taste of control

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by beetlesandstars, kryptonian

Summary

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"What?" Shane says, distracted. "We just had dinner."

"Yes," Ilya says. "But you had children's portion."

Shane sends him an incredulous look. "I had two servings."

"Of baby food."

"Ilya."

"Shane."

Shane sighs. "Can we not do this? Please."

Unfortunately for Shane, they must do this.

Or: Shane's restrictive eating versus Hayden Pike and Ilya Rozanov.

Notes

they put a probable lesbian and a known gay man in a rainforest-themed airbnb like they didn't know this would spawn hollanov fanfics… fools...

also rachel reid said shane hollander doesn't have an ED then showed us a man with a raging eating disorder. HELLO?

cw: extensive discussions about restrictive eating + excessive working out in relation to eating disorders and explicit discussion about eating disorders, but with no terms used. this includes shane's pov describing his thoughts about food, health, etc. please take care of yourself while reading <3

enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya has a notorious sweet tooth.

Rarely does he let himself indulge in things other than Shane that are true comforts, but something sweet like chocolate is something he's never been willing to deprive himself of. Sinking his teeth into a decadent dessert, or a tart snack isn't unusual for him, but often, he indulges during breakfast too—whether it's a chocolate croissant or pancakes smothered in Nutella or a strawberry milkshake.

Today, Ilya opts for an omelette because they've got way too many eggs in the fridge, but there's an aching in his teeth for something saccharine. He nabs himself a Kit Kat before he settles down to eat.

He's just taken an outrageously big bite when Shane ambles into the kitchen, pulling a t-shirt over his head.

Ilya loves looking at Shane when he's just gotten out of the shower, pink-cheeked and soft and touchable. His freckles stand out more, and he combs his hair back so he looks a little like an underdressed, slightly sleepy businessman. Ilya mourns that he'll have to drive home soon to make it in time for practice. He just wants to stay here and look at Shane forever.

His nightmares are few and far between when he's with Shane, but he knows they'll return with a vengeance once he's alone again. He hates being alone.

The distance is heavy, but he tries not to focus on the weight, not when Shane is right here, right now.

When Shane approaches, hand landing on Ilya's elbow, Ilya leans in to peck Shane on the lips, but Shane ducks away.

It stuns Ilya a little; a sharp prick of hurt manifests in his chest, but he shoves it aside in favour of glaring at his boyfriend.

"Shane, you will not kiss me?"

Shane slides away, glancing up at him as he grabs a coffee mug out of the rack. "It's not like that."

"It is like that," Ilya says, though he's not entirely sure what 'it' is. He's sleepy, and he wants to kiss his boyfriend before their itinerary for the day catches up to them.

"Hm." Shane pours the coffee sedately before sitting down beside Ilya. He always forgoes milk in his coffee, even though he prefers it.

"You do not want to kiss me. Did you forget to tell me we are fighting?" Ilya isn't pouting, but it's a close thing.

"No."

“So you have other problem?”

“I don’t have a problem,” Shane says, voice mild the way it only ever is when he’s trying to rein in his emotions. Ilya watches as Shane takes a long sip from his coffee, staring down at the chocolate wrapper just beside Ilya’s knuckles on the counter.

Ah. It is like that.

Ilya licks his lips, tasting the smear of chocolate that Shane must’ve spotted when he’d leaned in.

“You have problem,” Ilya insists, just as mildly. “You don’t want to kiss me because you will want the chocolate too, yes? You get a taste, you want. I was your first chocolate.”

Shane reaches out and grabs a celery stick from his plate, taking a bite of it in lieu of answering.

Ilya watches him impassively. “You eat like rabbit.”

“I eat like athlete,” Shane retorts, finishing off the stick. “You eat like a child eating their birthday breakfast.”

“Every meal should be like birthday. A joy. Not torture. I remember the anchovie smoothie from last night, Hollander– there is no joy in that. You could not pay me to drink it.”

“It tastes fine,” Shane says, like a liar.

“It does not taste good going in. And makes your cum taste like shit.”

“Hey!” Shane says, affronted.

“I still give you blowjob out of the kindness of my heart. I love your dick. I am generous and swallow. And every time you try to poison me.”

“You’re such an asshole.” It’s one of Shane’s favourite phrases. The insult settles over Ilya like praise.

“I have eaten asshole. Taste better than your smoothie.”

As punishment, Ilya cops a carrot stick to the temple. It bounces off and lands on his plate. He lifts it, tossing it into his mouth before shooting Shane a crooked grin.

The eye roll he gets in return feels almost as good as a kiss. Almost.

Hayden groans, long and tortured. “I can’t believe you’re making me agree with Rozanov.”

“Hey,” Shane warns, pulling his sock off.

“Listen, dude, I’m no happier about this than you are. You know how I feel about the guy.” Hayden tugs his shirt off by the collar. “But this time, he’s got a point.”

Sighing through his nose, Shane grabs his underwear by the waistband and yanks them off. “He does not have a point.”

“I mean,” Hayden says, tilting his head. “I’ve never seen you just *eat,* you know?”

Hayden steps out of his underwear right as Shane grabs his towel and wraps it around his waist, heading toward the shower. As they walk, Shane asks, brow furrowed, “What does that even mean?”

Hayden shrugs, turning the handle and then stepping under the cool spray of the shower. “Like, when we’re at a restaurant or whatever. You order the healthiest option, and you don’t, like, steal fries off of anyone’s plates. You don’t order a beer. You don’t have any dessert. You eat like it’s a chore, man. But– you haven’t always been like that. It didn’t used to be this bad, but you just … it’s changed. Developed.”

Hanging his towel on the wall, Shane steps under the showerhead beside Hayden, feeling a little underdressed for such an intense conversation. He kind of wishes now that they’d paused and continued arguing after the shower had ended.

When he catches Hayden’s eyes, Shane rolls his eyes, chest tightening with discomfort. Angrily, he squirts shampoo into his hand and slathers his hair with it. “I have a problem because I don’t drink or steal fries?

“You know that’s not what I’m saying here. You’re not enjoying yourself.”

“Whatever.”

The conversation is over, leaving tension hanging heavy in the air; the only sound filling it is the hot droplets colliding with the tiled floor. They spend the rest of their respective showers in silence.

By the time they’re back at their lockers, tugging clean clothes on, Hayden looks like he’s gearing up to say something again. Shane wishes he wouldn’t. He doesn’t need this argument haunting the rink and his home.

“It’s just something I do,” Shane says. “I’m just particular about my diet. I like to control it. Keep myself in check. It’s normal.” He takes a breath, takes a beat, before adding, “You know how the media can be about me. I just want to give them less to criticise. I want them to focus on my performance, not my ethnicity, or body, or– or you know…” Shane’s sexuality and Ilya always the elephant in the room, the one thing he can’t say out loud within these walls.

Hayden seems to understand the unsaid words. They finish dressing, bags slung over shoulders as they head toward the exit. Once they’re out in the open, with no chance of eavesdroppers or strangers walking in, Hayden clears his throat.

“I just think, maybe, you feel … out of control. All the time,” Hayden says, contemplative. “Like someone else is writing your narrative. So you– you take control of the things you can, right? Like eating.”

Shane’s fingers twitch, apprehension setting his shoulders straight. “I guess.”

