

Only You (Could Ruin Me Like This)

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Only You (Could Ruin Me Like This)

by [OpalApparition](#)

Summary

That girl at the club meant nothing. Shane drunk-texting Ilya at 2 AM means everything.

or

A bandaid for my brain following the Club Scene in episode four.

Notes

This fic uses a work skin to simulate text messages. You may turn it off by clicking 'Hide Creator's Style', but it will affect the formatting slightly!

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Chapter 1: Ilya

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The hotel room door slammed. Ilya kicked it shut a second time—harder—and the framed print of the Jacques Cartier Bridge rattled against the wall. *Fuck* the neighbors. *Fuck* Montreal. *Fuck everything*.

His shoes. He needed his shoes off. Now. He yanked at the laces but his fingers wouldn't cooperate, so he just kicked them off. One hit the closet door. The other skidded under the bed to be eaten by voids of shadow. Fine. Good. He didn't need them anyway. He wasn't going anywhere.

His shirt came next, yanked over his head. He threw it at the bed and missed.

The bathroom light stabbed his eyes when he flipped the switch. He squinted against it hatefully. Dim, and still too bright, and his head was too loud. In the mirror: flushed cheeks, damp hair curling at his temples, lipstick smeared along his jaw. Disgusting. He scrubbed at the rouge smudge with the back of his hand. It spread toward his ear. He scrubbed harder, nails digging into skin, until his jaw burned red and raw and the lipstick was just a faint stain, mottled like a bruise.

Not enough. Never enough.

His hands were shaking. When did they start shaking?

“*Fuck.*”

The shower took too long to heat up. He stood there naked, one hand braced against the tile, watching the steam begin to curl around the glass door. His dick hung heavy between his legs, still half-interested, *always* interested when it came to him, despite everything. Despite the girl with the tongue piercing turning out to be some kind of exhibitionist with a cuckolding boyfriend. Despite his teammate laughing at him when he'd stormed off the dance floor. Despite Shane fucking Hollander standing there in the middle of the crowd, watching Ilya make out with someone else like it meant anything to him at all.

The water scalded his shoulders when he stepped under the spray. Good. He wanted it to hurt.

His hand found his dick. Wrapped around the base. Squeezed. Eyes closed, head tipped back against the tile—*concentrate*. The girl on the dance floor. Her hips grinding. Slick heat of her mouth. She'd been hot. So many girls in Montreal were hot.

It did nothing for him.

He squeezed harder, working himself with quick, angry strokes. *Come on*. The girl's tongue piercing. Her perfume. Her hands in his hair. Anything. *Please*.

Nothing. His dick was barely interested, half-soft in his palm like a fucking embarrassment.

Typical. Even his cock was against him now. Another betrayal. He'd spent years perfecting the art of wanting people who were easy to walk away from. Svetlana's laugh in the dark. That girl in

Boston whose name he never learned. The coach's son back in Russia; that first dangerous thrill, cigarette smoke and bruised knuckles in the equipment room.

Easy. All of them easy.

And now look. He'd gone and fucked the one person guaranteed to ruin him for everyone else.

The hot water beat against his shoulders but he couldn't feel it. His mother used to say he had his father's talent for ruining good things. She'd been wrong about a lot—the pills proved that—but maybe not that.

His thoughts slid back to Shane, the way his thoughts always bent in that direction no matter where he started.

Ilya couldn't understand himself; he understood Shane less. Where'd he come from, appearing to him those years ago? Why, why had he noticed him at all, *boring*, so painfully Canadian, and—

Shane in that stupid white t-shirt that fit him just right, fabric tugging at shapely shoulders and across his chest. Her hands on his shirt, in his shirt, touching the skin beneath and the freckles that hid there. Shane with his hands on Rose Landry's waist, barely touching, palms ghosting. Testing? *Teasing*? Was she fragile and was he worried he may break her? Was she soft and sweet, and was that what made him give a fuck about not breaking her while Shane had no problem shattering *him* into miserable pieces too small to identify? He thought about the break of dawn, those breaking, desperate little pants Shane made in bed, when he was pinned and Ilya was finally, blessedly, pushing inside him, the way those dark eyes would go wide—

The way those dark eyes *had* gone wide, reflecting purple pink red lights beneath the thundering bass so loud it made the floor shake, French lyrics bleeding into English over blown speakers when their gazes met across the abyss of that dance floor.

Shane watching him.

He'd wanted to cross that space and grab him by that perfect collar and ask him what the fuck he thought he was doing; dancing with her, looking at her, looking at *him*.

Reducing him to this.

Ilya stroked himself faster, rougher than he needed to. The water beat against his back and he chased the image of Shane standing there, frozen, staring at Ilya like he couldn't look away. Like seeing Ilya with someone else hurt him.

Except it didn't hurt him. Shane had Rose fucking Landry. Shane had made his choice.

Ilya came with a choked-off sound, forehead pressed to the fogged glass, and it felt like losing.

“*Blyat*,” he muttered to the steam. Fucking useless.

He stood there afterward with water hammering his back, still braced against the wall. His heart pounded hard enough to hurt. The release had done nothing—no relief, no satisfaction. His dick was already softening and he wanted to punch through the tile. He turned the water hotter until his skin burned red.

When he finally shut it off, he stood dripping on the bath mat and stared at himself in the fogged mirror. Water ran down his neck, his collarbones, his torso; caught on the gold chain, dripped off the cross. He wrapped his fingers around it and squeezed until the edges bit into his palm, bending forward over the nearby sink counter, dripping on the marble. What to do. What to do.

He could go back to the club and find someone else, if for no other reason than to prove that he wasn't some stricken fool, only...

... the thought of anyone else touching him made his skin crawl.

Fine. So Shane had won this round, and Ilya felt absolutely pathetic. Years of NHL stardom and here he was, miserably jerking off alone in a Montreal hotel.

He toweled off and collapsed onto the bed naked. The sheets stuck to his damp skin.

Sleep wouldn't come. The room felt too loud for how quiet it was. His brain kept flashing the same red word over and over: *help. SOS.*

The clock read 12:47. Then 12:48. 12:49.

He rolled onto his side. The pillows were too flat. He punched one, tried to fluff it. The air conditioning cycled on with a mechanical hum that was almost as loud as his unsleeping ruminations.

12:50. 12:51.

His phone sat on the nightstand, screen dark. A dark screen, a dark room, and him still lit up inside like an emergency sign. He could text Shane. Say what? *Sorry I kissed a girl to make you jealous, want to come over?* His fingers twitched toward it. He pulled his hand back. Shoved it under the pillow.

12:52. 12:53.

He grabbed the phone.

No. He put it back. If Shane wanted to talk, Shane would text first. Shane always texted first after games. Except Shane was with Rose. Shane was probably—

He grabbed the phone again only to bite back a frustrated snarl and stuff it away again.

1:14. 1:15. 1:16.

Shane had chosen Rose, since she was safe assurance and Ilya was surely annihilation.

Ilya sighed, rubbing his face. No, that wasn't entirely fair. He could not blame him for wanting to feel safe and to avoid Ilya's personal brand of recklessness and abandon. Ilya was the one who'd shoved his tongue down some random girl's throat. Ilya was the one who'd made sure Shane saw, who'd made it a show. A public flagellation.

And it worked, didn't it? Shane with his hands barely touching her waist, like she might break. Shane finding him. The look on Shane's face before he vanished into the crowd. Those wide dark eyes going blank. Shutting down. Shutting Ilya out.

He could not blame him.

Good. Fine. Better this way. *Get out, go away. Get out.*

Ilya had always been good at stopping just short of the thing that would save him. He recognized the instinct immediately. He always did.

His chest felt like it was caving in, lungs struggling against the weight. He had the crazy, irrational certainty that if he stopped thinking about Shane for even one second, he'd disappear, that it was possible that Shane was the only thing keeping him in his own skin. He tried to remember how to breathe like a normal person. In. Out. Simple. Except nothing was simple and his throat was closing up and—

Golova krugom. His head spun. Round and round the same thoughts, same track, like a dog chasing its tail. Ilya counted to keep himself steady... thoughts lifting and scattering before he could catch them. Was he crying? He touched his face. Water. Just water from the shower.

1:32. 1:33. 1:34.

Maybe he'd ruined it.

Ilya threw off the sheet. Sat up. The room spun slightly—no, he was fine. He pressed his palms to his eyes until he saw spots. This must've been what it looked like, felt like to lose a mind in slow motion, one second at a time.

Maybe that night when he'd invited Shane to stay, when they'd talked instead of fucking and leaving like always, maybe that was the breaking point. The tuna melt. Watching him eat it on Ilya's couch in Ilya's shirt. The way Shane had smiled with his mouth full and Ilya's heart had done little flips. Stupid. Dangerous.

Or maybe simpler than that, stupider still, when he'd lost himself in the heat of Shane's body above him, glorious and golden and close, the only soft thing in the world, and whispered his first name against his neck rather than *Hollander* or some generic endearment in filthy Russian.

Shane had gone still for half a second—Ilya remembered that, he wished he could forget the way Shane's breath had caught—before moving again, pretending it hadn't happened and making distance. But it had happened. Ilya had given something away, handing Shane a piece of him that Shane could choose to ignore or leverage or—worse—pity.

And Shane... *ran* away.

He wrapped his fingers around the cross at his throat and squeezed until the edges bit into his palm. The metal was warm from his skin. His mother's skin. She'd worn it every day until she didn't wear anything anymore, until Ilya found her cold in her bed with the cross still around her neck and he'd taken it with shaking twelve-year-old hands because his father sure as fuck didn't deserve it.

Anyone would laugh at him for this, they would say it was delirium. Svetlana might've had some exasperated fondness when he did stupid things. Except this wasn't some childhood crush. This was Shane Hollander, who hated him publicly and fucked him privately and couldn't be bothered to text Ilya back for two months like none of it meant anything at all.

He should be furious. He *was* furious, and the vexation sat low and coiled beneath his bones, the same pressure he carried into corners, shoulder first, already braced for impact. This was familiar. This was a contact sport.

He was filled with rancor towards Shane, at Rose, at the whole fucking populace of Montreal, but mostly at himself because he'd let himself fall into the trap of realizing that it did have meaning. Worse, he'd made sure of that: cold ginger ales just in case and the tuna melt, the talking, the staying. He'd given Shane every opportunity to acknowledge what this was becoming. And Shane had chosen to pretend instead.

Two months. Sixty-three days, if Ilya was counting. Ilya hadn't been counting at first but then he was, and now he couldn't stop. Sixty-three days since *I can't do this*, and walking out of that room when every instinct screamed for Ilya to beg him to *stay stay stay*.

Sixty-three days and Shane had texted once, to turn him down to meet up after a game. Like they were just strangers. Like Ilya hadn't memorized the taste of him.

And for what? To lay here, alone on a night when he could've been, should've been out getting lost in the first available hot piece of ass that smiled his way? There had been options. There were always options. He was not picky: pretty faces and tight asses knew no gender, and he did not deny himself the hedonistic joy of being lost in a perfect stranger's embrace... but... he was. Here he was, denying himself when the object of his affliction had already moved on.

Rose Rose Rose. As pretty as the petals of her namesake, and like thorns under Ilya's skin.

She was pretty and fragile and someone Shane could show off at games when she wore his jersey or take to team dinners or introduce to his parents and maybe he even called her *Rose* instead of *Landry*.

The briar beneath his ribs was growing now, and Ilya's chest felt hollowed out, scraped clean. The worst part—the part that made him want to drive his fist through the nightstand, through the wall, to lay here and rot and wilt—was that he still wanted Shane. He wanted to drive and crash his car into wherever Shane was staying and crawl into his bed like a wraith to show him what he was *missing*, to lay next to him and do nothing rather than languish here and *miss* him.

Shane Hollander, this yearning for Shane Hollander, was a problem to be solved but all Ilya could do was drown in these sad poems of spiraling thoughts.

2:24. 2:25. 2:26.

The clock read 2:27 when his phone buzzed on the nightstand.

Jane

Jane: whny did you do that

Jane: right in frontnof me?

Jane: you're such asshole

Jane: fuck you

Jane: fucknyou rozanov

Kakaya naglost. The audacity. Shane had spent the night with his hands on Rose Landry's waist, dancing with her in that club while Ilya seethed across the room. And now Shane had the nerve to text Ilya like *Ilya* was the one who'd crossed a line?

And so what if he did anyway?

He'd kissed that girl—stared right at Shane while dripping lust and filth into her ear, marking her neck with stamps of unrequited lust—because he'd wanted Shane to see and to feel and to injure in the same way it hurt to see and feel him with Rose.

Good, Ilya thought viciously, kissing the slope of her neck. *Watch. Let him hurt.*

And it did because Shane did watch with that kicked-dog expression, caring enough to stare, but not enough to do anything about it. Typical. Two months of nothing and now Shane wanted to play wounded.

Well. Ilya could play too.

His own fingers hovered over the keyboard, already tapping out hateful blows. Never was a creature more dangerous than when it was injured, and Ilya felt maimed, and that it felt good to snap fangs. It would be easy to shut this down. *Poshel na khuy.* He typed: *At least she knew how to fuck me.* It didn't matter that she didn't, that Ilya had come back furious and alone. It would hurt and that was all that mattered, and it would make *none* of this matter. He'd gotten good at that—making things matter less. Making people think he didn't care about anything except the next game, the next girl, the next city.

Except—and he grit his teeth, seething all over—he did care, wretched thing that he was. He was maimed and in pain. He just wanted it to end. The cursor blinked at him, waiting.

Jane

Jane: whny did you do that

Jane: right in frontnof me?

Jane: you're such asshole

Jane: fuck you

Jane: fucknyou rozanov

Ilya: Fuck off Hollander

There. See? He could still do this. He could still pretend Shane was anyone, that this was anything other than Ilya's heart trying to claw its way out of his rib cage. Ilya dropped the phone face-down on the nightstand and rolled onto his back, determined to smother himself to sleep if he had to.

But his phone kept buzzing.

Jane

Ilya: Fuck off Hollander

Jane: fuckinf[rick

Jane: pirc

Jane: prick

Jane: fucj

Jane: i hate you so much

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ilya frowned at the screen. The texts were coming faster now, more erratic. This... wasn't... at all like the uptight man that he'd come to know. Shane did not drink like this. Shane counted, paced himself, watched his intake the way he watched ice time. Drunk meant something had already gone wrong.

Even more wrong, Ilya realized with pursed lips.

Drunk meant he had stopped paying attention.

Ilya sat up straight against the headboard, anger now joined by a cold dread like ice sliding down his spine.

Jane

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ily: How much have you had to drink?

Jane: jot enough

Jane: NOT

Jane: stupid phoNE

Jane: i want

Jane: cant even

Jane: yku dont care anyway

Jane: nobogy cares

Jane: im,drunk

Jane: im os drunk

Jane: *so**

That much was obvious.

Jane

Jane: im os drunk

Jane: *so**

Ilya: Where are you?

Jane: bar

Jane: the bar

Jane: with the

Jane: i dont knoe

Nu i chto? So what—Shane got drunk, Shane’s problem.

Except it wasn’t just Shane’s problem, was it?

That cold dread was rising now, coming up like the high of tide, bringing with it chunks of smashing ice. It felt like a bad line change, too many bodies going one way and nobody back. He sat up straight, heart hammering, already counting exits in the ice.

Ilya was no stranger to being drunk. He indulged often and to excess but there was... usually... some shred of sanity to it. Drinking here in Canada even more so, since it was with a teammate or Svetlana, but regardless of safety drunk always meant the same things at the bottom of the bottle: loose hands, loose mouth, no sense of when to leave or self preservation.

With friends, this was no problem. They protected each other. Where were Shane’s friends to help him? Ilya threw off the sheet and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

Jane

Jane: bar

Jane: the bar

Jane: with the

Jane: i dont knoe

Ilya: What bar?

Ilya: Where is your girlfriend, go home

Jane: rose LEFT

Jane: i left idk

Jane: everyine left

Jane: told them to

Jane: im,FINE

Jane: why you kiss her

Jane: why

Jane: looked right at me

They *left him*? Where the fuck Ms. Perfect Movie star, princess to hockey's Prince Charming? Who leaves someone that drunk and alone? His Shane. No—not his. Not anymore. Maybe never was. But still. Shane was alone. Drunk and alone in a Montreal bar, and Ilya had spent enough years in enough cities to know exactly how that math worked out. Drunk men made choices they regretted. Or someone else made choices for them.

Shane's face drew attention even sober—all those star-flung freckles, those cheeks, the curve of the small of his back. Drunk, not paying attention, alone? Unacceptable.

Ilya tried again:

Jane

Jane: why

Jane: looked right at me

Ilya: Where are you???

Jane: i cant breachte

Fucking Christ. Ilya hit the call button.

The phone rang twice before Shane picked up.

“*What.*”

Ilya's stomach dropped. Shane sounded wrecked—hoarse like he'd been crying or maybe screaming into a pillow for the last hour.

"Where are you? Just—where are you?"

"'m out." The words ran together. "Why'd you care?"

"Because you are drunk as *fuck* and you text like you dropped phone down stairs. Where are you? *Gde ty?* Hollander." Ilya snapped. "Where. Tell me where."

"Don' worry 'bout it." There was a muffled sound, maybe Shane shifting the phone against his ear. "Not your problem."

"*Chert voz 'mi!*" Ilya caught himself. Bit down on the words. His free hand curled into a fist, nails digging crescents into his palm. Thoughts ran between Russian and English and neither language could accurately hold his fury.

"*Ty moya—You are my problem!*" Ilya stood and started pacing the length of the hotel room, feeling misaligned and off balance, like he'd been assembled around the wrong center of gravity.

"You make yourself my problem my problem and then—" His voice cracked. Fuck. He cleared his throat. "Tell me where you are."

"Why?" Shane's voice cracked in the middle of the word. "So you c'n come laugh at me? Show me pictures of your—your *girlfriend?*"

"I don't *have* girlfriend, you fucking—" Ilya bit down on the rest of it. His free hand curled into a fist at his side. That girl on the dance floor had lasted exactly seven minutes before her boyfriend appeared, which was probably a new personal record for Ilya's spectacularly bad decisions. He'd spent a lifetime perfecting the art of self-destruction, but tonight he'd really outdone himself. If there were Olympic medals for ruining your own life, Ilya would have a whole fucking collection by now.

"She was nobody. Nothing, less than nothing. *Where are you?*"

"She looked like *somebody* when her tongue was down your throat."

Heat flared in Ilya's chest. "Oh, *now* you care? You had perfect little girlfriend glued to you all night. Very romantic."

"I didn't want Rose!" Shane shouted it, then there was a choked sound like he'd startled himself. "I wanted—*fuck*. Fuck you, Rozanov."

The line went dead.

"*Blyad!*" Ilya hurled his phone at the bed. It bounced off the mattress and hit the floor. He stood there in the middle of the room with his chest heaving and his hands shaking.

Because of him. Because Ilya had kissed that girl and made sure Shane saw. Because Ilya had wanted him to hurt.

Mission accomplished, apparently. And now what? Now Shane was out there crying in some dive bar because Ilya had proven a point. He'd won. This was winning, wasn't it? Shane hurt, Shane

drunk, Shane alone.

Shane *alone* and not having chosen Rose at all, and having chosen collapse.

It felt like shit.

Ilya grabbed his jeans off the floor and yanked them on, hopping on one foot when the denim caught on his ankle. His shirt was—there, on the chair. He dragged it over his head and shoved his feet into his shoes without bothering with the laces. Wallet. Phone. Room key. He snatched them all up and jabbed at Shane's contact while heading for the door.

He couldn't go back to righteous anger now. That door had closed.

It rang four times before Shane answered.

"I said—"

"I am not—" Ilya's English was slipping. He could feel it. "*Ya ne budu delat' eto s toboy.*" Fuck. He forced the words back to English. "I am not doing this with you. You tell me where you are right now or I start calling bars like psycho. Pick."

"You're not my—"

"*Shane.*"

The name came out like a whip crack. He'd just used Shane's first name. Over the phone. Where it could be overheard, recorded, *remembered*. He could make things worse.

He couldn't take it back.

Ilya stopped in the hotel hallway and pressed his back against the wall. When he spoke again his voice dropped lower but lost none of its edge. "Tell me where you are. Now."

The quiet stretched. Ilya could hear Shane breathing on the other end—uneven and shaky.

"Please," Ilya added, and hated how the word sounded coming out of his mouth. "Just tell me."

"...Murphy's," Shane mumbled. "On... I dunno. It's a bar the club. I... needed... My phone's gonna die."

