed a familiar face further away. Rosalie was leaning against a wall, eating an apple as two security guards were flanking her. She drew quite a crowd, people were attempting to squeeze past the vigilance of her muscles to speak with her and get a minute or two of her time.

If Aro was right, it was probable that the Russian figure skater was used to it, much like herself back home. Attention meant you did something right in your sport she supposed, otherwise no one would bother writing about athletes, much less vie for their attention.

As she came up close to the Slavic woman, the two gorillas barred her path, forbidding her to reach their charge. Her agent stiffened, protectively putting himself closer to the hockey player. The blond turned towards Bella, alerted to her presence by her guards sudden change in demeanor as they walked the streets.
It did nothing to quell the lust brewing deep inside Bella, though she was determined to ignore her baser instincts. She prided herself in her control over her emotions, and wasn't about to get carried away just because the woman was gorgeous.

The Russian gorillas let their athlete through after some kind of argument she understood nothing about, allowing the woman to approach Bella.

“Hello,” Rosalie began as she joined her.

“Hi, feeling any better?” Bella asked as she checked the blond out, finding nothing but a prim and proper woman facing her- unfazed by her little accident the night before.

“Da, da. Moy vrach podtverdil diagnoz vash sdelal. YA poluchil skanirovaniye mozga prosto chtoby byt’ uverennym, no ne bylo nichego nenormal’nogo, tak chto ya byl ochishchen-”

“You can hold it right there, Princess, I have no fucking clue whatsoever what you just told me,” she cut her off, already lost in translation.

It wasn't the few curse words that she had learned, nor the basic- “I'm lost” or “Where is the restroom”- sentences, ready made for eager tourists that she had picked up, which would help her understand what Rosalie just fired off. Alas, she had tried but there was nothing substantial that stuck, despite her little performance for the Russian's benefit the night before.

“I don't understand. You speak ruski yesterday,” while the blond made a much better linguist than her, she mixed up some tenses and words it seemed.

Fuck her life. That accent and her small mistakes made her even more attractive, what with the whole sexy foreigner thing no one would be able to resist.

“Huh...About that,” she said, embarrassed to be caught trying to show off, “I might have slightly overstated my skills yesterday-”
“You lied?”

“No, it’s not exactly, Princess, it’s more of a... an exaggeration?” Jesus, she was digging herself deeper and deeper into the hole in all evidence.

“Do not take me as fool-” she was getting red in her face and it was turning into their first meeting all over again.

“You’re a drama queen, Miss Rosalie,” Bella winked, trying to defuse the situation she had jumped into with both feet.

“What is the meaning of this?” Quipped the Russian, scrunching her face in confusion.

“It means you like being overly dramatic, you’re prone to blow things out of proportion, you know?” It was hard to give to someone a definition of an idiom she had been familiar with for so long. She struggled a bit to find the right words into her head, but attempted to clear Rosalie's puzzlement to the best of her abilities.

“Ah. I see,” she said, looking a bit cross.

“I was just teasing you,” Bella winked at her. Maybe she needed more people in her life to get her to relax, she thought as she watched the woman.

“Why?” Rosalie retorted, her sapphire eyes frowning at the US player.

Jesus, what sort of question was that? Why did people tease each other? That was a subject for a philosophy exam, with eager pupils one would give two hours to compose an essay on that question... Why did humans do what they do? Because of that never ending need to connect and interact perhaps? Because it was nice? To flirt? Because of their biological mating imperative? To make people smile? How the hell would Bella know?

She copped out of answering with a question of her own, half replying and half asking, “because it's what people do?”
Fuck, she wasn't equipped to deal with that shit. There was an inquisitive four year old inside the figure skater apparently, and she felt like a parent whose child always asks “why”. Now she understood her brother better when he bitched about his kids wearing him out with their questions...

She wanted to have kids one day, maybe, it was an hypothesis she couldn't completely eliminate if the timing was right and she found the right partner, someone to take the plunge with.

Besides, as a lesbian, if she wanted to be a Mom, she would have to go through adoption or sperm donors; and she did not relish the idea of growing a child inside her womb- no matter how many times her mom and sister-in-law had told her that having children was the most extraordinary experience of their lives. Perhaps it just was not for her. Some people never have kids yet they are perfectly happy about it. As a woman, she received some reminders of her biological imperative from time to time, mostly from the women in her family.

As if there was a whole underground league of women living by a secret code of some kind, vowing to pass the word along and tell every female out there about birthing through their stories- no, she did not want to hear the gory details of her mom's episiotomy, nor her aunt's thirty four hours labor, or the strange delivery of the placenta and what not. That could have make sense ages ago, for women to pass knowledge to one another through word of mouth but come on, in the twenty-first century, when the day came and she wanted to know with accurate precision what would happen to her poor vagina, she could look it up online for fuck's sake!

Rosalie jolted Bella from her reverie when she let out a frustrated little noise, throwing her hands in the air and staring intently at the hockey player.

“You are annoying,” was the snappy comeback she gave her.

“OK, then. Here I was thinking you were about to flirt with me. What a pity, Princess. Really, I'm disappointed,” Bella retorted, taking a step towards the baffled woman.

“What? No! I will do not such thing.” She stepped back, her security details warily looking at her while Bella took another step forward, much closer to the Russian.

“Oh no?” She smirked at the blush overtaking the Russian's cheeks. The woman spluttered again while Bella pushed her luck and came closer again, hoping to befuddle the blond some more as she stood toe to toe with her. “Why not, Princess?”
She was satisfied as she watched Rosalie process the words and the lack of space between them, her eyes widening with shock. The splotches of pink hue on her face turned scarlet, her head swiftly turning to look at her security guards, before gazing again in Bella's deep brown eyes.

“Because I am not-I...And you are-” she lowered her voice, that panicked look featured prominently on her face once more, “I...I am not...” To Bella's dismay, her fierce Russian had disappeared to let an almost shy, scared woman take over. “I am not like you,” she said softly, her voice almost inaudible.

“Alright, look, I'm sorry I didn't mean-”

“No. I need to go now,” she spoke, cutting off the apology she was about to hear from the US player.

“Poydem, rebyata!” Rosalie snapped to her guards, turning on her heels to leave without a second glance at Bella. Her bodyguards by her side, she walked away from her, getting as far as possible from the US player in a record time.

Bella had watched the Russian's departing back one too many times these days to her liking, and made a split decision; she took off running to chase Rosalie. Thankful for her physical condition, she raced after the blond through the alley, dodging athletes, tables and chairs, catching up with her in three minutes top.

“Hey, wait,” she grabbed Rosalie's arm from behind. She never saw her guards coming, too intent on her mission to apologize- now that she got her hands on her runaway Russian. The men jumped her, immobilizing her to the ground as they dragged her down; restraining her arms behind her back as they yelled at her, probably barking in Russian to stay still or something along those lines.

“Perestan'! Otpusti yeye, ya skazal vam, ya yeye znayu. Otpusti yeye!” Rosalie was screaming furiously at them. There was the stone cold bitch she had first met, with her feisty temper and authoritarian, condescending tone.

“Hum, guys? I'd like to get out of this alive, if possible. Maybe keep my body intact, if you don't mind?” Bella squeaked under the weight of the men keeping her to the ground.

The three of them turned to her with matching glares on their faces. Rosalie softened a bit as she watched her squirm beneath her muscles, and there was a slight beginning of a smirk right at the
corner of her lips.

Her own security detail had been distracted, only catching up with Bella as the men let her up, returning to their initial position, flanking their athlete while they stared her down- definitely not impressed by her wiggling-on-the-ground skills. She knew self defense tactics, but had nothing in store for situations where one gets pinned down by burly men unfortunately.

Her agent, who had not anticipated her sudden take off to pursue the Russian, was furious with Rosalie's men, putting himself between Bella and the Slavic bodyguards, agitatedly cursing at them and alternatively yelling at Bella. He calmed down once he was reassured by his athlete that she wasn't harmed, Rosalie even apologizing on behalf of her brutish security, along with Bella halfheartedly explaining that she did sneak up on them. Everyone took a step back, taking the tensions down a notch and observing each other.

“Can we talk?” Bella asked the other athlete, trying to ignore the attention their little commotion had garnered.

“I don't have the time.”

“Come on, we can have coffee or something?” She tried again, not wanting to let the little blond temptress get away without clearing the air between them. Besides, she wanted to know more about the woman. She had that nagging once more, forcing her to overplay her hand with the Russian, lest she started running away from her again.

“Why? We have nothing to talk about,” Rosalie responded.

“Oh come on, Princess, have coffee with me. That's it. We can talk-”

“What about?” She interrupted the smirking American with a raise of her perfectly sculpted eyebrows.

“I want to apologize-” Bella tried softly, only to be cut off again.

“You did already.”
“OK, then have coffee with me to talk about the weather, about yourself or shit, just to tell me about Russia. I don't know. To get to know each other, Princess, show some hospitality for fuck's sake,” Bella said with conviction as she grinned to the baffled blond.

“First, you swear too much. And I don't want you to think—”

“Relax, Rosalie, it's just coffee.”

“If I say yes, will you leave me alone?”

“Sure, for now,” Bella replied as she smiled to the frustrated woman in front of her.

Rosalie informed her bodyguards they would be making a pit stop to have coffee with the US player, they argued a bit in hushed tones besides Bella, but seemed to settle down their difference as the blond came back next to her. Her own detail wasn’t happy about it, but after expressing his opinion on the matter, he took his position near his charge and remained concentrated on his job, to avoid any more mishap like earlier.

They walked in silence the few meters separating them from the coffee shop in the middle of the Olympian village, both athletes side by side as the Russian muscles were respectively a step ahead and one behind them, encircling them as they made their way through the crowd, Bella's agent watching her back, a step beside her.

They entered the shop and took a seat, one of Rosalie's bodyguards taking their order while the remaining Russian and the American flanked their table to block them from prying eyes.

“Look, I want to apologize,” Bella started, “I didn't mean anything, it was just a joke.”

“I'm not used to- I mean I don't meet a lot of...” she hesitated before saying “lesbiyanka.”

Bella needed no translation to understand the word, “so, I'm like a wild, extinct species you've never met before?” She laughed at the embarrassed woman in front of her.

“I don't go out a lot,” she started and Bella thought yeah, you could say that. “And in Russia, it is not
like America,” defended Rosalie at the confusion displayed on the hockey player's face.

“Hey, it's OK, I get it,” she comforted, still a bit dumbfounded at the woman's admission. It was a
gut-wrenching reminder that while she had the freedom to love and fuck whomever she wanted in -
relative- indifference back home, it certainly was not the case everywhere.

The conversation flowed more easily between the two athletes after that. Rosalie started to open up a
bit to Bella as they talked about the Games, their hopes and their countries for ten minutes or so. It
seemed to be going really well- as far as non first dates went, Bella figured.

The blond was smiling and appeared to relax while they spoke, until Bella let herself get carried
away and tucked a strand of hair behind Rosalie's ear as she flirted with her. Rookie mistake, never
push more than you get at first, but her hand had reacted impulsively without her conscious
agreement, lulled into a false sense of security and forgetting for a moment that this wasn't a date.

“What are you doing?” Asked the horrified Russian, with wide eyes, and Bella knew their moment
was over.

Not a second later, her bodyguard received a phone call and the blond skater tensed further the
minute he answered, her whole body stiffening as he spoke to the person on the line and took some
sneak peeks at his charge.

Bella tried to get them back on a safer path, even apologizing for her overstepping gesture, to no
avail. As soon as her bodyguard hung up, he shouted something in Russian to his colleague, who
sprang up to his feet. She put her hand on Rosalie's arm, trying to get her attention back and she did,
but she recoiled from her touch. Her little temptress clamped her mouth shut, made up some bullshit
excuse about training and left in a hurry.

Fully aware that she had pushed too much and too soon, but also that the Russian was her little Miss
pipedream fantasy, Bella was determined to put her silly crush on the beautiful Rosalie to rest. There
was no point for her to lust over an unattainable wonder woman, no matter how much Rosalie could
turn her on.

'Been there, done that,' she regretted- no sense in making the same mistake twice. Holy fucking
straight women might be the holy grail for some lesbians, but this one wasn't planning on wasting her
time on them anymore.
I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
Less than two hours later, James came running towards Bella, with their coach and Angela hot on his heels.

“Bella,” he screamed from down the hallway, “what the fuck did you do?”

“What do you mean?” She retorted innocently to the man dashing at her with a printed paper in his right hand; furiously jerking it back and forth as his chest heaved with short breaths.

“Fucking Christ, Bella! It's all over the Internet! It's going to be front page tomorrow. Front page!” He exclaimed again, now standing his ground in front of her, shaking said piece of paper in her face. He vociferated “look at that,” as he pointed at random to the different set of characters that constituted a word, or perhaps a sentence in the Russian language on the website printout.

There was a US flag in the background of the page, alongside a prominent Russian one above a picture of Bella on the ground, restrained by Rosalie's security. The figure skater stood alert as she observed the scene, annoyed and incredulous at the same time. The picture was worse for Bella, she looked ridiculous with her face contorted in a mix of non photogenic surprise and hurt. Bold, red Cyrillic letters were captioned on her forehead with an exclamation point and a legend underneath.

She had a hunch that those words were not flattering for her; and the apprehensive look in Angela's eyes, or the anger she could clearly sense radiating from her coach, who hadn't said a word yet, were all she needed to confirm her suspicions.

“Holy shit-” she yelled, reaching for the offending paper, tearing it out of James' grasp for her examination.
“Damn right, holy shit!” Interjected Jacob, while James cut her off.

“Do you know what it means?”

Bella gave him a look, “obviously no, James, so why don't you enlighten me?”

“It reads 'Team security forced to backcheck gay US stalker'. And that's just the headline, Bella!” James translated for her, “the article is full of allegations about how you've supposedly harassed her since you've landed here. They even quote a fucking anonymous source as their so called witness of your pathetic pursuit. And in case you're wondering, yes their closing point portrays you as a case in point of gay behavior,” he finished in a heavy tone, appalled at her actions.

“For Christ's sake, Bella,” her coach groaned, “what happened?”

“I'm sure there's a perfectly good explanation, right Bella? They're jumping to conclusions,” Angela tried to calm the men down without much success.

She had their full attention as they focused on her, eagerly awaiting her side of the story. She didn't know what to say, she had not really thought this through when she had taken off after the Russian blond. She had listened to her instincts, to that inkling she had to find out more about the woman, against all rationality. Objectively, she knew that she had to keep a low profile and not make any waves, but the repercussions of her actions had not even crossed her mind earlier. There was nothing then but raw impulse, and a somewhat foolishness on her part, that had forced her to listen to that gut feeling.

Faced with those consequences, she hesitated before justifying herself. “We were talking and she left, so I caught up with her but they jumped me.”

All three were looking at her with equal expressions of incredulity on their faces; and perhaps her admission was as astonishing to them as it was to her, still wary over her own reaction in the heat of the moment.

“Do you know how many fucking crazed Russians I've already had on the line, thanks to your little coffee break?” The man asked her as he was watching her, contempt lacing his voice at the trouble she had caused him, apparently not appeased at all. “And all that in less than half a day, you're a miracle worker in this shitty country apparently.”

“No, James, I don't but I can imagine, I'm sorry” she tried to placate their PR rep, but the man
wouldn't leave it alone, too intent on airing out his displeasure at the hockey player.

“That's strike two, Bella. Get a grip on yourself before you're benched for inappropriate behavior—” he was so infuriated at her that he missed Jacob's tight lips frowning at him before Bella interrupted his rant.

“Careful, James, you wouldn't want to overstep, right? I'm sorry you've had to deal with that mini crisis. It wasn't supposed to happen, but don't fucking start threatening me, asshole,” she answered in a cold voice to the stunned man who gaped at her.

“OK guys, why don't we all take a step back and calm down?” Angela suggested, watching the growing tension between her teammate and the man handling their communication.

However much she despised the piece of work who handled their PR, she couldn't let him get the best of her friend in front of their coach. Bella was brilliant, but even their leader had to step in line sometimes, or their team would be nothing but a chaotic mess of individuals ineptly jumbled together, prohibiting them from functioning as an effective collective group.

Their coach jumped in, staring James down as he spoke with authority, his voice colder than the one spewing empty threats at his best player. “Do not mistake what little PR authority you hold for more than it is, James. As far as I know, you haven't been promoted to coach, and I am the only person responsible for the team roster.”

The man spluttered at Jacob, suddenly turning apologetic- and some might say even fearful, at the mountain of a man standing besides him, glowering down upon him.

“Now, Jacob, certainly, you don't mean—” he started, but whatever honeyed-words he could come up with would not erase his previous surge of arrogance.

“Tell me, James,” Bella smirked at him, her dark eyes glittering with cold fury, “who do you think is easiest to replace on the team? You or me?”

Her coach could not help but snort, the answer so obvious there was no need to ponder it any further than that. Angela tried to repress her amusement as she looked down and breathed deeply.

“Now Bella, there's no need for any of that...” James was no fool-unless he was overcome with his
own stupidity, that is- he backed down at last, halfheartedly apologizing to the athlete, “I was just frustrated, and I apologize for taking it on you.”

“Good, then we're finished, yeah?” She asked, looking towards her coach more than the other man- another sign of the high esteem she held for the smaller built James, though he couldn't recognize the clues her body was desperately sending off to everyone around them.

At Jacob's nod, she reached for her friend's arm, wanting to get the hell out of dodge as soon as humanly possible.

She ignored James' last comments as they left together. “Sure, we'll just have to coordinate our response strategy but I will call you later.” he yelled while they made their escape, hopefully under no illusion that she would turn back and continue this conversation. Or at least she'd fucking hope so for his sake, given she had no intention at all on coming back to finish it.

Already thinking two moves ahead, she decided to send a text to Edward, asking him to monitor the internet and the response back home to the first posts in Russia. Her brother was his ever charming self, diligently assuring her that he would coordinate with the members of her own PR team and make damn sure that this would not affect her Games too much.

They needed to diffuse the situation obviously, but there was no telling how the Russians would take to their version of story telling. And if possible, there was the utmost need for discretion and smooth operating, as they could not afford to piss the country hosting the Winter Olympics any more than they could afford the bad press that was starting to accumulate on this side of the world. She was grateful for him; without her family and their support, she would be lost in her own world, which is precisely why she was thankful for his support.

His opinion- much like her family- were always useful and she used to weigh the pros and the cons based on their input, a method that had yet to fail her. Reassured by the grip they had on the situation, she hung up and went back to her room with her fellow teammate.

The rest of the evening was spent resting like a recluse in her room, effectively enjoying the perks of having the only solo occupation on their floor, left to her own devices by the rest of her team as she reflected on the turn of events brought on by these last twenty four hours; browsing the Internet as she laid sprawled on the bed, warily going through tweets and posts, scanning them and those Edward had sent her. Only to feel worse as she read each word that were reported by various US media- which had picked up the info via their Russian counterparts- and ordinary people alike. As ever, journalists and gossip mongrels were quicker than the general public to draw conclusions, while most of the regular folks were advocating a ceasefire on her behalf.
Not even skimming through the haters and their indignation, she focused on the positive reactions and the neutral ones rather than the attacks on her person. So far, there was speculation regarding whether she would release a statement to attempt to defuse an ever frenzied situation—bound to escalate into a full blown diplomatic incident, or so were solemnly declaring news anchors on every channel she could watch online.

Astonished at the links her brother had sent to her in the span of mere minutes, she was twitching nervously, anxious to do something instead of watching it all unfold before her eyes as a powerless bystander. She hated that, the media attention that came with sports, this never ending need to know everything about her...She was nothing special, well in her personal life at least—apart from the little issue of her sexuality, she was just a standard athlete.

Emmett and Sam were probably the two who got the most kick out of it, as they were always teasing their sister about her boring life. They were right, she led a bona fide, predictable, dull life. Her routine was the same every day for the most part—sleep, wake up, have breakfast, then training, eating and some more training, back to eating and finally sleeping. Some days, her schedule varied a bit, and she had a meeting or had nights out with friends, but her every day life pretty much amounted to that. Hence her brother and his lover's endless amusement in the interest her life suddenly held to others.

Granted, she should be happy that people were paying attention to her performances, but she could do without the scrutiny that came with it. Anonymous posters all around the US and aficionados abroad were dissecting her mundane life under a microscope, while those versed in her sports were speculating about her future moves in an already promising career. It was exhausting to face, though she tried to look on the bright side and see it for the recognition people were crediting her with.

Besides, it brought more attention to women hockey and female sport in general—which she couldn't help but feel proud of. It would at least be somewhat of an achievement for her, if she succeeded in her quest for gold and beyond that in her whole career; and was able to shine a spotlight on others through her accomplishments. Not that the US player was fundamentally selfless—truth be told, she was first and foremost striving to reach her goals for her, and not the benefit of others; yet it was a byproduct she was immensely grateful for.

Bella woke up in the middle of the night. Too restless to sleep anymore, she left her bedroom to get some fresh air. She thought about alerting someone in their security of her imminent departure with a text while she put her boots on, but all the same, she dismissed the idea—wanting to be left alone for a while, even if it went against the rules.
She deserved a break after that fucked up day, she thought, sneaking out as quietly as she could into the night. She loved to walk at night, there was a sense of peace in the quiet atmosphere enveloping the streets of the Olympic village. The hockey player felt better as she strolled down to the small park nearby- rather a patch of grass thrown in a corner to make for a greater bucolic scenery contrasting with the asphalt and the dull color of the compounds all around her.

She wandered down, trying to find an isolated bench to sit on and relax a while. Still meandering through the small park, Bella jumped when she heard she heard a noise somewhere a little further up the road. Curious, she wanted to find out what the sound was, though she was cautious. Ever apprehensive about what she would discover; almost missing the secure feeling she had when the security agents were by her side.

She felt a tad ridiculous at that assessment, there were still things they would not be able to prevent, regardless of their training- such as a bomb, or a moment of inattention, in which theory she would be dead. No one would be able to stop it, but that was alright; in the end, weren't we all liable to pass away at one time or another?

We are all fated to die, the first breath every human being takes is also the start of the end- a slow, sometimes agonizing decay until we expel the last breath from our chest. She had made her peace with the death question long ago, settling for a _que sera, sera_ policy- _whatever will be, will be_- along with her personal favorite, _carpe diem_: enjoy every day as if it was your last one. There is no point in dwelling on the things one cannot control, best roll with the flow and ride out this crazy thing called life.

Bella heard the noise become louder as she walked towards it, turning down the corner to reach a faceless shape on a bench. The shape was moving back and forth, crouched down with the head tucked down towards the chest, shaking like a leaf from time to time. She observed from afar a little while, unsure if she should approach or leave the person be.

The hockey player never got the time to find out what she would do, for the silhouette turned her way. The visage revealed the woman that had been haunting her thoughts the past few hours. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, giving her beauty something tragic, and it tugged at Bella's heartstrings.

It was her turn to recoil at the cold demeanor the Slavic woman was throwing at her. Not that it was surprising for Bella, she had imagined, after their last encounter mere hours earlier went south, that the other athlete wouldn't exactly give her a warm welcome. That was indeed the case, as the Russian seemed intent on making her displeasure known.

Bella knew she had fucked up by letting herself throw away any common sense she possessed, apparently- not to say anything about her inner smooth talker. Shit, she had acted like an over eager teenager on a prom date, as if the gorgeous blond was the first beautiful woman thrown her way...And believe that, if nothing else, she had her share of puck bunnies vying for her attention.

Due to the media's interest in her, and her own physical attributes, not to mention experience, she knew perfectly well that she was good looking. With her long brown hair and its red streaks framing delicate, classic features- all that on an athlete's body, she was many a young lesbian's wet dream. So, thank you very much, but she was no newbie to picking up women, dates or sex. Relationships on the other hand? Another subject entirely.

“Whoa, Princess, calm down,” Bella tried to appease the sobbing woman on the bench. She wasn't a crying expert either, but the broken look on the Russian blond's features would compel anyone to act.