“You know, after Jackie gave birth the first time, she changed a little after, you know? I didn’t know what was going on. Took months for us to figure it out. Eventually, Doc said it was postpartum. Not abnormal for first-time moms. I felt useless, man. For months. And I was away all the time, so I was never sure if she was actually getting better or just– trying to protect me. She knew how guilty I felt about it.”

“Oh,” Shane says quietly. “I didn’t know that.”

“But, Shane, man,” Hayden says. “She stopped eating. She told me her emotions were so out of her control that she just… controlled what she could.”

“Like me, you mean.”

Hayden shrugs. “A little. Maybe. I’m just saying shit, man.”

Shane mulled over his words as they walked, unsure how exactly he could explain himself. Not that he should have to explain himself, but Hayden is his best friend, and he finds himself *wanting* to reassure him. Because he is fine. Everything is fine. “It’s not like I’m not eating. I’m just careful about what I eat. I’m a high-performance athlete; it’s a high-performance diet. It’s … normal.”

Hayden makes a disbelieving noise. “I’m also a high-performance athlete, man. And I eat like one. I eat heavy protein, and I work out regularly, you—” Hayden pauses, brow furrowing as he searches for the right words. “Fuck, dude, I don’t know. You don’t starve yourself, but you eat like you’re being held at gunpoint.”

Shane bites back another ‘whatever’, readjusting his bag on his shoulder. “I’ve got an appointment. I’ll see you later, man.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Hayden blows a raspberry. “The kids miss their uncle Shane, by the way. Come over sometime!”

“Will do.”

Ilya ends up bringing three different kinds of wine to Yuna and David’s for dinner two weeks later, when he’s back in town. They’ve got forty-eight hours together this time. It never feels like enough.

Shane swears he has no reason to be nervous around them anymore– that his parents love Ilya just as much (if not more) as they love Shane. But Ilya’s planning on being with Shane for the rest of his life, so he needs to make a good impression. Every time.

“Ilya, sweetheart,” Yuna says, smiling at him as she takes one of the bottles. “You didn’t have to bring anything.”

“He insisted,” Shane tells her, a half-smile on his face.

“No,” Ilya says. “I was in shop, and the wine man said these are best. And you deserve the best, Yuna.”

Yuna laughs, and Shane’s eyebrows fly to his hairline. “Wine man?”

“You know,” Ilya says, toeing off his shoes. “Guy who knows wine. Wears a little uniform.”

“Oh, a sommelier.”

“A summary, yes.”

“Right, well,” Yuna says, still smiling. “Come on in. David’s just taking the lamb off the grill. Oh– and Shane, I’ve got your veggies in the oven. They’ll just be a minute.”

“Thanks, Mom,” Shane says, following her into the kitchen. Ilya lags behind for a moment, amping himself up while at the same time questioning why he feels the need to do so. It’s just dinner with Shane’s parents; he’s done this hundreds of times before.

Crossing the threshold into the kitchen, Ilya sets down the two remaining wine bottles on the counter.

“Want some?” Yuna asks, gesturing to the half-full wine glass on the counter.

“Yes. Please,” Ilya says, sliding into one of the barstools beside Shane. He presses his thigh to Shane’s, and Shane presses back, hiding a smile in the palm of his hand.

He accepts the glass of wine Yuna hands him with a happy hum, taking a sip before looking at Shane.

“Shane, you want?”

“Uh–”

“He doesn’t,” Yuna replies for him.

Ilya freezes. Annoyance and frustration rolls over him so quickly he has to bite his tongue to keep from saying something he’d regret later. Normally, his anger would feel sharper, but recently, like a lot of what he’s been feeling, it just feels dull and exhausting. He’s far more worried about Shane, who barely even notices the interaction at all.

Maybe Yuna thinks Shane isn’t like this when he’s not around her– that Shane has casual beers or the occasional candy bar or pizza. Perhaps she sees Shane restricting as an extension of the rest of him, as a habit– a neurotic quirk.

Ilya is intimately familiar with bad parents, and Yuna Hollander isn't one of them. She's a good mother, but she's more than that; she's his manager too—someone who is worrying about his performance and career as much as Shane is. He notices now how much it's seeped into other aspects of their relationship.

She never asks Shane what he wants to eat, just following the guidelines Shane does, the ones outlined by the stupid dietitian. Ilya wants to strangle the stupid dietitian.

Yuna knows the restrictions as well as Shane does. Because she knows everything about him. Well, almost everything.

Despite his frustration, Ilya doesn't say anything. Not here, not now. He takes a sip of his wine, letting the rich flavour calm his frayed nerves, lulling them back into submission. If he could, he would curl up by a fire and share a glass of wine with his boyfriend, talking pointlessly about nothing with two of the most important people in Shane's life, but he can't. The barrier is there, thick as a brick wall, haunting more than just Shane.

Still, it's not difficult to make it through dinner, not when Yuna and David are so easy to be around.

Ilya doesn't mention that Shane has an entirely different meal from the rest of them. He doesn't mention that Shane is the only one not drinking. He doesn't mention any of it.

Yet.

But, once they're in the Jeep, Shane's hands on the wheel as he hums a song Ilya doesn't know, he realises this might be the only way to bring this up again without Shane shutting it down and walking away.

The song on the radio ends, and Ilya grabs Shane's phone, heading to his favourite playlist that just has all his favourite bands' discography on it. He hits play wordlessly.

Like Anya, Shane's favourite music calms him down. Perhaps this will help. Though he does prefer her choice of music over Shane's.

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"What?" Shane says, distracted. "We just had dinner."

"Yes," Ilya says. "But you had children's portion."

Shane sends him an incredulous look. "I had two servings."

"Of baby food."

"Ilya."

"Shane."

Shane sighs. “Can we not do this? Please.”

Unfortunately for Shane, they must do this.

“You are not hungry?”

“Ilya—”

“Be honest, Shane. You are hungry, yes or no?”

Shane stays quiet. Shane’s favourite song fills the silence. Ilya is unsure if the music is helping.

“Baby,” Ilya says. “Please. Let me make you dinner when we are home.”

“No,” Shane says.

Ilya deflates, heart aching. He doesn’t know how to do this, how to help Shane when he doesn’t want help. But he’s watching the man he loves suffer, so he will keep trying. He just needs to find a new angle, a new way of approaching Shane about this.

“I love you,” he says, watching Shane’s side profile, “And I worry. I will always worry. But we do not have to speak about this right now.”

“Thanks.”

“I will worry in silence instead.”

“Ilya.”

“Shh. I’m busy worrying.”

“Ilya cornered me after dinner with my parents,” Shane says, dropping onto the bench beside Hayden as Hayden laces up his sneakers, preparing to head home. Most of the team has filed out, leaving them mostly alone with a straggler or two on their way out the door.

“You want me to kick his ass?” Hayden offers.

Shane rolls his eyes, jabbing Hayden in the bicep with his elbow.

“What! This is supportive bro behaviour, not anti-Ilya Rozanov behaviour,” Hayden defends.

Shane pulls his own sock on over his foot. “As I was saying, he cornered me. He waited till we were in the car and started an argument outta nowhere.” He pulls on the other sock. “I don’t know. I know he wasn’t trying to, but he just—he has shitty timing sometimes.”