"Hollander you are a *disaster*," Ilya snapped. "Stay there. Do not move. You understand me?"

"I'm not a child—"

"You act like one! Stay. There." Ilya was already moving, jabbing the elevator button. "You get drunk, you stop watching your drink, and suddenly everyone thinks they get a turn. You understand me or no?"

"No one's—"

"Just because you are man does not mean—ugh! How are you so stupid, you don't even know what you look like right now, what you *sound* like. You never do, Hollander." Ilya's hand tightened on

the phone, and he rubbed one over his face, finally allowing the wreckage of how he felt to bleed into his voice. “Pretty boy, all alone, can barely stand? You know what happens?”

“I...”

“I am coming for you. Stay where you are and do *not* leave the bar.”

“Fuck, I don’t want you to—”

“I do not give single fuck what you want right now!” Ilya was sure he was yelling, but everything sounded like static in his head, “You sit down, you stay where I can find you, and you do not leave with anyone. *Da?*”

Another silence. Then, so quiet Ilya almost missed it: “...okay.”

“Good.”

Ilya hung up and pulled up the Uber app with fingers that wouldn’t stop shaking, nearly sprinting down the stairwell to meet the amorphous sedan as soon as it pulled up in front of his hotel. Ilya knew he probably looked deranged—wet hair, untied shoes, jaw clenched so hard it hurt. He probably had veins jumping out of his neck. *Ne vazhno*. He’d worry about looking normal later.

The driver dropped him off seven minutes later. Murphy’s was a narrow dive with peeling paint, a flickering Guinness sign, and a handwritten placard in the window warning in French that the kitchen was closed. Ilya pushed through the door into the smell of stale beer and dim lighting that made him squint.

He spotted Shane immediately.

Slumped at the bar with his head pillowed on his folded arms and dark hair falling across his forehead. There was lipstick on his collar—pale pink, smudged. His phone sat next to his elbow. An empty shot glass and a half-finished beer sweated condensation onto the scarred wood.

Ilya stopped breathing. Just—stopped. Like someone had punched all the air out of his lungs. *Look at you*, he thought. *What have I done to you?*

He crossed the room in five strides. The bartender—a heavysset guy with a beard down to his collarbones—looked up when Ilya approached.

“He with you?”

Was he? No. But Ilya, for better or for worse, was with him, locked in this laughable *kismet*. Why else would he be sprinting across Montreal to rescue his secret ex-whatever looking like he just escaped an asylum? The melodrama of it all.

“Yes.” Ilya touched Shane’s shoulder. “Hey. Up. You look like shit.”

Shane lifted his head. His eyes were red-rimmed and wouldn’t focus. A tear track cut through the flush on his cheek. When he saw Ilya, his face went through three expressions in quick succession: shock, relief, then this awful desperate hope that made him look sixteen again, back when they’d first started this and Shane had looked at Ilya like he was the only person in the world who understood.

“You came,” Shane said finally, and sounded devastated about it.

“Of course I come, you idiot. Can you walk?” Ilya slid an arm around Shane’s waist and hauled him upright. Shane swayed against him and Ilya tightened his grip.

They left him. Rose fucking Landry and Miles and whoever else Shane had been with tonight—they just *left him here*. Maybe Shane told them to. Maybe he said he was fine, he’d get a cab, go home without them. Ilya could picture it: Shane putting on that smile, that *I’m fine* face he used when he was dying inside, waving them off because he didn’t want to be a burden.

And they’d believed him. They’d actually left.

Ilya exhaled through his nose, teeth ground together inside his mouth. Pretty face, pretty freckles, drunk enough that he’d barely notice if someone slipped something in his drink or followed him outside. And Montreal knew who he was. Everyone in this bar probably knew who he was.

“I would not leave you like this,” Ilya said, pulling him closer. *Never. I would have you leave me; I would never leave you.*

“Can *you*? Walk?” Shane shot back, as if it made any sense. As if Ilya wasn’t walking over his own dignity now to retrieve him. Shane leaned heavily into Ilya’s side.

“*I am not wasted.*” Ilya threw cash on the bar—too much probably—and started steering Shane toward the door. *Khren s nim*. To hell with it. He’d spent money on stupider things than rescuing Shane Hollander from himself.

... even if he was being an ungrateful little *durak* at the moment.

“I hate you,” Shane mumbled against Ilya’s shoulder.

“I know,” Ilya said.

And he did know. He’d wanted Shane to hate him, hadn’t he? Just as much as he wanted Shane in his arms tonight.

How awful to have everything he wanted.

“I don’t...” Shane turned his face into Ilya’s neck. Breath hot, alcohol-sour. Ilya knew that smell—he’d worn it himself often enough. Part of the routine: drink until you stop thinking, fuck until you stop feeling, wake up and do it again. Cheap thrills, Svetlana called it. She wasn’t wrong. “I don’t only hate you. I—” He cut himself off with a miserable sound.

“I...” Ilya’s throat was tight. They were standing on a sidewalk in Montreal at fuck-knows-what hour and Shane was drunk and Ilya was—

Ty dolboeb, he thought viciously. *Idiot*. Coming out here like some kind of hero when all he’d done was make it worse. Hurting him on purpose and then—what? Running to save him?

Ilya pushed through the door. Cool air. Shane shivered. Ilya noticed, and of course he noticed. He noticed everything about Shane. That was the problem. Ilya pulled him closer, the way Andrei used to pull his jacket tighter around him in Moscow winters, back when Ilya was small enough that his brother still thought he needed or was worth protecting. Before everything went to shit.

His hands were shaking. Tremulous and traitorous. That was twice tonight. He couldn't remember the last time before that. Maybe when he was twelve and his mother's skin was already cold and the cross was still warm from her body and he didn't know what to do, didn't know who to tell, didn't know anything except that he was alone now and always would be.

Shane made a small noise against his neck.

Just like Shane had been here alone.

Fuck.

Terrified. He was fucking terrified.

"We talk later," he managed. "Not now. When you're—just not now. Come." He tightened his arm around Shane's ribs, and felt whatever molten bellows of fury within him fade to low smouldering embers. Banked down but burning. "Let's get you back."

Shane didn't argue. He just tucked himself tighter against Ilya's side and followed where Ilya led.

That scared him more than anything else tonight.

Ilya already had his phone out, ordering a cab—two minutes away. He kept Shane upright against the brick wall, one hand on his waist in case Shane's legs decided to quit. Shane's shirt was damp with sweat. His pulse jumped under Ilya's palm.

Ilya counted the frantic beats despite himself. Fast. Too fast. Shane was panicking under the drunk, even if he didn't know it.

See? Ilya wanted to say. *This is why you don't drink like this. This is why you don't let your friends leave you. This is why—*

"You smell like her," Shane said suddenly.

Ilya went still. "What?"

"That girl." Shane's nose wrinkled—disgust, maybe, or hurt trying to look like disgust. Ilya knew the difference. "You smell like a *girl's* perfume. It's—" His hand came up to Ilya's collar, fingers curling in the fabric, wiping. Rubbing. Trying to wipe it away. "I hate it."

He wanted to laugh—it was funny, wasn't it? Shane jealous of someone who meant nothing. Shane trying to mark him, claim him, when he'd spent two months pretending Ilya didn't exist.

He didn't laugh.

"Sorry." He was. He wasn't. He didn't know.

"Don't be sorry." Shane's grip tightened. "Be—I don't know. Why's it so fuckin' hard to be *mine*?"

Mine. The word lodged somewhere between Ilya's ribs and throat, sharp-edged. A knife. Shane didn't say things like that. Shane said *Rozanov* and *this doesn't mean anything* and *I can't do this*. Shane walked out of hotel rooms before the sheets were cold. Two minutes felt like twenty. Before he could figure out what to do with it, headlights swept across them. The cab.

Getting Shane inside was—fuck. Shane’s coordination was shot and he kept grabbing at Ilya instead of the door handle. Ilya wanted to laugh at that too. Ilya practically had to fold him into the car, one hand on his head so he wouldn’t brain himself on the doorframe. *Ostorozhno*. Careful.

His mother used to do that—palm on his head when he got in the car. Every time. Like if she stopped, something bad would happen.

Something bad happened anyway.

“Hôtel Le Saint-Sulpice,” Ilya told the driver, then slid in beside Shane.

Shane was on him before the lock clicked.

Not frantically—that would’ve been easier to deflect. No, Shane moved slow and determined the way drunk people do when they’re trying very hard not to seem drunk, sliding across the seat until he was pressed against Ilya’s side, face buried in Ilya’s neck. His hand found Ilya’s, fumbled, then laced their fingers together like he’d done it a thousand times before.

Like they did this. Like this was normal.

The driver’s eyes flicked to the rearview mirror, and Ilya stared back with a dead-eyed challenge. *I’ve already made every bad decision tonight, what’s one more?* Shane was holding his hand in the back of a Montreal cab like they were teenagers going steady, and Ilya’s career was probably circling the drain, but sure. Fine. Why not add public displays of affection to the list of catastrophically stupid things he’d done in the last four hours?

The driver looked away. But that didn’t mean he hadn’t seen anything or wouldn’t talk.

See? Ilya wanted to tell Shane. *This is why we can’t. This is why it’s impossible.*

This was wrong, too public. Shane was out of his *mind*, and this was proof. Every instinct honed by years of hiding screamed at him to create distance, to keep this professional, to protect them both. His thumb traced the ridge of Shane’s knuckle instead, buckling under the promise of this mutual destruction.

This was how it would happen, then. Not with a bang but with this: Shane’s fingers threaded through his in the back of a Montreal cab, the driver’s eyes flicking to the rearview mirror. Ilya could already see the headlines he was choosing. The career he was gambling.

Shane’s career, more than his. Shane Hollander who loved hockey above all things while Ilya... loved hockey but did not *live* it.

“Hi,” Shane mumbled against his throat.

Privet, Ilya thought automatically, *stupidly*, his whole body tight. Shane’s weight was warm and solid against his side, thigh pressed along Ilya’s thigh, chest against Ilya’s ribs. Ilya could feel Shane’s heartbeat or maybe his own, too fast, too hard. Shane’s hair smelled like that cheap sport shampoo he always used. Ilya had made fun of it once—*Is this what passes for luxury in Canada?*—and Shane had thrown the bottle at him.

They’d fucked in the shower after. Shane’s back against the tiles, Ilya’s hand over his mouth to keep him quiet.

This felt more dangerous than that.

Ilya could feel each exhale hot against his neck, and with it came the unsettling awareness that he was the only one fully present. Wanting Shane felt clear-eyed and irrational at the same time, a need he could trace step by step and still not stop.

“... Hollander...” Warning. Stop. Don’t say things you’ll take back in the morning.

“Missed this,” Shane ignored him. Of course he did. “Missed you. Stupid how much I—” He pressed closer. “Two months. Why didn’t you call?”

Because you told me not to. Because you walked out. Because I was waiting for you to—

“Stop talking,” He was so tired of protecting Shane from this. From them. The smart play was to put Shane in the cab alone, go back to his room, pretend this never happened. He could’ve even taken a cab to Shane’s own place, why did he even bring him here?! “*You* told me—”

“I know what I told you.” Shane’s fingers curled against Ilya’s skin, then uncurled, then curled again like he couldn’t figure out what to do with his hands. “But I—I kept waiting for—I thought maybe you’d—” He made a noise. Frustration. Pain. Both..

Ilya knew that sound. He’d made it himself a million times in locker rooms and in hotel rooms and in Boston in his bed, staring at his phone. Waiting for Shane to text. About anything.

We’re both idiots, he thought.

Ilya caught Shane’s hand. Pressed his palm flat over Shane’s knuckles, and held him still. Not to be kind or to reciprocate but because Shane touching him like this—restless, wanting, *needing*—made it impossible to think. Shane made it impossible to remember all the reasons this was a bad idea. It made him want to pull Shane closer instead of pushing him away like any smart, better, person would.

But Ilya had never been smart about Shane. He’d been reckless and stupid and addicted to something that was going to destroy them both eventually.

“I hate how you were looking at her,” Shane continued, mouth moving against Ilya’s jawline now.

“I was not looking at her like anything. I was looking at *you*.”

“You were touching her.”

Ilya felt like he was cast lead. “Yes.”

“Why?” Shane’s voice cracked. “To hurt me? Did it—did you want—”

“You were touching *her*.” Even the *thought* of Rose Landry tasted like battery acid.

Shane went quiet against his neck. His hand in Ilya’s tightened.

The cab moved through Montreal. Ilya kept his eyes on the window. Street lights. Stop signs. Buildings Ilya didn’t recognize and never would. He’d been coming to this city for years—for Shane—and he couldn’t tell you a single street name.

“Do you—” Shane started, then stopped. His hand slid under Ilya’s shirt, palm flat against his ribs. Warm. Shane’s hands were always warm. And—*Fuck*. Not here. Not in a cab with a driver thirty centimeters away.

“When you’re—” Shane tried again. “Do you think about—”

“What?” But Ilya already knew. Could see where this was going.

“Other people.” Shane’s fingers spread. Pressed. Like he was trying to feel Ilya’s soul through his ribs. “When you’re with me.”

Ilya paused, considering his answer.

He should say yes. Ilya knew he should lie and make it easy for both of them. *Of course I do. You’re just another fuck, Hollander. Nothing special.*

“No.”

Fuck.

“Never?”

“Never.”

Shane made a sound—relief or pain or both. His hand moved higher. Thumb brushed Ilya’s chest until his fingers found the chain. The cross. His mother’s cross.

Ilya’s heart leapt into his throat and he froze with a sharp inhale through his nose.

“Then why—” Shane’s thumb traced the edge of the metal.

“*Shane.*” Warning. Begging. Stop. Don’t.

“—why won’t you—”

Ilya caught Shane’s wrist, pulled his hand out from under his shirt. Shane made a noise—protest, almost a whine. Tried to lean in. Mouth seeking Ilya’s neck like that would fix this, like sex had ever fixed anything between them except the wanting, and even that only lasted a few hours before it came back worse.

The cab stopped at the front doors of the hotel.

Spasibo, Ilya thought. Thank fucking god.

“Come on.” Ilya extracted himself, paid the driver, nearly throwing the wads of cash for his service and his discretion. Came around to get Shane out.

Shane didn’t move, and instead looked up at Ilya with those dark eyes, unfocused but trying. Always trying so hard.

“Up.” Ilya pulled him out. Shane stumbled. Ilya caught him out of reflex, like catching a puck. Muscle memory. “I’ve got you.”

Shane leaned into him. Full weight. Trust. “Yeah. Okay.”

That trust was going to kill him. Or save him. Ilya didn’t know which. *Na avos’*. Maybe it would work out. Maybe it wouldn’t. Russians survived on maybes.

The elevator: Shane sagging against him, eyes closed. Dead weight. For a second Ilya thought he’d actually passed out. Then the doors opened—that mechanical ding—and Shane jerked awake, blinking and confused.

“Where—”

“My room,” Ilya steered them into the hallway, their footsteps muffled by carpet, wall lights set low along the corridor. Key card. His hands were steadier now. Something to do. A problem to solve. This he could handle. “Come on.”

“Oh.”

Drunk Shane he could handle. Drunk Shane asking questions—that was harder. Ilya learned young which questions were safe to answer immediately and which you survived by postponing. But this? Getting him to bed, making sure he didn’t choke on his own vomit, keeping him safe?

This Ilya knew how to do.

Ilya got them down the hall, to the door, and on the third try with his card the door finally unlocked. Green light. Ilya pushed inside, pulled Shane with him, flipping the additional metal safety latch behind him. Hit the lights. Shane blinked against the brightness, swaying.

“Sit.” He guided Shane to the bed, the one closer to the door, not the one Ilya had been lying in an hour ago, sheets still tangled from when he couldn’t sleep, couldn’t stop thinking about Shane’s hands on Rose’s waist.

Shane sat. Heavy. Like his strings had been cut. Looked down at his feet. “My shoes? I need too—”

Shane. *Vospitannyy*. Raised right. Even like this. Shane Shane Shane always so polite, taking his shoes off inside, even now.

“I know. I’ll get them.” Ilya knelt, started unlacing, and bit back a snarling curse. The carpet was rough under his knees. He reached for the first shoe, started working the knot and... of course. Shane’s stupid fucking shoes with the laces he always double-knotted because he was paranoid about them coming undone during a game.

Shane’s hand landed on his head. Heavy. Uncoordinated. Fingers slid into his curls.

Terpi, Ilya froze. *Endure*. *Don’t move*.

“Nice hair,” Shane mumbled, petting him unashamedly. He’d had plenty of people touch his hair. Girls, mostly. Sometimes guys. Usually during sex or after, that lazy intimacy that didn’t mean anything. Ilya liked it—liked being touched, liked the attention, liked feeling wanted even if it was temporary.

This felt different.

“Mm,” Ilya said, fighting knots and words at the same time.

“No, ‘s—” Shane’s fingers twisted in the curls, pulled a little. “I like it.” Pause. Breathing. “I like you.”

Fuck.

“I—” Shane stopped. Lost the thought. Stared at nothing.

Ilya looked up. Shane was looking past him, eyes unfocused, face flushed. Drunk. So fucking drunk, in the morning he wouldn’t remember this. He wouldn’t remember giving Ilya this, and so he would just take it away with the sunrise. Ilya would remember.

But a long memory was not always a gift.

Ilya went back to the laces. Got the first shoe off. Tossed it aside. Second shoe. Double-knotted too. Ilya’s fingers worked at it.

“Rozanov?”

Ilya looked up again. Shane was looking down at him now. Actually looking. Trying to focus.

“Yes?”

“*Why’d* you come?”

Simple question. Complicated answer. Did it matter why? There was never a choice to this compulsion of *Shane*.

“You texted,” Ilya said, postponing.

“I was mean to you.” Shane’s words were slurring more now. “Said—uh—a lot of things. I hate you. Fuck off. Um.”

“You did.” Ilya got the knot loose. Started unlacing. “You say that a lot.”

“... I do, don’t I?” Shane asked finally. Quiet. Almost wondering.

Ilya kept his head down. The second lace slid through his fingers, damp from Shane’s sweat and whatever had splashed on him between the nightclub and the bar. Why had he even gone there? If there was a chance of a coherent answer, Ilya would’ve asked, but Shane was in no state to *think* at all anymore. The questions remained though, circling like water about a drain, threatening to drag him down. Why hadn’t he just gone home, why hadn’t he just gone home with Landry? The knot loosened in a reluctant give. He worked it the rest of the way out and pulled the shoe off, slow enough that Shane didn’t tip sideways when the last bit of resistance let go.

Shane’s socked foot touched the carpet and stayed there, planted and steady for half a second. Then his ankle rolled inward and he caught himself with a small shift of his hips, a drunk correction that came a beat too late.

Ilya set the shoe aside and then straightened from his kneel, shifting his weight back onto his heels, still moored between Shane’s knees. Shane’s hand still on his head. He wasn’t petting him now, rather holding him like an anchor, fingers curled into Ilya’s hair as if he needed the contact to keep his eyes open. And Ilya... let him, kneeling like a suppliant at his feet. Shane’s pupils looked huge in the hotel light.

“You always *do* this,” Shane said, as if he were accusing Ilya of leaving a mess in the kitchen.

“Do what?”

Shane’s lips parted, then closed again. He leaned forward on the bed, shoulders rounding, and his hand tightened in Ilya’s curls with a clumsy little tug that made Ilya’s scalp sting, leaning down down down, towards him, knocking their foreheads together. Whatever he was accusing him of remained a secret. Ilya reached up and caught Shane’s wrist before Shane could pull again. He didn’t pry him off yet. He held Shane’s wrist steady, palm to pulse, and felt the quick stutter there. Shane’s skin was hot.

“Rozanov, I—shit, want you.”

Shane shifted forward, shoulders rounding, upper body folding down, and suddenly they were even more face-to-face. Shane’s knees pressed against the outside of Ilya’s ribs, caging him in. His free hand came up, searching, found Ilya’s shoulder and gripped the seam of his t-shirt. Needily bunching it, pulling, with all the blunt gravity of inebriation, and then—then Shane’s mouth moved toward Ilya’s mouth, clumsy, open, intent on making contact wherever it landed. He was leaning so far over that Ilya couldn’t shift back without toppling. Shane’s lips brushed skin, missed, found again. He caught stubble near Ilya’s chin and pressed there instead.