She came closer to her, trying not to make any sudden moves, as to not startle her- much like one would with a wild animal; and from where the American stood, she was definitely as volatile as one. Must be that Slavic temper, she thought briefly as Rosalie watched her quiet approach, blowing hot then cold perpetually.

“Don't!” Rosalie warned in a flat, expressionless voice.

“Fuck, what happened to you?” Bella asked, facing the heartbroken beauty.

“Nothing-” the Russian turned away from the hockey player.

“That doesn't look like nothing,” retorted the American.

“It is not any and your business-”

“Of,” smiled Bella, correcting the slight mistake.
“What?” The blond frowned.

“Any of your business, Princess.”

“Humph,” she snorted through her tears, “Ya vse ravno, yeblya amerikantsy- pindos!”

“OK? I still don’t understand but never mind. What’s up? Why are you crying?”

“There is nothing to say-”

“Come one, try me, I’m a good listener,” she answered with a smile.

The Russian said nothing, and for a little while there, Bella thought that she would remain silent as the tears came running down her cheeks.

“I...I,” she murmured, “I am into troubles.” This time, the American did not bother correcting her but took a seat, next to the skater on the bench.

Rosalie did not look up at the added weight besides her, no, she stuck her sight on an imaginary point, far away in front of her.

“Why?” Bella sat sideways, facing the blond’s profile. She had to admit that the tears tracks on her face did nothing to diminish her stunning features. Quite the contrary, there was something dreadful to her stare, and her face looked distressed, yet hauntingly beautiful.

“Because,” she hesitated, turning towards Bella at long last, “because of-”

“Me?” The hockey player cut her off, figuring the Russian team would not have appreciated their earlier misunderstanding slash scuffle any more than her own staff.

“Yes,” she replied simply.
“I’m sorry-”

“You really do say that a lot, do you not?” The Russian remarked as she grinned to the US player.

“Hey, it got me a smile; Princess, that's a start, right?” Bella smirked back, glad the other woman seemed to feel a tiny bit better.

“Rosalie,” the Slavic athlete reminded Bella with force.

“Alright, well, how bad is it then, Miss Rosalie?”

“My team is not happy-”

“Yeah, I'm sure they weren't thrilled,” replied Bella with sarcasm.

“My sport is like a...a religion in Russia. People love hockey and figure skating, it's a...Vot der'mo, kak vy govortite, chto? Eto pochti traditsiya-”

“Traditsiya, tradition? An established practice?”

“Da, tradition,” nodded Rosalie.

“OK, so they're pissed?”

“You don't understand, the President will come to my first competition and the start of the hockey only. It is that important here,” Rosalie explained with a level head.

Bella was surprised- not about the hockey, she already knew the Federation was big on it- but she never thought they'd like figure skating so much. The fact that Putin’s first two events in the Olympics would be those sports was highly significant. Count on the man to have a good strategy for anything, he was always prepared with contingencies plans, even for public relations. The man was a
chess player and a military strategy connoisseur for fuck's sake.

“I didn't know,” Bella admitted, “so, pissed, huh?”

“Yes, they are. Oni obozlennyy pokinut'. Pissed off, oni nedovol'ny.”

“I'm sorry-”

“Stop saying that,” Rosalie shouted suddenly, startling Bella who threw her hands up.

“Alright, shit, you scared the fuck out of me!”

“You swear-”

“Too much, you've said that already,” Bella cut her off before she could state the obvious once again.

Rosalie smirked, seemingly forgetting all about her tears at last.

“You won't allow me to apologize...Will you at least tell me what happened? I suppose they've seen the pictures all over the Internet?”

“Yes, they have-”

“And?”

“My team was angry,” she sighed.

“At you?”
“Not. Niet, ne u menya, no.”

“Ah,” Bella had expected that the Russian officials would not have been any more thrilled than the general opinion of their people online. “Let them get pissed at me, Princess, I can handle it,” she smiled and bumped Rosalie’s shoulder with her own.

“You shouldn’t have to,” she turned to face Bella, with eyes full of sadness and a melancholic smile adorning her lips, “did you see Rossii put’ yet?”

“The blog with us splashed on front page?”

“Da, they published our pictures first,” she clarified.

“Yeah, my PR rep saw it before anyone, he showed it to me,” Bella nodded at the Russian. “It’s a bit funny actually,” she shrugged, “he told me it said ‘security backchecks American lesbian stalker’ or something?”

Rosalie nodded, “da, why is it funny?” Frowning with her eyebrows raised, she stated, “someone on my security said the same thing to me.”

Bella smirked before explaining to the confused little Russian who had a change of mood, now more curious than sad it seemed. “Because it’s hockey lingo, it’s a term we use, backchecking. It means rushing back to the defensive zone when an opposing team attacks.”

“Oh. So, it is funny because of our the picture?”

“Exactly-”

“B-But...How can you find this amusing? Did someone translate eto- it, I mean, for you?” Rosalie gave her another frown, her sad eyes lowered to the ground as her shoulders heaved with a deep breath.

“I know,” Bella laid her hand on the other woman’s shoulder, “hey, it’s not your fault, I should have been more careful, I didn't think-”
“Why did you do it?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t think, just reacted-”

“But why?”

Bella tried to come up with an answer to that, but was not willing to delve deeper into her own feelings herself. The Russian watched her intently and added, as fast as ever, in her native tongue, “výše golový ne prýgnesh’.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means you can not jump above your head,” she explained to Bella who watched her with rapt attention, hanging on every word the Russian pronounced in that heavy accent of hers. “I tried to tell my team what happened, but they won’t listen to me,” Rosalie trembled again, rubbing her hands against her knees as she shook her head.

“Did you try to defend my honor, Princess? I’m flattered,” Bella laughed to the outrage displayed on the little spitfire, she would much rather suffer the anger or the indignation if it dried her tears- not that she would ever admit that, upfront, to the Russian.

Rosalie swatted her arm away, “don’t joke, my coach is furious and my staff want me to make a statement.”

“So what? Do it,” Bella retorted with arrogance.

“Der’mo, you do understand that they want me to say it is the truth, yes? That you have been stalking me?” She scoffed, her incredulous features staring back at the American.

“Yeah, well I can take it, Princess, don’t you worry about me-”

“You still don’t understand, people are going to hate you. I am loved in my country, they think I will
win the gold and-"

“Hey, hey, Rosalie, look at me,” Bella interrupted as she reached for the Russian's hand while she stared at her, trying to convey her strength to the other woman, who seemed still deeply affected by the backlash their little chance meeting had provoked. “It's OK, my team will release a statement to counter yours. It's nothing special, just dealing with the press and politics as usual.”

The Russian took a deep breath, “I wish it did not have to be like this,” she said, already resigned to her fate.

“It's OK-”

“Nothing about this is OK” Rosalie snapped back to the optimistic westerner at her side.

“Maybe, but it's useless to get worked up over things you cannot change, Rosalie,” Bella brushed the hand that she still held in her grip, amazed the Russian had not snatched it back yet. She'd admit that the other woman had surprised her, she wasn't expecting the sadness nor the remorse, just reproaches for her reckless actions ultimately landing both of them in deep waters. There might be hope for her gorgeous, Slavic blond yet, she mused as she stared at the mess of emotions displayed on her face.

Her heart went out to the Russian, she was testing the boundaries of her own society against her will. Bella knew she was to blame for a large part in their current media debacle, she had acted without thinking about repercussions- and understood that her negligence had caused it. Yet, she couldn't help but feel glad that things had happened that way, for it got her a glimpse into the Russian's mindset and things were much more complicated than even she had foreseen.

The woman was obviously conflicted, there was this inner struggle inside the American between one part of her telling her that Rosalie was obviously interested, and the other one who tried to downplay the feeling and tell her that she was being nice and slightly bi-curious, nothing more.

She had practically sworn off straight women- ever since a debacle with a married woman in her early dating days- figuring they were more trouble than they were worth and besides, sexual attraction could not be commanded, so there was no point in trying to reach for the impossible.

Though there was this thing in her, pushing her towards the Russian, regardless of the grudges each country held for the other- just basic human appeal at work, drawing her towards the blond.
“You are always stoic?” Asked Rosalie, regarding the other nation's athlete as one would a very strange character, something unique that she was laying eyes upon for the very first time- a weird type of woman she was not sure how to deal with, someone who threw her off balance.

“I'm far from that, Princess, but what do you suggest we do? Do you want to speak out and explain how a notorious lesbian chased you down and flirted with you?” Bella questioned the blond, tightening her grip on her fingers, “shit, maybe you should just tell them straight up that I'm interested in you-”

“You are?” Rosalie raised her head to gape at the hockey player, a bewildered look in her eyes as she seemed to weigh that statement.

“Of course I am, Princess,” Bella laughed at the astonished look on the other woman's face.

“But-But, I thought-”

“What? Come on, Rosalie, I'm not gonna jump you but I won't lie either, of course I think you're beautiful-”

“You do?” The Russian cut her off, still looking absolutely bewildered at the concept.

“For fuck's sake, Rosalie, have you looked in a mirror recently? You're beautiful, surely that's not news to you?”

“I-I...Of course, I mean...You are- and I'm not...I just thought that...I don't know,” she spluttered.

“Well now you know,” Bella smirked at the speechless blond, wiggling her eyebrows to amuse the woman- and make light of the heavy implications each revelation of the slightest feeling could have for both athletes.

They said nothing more for a moment and just sat quietly next to one another, spacing out; each of them struggling with their thoughts and feelings. It went on for a while, until Rosalie finally set her sights on Bella, grabbing her elbow to get closer to her and bridge the small gap between them.
To Bella's amazement, the Russian never stopped leaning forward until they stood nose to nose, Rosalie's body fully angled towards Bella's as their breaths mingled together, their faces barely an inch apart.

“Rosalie,” Bella warned in a rough voice, not sure she would have the restraint later on to stop herself.

“Don't move, I want to try something,” the Russian answered, slightly hesitating at the heavy stare the US player gave her.

Lo and behold, she brushed her full lips against Bella's- albeit tentatively at first, perhaps on account of the high stakes both players were chancing. Yet, her lips seemed to press more firmly, opening to graze her tongue to Bella's bemused ones.

Slowly but surely, her tongue invaded the American's mouth, and Bella stopped resisting altogether. Her hands came to rest on the Russian's waist as her palm slid along her neck, supporting her every move and guiding the Slavic blond to press her body onto Bella's impatient limbs. Every instinct was telling the hockey player to take charge and lead the rebellious kiss the other woman seemed intent on inflicting to the American.

Their kiss was bruising, almost reproachful, their lips clashed together with violence- demanding, passionate and harsh at the same time. It wasn't a unicorn and rainbows kiss, but a tragic, epically vicious one. The cold Russian let her fiery soul out it seemed, if that tempestuous kiss was to be trusted, however Bella gave as good as she got, rewarding Rosalie's effort with a heated response of her own. It went on for a while, although Bella couldn't keep track of time, too busy with the other woman's unexpected burst of desire to care about such trivial things; until Rosalie stepped back.

When she did, the Russian was stunned- her eyes were glazed over, much like Bella's- even though there was this determination at first in the blond's eyes, it was quickly dismissed by a flash of conflicting emotions on her face.

“I'm sorry, I shouldn't have,” she whispered, apparently still shell shocked over her own actions.

“It's OK, Princess,” Bella reassured the panicking blond with a smile.

“No, I can't- I- I'm sorry,” she sputtered, still half dazed it appeared.
“Rosalie—”

“Niet, I'm-I-vy ne mozhete tak postupit' so mnoy,” she said quickly, seemingly reverting to her mother tongue every time she was in a stressful situation.

Bella was about to cut her rant out and try to comfort her as best as she could, over what was an obviously confusing situation for the Russian, but she never got the chance to even try. Rosalie shook her head and mumbled “ya ne mogu, ya ne. Mne ochen’ zhal,’” before she took off running, disappearing into the darkened streets before Bella's incredulous eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you think.
Still dazed, she went back to the US compound. Moving along the streets of the Olympian village, she stumbled against the sidewalk and was expecting to collide with the ground, laying hard on the pavement. Her prediction never had the chance to fulfill itself, for arms wrapped around her waist, keeping her upright.

After regaining her balance, she turned around to face the man who had been assigned to her security most frequently ever since they landed in Sochi.

“Surprised?” Asked Aro, watching her with a smirk shaping his paper thin lips.

“What are you doing here?” Bella gaped at man.

“Did you think you could go as you pleased without us knowing?”

“But-but...How?” She asked him, not having heard his approach- not even aware that he had followed her in the first place.

“We're on 24/7, Miss, there is always at least two of us watching the entrance at all time. Our job is to protect you guys, even when we get a runner,” he winked at the hockey player.

She had asked the agent multiple times to drop the formality and just call her Bella, but the man was struggling with it, too accustomed to it by that point in his career. Some of her fellow athletes insisted that there should be no familiarity between them and the security agents, though she believed that to be utter bullshit. To each its own, of course, but those guys did not deserve such attitude; especially from the people they would take a bullet for, if it ever came down to it. For her part, she was trying to be nice with them, just like her, they were only doing their job and she wasn’t one of those stuck-up bitches who looked down on everyone. She made a point to be as down to earth as possible- and truth be told, her mom would have her hide if the temptation was ever there, Esme had raised all
three of her kids right, to be polite and well mannered; so really, it was a no brainer to her.

“Well fuck me sideways, I thought I was being discreet-”

“I bet you did,” the man laughed as they started walking back towards their accommodations, “I got kids, Miss-”

“Bella,” she corrected.

“Right, Bella, anyways, I know what a guilty, about to sneak out person looks like.”

“Damn, so you've been following me the whole time?” She sighed apprehensively, glancing at Aro from the corner of her eyes. That was just what she needed, on top of her Russian turmoils.

“Yes-”

“Look, I can explain, please don't say anything to James,” she pleaded as she cut him off.

“I won't-”

“Thank you so much, Aro,” she interrupted again, expressing all the gratitude she felt towards the man who wouldn't rat on her to the powers that be.

“Don't thank me yet, I wasn't finished. I won't, as long as it doesn't impact your security. That is still our only concern, the rest is politics and your business. Our mission was very clear on that and there is no snitching clause on your behavior during the Games, so please don't try to sneak out again-”

“I won't, thank you, I promise,” she assured the serious man, grateful for his don't ask, don't tell policy.

“Listen, after we finish discussing it, I've seen nothing, but til then, I need you to tell us if this thing goes on, because of the chain reactions it could set off with the Russians. They won't be happy,” he said as he watched her solemnly.
“I know,” she whispered, knowing full well the situation was already explosive after the picture debacle. Neither country would take kindly to an affair between their star athletes. But she was getting ahead of herself; as for now, it wasn't an affair- merely a stolen kiss and heated looks the Russian had surprised her with. The attraction was there though, and only time could tell what would happen with Rosalie. Lust was a dangerous thing and emotions tended to cloud one's judgment, flooding their minds with irrationality and ultimately leading towards rash behavior.

“I'm going to overstep but perhaps, if it is bound to happen again, it might be wise to avoid any outside venues, alright?” Suggested her agent as he pulled her back from her daydream.

“Yeah, I hear you. I'll be careful.”

They stopped talking, Aro reassured that he had made his point as Bella was still reflecting on the words of advice the man had just dispensed to his charge while they made their way back, still shrouded in darkness.

A few hours of sleep later, it was the start of another day for the athlete. It began with a shower, followed by a breakfast of champions with her team. Unsurprisingly, she was the main topic of conversation amongst her teammates, most of them wanted to understand and know the truth about the articles and the gossip surrounding her picture, but she was glad to see that a large portion of her team was fully supporting her. Some had wolf whistled at her arrival, and of course, Lauren had to distinguish herself and taunt her.

“Fucking the enemy already Bella? Damn, you work fast-”

“Shut up, Lauren, that was uncalled for,” retorted Angela, quick as ever to defend those she loved.

“I don't know, Lauren, seems to me the fact that you're still a duster on the roster says you're well beyond my own accomplishments,” she snapped to the mean girl wannabe, not the least impressed by her allegations. The woman was a mean cunt, that was a fact. Though frankly, coming from the slut who probably landed her spot on their team with her deep throat skills- yet couldn't fathom the skills to be more than a bench warmer- it was a meaningless, cheap jab.
There was laughter and comments thrown in by her fellow players, in a boisterous atmosphere. Overall, they were a quite randy bunch—contrary to most people's opinion, women were not any less crude than their masculine counterparts, quite the opposite sometimes.

She took it in stride, never faltering against her coarse comrades, seeing how her brothers and the all around masculine field that was her sport, had steeled her nerves.

Coach Black put his team through the ringer as the training hours accumulated for his athletes. He wasn't about to back down so close to their objectives. The man put up a solid front in the media, never too arrogant nor modest; yet firmly believing in their chances to bring the Gold back to their homeland.

As his team was leaving the ice, he took the time to speak with his best player—knowing full well that she would not be leaving at the same time, as her own training regiment had been seriously impeached by her latest Russian misfortunes.

“I've talked to James, he still wants you to issue a formal apology,” he began as they skated back and forth on the barn.

Bella sighed, thought bitterly to Rosalie's own position probably mirroring her own at this moment.

“Yeah, my brother suggested a simple statement explaining what happened. Neutral, as to not incense the Russians,” she told him, revealing to her coach the content of Edward's latest text. “I apologize for my behavior yesterday.”

“Don't mention it, he is an asshole and he shouldn't have said it. Though maybe next time you could try to be a little more diplomatic, Swan” Jacob advised her, his serious eyes intent on his world-class player.

“Thanks—”

“Don't, my job is to protect my team as well, you know that,” he patted her shoulder with a glimpse of a supporting smile.

“I'm still grateful coach.”
“Alright,” he added with a gruff voice and cleared his throat, “don't stay too long, I want you in top form tomorrow, Swan.”

“Yes coach!” She straightened on her skates, standing on guard before saluting her coach like a soldier would have his commanding officer.

“Ah ah, very funny, Swan,” Coach Black turned to her, leaning against the door for on-ice entry. “Don't forget to practice your mid barn shots!”

“Yes, sir,” she jested while he exited the rink.

Bella dangled the puck around an imaginary opposing player for a while, skating around the pylons her coach had left on the barn for her little practice session. Her limbs moved mechanically, with her mind blank, focused on the motions drilled into her muscle memory- without needing her input as her movements were guided by years of repeated workout.

She turned and wheeled, firing a slapshot from the middle of the barn. She fist pumped at her own success, whistling- which she would never do in a game. Bella wasn't one for cellys- that only lead to monumental chirping. Besides, her father thought the best players were those who acted and fired lasers, not those who strutted like peacocks every time they did their job.

She heard clapping and whirled around, noticing Rosalie leaning against the wall, behind the door that allowed skaters access to the barn.

“What are you doing here?” She asked as the other seemed back to her stoic facade, regarding her coolly with her features twisted in a severe, almost mocking frown while she applauded.

“It's my slut-

“Slot,” Bella corrected, smiling at the slip of her tongue.

“No matter. You cannot be here,” she said snottily, taking off her skates guards on the carpet before
stepping on the ice rink.

Rosalie warmed up in front of the bemused American. The damn woman was giving her whiplash. For the first time in a long while, Bella wasn't sure how to react. It appeared to be the only common denominator linking their encounters, she would never know which Rosalie she'd be faced with. Would it be the skittish kitten who kissed her? Or the rude bitch with the scathing verve? Shit, did she flip a coin each time they met to decide which facet of her personality she would uncover?

“Oh yeah? Who says, princess?” She bit back to the skater still twirling in front of her.

“You made life very difficult for me yesterday,” Rosalie softly uttered as she looked down.

“Really? That's all you have to say after yesterday?” She looked baffled to the Russian, not believing this would be what she pointed out first. To Bella, the case was closed, they had explained each other previously and that was that. Biting the bullet, she went with appeasement, steeling the bitter comeback threatening to escape from her lips. “I never meant for this fucked up mess to happen, Rosalie, I already apologized. What else do you want from me?”

“I would hope not,” the Russian snorted, shaking her blond head back and forth.

“I'm sorry.”

“Da, tak vy skazali, yes. No eto ne imeyet nikakogo znacheniya,” she mumbled, “I- it...still makes the situation...not- not different,” Rosalie struggled with her words, scrunching up her eyebrows as she formed them.

“I know. Look, it's been blown out of proportion, my team tightened up security and I have a statement ready to go public if need be, but-”

“But chto? Err...what?”

“You know what. You-”

“Are you going to say it?” She cut her off.
“Do you want me to, Rosalie?” Bella countered, coming closer to the skittish Russian. She watched the other woman squirm a bit, she heaved a breath, the blond tried to speak but the words wouldn't come out. She choked in front of the US player, never answering her question. Rosalie put her hands against her face and sagged, losing her composure as Bella touched her shoulder. She kept it light, barely making contact with her skin as her fingers hovered above her skin. Bella observed her palm hovering above the curve of her neck, itching to stroke it but not sure she should. She brushed the pad of her thumb against it with a flick of her wrist, and stepped closer to the Slavic blond, her right arm encircling her around the waist. Bella hesitated a little, fearing it might be too much for her little spitfire, but went against her own self preservation instincts and hugged the blond anyways, happy to feel the warmth of Rosalie's body against hers.

“What do you want, Rosalie?” She whispered against her ear, stepping back to watch her conflicted face.

“I don't want to feel like this,” she sighed, “I just...I was never-”

“It's alright, Princess, you're gonna be fine-”

“No I am not,” Rosalie muttered. She seemed distressed, the soft lilt in her tone turning somber as she spoke. Her body huddled up on itself, and she would not look up to meet Bella's eyes- no matter how much their present closeness seemed to affect her.

Bella trailed her hands up to her chin, tilting the Russian's face towards her while she tried to come up with the words that would appease the other athlete, give her a semblance of normality in the world she had involuntarily shaken up ever since they met.

She could sympathize only too well with the confusion Rosalie was experiencing right now. She had that moment too, back in the day when she started feeling different than other little girls, the only major difference between their circumstances was their age, as Bella had realized quite early on in her life that her heart would never be swayed by boys. Hence her empathy with the sudden burst of feelings exploding inside the Russian's mind. She recognized the confusion, the doubt and the anger it brought in the perfect little life she had made for herself. But perhaps Rosalie's situation was worse. To suddenly doubt everything one knew so far couldn't have been easy, rather than knowing almost right from the start.

Still, she couldn't help but be glad she was affecting the other woman as much as she sent her own damn mind spiraling. The US player had been determined to forget all about Rosalie. She wanted to wipe out her gorgeous face and those baby blue eyes from her mind; the distinguished air her nose gave the woman, atop her full lips and that athletic body giving her a glimpse at wonderful curves
hidden from her sight. Yet here they were.

The coffee debacle had forced their path to cross once more, thrown together in the midst of their respective countries aspirations in the Games. They were singled out by both sides, designated as an anomaly to be picked apart until it caved and conformed to what was supposed to be. Bella refused to be held hostage, whether it be by the media or her own fucking country, she wasn't a pawn that her leaders could dangle back and forth to infuriate their foe and spike the tensions between each nation.

The Russian had kissed her, albeit with hesitance and tentatively but still, she had bridged the gap between them to graze her lips across her own and enter what seemed to be a new territory for her. And she had done so of her own accord.

“You kissed me,” Bella said under her breath, still very much astonished that she had actually done it the day before.

“I.” Rosalie sighed, continuing in that low, melancholic tone of hers; “I didn't.”

“Don't say you didn't mean it, Princess,” interrupted the hockey player, “that wasn't an oops, I tripped and fell on your lips moment, and we both know it.”

Rosalie turned her face away from Bella, breaking free from the palm holding it in place as she moaned in frustration. The sound took both of them by surprise, Bella was watching the confusion spread heatedly across the Russian's features, highlighted by bitterness.