“What did he say?”

Shane’s hands tighten around his t-shirt. “It doesn’t matter.”

“I cannot supportive bro talk if you don’t give me context.”

“Hayden.”

“He just–” Shane sighs, frustrated. “Mom always makes sure I can eat dinner with them, right? Like, it follows the meal plan I use and everything. And I guess Ilya didn’t like that.”

“What, like, he didn’t like dinner because it was tailored to you?”

“No, she made me a separate dinner. Different food.”

Hayden eyeballs him. “And she—normally does this? Every time?”

“Yeah.”

He makes a soft *ah* noise. “So, it’s about the food thing.”

“There is no food thing.”

A tense silence follows.

When Shane looks up again, Hayden’s face has morphed into something pained– his mouth a flat line, eyebrows furrowed. “Okay, maybe it’s not just a food thing. But, uh… you– you remember a couple months ago, I came into the gym and found you passed out on the floor by the treadmill? You were down for barely a minute, but you told me you’d been in there for five hours before you dropped. You just don’t stop.”

“Hayden—”

“No, shut up, let me finish,” Hayden interrupts, eyes pleading. “I’m worried about you. This is– this is *serious,* man. I’m not just, like, bringing this up ‘cause you look kinda miserable and you’re fighting with your … you know. Trust me, I do not wanna be on Rozanov’s side on anything. But I’m worried you’re gonna hurt yourself for real.”

The discomfort settles in his hands as they wring in front of him, eyes cast downward. “I’m not miserable. I’m—come on, man.” He scrambles to find the right words, tongue clumsy in his mouth. “I’m *happy.* I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. Ilya and I are so good right now. We’re kicking ass this year. I love my life. I love hockey, so I keep myself in check. It’s—normal.”

I’m normal. Please.

“I know you love hockey. I love hockey. We all love hockey,” Hayden says, leaning back against the wall, jaw set tense. “But this job is going to fucking kill you if you keep acting like this. I’ve seen guys go down this road, Shane. They push their body, and they push their eating, and they crash. Every time.”

It’s frustrating. It feels like no one understands where he’s coming from, and that they won’t listen, no matter how much he assures them all that it’s fine, that his dietitian says it's fine,

even if he neglects to admit just how much he's working out to her—she's still the one monitoring his diet and making sure he's in peak, physical health.

It's normal to look after yourself. It's *normal*. He's normal.

"You act like you're invincible, but you're not," Hayden says, voice taking on a softer, sadder quality. He looks older, suddenly, and Shane has to look away. "And the things you're putting yourself through… if they don't hurt you now, or in a couple of years, they're gonna affect you down the line. Bone density, muscles, heart and mind– all of it. You're gonna be in pain, Shane, and I don't fucking want that for you."

Shane knows what he wants to say: that it doesn't matter, because right now, in this moment, he's still the NHL's star player. How what he's doing now will affect him in the long run has no bearing on his choices, because who he will be in ten, fifteen years doesn't matter. He doesn't think about who he will be without hockey, because the very thought of not being who he is right now unmoors him.

The only thing about the future he's certain of is that Ilya will be by his side. It's the one thing in all of this he never has to doubt.

"I take care of myself," he says, as firmly as he can. "That's all it is."

Hayden gives him a look, eyes sad, mouth downturned, before looking away. He nods once, curtly, before standing. "Sure, Shane. I'll see you at practice."

Things don't change for a long time. Ilya doesn't bring it up again, bar his light jabs about Shane's "gross" food choices. Then, they're outed, and then engaged, and then they're finally on the same team—so much upheaval that the entire thing feels half-forgotten, even if Shane still thinks about it sometimes, about the concern they'd shown, the fear for him. It makes him feel sick with guilt.

It doesn't change anything.

But he feels sick.

Ilya sometimes watches him eat with the muscles of his jaw pulled tight, and concern swimming in the ocean of his eyes, but he doesn't say anything.

Hayden still tries to nudge him to leave the gym early, but Shane is too dedicated.

But then Anya gets out right before they leave for a game, sprinting away so fast that even two star athletes struggle to keep up with her. It takes ten minutes for them to catch up to her, and ten minutes to get back home. It cuts right into the time Shane had set aside to eat his celery and carrot sticks and finish off his protein shake.

The food lies set out nicely on a plate, and it catches Shane's eye as he rushes past the kitchen, attempting to catch up with Ilya, who is already one foot out the door.

While they drive, he can't stop thinking about missing this meal. His calories will be off for the rest of the day. Each meal is perfectly scheduled out to ensure he's properly fueled, and without it, everything is wrong.

His skin feels itchy, thoughts whirring a thousand miles an hour. It's only ten minutes into the drive, stopped at a traffic light, that he realises Ilya is watching him.

"What?" He asks.

"You look worried," Ilya notes, fingers shifting minutely on the wheel. "Nervous for game?"

Shane shakes his head. His throat feels a little too tight, anxiety winding vine-like around his windpipe. "No, I just … I ran out of time to eat."

Another shift of his hands on the wheel, fingers tightening around it. "Okay. We grab you something before game."

Shane knows nothing at the stadium will line up with his diet. Or even if it does, he'd have to research the caloric and protein count and make sure it aligns exactly with what his previous meal would've been. He's not even sure how much of his protein shake he drank. It was a little over half, but he'd need the exact measurements, measurements he didn't have time to grab.

It's not feasible that he'll be able to eat before the game, but he's got fresh carrots and celery in the bottom of the fridge. He can eat as soon as he's home, and hopefully it doesn't throw everything off too much. It's fine.

Still, though, he doesn't explain this to Ilya. He wouldn't understand.

"Yeah, sure," he says, head turning to face forward, gaze focused intently on the road ahead. "If we've got time."

"We will make time," Ilya insists.

Dread creeps up Shane's spine, crawling up the back of his neck next. He can't eat anything there. He won't. He doesn't want to have to argue about it with Ilya, not before a game, not when their whole team will notice the tension. It'll throw them all off.

This game is important, like every game is important.

He raises a shoulder in a half-shrug, nodding even though he knows it's not true. "Yeah."

Shane is rushing around from the moment they arrive, filling every minute he can with tasks, conversations, and preparations to ensure that he doesn't have a single moment alone with Ilya. It doesn't feel great—but he's just trying to avoid the argument, or the concerned comment. He feels off enough as it is.

He manages to keep up the act until they're changing and preparing to skate out onto the ice. Ilya slides up beside him, protein bar in hand. Chocolate flavoured. *HIGH PROTEIN* printed

on the side in bold font. Shane's stomach tightens. Fuck, it would barely taste like real chocolate, they never do, but it'd be so good. It'd melt on his tongue, overwhelming his senses.

But he doesn't even need to see the side to know that it doesn't line up with what he's allowed to eat; just the sight of it makes alarm bells go off inside his head.

"Stole this for you from Coach's office. You have time to eat."

Shane's fingers grip tight to the fabric of the shirt held in his hands. He drags it over his head to give himself a minute to breathe and come up with some sort of excuse that won't make Ilya push. The shirt hides the panic clawing at him pretty effectively, buying him enough time that someone passes by, nudging Ilya's shoulder with their own, and says, "Dude, do not eat that right now. Not right before a game. That sweet shit will make you barf."