“No, Hollander,” Ilya’s forearm came up between them, braced against Shane’s sternum. Keeping his hands still took effort. Not touching Shane took effort. This was not restraint born of virtue but of fear, and fear burned hotter the longer he fed it. He pushed firmly and Shane’s weight shifted backward and felt his own body revolt at the restraint. His blood ran fast. His stomach clenched. His hands wanted to slide under Shane’s shirt and grip his ribs and haul him in until Shane stopped thinking about anyone, everything, else.

He did not move.

Shane made an irritated noise and pushed at Ilya’s arm with his palm, as if this was a minor inconvenience he could solve by trying and pushing harder. Like this was some check in the rink.

“Stop,” Ilya said.

Shane’s eyebrows knit. His face went slack for a second, like he couldn’t make sense of the word. Then his mouth twisted.

“You *never* stop me,” Shane said.

“I am stopping you tonight,” Ilya said. “Because you are drunk.”

“So? I want you to. I’d let you. I’m fine,” Shane said immediately.

“You can barely sit up,” Ilya said.

Shane’s eyes flashed at that. His hand slid down Ilya’s shoulder, then under the collar of his t-shirt—reaching down from where he sat above Ilya’s kneeling form. His fingers spread on skin, palm pressing flat against Ilya’s chest like he wanted to feel his heartbeat and prove something. “I can,” Shane insisted, and his words slurred together on the end. “I can do whatever. I can do a *lot*, I can show you.”

Ilya swallowed. Shane's thumb dragged a short line along his skin and Ilya shuddered, Shane watching him *feel* it. Even drunk, Shane noticed.

"You want it too," Shane said.

"I want *you*," Ilya corrected, "I do not want *this*."

Shane's eyes went wider. He inhaled like he'd been punched. Then his mouth pulled into a shaky smile that didn't reach anything else. "This? Huh? Then why're you acting like I'm...." He shook his head once, hard. The motion made him sway and he grabbed Ilya's shoulder again to steady himself. "Like I'm dirty."

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to," Shane said. "And if not, *prove* it." He leaned forward again, stubborn. His lips aimed for Ilya's, more precise this time, like he'd found the line between them and meant to cross it.

Ilya turned his head so Shane kissed his cheek instead.

Wet heat. Lips. The press of Shane's mouth against the wrong place, and Ilya's whole body went rigid. *Don't*. Shane made a frustrated sound—not giving up, never gave up, *fuck him*—and tried again. His mouth found Ilya's jaw, dragged along the stubble there. Ilya could feel Shane's tongue, just the tip of it, tracing the line of bone.

Bozhe. God.

Ilya's cock was hard. Had been hard since Shane first grabbed at his hips in the fucking cab. His hands wanted to thread into Shane's hair and guide his mouth lower, wanted to feel those lips on his throat, his chest, lower. Seven years and Shane still knew exactly where to put his mouth to make Ilya forget every good intention he'd ever had.

Shane shifted his angle. His breath hit the spot just below Ilya's ear, and Ilya felt it shoot straight down his spine. His hips twitched forward before he could stop them.

Nyet. No. Ostanovis'. Stop.

But Shane was still going, mouth open now, sucking at the skin below Ilya's ear, and Ilya's vision went white at the edges. He could feel his heartbeat hammering against Shane's lips, and how much Shane wanted this, how much he *thought* he wanted this, him, even drunk, even now. The knowledge sat in Ilya's chest like broken glass cutting and cutting and cutting.

Not like this. You won't remember. Tomorrow you'll hate me for this. This is wrong.

Ilya's forearm came up hard between them—when had he moved it?—and pushed, the last thread of his patience snapped. He hooked his fingers into the front of Shane's shirt and pushed. Shane rocked backward onto the mattress with a small sound of surprise, giving Ilya just enough space to finally stand. Ilya's knees creaked as he rose, one hand braced on the bed for balance.

Shane blinked at him sprawled atop rumpled sheets, offended.

"*What*," Shane said, and it came out like a dare.

Ilya stared at him. The freckles across Shane's nose stood out darker against the flush. There were faint tracks on his cheeks where he'd wiped at tears and smeared them. His lower lip looked swollen from biting it.

"I am not fucking you tonight," Ilya said.

Shane's eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Because you are *drunk*," Ilya said again.

Shane scoffed. "So what?"

He stared at Ilya like he'd caught the bitterness in Ilya's voice and wanted to chew on it. Then he moved; not away, but forward. He crawled across the mattress on his hands and knees, closing the distance Ilya had tried to create. His shirt hung loose, collar stretched and crooked. His hair fell forward into his half-lidded dark eyes.

Ilya's mouth went dry.

Shane's hands found Ilya's hips before Ilya could think to move back. His fingers hooked into the waistband of Ilya's jeans and gripped, knuckles pressing against Ilya's stomach through the denim. He pulled, trying to drag Ilya closer, trying to close that last breath of space between them.

"You can," Shane said. His eyes were glassy now, wet around the edges, but stubborn. "I want you to."

Ya znayu. I know. I know you do and that's the problem—

Ilya caught Shane's wrists and pried his hands free from his jeans, one at a time. Shane's fingers resisted, curling tighter into the fabric before Ilya forced them loose. He held both of Shane's hands in his own, pinning them between their bodies. Shane tried to twist free—once, twice—and Ilya tightened his grip until Shane's bones shifted under his palms and Shane finally stopped struggling.

"No." Ilya's bit out. "Hollander, I am not doing this with you. I am not. I cannot. No."

"I want you," Shane said, and it sounded mean, like he was angry at Ilya for being in the way of it. "And you want me."

Ilya's hands kept Shane's hands pinned between them. He held on as if his grip could keep both of them from doing the stupidest thing in the room.

"Not tonight."

"Why're you pretending—"

"This is not pretending!" Ilya snapped. "This is me stopping because you can't hold your head up."

Shane's face twisted. His brows pulled together and his mouth opened like he was about to argue, but Ilya cut him off again: "Shane. We are not fucking. I am not fucking you like this," Ilya said, each word bitten off clean. "You will sleep. In the morning, if you still want—" He stopped himself. Forced his breathing to even out. "If you want, we talk. But tonight, *nyet*. No."

Shane stared at him. For three heartbeats—Ilya counted them, felt each one slam against his ribs—neither of them moved. Then the fight drained out of Shane’s shoulders and he sagged forward. His hand shot out, caught Ilya’s knee for balance. His fingers curled into the denim.

“You’re such a—” Shane started, but the words dissolved. He closed his eyes and pressed his forehead to Ilya’s thigh. His next breath shuddered out wet. Ilya’s hand hovered over Shane’s head, keeping his palm suspended in the air. His hand still hovered, useless, trembling in the air above Shane’s head like he was twelve years old again and didn’t know what to do with his body, didn’t know how to help, didn’t know *anything*.

He wanted to touch, to smooth back the damp hair stuck to Shane’s temple, but he kept his palm suspended in the air. If he touched Shane now, he wasn’t sure he could stop.

Ty dolzhen spat’. You need to sleep.

“Come on.” Ilya shifted back and stood, pulling Shane up with him by the elbow. Shane swayed and Ilya steadied him with a hand on his ribs. “Shirt off, it is filthy. You will wear one of mine.”

Shane fumbled with the hem but his fingers wouldn’t cooperate. They slipped off the fabric twice before Ilya batted his hands away and took over. He grabbed the back of Shane’s collar and pulled the shirt up and over his head in one motion. Shane’s arms got tangled in the sleeves and Ilya had to work them free, one at a time, like undressing a child.

The shirt came off inside-out. Ilya dropped it on the floor.

Shane stood there bare-chested, blinking slow. A red mark bloomed on his neck where Rose must’ve kissed and sucked too hard. Foolish. Stupid. He hated her for leaving marks, and Shane for letting her. Ilya looked away from it and crossed to his duffel bag by the door. He pulled out a clean t-shirt, black and soft from too many washes, and brought it back.

“Arms up.”

Shane lifted his arms halfway. Ilya guided them the rest of the way and slipped the shirt over Shane’s head, pulling it down his torso. The fabric hung loose on Shane’s frame, hem falling to almost mid-thigh. The sleeves were too long. Shane looked small in it. Ilya smoothed the fabric at Shane’s shoulders, fingers lingering a second too long at the collar. Shane’s skin was warm under his hands.

Moy. Mine.

Ilya shoved that thought down and reached for Shane’s belt. “Pants too. You cannot sleep in jeans.”

Shane’s hands came down to help but Ilya was already working the buckle loose. Their fingers brushed and Shane pulled back, swaying slightly. Ilya kept his eyes on the belt, not Shane’s face. He pulled the leather free from the loops and let it drop. The button came next, then the zipper, each small task requiring more focus than it should’ve. Shane swayed forward and caught himself with a hand on Ilya’s shoulder.

The weight of it burned through Ilya’s shirt.

“Easy,” Ilya said, though he wasn’t sure if it was for Shane or himself anymore. Undressing him was nothing new. They were naked together more often than they wore clothes but this was the first

time that Ilya had ever undressed Shane without the immediate goal of sex. He hooked his thumbs into Shane's waistband and started working the jeans down his hips. The denim was tight, still damp with sweat. Ilya had to ease them down carefully, conscious of every point of contact—his knuckles grazing Shane's hipbones, his palms sliding down the outside of Shane's thighs.

Shane tried to step out of them and nearly lost his balance. Ilya steadied him with a hand on his hip, thumb pressing against bare skin just above the waistband of his boxers.

“Step. Other foot.”

Shane lifted one foot, then the other, wobbling through each motion like he'd forgotten how his legs worked. His hand tightened on Ilya's shoulder for balance. Ilya pulled the jeans free and tossed them toward the pile of discarded clothes, then straightened.

Shane stood there in his boxers and Ilya's shirt, blinking down at himself like he couldn't quite figure out how he'd gotten here. The shirt's neckline had stretched wide and slipped off one shoulder. His hair stuck up at odd angles. He looked young. Vulnerable. Nothing like the Shane Hollander who glared at Ilya across faceoffs, who traded barbs in pressers, who fucked like he had something to prove.

This was just Shane. Drunk and exhausted and trusting Ilya to take care of him.

It was unbearable.

Ilya's hands itched to reach out again—to fix Shane's collar, smooth his hair, pull him close, *touch me, I am dying*. He curled his fingers into fists at his sides instead.

“Lie down.”

Blessedly, Shane obeyed. He crawled onto the bed and collapsed face-first into the pillow with a muffled sound. His legs hung off the edge, feet still touching the floor.

Ilya had to fight to control his breathing, to not give away how exquisitely Shane was destroying him with his obedience now that he was choosing to give it. He grabbed Shane's ankle and lifted, swinging his legs up onto the mattress. Shane made a noise of protest but didn't fight it. Ilya moved to the other side of the bed and pulled the pillow out from under Shane's face, repositioning it higher up so Shane's head actually rested on it instead of being smothered by it.

Shane rolled onto his side. His eyes were already half-closed.

Voda. Water. Shane needed water. It wouldn't prevent the morning hangover, but it might help.

Ilya went to the bathroom and filled a glass—such a nice fancy hotel with real glasses—from the tap, turning the light back off when he returned.

“Drink,” he said, crouching beside the bed.

Shane's eyes opened partway. He pushed himself up on one elbow and took the glass with both hands. Water sloshed over the rim and dripped onto his chest. He drank in three long pulls, throat working, then handed the glass back.

“More?”

Shane shook his head and flopped back down. The pillow muffled his words. “M’fine.”

He wasn’t fine. But arguing wouldn’t help.

Ilya set the glass on the nightstand within reach. Then he looked around the room for a trash can. There—by the desk. He carried it over and placed it next to the bed, close enough that if Shane needed it in the night he wouldn’t have to get up.

Shane was watching him through slitted eyes.

“What?” Ilya asked.

“You’re taking care of me. I... you... always doin’ this... better than I can. Nice.”

Of course I am.

Ilya stood, saying nothing. He needed distance. If Shane kept talking like this, kept looking at him like that, Ilya was going to do something stupid.

“Go to sleep, Hollander. Goodnight.”

He moved toward the other bed but Shane’s hand shot out and caught his wrist.

The grip was weak. Ilya could have pulled free easily. He didn’t.

“Stay,” Shane said.

Ya ne mogu. I can’t. If I stay I will touch you and if I touch you I will not stop and you are drunk and tomorrow you will hate me and this will all have been for nothing and I cannot—

“I’m here,” Ilya said.

It wasn’t a lie. Not exactly. He was here. In this room. He would be here in the morning when Shane woke up with a headache and a mouth like cotton and no memory of begging Ilya to fuck him to kiss him to stay.

Shane’s thumb brushed the inside of Ilya’s wrist. “Don’t go.”

“I’m here,” Ilya repeated. He carefully extracted his wrist from Shane’s grip and stepped back. “Sleep now.”

Shane’s hand fell to the mattress. His eyes drifted shut. His breathing started to even out almost immediately, the exhaustion and alcohol finally pulling him under. And Ilya watched, counting the seconds between breaths. Shane’s mouth fell open and a small sound escaped—not quite a snore but close. His face went slack, younger without the tension he carried when awake.

Krasivyy. Beautiful. You are so beautiful and I am so fucked.

Ilya waited until Shane’s breathing settled into a steady rhythm, deep and slow. Until he was *sure* Shane wouldn’t wake up if Ilya moved. Then he backed away to the other bed and sat on the edge of the mattress. He should sleep. He’d been awake for—what? Over nearly twenty hours now? He didn’t even bother undressing himself.

I want you to.

I missed you.

Why didn't you call?

Every word Shane had said replayed in Ilya's head, sharper now. When Shane was awake and talking Ilya could focus on keeping him safe, on stopping him from doing something they'd both regret. Now there was nothing to focus on except the moments on repeat.

Ilya pulled out his phone. The screen was too bright in the dark room and he turned the brightness down before opening his messages.

He scrolled to teammate's name and typed:

David

Ilya: Have someone over tonight. Sleep somewhere else

The message delivered. Three dots appeared almost immediately, then disappeared. Then appeared again.

David

Ilya: Have someone over tonight. Sleep somewhere else

David: you fuckin serious rn

David: its 3am

David: where am I supposed to go

Ilya didn't respond. He turned his phone face-down on the nightstand and stared at the ceiling. David would forgive him eventually. Probably. Or he wouldn't, and Ilya would need a new roommate for away games, if he still had a career at all, which would just be another casualty of the Hollander-Rozanov Disaster. He was already tallying the damage: his dignity, his common sense, his teammate's goodwill, his career prospects.

By morning he'd probably add his sanity to the list. There were many ways this could end, but fewer than he pretended. He could feel the narrowing, the quiet click of doors closing one by one.

The room was too quiet. Again. Shane's breathing filled the space—uneven at first, then settling into a steady rhythm. The air conditioning cycled on once more with a mechanical hum. Ilya's heartbeat pounded in his ears, too loud, too fast. His hands lay at his sides, fingers curled into the sheets.

He tried closing his eyes. The darkness brought the memories into sharper focus. Shane crawling across the mattress on his hands and knees, shirt hanging loose, eyes half-lidded. The wet heat of

Shane's mouth dragging along his jaw. Those fingers hooked into his waistband, knuckles pressing against his stomach, trying to pull him closer.

You ruined me a long time ago.

Had he? Ilya had spent years convincing himself this was mutual, that Shane wanted this the same way Ilya did. That they were both trapped in the same impossible situation, wanting each other but unable to have it. But... what if Ilya had been lying to himself the whole time? What if he'd taken advantage? Shane had been nineteen the first time, barely legal, and Ilya had been the one to kiss him first. Ilya had been the one to suggest they keep doing it, to establish the pattern of hotel rooms and locked doors and pretending they barely knew each other in public.

Ilya rolled onto his side, facing away from Shane's bed. His shoulders were stiff. Every muscle in his back was tense and his neck ached from holding himself so still.

On the other bed, Shane made a small sound in his sleep. A sigh or maybe a word, too soft for Ilya to make out, and shifted in his sleep, rolling onto his back. His arm flung out to the side and his hand hung off the edge of the mattress. His mouth stayed open and his breathing hitched once before settling again, muttering a word: *Ilya*.

His name.

I am so fucked.

The clock on the nightstand read 3:47.

3:48. 3:49. 3:50.

Ilya didn't sleep.

Except at one point, he must have.

Ilya woke to knocking. *Stuk-stuk-stuk*. The sound organized itself into meaning slowly—room service, he'd ordered it at six. He was still in yesterday's clothes, the fabric twisted wrong against his skin, and he couldn't remember crossing from the chair to the bed. *Provaly*, he thought. Blackouts. Gaps. This is what exhaustion does.

He collected the order from the unassuming hotel staff at the door and glanced at the cloches—four orders of eggs, toast, coffee, orange juice. It was the most benign hangover breakfast he could imagine outside of *kasha* or *syrniki* which were in short supply in Montreal at last minute notice. It was, he hoped, the kind of breakfast Shane would tolerate with a hangover.

He signed for it at the door and wheeled the cart inside. Shane hadn't moved. In the first bed, he was still curled on his side, mouth open, drooling, one arm flung across the pillow.

Ilya poured coffee. Set the water glass closer to the bed. Sat in the chair by the window and waited.

8:21. 8:22. 8:23.

Shane stirred around nine. A groan first—the sound pulled from deep in his chest, not his throat. Ilya tracked the movement: Shane's hand reaching for his head, fingers pressing against his temple in that specific way that meant migraine, not just headache. He rolled onto his back and his eyes

cracked open, blinking like he was concussed. He should've checked for that last night, his pupils, even though he knew Shane's head was fine. It was everything else that was broken.

"*Fuck,*" Shane croaked.

Ilya stood and brought the water. Shane pushed himself up and drank half the glass without breathing. When he finished, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and finally looked at Ilya.

His face went red. "Oh god. What—how did I—Where—"

Shane sat there drowning in Ilya's shirt; collar sliding off one shoulder, looking like a penitent altar boy who'd been caught with the communion wine. The freckles stood out starkly against his hangover-gray skin, his hair performing gravity-defying acts of chaos, and he radiated such intense, nearly Catholic level, guilt that Ilya wondered if he was about to cross himself.

Svyataya Mariya, Mater' Bozhiya, molis' o nas, greshnykh...

"Good morning." Ilya said, swallowing down the rest of that orthodox and spiteful Hail Mary. His voice came out steady. *Practiced.* How many times had he done this—watched someone wake up in his bed, waited to see what they'd remember, what they'd regret? *Skol'ko raz?* Too many to count. "You got shitfaced and almost donated your kidneys to the black market, until I was kind enough to collect you. Then you begged to suck my cock a few times as thank you. You are at my hotel, and *that* is my bed."

"Oh *god.*" Shane's face drained of color. The freckles stood out darker, like someone had drawn them on with a fine-tipped pen. He pressed his palms to his eyes. "Did we—"

Ilya kept his hands loose at his sides. He catalogued Shane's tells: the white-knuckled grip on the sheets, the way he couldn't hold eye contact for more than two seconds, how his breathing had gone shallow. *He thinks I took advantage.*

Shane truly did hate him, then.

"No, Hollander," Ilya said flatly. *Of course not.*

"But I—" Shane's hands dropped. His eyes were wide. Panicked as he shook his head, perhaps trying to remember. "I tried to—I'm so sorry. Fuck. I'm so sorry, I was so drunk, I didn't mean—"

"Stop."

Ilya watched Shane's shoulders curl inward. *Defensive posture.* He was preparing for rejection, for Ilya to be disgusted, for this to be the end. Ilya recognized the shape of it—he'd done the same thing himself a hundred times.

This is what we do, he thought. *We apologize for wanting.*

"No, I need to—I shouldn't have—"

"*Stop* apologizing." Ilya's jaw tightened. "It is fine. You were drunk. I said no. It is over."

Clean. Like cutting losses. *Otsech'.* Cut it off before it rots. He was very good at this, Ilya reminded himself, at pretending things meant nothing.

Shane flinched. “Rozanov—”

“You only want me when you’re drunk anyway, *da?*” Ilya heard the bitterness in his own words and didn’t stop it. Shane had only reached for him when he couldn’t think straight, when his judgment was drowned in alcohol and grief. What did that say? *Nichego khoroshego*. Nothing good. “So is fine. *Forget* about it.”

“That’s not—” Shane swung his legs off the bed, swaying slightly. “That’s not true.”

“No? This is news to me. You have been *very* clear, Hollander. Very busy. Too busy to remember I exist, and then you get drunk and suddenly you want—”

“I want you *sober*,” Shane said. His hands curled into fists on his thighs. “I want you—fuck, Rozanov—it’s a problem how much I want you. I wanted you at the club. I wanted you even when I’m with—which was fucked up, but I—” He sucked in a breath. “I *always* want you.”