“I can't,” she spoke while she stepped back from their embrace, “you don't understand, I can't be like that, like you...I'm not strong enough-”

“Oh, Princess,” Bella cut her off, tightening her arms holding the Slavic beauty close to her, as she murmured. She felt the erratic thump of the heartbeat echoing against her tense frame, nothing in her posture willing to loosen up the stiffness of her muscles pressed against the US player.

“Ya ne mogu...Ne delay etogo so mnoy,” she heard in the crook of her neck where Rosalie had burrowed her forehead; lost in translation and overwhelmed by the feelings surging through her.

She was not prepared for that. Lust, she could handle, fucking was her thing. But feelings? That shit
was messed up, plain and simple. Feelings complicated everything, it made meaningless affairs become intricate entanglements of affection, desire, needs and passionate devotion she did not want to subject herself to.

She had seen her parents, who still loved each other to this day- after more than twenty years of marriage- and her brothers relationships blossom into strong commitments to their significant others. And from where she stood, it looked fascinating. To still appreciate your partner after years of intimacy- marred by the shit life threw at them, and the routine installed after a while- was amazing to her. She just wasn't sure it was for her, she liked being a free agent. Her track record in relationships spoke for itself, save for a few relationships which lasted for some months, she essentially had friends with benefits, or the sacrosanct fuck buddy- her saving grace for a time if there ever was one.

Although it suited her, it was no picture of what togetherness looked like. Acknowledging she had no true ground to stand on and know how to deal with that thing blooming between them, Bella could not help the attraction she felt. For once, she wanted more. Or she thought she did, maybe...There was that annoying part of her who wanted more, despite the fact that she wanted to fuck Rosalie all night long. She would like to deny it was there; that annoying, freaking inkling deep down inside, or the way her heartbeat was pounding in her chest every time they had a confrontation, a moment...

Fuck, she wanted to get a grip on herself and get her control back. In an ideal world, they would fuck, then go on their merry way without looking back. In that realm, she would obliterate their meetings in the deep recess of her brain and only keep in mind the memory of her body; which she would have fucked sideways until the Russian passed out- a fuck and run, a simple, uncomplicated, sexual tryst. Nothing messy about that.

In their reality, however, she found herself daydreaming about the other athlete; wondering about her life ever since the Russian had opened up to her. The woman was beautiful, no doubt about that, but her personality, alternatively blowing hot and cold to keep her on her toes- sometimes harsh then soft, a warrior on the ice yet a skittish kitten when she was faced by the unknown it seemed- appealed to her. It called to something within the US athlete, hell, maybe there was a masochist in her- if the recent days meant something. She had trouble reconciling what she knew with what she discovered, much like Rosalie she'd surmise. Add to that the confusion stemming in the Russian about her sexuality and that was just a recipe for disaster.

Interrupting the train of her thoughts, Rosalie tilted her chin towards Bella. The American watched in wonder as her cheeks reddened and she timidly brushed her lips against Bella's. Fuck it, she thought. She was only human, and that was one temptation she could not resist. She did what any sane woman would have done in her stead, and kissed her back.
Russian 101:

Да, так вы сказали = Yeah, so you've said.

Нет это не имеет никакого значения = But it doesn't make any difference.

Что? = what

Я не могу... Не делайте этого со мной = I can't... Don't do this to me.

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
She stumbled as Rosalie gripped her shoulder to lean on her but righted herself. The blond laughed at her little mishap, her face lightening up while Bella glared down to the smaller woman, though she could not stop the tiny smile threatening to overtake her features.

There was something intriguing about the Russian, she kept dancing around her with that cold yet burning, Slavic temper of hers, never giving too much away about herself so far, yet kissing her on a whim. She was unlike any woman she had ever met; she piqued her interest, and hard as she tried, the universe seemed dead set on crossing their paths time and time again. What was a woman to do, in such circumstances, but roll with it and see where it got her?

“Oh, you think this is funny, Princess?” Bella asked the giggling woman. Today was full of surprise—not only could she smile, but she could laugh too. Who knew, the hockey player thought while she grabbed Rosalie to bring her closer.

“Chto my delayem? YA khochu-”

“English, please,” Bella cut off the flustered Russian, with a smile and a light tone which did not reflect the feelings festering between them.

“What are we doing?” She asked with a frown marring her beautiful face, worry etched on the lines tracing her features as she looked up to Bella.

“I don't know, Rosalie, you tell me, you kissed me,” Bella answered honestly. She wanted to know what the Russian thought; if it was something more than an experiment to her, the 'I kissed a girl' moment and I'm so cool now...No fucking need to torture herself if that was the case, she mused with bitterness. Ever since that song, straight girls just loved to show off with a little girl on girl lip action, often for the benefit of their lucky boyfriends, as a simple way of attracting attention or merely to say they've done it. The US player did not need to lay her whole damn life on the line if the Russian held
no other intentions than filling a bucket list at her expense.

There was no telling how much of a fucking disaster their connection would lead to. Not only were the stakes high because of the Games, but the politics behind it all would inevitably turn a relationship between them into a major cluster fuck neither of them needed to deal with. There seemed to be no happy ending possible to their story. Given the reaction a picture of them together had provoked, what good could come out of their relationship?

If it came to that, eventually...Bella was lost in thought, trying to piece together the many different outcomes there could be to their Olympian affair. But no matter how much she wanted to believe it could happen, she saw nothing but trouble for them. Yet, Bella- much like Icarus fleeing the labyrinth, couldn't help but fly too close to the sun, irrepressibly drawn to the strange Slavic creature. She knew it was a bad idea, hell she could hear her brother's voice tell her to be responsible and not do anything too reckless; Bella would bet a hundred bucks on those being the exact words Edward would be screaming at her if he could.

Her mind was playing the reasonable card, screaming at her to get out of there while she still could, while her heart told her there was something there. It was a strange feeling, almost as if a part of her own heart was trying to betray her, forcing Bella to acknowledge it while her brain tried to steer her clear of any wrongdoing. The two forces were waging a war inside of her, yet not even the realistic part of her would be sufficient enough to deter Bella from finding out if it was real or just a figment of her imagination.

She had said fuck it, and she meant it. She would take a leap for once in her life, and maybe, yes, against her better judgment. But she would do it- not for the sake of love or whatever bullshit Disney had tried to sell her when she was a kid, she’d do it for herself, because she deserved to find her connection, it was her human right to rid herself of that primal need, goddammit...All joke aside, why would the Universe show her that tiny sliver of a connection, only to rip it from her grasp? What was the fucking point? While she wasn’t superstitious like her fellow teammates, even she had to admit that there was such a thing as just too many freaking coincidences.

Besides, it was exciting, this rush of adrenaline only lust and emotions could give a person, the thrill it brought her as she bantered with the feisty Russian and pushed while the other pulled, a crazy Olympian tango both of them wanted to lead. Their respective tempers would most definitely lead to a disaster of equal proportion to the blow out they should prepare for- if they were to go any further than heated kisses here and there. Flashes of feelings whispered in secret could only get them so far and Bella wasn't a half assed kinda girl- never had, never would.

That was what landed her the spot she aimed for on the national team and in Sochi in the first place. Either she was in or out, there was rarely any middle ground in her personal life or her career, for that matter. From time to time, her Mom reminded her that she should tamper that radical side of her personality but she was a lost cause, though even her dear mother had to admit on occasion that she
had come a long way since her teenage years.

“I don't know,” she exclaimed still furrowing her brow, “I told you I never did anything like that!”

Bella had to laugh at the expression of utter outrage displayed on her face. She took a step back, and skated backwards with her right hand extended, expecting Rosalie to follow her as she headed towards the on-ice entry door.

“No-what are you doing?” The other woman interrupted, apparently not getting the clue Bella was trying to convey.

“Come on, we're getting out,” the hockey playeranswer as she skated back to the bemused Russian, holding out her hand once more.

“Pochemu-”

“I know this one,” Bella interrupted what was sure to be another Slavic rant, not that she didn't enjoy hearing the language, because she did, very much so- but she did not want to tempt fate anymore than they already had and stay on the barn, too exposed to prying eyes. “Jesus, Princess, you ask too many questions. Now come on, or do I need to give you a piggyback ride?” She winked and gave her a cheeky smile.

Rosalie huffed indignantly, steeled herself and skated right past Bella, snotily ignoring her. If anything, it amused the American and did nothing more than spike her latent lust at the feisty behavior. Plus, it gave her a great view of that glorious ass, she thought as she smirked and got out of the barn to put her skates guards back on. Fuck, she was such a glutton for punishment, Bella thought as she watched Rosalie tap her foot to signal her impatience.

“What now?” The Russian, who was waiting for her with her arms crossed beneath her breasts, huffed as she glared.

“Now we go somewhere-”

“Where?”
“I don't know. Would you come with me if I could sneak you into my hotel?” She asked, only half kidding, part of her eager to provoke her little spitfire in the wake of the heavy conversation that was coming their way.

“What?” Rosalie was horrified, “I'm not-YA ne sobirayus' zanimat'sya seksom s vami!”

“English, Rose,” Bella requested as she took Rosalie's hand in hers, the pet name slipping out against her will. See, this attraction mind fuckery shit was already giving her bad habits. Though to be fair, she'd much rather think about pet names than complicated feelings and their implications.

“I am not sexing with you-”

“Fucking, you mean, Princess,” she laughed at the stunned athlete who was regarding her with hostility once more, her cheeks blazing red as she glared her down.

“No matter, I am not-”

“Jesus, I heard you the first time, I wasn't suggesting we have sex, Rosalie, merely that we go somewhere private to talk.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, oh.” Bella shrugged her shoulders as she watched her little spitfire deflate before her eyes, “not that I wouldn't enjoy it,” she winked. Rosalie meekly slapped her shoulder and huffed, not even dignifying her last comment with an answer.

“OK, moving on...Look, maybe we can go in the locker room then? Less risky, yes?”

“Da, no-” Rosalie started but silenced herself as they walked toward the nearby room Bella’s team used to change, both athletes wanting the privacy they deserved for such a personal conversation.

Bella was thinking about the KGB, and how it would be just like Putin to bug every square foot of the Olympics infrastructures. And really, who could blame him? To have every country in the world and their delegations inches away from his prying ear was probably a wet dream of his, she thought
sarcastically as she closed the door behind his country's best chance of medal in the skating part of the Games. And what an asset she was, she mused again, watching her pace back and forth before her eyes.

“No means but in Russian right?” Bella tried to start with something easy- it seemed the little blond summoned tact in the hockey player, a late start for the brash woman.

“Yes,” she nodded, “but.”

“But what?” Prompted Bella.

“But, I'm not sure I should. I mean, you're already...” she hesitated before adding in a pained whisper, “my people will hate you-”

“Why don't you let me worry about all that, Rosalie? I got thick skin, I told you that.” Bella put her hands on the Russian's back as she turned away from her.

“They are strong i gordyy- um...proud? And you offend my people, you-you do not understand the Russians,” the blond muttered, taking her head between her hands as she rested her weight against the palm rubbing soothing circles on her Team Rossiya hoodie.

“Perhaps. But I know attention and I know what it's like to have people hate me, discriminate and stigmatize me, for no other reason than my sexual preferences, Rosalie. Do you think it was all fine and dandy for me when I came out back home? For weeks, I received death threats at home, people would send me disgusting things to scare me, to tell me that they think I'm an abomination, something that goes against nature...So please, don't tell me I don't understand anger or hatred.”

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that. Still, in Russia, it is much difficult. For some years now, people have become more and more religious and with the new law...Violent, extremist groups are maiming people, just because they are dressed too gay or-”

“I get that, Princess, but they're still ignorant people who have nothing better to do than hate what they don't understand, mindless dumb fucks who have nothing to fight with but their fists. They mean nothing to me. And they shouldn't mean anything to you either. We can be smart, we can take every precaution you like, the question is are you willing to do it?”
The Russian said nothing for a few minutes, Bella thought that perhaps she was doing the same thing that she did, weighing the pros and cons of starting anything between them while the context was so heavily paralyzing for both of them. The way she saw it, it wasn't a question of betraying her country, she would never do that- not for all the gold or glory in the world- though she was perfectly aware that if the rumors got out, some people would jump to those conclusions and it would be easier for herself to defend her reputation under public scrutiny than the Russian, with the gay issue acting as a lead cloak, shrouding the country and its minds.

In many ways, Rosalie had it much worse than her, for her country and the power in place abhorred gay people to a degree she would like to think most Americans had long gone past. Her stakes were higher, Bella knew she would face negative reactions but she would wager that the majority would not be that offended- sure there would be outrage and doubt thrown her way, but she had become used to that by now; while the situation could potentially become explosive for her Slavic temptress. Vladimir Putin would, in all likelihood, not take kindly to a sexual dalliance- much less a relationship between them if he ever heard about it through his all knowing FSB grapevine. And his people were probably not going to wave LGBT flags in front of the Kremlin to force his hand.

“V poryadke- OK,” Bella almost missed the whispers tumbling from her luscious lips while she reflected on their cluster fuck of a situation. “I want to but I don’t know how. It's not that simple,” the Russian tried again, “I told you-”

“Look, Rosalie, we're not gonna be afforded the luxury of doing the regular, attraction thing,” Bella winced as she cut her off, “and dance around each other like any normal people. Shit, we both know that this little back and forth we've been doing these past few days won't cut it for much longer,” she repeated, looking straight in those endless pools of blue. The myriads of emotions playing on the Russian's face were fascinating to watch, albeit a bit disconcerting for her. She could wax poetics about her beauty and the tragic part of it, but her silence was perhaps the most vibrant homage she could give, mesmerized as she was by the cluster fuck her life was turning into- on the sole account of a little blond who rolled her “r’s”, had quite the temper and apparently the power to stir up her hormones like no one before.

“I understand that it is complicated for you, hell I even get that you're unsure and I'm not asking for full on dirty fucking tonight, much less a proclamation of love tomorrow,” Bella argued again, tired of the confusion that had settled over her mind these past few days. Their situation was complicated enough without doubting each second of everything, they needed to make choices. Hard ones, things that went beyond their own circumstances, but those decisions needed to be made. Harsh as it may seem, to make potentially life altering choices on the basis of attraction and a couple of interactions here and there, they needed to be proactive given the microscope they were under.

“I can give you all the time you need to wrap your head around your feelings, we can talk about it all night long if that will help make it better, I've got no problems with that, nor with being your first woman,” Bella smiled at that, feeling a bit like an asshole- since when was she that type?- but kept focused and took a deep breath. “And I'm not trying to corner you, I appreciate how strange it must be for you, Princess,” she added, “but what I can't do, however, is constantly have doubts about
whether you do want to give this a try or not.”

The Russian nodded, silently agreeing to her argument while the hockey player tried to justify what she was asking of the other athlete, just a day short of the grand beginning of their competition. “I'm probably being unfair, but I can't. And I won't. I need to be focused on my goals, I wasn't expecting to meet anyone here, and I know I sound like a fucking asshole,” the Slavic blond grinned at the too frequent use of profanities punctuating her rants.

“You need to decide if this is worth it to you, Rosalie, risks and all. I need you to enter this with your eyes wide open. We both do, there is too much at stake for either of us to do it any other way, you understand? ” She asked the pale woman in front of her.

Disbelief turned into understanding as the Russian skater mulled over her words. Hurt, confusion and uncertainty were etched all over her features as she tried to come up with some sort of an answer for the hockey player making her case in front of her.

“I- I...Bella,” she sighed. The Russian, who had pushed their interactions first, going so far as to initiate their first kiss, was seemingly unable to word her thoughts after the other woman's plea.

“Look, if it's not, I will understand. We can forget each other, it will be as if I never existed, I know the stakes are much higher for you than they are for me. And I cannot promise you an easy ride, Princess, I won't lie to you.” She laid her palm against the Russian's cheek, trying to enjoy every little moment the other would be so brave as to give her.

There was the double edged sword her own conscience had warned her about. The weight of a single little choice that should be simple in any other circumstances. Back home, she would have never thought about the future so early into something that wasn't even a something yet, but their situation demanded their caution, starting with the beginning of that something. Perhaps those obstacles standing in their paths would be too much to overcome in the end- and she would not bet on the Russian's decision to even try, but at least she had said her piece. Now, the ball was in her court. Bella could not have this status quo perpetually hanging over her head, like a swinging axe swaying over her Games. Such a state of indecision was not something she could cope with on a regular basis during competition, there was a reason for her media blackout before games and the reactions to their pictures were not really advocating any reconsideration on her part, hence her pseudo ultimatum to the other athlete. There were some facts that would remain unchanged, no matter what decision they made or didn't.

Yes, it would be complicated. No, their countries would probably not be ecstatic to see the dangerous liaison happen, but those were the facts they had to deal with. Neither Obama nor Putin would be celebrating the bridge both of them could build for their respective country through a relationship, an unwanted evidence that their people were not condemned to repeat the same patterns
over and over again...

People would not be impressed with them, some would be offended, it would spark endless debate, controversy would follow them throughout their Games; and yes, it would be hard. The question, or rather the dilemma that was posed by their unique circumstances; as it was, remained the same.

The two athletes had to decide whether they were willing to take such risks and potentially compromise their future career if the controversy did not abate or worst, escalated. There would be repercussions, the American could see it plainly from where she stood. There had to be, it was politics, and the public opinion was volatile. Both of their countries would probably try to manipulate their situation to their advantage, she surmised, but all that was a part of the package deal they had to choose. Or not.

Sure, they could try to keep things quiet, be secretive, but no matter how much they put their minds to hiding the truth, it was bound to get out one day or another. She would not bet on much more than two days, what with all the cameras, people and multiple interferences they had to manage every day. Such were the joys of a world where everybody and their neighbors possessed a camera in their phones, broadening the scope of potential paparazzi to just about every single people out there.

Perhaps it would break them, and the embryo of a relationship they were building could not do anything else but fail. Those were all risks that they needed to take into account before they embarked on anymore secret meetings, or sneak out in the middle of the night for stolen kisses when no one was looking. Just like she had said to the Russian, they knew most of the risks they would incur by seeing each other. Though before they even decided to play the game, it was imperative that they understood the rules.

For her part, Bella had already made her decision; she was willing to chance it, if the other woman wanted to. Just this once, she would leap for her. She had accepted most of their circumstances as they were, the things they could try to control and others that they would endure, it was just the way life went, in each things and so particularly in their case.

She would be patient with the Russian, introducing her slowly to her world, provided the other woman was willing. That was the core of her problems. While her decision had been made quite quickly- considering the amount of pressure it would put on her from that day forward; she could understand the other's hesitation. It seemed like an awfully hard leap of faith, for someone who showed no inclination for the same sex before in her life; she was well aware of that.

Despite those reservations, she had asked the blond to make her choice and take a stand, whether it be by her side or not. They were still at that step where things could be undone and hearts mended, but Bella knew that once she was in, there would be no getting out- not for her. If the Russian had captured her attention that much by now, it was significant. There was no halfway possible, she
wanted to try, but she could not be the only one. And while dancing around one another could be fun, their circumstances were too difficult to prolong the uncertainty anymore and not clear the air between them.

“I can't. I want to, I do, but I don't think I can,” Rosalie pulled Bella from her darkening thoughts.

“Why? Because you're afraid about your people's reaction?”

“Da, but not only-”

“Then what is it?”

“I have a...I-” she muttered under her breath, trying to look up, but not able to hold her eyes to the American's for long. She was hiding something, the hockey player had seen first hand how much she liked to keep her cards close to her vest, and she could only imagine how hard it must be for her to open up, though it was a necessity if they were to make some progress together. Their path would be hard enough without adding any more shit to their plate by being dishonest with each other. That thought popped again into her head, an easy justification- albeit true- to the hard choices she was demanding of her Slavic temptress. Gone were the days when she could get by with a Devil may care attitude, nowadays she had to contend with her PR team and the conflicting interests that sometimes arose between her public image, her own interests, those of her club or her national team, sometimes the burden put on athletes seemed endless though she knew she had an easy ride on the whole. She was skating for work and making money out of her passion, not working in a goddamn factory at the assembly line for fuck's sake- but still, it seemed like an awful lot of pressure rested on her shoulders sometimes.

“I'm going to need you to open up, Princess, otherwise that thing between us? It ain't gonna work,” she tried to tell the struggling blond in front of her again, hammering her point home.

“YA znayu- I know. I-”

“Come on, Rose, what is it?”

“I have someone waiting for me back home,” Rosalie gave her a sad little smile as she spoke, not even chastising the American for her second slip of tongue with the pet name, her eyes becoming bluer as they shone with emotion.
“W-What?” Bella was stunned for a second, not really sure that she heard the Russian right.

“I have someone waiting for me at home.”

“Someone...A husband someone?” Bella asked, incredulous, as that had not crossed her mind for even a second, so focused that she was on the particular of their situation, completely forgetting the rules of dating 101. To her credit, it was that much unbelievable because the Russian had been the one to initiate their kiss and had sought her out in the beginning.

“No, not really,” Rosalie told her, a somber look on her face, while Bella was trying to wrap her mind around the concept of a 'not really husband'.

“I have family,” she said after a minute, “I can't take any chance with their safety. You don't understand, I-whatever I do, I must think about the repercussions it will have on them.”

“I get that.”

“Do you? Do you know what they will do to my family if the media continue to publish articles about us? Is your government going to turn on you?” Rosalie asked, her fiery temper coming out to play once more. “Because that is what will happen to mine- me, if I step out of line,” she tried to explain to the baffled American struggling to understand the depth of the repercussions their entanglement could have on her family. The US athlete had to admit that it was one parameter she had foreseen, but perhaps underestimated. Of course, she knew that it would have different consequences for them, and she was well aware that it would be easier for her than the Russian, yet she had convinced herself that, save for a public snub, and bad press, it wouldn't be so bad if they were proactive about it. They could anticipate and prepare, not just go through the motions.

“I understand. I do, it just means that we have to be more careful, that's all. Where do your family li-” she tried to argue.

“You still do not get it,” Rosalie cut her off in a harsh tone, “my parents died a long time ago, in a car accident. Fifteen years ago, when Putin tried to access to the highest State functions, my papa was a journalist,” the Russian explained as her eyes veiled under the weight of unshed tears. “He made it his life mission to prevent him from being dubbed Russia's next President, but never voted that year,” a tear fell down her cheek but she wiped it angrily, staring intently at Bella.
Their respective countries had different political backgrounds and circumstances, very true; and while people might be upset back in the States, pressure would not be put on her family, at least not by her own damn government. Or she’d fucking hope so, for the sake of freedom and their damn constitution. Whereas Putin and its FSB cronies would not hesitate much before sending the cavalry to her little blond’s doorstep, if they did not go any further than that. She had a much clearer picture of the Russian's hesitations, the dire consequences she would face if the powers that be smelled even a whiff of untoward behavior were not only career repercussions- that was only the tip of the iceberg- but the worst would affect her family.

There was no easy choice, and it all boiled down to that. Choices, decisions they had to make based on the slightest inkling they felt. Decisions that would affect their families, for the Russian even more so, but still, the hockey player knew that hers would be subjected to the gossip back home, the rumors, people wanting to get all the nitty gritty details of the scandal.

There were lives hanging on the balance, their family's and Putin- who had gambled his reputation on the most expensive Games in history- would not let them throw a wrench into his plan. He would not be satisfied until he had shown the extent of his power to the world and the true grandeur of his motherland. She knew the man had a stranglehold over the institutions, the President of the Russian Parliament was a close friend and supporter of his, the FSB swore fealty to the man- and they would bow down to his will, no matter the consequences. There was only one leader in the mighty Rossiya, a man with strength and skills, intelligence and a great propensity to capture the general public opinion and rally it against the humiliating West.

Hell, she wasn't even sure how her own country's intelligence agencies would greet the news, not to say anything about the Republicans. Hence the multiple precautions they owed their loved ones. They couldn't afford to make mistakes, it was not in their cards unfortunately. All the same, they could have left it at that, and content themselves with moving on, forgetting about each other in a heartbeat, yet neither of them seemed willing to let it go.