Shane doesn't even register who it is that said it, too busy being hit with such a strong wave of relief that his knees go a little shaky.

Ilya doesn't acknowledge them, just wiggles the bar in his hand. "Don't care. You have to eat, Hollander."

Suddenly, the Coach's whistle blows. Everyone's attention turns his way before the rest of the team moves to all gather around him.

"Sorry," he murmurs, quiet and private between them. "After the game. I promise." Shane shoots him an apologetic smile and ducks past him, their shoulders brushing just slightly.

Everything's fine. Shane's cold-sweating and vaguely nauseous, but everything's fine.

He just has to focus.

They're halfway through the game, and Ilya shoots the puck his way, winking at him. Shane receives it expertly, pumping his thigh muscles to skate ahead, feeling electric as he dodges an opposing team member.

And then, suddenly, Shane's head is swimming. His eyes won't focus, and his stomach turns. He slows down for only a second, but it's enough. The puck is a blur as it rests against the end of his stick, and then—

Davis rams into him from the side, and Shane goes careening into the barrier.

For a moment, the entire world goes black. His head fills with static, his ears ringing with the impact. He lies very still, taking stock of his body. Nothing feels broken, despite the immediate pain that washes over him, pulsating like a living thing.

Distantly, he registers the roar of the crowd, the chanting for him to get back up. Face hovering over the ice, he acknowledges the tiny part of him that doesn't think he can. And then he gets the fuck up.

Wrists screaming, he pushes himself up, halfway to standing. The thought of standing feels like a Herculean task, but– he has to. So he does, gripping his stick with both hands to hide the shake in his body.

He has a job to do, but, inexplicably, his eyes water.

He kind of wants to call Rose. He really wants Ilya.

Ilya, who is stood frozen a couple of paces away, staring at him.

It's Troy who makes it to him before anyone else, sliding an arm under Shane's to help drag him to his feet. Barnett guides him backward till he's against the railing, and Shane bites his tongue, the shame buzzing just below his skin.

The doctor comes over, and the entire game's paused because he got a little dizzy. He feels stupid. Embarrassed. She shines a light in his eye, making him follow it, and he does. She clears him, and before he can head back to centre ice, the coach waves him over. Shane doesn't even have time to look back—to see if Ilya is still staring, still panicking.

Shane pulls his helmet off, leaning over the barrier in front of Wiebe. "I'm good."

"You looked out of it before you hit the ice. You're off."

"I'm okay," Shane says quickly. "I just got a little dizzy."

"Bench," Wiebe reiterates.

Shane shoves his frustration to the side and skates toward the bench. His eyes find Ilya's momentarily, but he looks away just as quickly again.

Huffing, he sits himself down on the bench. He knows that the Ottawa Centaurs have got this in the bag– that they're going to win. But he's not going to be on the ice to celebrate it with his team. He's stuck on the goddamn bench.

The heady rush of winning is, of course, what Shane strives for. But there is more to it than winning; he lives for the sense of physical locality, how, while playing, he is no more than a body in constant motion, in complete control.

He can't jeopardise that.

But would the occasional beer and hearty meal be jeopardising?

This job is going to fucking kill you if you keep acting like this, Hayden had said. And– well. All Shane knows is that he isn't on the ice right now, and it's his own fault.

But… but maybe Ilya was right. Maybe he's supposed to treat his body like a friend and not just a machine he has to fuel to make everyone around him proud. If he does that, maybe he'll improve.

Or maybe he won't. It has to stop mattering. It never should've mattered this much.

Maybe he deserves to be happy *and* feel good in his own body, or maybe it's not about being deserving or undeserving at all. Maybe it's about choosing joy, choosing to accept help, choosing himself.

The roar of the crowd is deafening, and Shane realises all at once that the change cannot come from anywhere else but from within. He needs to want to change for himself– not for the crowd, or the media, or Hayden, or even Ilya.

Shane closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. For the first time in years, he feels like he can breathe– like something's loosened in his chest, like a knot's come undone.

When he opens his eyes again, his gaze finds Ilya's. Ilya ceases celebrating mid-shout, instead rocketing himself toward Shane, and Shane can't help but laugh. He stands, opening the gate just in time for Ilya to crash into him, pulling him into a tight embrace.

"You are okay?" Ilya asks, his cold nose pressed to Shane's cheek.

"I think I'm gonna be," Shane says, unfamiliar with saying that and meaning it.

The day after the game, Ilya knows he has to tell Shane about the therapy, and the depressive episodes.

He tries, all day, to bring it up organically. But it never feels like a good time.

And then it just- happens. One moment, they're cooking together in the kitchen, the next Ilya's watching Shane scoop butter Ilya put in the pan *out* and back into the package.

"Shane, no."

Shane freezes. "What?"

"This is not a lawless kitchen. We do not put less butter in *our* dish because *you* want to eat like bird."

Shane blinks, before he nods once, decisively. "You're right. Okay. You're the chef, you decide."

Oh. Ilya shoots him a pleased smile, grabbing the spatula from him with a flourish. "Thank you."

A few minutes later, Ilya says, "I was thinking we could go walk Anya later, yes? In the sun. She likes the ducks in, uh– how you say? Big puddle?"

Shane doesn't respond. Ilya looks up to find him staring at the salt shaker.

"Shane?"

Nothing.

“Hollander.”

Shane, finally, looks up. “Sorry,” he says, eyes flying from Ilya’s face down to the pan. “What did you say?”

“Anya. Park. Big puddle.”

“The pond?”

“Yes.” Ilya nods. “The pond. With the ducks.”

“Sure,” Shane agrees.

Ilya whistles a little tune as he opens a cabinet to grab the paprika, pleased with the aroma in the kitchen. He loves cooking. He especially loves it when Shane’s in the kitchen with him.

He is *not* loving how unhappy Shane looks right now.

“Maybe we can go to the cinema soon?” he suggests, flipping the chicken breasts. “We can ask Yuna to take Anya.”

Silence.

This time, when he looks up, Shane’s eyes are unfocused, staring out the window with a distant look in his eye. Ilya doesn’t mean to get angry, but he’s tired, and he’s so—fuck. He is tired of holding everything in. Days ago, he watched Shane miss one meal and end up flattened on the ice.

He’s felt that fear before. The fear Shane will get hit and not get back up. Ilya sighs, throwing a hand up. “You are not even focused.”

Shane, affronted and suddenly listening, says, “I’m the most focused I’ve been in my entire life. I– I know what I’m doing.”

Ilya scoffs. “Right, you are listening. Shane Hollander knows everything. Shane Hollander knows his fiancè is depressed.”

An awful, stony silence follows. Shane’s eyes are wide, chest heaving. His heart’s beating so hard that Ilya can see his chest pulse with it through his shirt.

Fuck. Okay, bad tactic.

“You’re– Ilya, what?”

Embarrassment colours Ilya’s cheeks, and he clenches his jaw, moving the pan off the heat. “I did not mean to say it like that. I did not mean to imply you are– at fault.” He swallows, blinking quickly. When he raises his head again, Shane is still looking at him. “We are going to be married, and you should know, I am going to therapy. Because I am depressed, Shane. Sometimes.”

The admission feels like a shift of a weight off his chest, the change in pressure so severe that he feels dizzy with it.