Ilya went still. Heart stopped. Lungs stopped. Everything stopped. *Vsegda*.

Always. Shane had said always. The word didn’t translate right—*vsegda* meant something heavier in Russian, meant *eternally*, meant *without exception*, meant— He couldn’t breathe. Why couldn’t he breathe?

And Shane was still trying to explain.

“... I... let me... give me a second.”

Every instinct screamed at him to leave—walk out before Shane could finish whatever explanation was about to gut him. He’d heard enough confessions that started with *let me explain* to know how they ended. *Ya poidu*. I’ll go. Spare them both the humiliation.

But his feet stayed planted.

Shane’s hands twisted in the sheets between them. His knuckles went white. He opened his mouth twice without sound coming out, then closed it again and looked away. The flush on his cheeks deepened.

Spit it out, Ilya wanted to snap. *Whatever it is, just say it so I can leave*.

Ilya had always been good at stopping just short of the thing that would save him. This was the moment.

But instead of snapping or stopping, he didn’t say anything. He kept his own face blank. Neutral. The same face he wore for post-game pressers when reporters asked questions designed to make him lose his temper.

“Rose... I like her a lot.”

“*Tch*.” Of course. Of course Shane liked her. Everyone liked her—beautiful, famous, safe. *Bezopasnyy vybor*. The safe choice. “Of course. Makes perfect sense to chase her while you keep crawling back to me. Fuck off, Hollander.”

Even as he said it, Ilya knew he was being unfair. Hadn’t he done the same?

Svetlana. The girl at the club. A hundred other faces. All those bodies he'd put between himself and this feeling. *Hypocrite*, he thought viciously. *Liar*.

Ilya scrubbed a hand over his face and exhaled hard. Fine. Enough posturing. Perhaps he could be honest. It was impossible to make things even worse now: "I... do not blame you for chasing her, Hollander. She is safe choice, and I know I am... *this*... was... there is chance that driver saw us last night in cab when you were... It does not matter what you were doing; we can deny everything. You can still have white picket fence and movie star girlfriend. I will not stand in way of that."

"Stop it! I'm trying to say that I like her a lot, but I... know... that it's a mistake," Shane continued. His face was burning now, words tumbling out. "I thought maybe if I tried with someone else, someone I could actually—but I couldn't. Every time she touched me, even dancing, I just—" He scrubbed a hand down his face. "It was awful. I felt awful. Because all I wanted was you."

"Then why—"

"Because why anything! I don't want to fuck it all up!"

Shane's chest heaved. He looked wrecked—hair sticking up where he'd been sleeping on it, eyes red-rimmed and desperate, mouth twisted in that way that meant he was about to cry or scream or both. His hands twisted in the sheets.

Destroying them, Ilya noted distantly. *Like he destroys everything when he's scared*.

Ilya waited. His pulse hammered in his throat but he kept his feet planted, arms loose at his sides. This was strategy. *Taktika*. If he moved first, Shane would bolt. If he pushed, Shane would retreat. So he waited, and he watched, and he let the silence do the work. The years had taught him this: Shane couldn't stand silence. He'd fill it eventually. He always did.

"I don't—" Shane started, then stopped. His mouth opened and closed. He looked like he wanted to crawl out of his own skin. "I'm shit at this. I don't know how to—"

He stood up too fast and swayed. Ilya's hand twitched but he didn't reach out.

Shane steadied himself against the mattress. "When you called me Shane," he said, the words coming out strangled. "In bed. When we—" His face went scarlet.

Ilya went still. *Two months*. Sixty-three days of thinking Shane had rejected him, when really—

"I thought you wanted me gone," Ilya said slowly.

"I freaked out. I'm *sorry*." Shane took a step forward. His hands hung useless at his sides, fingers flexing like he didn't know what to do with them. "I wanted—fuck, I want—"

He closed the distance between them.

His hands found Ilya's face—clumsy, shaking, too warm. And he kissed him.

Oh.

It wasn't smooth. Shane's mouth crashed into his, too hard, their teeth clicking together. His fingers dug into Ilya's jaw like he was drowning and Ilya was the only solid thing left in the world. And maybe that was true. Maybe they were both drowning.

Tonem vmeste, the thought came, wild and greedy. *We'll drown together then.*

Ilya's hands came up, gripping Shane's hips to steady him. Shane made a breathy sound against his mouth and kissed him harder—mouth open, breathing uneven, fingers pressing divots into Ilya's jaw. His lips were chapped. He tasted like morning breath and desperation. He tasted like *shit*, and all Ilya could think was *at last, at last, at last*.

When they broke apart Shane's forehead dropped to Ilya's shoulder. His breath came in nervous huffs at Ilya's collar.

"You're not a mistake. I don't—look I don't know *what* you are, what this is. But it's not a mistake."

Ilya's chest cracked open. Splintered. A fracture opened inside him and he couldn't—He turned his head and pressed his mouth to Shane's temple, breathing him in. Mistake. Shane smelled like stale beer, cigarette smoke, the sour-sweet smell of dried sweat. He smelled terrible. He smelled like catastrophe. Ilya wanted to crawl inside his skin and live there.

"Okay," he said, and his voice came out wrecked. *Broken*. When had he started falling apart again? He couldn't tell anymore. Couldn't tell what was sweat and what was tears and what was just... everything. "*Da*. Okay." He was saying it for himself as much as Shane.

This is happening. This is real. We're doing this.

"Okay?"

"Okay."

Shane's arms came around him, crushing them together. He was shaking.

They stood like that for a long time, holding on.

Finally Ilya pulled back, hands still on Shane's hips. He needed distance. Needed to think. Needed to not be touching Shane before he did something stupid like promise him forever. "You need shower. You smell like an ashtray fucked a brewery."

Shane laughed, wet and startled. "Jesus, Rozanov."

"Is true." Ilya pushed him gently toward the bathroom, and even that—the small of Shane's back under his palm—felt like too much. *Slishkom mnogo*. Everything with Shane was always too much. He wouldn't have it any other way. "Go. There is mouthwash. You can use my toothbrush if you want, I don't care."

"That's disgusting."

"Your mouth was on all sorts of things last night," Ilya said, thinking back to Rose and then Miles, the pink smear on Shane's collar. "You are disgusting."

Shane's face went crimson, and Ilya realized he'd taken it as innuendo. "I—we didn't—"

"No, but you tried very hard. Toothbrush is like \$2. I will buy new one." Ilya crossed his arms, fighting a smirk. "Go clean up. Then you eat. I ordered enough food for small army, which should be enough for one very stupid and boring person like you."

Shane looked at him for a long moment, something soft and uncertain in his eyes. Then he nodded and disappeared into the bathroom.

Ilya listened to the water start. Let out a long breath. Sat down on the edge of the bed and put his head in his hands.

What the fuck are we doing?

But he already knew. They were doing this. Whatever this was. However impossible.

The shower kept running. Ilya poured himself more coffee and waited.

His phone buzzed on the nightstand. Three texts from David asking where he was, was it worth getting his dick wet knowing that he'd had to bunk up in one of the other rooms and share a twin with Victor of all people. Ilya typed back: *Running late. Will explain later.*

He didn't know how to explain this, or how he'd ever know what this even was yet. They'd kissed. Shane had said he wanted him, *liked* him. That was—fuck, that was more than they'd ever had before. More than stolen hours in hotel rooms. More than pretending they were nothing to each other.

But what did it mean? What could it mean?

Ilya took another sip of coffee, and heard the water shut off. Ah. He'd drifted again, spacing out. He heard Shane moving around in the bathroom.

They'd figure it out. They had to. Because going back to before—Ilya couldn't do that again. Wouldn't.

The bathroom door opened and Shane emerged like a vision, hair damp and skin pink from the hot water. He'd wrapped a towel around his waist. Droplets ran down his chest.

“Feel better?”

“Like death,” Shane said, but he managed a weak smile. “Probably deserve it though considering... uh... how I was behaving last night, and for—” He paused, rubbing the back of his neck. “For cheating on Rose.”

Ilya snorted. He poured Shane coffee and pushed the cup across the table. “I was here first. Technically, *she* is homewrecker.”

It was a bad joke. Terrible, really. Not even funny.

They both laughed anyway.

Shane's shoulders loosened. He crossed to the bed where Ilya had laid out the food and sat down, picking at a piece of toast. Ilya sat beside him with his own plate. They ate in companionable quiet, Shane nibbling at the edges of his toast, Ilya working through scrambled eggs but leaving the lion's share for Shane.

Shane stole a piece of bacon from Ilya's plate. Ilya retaliated by snagging a large bite of Shane's toast to leave a crescent of his teeth in the crumb.

“I thought I ruined everything,” Ilya said eventually. He wasn’t looking at Shane, just down at his plate. “After the... when you stayed over. When you said you couldn’t do this.”

Shane set his toast down. “You didn’t ruin anything. I did. I’m the one who—” He stopped. Started again. “We both suck at this.”

“*Da*. We are disasters.”

“Absolute fucking disasters,” Shane agreed.

Ilya looked at him then. Shane was already looking back—eyes luminous with unshed tears, mouth soft, that crease between his brows finally smoothed away. Beautiful.

He leaned in. Shane met him halfway.

This kiss was different from the frantic collision earlier. Slower. Shane’s mouth was soft against his, tasting like coffee and toothpaste and Ilya wanted to *devour* him. His hand came up to cup Ilya’s jaw, thumb stroking along his cheekbone.

Ilya’s fingers found Shane’s damp hair, tangling in the short strands. Shane made a small sound and shifted closer, one leg hooking over Ilya’s thigh, kissing until Ilya’s lips felt swollen, until his lungs burned for air. When they broke apart Shane stayed close, forehead resting against Ilya’s.

“We should probably talk,” Shane murmured. “About what this means. What we’re—”

“Later,” Ilya said. He didn’t want to think about the impossible logistics right now. Didn’t want to ruin this moment with reality. “We talk later.”

Shane nodded. His hand slid down Ilya’s chest, fingers spreading over his ribs.

They shifted on the bed, plates abandoned on the nightstand, Shane half in Ilya’s lap now. Ilya’s hands found Shane’s waist under the towel, skin still warm and damp with water. Shane kissed along his jaw, down his neck, teeth grazing his collarbone.

Ilya felt it then. The hard line of Shane’s dick pressing against his hip through the towel.

He pulled back, incredulous. “Are you—”

Shane’s face flushed red. “I—yeah. Sorry, I just—” He bit his lip. “Didn’t you say something last night? About if I still wanted you in the morning?”

“That you remember but not begging for my cock until I put you to bed like a toddler?” Ilya stared at him. Then he laughed, sharp and surprised. “I meant if you wanted to *talk*. Not—” He gestured at Shane’s lap.

“Oh.” Shane looked mortified. He started to pull away but Ilya tightened his grip on his waist.

“But,” Ilya said, his mouth curling into a smirk, “after the shit you put me through last night? Making me watch, making me hunt you down like a dog, so drunk I had to *carry* you back here, trying to seduce me when you could barely stand?” He leaned in, lips brushing Shane’s ear. “So messy, Hollander. But now. Now that you’re sober, I have no problem fucking you like you deserve.”

Shane shuddered. “Yeah?”

“*Da*.” Ilya’s hand slid up Shane’s spine. “You want that? Besides, I hear is hangover cure. Maybe. I saw on WebMD.”

“You didn’t look up anything on WebMD.”

“No, but I could have. The research would agree with me. I am very confident about this. So. Do you want?”

“*Fuck* yes.”

Ilya flipped him onto his back in one smooth motion—muscle memory, the same way he’d pin someone during a fight, except this was Shane and therefore nothing was the same. Shane’s towel came loose, falling open. His dick was flushed and hard against his stomach, and Ilya’s mouth went dry looking at him. Years of this and it still hit him like the first time.

“Then I will give it to you,” Ilya said, “Everything you want.”

Ilya didn’t rush. Couldn’t rush—not now, not when this might be the first time it actually meant anything beyond the physical. He crawled over Shane, kissing him slow and deep until Shane was squirming beneath him, making these small desperate sounds in the back of his throat.

His hands mapped territory he knew better than his own body: the familiar dips between Shane’s ribs—he could count them in the dark, had counted them in the dark—the flat plane of his stomach, the jut of his hipbones, sharp enough to bruise Ilya’s palms when he gripped too hard. Shane’s skin was still warm from the shower, smelling like that generic hotel soap, and underneath it: *Shane*. Salt and want and something Ilya had never found words for in either language.

In Russian it might be *odnolyub*—a person who was only capable of loving only one other in their entire life, or maybe *rodnoy*, beloved, my own, but also *native*, something that belonged to you from birth. In English there was nothing close.

He hoped he never found the right word.

Some things were better left unnamed, left enormous and undefined.

Shane’s fingers found Ilya’s belt, tugging. “Off.”

Ilya caught his wrists and pinned them above his head. “Patience.”

He ducked his head and put his mouth on Shane’s neck, biting down where shoulder met throat. Shane bucked up against him with a gasp—Ilya felt it through his whole body, the arch of Shane’s spine, the clench of his thighs, the way Shane’s hands scrambled for purchase on his shoulders.

He worked his way down, teeth scraping over Shane’s collarbone, tongue flicking over a nipple until Shane whined.

“Rozanov!”

The surname. Always the surname. Ilya worked his other nipple with his teeth, barely reacting, and

“Ilya.”

“God—fuck—”

Stoy. Stop. Ilya’s brain stuttered. Shane never said his name during sex, or ever—it was always *Rozanov*, always distant even when Ilya was inside him, when they were as close as two people could be. But now Shane’s mouth shaped those two syllables like a confession, like a plea, and Ilya’s blood ran hot, boiling. He was an inferno of want; he wanted to hear it again. Wanted Shane to say it like that every time, wanted to own the way his name sounded in Shane’s throat.

Ilya released Shane’s wrists to pull his own shirt over his head. Shane’s hands immediately went to his chest, fingers spreading over muscle. Ilya let him touch, let Shane trace the lines of his torso while he worked on his belt. He shoved his jeans and boxers down, kicked them off. Shane’s eyes went dark, tracking down Ilya’s body to where his cock hung heavy between his legs.

“Come here,” Shane said, reaching for him.

Ilya settled between Shane’s thighs, grinding down. Shane moaned at the friction, their cocks sliding together. Ilya rocked his hips, watching Shane’s face—how his eyes went hazy, how his mouth fell open.

“You’re so—” Shane’s hands gripped Ilya’s ass, pulling him closer. “I need—”

“I know what you need.” Ilya kissed him again, messy and wet. Shane was already writhing beneath him, hips rolling up to meet each grind of Ilya’s pelvis.

Ilya reached over to the nightstand, fumbling through the drawer until his fingers closed around the bottle of lube he’d flung in there just in case, back when his only plan was *I need to get laid* and before the fallout. He popped the cap and poured a generous amount, warming it between his fingers. Automatic, thoughtless, the same way he’d taped his stick a thousand times.

Shane’s knees fell open wider, shameless. “Hurry up.”

“Bossy,” Ilya hummed. He tossed the bottle away and circled his fingertips around Shane’s opening, but this time he forced himself to slow down, to watch. Shane’s face. The small tells. Cataloguing like he catalogued opponents’ weaknesses, except this was the opposite, finding what made Shane come apart, what made him *more*.

The flutter of Shane’s eyelids when Ilya’s finger circled his rim. The part of his lips. How his breath caught—actually stopped, held suspended in his lungs—when Ilya pressed inside with one finger.

He wants this. Not drunk-wants, not running-from-himself-wants. Actually wants.

“Look at me,” Ilya said.

Shane’s eyes opened, pupils blown so wide the brown was nearly swallowed. Ilya catalogued it—the dilation, the way Shane’s left eyelid fluttered slightly more than the right, how his gaze tried to focus but couldn’t quite manage it. *Overwhelmed already*, Ilya thought. *Good.* He worked him open slowly, one finger, then two, crooking them until Shane’s hips jerked off the bed.

“More,” Shane gasped. “I can take it.”

Ilya added a third finger and Shane arched, head tipping back against the pillow. His dick leaked onto his stomach. Ilya wanted to taste it, wanted to put his mouth on every part of Shane until he couldn't remember anyone else's name. "Always so good for me," Ilya murmured, scissoring his fingers. Shane's body opened for him like it remembered, like it had been waiting. Like it was made for this. "You love this, *da*? Love having me inside you."

Shane nodded frantically, beyond words. His hips rocked down onto Ilya's hand.

"No one else could give you this." Ilya's thumb pressed against Shane's rim, stretching him wider. He watched Shane's face—the flush spreading down his neck, the way his mouth fell open. "A 'mistake' you called it. Mm. You are right, it's true, what woman could fuck you like I do. Who could spread you open and make you beg."

"Yes," Shane gasped. "God, yes—only you—"

Ilya pulled his fingers out. Shane whined at the loss.

"Shh," Ilya said, slicking his own cock. "I have you."

He lined himself up and pressed inside in one slow, steady push. Shane's breath punched out of him. His hands scrabbled at Ilya's back, pulling him closer, deeper. The first inch is always the hardest: Shane's body resisting even as he begs for it, and Ilya had to breathe through the urge to just thrust home. The heat was immediate and overwhelming, tight enough that Ilya had to stop halfway, jaw clenched, because if he didn't he'd come right there like some teenager. His thoughts were melting. He felt it in his thighs, the shake starting already, and they'd barely begun.

Ilya bottomed out and stilled. *Vot tak*. Like this. Exactly like this. Shane's legs came up, ankles locking behind Ilya's back, and Ilya had to close his eyes for a moment against the intensity of it, being inside Shane, nothing between them, Shane holding him like he never wanted to let go. They stayed like that for a moment, Ilya buried to the hilt, Shane's body clenched around him, and Ilya felt it like a fist around his heart. This would ruin them. No, it already *had*, and now they were in the death drop together anyway. Shane would have to tell Rose. They'd have to figure out what to tell their teams, the press, the fucking world. Everything would change and there was no going back.

Bizarrely, he was not scared.

Only Shane could ruin him like this. If he was going to be ruined, let it be by this: by Shane gasping his name, by the way Shane looked at him like Ilya was the only solid thing in a tilting world. Their destruction would be mutual, be complete, be worth it.

It already was.

Ilya forced himself to look down at Shane beneath him: cheeks flushed dark, kiss swollen lips, freckles stark against his skin like constellations Ilya had memorized.

"Fuck," Shane gasped beneath him, and Ilya could feel the word as much as hear it, Shane's body clenching around him. He could feel Shane's heartbeat through his cock, or maybe that was his own pulse, he couldn't tell anymore. His forearms burned where they bracketed Shane's head.

This. This was worth two months of misery.

A bead of sweat rolled down Shane's temple. His pupils were still blown wide. Wrecked already and Ilya hadn't even started moving yet.

Mine, a primitive beast in him growled. *This belongs to me.*

"Move," Shane demanded, breathless. "Fuck me. Please."

"When I'm ready. For now, I want to look at you," Ilya said, rolling his hips just enough to make Shane gasp and his hands claw at Ilya's shoulders. "I have ruined you, haven't I? For anyone else."

The thought should have made him feel guilty—he'd taken Shane's choices away, monopolized him, made it impossible for Shane to want anyone else. But he felt savage satisfaction instead. *Good*. "You could never go back. No woman could hold you down like this. Could never take you apart the way I do."

"Never," Shane managed. "Only—fuck—only want you—"

Ilya pulled back and thrust in hard. Shane cried out, nails raking down Ilya's spine hard enough to break skin. Good. Mark me too. Ilya set a punishing rhythm—all the frustration, the fear, the wanting, two months of it, sixty-three days of missing Shane and hating that he missed him, all of it pouring into each snap of his hips. Shane slammed his hips up to meet each thrust, strong thighs clamping around Ilya's waist with bruising force. Not taking—*demanding*. His hockey-hardened body knew exactly how to leverage the angle, and Ilya felt the shift in his own spine, the way Shane was fucking himself on Ilya's cock as much as Ilya was fucking him. Begging for more. Demanding more. Always more. *Nenasytnyy*. Insatiable.

So perfect.

"Touch yourself," Ilya gritted out.

Shane's hand flew to his cock, stroking in time with Ilya's thrusts. His other hand fisted in the sheets. The headboard slammed against the wall.

"Close," Shane gasped. "I'm—fuck—"

Shane's face when he was close, slackjawed with that unfocused gaze, did something to Ilya every time. It made him feel ten feet tall and terrifyingly small all at once. This was trust. This is Shane giving him everything, laid out and split open, and Ilya could wreck him. He could make him regret this, *hurt* him in all the ways physical, and the weight of that responsibility, the awe of Shane, only made him piston his hips faster.