“So I know all about cost and risks,” Rosalie reiterated, her tone cold as ice and her spine straightening, “my dedushka i babushka brought me up from that point. They live in Crimea, near the Russian border-”

“Dedushka i babushka? What does that mean?” Bella asked, one too many attempt to diffuse their tense situation, but also curious about the exotic language.

“It is the parents of my parents, I cannot remember how you say that in English,” Rosalie scrunched up her eyebrows, attempting to come up with the right word to express her Russian idioms. It was another moment of lightness in a heavy conversation. So far, the language barrier seemed to provide enough humor to their lives to counteract the gravity surrounding them.
“Ah, your grandparents you mean. OK, babusha and dusha-”

“Niet, ne tak,” the Slavic woman replied, her mother tongue overwhelming the American once again. “De-dush-ka i ba-bush-ka,” she sounded each word out loud for the dubious foreigner.

“OK,” she repeated the words, trying to get it right.

Once she had the Slavic seal of approval on her pronunciation, she went back on topic. “So, you're half Ukrainian?”

“Niet, full Russian. My family was there long before there was a Ukrainian country and my dedushka i ba- err...my grandparents still live there,” Rosalie clarified. Such was the curse of countries created by the more or less arbitrary partition of war spoils between greater powers, political gestures given against a nuke or two back then here, or a temporary cease fire there.

“Alright, so it complicates things, but you had to know from the get go that it would not be easy, no? Or did you just kiss me for the heck of it? True, it's another damn complication to add to our plate, Princess, but we can deal with it. Where did the bitchy little fighter I met the first day go? I-”

“No, you still do not get it, do you? I have a...ugh,” she groaned, the frustration plain to see in her shifting stance. “U menya yest' doch'-”

“English, pozhaluysta,” Bella winked at Rosalie, trying to alleviate her annoyance with the small bit of Russian knowledge she possessed. It worked and she got a smile in return, tinted with that air of sadness she was still getting used to.

The other woman shifted her stance and heaved a deep breath.

“I have a daughter’
Russian 101:

Russkiy syurpriz = Russian surprise
Chto my delayem? Ya khochu... = What are we doing? I want...
No = But
Niet = No
Da = Yes
Epoch = Why
YA ne sobirayus' zanimat'sya seksom s vami = I'm not going to have sex with you
i gordyy = and proud
Rossiya = Russia
V poryadke = alright
Yebat' = Fuck
YA znayu = I know
Niet, ne tak = No, not like that
Dedushka i babushka = grandparents
U menya yest' doch' = I have a daughter
Pozhaluysta = please

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to know what you think!
Four words and fourteen letters, that's all it took to throw Bella's world off its axis.

“What?”

“I have a daughter,” Rosalie said timidly, looking into Bella's eyes with apprehension as she dropped her bombshell on the astounded American. No sound could be heard in the locker room whilst both women were staring at each other. One of them was shifting her stance from side to side, her anxiety obvious to Bella, still in shock over that little sentence.

“A-A daughter?” Bella croaked before clearing her throat meekly.

“Yes,” the blond mumbled as her cheeks reddened and she watched the surprise register into the hockey player's face.

That was a game changer for Bella. Shit, she had expected the complications- even though she had perhaps underestimated the consequences it would have on the Russian's family- but a child changed everything. She wasn't even ready for that for fuck's sake. There was enough troubles for them already without a tiny little life hanging in the balance.

“Fuck,” Bella whined out loud, her mind going a mile a minute as it tried to process the curve ball that had been thrown to her.

“Mne o-ochen' zhal” Rosalie started to stutter, reaching out with her hand for the hockey player who started pacing in front of her.

“But...But-You're too young- how?” Bella cut her off, too unsettled to stall her own damn questions and wait for an explanation. “I mean, obviously you're not- and I know how, scratch that-but...I didn't
expect that.” The hockey player's tone faltered, she took her head into her hands, too incredulous to even think about the implications of that impromptu revelation.

“I'm sorry,” the Russian said softly, “I had to tell you. You-you need to understand that whatever I do will impact her life.”

“Shit, I get that, Princess. I do, I'm just...Fuck, you do know how to keep me on my toes,” she lifted her head up and shook it a bit, back and forth, as if to clear the fog of frustration, anguish and helplessness threatening to overtake her mind.

“It's okay, eto,” Rosalie sighed, “it- it was not a good idea anyway” she added with sadness heavy in her tone, her blue eyes turning stormy gray under the weight of the moment. “I understand,” she stated with resignation. She turned her back on Bella and slowly backed away, taking a first step towards the door then another under the American's tormented eyes. Jolted into action at their own damn pattern about to repeat itself like an endless loop, she lunged for her arm, halting the other woman's escape.

“Whoa, back up a minute Princess,” Bella reached for her hand and tugged her closer to her own body. “What can you understand when I haven't even processed that little bomb you just dropped on me?”

The Russian sighed, smiling as a tear escaped her eye again, her features contorted with that strange mix of melancholy and resignation the American was starting to get familiar with. She could have lamented over the fact that their several encounters had been full of those looks so far but that would have done nothing but make her mind spin further into depression. She felt inclined to be positive, an attitude their mother had drilled into her kids, maybe just as much as politeness. Even when she hit her rebellious teenage years, she was never that girl who spent her time deciding whether she would slit her wrists or not, a testimony to her good adjustment capacities.

There had to be something they could do, no matter how unsolvable their circumstances might seem. She could almost hear her mom's voice in her head, whispering her mantra to her- each problem has a solution, but as Bella watched Rosalie, she understood the other woman was expecting nothing but rejection from her. Truth be told, she wasn't prepared for something of that magnitude, and no she did not expect it, hence her astonishment- but was there ever a right moment for that kind of news? Her dating history was limited enough, of course she didn't have any chapter on people with kids.

The athlete never really paid them attention and perhaps she'd go as far as to say that it usually acted as some kind of deterrent effect on her. Not that she had a problem with them, she loved her nephews and her niece to death, but at the end of the day, she wasn't responsible for their well being or their education- and that was a heavy burden the American was not sure she'd be able to shoulder, yet. Thus she avoided any complication. That included entanglements with married people, and all
the more so those who had kids. Yet not even that seemed enough to keep her away from the Russian player.

“Hey,” she lifted Rosalie's chin with her fingers, wanting her complete attention. “I'll admit that you stunned me for a while there, but it doesn't change how I feel,” Bella said with tenderness to the flustered blond in her arms, “you intrigue me,” she added as the Russian snorted in answer.

Hell, what was a child when one considered the FSB, the Cold War and generations of anonymous people hating each other on the basic principle of prejudice?

She would need time to properly move on from that shock and what it meant, yet she was still not experiencing any change of heart, as crazy as it was even for her. The draw was still there, difficult circumstances be damned. And provided her little blond did not have anything else to spring on her, she would try to understand how a child could even figure out into their equation much later. She just couldn't deal with that now.

“So, you got a daughter, OK,” Bella nodded, “I'll-I'm gonna need some time to process that-”

“I understand, I didn't...ya prosto- I don't even know what I want,” the Russian grunted. “Ya prosto zaputalsya-”

“Net ponyat’” Bella interrupted, mustering her better Russian for the occasion, though she couldn't go past her first two words before the blond corrected her.

“Nepravil'no, eto 'ya ne ponimayu’” There was something to be said about the Slavic language, it was beautiful, rough and strong yet melodic, but it was getting her nowhere.

“Rosalie,” she said in a stern tone, her patience wearing thin as the revelations of the day were starting to catch up with her. The Slavic language doing nothing to help clear her mind and think properly.

“I know” the Russian's voice took a particularly high pitch, her breathing impeding her speech ability, just not as much as her annoyance given their situation- still standing in the middle of an absurdly white, clinical locker room with a strange blend of scents, part sweat and part chemicals; not the ideal location for a heart to heart, most people would concede.
“I- eto razocharovaniye...um...frustrating?” She asked, meeting Bella's eyes with her own apprehensive, inquiring stare. “I want one thing when I know I should not,” Rosalie whispered, her voice barely audible in the silence enveloping them.

Bella smiled to her, apparently at loss for words. They watched one another for a while, neither of them moving an inch nor speaking, the Russian seemed content to stay stoic, a picture of poise mirroring the great Slavic heroines of yesteryear.

“Maybe you should try again, just to make up your mind,” Bella smirked at her blushing Russian, “or you could tell me about your kid?”

Rosalie frowned but that seemed to do the trick, the blond got some color back into her cheeks and relaxed into the foreigner's arm slowly as she told Bella all about her daughter.

“She's five years old soon, her name is Kira-”

“Ki-ra” Bella tried it out, repeating each syllable to the best of her ability. “Do you have a picture?”

Rosalie reached for the front pocket of her hoodie and took out her red phone. She swiped her thumbs over the screen a few times and shoved it under the American's nose, “here.”

The hockey player watched with caution, almost afraid of what she would find on the screen. She had experienced that awkward moment one too many times with parents showing off pictures of their offspring, only to find strange faces staring back at her. She was lucky enough for once, she soon realized as she looked upon a cute little blond smiling from ear to ear. The child was a perfect mini me for the Russian beauty, complete with the blond ringlets framing an adorable, chubby face.

“Cute kid,” she commented as she passed the phone back to the smiling Russian who nodded.

“I think so too but she is mine, I am...err...Na menya okazyvayut vliyaniye....I'm- um...prejudiced?”

“You're biased, you mean,” Bella corrected.

“Da. Biased, that's the one I was looking for. Khorosho, now you know.”
“And I’m still not running away. Though I should, fuck knows why.”

“Why?” She cut her off, wringing her hands together.

“How about a little truth, Princess?” Bella asked. “Here, I'll start. For some crazy reason, I'm attracted to you,” Rosalie snorted but Bella continued, “and apparently you turn me into a blubbering fool, so yeah,” she admitted, embarrassed at her own lack of finesse. “And your daughter? Surprisingly enough, not even that little bomb is doing anything to solve that. There. Now your turn,” Bella smirked to the Russian, an arrogant facade to cover up her sweating palms and the thundering beat of her heart as she laid her heart bare for her Slavic temptress.

Rosalie turned her head away from her, and took a few steps back, refusing to look at her as she spoke. Compulsively clutching the sleeves of her team hoodie with her hands, she held her stiff posture for a while, pacing back and forth a few meters away from the American.

“You want truth?” She muttered under her breath, still struggling with her words it seemed, as she stumbled on the last syllable with her heavy Slavic accent. “You're the first woman I- I am attracted to- and I...” she sighed, rubbing her hands against her neck and shoulders to soothe the growing ache she felt deep in her bones.

“Why did you kiss me?”

“Because I wanted to,” Rosalie turned to Bella at the question, smiling while she gave her simple answer, “I had to try.”

“And?” The hockey player took a step towards the Russian, watching her expression falter and her cheeks reddened as the embarrassment seemed to settle in her face. “What conclusion did you draw from your little experiment, lyubimaya?” She taunted Rosalie in her mother tongue, the Slavic word tinged with a deep voice as she stood closer to her feisty blond. The Russian gasped at the sensual tone and looked intently into her deep brown eyes, mesmerizing Bella with that heavy stare of hers- full of promises, confusion and still, that lingering sadness.

“And...Argh...” Rosalie frowned, “chert poberi,” she swore, “I- I liked it,” she admitted, avoiding her gaze to the side.

Bella smirked cockily to the other woman, laying her hand against her back as she dipped her head
to brush her nose against Rosalie's. “I know you did, Princess,” she winked and watched the deep red flare across the soft, alabaster skin.

“You did not,” objected the Russian, though her eyes closing and the soft sigh she let out did nothing but encourage Bella to keep pushing.

“Look at me, Rosalie,” she demanded and watched the Russian open her eyelids to fix her stare on her, baby blue eyes clouded with lust whilst trembling hands laid on Bella's arm. “I'm going to kiss you, so now would be a good time to stop me if that's not what you want,” she said softly.

Rosalie sighed but never moved an inch, prompting Bella to move her lips against hers as she flicked her tongue to the Russian's plump bottom lip. Opening her mouth, she moaned as Bella took control over her tongue, passionately responding to the American's assault, her hands moving up to her shoulders- an unconscious move to mold her body to the hockey player, getting closer to the source of her conflicted emotions while their tongues battled together in a sensual dance.

Bella backed her towards the wall, pushing Rosalie's back against it as her fingers were skimming over her skin, barely touching her sides up and down with the tip of her digits, slowly trailing against the supple skin of her shoulder, her breast and her waist, then the curve of her hip. Rosalie shivered while the taller brunette spread her legs with her knee, entangling their bodies much closer in the heat of their desire. Bella pushed the Russian with her weight to feel and fight, to push and prod, she wanted to see that feisty little temper of hers come out and play.

She wasn't disappointed, for Rosalie was all that and more. She was an eager first timer apparently, if the sounds she made were any indication. The tiny moans blended together in Bella's mind, echoing every bit of lust she felt at that moment. Rosalie gripped her braided hair with her fingers and pulled on it, eliciting a groan from the hockey player at the rough play.

Never one to be outdone, Bella bit her bottom lip lightly, tugging on it and swiping her tongue against it to soothe the red, bruised mouth, releasing it with a thin sliver of saliva still hanging between them. She captured Rosalie's mouth again for a last quick kiss before letting her breathe, laying her forehead against the Russian's as they tried to rest their heaving chests. Both women were trying to catch their breaths as they watched each other; admiring the lust in their eyes, that thirst for one another only desire could produce.

Heartbeats were thudding against their ribcage, wild looks and heavy stares exchanged for a moment suspended in time- something that was only theirs to share, the passion of the first days, realizing you have that deep hunger for someone, trying to quench it until you have nothing left but pleasure and for once, Bella felt something more.
She had experienced passion before, hell she was no stranger to fucking and had sexual trysts from time to time, but nothing like that. Ever. Her body was responding more to the Russian than any other woman she had ever been with, there was that thread that pulled her to the other, that deep nagging she had felt ever since they had met which only Rosalie seemed to soothe.

At first, it was an annoying inkling she tried to stop, but now, it felt bigger. That was a strange feeling, frightening yet exciting, hovering over the deep end for a moment too long before leaping. Shit, she was so fucking screwed, she thought as she watched her little spitfire and the lust written all over her beautiful face.

“Well one thing we know for sure, Princess,” Bella grinned to her flushed Russian, “we got chemistry alright,” she winked as the other laughed, granting her a full blown smile in her flushed face.

“Svyatoye der'mo!” She giggled, something that delighted the American. Even if she was still lost in translation, she supposed she'd have to get used to it, and frankly, if she could get that reaction to a kiss with her Slavic beauty, she couldn’t wait to see her writhing under her body all night long- now that would be a sight for sore eyes. Rosalie was glowing, there was no other word to qualify the pleasure written on her face, and Bella was treated to what seemed like a rare occurrence for the figure skater who appeared to be so tightly in control of her emotions to the outside world- and yes, a bit of an epic bitch sometimes. Bella wrapped a strand of blond hair around her finger and played with it behind Rosalie's ear after a while.

“It was good,” Rosalie commented, “but I need to get back to practice,” she added with regret lacing her tone.

“Just good? Fuck, Princess, it was more than that-”

“Zakhvatyvayushchiy...Um...Spectacular?” The Russian teased, smirking at Bella who laughed.

“That's more like it, yeah,” the hockey player smiled arrogantly while Rosalie just rolled her eyes at the satisfied, proud American still holding her close.

“Tomorrow, after the opening ceremony, can we meet?” Rosalie asked, fidgeting for a second, “We need to discuss how we are doing this,”

“Oh so we're doing it, now?” Bella teased, fucking ecstatic that the other would be willing to risk it.
“Sure, I'll try to see if Aro can bring me here, would that be OK for you? I figure it will be safer, we both have a reason to be here, so it shouldn't look suspicious.”

“I will try and be here. It is best, da,” the Russian nodded, eagerly agreeing to Bella's tentative draft of a plan.

“Alright. Can I have your number, Princess?”

“I think you will have to work for it, isn't that what you Amerikos say?” Rosalie countered with snark.

“Oh come on, Rosalie. Don't play hard to get, Princess, it's gonna be difficult enough as it is,” Bella argued as she mustered the most innocent, pleading look she could project for her little Russian's benefit and try to soften her up. That was a side she had yet to see, playful yet sarcastic Russian. “Besides, you never know when you could want a repeat of...how did you put it again?” She baited her Slavic blond with a smile, only half joking, “ah yes, spectacular, isn't it?”

“So you can kiss, bol'shoye delo! We will see what else you can do.” Rosalie retorted with a challenging look on her face, that glint in her blue eyes daring Bella to do something.

She tugged the Russian against her body once more, delighting in the feeling of her curves pressing to her own and whispered, “whatever you want, Princess,” before biting her earlobe and soothing the tender flesh with her tongue, making Rosalie gasp. She kissed her neck next, laying butterfly kisses and quick licks here and there to hear her Russian moan. She disentangled herself from Rosalie the moment she gave her what she wanted, that low thrum of her voice which told her she liked the attention. Bella left her bereft, still dazed and confused, with her eyes half closed and her mouth open.

“That was no fair,” the Russian shook her head and frowned as she watched Bella step back from her with a grin on her face.

“All's fair in love and war, Princess,” she winked, “come on, do I have to beg for that number?” Bella asked, cocky smirk back in its place as she faced her little Slavic temptress.

Rosalie smiled before relenting, giving it to her and getting the American's digits into her phone before they separated with a promise to meet the next day, after the opening ceremony.
As she was leaving the ice rink that night, Bella felt hopeful. Maybe it was foolish, to hope and actually try to believe that she could have it all, get the girl and the gold, but she would fight. Politics and rivalry be damned, she was dead set on getting her way, no matter how many pitfalls threatened her path. And so far? Neither her determination nor bravery had ever failed her.

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Russian 101 :

Mne ochen' zhal' = I'm sorry
Ya prosto = I'm just
Ya prosto zaputalsya = I'm just confused
Nepravil'no, eto : 'ya ne ponimayu' = Wrong, it's 'I don't understand'
Eto razocharovaniye = It is frustrating
Na menya okazyvayut vliyaniye = I'm biased
khorosh = well
Chert poberi = Damn it
lyubimaya = darling
Svyatoe der'mo ! = Holy shit!
Zakhvatyvayushchij = spectacular
Amerikos = Russian derogatory term for Americans
bol'shoje delo = big deal!

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you think.
Bella stretched a bit on the bed, making her sore joints crack as she yawned and took off naked for the adjoining bathroom. She relaxed under the hot spray of the luxurious shower, one of the best features she was granted complimentary of the room, unlike her fellow teammates who had to settle for sharing a smaller en-suite bathroom. Washing her hair twice to cleanse it of the sweat she had accumulated during training all day, she squeaked audibly when her phone started beeping furiously. Swearing out loud, Bella reached for the towel she had left besides the shower door and grabbed the beeping device.

She swiped her fingers on the screen a few times, unlocking it to check her unread text messages. Smiling, she opened her brother's latest text to find a simple sentence staring back at her: "nicely done, B! Sam says great boobs ;)

Scrolling down, she watched the next one, “Can you talk? We're @ home. PS: Edward is gonna KILL you!”

She had barely written a word when her cellphone rung, half panicking as she got out of the shower, still wet, dripping all over the carpet while she danced around, balancing her phone while she dried herself.

“Yeah?” She took the call, without paying attention to the name on her screen, hoping to God that it wouldn't be James.

“Hello, darling,” greeted her Mom's soft voice on the other end of the line.
“Hi, Mom,” she replied enthusiastically while she put on her panties and its matching brat, her breath coming out harder with the contortions she imposed to her body.

“Don't you 'hi mom me', young lady,' her Mom could cut the niceties off like no one's business.

“Um...OK, then...What did I do this time?” Bella asked innocently, knowing perfectly well just how bad it must be back home for her mom, who more or less despised the TV and preferred gardening to lazing around the house, to know all about her crazy Russian adventures.

“Why is it, lately, that every person with a broadband connection knows more about your life than your own mother?”

Oh shit, Bella grimaced. Nothing good ever came out of that tone of voice, Bella mused in silence. Her Mom could scare a serial killer with a raise of eyebrows and her intonations, the woman could have been an Army General with the way she kept her kids in line.

“So you heard?” she asked timidly to her Mom.

“Of course, baby, it's all over the news,” sighed her mother over the line.

“Shit, I-”

“Language, Isabella-”

“Hi, kid,” her father interrupted his wife to make his presence known and greet his daughter.

“Hey, dad.”

“How are you holding up, kiddo?” Her Dad inquired, his first question, as always. Her parents were always worried about their only girl. She lead the most public life out of all their children, and the scrutiny it drew constantly on their child weighed down heavily in – on their minds. Her father was the most enthusiastic of them all, regarding her career as an athlete, and she knew that sometimes, he
would worry that he had pushed her too much.

Being a parent was hard work, there was no guarantee whatsoever that they would not screw up the lives of their children with their choices and they had to deal with this ongoing concern for their kids, every day along the wild ride that was parenthood.

“I'm OK, Dad, thanks. How about you guys?”

“Good, good. Your Mom woke me up at five in the morning though-” Carlisle started in a tired voice, only to be cut off by his exuberant spouse.

“Shush, honey, we don't matter darling,” Esme started, “I want you to explain, please,” she finished with gentleness. “Is it true?”

Bella sighed, but said nothing for a while, trying to muster up the courage to fess up to her parents.

“Bella? Come on, sweetheart, talk to us,” encouraged her father.

“I- it's...” She groaned out loud, “Yes, OK?”

Her mother gasped while her father swore before being reprimanded by his wife.

“I mean- they're blowing it out of proportion, Mom- I haven’t done anything but follow her-” Bella tried to plead her case, stuttering her way through a clarification she owed her parents.

“Oh I know, sweetheart,” her Mom told her, oddly calm as her father simultaneously exclaimed “not really pleading your case there, darling.” “Stop it, Carlisle, I know my child and she might be a lot of things but she's not a stalker,” Esme said with force.

“Gee, thanks for the vote of confidence, mother,” Bella laughed bitterly, “I know the picture look bad, but they just...interpreted it to fit their narrative. I surprised her security agents, they overreacted and bam, I was on the floor;” her voice quavered with frustration-irritation, a sign Bella’s parents did not welcome.
“So?” Prompted her Mom impatiently.

“So we met a few days ago, don't know...I- she...She was intriguing, she...” Bella stopped herself at that, not really knowing how to explain her inner turmoils to her own parents, “I like her,” she softly admitted.

“Jesus, Bella,” her Dad groaned, “OK? What about the picture?” he asked, trying to move things along as Esme kept silent, mulling over her daughter's fluster explanation-words.

“We just...Look guys, I was- we started talking together...And she fled, so I guess...I-” Bella tried to answer truthfully- tried to stick as close to the truth as possible in her fumbling explanation, over the roaring laughter of her Dad, echoing on the other end of her phone.

“Carlisle! Now, please, no more nonsense-- Get a hold of yourself, for God's sake,” Esme scolded her husband to no avail, for he could not seem to refrain his fit of giggles.

“Ah ah, Dad, laugh it up.” He couldn't stop laughing as she continued, “it's not funny, I just-”

“Oh sweetheart, I get it just fine. You went after her didn't you?” Carlisle asked, controlling his guffaws at last.

“You're your father's daughter baby, no doubt about it,” added her Mom in an amused tone.

There was hushed whispers between her parents as she smiled at their behavior, not that she could see, but she knew them well.

“Do you want to hear what happened or not?” She demanded, only teasing her parental unit as they voiced their agreement, her dad commenting pretty fast, “you obviously caught up with her.”

“Yes, daddy dearest, I did. And that's about it. Her security details threw me down on the ground when I tried to grab her arm to stop her, hence the pictures you saw plastered all over the news,” she admitted to her parents- not needing the reiterated laughter of her Dad to realize just how careless she had been.
“CNN said her name was Rosalie, right?” Queried her Mom with interest to change the subject and quell her spouse's mirth.