“Therapist helps me try to fix it, but maybe it is not something that can even be fixed. It is no one's fault. Maybe I am just like my mother," he explains. He thinks of her now, alone with no one to tell. He is not like that. Now, they are out, he has friends, teammates. *Shane*. People who can understand his pain, even if they can’t take it away.

“You’re not alone,” Shane says immediately, like reassuring Ilya is instinctual. “You’re not, ever.”

Ilya nods silently, eyes prickling. This week hasn’t been bad– no nightmares and no heavy moments, but he’s been worried about Shane. Worried about himself, too.

“Therapy helps. We have talked about maybe trying medication. It is hard to find the right way to help. It takes time. I do not want you to blame yourself if it gets bad and you cannot fix it.”

“Ilya,” Shane says after a moment, voice small and unsure. The sentence never goes further. Ilya looks at him, waiting.

Swallowing, Shane shakes his head, mouth dragged downward seemingly against his will, judging by the way he instantly forces it up again. His voice wobbles as he says, “Come here.”

It’s a relief, falling into Shane’s waiting embrace, tucking his face into the crook of his neck, his shoulders slumping as he exhales against the warm skin of Shane’s throat. It hits him all at once: that he’s safe, that he’s loved, that despite it all, Shane wants to understand. Shane *wants* to be here. He chose *him.*

“I love you,” Shane says quietly. “Always, Ilya. No matter what. You can’t scare me off.”

“I know.”

“I want you to lean on me. I want you to ask for help. I’d do anything, Ilya. I’d move mountains for you.”

Eyes burning, Ilya nods once sharply. Shane squeezes Ilya, nuzzling into his hair.

They stand there for a long time. Still, Shane doesn’t pull away when he asks, “What’s therapy like?”

Ilya mulls it over. “Shit.” His words are mildly muffled by Shane’s shoulder.

Shane laughs, tearful but relieved, almost.

“You would like therapy. It is boring. You like boring things.”

Shane huffs a laugh.

“You will think about it?” Ilya prompts.

“I’ll think about it,” Shane promises, pressing a soft, lingering kiss to Ilya’s temple.

Good enough, Ilya thinks. *Good enough for now.*

“Okay,” Shane says, three days later, staring into his cup of coffee. Black, like it always is. “I– I need help.”

Ilya pauses mid-movement. He looks caught off guard. “Because of the game?”

Shane shakes his head, jaw clenched. “No, because of — everything. I can’t keep doing this. I can’t miss one meal, and have it, like, take me out. I could’ve been injured. A lot worse. I …”

The race of his heart and tightness in his chest do nothing to ease the physical pain that’s pulsing through his ribcage, even now. He sinks against the couch, forcing a slow inhale, and then after a beat, an even slower exhale.

“I didn’t realise. I know you told me. I know. But—I couldn’t see it. I didn’t want to see it. Everything has felt so out of control for so long, it felt like if I kept this one thing up, it’d be okay.”

Ilya doesn’t cut in. He’s usually always prepared to make a comment or a joke, but instead, he just folds his legs beneath him on the couch, hands settling in his lap, his gaze steady and unbearably soft as he listens.

“But… it’s not… I know it’s not right. Or healthy. I just — I don’t want to feel like this. I don’t want to be like this. I don’t want to be so focused on this *all the time*. Ilya, I’ve been— I’ve been such a selfish partner,” Shane says, blinking rapidly. His lower lip trembles, and he sucks in a sharp breath. “I’ve been so focused on counting calories and ignoring how fucking hungry I am all the time that I didn’t even notice you were suffering. I didn’t know how bad it was.”

“Not suffering,” Ilya says softly. “Not so bad now.”

“But it *was* bad,” Shane says, eyes bright with tears. “You were alone, and– and depressed, and I didn’t see it. Why didn’t I see it?”

For a moment, neither of them moves. Then, Ilya shifts closer and reaches out, his fingers settling and wrapping around the side of Shane’s bicep, his touch warm to the skin even through the thin layer of Shane’s t-shirt. The tough is light, grounding.

“I did not want you to see. *I* did not want to see. Yes, was bad. But, it is not like it is your fault, Shane. You are thing that made me happy, even through that. You are maybe best thing that has ever happened to me.”

Shane’s mouth turns downward, his eyes burning. “Okay.”

"*But*," Ilya says, squeezing his arm. "This is not about me. This is about you. You want to do better. Be better for yourself. We can do this. Together. I have been thinking about this."

Shane should've figured as much, but he hadn't considered how long this has been on Ilya's mind, that he's had plenty of time to consider options and ways to help.

He loves him so much.

"I think you need therapist. Like we talked about. And also, we will fire stupid dietitian."

"He's not stupid," Shane defends, soft and quiet. Taken aback by the overwhelming wave of adoration he feels for his fiancè.

"He is stupid. I hate him. He is fired." Ilya waves his free hand dismissively.

Shane nods, then pauses, chewing the inside of his cheek. Ilya must see that he's hesitating, and squeezes his arm again, urging him on.

"I just—it's always been like this. And I'm the best player that I could possibly be like this. I just … I'm scared. Of what might happen when I change things. Even though I know that I should."

"Shane Hollander." Ilya takes both of Shane's hands into his. "Do you understand with or without restrictive diet or insane workout schedule, you would still be best hockey player I have ever seen? You are good. Who in the world cares as much about Hockey more than you? No one loves it like you. This is what makes you good. You do not need to do this to yourself."

"You're the best hockey player you've ever seen," Shane deflects, staring down at where their hands connect.

"Shut up. I am serious. Do not make me take you to the trophy room."

Suddenly, Shane remembers vividly being bent over his own leather chair, fucked and reminded him exactly who he is. All Ilya has done since they've gotten together is remind him who he is, and remind him how worthy that person is of everything he's worked for.

Shane sniffles, pulling his hands back and lifting them to cradle Ilya's face, his thumbs framing his cheeks. "I love you."

Ilya wraps his hands around Shane's forearms, like he can't stop touching him, even for a second.

"I love you," Ilya responds, leaning in and nuzzling their noses together. "Sweetheart, I love you. I am proud of you, okay? We will fix this. You and me. And friends. And loved ones. We all have your back."

Shane is struggling more and more not to cry. So, instead, he kisses him. Ilya takes a beat to respond, but returns the kiss easily, kissing back with such tenderness and love that it makes Shane's chest ache.

He's sure his eyes are glistening beneath the soft light, tears threatening to slip over his lash line, but as he pulls back and looks into Ilya's eyes, Ilya doesn't mention anything. He just smiles, soft and proud.

Time passes, and slowly, but surely, things do change. Shane starts seeing a therapist, and it takes a while for them to really click, but eventually, they do. He works on his eating, fighting through the guilt every time he eats something he'd previously banned himself from, and battling against the instinct to count calories every time he prepares a meal.

Sometimes, when they go out to eat, he still gets a little anxious ordering. And other times, at the gym, he overexerts himself and finds himself dizzy again.

But he talks to the people in his life. He works on it, and reminds himself the only way out is through.

Months pass, and eventually his birthday arrives. The entire Centaurs team is there, along with several other players they've befriended over the years. Many of the coaches from camp, too.

Shane's family is there too, even his cousins and their partners.