"Do it," Ilya said, feeling his own orgasm building low in his belly. The burn flared every time the tip of his cock plunged back inside, and he mentally urged his body to work faster to match Shane's zenith. "Come for me."

Shane shattered, spilling over his fist with a broken moan. His body clenched around Ilya and it was too much—Ilya followed him over the edge, burying himself deep as he came.

They collapsed together, breathing hard. Ilya's arms shook—not just from exertion but from everything, all of it, the weight of what they'd just done and what it meant. Shane pulled him down before his arms could give out, smashing their bodies together and taking Ilya's full weight without complaint.

Ilya turned his head, mouth against Shane's neck, breathing him in. He was dizzy with delight, floating. He needed to say something. Needed to break the intensity before it consumed him completely, and it was obvious to Shane, too, just how desperately he was in love.

"Still have headache?"

Shane huffed out a laugh. "What?"

"Hangover cure," Ilya said, propping himself up on one elbow so he could see Shane's face. Safer to joke than to say what he was actually thinking. "Is working, yes?"

"You're ridiculous." Shane's hand came up to push at Ilya's shoulder, but there was no force behind it. His face was flushed, hair sticking up at odd angles, mouth swollen from kissing. He looked thoroughly fucked and possessed.

"You love it," Ilya said.

Shane rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. "Unfortunately."

"Good, because I am thinking," Ilya said, shifting his weight and flexing his hips, "that I have just enough time to make you cum again."

9:54. 9:55. 9:56...

Why the fuck did it matter what minute it was? For years Ilya had counted minutes—how long until Shane had to leave, how long until their next game, how many days until he might see him again. *Vsegda schital vremya*, always counting, always rationing time like it was running out.

Shane's phone buzzed in his pile of forgotten clothing. No doubt it would be Rose.

They both stared at it.

"I have to—" Shane started.

"I know." Ilya's arm tightened around Shane's waist.

Shane's phone went silent. Then buzzed again. Ilya already felt tension returning to his shoulders. The real world, calling them back.

"I'm going to tell her," Shane said quietly. "Today. I have to."

"... I know." This was it—the first consequence. The first price.

Shane pulled back enough to look at him. His eyes were dark and so painfully scared. "This is going to get complicated."

"It already is complicated." Ilya caught Shane's chin, forced him to hold his gaze. "I do not care it is complicated."

A lie. He cared desperately. He was terrified. But he was also done pretending he could walk away from this, from Shane, from whatever impossible thing they were building in the wreckage of their carefully constructed lives.

“So you will call her and tell her and be done with her. But not yet. Five more minutes where nothing exists except this.”

Shane’s phone buzzed again, but instead of going to it, he stayed, leaning in to kiss Ilya again. This was a choice too. One that would have consequences tomorrow, but for now neither of them mentioned it. They’d earned at least that much. They had time now. All morning. Maybe longer. Maybe—

He didn’t let himself finish the thought.

Ilya intended to use every second of it, regardless.

Chapter End Notes

[Bsky](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [My Hollanov fics on AO3](#)

Yeah. Not much to say here, I wanted to just take things a different direction. Cheating is bad and I don't condone it, but it's what the narrative wanted.

Begging one of y'all beautiful and talented people to write this from Shane's POV so we can all be sad together with these fools.

My Paper Thin References:

1. [t.A.T.u. - Я сошла с ума \(Ya Soshla S Uma\)](#) - I think these lyrics in Russian are much sadder, and more closely align with how I imagine Ilya spirals.
2. [Can Sex Cure Your Hangover? I Got Insanely Drunk to Investigate](#)
3. My writing anthem for this fic was [Wish It Was You \(Nils Hoffmann Remix\)](#).

I am sort of flying blind here with Russian; I have a close friend that speaks Bulgarian but that's obviously not the same language so... apologies for any errors. I would be VERY open to corrections to any mistakes I've made. I love learning!

And last but not least... thanks for reading! If you liked it, I'd love to yap in the comments.

Not sure what to say? Comment anxiety? How about...

- ❤️ “I liked/loved it!”
- 🇺🇸 “this wasn't my favorite”
- 🤪 “save a horse, ride a Rozanov”
- 🏒 “dumb hockey boys make me happy”
- 🗡️ “this usually isnt my thing... and yet”
- 💀 “how dare you (affectionate)”

Chapter 2: Shane

Chapter Summary

That night, from Shane's Point of View.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shane's shoulders turned sideways to slip between dances, hands loose at his sides. Bodies, slick with sweat, jostled him left and right and the music was loud, loud enough to make his ears ring, rattling his bones, but he barely heard it. Rose's tipsy laugh faded somewhere behind him beneath the neons as he left her behind on the dance floor. Miles was calling his name, promising more champagne. Strobe lights cut through the dark in jagged white bursts. And there, just ahead, between where the crowd parted—

Ilya.

Golden curls were damp at the temples where they clung to his skin. Ilya's shirt was nearly transparent, white and leopard fabric stuck to the planes of his chest, and when the lights swept across him just right, Shane could almost make out the outline of the bear tattoo on his ribs. The gold chain around his neck caught the strobe, a brief flare that made Shane's breath stick in his throat.

Ilya and a *girl*.

She had her hands on Ilya's hips, grinding against him with her head thrown back. Ilya watched her through half-lidded eyes, lips parted. He looked relaxed. Hungry. His fingers splayed across her lower back, thumbs pressing into the small of her back, bunching the fabric of her dress.

Shane's stomach lurched and his feet stopped moving, body rooted while his eyes tracked Ilya's every movement. The girl pressed against him, and her hands were sliding up under the fabric of his shirt. Ilya bit his lower lip, eyes closing. Shane's throat closed. He knew those ribs, had traced them in the dark, and watching someone else touch them made his stomach turn over. Shane felt the nausea roll through him, hot and acidic, rising up the back of his throat.

He was going to be fucking sick. Shane tried to pull in air but the bass was too loud, pressing against his ribs, and breathing felt like drowning on dry land.

The girl turned in Ilya's arms. Her mouth found his. It wasn't gentle—teeth and tongue and her hands shoving up under Ilya's shirt, nails dragging over his abdomen, his chest, and Ilya *shuddered* at the contact, kissing her back with everything Shane recognized, everything Shane had felt against his own mouth a hundred times.

Shane stood alone in the middle of the dance floor. People moved around him, bodies bumping his shoulders, but he couldn't make himself move. He was staring. He knew he was staring. Anyone

could see him standing here, frozen, watching Ilya Rozanov kiss some random girl in a Montreal nightclub.

He needed to leave. Now. Before—

Ilya pulled away from the kiss and looked up.

Their eyes locked across the dance floor.

Shane's eyes went wide, humiliation flushing up his neck as he realized exactly how long he'd been standing there, unmoving, watching.

Ilya smiled. That same crooked, devastating smile Shane had seen in hotel rooms and hallways when no one else was watching. But this time it was different. This time it was cruel. Ilya's eyes stayed on Shane's face as he bent to whisper in the girl's ear, mouth moving against her skin, gaze never wavering.

Shane understood. *This is payback.*

Two months. He'd walked, nearly *ran*, out of Ilya's home two months ago, like a coward. *Hollander. Hollander...* It didn't matter in that moment that Ilya was sincere, that Shane *believed* him, or that he'd bought ginger ale or moaned his name when he came. Ilya liked women. Ilya liked Svetlana. Ilya did not like him in the daylight, in any way that could ever be real. It was too much, and he was scared, he was wearing Ilya's clothes and had never been so happy over just sitting on a couch and talking about nothing and... he had ruined it.

And he had run.

What was there to say after that? *I kind of think that I've never been as happy as I am with you, and that freaks me the fuck out. Are you going to marry that Russian girl? Please don't marry that Russian girl, I know you'll never be with me, but—*

No. No. There was nothing to say, no do over, no penalty shot or fix.

Rozanov liked girls. Shane... didn't... think he had ever liked anyone before, or after, Rozanov.

And so he treated the problem like any other: he wasn't trying hard enough to make it work.

He'd started dating Rose some weeks later. There wasn't any hiding either, he let every camera catch them together. Rose wore his jersey to games and blew kisses on the Jumbotron. They went on dates. She kissed him and he kissed her. There were pictures of that too, and Rozanov would've seen. *See? I'm not clingy, I don't care too much, I'm not wrong, I like girls too.*

This was, had to be, payback.

Now Rozanov was making sure Shane *saw* too. Rozanov wanted him to watch. Rozanov wanted it to hurt the same way Shane showing up in tabloids with Rose must have hurt *him*.

It worked.

Shane turned sharply, cutting back through the crowd toward the edge of the dance floor, toward the stairs that led up to the VIP section, the bathrooms beyond, and the *exit*. Out, had to get out

didn't matter how or to where he would go after. *Out*. The disconnect between thought and motion felt familiar. Safe. He could let his body handle this while his mind went elsewhere.

He didn't get far. Rose caught his arm as he pushed past a knot of dancers, her grip firm enough to stop his momentum.

"Shane? Where are you going?"

Had she come looking for him? Shit, how long had he been *standing* there? Staring. Shane jolted when Rose's slender fingers wrapped around his wrist. Rose's neatly plucked brows furrowed. "Shane?"

Miles appeared at her shoulder, eyebrows drawn together, concern cutting through his buzz.

"You okay?" Miles leaned closer, voice raised over the music. "You look really pale."

"I—" Shane forced his face into something that felt like a smile. "Yeah. Sorry, I—I'm fine. It's just hot down there. I'm sorry."

"Baby why are you apologizing?"

Shane shook his head dumbly. His throat had gone bone dry. *Because what else can I do?*

Rose's thumb pressed against his pulse point and with it came a fresh wave of panic: *calm down, Shane*. He couldn't let her feel it racing. She couldn't know what he was feeling. Shane didn't even know. Head spinning, he made himself breathe slower, deeper, until the dread clawing at his skull subsided enough that he could think.

"Well, no big deal. Come on," Rose said, tugging him back toward the VIP section. "Let's get you some water."

Shane let them pull him up the stairs. The VIP area sat elevated above the main floor, roped off with velvet cordons and guarded by a woman in all black who nodded them through. The space was smaller than the chaos below, scattered with low couches and tables lit by dim orange bulbs. Bottles of vodka and champagne sweated in ice buckets. The music thinned to a manageable roar up here, though talking meant leaning in, being close, breath fanning over ears. Rose's PR team had arranged their table. Her face sold magazines, opened doors. The section filled with actors, models, agents Shane didn't recognize.

Miles flagged down a server and ordered another round. Shane sank onto one of the couches. From here he could see the dance floor—a writhing mass of bodies and lights—but not individual faces. Not Ilya. Not the girl. The not-knowing, strangely, felt worse than seeing it had.

Rose pressed a cold bottle of champagne into his hand. "Drink this."

"I thought you said water?"

"That too, we'll get some glasses. Unless you want me or Miles to ask if they have soda?"

Too many choices. Couldn't she just pick for him? He couldn't think about ginger ale without thinking about Ilya anyway, and...

And the champagne was crisp and tasteless and did nothing for the sick feeling in his stomach. He needed the alcohol though, and the numbness it promised. He never touched alcohol during the season; too busy counting macros and always sticking to water or ginger ale, treating his body with the discipline his sport demanded. The bubbles cut through the revulsion churning in his gut. He pushed himself to take another sip.

Play normal. Act like it doesn't matter. Ilya's moved on, so have you.

Miles dropped onto the couch across from them, sprawling with his arm along the back. "That was wild down there. Did you see that guy in the red? Guy can actually dance."

"He's got rhythm," Rose agreed. She tucked herself against Shane's side, head on his shoulder. Her perfume was sweet and floral. "Unlike some people."

"Hey," Shane said, aiming for playful and landing somewhere in the vicinity. "I can dance."

"You can shuffle from side to side," Miles said. "That's not dancing."

Rose laughed. The sound vibrated through Shane's chest where she pressed against him. He should feel something. Warmth, affection, desire—anything. She was beautiful. She was here. She was touching him like she had every right to, and Shane felt nothing except the ghost of Ilya's smile burning behind his eyes.

He drank more champagne. Finished the glass. Accepted another when the server came back around.

"Have some water too, babe." Rose said, snatching up glasses of water for each of them as well, and leaned over to peck Shane on the lips. "Pace yourself."

Pace himself? How? How could he do that when all he could think about wasn't her, Rose, at all, but him him him...

Miles launched into a story about the game he'd attended some weeks back to draw Shane in, trying to make conversation while claiming it was something he'd half-watched from a box, loudly indignant on Shane's behalf. Shane nodded at the right moments. Laughed when Rose did. He was good at this, the pretending.

Did it feel like agony for anyone else?

By now, all the surroundings had started to take on an almost pleasant blur. His skin felt like it was buzzing, his face was hot. Actors filtered through the VIP section. Models. Someone's manager. Shane recognized faces from Rose's industry events—people who smiled at her, ignored him. He was decoration. The athlete boyfriend. Below, bodies packed the dance floor. Rozanov could be anywhere down there. Or he could have already left with that girl.

Or... or he might come here. Rozanov might already be climbing these stairs right now, skin still gleaming from the dance floor heat, that nearly transparent shirt clinging to every line of his chiseled torso. Who would stop him? The assortment of models on the nearby couches had the kind of faces that sold magazines—severe cheekbones, perfect symmetry, sex appeal. Rozanov had that too, except his was *effortless*. That tussled, just-fucked hair, that always looked artfully disheveled, hazel eyes that shifted between gold and green depending on the light, and that rugged jawline beneath that perfect smile. The image of him in some haute couture came easily to Shane: in a suit

with this tie teased loose, the shirt unbuttoned to reveal the glint of his cross and golden skin. Even on ice acting as a human freight train, Rozanov photographed like he was born for it. He'd fit seamlessly up here while Shane sat sweating in a stupid white T-shirt that suddenly felt something a child would wear.

Shane drank.

Rose shifted against him, her hand sliding down to rest on his thigh. Her fingers were small and light. Shane covered them with his own, squeezing, trying to feel the connection he was supposed to feel when the woman he was dating touched him.

This is what I should want. Rose is perfect. This is normal.

Miles caught Shane's eye across the table and grinned, oblivious. He was talking faster now, gesturing with his drink. Getting drunk. Rose was too—Shane could tell by the way she kept giggling at things that weren't that funny, the way her weight against him grew heavier.

Shane matched them drink for drink. One bottle becoming two, becoming three. God, how many now? He'd lost count. Shane kept emptying them, leaning hard into the smoothing-over effect of alcohol that abated all sharp thought. Thinking about Ilya was sharp. He was a knife, stabbing somewhere unseen in his chest, slipping between the ribs.

And even though the club had compressed around him now, sounds compressing and expanding back and forth, the tipsy haze didn't hide anything the way it should have. Every time he closed his eyes he saw Ilya's mouth on that girl's neck. Saw his hands on her hips, fingers splayed possessive and sure. Saw that smile—the one that said *I know you're watching. I want you to watch.*

Rose turned her face into Shane's neck the way she did when she wanted to beg for a kiss, pink lipstick smearing on his shirt. "You smell good."

If I can just feel this, want this, be this—

But his brain wouldn't cooperate. It kept circling back. Ilya's hands on her waist. That kiss. That smile aimed across the dance floor like a weapon.

Payback.

Rose's fingers laced through his. Her thumb traced circles on the back of his hand, slow and gentle. Shane looked down at their joined hands. Hers were pale, nails painted pink with white tips. Feminine. Pretty. His own hands were broader, knuckles scuffed from the game. Together, side by side, they looked right together, like the kinds of hands that would be on a magazine or a commercial or interlaced when cameras flashed outside red carpets or restaurants. Bombshell actress and Athlete. That was supposed to be the winning combo, and it made sense to everyone, even to fans that might've considered him a novel minority in an otherwise white-washed sport.

Rose made him normal. She bloomed around him, hiding the unsightly parts with flowers, and made him look, from the outside, like exactly what he was supposed to be. And... she cared about him, Shane knew. Genuinely. Her thumb traced affectionate circles on his palm. He concentrated on the warmth of her palm, the softness of her skin. *Feel it. Just feel it.*

Shane felt nothing.

... and... he wanted to feel it, whatever was supposed to be here but screamed its absence. He concentrated on the warmth of her palm, the softness of her skin, the weight of her leaning into him. He could make this work. He could want this.

He could.

He drank more. More rounds. Shane lost count. The bottles kept appearing and disappearing. His vision swam at the edges. There was water, too. The bar was out of ginger ale, fucking dammit. The music pounded through his skull.

He thought about Ilya constantly.

Rose yawned, eyes drooping. She blinked slowly, trying to focus. "I think I'm drunk."

"You *are* drunk," Miles said. He wasn't much better off, swaying where he stood.

Shane seized the opening, tongue feeling thick and clumsy in his mouth: "Oh—yeah. Miles... you should take Rose home. She's got that early call time tomorrow, right?"

Rose made a small noise of protest. "I'm fine."

"You're falling asleep standing up." Shane kept his voice light, affectionate. Everything a concerned boyfriend should be. "Go get some rest. I'll finish my drink and grab a cab."

"You sure?" Miles asked. He already had his phone out, probably calling a car.

"Yeah, I'm good." Shane hugged Rose, pressed a kiss to her temple that felt like nothing. "Text me when you get home."

Rose mumbled agreement against his chest. Miles guided her toward the stairs, one arm around her shoulders. She turned back once, waved at Shane with her free hand. Shane waved back.

Then they were gone.

Shane stood alone in the VIP section. The noise pressed in from all sides now, and it was oppressive—music, laughter, shouted conversations—but it was muffled now. It felt like cotton in his ears. It felt like watching a life through glass. Bodies moved around him, blurred shapes that swam in and out of focus like fish. No one looked at him directly, or... maybe they were, but he'd long stopped trying to track their faces long enough to tell.

He finished his drink. Set the empty bottle on the table. Grabbed another from the ice bucket.

Below him, the dance floor writhed and pulsed. Shane stared down at it. Ilya was somewhere in this building. Somewhere in this city. Somewhere close enough to reach but impossibly far away.

Shane drank until the bottle was empty. Grabbed his coat. Walked down the stairs and out into the January cold without saying goodbye to anyone. The frigid air bit into his flushed skin immediately, and Shane blinked against the shift from strobing neons to dimmer streetlight orange. God, it was quiet out here. His ears rang with it, thundering bass replaced by a whitewater rush of absence.

Before him, the street stretched empty in both directions. Shane's breath fogged white. Where'd he part? Home. He wanted to go home. He wanted to go to the *cottage* and never leave it again. He

needed his car. Though... wait, no. Shane shook his head, scraping a hand over his face, rubbing at his eyes, feeling the tension in his temples. *No, you dumb fuck, you can't drive like this. Okay, okay, what to do...*

Walk it off. He could walk it off. Sober up so he didn't throw up in a cab.

Shane started walking. Montreal never felt quite like home the way Ottawa did, but he was familiar enough by now. Left, then right at a corner. Right now, left again. The sidewalk tilted under him or maybe *he* tilted, shoulder catching against brick to steady himself. Montreal at two in the morning: dark windows, locked doors, someone's distant laughter cutting through the cold. His dress shirt was too thin. The cold seeped through cotton and into his bones.

Movement felt like progress. Like working the stationary bike at 4 AM when sleep wouldn't come. *Go. Do. Fix.* His legs knew the drill even if his brain was champagne-soaked and useless. Move until the static in his head went quiet. Except there was nothing to fix. No penalty to kill. No defensive breakdown to correct. Just this: the wanting, the hurting, the impossibility of it.

Go. Do. Fix. If you can't fix, push until you can. Do not stop.

Even if he'd wanted to stop, Shane wasn't sure he could anymore.

How many blocks had he gone now? Three? Five? His feet hurt. The nice shoes he'd worn to impress Rose pinched his toes and the pavement jarred up through his soles with each step, and why was he *here*, why'd he come out at all, why why why why.

A stoop. Shane spotted it in his periphery, three concrete steps leading to a closed storefront, and his legs gave out as soon as he made it there. He sat hard, falling more than sitting. Flop. Well fuck, that didn't feel good. The cold bit through his jeans immediately but he didn't get up. Fuck. He was cold and miserable and *alone* and tomorrow Rose would ask him *why did you have Miles take me home when you could've?*

Because I still would've been thinking about him, Shane thought, blinking hard as his vision went blurry, the corners of his eyes stinging, *because I'm always thinking about him.*

The tears started.