“Yes-

“It's huge here, darling. They even talked about it on The View. Whoopi Goldberg said it was romantic, she's gushing about you, baby. She's a figure skater, yes?” Trust her Mom to interrogate the hell out of her. Bella had figured that she'd be much more apprehensive about it, though she was also a hopeless romantic at heart, so her obvious interest wasn't that much of a surprise to her hockey player of a daughter and it made her smile at her kind heart once more. No bragging but hands down, her Mom had the most gentle soul of them all yet she could be fierce and protective, when her kids were concerned and even a bit authoritarian with her husband when needed.

“Yes darling, if Whoopi Goldberg said so,” her Dad teased, mocking his wife with a tenderness only years of a life spent together could bring two persons.

“Yes, Mom, she's a figure skater-”

“And a Russian,” interjected her Dad.

“That she is, yes,” she conceded, sighing heavily.

“Are you sure that you should, baby? I mean...the media are already making it breaking news, I don't want you to get hurt, darling-”

“Esme, she's an adult, let her-”

“Don't tell me I can't give any advice to my child, Carlisle.” Her mom scolded him, prompting the both of them to resort to their usual bickering.

Bella tuned them out for a while as she got off her bed where she laid in her underwear, to get a bottled water from the minibar. They continued for a minute or two before focusing on her again.
“Did you speak with your brother?” Her father asked as she bit her nails out of anxiety.

“Which one?”

“Edward, he should be working on-”

“I know, Dad. We’ve texted back and forth, he’s already on it, don’t worry.”

“OK, good. So maybe you should just avoid her- that is assuming you want to see her again, yes?”

She heaved a deep breath but said nothing as she tried to think of a way to explain her feelings to her parents without sounding careless or nonchalant.

“Yes, I will see her again-” she settled for the simple truth.

“You need to be careful, Isabella,” her Mom interjected.

“I know, Mom and I will,” she started but this time her phone beeped, alerting her to a double call she was receiving. She checked the screen to see who was trying to reach her and saw Emmett’s face. “Listen, Mom, Dad, Em’s calling and I want to say hi before the ceremony. I will call you later, yes?”

“Fine, sweetheart, please be safe, we love you,” Esme answered in her placating, motherly, ‘I’m worried but I’m trying to be strong’ tone.

“Yes and good luck for tonight, baby,” she answered as her Dad shouted “don’t trip, break a leg, and wave,” over the line.

“Yes Mom, thanks Dad. I love you guys too. I’ll try to call tomorrow, bye.”

She switched calls and reached for an apple she had found, hidden behind the cereals stand, this
morning at breakfast, biting it as she answered.

“Hi Em,” she greeted her younger brother.

“Hey, B, are you ready for tonight?” asked her boisterous, juvenile sibling. “Sam is watching CNN, did you know they're going to have a camera focused on you the whole time?” He added with such cheer in his voice one would have thought he was talking about the Super Bowl or something, but no, the little brat just seemed to take great pleasure in her misery.

“Fuck, just what I need,” she exclaimed, not that surprised but still very much annoyed with the news Emmett had just delivered to her. “Is it that bad?” She asked apprehensively.

“Hell, Bells, they've been talking about it non stop all day-”

“Great,” Bella sighed, laying her head against her bedroom window, loving the view before her eyes, with all the lights in the night, illuminating the buildings up until the Caucasian Black Sea port.

“Don't worry, B, it will blow over soon,” her little brother tried to reassure, finally sympathetic to his older sister's precarious position in the limelight.

“Yeah, I wouldn't be so sure about that, Em, but thanks for trying,” Bella answered softly.

She heard her little brother grunt over the line before he let out a deep breath, swearing out loud while she listened to the noise surrounding him. She could hear her brother-in-law saying something to Emmett, but could not decipher what it was on her end.

“Holy shit, B-

“Yeah, you got that right,” she cut him off before he screamed her ear out again.

“No, I- I meant holy shit, Putin is giving a press conference about you I think” Emmett cried out.
“What?” She rushed to the other side of her room, grabbing the remote for the small TV set she had in a corner of her room.

Turning it on, the hockey player did not have to channel surf endlessly in the hope of finding it much longer, for it appeared to be on every one of them.

There stood Vladimir Putin with his stern figure, scrutinizing eyes and severe tone. Her brother was speechless, but she could hear bribes of her language over there, translating the intervention given by Russia's President.

“What is he saying?.” She asked, full of anxiety as she watched the images with a dose of morbid fascination, suspecting what he would say. Her worst fears were playing out before her eyes yet a part of her could not believe it happened so fast.

“What the- FUCK YOU, ASSHOLE,” her brother's lover, Sam, yelled as they turned the volume louder on their screen, allowing Bella to hear the American translator as clearly as she would if she was in her little dipshit of a brother's house, only with a slight echo in addition.

“And I will not stand for intimidation. The security will be reinforced around our athletes, but do not doubt for a minute that there is going to be consequences for anyone who's trying to harm Russian citizen. Our athletes will be protected, no matter what.”

“Did you hear the motherfucker, B?” Em asked, incredulous, at the surrealist scene they were both watching simultaneously on different sides of the globe.

Though she was left momentarily speechless for once, the American was less than impressed by the man's little scare tactics. Truth be told, that was only step 1 of the repercussions she was expecting. There lied the justification of the hard choices she had demanded of the Russian. It was already starting to rain down on them.

First came the blog posts, then the contamination all over the Internet and the medias back home before Putin fired his first -and perhaps only- warning shot. She supposed it was only a threat -for now- that the ex KGB Director did not even bother to veil.

“Fuck, that was quick,” she blew out, feeling already defeated. Her ominous circumstances now clearer than ever; in all evidence, there would be no state of grace for them. No, they were to be thrown right into the lion's den, straight to the wolves without further delay.
“Yeah, they're decrypting it on the show, I told you, they made a breaking news out of it” Emmett told her, tuning his TV down simultaneously.

“Don't make it worst, Em,” Sam chastised his long time partner.

“What did I do? I'm just saying, and despite what Edward thinks, she's got a right to know.” Her little brother was frustrated and expressed it quite loudly, as usual, outraged at his own lover's reprimands and their brother's belief that he knew better.

“Stop being so negative, hon, she needs support, not that-” her brother in-law tried to explain to his hard headed man.

“But I was just pointing out that they are, nothing else,” whined her little brother to no avail and the two proceeded to have one of their famous lover spat, louder than Bella could imagine and for much longer than she would have liked.

Her family turned bickering into a whole new art form of foreplay- it seemed to run in their DNA if her parents and her siblings relationships were anything to go by. Much like her parents, they ignored her as they argued back and forth until one of them remembered that she was in fact still on the other end of the line.

“By the way, sis, I didn't think you had it in you,” Emmett teased her as Sam barely grunted, used that he was to his man's antics.

“Oh yeah? I'll have you know I have plenty in me-err...” she cut herself off, realizing the double meaning her words could have.

“That's what she said!” Emmett howled with laughter. Trust her youngest brother to taunt the hell out of her for that little slip of the tongue, typical Em behavior.

She heard a thud, guessed that it must have been Sam's hand cuffing his lover behind the head, as was the custom for every stupidity that would fell off Emmett's lips- quite a lot actually- in their household.
“Babyyyy,” he whined, only serving to fuel his partner’s annoyance.

“Um guys? Still there,” Bella told them, trying to avoid the inevitable. The two of them were constantly making passes at each other, no matter the place or the circumstances, primal need took precedence.

“Right, so you're stalking Russians now?” Sam went straight for the jugular.

“I'm not *stalking* her, for fuck's sake, merely running after her-”

“What's her name?” Both men chorused, not caring about her explanation as much as they wanted the details on her scandalous little blond.

“Rosalie,” the hockey player gave in to their questions, knowing it was useless to avoid it, for they would go after her scent like well trained hounds until she gave them something to satisfy their curiosity. Besides, they were family, and they deserved to know what was going on. Directly from her, not via the internet or whichever news anchor would voice their opinion on the matter live on TV.

“OK,” they said at the same time.

“OK?” Bella asked them, surprised they would leave it at that, “that's it?”

“Well yeah,” Sam started.

“Unless you wanna share?” Her sibling tried another approach.

“Ah,” she blurted out, “I knew it. You can't leave it alone, can you?”

“Oh come on, B, that's forbidden territory even for you, so don't expect us not to be interested.”

“True,” Bella admitted to them as she went through her stuff to find a clean pair of underwear for tonight.
“Sooooo?”

“Don't whine, Emmett, it's unattractive,” she jested as she heard Sam's protests.

“Nope, not unattractive to me, babe,” the traitorous little shit added.

“Anyways guys, I have to get ready for the ceremony, sorry but the gossip will have to wait.” So what if she took the easy way out for now? She did have an opening ceremony to attend after all.

“So unfair,” her brother protested, “call us after if you have time?”

“Yeah, I'll try, but no promises. You'll watch the opening?”

“Sure B, wave at the camera for us,” Emmett requested as she tried to multitask and dress at the same time.

“Ah ah, Dad said the same thing, moron,” she reproached affectionately to her brother. Almost losing out her balance, she righted herself before agreeing, “sure, I'll be the one in red, white and blue.”. She said her goodbyes and hung up, finally able to put on her pants and jacket.

Reading for a while in her room, she stalled but joined her team downstairs when the time came, eager for the ceremony to start. Actually more than ready to get her skates on and do what she did best, score and lead her team to victory. She was looking forward to meet her Russian later on, if they could wing it. She tried to spot her as they waited with their respective countries backstage for mid show, to make their grand entrance, but only saw a flash of blond hair that could have been her, hidden within the massive Slavic delegation who spoke loudly as they waited. Not willing to make a peep and attract more attention than she already was, she focused on the big screen displaying the first clip of the night; a little blond child named after love who was supposed to act as their guide through the Russian display of mythology and power they were about to witness.

Let the games begin, she thought as her time came and she paraded behind the US flag bearer, waving the Star-Spangled banner back and forth as their impressive delegation seemed to emerge from a projected rendering of the United States, right at the heart of the Fisht Olympic Stadium of Sochi.
As she stood behind her nation's colors, Bella could not help but marvel at the irony of the Russians banning gay propaganda, yet featuring so prominently in their grand opening ceremony such gay figures as Nijinsky, Tchaikovsky or Diaghilev. And she wasn't even going to mention the so called lesbian group they flaunted in the pre-show. None of those things mattered to the hockey player; only her games and her little Slavic temptress remained present in her mind throughout the different portions of the indoor ceremony. And despite every obstacle, she savored the moment until the very end.

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to know what you think.
There was much to be said on the subject of the Opening Ceremony in Sochi, Bella reflected as they departed the indoor stadium. She could not help but think about something Winston Churchill said a long time ago, history is written by the victors. International delegations were granted the right to leave their seats first, a prerogative given to athletes on the basis of the heavy security measures put in place by the Russian government; to avoid any incidents during the Winter Games. The Ceremony in itself was nice, albeit expensive to an extent that would make even the one percenters of this world cringe at such a blatant waste of money. However to Vladimir Putin, that was money well invested.

He splurged on the lights, huge sculptures, various video projection all around the Stadium and many more extravaganza that the US player couldn't help but find over the top. Yet it was a beautiful event. To the untrained eye, it was nothing but a myriad of paintings relating centuries of History in the Slavic land. Eras depicted with a splash of grandeur and a dash of epic, bringing to life a certain vision of history. Perhaps Churchill drew from Bonaparte, when he said “l'Histoire est une suite de mensonges sur lesquels on est d'accord"- history is a set of lies agreed upon, for both statements seemed to complete each other.

In the United States, Bella was taught about the Cold War and Russian History to an extent, but it did not seem to fit with that glorious vision Putin showcased that night and obviously, he had a whole other version of its country’s history and its place in the world. That was fine, hell if the man wanted to delude himself into thinking that some bloody times were a necessary evil, it was more than OK with her, though it left her an uneasy feeling- as if that night was all about displaying strength and putting up smokescreens. It should have been about the event or the athletes, yet Bella would bet she wasn't the only bemused spectator in the audience that night. There was snickers in the US ranks, hollers and provocations at times, merely brushed aside when the stoic Russians belted out a grand rendition of their national anthem. And it was poignant, hell it even gave her goosebumps, but it was also strangely puzzling for American athletes and team staff alike. Here they were, in the lion's den, and despite the President of the IOC's pleas to leave politics behind and just enjoy the Games, one could not help but feel its heavy weight.

Bella was walking through the crowd of US players huddled together in the front of the Stadium, Aro trailing her like a hound. The man hadn't let up since the public bashing in Russia had
intensified. She checked her phone for perhaps the fifth time in a whole minute, eager to see if Rosalie had answered the text Bella had sent ten minutes or so before the end of the ceremony - asking if they were still on for tonight. She saw nothing but texts from her brother, alarming her to the depth of the whole story which now ran wild back home; telling her he was going to release their 'no comment' statement, barely apologizing for any misunderstanding but pretty much noncommittal. More bullshit for her, but if it deflected the public attention from Rosalie, even for a short time, it would be worth it. Besides, they needed to take matters into their own hands, not wait out for any more statements Putin could release in the wake of the Opening night. She felt a weird, uncommon surge of protectiveness when the Russian was concerned, it seemed, and she wanted to shield her from the harsh reality they were living in, as stupid and reckless as that sounded to her own mind.

Edward kept her appraised of any new development she needed to know, almost single-handedly managing her life in her stead, as her agent. Most athletes she had met had advised her to change for a professional manager, but she liked to think there was no one that would take her own interests at heart as much as her brother would. As siblings, they sometimes fought like hellions, back when they were growing up in their sleepy little town of Forks, but they made a good team in their professional lives and she could rely on him to watch her back at all times, something she was forever grateful for.

Her oldest brother contributed a hefty amount to her success, he managed her day-to-day life with his assistant and some people he contracted for special occasions, accommodating her needs and optimizing what could have been wasted time for her along the way.

They had always been a tight bunch, sibling rivalry be damned, hence the reason why the transition came so easily to them as they shifted seamlessly from brother and sister to agent and player. Sure, it was sometimes annoying that her older brother still insinuated himself into every corner of her private life and sometimes it was awkward as hell, much like her current situation. But even so, Edward had always been her fiercest protector and he had no intention in relinquishing that title anytime soon. Bella was content to sit back, focus on her sport and do her thing.

While she could understand that it might be toxic to work with family for other players, it was the right formula for her and she trusted her brother to be honest with her if he ever felt like quitting his job. She had faith that he would keep her grounded and pull her head out of her ass if she ever became an asshole, her whole family would, no questions asked.

Once Emmett was out of law school, she would retain his services as well, they had already mapped out the future. She would invest her money to help him create his own firm when he got out of Harvard. Some might see it as nepotism and it was, in part, but more than that, it was also a sound investment. There was no lingering shred of doubt in her mind about her brother's future success, he was an intelligent and sensible young man, with a rhetoric talent only a selected few possessed and she was willing to take the risk.

Besides, what good was earning money if she couldn't lend it to her family to support their ventures
on occasions? She liked making money, of course, who didn't? It afforded her many luxuries, such as freedom to envision her future with serenity. Only wealthy people would tell themselves that money wasn't everything, but she knew they were only fooling themselves. Her parents had not always been affluent, they went through some uncertain times in her life, tight spots for them to weather, and she firmly believed it had provided her with a unique perspective. Whether one liked it or not, the world worked in a capitalistic system and money was the core of it.

She had experienced first hand what it felt like to be strapped for cash, and how difficult it was not to know what the future holds or how to make ends meet every month- and she was stronger, thanks to that. So, of course, she appreciated the freedom to choose where she would spend her next vacation or the pleasure it brought her to put a smile on her mom's face with a new dress- not to say anything about her nephews and niece whom she loved to spoil shamelessly, to her brother's annoyance.

Glancing at her phone, again, approximately twenty seconds after she pocketed it, like a compulsive addict of some sorts, Bella was disappointed to see no answer from her Slavic temptress. And in a way, she was, everybody was addicted to technology nowadays, but boy was it ever good to be addicted to that thing. She loved tech, loved the principle of it, all the progress it could bring to mankind, she loved the controversy it could bring too, if- as is often the case- it was perverted from its idealistic views or purposes.

And while she had been a kid of the 90s, she still remembered a time before it, when people had to be on time or their friend would leave, days when your first reflex was to take a dictionary, not google the hell out of everything. She loved hers, had half her life stored away in her phone-pictures, calendars full of appointment for her career and her regular life, numbers she could not be bothered to learn anymore, now that they were barely two swipes of fingers away at any given time, her words with friends app and many others.

She sighed with relief when her phone signaled she had received a text from her little temptress, at last. She read the words as she shielded her phone from view, already paranoid as fuck after her recent little Russian debacle, no need to risk anyone looking over her shoulder.

Can meet tonight where agreed. In 5 min? R

She laughed out loud. Awkward and formal, check. She half expected a request to RSVP to come through any minute. She'd have to teach her little blond the joys of proper texting one of these days. Bella responded yes right away, too afraid to let Rosalie slip out of her grasp tonight. Their window of opportunity was already too short to waste. Slowing her pace to fall in step with her security detail, Bella inched closer to the man who threw a suspicious look her way.

“What is it?” He asked, his head moving to accommodate his eyes, checking every angle around them to make sure there was no threat to her safety. She could appreciate his willingness to succeed
at his job, the concentration he obviously applied to it at any given time. It made her feel safer, which she supposed what exactly what the powers that be had intended in the first place.

“I- um...I need a favor?” She asked, lowering her voice to make sure no one heard them amidst the noisy cluttered background of international delegations.

“Ah,” he smiled, “I gathered that, Swan. Speak up. What can I do for you?”

“I need you to bring me at the rink-”

“When?”

“Tonight?” He looked mildly annoyed, she gave him her best heartfelt expression, trying to muster the innocence she still held from her childhood and appeal to his inner papa bear. Bella knew he had a soft spot for her- somehow, the man always seemed to find himself assigned to her and she had watched him when she trained, she could tell he had a knack for hockey and she half expected him to make his coming out on the subject any time now.

“When tonight?” He asked, glancing with cautious eyes at her, still sweeping their surroundings as they walked.

“Um...err...now?”

“You're kidding me, right?”

“Or not, I mean, I understand it wasn't planned and-”

“Swan,” he groaned, laying a hand against his forehead, still observing the player besides him warily, “fuck, alright, I'll bring you there. Just let me check in with my boss before you recruit me for this little adventure of yours.” He gave her a pointed look as he took out his phone, both of them stopping in the middle of the streets. He put two steps between them, turning sideways to speak with their security team back at the compound, explaining that they would be taking a quick detour before coming back. Bella watched the crowd split into different groups, people coming and going in different direction when she heard a shout farther back.
She turned to the noise behind them, intrigued but not surprised, people were always rambunctious after such events—blame alcohol and festive dispositions. She distinguished nothing besides white noise, until she felt something brush her back. Glancing back, she came face to face with an angry, red faced blond who grabbed her violently, immobilizing her arm behind her back.

“Privet, shlyukha, ty sobirayesh'sya vzyat' nemnogo progulyat'sya so mnoy. YA sobirayus' nauchit' vas nebol'shoy urok, kiska lizhet pizdu” the man yelled to her, tightening his grip on her, “ya sobirayus' nauchit' vas, kak sosat' chlen, i ona vam ponravitsya, suka.” The man was smirking as he vociferated, his face twisting to hatred with every word he spat at her.

“ARO! Argh, fuck,” she yelled and grunted, struggling in vain for a while, trying to get out of the choke hold, trashing wildly. She saw her security detail in a similar predicament, laying into two men. Aro alternated kicks and blows to his assailants, never leaving his eyes from his charge.

“Aro- ahhhh,” she screamed uselessly amidst the chaotic group of international athletes, “let me g-go, motherfucker, let me- shit, asshole, let go! I'm gonna kill you,” she threatened weakly.

The man only tightened his grip on her shoulder, gripping her throat as he tried to carry her away. Bella started to panic as the fear escalated inside of her. She tried to keep her emotions under control but couldn't help it, her shallow breathing and pounding heart seemed to resonate in her head, vibrating throughout her body as the fright incapacitated her limbs.

Her senses were fogged, her brain dulled as the paralyzing realization came to her. She had seen enough statistics on violence back home to know things would only get worse if she disappeared with the man. Trying to breathe deeply and clear her mind, she took a hold of herself, knowing panic would not help her. She tried to apply her self defense training to her current situation as best as she could, and stomped on the man's foot while she jabbed his gut with her elbow, grunting with the effort, feeling the strain on her muscles.

“Chertovski shlyukha,” the man exclaimed, spitting in her face as he released her.

Aro ran the three steps separating them once he had put his two assailants out of commission, to position himself between Bella and the mad man, his gun out and trained on the demented Russian yelling at them.

“Ty nichto, no chertov shlyukha, my sobirayemsya ubit' tebya, ty menya slyshish'? Vy luchshe podal'she ot moyey strany, prezhde chem my tebe kishki, trakhat' vlagalisheche.”
Though Aro now guarded her closer, Bella felt her heart in her throat and her palms sweating as she listened to his rant. Bella could hear Aro and the man screaming at each other as he reached behind his back to clasp her hand. After mere seconds, when his hand started clutching her hand harder, shaking it back and forth as if he knew she was in shock, desperate to clear the buzzing sensation that had taken hold of her yet unable to speak, much less move to reassure her security detail.

Upon closer examination, she realized their attackers seemed intoxicated, now stumbling after their little show of strength. They embodied every stereotype she had for Russian men, their blond and pasty complexion blushing under the strain of their adrenaline fueled aggression and heavy howling. The man who had grabbed her looked near to popping the prominent vein on his forehead, the throbbing blood vessel the only thing she could focus on for a while.

“SWAN, COME ON, STAY BEHIND ME,” she faltered when her brain processed Aro's voice, “are you alright?”

“Swan? Are you alright?”

“Ye- yes...I-I'm good-” She was far from that, still half terrorized by the violent encounter- though she could feel no broken bones, thank fuck for small favors. That would have to be confirmed later, as adrenaline tended to diminish the impact of one's injury and she could see a checkup with Charlie in her very near future.

“You sure? Don't move, motherfucker or I'm gonna blow a hole the size of Texas in your chubby face, you get that? Don't you fucking move, asshole,” he glanced briefly behind him at her, making sure she was telling the truth, seemingly satisfied when he met her eyes.

Bella gulped but reiterated that she was fine, well as much as one could be after the shock settled in at least- now concentrating on the crowd their commotion had garnered. Everything had happened so fast. One minute they were merrily on their way to the ice rink to meet Rosalie, and the next that Russian redneck was all over her.

Apparently, people had enough common sense to get the hell out of dodge when they saw the altercation, and her agent's gun had probably scared a lot of curious athletes. Still, there was a little crowd of people further removed from them, observing them with wide eyes and gaping mouths. Bella watched the vultures around, she could distinguish various news crew amongst them, shit, those bastards had probably taped the whole encounter. Their delegation wasn't anywhere near them, probably already safe and sound back at the hotel, but there were Russians and people decked in flags she could not recognize. A few dozen of volunteers were nearby as well, with their phones in their hands, capturing the altercation which was bound to end up all over the internet via twitter or
whatever social media within the next minutes. Little beams were flashing at them, stolen pictures of her life as it was playing out for them.

The hockey player felt exposed, a recurrent feeling these days, in behalf of the growing public attention she was subjected to. It was chilling sometimes, to see people act so differently with her, just because she had been on a few magazine covers. But more than that, the weirdest thing had to be this obsession that festered with it, a compulsion which drove regular people to snap pictures of her. For the most part, the general public and her fans were nice, but every so often, it felt as if they were trying to own a piece of her. And the strangest thing was that they felt entitled to it, as if her pseudo celebrity status came with a non privacy clause.

Bella had an epiphany as she attempted to slow down her labored breathing. She realized that no one had interfered. They should have been helping, not recording the moment for posterity- fuck what the hell was wrong with their generation? Were we really at that point, where human beings don't care about others anymore? Is gossip so important nowadays that we should forgo any hint of common decency? Is that really the world we live in, the American wanted to shout to them.