It's the perfect day, if he's honest. He spends it watching Ilya move easily among the people they both love, watching Anya chase Hayden's kids around the backyard. As the night winds down over plates of catered food, he even finds himself sitting alone with his dad by the fire, a guilt-free beer in each of their hands. Shane doesn't even think about it as he drinks. He just settles into the lawn chair and talks about nothing. It feels like everything.

Later, as the night thins and guests begin to peel away, a couple of thoughts creep in—he didn't work out today, maybe he should go for a run after everyone leaves. But instead, he kisses his fiancé's cheek, plucks a wine glass off the table, and drops onto the couch beside Rose. He rests his head in her lap while they talk.

Eventually, she leaves, and he's left melted against the touch, contented and joyful.

He doesn't exactly have plans for them to fuck, but then as the night is coming to a close, and everyone is heading out the door, he spots Shane on the couch with his head propped up on a throw pillow, sipping the last of his glass of wine for the night, hair mussed and looking exhausted in the way one only does after having a long, perfect day.

The way he's lounged horizontally on the couch has his shirt riding up, revealing the soft, smooth skin of his hip and a slip of his stomach.

And Ilya simply has to fuck him. Someone has to. He's looking happy and content and extremely fuckable.

Ilya shuts the door behind their last guest, striding over to where Shane is perched, his body a little buzzed from the alcohol pleasantly pumping through his bloodstream. He grabs the

now-empty wine glass from Shane's hand and places it on the coffee table. Shane looks up at him, eyes bright. "Everyone gone?"

Ilya throws his knee over Shane's thighs, settling on his lap with his thighs parted over the width of it. Shane's eyes widen a little, hand settling on Ilya's hip.

"Yes. All gone. Just you," he says, leaning down, brushing their lips together. "And me."

"Yeah," Shane exhales.

"You are tired? Need to go to bed?" He almost kisses him, but right at the last second, turns and kisses along his jaw instead, brushing his lips across the sharp line of it.

Shane sighs softly, tilting his head back and exposing the length of his throat. "No. I'm awake." His hand slips under Ilya's shirt, drifting up and down his side. "Totally awake."

Ilya takes the offering of skin and mouths at Shane's throat for a moment, sucking right beneath the hinge of his jaw where he knows Shane is sensitive. Shane, as expected, whimpers and grinds up against him, already half-hard.

"Hm," Ilya hums, pulling back, nudging their noses together. "Maybe we go to bed anyway, yes?"

Shane nods, pushing himself up and slotting their mouths together, immediately deepening the kiss by sliding his fingers into Ilya's curls and sliding his tongue straight into Ilya's mouth. It does not take much to get Shane Hollander rearing to go.

They don't move immediately, too wrapped up in making out slowly, tasting each other's mouths. A few moments in, Ilya adjusts so they can drag their dicks together through their clothes, and Shane is moaning more into Ilya's mouth than kissing him.

Ilya does not mind.

Eventually, though, Shane is so worked up that Ilya thinks if he wrapped a hand around his cock and pumped twice, he would spill over Ilya's fingers and complain about it being over too soon. So, because he is nice, he breaks the kiss despite how much he doesn't want to, and drags Shane up with him after he stands.

Their fingers interlock as they traverse through the cabin, kissing against the walls intermittently and only breaking when one of them starts grinding again. Along the path, almost all of their clothes are shed, leaving them both only in underwear and Shane in a pair of fluffy socks.

They have a lot of sex, they always have, but something feels different tonight. Shane is happy and content, and Ilya is so happy that he's happy.

It's been a good day. A great day. Proof that all the difficult days that have passed were worth it.

They make it to the room, and almost as if Shane is snapping out of a trance, he holds a finger up in Ilya's face and says, "One second."

He darts out of the room, collecting both their clothes and dumping them in the hamper by the door. Ilya's cock gets even harder just watching him. He cannot be blamed. Shane's quirks do it for him.

He watches him fondly, grinning and mostly naked, standing by the bed. Shane nods down at the hamper, looking satisfied before stepping back into Ilya's space.

Ilya shoves Shane onto the bed with a firm push to his sternum. Shane huffs as he collides with the sheets, pouting up at him. Or, frowning, maybe. Ilya is unsure. They all kind of look the same on Shane's cute little face.

"Let me suck your dick," Shane says, propping himself up on his elbows.

"Ah, no, you are birthday boy. It is your big day, Mr Thirty. You suck my dick tomorrow," Ilya advises him, tapping Shane's thigh and gesturing for him to crawl up the bed and settle amongst the pillows. "Tonight, I finger you till you are shaking and fuck you into mattress."

Shane blinks at him, seemingly surprised at Ilya's answer. Which is fair– Ilya Rozanov has never turned down the opportunity to slide his cock into Shane's pretty mouth. Still, though, he does not question it. Just nods slow, glancing down the length of Ilya's torso, tongue darting out to wet his bottom lip.

"Yeah. Okay," he says, his voice a little tight.

Shane goes where he's told, head dropping against the pillows and thighs parting. Ilya is nearly tempted to bend Shane in half and eat him out instead, Shane's legs hooked over his shoulders, but he is a man with a plan. He will stick to his promises.

He crawls atop Shane first, though, kissing him deep and hungry. It's a lot more rushed and desperate than it'd been on the couch, more a collision of tongue and teeth than a kiss at all. Shane is chasing his mouth every time Ilya pulls away to breathe, huffing frustratedly every single millisecond they're parted. Ilya has the unexplainable urge to bite him.

Ilya curses that he has to separate his mouth from Shane's to open him up properly. He kisses him deeper, savouring the taste of him, tongue sliding into his mouth before he mournfully breaks away, descending down Shane's body, but not before pressing open-mouthed, lingering kisses along the length of his body, taking a special moment to appreciate the dip of his hips where Shane is so sensitive.

His eyes rove over the planes of his body, greedy and proud all at once that he gets to have this, that he wants it forever.

He might be the luckiest man on the planet.

Shane's breathing is heavy, his hands gripping into the sheets as Ilya bites and sucks at the skin there.

He reluctantly pulls away, collecting the lube from the side table drawer before settling back between his legs.

“You are ready?”

Shane nods. “Yeah. Fuck. Please. Come on.”

He tucks his fingertips beneath the waistband, tugging once. Shane lifts his hips compliantly. He drags them off, tossing them vaguely towards the hamper before leaning down and licking a line up the length of Shane’s cock as he clicks the lube open. Shane whimpers, hips squirming. He takes Shane into his mouth, seamlessly squirting some of the lube onto his fingers, smearing it around without taking his mouth off Shane’s dick once.

He’s so hard in Ilya’s mouth, leaking heavily and twitching under the attention of his tongue and lips.

A finger is moved to his hole, slick and focused on its mission as it presses inside him. Shane whimpers, hips shifting forward, then back, like he’s unsure if he should fuck deeper into Ilya’s mouth or press further down on his finger.

Ilya chooses for him. He kisses the tip of his cock goodbye, kissing his hip again, and focuses on fucking his finger in and out slowly.

“You are pretty like this every time,” he murmurs, leaning his cheek against Shane’s blood-warm thigh. “View will kill me one day, Hollander. Too good. I am addicted.”