"No, no, shit, *fuck*," Shane pressed his palms against his eyes but they came anyway, hot and fast, spilling down his cheeks. His shoulders shook. *Look at you. Pathetic.* He was crying on a Montreal street at two in the morning, drunk and freezing and no one was here to see him fall apart and... and...

He wanted to go *home*. He wanted to stop *hurting*.

His phone. At least, a coherent thought through the daze. Shane fumbled it from his pocket with numb fingers, nearly dropped it twice. The screen was too bright. He squinted at it, trying to focus. *Call a cab.* He needed to call a cab. He needed to call a cab and...

And there, sitting next to the rideshare app, were his text messages on the bottom of the screen.

Dammit.

Okay, maybe he wasn't done crying on the side of the street like a loser yet. Maybe he was sliding past the rideshare app, opening up his texts, and scrolling down down down past Rose's name, the Hayden's, his parents, his other teammates. Down and down, into the trench, into the abyss. He felt like a diver going into the deep.

He felt his heart in a vice under the immense pressure of the entire ocean and then... there.

Lily.

Their text history was sparse. A story several years old with sparse back and forth consisting of hotel room numbers. *Third floor, 338.* Chirps before games. *You ready to lose?* Nothing real. Nothing that mattered, especially not now.

Shane's fingers moved across the keyboard, clumsy and slow:

Lily

Jane: whny did you do that

Jane: right in frontnof me?

His thumb hovered over the screen. *Delete this. Bad idea. Throw the phone in the gutter. Pretend this never happened.*

Lily

Jane: whny did you do that

Jane: right in frontnof me?

Jane: you're such asshole

Jane: fuck you

Jane: fucknyou rozanov

Send and send.

Shane stared at the screen. The messages sat there, delivered, read receipt showing. Three dots appeared. Disappeared. Appeared again.

His lungs squeezed. He tried pulling air through his nose—four counts in, four hold, four out. The sports psychologist's trick for managing pre-game nerves. Except his ribs wouldn't expand right. The inhale stopped halfway, trapped somewhere behind his sternum.

Breathe. Just breathe.

He couldn't.

The street stretched empty in both directions. No cars. No people. Just Shane and the cold and the phone screen burning his retinas. His thumb hovered over the messages. He could delete them. Unsend. Pretend he'd never—

The phone buzzed.

Lily

Jane: whny did you do that

Jane: right in frontnof me?

Jane: you're such asshole

Jane: fuck you

Jane: fucknyou rozanov

Ilya: Fuck off Hollander

Four words. That was it. Four words and they punched the air out of Shane's lungs completely. He doubled over, phone clutched in both hands, forehead nearly touching his knees. The concrete scraped through his jeans.

Fuck off Hollander. Not even his first name. Not even pretending they were—what? Friends? Something more? Just Hollander. Like Shane was nobody. Like the last few years meant nothing. He tried to swallow down the sob, but it came anyway, then another. His shoulders shook and he hunched tighter, trying to make himself smaller, trying to disappear into the stoop.

More tears. His whole body shook with it now, and worse, he was typing again more texts. *Prick. Fuck. I hate you so much.*

Tears plopped fat and wet on the phone screen now as he hunched over it.

Lily

Ilya: Fuck off Hollander

Jane: fuckinf[rick

Jane: pirc

Jane: prick

Jane: fucj

Jane: i hate you so much

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Send.

Had he spelled that right? Was that legible? Shane's screen was blurry just like his head and it was hard to tell. Or care. Especially when three dots appeared. Ilya was typing. Shane watched them pulse, his breath coming in short gasps that fogged white in the cold. The dots disappeared. Reappeared. His phone buzzed.

Lily

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ily: How much have you had to drink?

Shane's fingers slipped on the screen twice before he managed to type back.

Lily

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ily: How much have you had to drink?

Jane: jot enough

Jane: NOT

Jane: stupid phoNE

He wanted to throw it. Wanted to scream. His hands shook—from cold or emotion or both—and the letters kept swimming.

Lily

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ily: How much have you had to drink?

Jane: jot enough

Jane: NOT

Jane: stupid phoNE

Jane: i want

Jane: cant even

Delete. Backspace. Try again. The screen blurred.

Lily

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ily: How much have you had to drink?

Jane: jot enough

Jane: NOT

Jane: stupid phoNE

Jane: i want

Jane: cant even

Jane: yku dont care anyway

Jane: nobogy cares

Fuck. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, smearing tears and snot across his freezing face.

Lily

Jane: i hate thta i

Jane: cant stop

Ily: How much have you had to drink?

Jane: jot enough

Jane: NOT

Jane: stupid phoNE

Jane: i want

Jane: cant even

Jane: yku dont care anyway

Jane: nobogy cares

Jane: im,drunk

Jane: im os drunk

Jane: *so**

There. Truth. Let Ilya have it.

The response came fast.

Lily

Jane: im os drunk

Jane: *so**

Ilya: Where are you?

Shane looked up from the phone, blinking against the sting in his eyes. Where was he? He turned his head left, then right. Empty street. Brick buildings. And down the block—lit windows cutting yellow rectangles into the dark. A neon Guinness sign flickered green and gold. Murphy's, the lettering read in faded script above the door.

His thumbs moved across the screen.

Lily

Jane: im os drunk

Jane: *so**

Ilya: Where are you?

Jane: bar

Jane: the bar

Jane: with the

Jane: i dont knoe

More bubbles.

Lily

Jane: bar

Jane: the bar

Jane: with the

Jane: i dont knoe

Ilya: What bar?

Ilya: Where is your girlfriend, go home

Jane: rose LEFT

Jane: i left idk

Jane: everyine left

Jane: told them to

Jane: im,FINE

He wasn't fine. He was the opposite of fine. He was sitting on frozen concrete at two in the morning crying over a man who'd just shoved his tongue down some girl's throat and who obviously did not care about him apart from caring enough to hurt him.

Lily

Jane: bar

Jane: the bar

Jane: with the

Jane: i dont knoe

Ilya: What bar?

Ilya: Where is your girlfriend, go home

Jane: rose LEFT

Jane: i left idk

Jane: everyine left

Jane: told them to

Jane: im,FINE

Jane: why you kiss her

Jane: why

Jane: looked right at me

Send send send. The words kept coming, his fingers clumsy but determined.

Another buzz.

Lily

Jane: why

Jane: looked right at me

Ilya: Where are you???

Why did Ilya care? Why now? Two months of nothing and now suddenly he cared where Shane was, what Shane was doing, whether Shane was safe? The unfairness of it crashed over him. Shane's lungs seized. He tried to inhale but the air wouldn't come, wouldn't fit past the tightness in his throat. His ribs felt compressed, shrinking, collapsing inward.

Lily

Jane: why

Jane: looked right at me

Ilya: Where are you???

Jane: i cant breahte

His vision tunneled at the edges. Black creeping in from the sides, swallowing the streetlights, the sign, everything. His phone buzzed in his hand but he couldn't focus on it. Couldn't make his eyes work. Couldn't breathe couldn't breathe couldn't—

The phone rang.

The sound cut through the white noise roaring in his ears. Shane stared at the screen. *Lily* flashed across it, the name he'd saved Ilya under years ago when they'd first started this, when secrecy mattered, when everything was simpler.

Second ring.

Shane's thumb hit the answer button.

“What?” It came out strangled. Angry. Miserable.

“What?” He snapped miserably.

“Where are you? Just—where are you?”

“I’m out. Why’d you care?”

“Because you are drunk as *fuck* and you text like you dropped phone down stairs. Where are you? *Gde ty?* Hollander. Where. Tell me where.”

“Don’t worry ‘bout it,” Shane said, fumbling to hold the phone against his ear as he wobbled back up to stand. “Not your problem.”

“*Chert voz ‘mi! Ty moya*—You are my problem!” You make yourself my problem and then—Tell me where you are.”

“Why? So you c’n come laugh at me? Show me pictures of your—your *girlfriend?*”

“I don’t *have* a girlfriend you fucking—she was nobody. Nothing, less than nothing. *Where are you?*”

“She looked like *somebody* when her tongue was down your throat!”

“Oh, *now* you care? You had perfect little girlfriend glued to you all night. Very romantic.”

“I didn’t want Rose!” Shane shouted, and it echoed off the brick facades, into the night. “I wanted—*fuck*. Fuck you, Rozanov.”

And then Shane hung up.

The phone went dead in his hand. He lowered it to his lap and pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes until colors bloomed behind his eyelids. His shoulders shook. The tears wouldn’t stop and he hated it, hated crying on a Montreal street like some pathetic—

He sucked in air through his teeth. Another breath. His lungs burned with it.

The phone stayed dark in his lap. Shane stared at it, waiting for—what? An apology? Ilya to text back and tell him to go to hell? Nothing happened. The screen stayed black.

Thirty seconds passed. Maybe a minute. Shane lost track.

Then it lit up. *Lily* flashing across the screen again, vibrating against his thigh.

Shane let it ring. Once. Twice. Three times. On the fourth ring he snatched it up.

“I said—”

“*Shane.*”

His name. Not Hollander. Not some Russian curse word. *Shane*. Ilya never called him that. Never. Not during games, not in hotel rooms, not even that night on the couch when everything had felt

too real and Shane had bolted. Ilya always kept that distance, always used his last name like a barrier between them.

Shane's anger stuttered. Stalled.

"Please." Ilya's accent thickened around the boxy English word. "Just tell me."

Shane shut his eyes. The fight drained out of him all at once, leaving nothing solid to push back with. He was cold. He was tired. And the idea of having to decide what to do next on his own felt suddenly impossible.

"... Murphy's. On... I dunno. It's a bar. I... needed... My phone's gonna die."

"Hollander you are a *disaster*. Stay there. Do not move. You understand me?"

"I'm not a child—"

"You act like one! Stay. There. You get drunk, you stop watching your drink, and everyone thinks they get a turn. You understand me or no?"

Shane looked around, entirely alone on the street. "No one's—"

"Just because you are a man does not mean—ugh! How are you so stupid, you don't even know what you look like now, what you *sound* like. You never do, Hollander. Pretty boy, all alone, can barely stand? You know what happens?"

"I..."

"I am coming for you. Stay where you are do *not* leave the bar."

"Fuck, I don't want you to—"

"I do not give a single fuck what you want right now!" Ilya yelled. "You sit down, you stay where I can find you, and you do not leave with anyone. *Da?*"

"... okay."

"Good."

The line went dead.

Shane lowered the phone and stared at Murphy's down the block. The lit windows promised warmth. His fingers had gone numb around the phone. He pushed himself up from the stoop, swaying, and started walking.

The bar's interior hit him in waves: heat first, then the smell of beer and old wood, then the dim orange lighting that made his eyes water after the harsh streetlights. Nearly empty. A few people scattered at tables in the back. The bartender—big guy, beard down to his chest—looked up when Shane walked in.

Shane made his way to the bar and sat on a stool. His legs felt unreliable beneath him.

"*Qu'est-ce que tu prends?*" The bartender's voice was gruff but not unkind.

“Beer,” Shane said in English, then corrected automatically, “*Une bière*. Whatever’s fine. *Merci*.” Even drunk, even miserable, the politeness was reflex.

The bartender set a bottle in front of him. Shane wrapped his hands around it. The glass was cold. He didn’t drink, just held it, staring at the scratched wood of the bar top.

His phone sat next to the bottle. Dark now. Ilya was coming. Shane didn’t know how long that would take. Didn’t know if Ilya would actually show up or if this was some elaborate way to make Shane feel even more pathetic than he already did.

“You okay, man?”

Shane looked up. The bartender was watching him with concern that made Shane’s stomach twist.

“Just waiting for a friend.”

Friend. Right. Is that what Ilya was?

Shane picked at the label on the beer bottle. His hands wouldn’t stop shaking. Minutes crawled by. Five. Ten. The bar was so quiet he could hear the ice machine cycling in the back. His vision kept blurring at the edges and he had to blink hard to clear it.

The door opened.

Shane’s hands flexed around his beer bottle. He didn’t look up. Couldn’t. If he looked and it wasn’t Ilya, if it was just some random person coming in for a nightcap, the disappointment might actually kill him. Footsteps crossed the floor—heavy boots on old wood—and Shane kept his eyes on the scarred bartop, tracing the water rings with his thumb.

“He with you?” The bartender’s voice.

The bartender’s voice cut through the ambient hum of the refrigerators, the distant music bleeding through the walls from somewhere. Shane’s head came up before he could stop himself.

Ilya stood just inside the doorway, snowflakes melting in his hair where the outside light caught them. His eyes swept the bar—quick, efficient, searching—and locked on Shane. The relief that crashed through Shane’s chest felt like drowning in reverse, like surfacing after too long underwater. He’d come. Ilya had actually *come*.

For a second Shane just stared. Ilya standing in the doorway didn’t slot into anything his brain had prepared for, and the delay felt almost polite, like his mind was waiting for instructions. The bottle rested forgotten against the bar. Whatever he’d been bracing for collapsed, leaving him strangely hollow and exposed, caught mid-thought with nowhere to go.

Ilya crossed the distance between them in five strides and his hand landed on Shane’s shoulder.

“Hey. Up. You look like shit.”

He did not get up. Instead, Shane just blinked at him, vision having gone blurry again. “You came.”

“Of course I come, you idiot. Can you walk?”

Shane stood. Or tried to. His legs didn’t want to cooperate and he swayed, would have gone down if Ilya’s arm hadn’t come around his waist and Shane... leaned into him. He couldn’t help it

anymore, he was miserable and tired and had been cold for so long. And Ilya let him, cursing under his breath as he did so.

“Can *you*? Walk?” Shane shot back.

Ilya made a noise that might have been a laugh, might have been exasperation. He adjusted his grip, pulling Shane closer, and kept walking. “I am not wasted.”

Cash appeared on the bar—Shane saw it in his peripheral vision, too much money for one beer—and then they were moving.

“I hate you,” Shane mumbled against Ilya’s shoulder.

“I know,” Ilya said.

“I don’t...” Shane turned his face into Ilya’s neck. “I don’t only hate you. I—” He cut himself off with a miserable sound.

“I...”

Outside. Montreal at this hour this time of year felt like the air was made of icy knives. Shane sucked in a breath and it burned going down, sharp and clean after the stale warmth of the bar. His shirt was too thin. The cold seeped through cotton and wrapped around his bones. He shivered hard enough that his teeth chattered, as did the rest of him, but Ilya’s arm stayed tight around him, keeping him upright. Shane put one foot in front of the other. The sidewalk felt farther away than it should’ve been beneath his feet, but Ilya’s grip steadied him pulling him closer.

“We talk later,” Ilya murmured, and Shane had never heard him sound so unsteady despite being the one to hold them both upright. “Not now. When you’re—just not now. Come.”

He pulled Shane in closer and Shane went with it without arguing, his steps falling into place beside Ilya’s before he could think better of it. That scared him more than anything else tonight. Ilya already had his phone out, angling his body to shield Shane from the wind while he ordered a cab. Shane was pressed back against the brick wall, Ilya’s hand steady at his waist, holding him upright while the city slid past in flashes, and now that they weren’t moving anymore, that the wind had died down a little, Shane’s nose caught it—perfume. Sweet and cloying, nothing like the clean sports soap smell he associated with Ilya. It clung to Ilya’s collar, his neck.

Her.

“You smell like her,” Shane said.

“What?”

“That girl,” Shane said. His hand came up, fingers curling in the fabric of Ilya’s collar. He rubbed at it, trying to wipe the scent away. The perfume had soaked into the fibers. He rubbed harder, knuckles dragging against Ilya’s throat. “You smell like a girl’s perfume. It’s—” He rubbed harder. His fingers twisted in the collar, bunching it. “I hate it.”

“Sorry.”

That’s it?

“Don’t be sorry.” Shane’s grip tightened on the fabric. “Be—I don’t know. Why’s it so fuckin’ hard to be *mine*?”

The word escaped before he could swallow it back. Mine. Shane had never said that before, and especially not to *Ilya*. Had never claimed anything, never asked for anything beyond the next hotel room, the next time, the next careful hour of pretending this meant nothing. His face burned despite the cold. He wanted to take it back, wanted to laugh it off as drunk rambling, but Ilya had gone still beside him and Shane couldn’t make his mouth work anymore.

Headlights swept across them. A car pulled up to the curb.

Ilya opened the door. Shane stared at it, trying to make his brain work, trying to coordinate his limbs into the simple task of getting inside. His hand reached for the doorframe and missed. Reached again and caught the edge of the seat instead. Ilya’s hand came up to cup the back of Shane’s head, fingers threading through his hair, guiding him in so he didn’t crack his skull on the doorframe. The touch was gentle. Careful. Shane’s throat closed around something that felt like gratitude or grief or both.

He collapsed onto the seat, all his strings cut.

Fake leather was cold against his legs. He heard Ilya slide in beside him, heard the door shut, and then Shane was moving before he could think about it. Not frantically—he was too drunk for frantic, too wrung out for anything but this slow, determined crawl across the seat. He pressed against Ilya’s side and buried his face in Ilya’s neck where the perfume was fainter, where underneath it he could smell just *him*.

His hand found Ilya’s hand. Shane fumbled with it, fingers clumsy and numb from cold, until their palms pressed together. He laced their fingers and squeezed, holding on like Ilya might disappear if he let go. The fit of their hands together felt right in a way nothing else had all night. In a way nothing had felt right for months.

“Hi,” Shane mumbled against Ilya’s throat.

The driver’s eyes flicked to the rearview mirror but Shane couldn’t make himself care. Not now. Not when Ilya was here and real and holding his hand like it meant something.

“Missed this.” The words tumbled out against all the warning signs, but Shane couldn’t stop them, couldn’t contain them anymore, as they pulled up from his lungs on an exhale. Two months of not touching, of pretending he was fine, of dating Rose and telling himself he just needed to try harder—all of it came spilling out in a rush of drunken honesty. Too long holding his breath. “Missed you. Stupid how much I—”

He wriggled closer.

“Two months. Why didn’t you call?”

“Stop talking,” Ilya snapped. “You told me—”

“I know what I told you.” Shane’s fingers curled against Ilya’s skin, then uncurled, then curled again like he couldn’t figure out what to do with his hands. “But I—I kept waiting for—I thought maybe you’d—” He made a noise. Frustration. Pain. Both.

Ilya caught Shane's hand mid-movement and closed his fingers around it, firm enough to stop the restless searching.

"I hate how you were looking at her," Shane continued, mouth moving against Ilya's jawline now.

"I was not looking at her like anything. I was looking at you."

"You were touching her."

"Yes."

"Why?" Shane's voice cracked. "To hurt me? Did it—did you want—"

"You were touching *her*."

Oh. Rose. Right.

Shane went quiet. How had he just *forgotten* her like that? Blip. Gone. The cab hummed beneath them, tires rolling over pavement, and his thoughts scattered in too many directions at once. Rose's face when she'd laughed at something Miles said. Her hand in his—small, delicate, *wrong*. How even when she'd kissed him goodnight last week, his brain had edited her out and replaced her with *someone* else. Hazel eyes instead of blue. Stubble instead of soft skin. A body that knew how to pin him down and make him beg for it.

God, he was the worst.

It wasn't fair to her. *None* of this was fair to her.

Rose deserved better than a boyfriend who zoned out and felt nothing when she touched him. Who made excuses to cut dates short and avoided going to bed together because... could... he even do it? What if he messed that up too? He couldn't even stop thinking about someone else even when her mouth was on his.

The cab turned a corner and Shane's stomach lurched. He pressed closer to Ilya without meaning to, needing the solid warmth of him, needing *him*, and that was the problem, wasn't it? That was the whole fucking problem.

"Do you—" Shane started, then stopped. His hand slid under Ilya's shirt, palm flat against his ribs. Warm. "When you're—" Shane tried again. "Do you think about—"

"What?"

"Other people. When you're with me."

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

His other hand slid under Ilya's shirt, palm flat against his ribs. The skin there was warm, familiar in a way that made Shane's chest ache. He spread his fingers wide, trying to feel Ilya's heartbeat, trying to prove this was real. His hand moved higher, searching, until his fingers found the chain.

The cross.

Shane's thumb traced the edge of the metal, following the shape he'd memorized in dark hotel rooms. Ilya's mother's cross. The one thing Ilya never took off, never talked about, never let anyone else touch. Shane's fingers curled around it and Ilya went rigid beside him, every muscle locking up.

"Then why—"

"Shane."