No matter the circumstances, before capturing life, one should seize it, live rather than watch- and she was frequently amazed these days, whenever she’d be, when someone's first reflex was to take out a phone and snap a picture rather than lend a helping hand or merely to continue on their way, completely deaf to their fellow human beings' agonizing plea for assistance. Tonight wasn't any different. Still, it was chilling to acknowledge that people wanted to watch the attack rather than prevent it, like a goddamn entertaining show. How voyeuristic was that? The American saw nothing but vultures thirsty for blood- hers preferably.

“I've called it in, we're going to stay put until my guys get here. You OK with that, Swan?”

“Yes, I'm a- a bit...shaken up, but other than that I'm fine. Don't worry-” she retorted to the anxious agent watching like a hawk.

“OK good. And by the way Swan? Nice moves,” Aro winked at his charge.

They waited a few minutes for his colleagues to show up in order to get away, releasing their assailants in their custody. The agents and James would deal with diplomacy between security forces while Aro and her would be free to get back to the compound. Let them deal with that bullshit, that was something she didn't want to have to witness. Hell, the less she knew, the better.

Who knew what they would negotiate with the Russians to keep quiet. Though with the people taping it, she wasn't sure whether there would be something to negotiate or not, as a picture was
worth a thousand words. Perhaps both parties would fail to reach an agreement, in which case Bella was pretty sure that her PR team would milk the fuck out of such a golden opportunity, to even the score media wise. Fuck knew what tomorrow would bring, Bella thought, still a bit rattled by the altercation. It wasn't every day one got assaulted into a Russian choke hold, all the same her daddy would be pleased to see those self defense lessons had paid off.

Just like sport, to make it work, muscle memory was a necessity- otherwise it's nothing but a bunch of fancy moves strung together with no efficiency. Drills were her thing, she had been taught discipline by both her parents since their most tender years- and Bella was never more grateful to her dad's persistence that she must master at least the basic techniques and know how to fight back, than this very night.

They had finally been cleared to go, as soon as the other agents arrived, still drawing quite the crowd of IPAP- inquisitive people armed with a phone as her little brother dubbed his contemporaries ever since his big sister had been propelled to stardom. Or something akin to that anyways. Her family had such compassion, it was truly heartbreaking to see...Not. Em would sell her out for a double cheese and french fries, no questions asked.

She had a fleeting image of her mom in her brain, scolding her for being mean to her baby- her very big, muscular and tall as shit baby, but she supposed for her Mom he'd always be her last born, the one she'd be compelled to protect at every turn. Just because he was the youngest, the one to get pranked all the time by his eldest siblings when they all still lived together, so in her parenthood perspective, it actually made a lot of sense- despite their whining, her Mom was the law in their house so of course oftentimes, they would fold- with their tails between their legs, planning the next best prank, the one she wouldn't be able to thwart with her freaking sixth sense.

“Um...Swan?” Aro interrupted her internal monologue as he snapped his fingers in front of her face.

“Err- sorry? You were saying?” She looked at the man who had saved her life a couple of minutes ago. She had already profusely thanked him as they waited for his colleagues to show up, to which he had laconically replied “you're welcome, just doing my job.” He had nodded his head in respect, not making any more fuss and she could not help but marvel at the mindset of military men. He pushed it further in fact, when he tried to apologize for not seeing the men coming. Bella had dismissed his excuse, no one could have done better given their circumstances- best not dwell too much on the what ifs.

“Didn't you have somewhere to go tonight?” Her agent asked with a smug face as they were making their way across the Olympic village in silence.

“Shiiiiit” Bella whined at the reminder. In the thick of their altercation, she had totally forgotten about her little Slavic temptress. “Fuck, you're a life saver, man, I'm not sure I would have remembered
“Hell, Swan, now that we're on a roll, why not?” Aro seemed to find the panic he read in his charge's eyes amusing, whereas she proved to be near frantic, with the way her fingers moved on the phone she retrieved from her pocket. “We're already late, fuck my life,” she groaned, her features shifting to a somber mask.

“Come on, Bella, cheer up, it's only twenty minutes. And I'd say you got a perfectly good excuse this time-”

“Yeah, you're right, but- shit, I need to call her,” she retorted in a shaky whisper.

“OK, but we need to head there now, we don't have a lot of time. They told me Charlie wants to see you ASAP,” Aro stated as they headed left around the next corner.

She tried to call for the entire duration of their short walk to the ice rink, to no avail. Fuck...Bella could see it plain as day, she'd be furious and the American could only imagine just how much she would epitomize the saying hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Her little spitfire of a blond was volcanic enough as it was, thank you very much. She felt the residual adrenaline dissolve through her body, leaving room to a surge of anxiety spiking through her veins. She had the worst luck, it was such a fucking wonder she'd be that successful in her sport- and if it wasn't for that, she would have thought that she'd been cursed in another lifetime or something.

Their dynamic duo entered the ice rink precisely 35 minutes later than planned. Bella would be a filthy fucking liar if she did not admit to feeling scared. The perspective of a furious Rosalie, while very hot in itself, in a rough, make-up sex kinda way, was also a bit frightening. Although the Slavic Princess was most definitely not there yet. Besides, if she was her first woman, there was a very real possibility that she would not be ready to take that step until quite some time. Nevertheless, she would be remiss not to mention that she would very much enjoy the sex. Still, for once, she was also willing to bargain on a little delayed gratification.

Now, don't get her wrong, obviously if the Russian Princess felt like fucking earlier than planned, Bella wouldn't object- hell she would oblige- but she thought their circumstances warranted more patience and care, to tend to the little blond's first reticence. She was bound to feel weird at first, and just as she had told her before, Bella would let her set the pace, even if she ended up taking her sweet time. She wasn't about to pressure her into anything the Russian would regret the next morning. Her instincts were telling her to tread softly to reap the benefits of their sizzling connection and she'd try to curb her enthusiasm as best as she could.
Of course, there was still the matter of obliterating the fury she would be faced with, if she had stayed- and there was no guarantee that she had. For all Bella knew, she'd waited a grand total of five minutes before surmising the American wasn't worth it. Shit, she really needed to get her head in the game and prepare for the worst.

Bella kept glancing at Aro, the smug fucker, who wiggled his eyebrows at her obvious tells. She would bet that he could read everything she was thinking at this very minute with a singular twitch of her lips coupled with the tremors in her hand. Was she that obvious, broadcasting loud and clear every last one of her worries for him to analyze?

“Still not answering, huh?” He asked, his face progressively relaxing into his usual, stoic look. “If you want advice, Bella, I've been married for fifteen years and nothing works better than groveling. At her feet, if need be, but that always earns me forgiveness.”

“Thanks,” she nodded, appreciating the effort he was making to put her in a better head space. She smiled as she realized she was perhaps getting acquainted with his dad mode, and Bella could only imagine how much brownie points that would earn him in her own father's esteem.

'Um...Shit, OK, here we go,' she gave herself a little internal pep talk as they approached the locker room Rosalie had agreed to meet her in. Come hell or high water, Bella was determined. Rosalie would listen or she'd pester her until the end of the Games- and she could be pretty persistent when need be- that is, if she were here. She was so fucking screwed when the little blond was concerned, it wasn't funny anymore. Bella pondered apprehensively as they got closer to the door, her palms sweating and her erratic heartbeat drumming along the way.

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Russian 101 :

Zhizn' prozhit', ne pole pereyti = Life was never meant to be easy

Privet, shlyukha, ty sobirayesh'sya vzyat' nemnogo progulyat'sya so mnoy. YA sobirayus' nauchit' vas nebol'shoy urok, kiska lizhet pizdu. = Hi, slut, you're gonna take a little stroll with me. I'm gonna teach you a little lesson, pussy licking cunt.
ya sobirayus' nauchit' vas, kak sosat' chlen, i ona vam ponravitsya, suka = I'm going to teach you how to suck a cock, and you're gonna like it, bitch.

chertovski shlyukha = fucking slut

Ty nichto, no chertov shlyukha, my sobirayemsya ubit' tebya, ty menya slyshish'?! Vy luchshe podal'she ot moyey strany, prezhde chem my tebe kishki, trakhat' vlagalishche! = You're nothing but a fucking whore, we're going to kill you, you hear me? You better get the hell away from my country before we gut you, fucking cunt!

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
They could hear a distant noise coming from the locker room. Classical music playing behind the door, a soothing tune tinted with heavy notes, a requiem perhaps but her own knowledge on that particular type of music was not proficient enough to allow her to recognize it. Bella held the door slightly ajar to peek inside, her eyes falling on a prostrated figure laying on the bench. Her blonde hair was spread all over a bag emblazoned with the Russian flag, a pillow of sorts with her hands curled under her head as she rested. Bella glanced back to Aro, who was watching Rosalie, satisfied at least, that there would be no encore act to their post Opening Ceremony debacle. He nodded at her and chose to sit a few steps away from the locker room to give them some kind of privacy, yet close enough that he could handle any threat that should arise, in a timely fashion.

Bella smiled at his thoughtfulness, closed the door under his watchful eyes and turned around. She watched her little temptress for a minute or so, with her plump lips slightly parted with even breaths as she slumbered. Drawing near to the bench, the hockey player observed her face, the tiny frown between her eyes forming on her otherwise serene features. She could see remnants of tear tracks on her rosy cheeks, a heavy contrast to the sense of peace emanating from Rosalie, doing nothing to quell the troubled feelings bubbling inside Bella. She'd loathe to think she was responsible for that, yet could not help but consider whether her lateness was to blame, or those Russian assholes perhaps, if she had seen the altercation thanks to Youtube or countless Twitter messages most likely. Those noisy, fucking creepy people could probably be trusted to be efficient in the matter, spreading it all over the virtual world faster than it had taken Bella to get away from those aggressive Russians.

“Wake up, princess,” she whispered, brushing off a strand of loose hair from her cheek.

“Ne khodite tuda” Rosalie mumbled in her sleep, a pout taking hold of her mouth, “ostonorochno.”

Bella beamed at the cute display, cupping the Russian's cheek with her hand as she knelt besides the bench. Rosalie leaned into her touch, a ghost of a smile appearing on her lips.

“Ro-sa-lie,” she uttered in a singsong voice, her thumb rubbing around the apple of her cheeks.
Fluttering her eyelids open and scrunching up her eyebrows, her mouth twisting in a frown as she roused from her sleep, Bella watched the blonde's confusion upon waking.

“Gde ya?” Rosalie frowned, rubbing her eyes as she finally noticed Bella by her side.

“Hey-”

“You!” She sneered, probably remembering she was angry at the American. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, hello to you too, princess-”

“You weren't there,” she accused, cutting off Bella's answer short.

“I have a very good reason,” the US player retorted, holding up her hands in defense.

“I'm sure you do, but I'm not interested,” Rosalie replied coldly.

“I was ambushed-”

“What?”

“After the ceremony? We were coming here but got attacked-”

“By whom?”

“I don't know. Angry Russians.”

“Der'mo! I'm sorry, what happened?” She asked, making a metaphorical 360 degrees turn of attitude,
biting her nails as she looked up, now more worried than angry.

“Nothing serious. I'm OK. I'm sorry I wasn't there earlier. What happened to you?” Bella answered, side stepping the issue to understand why her little temptress seemed so down. Certainly, her lateness warranted anger, but surely it wouldn't send her into a crying fit? There had to be something else, Bella mused. Besides, there was an air of sadness on the blonde's face, more grave, almost somber, that she couldn't explain.

“Nothing,” Rosalie looked the other way, seemingly fascinated by a crack in the wall besides the American athlete.

“Have you been crying?” Bella asked, watching her features closely. She looked tired, there were dark rings under her eyes and the American thought again that she could discern faint traces of tears on her cheeks.

She approached the Russian, tilting her chin up to look into her eyes but Rosalie swatted her hand away, grunting, a sound the hockey player had not heard yet from her little spitfire, and she smiled, considering the other woman looked a bit like a drenched kitten with claws, adorably pissed off.

“It's my grand father,” Rosalie answered softly, “he called me a while ago, and the news from home are not good.” She sighed, picking at her sleeves as she spoke. “Someone came to them this afternoon, for yerunda reasons,” she exclaimed in a bitter tone. “They are trying to intimidate me.”

“Shit, Rosalie, I'm sorry. Are they alright? Were they harmed?”

“No...Not yet, but they threatened my grand father,” she explained as her eyes filled with tears, frustration and sadness reflected in the glistening orbs. “They told him he should have raised me better than to be a predatel...err...I don't remember this one...a betrayer maybe? Is it the word?” She asked Bella in a grave, hushed voice, her eyes pleading with the American.

“Shit...Yeah, no, it's a traitor, but...Fuck, princess, I didn't know it would get that bad this fast,” she answered, her tone laced with regrets.

“Da...well, I told you, you did not know my country...Putin was the head of the FSB, I expected that, just not so soon.”
“What can I do?” The hockey player asked, not used to having to sit back while the action unfolded without her knowledge nor power to act and sway their direction. She knew their circumstances were less than ideal, and she had been waiting for the backlash that had already started, what with the media and her nightly aggression but still, she was surprised and thrown off by the rapidity of their response. Again. Perhaps she had underestimated the Russians once again, she could only hope it wouldn't be the straw that broke the camel's back for Rosalie.

“Nothing.”

“There must be something, I could ask my staff—”

“And do what? Create an international conflict? Again? There is nothing we can do, don't you see that? They have all the power...” Rosalie trailed off, a stray tear falling down her cheek.

Bella hugged the blonde woman, shushing her as she wept in her arms. In her head were running several scenarios as she tried to come up with something to say to the other woman, to comfort and resolve the present mess in their lives. Never had she felt so drawn to a woman, that she so desperately needed to figure things out, to stall during the Games and to protect her, along with her kid. She wouldn't let the poor little girl be preyed on by fucked up people, just because her mom had the audacity to like another woman, and dared to explore it. She didn't know what to do yet, but she'd find something, she had to, no matter how impossible it seemed right now, there was no freaking way obnoxious political views or power plays would dictate her life. No fucking way, she thought with a renewed sense of faith and indomitable spirit.

As the minutes passed, the shaking progressively stopped until it was barely a quiver here and there. Rosalie looked up to Bella with her sorrowful eyes, pleading without saying anything, her desolate face breaking the American's heart. She reached down with her thumb, tenderly swiping away the stray tears running down her eyes.

“I need...” Rosalie trailed off, scrunching up her eyebrows as she untangled her limbs from Bella's to step back and pause a bit. She ran her hands into her long hair, sighing as she repeated her sentence.

“What do you need, princess?” The hockey player asked, grasping her wrist with her hand to keep the blonde from evading her once more.

Rosalie bridged the gap between them on impulse, taking the American by surprise as she kissed her, muffling her groans of protest with her lips. The Russian was frenzied, she was trying to get as close as possible to the other woman it seemed, rubbing her body against Bella's while she clutched her shoulders.
“Wait, wait...” Bella tried to interject.

“No wait. Kiss me. Now,” Rosalie ordered, tightening her grip as she spoke in that firm tone the American loved so much.

“Princess, shouldn't we talk?” She answered, warily regarding the Slavic woman. “And figure things out? Not that I don't wanna-”

“There is nothing to be done now,” the blonde countered sadly, “I want to forget right now,” she explained, looking torn but firmly standing her ground. “I want you to make me forget, pozhaluysta...please,” Rosalie begged with watery eyes.

“I can do that,” Bella nodded, resigned to agree with the desperate plea. “But please, don't cry,” the hockey player smiled sadly, pulling Rosalie into her arms again.

At that moment, there was nothing to be done but comply, so Bella obliged, taking charge of their embrace. She pulled the other athlete along, trying to find the nearest available surface while her resolve shattered and the thin control she had on her lust went along the way. But then again, Bella wasn't surprised, the figure skater barely needed to send her another one of those heated look to spike her desire, for it had been running rampant ever since they had that very first spat.

Much could be said about the sparse locker room, but Bella was grateful for the strategically placed bench in the middle of the room as she guided their bodies towards it. They sat on it, facing each other as the atmosphere grew heavy and serious around them.

“I don't know what to do,” Rosalie admitted in a whisper.

“It's alright,” Bella answered softly, smiling to her little ice queen- who seemed much less lethal right about now, unsure as she was. “Just do what you want, what feels right.” She added as an afterthought, kissing down Rosalie's neck until she squirmed.

“But- but...”

“Rosalie,” she repeated, taking her face between her hands, “I'm not expecting anything, okay? You
tell me how far you want to go. And if you don't like it, if you want to stop, it's fine, really,” she comforted gingerly.

“I'm not a child,” the Russian snapped, to Bella's amusement. Here was the blonde firecracker she had come to like so much, fidgeting on the bench as she glared heatedly at her.

“She'll learn, princess,” she answered, kissing those plump lips again before she pushed Rosalie to lie down on the bench, her body covering the other woman who squeaked in surprise, then moaned under her ministrations.

She trailed kisses, alternating with flicks of her tongue, insisting on a spot here and there, sucking lightly on the milky white skin offered to her. Her hand seemed to have a mind of its own, and it wanted more. She was greedy for contact and after squeezing her shoulder, molding the athlete's body against her own, her hand went lower, lightly caressing the curve of her spine. Rosalie sighed when the American palmed her cheeks, gripping them just tight enough to arouse her, making her forget about everything else but the present moment. She was grinding against Bella, turning her head to catch her lips again, roughly kissing her while Bella's hand caressed her ribs under the shirt she'd bypassed just a minute ago. Desire flared in both woman, the strong need to feel closer, and something akin to a mantra devoured their minds over and over again: more, more, more.

Nothing needed to be said. It was basic human nature at work, lust mingling with want, need tangling chaotically with their sanity, the overpowering emotions engulfing both women with its force. Rosalie arched under Bella as she stroked her covered breasts, a single digit mapping its own path on the round flesh. The Russian shivered and her hands bound themselves behind Bella's neck, anchoring her to the American above her.

“Take off your shirt, princess,” Bella commanded in a muffled voice, laying her lips against Rosalie's abdomen, dipping her tongue inside her navel to elicit more breathless moans from the wiggling blonde.

“Ya ne mogu...Chert'...I can't-”

“Here, let me,” Bella said, resting on her knees before guiding Rosalie to sit on her lap.

The Slavic beauty struggled to find her balance, though she enthusiastically welcomed the new position, groaning as she brushed against Bella's thighs. The hockey player reached with her fingers to grip the edge of her shirt and take it off, grunting when Rosalie's chest bounced in her face-practically smothering her against the ample bosom as it granted her a full view of those perfectly rounded breasts.
“Fucking finally,” Bella grunted when it came off, at last, after a few misses.

“Oh,” Rosalie gasped when the air hit her naked skin. She tightened her arms around Bella’s shoulder, then tentatively grabbed the edge of her shirt. “Vy tozhe...snimi yego- pozhaluysta,” she mumbled softly, her half lidded eyes pleading while she spoke.

“No need to translate that,” Bella winked as she teased the blushing woman in front of her, easily complying with her wishes.

“Luchshe- better,” Rosalie approved.

She shivered again when their skins touched and licked her lips while a slight tremor coursed through her body. Bella smiled to her, trying to gauge how much further she could take her quivering blonde, only too happy to provide the escape the other soughted in their embrace, chasing her problems away with a heavy dose of lust. She knew it wouldn't last, they would need to face reality sooner rather than later, still, she could offer to her that temporary reprieve. For now.

She lovingly touched the newly exposed flesh, bare for her pleasure and eyes only, eliciting another one of those light moans that escaped from Rosalie every now and then. Not a full blown one, rather a soft, little groan that was slowly making her fucking crazy. Bella thought briefly about stopping, but could not bring herself to be that reasonable— not when her little spitfire was putty in her hands, not even when she glanced at the clock and saw it was past time for her to go back and sleep before her game the next day. She was past caring, blinded by her lust as she laid against her beautiful blonde, their skins touching in the most delicious caress, slowly gliding against each other.

“I-I don't know why, but I...Ya khochu tebya,” Rosalie whispered softly. She smiled in a mix of confusion and desire, the conflicting emotions playing out on her face as she bit her bottom lip.

Bella smirked and nipped gently at her collarbone, chastising the Russian with tenderness for her slip of language, immediately soothing the red mark with her tongue. She blew on the reddened skin and watched as goosebumps spread over the heated flesh, going so far as to cover the exposed part of her breasts, right above her bra. Rosalie squirmed, arching out towards Bella, a full blown moan escaping her throat this time, as her eyes popped open to look at the woman on top of her.

“Do that again,” she murmured a minute later. “Pozhaluyst- agh...” Rosalie tried to amend to no avail, as the American player bit her harder this time. “Ah...Please,” she pleaded again.
“Interesting,” Bella smirked, “you like it rough, princess?” She teased, nipping at her neck this time.

“Ah,” she groaned, “I don't know-”

“We'll find out, don't worry,” she smiled to the embarrassed Russian, prompting her to blush even more.

She started to kiss an imaginary path down to her navel, quickly dipping her tongue in and out before going back again, nuzzling the top of her breasts. Rosalie tried to straighten up, wanting a taste of the American too, but Bella pushed her down, tutting the other woman with a raise of eyebrows.

“Where do you think you're going-”

Bella's teasing comment was cut off by the blonde, who arched again in a beautiful display, gripping her neck harder to bring her closer, finally having her way. Their breaths mingled as their tongues stroke each other, breaking away too quickly to sate Rosalie, who sighed, laying her forehead against Bella's.

“Too fast?” She asked her little temptress as their chests heaved with passion, yearning and eagerness, both woman overwhelmed by the feelings bubbling inside of them.

“Not, it's OK,” Rosalie reassured, capturing Bella's top lip with her own as their tongue met in a frenzied battle, only drawing back when she started to uncover her breasts.

“You sure?” The American checked again, cautious of her partner's inexperience with the same sex, not quite sure as to the extent of her experience with men. She was no virgin, obviously, she had a daughter to show for it but still, Bella did not want to be brusque with her.

“Da,” she nodded, reaffirming her assent with a small grin and sparkling eyes.

“Good,” Bella winked. She sat back on her haunches, thankful that Russians were apparently built like tree trunks, if the size of the bench was any indication. She held out her hand, intending for Rosalie to do the same, and reached for her back with her fingers, searching for the bra clasp. It didn't take more than a few seconds until she was divesting Rosalie of the garment- under watchful
eyes which had widened at the quickness of the gesture, raising an eyebrow at it.

“What?” Bella grinned, laying her hand against her neck to bring her lips in a kiss. Their mouths separated with a smack that resonated in the quiet room. “It’s not my first rodeo, princess,” she teased with a cocky smirk.

“Hmph,” Rosalie snorted. “Really? Well it will be the most unikal’nyy- err...unique. That I know,” she told her with a superior air, her head held high, while she spoke what seemed like common truth to her.

Bella laughed at the burst of confidence mixed with arrogance. “Of that, I have no doubt, princess,” she retorted in a husky voice, bridging the gap between them to steal a peck from her Russian.

“Now lay down,” she commanded again with a wolfish glint in her stare.

“But,” Rosalie started to complain but followed the instructions nevertheless.

“No buts. Don’t move,” Bella told her, briefly shushing her with her index finger.

She watched the blonde spread out on the bench, a delicious offering tempting her to no end and she couldn’t resist the heavy breasts, moving in time with the strained breathing, before her. She trailed a finger under her breast, making the Russian shiver with lust as she repeated the action with the other one. Rosalie sighed softly, closing her eyes at the same time, her mouth barely open.

Her tongue peeked out to lick her lips when Bella flicked hers against her nipples, a sign that didn’t go unnoticed by the American, who only attacked the little nub with more vigor. She bit it softly, testing the waters as she watched the blonde, looking for any evidence of discomfort, though she could only see pleasure etched on her features.