“Sh–Shut up,” Shane grinds out, but Ilya can see his face flush even from down here, between Shane’s beautiful, parted thighs. “Another.”

Ilya complies. Because he is nice. Also, because he wants to be inside Shane so bad that his cock is aching between his thighs. He also complies another moment later when Shane whines out for him to stop for a second, his own hand flying down to wrap around his dick to stave off his impending orgasm. Ilya only giggles about it a little bit. Because he is nice.

Once he’s stretched out, Ilya repeats the same path as earlier, kissing along thigh, then hips, then stomach and sternum, finishing with sucking a dark mark into the side of his throat. Shane is panting, rapid and uneven, tugging at Ilya’s hair and shaking. He is so perfect like this. So beautiful.

Ilya wants to do this over and over for the rest of his life. Spend every single one of Shane’s birthdays celebrating him through the day and fucking him through the night. The ring on his finger feels heavier as he uses his left hand to guide his cock to press against Shane’s rim.

His head lifts, eyelids heavy and mouth parted as he takes in Shane’s flushed face. His cheeks are bright pink, his mouth ajar as his eyes flutter open. “Hey,” Shane says, quiet.

“Hello,” Ilya whispers back, grinning. “Is still okay?”

“Yeah,” he breathes out, leaning up a little till their lips brush. “Fuck…Fuck me.”

He never thought he would be the type to settle down and get married, but now the thing making him leak heavily as he pushes inside is thinking about fucking Shane with a wedding ring on his finger.

The tight, hot squeeze around Ilya's cock is so good he has to hold his breath, head falling toward his chest on a heavy exhaling. Shane huffs a shaky laugh, but Ilya can't find the strength to shoot him a glare.

Instead, he lifts his upper body, hand sliding under one of Shane's legs to bend it back, pushing it down as he lowers himself and rolls his hips, grinding his cock in deep.

Shane moans, head tilting back. He makes such a sight like this, hands clutching helplessly at the sheets, stuffed full of cock, bent in half and taking it like he was made for it.

Ilya is helpless to do anything but tell him as much as he speeds up.

"Fuck, Hollander. Look at you," He exhales, setting a punishing pace, hips pumping. "So sweet for me. So full of my dick. You love it, don't you?"

Shane's spine arches, and an embarrassed high-pitched noise is ripped from him. "Fuck off. You know—"

Ilya presses his leg down further, fucking in harder. "I know that I know. *I* know you are a slut for it. But I want you to say it."

"Ilya," Shane grinds out, hand lifting and opening and closing a few times. Ilya wraps the leg around him instead, leaning in close.

"I love it. I—" His voice hitches, lashes fluttering as he adjusts to the new angle. Ilya feels Shane's thighs shaking around him. "Jesus Christ, Rozanov. I love it. Love your dick. Fuck me, fuck me, *harder*—Right *there.* Please—"

Ilya shifts down, face tucked against Shane's throat, hips holding the same pace. It feels so good inside of him, the hot, wet slide has Ilya's teeth sinking into his bottom lip as he buries himself inside of it over and over and over. After a beat, his arms shift, tucking under Shane's and curling around to grab onto his shoulders, pulling him down the bed onto his dick to meet every sharp snap of his hips.

"God, you're so good. Fuck, Hollander," He groans, like he just can't stand how perfect he is.

The noises escaping Shane are wanton and echo off the walls. He almost wishes Shane had closer neighbours so they could also enjoy how pretty he sounds.

An arm wraps around him, nails digging in hard against his back, dragging across the plane of his shoulder blade, hot, red welts left in their wake. Shane is wordless now, just making pretty little fucked-out noises right into Ilya's ear.

Ilya kisses the skin of his jaw before lifting himself up again. As much as he wants to stay close, he wants to see his face. Needs to. He sits back up, hand finding Shane's cheek, fingers

cradling the side as his thumb drags possessive and firm across his cheek, the softness yielding under his touch.

Shane's eyes are wet and fogged over, focused intently on Ilya. Ilya drags his hand down the side of his face, shifting it till it wraps around his throat. Shane gasps, pressing into the touch, clenching around him as his cock kicks between them.

"Mm? Yes? Feel good?" Ilya asks, fingers digging in against the veins either side of his throat. Not hard enough to properly cut off the flow yet, but enough to make Shane's vision go blurry.

"S-so good," Shane says in a rush, voice cracking with it.

Ilya's fingers tighten, cock throbbing inside of Shane as he watches euphoria overtake Shane's expression. Shane likes the feeling of being choked, sure, but what he loves more is how possessed he feels with Ilya's hand wrapped firm around his entire throat, pinning him in place. He hasn't said it in those words, but Ilya had dragged a similar enough sentiment out of him while jerking him off once.

"I love you," Shane says, gasping. Ilya shudders, hips rolling in even strokes, fucking him at an angle that punches pretty little *ah ah ah* sounds out of Shane.

"I love you. Fuck," Ilya exhales, his body so turned on that he's struggling to keep himself upright. He loosens his grip around Shane's neck, hand dropping away as he tucks his face back in the crook of it, panting with exertion as he thrusts. "So much."

Shane's hand slides into his hair, holding tight, like he's unwilling to let Ilya move away again. Ilya would stay there forever if Shane asked him to.

Ilya can't decide what's best: getting to watch Shane's face as he pleasures him or pressing his face to his neck, breathing him in, licking at his skin and his sweat. Here, though, he's tucked so close to Shane's pulse point that he swears he can taste each beat of his heart.

Minutes pass, the room filled with the sharp sound of skin against skin, their heavy breathing, and Shane gasping out his name over and over. He can tell Shane is getting close; he's tense and trembling beneath him, voice getting higher and higher.

Shane's hand slackens in Ilya's hair, and he pulls back to look at him, breath stuttering at the look on Shane's face. His eyes, half-lidded and dark, glitter in the low light, eyebrows furrowed like he feels so good he's mad about it, jaw slack as his breathing comes faster and faster.

"You will come on my dick," Ilya says softly.

Shane makes a wounded noise. Nods.

"Good boy, Shane," Ilya breathes, awed and utterly enamoured with the sight.

Like the words hit physically, Shane's back arches.

“Fuck, fuck, *fuck*—” Shane calls out right before his dick pumps ropes of come all over him, torso writhing as his face screws up and his stomach tenses. His groan breaks halfway through, turning into a soft, helpless moan, thighs shaking as they lower to the mattress. Ilya wants to rub Shane’s come into his own skin, wants to cover himself in proof of his boyfriend’s pleasure. Lowering himself, he groans at the feeling of how wet and sticky Shane’s stomach is, pressed to Ilya’s.

When Shane’s eyes flutter shut, Ilya stops moving his hips and leans down to press kisses to his cheek, chin, eyebrows and nose. Shane smiles at the attention, utterly at ease and so fucking beautiful it hurts.

“Was good?” Ilya asks, surprised by how rough his voice sounds.

“I can’t feel my legs,” Shane says, face splitting into a grin, and Ilya grins right back.

“I am sex god,” Ilya declares. Shane clenches around him in retaliation, and Ilya loses his breath, mindlessly rutting into him in slow, even circles.

Arching an eyebrow, Shane asks, “A sex god who wants to come in me?”

“Stupid question. I always want to come in you.”

Shane’s lips tug into a smile. “You’re so romantic.”