"—why won't you—"

He wanted—he didn't know what he wanted. To hold onto something solid. To make Ilya understand. To crawl inside his skin and never leave. His mouth found Ilya's neck, lips dragging against the salt-skin there, and—

But Ilya caught his wrist and pulled his hand out from under his shirt. Shane made a noise of protest, half-whine and half-growl. He tried to lean in again, seeking Ilya's mouth, needing to kiss him, needing something.

And then the cab lurched to a stop.

Shane looked around, disoriented. Buildings. Streetlights. A hotel entrance with warm light spilling out onto the pavement. He'd lost track of time, lost track of where they were going. Ilya's hotel. They were... um. Where? How long had they been driving? Where were they?

"Come on." Ilya's arm came around him again, guiding him out of the car. "Up."

And then—oh—falling? Shane stumbled getting out. His legs had forgotten how to work, knees buckling as soon as his weight hit them. Ilya caught him easily, pulling him upright, and Shane leaned into him. Let himself be held up. Let himself be taken care of, even though the rational part of his brain—the part that wasn't drowning in champagne and heartbreak—knew this was dangerous. Knew tomorrow he'd regret this. He knew Rose deserved better than him showing up drunk at another man's hotel.

But that was tomorrow's problem.

"I've got you."

"Yeah. Okay."

A hotel. They were at a hotel. Ilya's hotel.

The lobby blurred. Marble floors and gold fixtures and a chandelier that hurt to look at. The elevator dinged and Shane flinched at the sound, too loud in his ringing ears. Hallway carpet soft and bouncy under his shoes compared to concrete. A door opening, the electronic lock beeping. Lights flicking on, too bright, making him squint.

"Sit."

Shane's legs gave out and he sat heavily on the edge of the bed. The mattress dipped under his weight and shame flooded through him—sitting on someone's bed with his shoes still on. He

looked down at his feet, at his expensive shoes that pinched and made his feet ache. He needed to take them off. That was the polite thing to do, the right thing. His mother would be horrified. You didn't wear shoes on someone else's bed. You just *didn't*.

"My shoes," he said. The words came out thick, his tongue too heavy in his mouth. "I need to—"

He bent forward, reaching for his laces, but the distance stretched wrong. His fingers found the leather and slipped off. Found it again. The knot blurred in and out of focus. He'd tied them twice this morning—double-knotted like he always did because once, years ago in junior hockey, his lace had come undone mid-shift and he'd nearly broken his ankle. The memory felt important but he couldn't hold onto why.

"I know. I'll get them." Ilya knelt in front of him.

Shane watched through blurry vision as Ilya's hands went to his shoes, starting on the knots. Shane stared at the top of his head. At the golden-brown curls still damp at the temples. At the way Ilya's shoulders bent forward, at his hands—those hands that had slammed Shane into the boards a hundred times, that had scored on him, touched him with the lights off—now working patiently at Shane's laces.

No one had untied Shane's shoes for him since he was six years old and his father had taught him how to do it himself.

His hand came down without a thought and landed on Ilya's head. The curls there were still damp, whether from sweat or melted snow Shane couldn't tell. His thumb traced along Ilya's scalp, following the shape of his skull. The hair slipped through his fingers like water, and Ilya's hands stilled on his laces.

"Nice hair," Shane said. Had he ever told that to Ilya before?

"Mm," Ilya hummed, not looking at him.

Shane's fingers twisted in the golden-brown curls, pulling a little, feeling the texture of them. Softer than they looked. Always softer than they looked. Shane had learned that the first time, years ago in some hotel room he couldn't remember the name of, when Ilya had leaned down to kiss him and Shane's hands had found those curls and *pulled*.

"No, 's—" Shane's thumb traced along Ilya's scalp, following the shape of his skull. "I like it. I like *you*. I—"

Shane lost his train of thought. The room was spinning gently around him, a lazy carousel. He was so tired. The adrenaline that had carried him through the night—through seeing Ilya with that girl, through the drinking, through the crying on a frozen stoop—was draining out of him now, leaving nothing but exhaustion and the dull throb of his headache.

One of his shoes was off now. The room spun gently and he needed Ilya to look at him, needed to see his face, needed to know if this was real or if he'd wake up tomorrow and find out he'd imagined all of it.

"Rozanov?"

Ilya looked up. His eyes were dark, unreadable, and Shane's hand was still in his hair.

“Why’d you come?”

Rozanov blinked, surprised, and he chewed on the question like it was difficult to answer. Maybe it was, since Shane couldn’t think of the answer on his own. And for the answer... Shane didn’t know what he wanted. What would it mean if Ilya said *because I wanted to* or *because you asked* or *because someone fucking had to*?

He just needed to *know*.

“You texted.”

That wasn’t enough. That wasn’t an answer. Shane opened his mouth to push back, to demand something real, but his thoughts scattered before he could catch them. “I was mean to you,” he said, struggling to find the words. “Said—uh—a lot of things. I hate you. Fuck off. Um.”

“You did.” Ilya was still unlacing his other shoe. “You say that a lot.”

“... I do, don’t I?”

Ilya worked the second knot loose and pulled the shoe free. Shane’s foot hit the carpet, sock-clad and damp with sweat.

He *did* say that a lot. *Fuck off, Rozanov. I hate you. Leave me alone.* And every time—*every* single time—Ilya came back. He’d showed up at some random fuckass bar to collect him. Back in Boston at his house, he’d cooked for them, and... had... did he *have* ginger ale, or did he *buy* ginger ale knowing Shane liked it? Ilya let Shane walk out of his home two months ago without a fight, and then *still* answered when Shane drunk-texted him at two in the morning.

Shane never matched it. Never gave back what Ilya gave him. He just took and ran and hurt him and Ilya kept—

Ilya kept being *good* to him.

“You always do this,” Shane agonized, realization having finally reached his champagne soaked tongue.

“Do what?”

Nothing would come out right. His tongue felt thick and useless in his mouth. He wanted to kiss him. Wanted Ilya to tell him they were okay. Or maybe ask if they could be ever again? He wanted Ilya to apologize for the girl. Shane wanted to apologize himself for Rose, for running, for everything. He wanted to kiss him until he was breathless just to breathe him in. He pulled, dragging himself forward until their foreheads knocked together. The impact made his vision blur. His nose caught Ilya’s cheekbone. Ilya was his oxygen, and he was stricken for it. Shane’s hand was still in Ilya’s hair. He wanted to be close, so close, beneath and within and pinned and *his his his his*—

His mouth found Ilya’s jaw before he could finish the thought.

“Rozanov, I—shit, want you.”

Ilya’s forearm came up between them, pressed against Shane’s sternum, and pushed. Shane fell back onto the mattress. The bedspread bunched under his shoulders. He made a noise in the back of

his throat—irritated, wanting—and grabbed at Ilya’s arm, wrapping both hands around the forearm blocking him.

“No, Hollander.”

Shane shoved at it with his palms. Why was Ilya saying no? He was *offering*. Did he like that? Hadn’t Ilya always liked that? *You have to ask nicer than that, Hollander*. He was right here, he wanted this, why wasn’t that enough? He pushed harder but Ilya’s arm might as well have been a wall.

“You never stop me,” Shane said. And it was true—Ilya never stopped him. Never said no. So why now? What was different?

What had Shane done wrong this time?

“I am stopping you tonight,” Ilya said. “Because you are drunk.”

“So? I want you to. I’d let you. I’m fine,” Shane said immediately. He was fine. A little drunk maybe but not—he could do this. He could be good. He knew how to be good for Ilya. He loved being good for Ilya.

“You can barely sit up,” Ilya said.

That wasn’t—that wasn’t *true*. Shane’s hand slid down from Ilya’s arm to his shoulder, then fumbled under the collar of his t-shirt. See? His hands worked. Everything worked. His palm pressed flat against Ilya’s chest; skin hot, heartbeat hammering there. He spread his fingers wide, trying to prove something. That he was present. That he was here and wanted this and could handle it. He could handle anything from Ilya.

“I can,” Shane insisted. The words came out wrong, stuck together. “I can do whatever. I can do a lot, I can show you.”

His thumb dragged a short line down. Ilya’s breath caught—Shane felt it, the hitch in his breathing. See? Ilya wanted this too. So why was he acting like Shane was—like Shane was *wrong* for wanting it?

“You want it too,” Shane said.

“I want you,” Ilya said, looking at Shane miserably. He sounded like he was in pain. “I do not want this.”

The words hit Shane like a punch. *This*. This version of him. Drunk-Shane. Messy-Shane. The Shane who couldn’t even unlace his own fucking shoes. Shane who had been scared at his own name. Shane who ran away. Shane was Stupid. Not good enough. Never good enough.

“This? Huh? Then why’re you acting like I’m...” He shook his head once, hard, trying to clear it. The room swayed and he grabbed Ilya’s shoulder to keep from tipping over. “Like I’m dirty.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to,” Shane said. It was obvious, wasn’t it? Ilya thought he was disgusting. Drunk and pathetic and throwing himself at someone who didn’t want him. “And if not, prove it.”

Shane's mouth landed on his cheek. Wrong. All wrong. He made a frustrated sound—almost a whimper—and redirected, catching Ilya's jaw instead. The stubble scraped his lips as he dragged his mouth along bone. His tongue flicked out—just the tip—tasting salt and skin. He knew how to do this. He knew what Ilya liked. He shifted his angle, breath ghosting that spot just below Ilya's ear, the one that always made him—

Ilya's hands gripped his shoulders and shoved hard.

Shane fell back onto the mattress, ceiling spinning lazy circles above him. His limbs felt heavy, disconnected. He blinked up at Ilya, confused and hurt and completely lost.

“*What,*”

“I am not fucking you tonight,” Ilya said.

Shane's eyes narrowed. “Why.”

“Because you are *drunk,*” Ilya said again.

“So what?” Shane pushed himself up on his hands. The mattress dipped under his palms. He wasn't done—Ilya didn't get to just *decide* this was over unilaterally. Shane crawled forward on his hands and knees, closing the distance Ilya had tried to create. His shirt hung loose, collar stretched wide and sliding off one shoulder, and he could see it from here—the bulge in Ilya's jeans. Shane's mouth watered. He wanted to press his face there, wanted to mouth at it through the denim until Ilya couldn't say no anymore. Wanted to nuzzle and lick and prove he could make Ilya want this, want *him*. His hands found Ilya's hips, fingers hooking into the waistband and gripped, knuckles pressing against Ilya's stomach through the fabric. He pulled, trying to drag Ilya closer, trying to—

Ilya caught his wrists.

Shane's fingers curled tighter into the denim, holding on, but Ilya pried them loose one at a time. Shane tried to twist free but Ilya's grip tightened until Shane's wrist bones ground together and he finally stopped fighting.

“You can,” Shane insisted, “I *want* you to.”

“No.” Ilya's bit out. “Hollander, I am not doing this with you. I am not. I cannot. No.”

“I *want* you. And you want me.”

Ilya's hands kept Shane's hands pinned between them. “Not tonight.”

“Why're you pretending—”

“This is not pretending!” Ilya snapped. “This is me stopping because you can't hold your head up.”

Shane's mouth opened—he had arguments, he had *reasons*—but Ilya kept going.

“Shane. We are not fucking. I am not fucking you like this. You will sleep. In the morning, if you still want—” Ilya stopped. His breathing evened out with effort. “If you want, we talk. But tonight, nyet. No.”

Shane stared at him. He blinked and the room failed to settle, leaving him to feel more unmoored than ever. Ilya's face blurred at the edges and Shane realized his eyes were wet. When had that happened? He blinked hard but the tears came anyway, hot and humiliating, tracking down his cheeks. He was so tired. Bone-tired. *Soul-tired*. Tired of wanting and being wrong for wanting.

"You're such a—" Shane started, but the words tumbled away, unable to fit through his teeth. He closed his eyes and let his head drop forward until his forehead pressed against Ilya's thigh.

Above him, Ilya sighed. The sound was long and heavy and Shane felt it more than heard it—the rise and fall of Ilya's body, the exhale that seemed to carry everything neither of them could say.

"Come on." Ilya shifted back and stood, pulling Shane up with him by the elbow. Shane swayed and Ilya's hand found his ribs, steadying him. "Shirt off, it is filthy. You will wear one of mine."

Shane reached for the hem. His fingers found the fabric, lost it, found it again. He tried to pull it up but his arms got confused about which way to move. The shirt twisted around his torso.

Ilya batted his hands away, when it was clear to both of them just how much of a struggle this was, and Shane's arms dropped. He stood there while Ilya grabbed the back of his collar and pulled. The shirt went up and over his head in one motion. Shane's arms tangled in the sleeves—when had that happened?—and Ilya had to work them free, tugging the fabric down each arm like Shane was five years old and couldn't dress himself.

The shirt came off inside-out. Ilya dropped it on the floor.

Cool air hit Shane's bare chest. He blinked slow, trying to focus. His neck felt tender where—oh. Rose. The club. That felt like days ago instead of hours. Had she left a mark? Probably. She always did. Ilya was looking at it, then looking away, crossing to his duffel bag by the door.

Shane stood there swaying slightly, watching Ilya pull out a t-shirt. Black. Soft-looking.

"Arms up."

Shane lifted his arms. Or tried to. They only made it halfway before giving up. Ilya caught his wrists and guided them higher, all the way up, and slipped the shirt over Shane's head. The fabric was soft against his skin. Worn thin from washing and soft from being washed a hundred times. It smelled like Ilya's detergent, something clean and sharp that Shane had never been able to identify. Like *Ilya*.

Shane wanted to press his face into it and never come up for air.

He wanted to smother himself with it.

The shirt fell past his hips, sleeves hanging over his hands. Too big. Ilya was broader than him through the shoulders, taller by an inch or two. Shane looked down at himself, at the black fabric hanging loose on his frame, and couldn't quite process what was happening.

He'd spent years building walls—good asian son, good person, good captain, an attempt of being a good boyfriend. Brick by brick, smile by smile. And here was Ilya, seeing him at his worst and Shane... wanted to fall into him forever.

One t-shirt. That's all it took.

Ilya's hands smoothed the fabric at his shoulders. The touch lingered at his collar for a second, fingers brushing bare skin, and Shane's breath caught.

Then Ilya's hands dropped to his belt.

"Pants too. You cannot sleep in jeans."

Shane's hands came down to help but Ilya was already working the buckle. Their fingers brushed and Shane pulled back, off-balance. He swayed and caught himself with a hand on Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya kept his eyes down, focused on the belt. The leather slid free from the loops and dropped to the floor with a soft thud. Button next. Then the zipper. Shane watched Ilya's hands work, watched his fingers hook into Shane's waistband.

This should feel familiar. How many times had Ilya undressed him? Too many to count. But this was different. Slower. Ilya's knuckles grazed his hipbones as he eased the jeans down. His palms slid along the outside of Shane's thighs, careful, like Shane might break.

Shane tried to step out of them. His foot caught in the denim and he stumbled. Ilya's hand caught his hip, steadying him. The touch burned even through his boxers.

"Easy," Ilya said quietly. "Step. Other foot."

Shane lifted one foot, then the other. His hand gripped Ilya's shoulder hard, needing the anchor. His legs felt like they belonged to someone else, wobbling through each motion. Ilya pulled the jeans free and tossed them somewhere Shane couldn't see.

He stood there in his boxers and Ilya's shirt. When had he gotten so tired? His eyelids drooped and his whole body felt like it weighed a thousand pounds. He looked down at himself—at the black fabric hanging loose, at his bare legs, at Ilya still kneeling in front of him—and couldn't process how they'd gotten here.

This wasn't how it was supposed to go. They didn't *do* this. They fucked in hotel rooms and pretended they were strangers at practice and never, ever acknowledged that it meant anything. The shirt's neckline had stretched wide, slipping off one shoulder. He tried to pull it back up but his hands wouldn't cooperate.

"Lie down."

Shane obeyed. He crawled onto the bed and collapsed face-first into the pillow with a muffled sound. The mattress felt like a cloud. Or maybe he felt like a cloud. His legs hung off the edge, feet still touching the floor.

Something grabbed his ankle—Ilya's hand, he realized—and lifted. Shane's legs swung up onto the mattress. He made a noise of protest but couldn't really remember why he was protesting anymore, even though he was facefirst in a pillow. The pillow moved as Ilya repositioned itself under his head. Better. Shane rolled onto his side, eyes already half-closed. The room spun less when he was lying down.

Footsteps. Water running. The bathroom light hurt even through his eyelids. He was fading so fast now.

“Drink.”

Ilya was crouching beside the bed. Shane blinked at him. When had he moved? Shane pushed himself up on one elbow, which took two tries, and took the glass with both hands. Water sloshed over the rim and dripped onto his chest, soaking into Ilya’s shirt. He drank in three long pulls, throat working.

“More?”

Shane shook his head and flopped back down. The pillow muffled his words. “M’fine.”

He heard the glass land on the nightstand. Heard something else—plastic scraping carpet. A trash can. Ilya was putting a trash can next to the bed. In case Shane puked. Which he wasn’t going to do. He was *fine*.

Shane watched through slitted eyes as Ilya moved around the room. Taking care of him. Always taking care of him. He always did this.

“What?” Ilya asked.

Had Shane said something? Maybe. His mouth felt disconnected from his brain.

“You’re taking care of me.” The words came out slow, thick. “I... you... always doin’ this... better than I can. Nice.”

Ilya stood. “Go to sleep, Hollander. Goodnight.”

No. No, that wasn’t—Shane’s hand shot out before Ilya could move away, catching his wrist. The grip was weak. He could barely hold on.

“Stay.”

The word came out small. Smaller than he meant it. He wanted to say more, maybe try to explain that he didn’t mean stay in the other bed, didn’t mean stay in the room, he meant *stay with me, please, I can’t do this anymore, I can’t keep pretending, I need you*—but his mouth wouldn’t work and his brain was shutting down and all he had was that one word.

“I’m here.”

That wasn’t what Shane meant. He meant *here*, in this bed, close enough to touch. Shane’s thumb found the inside of Ilya’s wrist, pressed against the pulse there. Fast. Too fast. Ilya was—nervous? Scared? Shane couldn’t tell anymore. Couldn’t read him. He rubbed his thumb across that pulse point, feeling the rhythm.

“Don’t go,” he tried again.

“I’m here,” Ilya carefully extracted his wrist from Shane’s grip—gentle, like Shane was fragile—and stepped back. “Sleep now.”

Shane’s hand fell to the mattress. The loss of contact felt like falling. He wanted to reach out again, wanted to beg, wanted to tell Ilya everything he’d been too afraid to say for years. But his eyes were closing and his body was pulling him under and the last thing he felt was the absence of Ilya’s wrist in his palm. Exhaustion pulled at him like a riptide.

He was asleep before his next breath.

Shane woke to a headache that felt like someone had taken a hammer to the base of his skull.

He kept his eyes shut. Light pressed against his eyelids—too bright, even filtered through skin. His mouth tasted like he'd been licking ashtrays. His tongue was thick and dry, stuck to the roof of his mouth.

He swallowed. Regretted it immediately.

Ugh.

His stomach lurched. Not quite nausea but close enough that he froze, breathing through his nose in slow counts. *In for four. Hold for four. Out for four.* The technique his sports psychologist had taught him for anxiety. For when his thoughts ramped up before games, before pressers, before—

Before what?

Shane's brain felt like static again. White noise where memories should be. He tried to piece together the night before and got fragments: Rose's laugh. Purple lights. Champagne bubbles bursting on his tongue. Cold concrete under him. And—

Ilya.

The memory slammed into him with the force of a hip check, throwing him into the plexiglass hard enough to snap his spine. Ilya kissing that girl. Ilya's hands on her waist. That smile across the dance floor, cruel and aimed directly at Shane like a weapon.

Shane's eyes opened.

White ceiling. Unfamiliar. Not his hotel room. Not his room in Ottawa. Not his cottage. Where—

He turned his head and the room spun. He squeezed his eyes shut again, waiting for the vertigo to pass. When he opened them, he took in details slowly: nightstand with a water glass, sweating condensation. Trash can positioned next to the bed. Curtains drawn but light seeping around the edges. The bed across from his was rumpled but empty.

Oh god. Where am I?

Shane pushed himself upright too fast. Blood rushed from his head and spots bloomed across his vision. He braced his palms on the mattress, breathing hard through his mouth. His shirt; no, not his shirt. Black. Too big. It hung off his shoulder, neckline stretched wide.

Ilya's shirt, he realized.