Bolstered by her findings, the hockey player went back on track and applied the same treatment to the left one. Rosalie wasn’t shy, this time, and she let her know she liked it- quite vocally, to Bella’s utter delight. Here she was, moaning her little heart out thanks to her, and for some reason, a sense of fulfillment arose in her. She had good sex before, she’d even go so far as to say plenty of times, but never like this. She had always taken a great enjoyment out of making women cum, true, but never so strongly nor had she felt particularly proud. But this once, she did. And fuck, did that make a difference.
'Who knew', she thought, amazed by the feeling spreading in her chest.

Bella kissed her heatedly once more, while her hand was trailing down her stomach, stroking her ribs along the way, making the Russian giggle. Right, ticklish. She filed the spot away in her brain, to be revisited later on and moved her fingers lower, dancing over the edge of her yoga pants. Rosalie gasped into her mouth and seemed to stop for a moment, a very long moment, during which Bella wondered if perhaps she'd finally taken things too far for the other woman, but she barely grunted and attacked her mouth with a renewed lustiness. She bit her bottom lip, prompting a cry of surprise from the American at the sudden sting and whined when Bella stroked her pussy over the fabric.

“Ahh-” she moaned louder when Bella made another pass with her fingers, and tightened hers around the nape of the foreigner's neck, clutching the American to her. Failing to take off the tight pants, Bella broke their kiss slowly, catching the lips in a series of quick pecks before bending down to get the offending garments off.

She was halfway done when a knock resonated through the locker room's heavy door.

“Shit-”

“Chert-”

Both women swore, glancing anxiously at each other. Their eyes darted back and forth between them and the door, lips reddened and chests still heaving with lust as they tried to process the disturbance.

“What?” Bella asked in a frustrated tone, pissed off at the interruption and its bad timing.

“Erm...It's Aro. We need to get going,” came the embarrassed reply of her bodyguard.

“Fuck...Yeah, give me five minutes,” the hockey player retorted as she watched Rosalie, still breathless, struggling to get back into her clothes with her shaking hands.

“Sure, I'll be outside.”
She waited for the retreating footsteps, then sat back on the bench, with her body angled towards Rosalie. She took the trembling hands in hers, stilling them momentarily.

“Hey,” she started softly, “you OK?”

“Yes, I- I just...was surprised and my heart can't stop err...shaking, yes?” She answered, justifying her fright to the other woman.

“It's alright, he's my bodyguard-” Bella explained, watching Rosalie's eyes widen all of a sudden.

“Do you think he heard us?” She cut her off, voicing the question as it passed through her head, looking mortified at the idea.

“I don't know. But even if he did, he won't say anything,” the American reassured, trying to quell the blonde's growing anxiety.

“Are you sure?”

“Trust me-”

“I do- I think,” she spoke quickly, rolling her eyes at her own revealing slip.

“You think?” Bella teased easily, her grin expanding as Rosalie swatted her arm with her hand.

“Don't,” the Russian warned, her index finger wiggling back and forth.

“Fine” Bella conceded, engulfing the smaller blonde into her arms again, hearing the tired sigh escape her throat as she nuzzled against her neck. “We're gonna be OK, princess, you'll see,” she reassured, laying a kiss on the crown of her head.

“You Americans are always so optimistic,” the muffled reply came from the side of her collarbone—not even missing a beat, provoking Bella's laughter.
She conceded that perhaps, it was in their DNA, to always see the glass half full or at the very least, it was so deeply ingrained in them, in their culture, that they tended to seek the positive in every situation they were faced with.

“What's your program tomorrow?” Bella asked, changing the subject, already scheming for their next clandestine rendez-vous in her head.

“The first part of my competition begins. You too, no?” Rosalie checked.

“Yes, tomorrow evening, against Finland.”

“Do you think you will win?”

“Ah,” she snorted, “well I certainly fucking hope so, princess-”

“Don't be vulgar,” Rosalie admonished with a flick of her hand on the American's shoulder before straightening up, still in her embrace.

“Right, my apologies, your highness,” the hockey player teased with a smirk, particularly enjoying the miffed look on her cold as ice Russian, now that she knew what was under the seemingly stern exterior. “So, tomorrow's the big day huh? How's the competition looking?”

“Mediocre,” Rosalie answered in a snob tone, her head suddenly held higher. The certainty sparkling in those baby blues reflected strength and confidence, with a twinge of cockiness sprinkled on top. Bella couldn't help but smile at the woman in her arms, and the word adorable came to mind, though she didn't dare saying it out loud.

“Alright, then. I should probably avoid ever mentioning that word to the competitors in our team,” she smiled.

“You have one very good girl and a couple, who could probably try to get it,” Rosalie indulged in a serious analysis. “But tomorrow, it is the team competition and I will be...um...dependent?” She glanced to Bella, who nodded, inviting her to continue. “Da...Dependent on the others members of our team and their performances. I hate this part, I can't wait for the ladies' singles to start,” she
sighed.

“I'm sure you'll make your country proud either way,” Bella comforted, caressing her cheek before kissing her tenderly.

“Only if I win,” Rosalie retorted, breathless, once they separated, laying her forehead against the hockey player's.

“Swan, get your ass out there,” Aro yelled through the door, interrupting the sweet moment between the two athletes.

“Shit, yeah. Coming,” Bella screamed back, feeling her heart in her throat.

“You need to go,” Rosalie regretfully stated the obvious.

“Da,” the American teased, prompting a grin on the Russian's face. “I'll call you tomorrow afternoon, yeah?”

“Before your game?”

“Sure, you're gonna be my lucky charm, princess,” she taunted flirtatiously, sneaking in a quick kiss before getting up.

“Fine,” Rosalie agreed, getting up in turn. “Make sure you call before seven though-”

“Yes ma'am,” Bella saluted while she walked backwards to the door.

She watched her little spitfire slowly smile at that display and winked one last time before opening the door. She was about to move the door handle when Rosalie collided with her back, making her hit the wood panel with a small thud echoing in the room.

“Wha-” Rosalie cut her off as she turned, jumping her for one last, heated kiss.
She aggressively brushed her lips against Bella's, licking the seam of her lips before plunging her tongue in the American's mouth- shutting down any protest she might have had. Though she was surprised, Bella indulged the passionate kiss and gripped locks of blonde hair as she took control of the kiss, slowing it down after a minute, only stopping to breathe. Nothing needed to be said after that last embrace, both women were trying to catch their breath as their eyes stared, having a conversation of their own.

Finally breaking apart after a minute more, each of them returned to their respective world. The door closed on them, dividing them once again, as Bella walked away with her bodyguard while Rosalie collected her belongings, before taking the opposite route. Her heart was beating to a curious rhythm, made of melancholia yet furiously hoping for a better future, pounding against her chest as she joined her security detail near the rink and started walking to the Russian compound, lingering along the way.

Still, despite her better instincts, the Russian couldn't help but think that, perhaps, there was hope for them- if their respective countries didn't disseminate too many pitfalls in their path, starting with hers and the threats against her daughter.

Only time would tell if she had met the woman of her life or outright signed her own death warrant, she reflected, warring again with her conflicted emotions.

Two blocks away, Bella entered her bedroom, headphones on with her music blaring, pondering the exact same thing.

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**Russian 101:**

- Ne khodite tuda = don't go there
- ostorozhno = watch out
- Gde ya? = where am I?
- Der'mo! = Shit!
- Yerunda = bullshit, nonsense
predatel = traitor
pozhaluysta = please
Ya ne mogu = I can't
chert' = fuck
vy tozhe = you too
snimi yego = take it off
luchshe = better
YA khochu tebya = I want you
unikal'nyy = unique

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you have to say.
I own nothing but my ideas and words. Everything else belongs to its rightful owner. Happy International Fanworks Day, lovely readers! :) Enjoy & thanks for reading. Special thanks to those who bookmarked, commented, and left kudos on this little brainchild of mine :) Competition is finally starting for our ladies...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bella heard the crowd cheering, the atmosphere in the ice rink getting heavier as the minutes passed. She smiled when she saw the US fans who had came such a long way to support their team, until no doubt was left on the barn. They wanted the victory and nothing else. People were getting progressively louder, supporters in opposing sides heckled each others while her heart beat in her throat. It was finally there, that moment she had worked so hard towards, she was here, and it was fucking amazing. There was really no way to describe it, she saw a few crazy costumes amongst the fans, on both sides, faces painted in a ritual she had done herself many times with her family, on the other side of the fence.

“’Tis the star-spangled banner. O, long may it wave. O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave!”

And it was so much better from where she stood today- with all those different feelings bubbling in her stomach as she sang her heart out, with her teammates, in a patriotic moment of communion between their team, their fans and their whole country. There was excitement laced with fright, anticipation and determination...It was almost indescribable, the emotions she felt right now, the chills that it gave her, to know that millions of her fellow Americans were watching this right now, back home. Just as her whole family, singing their national anthem with them, to give them strength.

The game would begin, right after the national anthems but they wouldn't be alone. Their fans were a rowdy bunch, they would push the team, scream until their throats were sore and there was no hope left. Excited, scared, anxious, yes, she was all that at the same time. Both players and fans felt the conflicting emotions sizzling in the rink. A fight would take place on this very day, the first of its kind, opening this unique event and Bella had no other objectives but to win it. They only needed one shot to make a difference, she thought as she heard the last notes of the Finnish anthem.
Better make it count, there was no middle ground, no tie possible in Bella's mind. Only victory. No doubt, only the will to be the last one standing. No matter what. She would bleed on the ice, fight till the end, for her country, for her dreams, for her family and her fans. This was it. Tonight, the moment she had been waiting for her whole life, this was her night. She wouldn't be appeased with a draw tonight, fuck no, she wasn't here for mediocrity, she thought fleetingly with a feral smile as she remembered Rosalie's words just the day before.

Each team took its place on the barn, facing each other, trying to intimidate the enemy when the referee blew the whistle, and the game was on. Bella started skating with determination, swinging the puck around her opponents, throwing quick glances to her sides to see who covered her flanks.

She was moving as fast as she could, but on the inside, the American was plotting as she tried to score first, to deflate the opposing team right from the start. She wanted to crush them tonight, and her mind fired ten thousand questions a minute at her.

Who was in the better place to play it out? Could she get the shot first? How were her defenses holding on? How to avoid the Finnish player? Where would their goaltender be most vulnerable? Her heart was racing, entwined with her brain in a chaotic mess of impulses and swift thoughts. She was focused, but a part of her mind was removed from all action, observing intently, trying to come up with the best solution to lead her team to victory.

She could barely hear Angie, who was screaming multiple things at them. “Go right, no, side step, yes, take the shot, no, look out, to your right, come on girls, come on, go, go, go.” She knew the two girls defending Finland's goal weren't going to let her pass, but she went forward anyway, leading the attack wildly, never doubting her moves. She saw Finland's forward come at her with all she had and thought for a second that she was going to body check her.

Bella could practically see it happen, watching herself fall if she stayed on course, looking for another way from the corner of her eye. ‘Could she move to the right? Yes, focus, by pass that one-shit...she was gonna trip her. Shit, she knew it, she could feel it in her bones as she watched the red head come at her. She could see one of her teammate rounding the goal, discreetly signing to the side in order to attract her attention. Bella nodded, yes, she’d seen her. ‘Discreet, come on, calm the fuck down. Go for it’, yes, just one inch left before she feinted a shot but passed the puck to her teammate, right besides the goal- and scoooooooooreeeeed.

“Fuck yeah,” she screamed, high fiving Chelsea who had just scored their first goal of the tournament.

“Thank you, thank you, holy shit, I did it,” she mumbled repeatedly, overcome with the emotion, hugging Bella tightly.
“Hey, you scored it, you earned it, nice work dude,” Bella replied, laughing with Chelsea as they skated backwards to join the rest of their team.

“How fuck, girls,” Angela yells as their fans started cheering louder.

Bella turned on the ice, throwing her arms from top to bottom, encouraging their supporters to cheer, screaming 'USA, USA' right along them.

“Come on girls, that's it, come on,” their coach was screaming too, clapping his hands, pushing them to strike again and stay on point.

“I want the same one in the next minute, come on guys...Stay focused,” he added in a stern tone, never one to be satisfied by a meager 1-0.

They started again, now rattling Finland with their confidence, multiplying their attacks as the opposing team battled for the puck. Bella smirked as she became the target of every Finnish player, first it was a near shoulder check, then practically a fist against her back, it was getting dirty out there but she wasn't about to lose her nerves, not when the referee called out a foul on her, giving them the advantage. No matter how much the opposing team tried to argue, he wouldn't budge, calling out a penalty time.

Bella smirked when she saw the Finnish gals getting rougher with her, trying to even out the fouls by provoking her temper. She wasn't falling for that, not tonight. It was what they were looking for, but she wouldn't give them that pleasure, that would be just too easy. Besides, she had yet to score her first goal in the Olympics, and she was not leaving the barn without it tonight. The first goal was an assist for her, it had to- Chelsea had the better angle- and ultimately, it's the victory that mattered. But she wanted it so desperately, she had been dreaming about that goal for such a long time. That was years of training and sacrifices, of pain, injuries and abnegation, skating tonight for a win.

She knew her family was watching the game back home, she knew they were all together save for Emmett who was supposedly watching it with Sam. She could picture her dad, screaming at the TV, analyzing the play, coaching her through the screen as they watched her. She had always known, deep in her bones, that there was only hockey for her. She understood nothing but that, she was born for it, she breathed for it, knew the game like the back of her hand, hell she probably could play blindfolded and still score. Yet, tonight, every damn shot she tried was a miss- some closer than others but they were all shut down by the Finnish goalie.

They were still winning the game but had no other goal to show for it, though not for lack of trying
on their parts. Bella attempted every play she could think of, varying the angles of her shots, the speed and the strength she put behind it. Hell, she would have taken even an ugly goal, but still, nothing.

Coach Black screamed instructions at them and they listened, enjoying a period intermission, cluttered together around the man who vociferated to his players, trying to strengthen them. Bella thought briefly about her Dad again, who was probably biting off his fingernails like a mad man as he watched his screen, dying to be out there with her.

They went back on the ice, regrouping tightly to avoid taking a goal. Bella was defending when Finland got better and had a turn of chance, not yet buried it seemed. On a stroke of luck combined to her talent, she stole the puck in a great feint, leaving the Finland captain completely numb during a second- she probably envisioned the goal that would tie both teams, the poor girl. Bella approached, the crowd was getting louder, she was encircled by the two Finnish defenders but went through, she shot...And missed again.

She was getting frustrated, it had been five minutes since the second period started, and still nothing. She didn't understand, kept trying furiously, becoming increasingly angry at her self. She knew she could do it, she just needed to relax the fuck out and stop playing like a baby bird on its first leg. She gave herself a pep talk while she attempted to score again. The game went on, she scored another assist on the second goal at the beginning of the third period, before Finland finally succeeded beating Angie, to dream again at 2-1. She hated those game scenarios, when anything could happen at any given minute, but she loved it too, in a twisted paradox. She would have preferred to lead by more goals but it also made the fight worthwhile.

“Two minutes, girls, come on,” Angela hollered from her goal.

And when all hope seemed lost, Bella double-deflected a pass from Chelsea, scoring her first goal of the tournament.

The last minute, she felt nothing, skated without feeling the strain of the effort, just happy and eager for the referee to blow his whistle and celebrate. Fuck yes, she thought when he finally ended the game. Then, it was more cheering, congratulatory hugs, along with chants from their supporters and even a slight sheen of tears in their coach's eyes when he clapped her on her back.

Later that night, she was the last player in the locker room, waiting for her little Russian to come meet her, while Aro guarded the door loyally. It burst open, and Bella stood up, smiling when she saw Rosalie happily rushing towards her.
“I won,” Rosalie screamed loudly, jumping into Bella's arms.

“I know,” the American smiled at her little spitfire's enthusiasm, loving the glint in her eyes as she told her the good news. “My brother sent me a text to tell me they're saying it was the best performance of the night by a long shot-”

“Da, I heard” she laughed, her hands gripping Bella's neck to draw her into a celebratory kiss. “They gave me the highest score ever,” she told Bella when she released her lips, laying her forehead against hers.

“So I heard, princess,” Bella answered, basking in the glee Rosalie was radiating, “and I did too-”

“Oh, I know, I had the alert thingy on my phone,” the Russian told her, a little crease forming between her eyebrows as she tried to explain, “I'm glad you did...I was afraid, tonight, with all that yerunda peregovory...err- the...You know,” she trailed off, waving her hand between them.

“Yeah, well, I told you before, Rose,” Bella framed her face between her hands, speaking softly to the blonde in her arms, “you don't have to worry about me-”

“Ah,” Rosalie snorted, “so it is okay for you to but not me?”

“Jesus, that's not what I meant,” the hockey player tried to backtrack, “come on, princess, let's not waste what little time we have together by fighting, yeah?” She tried again, pecking Rosalie's lips with her own as she argued her case.

“Hmph- How is it you Americans say? I will let it glide?” She told the other woman sternly, granting her another one of her slanted glares.

“Slide, but yes,” Bella laughed, sliding her finger against the side of her bottom lip.

“Khorosho...well slide, then,” she amended, biting Bella's finger before she sucked on the digit, eliciting a tiny moan from the American.
“Fuck, princess, don't tease me if you don't mean it,” the American pleaded. “I can't take it tonight, I'm too wired-”

“It's the victory, da? The feelings it gives you...I- I love it, it's like Narkotikami...the-” she answered, only cut off by Bella's lips, capturing hers in a heated kiss.

She moaned when the hockey player deepened it, her tongue seeking entry as it flicked against her bottom lip, softly caressing it before she made her mind, abandoning her translation to yield under Bella's fervor. She backed the Russian into the wall, sliding her knee between hers, pushing her into the concrete surface, molding her body to hers.

Rosalie slanted her lips to draw Bella into a deeper kiss, never losing their connection as she felt her back digging into the uncomfortable wall. She moaned, and Bella's lust skyrocketed. It was the adrenaline crashing down that stimulated both women, driving them to frenzied moves, touching, caressing, kissing...The same damn mantra fogged their brains, it was always more, more, more. As if they couldn't bear to wait anymore, both relieving the pressure of their stressful day with their embrace.

“Fuck, princess, we need to cool it down,” Bella tried to find the last shred of her restraint.

“Why?” Rosalie asked timidly.

“Because I'm not sure I'll be able to stop this time,” the American tried to explain, her eyes looking deeply into her temptress', begging her to choose.

“Then don't,” she retorted, a daring glint in her eyes as she brought Bella back against her lips, offering herself to the other woman.

“Fuuuuuck,” Bella whined, “you can't do that to me, princess-”

“What am I doing?” She asked, grinning while her dilated pupils tried to lure her in.

“You know what..Fuck, you're such a tease,” Bella buried her head into Rosalie's neck, kissing the milky white skin as she sighed.
“I'm tired of waiting- I...I thought I wanted to wait, but yesterday...And now...I just want to be with you,” the blonde whispered, “I don't want to wait-”

“You have to be sure, princess...Yesterday, I kinda got carried away-”

“We both did, and I don't regret it. Do you?” She demanded, looking straight into Bella's eyes.

“Fuck- how can you even ask me that?” Bella asked her, hugging her tighter to her body, pleased when the other woman molded her curves against her willingly. “Of course not,” she retorted firmly, “I don't...I just don't want you to do anything you'll regret tomorrow,” she rasped.

“I won't. You said...Vy sprosili menya chtoby vybrat'-”

“Princess-” Bella admonished.

“I know, I know,” Rosalie growled, frowning at the woman holding her. “You asked me to choose...And I did. Are you going to hold back on me now?” She asked, gripping Bella's hair as she turned her head to look into the deep brown eyes watching her.

“ Fucking straight women,” Bella muttered under her breath.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she said, trying to look innocent.

“You know I heard you, right?” Rosalie asked, dubiously looking at her, her left eyebrow raised in a perfect little judgmental arch.

“Perhaps you need the challenge,” she added, “and I'm apparently not that straight,” she mused out loud.
“Apparently,” Bella conceded and laughed, smiling at Rosalie's mischievous grin. “Fine, but don't complain when you can't walk straight tomorrow,” she winked, attacking Rosalie's lips again.

The Russian cooled down Bella's ardor, pushing against her chest with her palms, their lips still connected by a thread of saliva as they looked at each other.

“We need to find a suitable place,” she told the American in a matter of fact tone that left no doubt to the other athlete. There wouldn't be any dirty fucking in that goddamn locker room.

“Yeah? Well I'm all ears, princess, 'cause for now? It's all I've got-”

“Can't your bodyguard get us somewhere private?” She asked again, trying to come up with a better location for their first time.

“Well, I told you the other day, I could sneak you into our compound, but...” she trailed off, trying to picture it.

“But what? Can't you bribe him to do your bidding?” She requested, only half joking it seemed.

“It doesn't work like that, Rose,” Bella smiled to her devious Russian. “Though the offer stands. If you can give the slip to your agent for two hours, we could-”

“Vozmozhno...um...maybe?” Rosalie hesitated, probably thinking as she spoke.

“Maybe? Really? Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Language,” the Russian chastised, “I said maybe. The situation isn't like some days ago,” she tried to argue, “I didn't know then-”

“Didn't know what?” Bella persisted, looking at her blonde with wide, disbelieving eyes.

“That I'd care so much,” Rosalie blushed a lovely shade of red, suddenly avoiding Bella's eyes.
“Hey,” the American put her fingers under her chin, lifting it to meet her eyes with her own tormented orbs. “You don't have to hide from me,” she told her softly. “I do too-”

“You do?”

“Jesus, princess, what do I have to do to make you see it? In case it wasn't clear before, I don't make a habit out of fucking the enemy,” she snapped harshly.

“Is that what this is to you?” Rosalie blanched, her eyes wetting as she observed Bella's face register her mistake.

“Fuck...That's not what I meant...Of course it isn't. I just don't go for complicated- usually,” she amended.

“So what, you fuck and walk?”

“Run, but yeah, essentially,” the American dug herself deeper into that goddamn hole.

“I see-”

“No, you really don't, princess. Does the simple fact that I'm willing to risk everything for you not speak for itself?” She demanded, taking Rosalie's chin into her hands again, looking into those watery blue eyes. “I care. A lot- but you should know that by now. Shit, I told you I would fuck up, I always do.” Bella took a step back, relinquishing her hold on her little temptress, pacing before the other woman.

“Look,” she started again, “I suck at this, okay?” She gripped her hair, regarding the Russian as she tried to lay her heart before her feet. “I suck at feelings, I'm not the roses kind, but I do like you. A hell of a fucking lot more than I should,” she looked down, ashamed at her own shortcomings whenever feelings were concerned.

“Hey,” Rosalie stopped her movements with a hand on her arm, bringing her closer once more. “You don't suck,” she smiled to the American, “I just- I'm still half elated and half frightened, okay? I need you too much and it scares me...The things- what I feel, it's too much uzhe...i...err...It's just so
“Okay,” the American agreed.

She had a momentarily lapse of judgment, not a lobotomy, and she would be what Rosalie needed. There was no other way now, she was in much too deep to pull back. She couldn’t, no matter how much she might want to, she was trapped by the Russian, forced to abide to their feelings no matter how much her brain told her to get the fuck outta dodge.

“Okay?”

“Yeah, okay, princess, besides we should be celebrating tonight, not fighting,” she conceded, a hint of a smile beginning on her face.

“Yes we should. Putin was pleased, did I tell you he didn't even mentioned you when he congratulated me?”

“He didn't?”

“No. Obviously my performance was...Eto bylo dostatochno khorosho,” she reverted to her mother tongue, seemingly without even noticing.

With that triumphal glint in her eyes and her smile, Bella didn't have the heart to correct her. They would have trials in their path but they had won, at least a battle. For now, they had overcame the obstacles in their journey. Though both women knew there would be more to come, they couldn’t help but feel optimistic in the light of their victories. It was a funny thing, adrenaline, victory, how it got one's blood pumping, sending their heart into overdrive. Rendering them euphoric as the crowd screamed their name.