Ilya rotates his hips, mouth falling open a little as he smiles. “I’m so hard for you. Is not romantic?”

“Is—” Shane huffs a breath, grinding his hips back, meeting Ilya’s next thrust, his eyes rolling back as he does so. “Very romantic.”

He can tell Shane is oversensitive, that with every sharp snap of Ilya’s hips, he’s biting back a sweet little whimper, only succeeding half the time. Ilya feels himself getting closer, teetering at the edge as Shane whines out his name, nails biting into his back, the pain sharp and sending arousal shooting through his spinal cord.

“Where– where do you want–?”

“In me,” Shane says immediately, and Ilya laughs through a moan.

“Я тебя люблю,” Shane says, slowly, like he wants to get every word right.

Ilya feels his cock grow even harder somehow, heat flooding him like molten lava. He moans raggedly, tucking his face back into Shane’s as his hips pump forward, driven by the instinct to make Shane his, to come, to mark him.

“Fuck,” Shane breathes after a sharp thrust, words slurred as his body jolts. He’s loose-limbed, lying there and *taking it,* and Ilya can’t think through the waves of arousal rolling over him.

“So good, you’re so good, baby,” Shane says, hand scratching Ilya’s scalp in a move so gentle and contrary to the way Ilya’s pumping his hips– a combination of domesticity and animal instinct.

“Shane, fuck,” Ilya moans, and Shane moans like Ilya’s pleasure is his own.

“Want you to come,” Shane tells him. “I wanna feel you, wanna feel it in me, please, baby–”

And well, he is the birthday boy. Whatever he wants, he gets.

Almost as if on command, Ilya feels his orgasm ripped from him, body moving on pure instinct as he drives into him, a groan escaping him that sounds borderline animalistic, smothered against the sweat-damp skin of Shane’s throat.

Worried he’ll crush him, Ilya rolls over onto his back. Shane follows immediately, draping himself over Ilya like a blanket, arm stretching across Ilya’s chest. Ilya moves Shane’s hand down so he can thread their fingers together, Shane’s arm flopping down like a dead fish.

“You are like Play-Doh in my arms,” Ilya says.

Shane swats at him lazily before a giggle bursts out of him, and Ilya’s heart threatens to kick right out of his chest and into Shane’s palms.

“You’re good at that,” Shane says eventually.

“I know,” Ilya agrees. “You tell me all the time.”

“No,” Shane says. “At making me laugh.”

Ilya blinks, feeling a soft smile overtake his face. He nuzzles closer to him, every particle in his body sighing happily. “I love it when you laugh.”

Shane smiles, eyes closed. “I love it when you laugh too.”

The next morning, Ilya wakes up to an empty bed. Well, a mostly empty bed. Anya is asleep at the foot of it, curled in on herself with her tail tucked around her. It is endlessly adorable. He thinks he would burn down entire civilisations for her.

Waking up without Shane is not alien to him; Shane often rises before he does. Like usual, the bed on his side is tucked in, while Ilya’s side of the blanket is splayed messily across the bed.

Ilya drags himself out of bed, pulling on underwear and not bothering to cover himself any further. The cool air pricks at his skin, but he chooses not to notice it. He’s chasing the familiar warmth of his fiancée, uncaring of the world around him. Last night had been special, a night that felt like another barrier between them had been broken down.

Ilya trapes down the hall, finding Shane eating breakfast at the dining table. There’s a plain yogurt half eaten with a spoon sticking out of it, and a handful of fruit in a bowl in front of

him.

It's the yoghurt that makes Ilya's nose scrunch. The Icelandic Yoghurt. *Skyr*. High in protein, but it is extremely tart, with a thick, dry, disgusting texture. He'd stolen one once right as he headed out the door, and hadn't even been able to make it past the first mouthful.

He hasn't seen Shane eating one in months. Not since they talked. But, there it sits, unfinished and haunting on the dining table. Shane doesn't hear him come in, too focused on the book he's reading, instead taking another mouthful of the yoghurt. He watches as Shane's lips purse, his nose scrunching a little as he swallows it down.

Ilya doesn't say anything. He just steps back out, heading into the kitchen and grabbing himself a bowl of cereal, barely noticing the brand before he's already tucking it away. It doesn't matter. It's something sugary and American.

"Good morning, пирог с тыквой." *Pumpkin Pie*.

Shane glances up, smiling gently. Ilya's eyes settle on the familiar smattering of freckles across his cheekbones, something fond and adoring blossoming in his chest. "I know that one."

"I almost regret you learning Russian. I cannot be gross and mushy without you noticing anymore."

Shane laughs, pushing the chair beside him out with his foot. "Sit down."

Ilya complies, dropping an exaggerated kiss against Shane's cheek on his way down.

They eat in a pleasant silence, but Ilya worries. He knows recovery isn't linear. That one win doesn't mean there won't be any more losses, but he worries. He shouldn't be surprised at the change of behaviour coming after the incredible day that yesterday was—one full of celebration, good food, relaxation and joy.

Shane finishes before he does and begins telling Ilya about the book he's been reading—a biography about some old American goalie. He listens, nodding along and asking a few prompting questions. He does not particularly care about the book, but he cares about Shane, and if he's honest, he thinks he'd be willing to listen to Shane talk about drying paint.

That's love, he supposes.

Hours pass by quickly after Shane finishes breakfast. Ilya follows him around and helps him with domestic chores, which Shane teases him about but secretly loves. The day's agenda is fairly empty other than that, so while Ilya finishes folding some laundry, Shane heads toward the kitchen, ready to prepare lunch.

His thighs are a little sore from exertion from the night before, but the burn makes him feel a spike of arousal with every step he takes.

He grabs one plate, preparing to make his own lunch, brain calculating each item's calories as he measures them out. He's so focused on following the familiar movements that he doesn't hear Ilya enter the room.

Ilya wraps his arms around him, pressing himself flush against Shane, a kiss pressed to the back of his head. "I make you lunch," Ilya says into his hair, voice lilting upwards like he's asking a question.

"I can—"

"Sit pretty and relax. I want to cook for you."

He thinks about the fact that he can't know every single detail about the meal if Ilya prepares it. Realises only then that it's something he's worried about. He sighs, glancing down at the salmon he'd pulled out, jaw tight.

And then, little by little, Shane's shoulders droop. He leans back into Ilya, and Ilya squeezes him a little tighter. "Okay."

He trusts him to cook for him, trusts Ilya enough to know that whatever he puts in front of him will be good for him. And it'll probably also taste very good.

And that's all that matters.

Ilya leans down, kissing Shane's shoulder. "Okay, pretty. Go. Sit. Keep Anya company on couch. She gets lonely, you know."

Shane rolls his eyes, peeling out of Ilya's arms. He pecks his cheek quickly, waltzing down the hallway before collapsing next to Anya who is sound asleep, head resting atop a throw pillow. He cards his fingers through her fur, and exhales. She lets out an exasperated huff at being disturbed like she often does. He scratches behind her ear in apology.

When Ilya returns with two full plates twenty minutes later, Shane's no longer anxious. Turns out, he prefers the taste of food to the taste of control anyway. Especially if Ilya cooked it just for him.

End Notes

thank you so much for reading :D let us know what you thought in the comments!

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