Bella listened to Rosalie's tale, smiling at the right moments, patting her shoulder when the Russian explained how much stress she felt as she waited for her notes to show up. Then, the anxiety, again, and the loss of control after that, whenever another competitor received the judges' notes. Trying to look pretty while feeling so sick she thought she'd pass out or vomit on the floor.
“Shit, I had no idea it was that bad,” she said softly at the end, watching her little spitfire sip at her bottled water.

The other woman grinned, reminding Bella that it was worth it, for those cheers she knew so well, here on her home ground. Performing for her country was one thing, but at home? That's a whole other kind of pressure, and of pleasure, too, when the success is at the end of the road. Tonight it was, and she was happy for Rosalie, glad that their relationship wasn't standing between her and that goal they shared. Bella's path to victory would be longer, game after game, until that final one. Rosalie shared her enthusiasm, reassuring although she knew nothing about hockey nor the caliber of the other team. She had faith. A strange, unwavering strength she renewed tonight, with her first win.

Although she was determined to the strong one, the American realized it was completely unnecessary. Rosalie had more than enough strength for the both of them. And perhaps, they could just draw from each other, lean on one another. On equal ground. Bella thought about her brother, Edward, who was always praising the joys of married life to her and for once, she saw what he meant. It felt good to have a partner, someone to be with, not to be alone anymore. It was a strange emotion, something that was never there to begin with, yet all of a sudden was everywhere.

She never wanted that, never truly had that longing, but here she was, smiling like a lovesick fool at her little ice queen, ripe for the taking, hers to do with as she pleased. That weird, euphoric feeling mingled with her lust, her fears, to twist the pit of her stomach. Pulling her between both end of the spectrum while Rosalie tugged her closer.

“You OK?” She asked, as she traced mindless patterns with her fingers against her neck.

“Huh huh,” Bella answered, “just a bit-”

“Too much?”

“Yes- no...Shit, I'm just-”

“Me too,” Rosalie reassured softly before kissing her, perhaps realizing that tonight, the other athlete needed the role reversal and more than eager to give it to her.

“Who are you?” Bella asked when their lips separated. “And what have you done with my Russian?” She teased, eliciting a laugh from Rosalie.
“You can’t let me have my moment, can you?” She grinned at Bella. “Tonight, I feel like nothing can stop me-”

“You're riding the victory high, princess, believe me, I get it,” the American spoke pragmatically, winking for good measure. “Still, I feel like I've entered the Twilight Zone,” Bella smirked, quickly elbowed by the Russian.

“Don't mock me, I feel good and you should too, we won-”

“For tonight,” Bella hated to remind the other, not wanting to put a damper on that glorious mood she was in, but unable to avoid the fleeting thought that, perhaps, it was just too good to be true.

“Da, da, I know how the saying goes. It's not the polnyy-full, sorry, war,” she amended.

“But it does feel good,” Bella agreed, laying her palm against Rosalie's cheek. “So, I'm gonna shut up, kiss you and-”

“More?” The Russian cut her off, eager to get started on the lessons she was promised by the other woman.

“Mozhet byt’” Bella teased in a husky voice, capturing Rosalie's lips with her own, resolved to forget anything that wasn't her blonde Russian for the night.

And to assuage her guilty conscience that wanted to talk and figure shit out, she added her tongue to the mix, determined to celebrate their first glorious day of competition in the Winter Games. Fuck consequences, talking, and all that overrated bullshit. Tonight, they both needed to celebrate, feel alive, and yes, fuck. In the name of victory, of course.
Russian 101 :

Slavnaya pobeda = Glorious victory

yerunda = bullshit, nonsense

peregovory = talks

khorosho = fine

Narkotikami = drugs

Vy sprosili menya chtoby vybrat' = You asked me to choose

vozmozhno = perhaps

uzhe = already

i = and

Eto bylo dostatochno khorosho = It was good enough
polnyy = full

Mozhet byt' = Maybe

Chapter End Notes

I always appreciate feedback. Good, bad or in between, I want to hear what you think.
“Hmm...Wait, wait,” the Russian moaned before interrupting her American lover as she started to explore her neck thoroughly, leaving Bella’s eager mouth bereft.

“What, Rose?” She leaned back, trying to understand what the writhing woman in her arms could want now, when she had nothing in her brain but desire.

“We really need to move-”

“Right,” Bella retorted, her mind scanning the different possibilities they had. “The best I can offer you is my room, back at the US compound. I don't have any roommates, so that's a plus, but the only tricky thing is how to sneak you there. Got any other suggestions, Princess?”

“Der'mo I don't know...I have a friend in the French compound, but-”

“The French, really?” Bella said skeptically, rolling her eyes at the idea.

“What's wrong with them? Do you have some kind of Amerikanskiy prevoskhodstvo...Err...American superior thing with them too?” Rosalie demanded warily, eyeing her with a suspicious glint in those baby blues while Bella laughed.

“Nah, not really? Shit, maybe,” she admitted half-hardheartedly after a beat.

“Huh, I see,” Rosalie stared her down skeptically. “You know USA is not the only great country in the world, da? I mean, I would love to see it one day, but you don't have all the-”
“All right, all right, I get it, Princess. Let's chalk it up to my own fucking stupidity, yeah?” She smiled, laying a quick peck on the Russian's lips.

Bella felt her smile against her lips, laughing before nodding her agreement.

“That is a fair assessment,” her little minx even added, eyes twinkling with mirth.

“So, are we really gonna try sneaking you into my room? Are you sure you can disappear for the night? Is that even a possibility or are they watching you like hawks?”

“I think I can be out. I will need to call a friend, but it should be okay if I'm back for breakfast—”

“You think or you know?” Bella asked, leveling Rosalie with a dubious look. “I don't want you to get into more trouble.”

“Oh, and you think I want that for you?” She questioned, angry again, untangling herself from Bella’s arms to pace before her. “I don't want a white knight, my soglasny? I said it to you before, but you need to hear it again ochevidno. I am the same as you— your equal, da? And I will not have you thrown into more— more...Chert poberi! I...”

“Hey, Rosalie,” Bella tried to appease the agitated Russian, laying a hand on the other's arm. “Calm down, Princess, that's not what I meant...I just, look, I never meant to make you feel inferior or whatever, on the contrary,” she snorted, agitatedly pacing in front of her bemused Russian. “You’re probably the only woman I've ever felt...I...You can keep up with me, OK? I know that. That's actually one of the things I like about you, which is probably why you've intrigued me so much...And if I made you feel inadequate, or I don't know, then I'm sorry, that was never my intention. Just...Perhaps it would be easier for me to get caught rather than you, that's all I meant, I swear.” She took Rosalie's face between her hands, giving her a tender look to go with her passionate declarations.

“Humph” Rosalie grumbled, shaking her head disapprovingly, torn between annoyance and tenderness as the hockey player tried to make amends.

Not waiting for an answer, Bella kissed her full lips, trying to erase the past five minutes and her aggravating habit to constantly put her foot in her mouth and say the wrong goddamn things. Rosalie moaned when her tongue tried to dominate their dance, but let it go, biting Bella's lower lip as
retaliation. Their kiss lasted until both athletes were out of breath, watching each other heatedly—up
to the moment Bella wanted more, leaning again towards Rosalie. Of course, she just had to put her
hands up at that moment and turn her face away, stopping the greedy American while she shook her
head, “niet”.

“Don't do that again,” she admonished sternly, “you told me we needed to work together if this was
going to work and that's all I'm asking. I need a partner, not a hero. So don't be all geroicheskiy—do
not go all American on me, I don't want your sacrifice. I want you to share the burden with me, not
always put me on the sidelines because you think it is best, khorosho?” She spoke with conviction,
her eyes never leaving Bella's while she gripped her neck, trying to convey her point as best as she
could.

That moment, that declaration, seized the American's heart, as if she needed another fucking
confirmation to all those feelings. They were in this together, and they would face the consequences
as a unit, as two parts of a whole, presenting a united front to the world and those who would
inevitably try to separate them. The time for incertitude had come and passed, now was not its
moment, now was the time for resolution and strength. Bella knew that, she believed in them, as
insane as that could sound even for her regular standards, she had faith.

Faith that her Russian ice queen had resolve, faith that this inkling of a something, this little persistent
feeling that should have never happened would endure. Faith that they could weather any storm that
might come upon them and try to infringe on this beautiful little something that they were building
together. Though she was only human, and as such was prone to the pernicious feeling that was
doubt, she was more than willing to try and erase it from her own mind, as if it was never there to
begin with. She nodded, Rosalie’s repeated reassurance, and unwavering need, steeling her own
resolve.

“Oh okay,” she told her Russian lover, whose blue eyes bore into her soul, leaving an indelible mark.
“Fine, have it your way, princess, we'll share the damn burden,” she relented with a wink, squeezing
Rosalie’s waist as her fingers felt the itch to wander down.

“You like getting on my nerves, don't you?” Rosalie grunted, laying her head against Bella’s neck, searching for comfort and strength, something she wasn’t even aware that she needed until their introduction.

She had always been known as “kholodnyy odin”, the cold one, the one nothing could touch or
bother. A stoic skater, someone whose blood ran cold, a level headed champion who never made
any wave. The one Russian media loved to scrutinize, whether it be for the brilliance of her
performances, or to analyze her private life to death. The perfect Russian, save for a few mistakes
that had yet to make front page, she embodied her country’s spirit just as much as their aspirations in
the Winter Games.
Yet it only took one pissed off American to throw her off course, a single athlete, to reconsider everything she’d known up to that point. Many people would have called her insane, and she figured it was only a matter of time until the headlines in Russia read just that—perhaps in stronger words, most certainly labeling her a traitor. Still, she couldn't bring herself to have any regret.

She thought about her daughter, the most perfect accomplishment in her short life, the child she had loved ever since she grew in her womb, and never regretted having, despite her young age, or the shortcomings of Kira’s papa, and how much he’d hurt her. Rosalie couldn't help but think that her baby girl would be proud of her mama, for standing up for herself, and not giving in to the popular opinion of what constituted acceptable behavior.

If there was a thing her daughter was, it was hard-headed. Her little girl could give her American lover a run for her money any day on that front. She surprised herself by trying to envision what their meeting could look like, fire and fire meeting, contrasting with the hot and cold encounters Bella and Rosalie had been prone to at first, a sizzling mix burning bright every single time they met.

In all likelihood, Kira would love Bella. Her sweet child was still naïve and loved to meet new people, too young to know the damage they could cause with their action or words. She was extremely curious and would be thrilled to get to know her American lover, if only to laugh at the sound of foreign language. Rosalie smiled as she pictured them together, loving what she saw in her mind.

“You know you love it, Princess,” Bella interrupted her train of thoughts, cradling her head against her body as she whispered.

“I really do not know why,” Rosalie answered dubiously, trying hard to contain her growing amusement, yet somewhat serious.

She truly had no idea why she was attracted to the American, why her treacherous mind thought about her all the time, ever since they had first met; nor why her equally unreliable heart clenched painfully when she thought about the possibility that, someday soon, they would have to be separated, each athlete returning to their respective country after the Olympics. It simply was, there was no way around that feeling for the Russian, not anymore.

“Oh I have a few theories on that. Care to explore those some more, lyubimaya?” Bella teased, laughing when Rosalie flushed bright red, no doubt remembering their latest heated moment.
“I think I am making your mind go fool,” the miffed Russian told her in a stern voice, still trying to be the serious one, despite Bella’s innuendo.

“Oh you’re definitely making me go crazy, Princess,” Bella laughed at her Slavic lover. “But now that I’ve had a taste of you, Rose? I wouldn’t have it any other way,” she waggled her eyebrow, loving the amused sheen in her feisty blond’s eyes.

Rosalie snorted but never contradicted the feeling. They were both way out of their comfort zone, Bella mused, but the taste of victory was too fresh in her mind to let anything derail their evening. They’d been interrupted cruelly the night before, there was no freaking way in hell she was getting cockblocked tonight, by Aro or anyone else. She wanted- no, scratch that, she needed to explore every inch of Rosalie’s skin tonight. She wanted to drown herself in their connection.

“Come on, let’s go. I feel like kidnapping a Russian,” she teased, smoothing down a few wrinkles of her Russian’s rumpled shirt.

Rosalie raised an eyebrow and shook her head, probably biting back on another sarcastic retort to Bella’s poor taste in jokes. Or was it the domestic action that she contemplated? The American shrugged, smiling as she reached for her things, stuffing them into her hockey bag while Rosalie gathered her own belongings.

“Ready, Princess?”

“Da, we go now,” Rosalie looked straight into her eyes and answered firmly after a pause, grabbing her own Russian flag themed bag.

“Then let’s get this show on the road.” Bella swung her bag across her shoulder with her right hand, reaching for Rosalie’s fingers with her left one. She squeezed her hand one last time before letting go, winking to her. All of a sudden, they were engulfed in a certain urgency, both women very much eager for the things to come as Bella opened the locker room’s door.

After a brief explanation with Aro, filled with begging on her part, and annoyance on his, the man relented and agreed that being indoor was the best option, in a voice that told Bella he was definitely choosing the lesser of two evils. In a last ditch effort to get his charge to behave, he pointed out that the previous night had already been quite eventful, but eventually relented, albeit reluctantly, and became an accomplice to their little secret rendezvous.
Walking back to the US compound had taken the nervous agent and the two women following him a lot more time than it usually did, no wonder really, given the ridiculous precautions said agent enforced. Bella had never avoided the main road to stick to the shadows as long as during their little trek home. Though, to his credit, the man did sneak them inside the compound—thanks to the help of a few trusted colleagues he had warned beforehand, enlisting the men to get them in the halls leading to Bella’s room, with no one the wiser.

Aro didn’t linger, but to remind her to keep the door locked and call him whenever the Russian wanted to go. “Emphasis on the whenever,” he’d told her, “meaning even in the middle of the night, all right?”

“Yes, sir” Bella winked at the man who only scowled. She thanked him once again, and he left them to their privacy.

Dutifully locking the door, she sighed, internally thanking the government for conniving agents, then turned to watch her Russian. She had her back to her, looking towards her nightstand, where she kept all her little trinkets from home. Rosalie observed silently for a while, but her eyes strayed back to the bed, and she visibly stiffened. Bella approached her from behind, softly kissing her neck as her arms crossed against her waist, hugging the Russian. Rosalie relaxed in her embrace, molding her back against Bella, angling her neck to grant her better access.

“Hm…this is good,” she remarked, shivering a little under Bella’s lips.

“Yeah?” Bella hummed against her neck, listening to Rosalie’s labored breath and the silence around them.

Alone at last.

“Da,” Rosalie turned around, smiling as she blushed.

Her arms came up, encircling Bella’s neck, cuddling the American with ferocity. The air was thick with desire, yet the atmosphere remained tender for a moment. Strangely enough, it felt like home to Bella. Comfort…and did she dare thinking about it? Love.
Rosalie seemed almost bashful, hiding away in Bella’s arms, lost in thought, and the hockey player couldn’t help but wish they mirrored her own. She laid her hand on Rosalie’s cheek, smiling when the Russian nuzzled against it, sighing softly.

“You okay, princess?”

“Hm,” her Slavic temptress mumbled, closing her eyes as they shared a tender moment in the privacy of her room. Away from prying eyes, they were finally free to be themselves, to explore their connection with no trickling down hourglass. It was a nice change of pace for them, though it was almost unsettling to know they would be together for much longer than before. Rosalie had used her phone, in the middle of their peregrination home, to call an influent friend in the Russian delegation—making certain her absence for the night would not trigger any red flags.

“Hey, look at me,” Bella asked, stroking her fingers against her feisty Russian’s cheek. “You know I don’t expect anything, right? I know this is difficult for you, Rosalie, I-”

“Stop,” Rosalie interrupted, shaking her head firmly, opening her eyes again to look in Bella’s own brown orbs. “I know that. I mean… I want, okay? I know I probably shouldn’t, but I do. This? You and me? I really want it,” Rosalie told her, leaving no place for doubt in the American’s mind that she meant it.

There was something in her eyes, a spark of determination that tugged at Bella’s heart, made it beat an erratic little music within her chest. Something born out of need and desire, desperation and longing mixing with that primal need to connect together. She smiled, trying to convey her support without voicing it, to this woman who made her world spin out of control, her heart race and her mind think about a future together. No matter how unlikely that possibility seemed.

“It’s the first time since my daughter came- not came, since I have her, da?” Rosalie spoke softly, struggling to find the right words to encompass her feelings, and open up, something almost foreign to the closely guarded Russian star.

Bella couldn’t interrupt the moment. The weight of the blonde’s confession forbade her to do anything but nod, and tighten her grip on Rosalie’s waist; a show of silent support while the Russian bared her heart to her.

“You’re…the first- the first woman, da, but you’re the first person I want to let in too. There hasn’t been anyone since I had my daughter,” she took a deep breath, slowly letting it out as her hand came up to grip Bella’s. “Kira’s papa, he’s not a good man. He was… And I don’t… I’m not- I… I don’t know how to,” she trailed off, slightly agitated as a lovely shade of red spread over her cheeks.

“Hey, hey, princess,” Bella twisted her hand to entwine their fingers, bringing them to her lips, softly kissing Rosalie’s knuckles. “It’s alright, I don’t have a clue what I’m doing either,” she whispered, cockily winking at the Russian who let out a self-deprecating chuckle.

“But you know women. You’ve… I mean… I’ve seen-” Rosalie mumbled off, embarrassed by her own words, her face glowing red at the admission slipping out of her mouth against her will.

“Ha-ha, has someone been googling me?” Bella inquired, impudent, in an effort to lighten the heavy mood that permeated the room. “Look, Rosalie, I’m not gonna lie to you okay? Yes I know women, I’ve slept with my fair share of them. Although I should point out that anything you might have read online is most likely over exaggerating my prowess.” She smiled as the other woman rolled her eyes. “But don’t think for a second that it’s ever been like this. This pull you feel? I feel it too, Rosalie, and
it’s never been like that for me before. Never. All right, Princess?” Bella held her eyes with her own and stroked her thumb along Rosalie’s hips, willing the other woman to see that there was no need for her to feel unsecure about her feeling. Not when this raw need was just as much a new experience for her. “So, believe me when I tell you this is brand new for me too, and I’m way out of my depth here. We’ll just take our time,” she smiled, trying to muster up as much confidence as she could, given their delicate circumstances.

“We don’t have that, you know this as much as I,” Rosalie objected, mumbling a few Russian words under her breath.

“I know, but it doesn’t mean we have to do anything you’re not comfortable with, just because time isn’t on our side, Princess…I don’t want to ever be something you regret,” she whispered softly.

“I hope you won’t,” Rosalie admitted, eyes downcast, fleeing Bella’s inquisitive gaze.

“Me too, Rose, me too,” Bella trailed her fingers along her back, splaying it to cup her neck. “I can’t predict the future, but I promise to be honest, always, and to try my best not to screw up,” she grinned at her beautiful blond, loving how much she relaxed under her touch.

“I should not stop my breath then” Rosalie teased, leaning in to lay a soft kiss on Bella’s lips.

“You do that, princess,” Bella chortled, mouth parting to accept the eager tongue flicking her lower lip.

Now that the novelty of kissing a woman had worn off a bit, Rosalie was more than just a willing participant in their sensual embrace. She rarely hesitated to take the lead anymore, tangling their tongues with assurance, comfortable with the intimacy in their little bubble of attraction, isolating them from the rest of the world and their prying eyes. If she was honest with herself, the hockey player had to admit she was still surprised at the pace of their connection, but both of them were unable to resist the draw they had on each other, that ever present pull they felt since the beginning. Bella guided her enthusiastic little temptress, maneuvering them towards the bed, her legs steering them along with the firm grip she had on Rosalie’s waist; never breaking their kiss, not even as Rosalie squeaked, when the back of her knees hit the mattress.

“Der’mo” she swore, and Bella couldn’t help but laugh at her petulance.

“And here I thought you were graceful, Princess,” she taunted.

Rosalie glowered at her for a while, then crooked her finger, devilish glint settling in her eyes. She
motioned for Bella to come closer with a come-hither look on her face.

“Come here,” she demanded, her Slavic lilt tinting her husked words.

Bella cocked her head to the side, observing the beautiful blond reclining on her bed. With her arms behind her back, her tempestuous Russian waited for her to make her move, join her and just do something; huffing in impatience when nothing happened.

Arrogant as she could be sometimes, Bella felt a slight trepidation come over her, a wave of anxiety settling deep in the pit of her stomach. She’d never been nervous about her performances with the women she fucked, yet this time, the moment weighed heavily on her shoulders. Not for the first time, she thought that their budding relationship was too important for her to screw up. She didn’t want to disappoint Rosalie, hence the weird stage freight she had to overcome all at once. Bella shook herself, sighing softly at the only woman to ever spin her world off its axis.

“Are you not coming?”

It was the hitch in the Russian’s voice that did her in. She was supposed to be smoother than that, really, it wasn’t her first rodeo for fuck’s sake. This was her thing, Rosalie trusted her to know what she was doing, and so far, she’d only let her down. She was angry at herself for allowing doubt to sneak in without warning, instead of focusing her attention on Rosalie. Bolstered by her short, half a minute pep talk, Bella smiled at her little temptress.

“Shit, sorry, Rose. I’m just…I’m nervous too, alright? Apparently you’re my kryptonite-”

“Your what?” The Russian chuckled, her eyes glinting with mirth.

“Please tell me you know Superman, princess?” She asked, incredulous at the possibility that there could still be some people on this Earth who did not know the DC comics superhero.

Rosalie frowned, taking her time to mull it over, biting her lower lip as she thought.

“Come on, Rose,” Bella whined, “Superman?”
She hummed the famous theme song while she mimicked the flying man- complete with the clenched fist, arm drawn straight in front of her. Rosalie laughed out loud at the ridiculous display, barely able to choke out an answer.

“Da, you did it well,” she finally exclaimed between bouts of laughter, still gasping for breath as she tried to calm herself.

“You knew!” Bella cried out. “I can’t believe you let me make a freaking ass out of myself,” she scowled to Rosalie.

“It was funny,” the Russian insisted, smiling as she wiped her eyes. “And now I believe you should know Russians are not complete fools, da? We do have the internet, you know.”

“Fair enough” Bella smirked at her feisty blond, enjoying their banter despite her lingering lust. “Now let’s see if you’re still laughing when I do that...”

She walked the few steps separating her from the bed and kneeled before her, cupping her jaw with her hand. Rosalie’s cheeks were already reddened by her laughter, but there was no mistaking the sigh she made when Bella stroked her flesh with her thumb, nor the glimmer in her eyes. She took her lips with a bruising passion, refusing to relent until Rosalie moaned. She chased her tongue with her own, twisting around Rosalie’s submissive one for once, pulling her whole body towards her. Sucking, and then nipping her lower lip when she tried to pull away, bending her taller body over her Slavic temptress. Rosalie moaned again, delighting Bella with the way her body responded to her assault.

“Well, princess?” She backed away and asked, cocksure, licking her lips to entice the other woman just a breath away from her.

“Potselui menya” Rosalie begged, laying her hand on Bella’s, their noses slightly bumping together when she leaned in.

“English, Rose” Bella admonished, biting her full lips with care.

She moved backwards one more time as Rosalie tried to capture her lips, leading their bodies back and forth, twisting the moment she thought her Slavic temptress would catch her. Said Russian was getting increasingly frustrated with Bella’s little escapist game and made it known, aggressively pouncing on the American with her hands, catching her wrist as she brought their bodies closer.
“Kiss me,” the Russian lamented, giving another little bump to Bella’s nose. “Please.”

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Russian 101

Der’mo = Shit

Amerikanskiy prevoskhodstvo = American superiority

Da = Yes

Papa = Dad

My soglasny? = Do we agree?

Ochevidno = Obviously

Chert poberi! = Damn it!

Niet = No

Geroicheskiy = Heroic

Khorosho? = Okay?

Vas razdrazhayut menya net kontsa = You annoy me to no end

Kholodnyy odin = The cold one

Mama = Mom

Potselui menya = Kiss me

Chapter End Notes

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