His jeans were gone. He looked down at his bare legs, at his boxers, at the oversized t-shirt that smelled like the man he couldn't get out of his head. Pieces filtered back in: Murphy's bar. The sidewalk. Crying on a stoop. Texting Ilya. *Fuck you Rozanov. I hate you so much.* Hands on his shoes, unlacing them because Shane's fingers wouldn't work. Shane trying to—

Oh god oh god oh god.

Shane groaned. *Oh fuck.* He couldn't remember anything else.

Pain throbbed through his head again, starting at the base of his skull and radiating forward until it settled behind his right eye. Shane pressed two fingers into his temple, trying to apply enough pressure to dull the ache and pressure. Great, just great, a migraine would make everything *worse* than it already was; even the thin strip of light leaking around the curtains felt like it was drilling into his retina. He rolled onto his back and, again, the world wobbled around him. When he opened his eyes, the white ceiling refused to stay in one place.

"Fuck," Shane croaked.

A chair scraped against carpet somewhere to his left. Shane turned his head and regretted it immediately as the motion sent fresh waves of *oh shit, I'm going to be sick and die, and death might be preferable to living* through him. The room lurched, nausea climbing fast enough that he froze, jaw locked, breathing shallow through his nose until it settled into something survivable.

Ilya was there.

He stood near the chair by the window, one hand braced on its back like he'd pushed himself up from it not long ago. He was still dressed in last night's clothes. The shirt hung rumpled, creased where he must have slept in it, collar tugged out of shape. His hair had lost whatever careful disorder it usually carried and now just fell where it wanted, curls flattened on one side, springing loose on the other. There were shadows under his eyes.

Ilya crossed the room without saying anything, picked up the water glass from the nightstand, and held it out.

Shane pushed himself upright. His arms felt disconnected from his body but he pushed himself up anyway, wobbling, and he hated to feel so weak for this audience of one. He took the glass in both hands to keep it steady. The water went down cold and fast, shocking his throat. He didn't stop drinking until half of it was gone and his lungs were screaming for air. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and made himself look at Ilya.

... who was just *looking* at him with his jaw set, lips pulled into a thin line. He looked angry. He looked... *hurt*.

It would've been easier if he was yelling.

Shane felt himself flush, the prickle of it starting in his cheeks and spread down his neck, into his ears. He needed to leave. He needed to fix this. His brain reached immediately for exits and solutions the way it always did after a loss or a mistake of any severity. Leave before it turns ugly. Fix it before anyone says it out loud.

Except his legs didn't move.

He stayed where he was, perched on the edge of Ilya's bed in a borrowed shirt, feet planted wrong on unfamiliar carpet, staring at the man he had absolutely made a mess of the night before and trying to reconstruct how badly. The memories were there, hovering just out of reach, and the not-knowing was almost worse than whatever the truth was going to be.

"Oh god. What—how did I—Where—"

“Good morning. You got shitfaced and almost donated your kidneys to the black market, until I was kind enough to collect you.” Ilya said, breaking off his ramble. His gaze was stormy and fixed somewhere past Shane’s left ear, jaw set like he was bracing for impact. “Then you begged to suck my cock a few times as thank you. You are at my hotel, and that is my bed.”

He... *what? What?!* The sentence was over before his brain caught up to it. Shane sat, frozen still, as his body reacted ahead of memory, the shape of the night refusing to come together.

“Oh god. Did we—”

“No, Hollander,” Ilya said flatly.

“But I—” Shane’s hands fell away from his face and landed in his lap. The memories were coming back now in flashes that made him want to crawl into the mattress and disappear. His fingers hooking into Ilya’s jeans, trying to pull him closer. Crawling across this bed—this exact bed—on his hands and knees. His mouth on Ilya’s jaw, his neck, anywhere he could reach. Saying *I want you* like it was a revelation instead of something he’d been trying to hide for years. Ilya’s forearm coming up between them, pushing him back. Saying no. Saying—

“I tried to—I’m so sorry. Fuck. I’m so sorry, I was so drunk, I didn’t mean—”

“Stop.”

“No, I need to—I shouldn’t have—”

“Stop apologizing. It is fine. You were drunk. I said no. It is over.”

It is over.

Shane flinched. “Rozanov—”

“You only want me when you’re drunk anyway, *da?* So is fine. Forget about it.”

“That’s not—” Shane swung his legs off the bed, swaying slightly. “That’s not true.”

“No? This is news to me. You have been very clear, Hollander. Very busy. Too busy to remember I exist, and then you get drunk and suddenly you want—”

“I want you sober,” Shane said. His hands curled into fists on his thighs. “I want you—fuck, Rozanov—it’s a problem how much I want you. I wanted you at the club. I wanted you even when I’m with—which was fucked up, but I—” He sucked in a breath. “I *always* want you.”

Ilya stopped moving. His shoulders locked, his breathing changed—Shane could see his chest rise and fall, slower now, like he was forcing himself to stay calm.

Why was explaining this so hard? Why was *everything* about this hard?

“... I... let me... give me a second.” The words were somewhere in his head but he couldn’t get them from his brain to his mouth. His tongue felt thick and useless. He needed to explain—about Rose, about the club, about the two months of radio silence—but every time he tried to grab onto a thought, it slipped away. His hands were still curled into fists on his thighs. He loosened them, then tightened them again. Ilya was watching him and that made it worse. Shane could feel the weight of his gaze like a physical thing.

How did he explain that he'd been terrified? That hearing his own name from *those* lips, like *that*, when everything was almost perfect, so domestic and sweet he wanted to melt into it, and that had made him panic because it meant this was real, not just sex in anonymous hotel rooms? Fucking tuna melts and ginger ale and stay the night and *his name*, along with the realization that Ilya was really, truly, looking at him.

How terrifying, how wonderful, to be seen.

He wasn't sure anyone ever had, not for real anyway, before.

And... it'd frightened him.

And that hurt Ilya.

Shane took a breath. Let it out.

Ilya hadn't moved. He stood there waiting, and Shane could see the tension in his jaw, the way his hands hung loose at his sides like he was forcing them not to curl into fists. Honestly he looked like he might bolt, and wouldn't that be funny? Wouldn't that be *fair*? But of course he wasn't running, Ilya was being *nice*, nicer than Shane ever was, and he was waiting for him to spit it out.

"Rose... I like her a lot."

"Tch. Of course. Makes perfect sense to chase her while you keep crawling back to me. Fuck off, Hollander." Ilya scrubbed a hand over his face and exhaled hard. "I... do not blame you for chasing her, Hollander. She is safe choice, and I know I am... this... was... there is chance that driver saw us last night in cab when you were... It does not matter what you were doing; we can deny everything. You can still have white picket fence and movie star girlfriend. I will not stand in way of that."

"Stop it! I'm trying to say that I like her a lot, but I... know... that it's a mistake," Shane continued. His face was burning now, words tumbling out. "I thought maybe if I tried with someone else, someone I could actually—but I couldn't. Every time she touched me, even dancing, I just—" He scrubbed a hand down his face. "It was awful. I felt awful. Because all I wanted was you."

"Then why—"

"Because why anything! I don't want to fuck it all up!"

His lungs were working overtime, pulling in air faster than he could use it. The words had ripped out of him and now he sat there on the edge of the bed with his hands twisted in the sheets, knuckles white, trying to figure out what came next.

Ilya watched him. Waiting.

"I don't—" Shane started, then stopped. His mouth opened and closed. He wanted to crawl out of his own skin. "I'm shit at this. I don't know how to—"

Shane stood up. Too fast. Perspective slipped and he swayed, one hand shooting out to brace against the mattress before his knees could give out. Ilya didn't move to help. Just stood there watching him struggle to stay upright.

“When you called me Shane,” Shane said. His throat felt tight, like someone had wrapped a fist around his windpipe. “In bed. When we—”

Blood rushed to his face. His ears burned with it.

Ilya was still very, very still.

“I thought you wanted me gone,” Ilya said slowly.

“I freaked out. I’m sorry.” Shane shook his head, and the words tumbled out fast, tripping over each other in their panicked haste. Shane took a step forward. His hands hung at his sides, fingers opening and closing because he didn’t know what to do with them. He never knew what to do with them. “I wanted—fuck, I want—”

He closed the distance between them. His hands came up and found Ilya’s face. His fingers shook where they pressed against Ilya’s jaw. He kissed him.

It wasn’t good. Shane’s mouth hit Ilya’s too hard and their teeth clicked together. He didn’t care. His fingers dug into Ilya’s jaw, holding on, and Ilya’s hands came up to grip his hips. The touch steadied him. Shane made a sound against Ilya’s mouth, begging, and kissed him harder. His mouth opened. His breathing had gone ragged and uneven. His lips were dry and chapped and he probably tasted awful but Ilya was kissing him back and that was all that mattered, all he could think about.

When they broke apart, Shane couldn’t hold himself up anymore. His forehead dropped to Ilya’s shoulder. He breathed against Ilya’s collar in short, nervous bursts.

“You’re not a mistake. I don’t—look I don’t know what you are, what this is. But it’s not a mistake.”

Ilya’s mouth pressed against Shane’s temple. His breath was warm there, shaky. Shane felt it—the exhale that seemed to go on forever, like Ilya had been holding it in for months.

“Okay. *Da*. Okay.” He was saying it for himself as much as Shane.

That... that was it? Okay. *Okay?*

“Okay?”

They were doing this?

“Okay.”

They *were* doing this, whatever *this* was. Shane’s arms came up, wrapping around Ilya and pulling him in. His fingers dug into Ilya’s back, clinging, and he couldn’t stop shaking. His whole body trembled with it, exhaustion or relief or terror or all three at once, and Shane buried his face in Ilya’s neck and held on. His throat felt raw from drinking too much and crying too much. His heartbeat hammered against Ilya’s chest. Or maybe that was Ilya’s heartbeat. He couldn’t tell anymore.

They stood like that. Shane didn’t know for how long. Long enough for his breathing to even out. Long enough for the shaking to subside to a tremor in his hands. Long enough that when Ilya finally pulled back, hands still on Shane’s hips, Shane’s first instinct was panic—*he’s leaving, I said too much, I ruined it—*

But Ilya didn't leave. Instead, he just looked at Shane with those hazel eyes, searching his face and... then there it was. The slow, wonderful, curl of those lips into that lazy, crooked smile he loved.

"You need shower. You smell like an ashtray fucked a brewery."

Shane laughed, "Jesus, Rozanov."

"Is true. Go. There is mouthwash. You can use my toothbrush if you want, I don't care."

"That's disgusting."

"Your mouth was on all sorts of things last night. You are disgusting."

"I—we didn't—"

"No, but you tried very hard. Toothbrush is like \$2. I will buy new one," Ilya said, herding him towards the bathroom at the same time. "Go clean up. Then you eat. I ordered enough food for small army, which should be enough for one very stupid and boring person like you."

Shane stumbled into the bathroom and shut the door behind him. The lock clicked. He leaned against it, forehead pressed to the wood, and tried to breathe.

He'd kissed Ilya. He'd told Ilya he wanted him. That it wasn't a mistake.

Oh god.

The bathroom was small and pristine, and looked like every other hotel he'd seen during the season: white tile, white sink, white towels folded on a chrome rack. Shane pushed off the door and turned on the shower. Steam billowed up immediately. He shed Ilya's shirt, folded it and set it on the sink, and stepped under the spray. Hot water hit his shoulders and he flinched. Too hot. He adjusted the temperature and stood there, letting it pound against the back of his neck. His head throbbed, but the warm water and steam was helping, even though his stomach was churning. This wasn't the *worst* hangover he'd ever had, but last night's alcohol was still working its way through his system, making everything feel overexposed.

He'd *cheated* on Rose.

The thought arrived with perfect clarity, cutting through the hangover fog. Not *about* to cheat. He had already done it. His mouth on Ilya's. His hands in Ilya's hair. Begging Ilya to fuck him while Rose's lipstick was still smeared on his collar, while Rose was slipping into bed and maybe dreaming of him.

Suddenly dizzy, Shane grabbed the hotel soap and scrubbed at his arms, his chest, his neck. The bar was small and slippery in his hands. He scrubbed harder, trying to wash off the club smoke, the alcohol sweat, the evidence of last night. If Ilya hadn't stopped him—and god, what kind of person did it make Shane that Ilya had been the one with enough sense to say no?—they would've had sex.

If he'd had his way, Shane would've woken up this morning having done more than just *kiss* someone who wasn't his girlfriend.

He was a terrible boyfriend. Worse than terrible. He was the kind of person who paraded Rose around to games and dinners and press events while thinking about someone else, using her like a

shield for... for what? *Why* had he gone and made it so complicated?

The water ran down his face. He wasn't sure if it was just water anymore.

But god, the relief. The exhilaration sitting bright and terrifying in his chest. Ilya had come for him. Ilya had said *okay*. And Shane—Shane could stop fighting now. Stop pretending he wanted anything else.

Stop being strong enough to try to walk away.

He turned off the water, then stood there dripping on the bath mat, staring at himself in the fogged mirror. His reflection was blurred, features indistinct. Maybe that was better. He didn't want to look himself in the eye right now. Cleaning was, as always, an easier and therapeutic task to focus on instead, and he noticed he picked up the red toothbrush by the sink. Red. Still pretty new, like he'd just bought it for this game. Shane squeezed toothpaste onto the bristles, knowing that if he wasn't so delirious right now, he'd be horrified by the idea of sharing a toothbrush with another person but...

It was hard to care about swapping spit at the moment. Mint taste cut through the stale alcohol coating his tongue. When he finished, he rinsed and set the toothbrush back in the holder next to where it had been, then, after a moment's pause, wrapped himself in a towel and stepped back out into the suite.

Ilya was sitting on the edge of the bed, still dressed in yesterday's clothes. He looked up when Shane emerged. His eyes went to Shane's face, then dropped to his bare shoulders, the towel, and back up. His mouth opened like he was about to say one thing, then closed, before opening and saying instead: "Feel better?"

"Like death," Shane said, but he managed a weak smile. "Probably deserve it though considering... uh... how I was behaving last night, and for—" He paused, rubbing the back of his neck. "For cheating on Rose."

Ilya snorted. He poured Shane coffee and pushed the cup across the table. "I was here first. Technically, *she* is homewrecker."

No, Shane thought, *I think I'm the one that wrecks things*.

It was a bad joke. Terrible, really. Not even funny.

They both laughed anyway, and some of the tension in Shane's shoulders eased as he crossed to the bed where Ilya had laid out the food. Then the smell hit him, eggs, bacon, toast, and his stomach growled, festering with hunger. He picked up a piece of toast and took a small bite from the corner, letting the bland starch settle on his tongue before swallowing.

Perfect.

Ilya sat beside him with his own plate. They ate without talking, which should have felt awkward but... it wasn't. Maybe they'd gone through so much shit that nothing *could* feel awkward anymore. Feeling bold, Shane reached for a piece of bacon from Ilya's plate. Old habit from years of stealing food off teammates' trays, except Ilya wasn't his teammate and this wasn't the cafeteria and Shane's hand was shaking slightly when he brought the bacon to his mouth. Ilya, seemingly unbothered, retaliated by snagging Shane's toast and biting off a huge chunk just to be a dick.

He loved that.

They were sharing food. They were sitting on a bed together eating breakfast like this was normal, like they did this all the time, like Shane hadn't spent months convinced he'd destroyed whatever this was, and that it might be gone forever.

"I thought I ruined everything," Ilya said eventually. He wasn't looking at Shane, just down at his plate. "After the... when you stayed over. When you said you couldn't do this."

Shane's hand stilled halfway to his mouth. The toast felt heavy between his fingers. His brain scrambled for words, for the right thing to say that wouldn't make this worse. "You didn't ruin anything. I did. I'm the one who—"

He stopped. How did he explain that hearing his own name in Ilya's voice had terrified him? That the tuna melt and the ginger ale and the talking on the couch had felt too much like something Shane could want, maybe even *have*, and therefore something that would destroy him when it inevitably ended?

"We both suck at this," Shane said finally.

"*Da*. We are disasters."

"Absolute fucking disasters," Shane agreed.

He looked at Ilya then. Really looked. Ilya's hair stuck up where he'd slept on it wrong, curls flattened on one side and springing loose on the other. Stubble shadowed his jaw. His eyes were tired but focused completely on Shane's face, searching for something Shane wasn't sure he knew how to give.

Shane leaned in before his brain could catch up and tell him all the reasons this was a bad idea.

Ilya met him halfway.

This kiss was different from the frantic collision earlier. Slower. Shane's mouth found Ilya's and lingered there, tasting coffee and toothpaste and underneath that the salt-warmth he'd been trying not to think about in someone else's arms. His hand came up and cupped Ilya's jaw, thumb pressing into the hollow beneath his cheekbone where stubble gave way to softer skin. Ilya's fingers slid into Shane's damp hair, tangling in the short strands and tugging just enough to make Shane's breath catch.

God, he missed this. He needed this.

Out of reflex, or maybe he was still drunk. Shane moved closer, hooking his leg over Ilya's thigh and the towel rode up but Shane couldn't bring himself to care. His lungs burned but he kept kissing Ilya, kept trying to prove through touch what he couldn't figure out how to say with words. That he wanted this. That he was terrified of wanting this. That he'd been thinking about this for forever and hating himself for it and now that it was happening he didn't know how to stop.

When they finally broke apart, Shane couldn't make himself pull back. His forehead dropped to Ilya's and he stayed there, breathing hard, trying to remember how his body was supposed to work.

"We should probably talk," Shane murmured. "About what this means. What we're—"

“Later. We talk later.”

Shane nodded. His hand slid down Ilya’s chest, fingers spreading over his ribs. The plates got shoved aside and then he was climbing into Ilya’s lap, towel loosening around his hips. Ilya’s hands found his waist underneath it, palms warm against skin still damp from the shower, and Shane’s mouth went back to Ilya’s jaw. He kissed along the line of bone, tasting salt and stubble. His teeth grazed Ilya’s collarbone and Ilya’s grip on his waist tightened.

He was hard. Fully hard, his dick pressing against Ilya’s hip through the thin barrier of the towel, and there was no way Ilya couldn’t feel it.

“Are you—”

Shane’s face flushed red. “I—yeah. Sorry, I just—” He bit his lip. “Didn’t you say something last night? About if I still wanted you in the morning?”

“That you remember but not begging for my cock until I put you to bed like a toddler?” Ilya stared at him. Then he laughed, and the *happy* sound made Shane’s heart do a horrible flip-flop in his chest. “I meant if you wanted to *talk*. Not—” He gestured at Shane’s lap.

“Oh.” Shane looked mortified. He started to pull away but Ilya tightened his grip on his waist.

“But,” Ilya said, his mouth curling into a smirk, “after the shit you put me through last night? Making me watch, making me hunt you down like a dog, so drunk I had to *carry* you back here, trying to seduce me when you could barely stand?” He leaned in, lips brushing Shane’s ear. “So messy, Hollander. But now. Now that you’re sober, I have no problem fucking you like you deserve.”

Shane shuddered. “Yeah?”

“*Da*.” Ilya’s hand slid up Shane’s spine. “You want that? Besides, I hear is hangover cure. Maybe. I saw on WebMD.”

“You didn’t look up anything on WebMD.”

“No, but I could have. The research would agree with me. I am very confident about this. So. Do you want?”

“*Fuck* yes.”

Immediately, Shane’s back hit the mattress and the air punched out of his lungs. Ilya had flipped him like it was nothing—the same way he’d pin someone during a fight, except Shane wasn’t fighting. The towel came loose and fell open, exposing him completely. Shane’s first instinct was to cover himself. His hands twitched toward his lap before he forced them still. This was Ilya. Ilya had seen him naked hundreds of times. But this felt different. This was broad daylight and that there was no pretending anymore this meant *nothing*.

Ilya was looking at him, eyes tracking down Shane’s body and Shane felt it like a touch; his flushed face, his heaving chest, his dick hard and obvious against his stomach. Shane wanted to squirm under that gaze, wanted to hide, but he stayed still.

“Then I will give it to you,” Ilya said, “Everything you want.”

Everything.

What did he want? He wanted this—Ilya's hands on him, Ilya's mouth on him, Ilya looking at him like Shane was the only thing that mattered. He wanted to stop thinking. He wanted Ilya inside him, in his lungs, in his bloodstream. He wanted—

Ilya crawled over him and Shane's brain went offline.

Ilya kissed him slow and deep, nothing rushed about it, and Shane squirmed beneath him. His mouth made sounds he'd be embarrassed about later, needy and desperate, but he couldn't *stop*. Ilya's fingertips traced the dips between his ribs, counting them. His large palm spread across his stomach, pressing. Thumbs dug into his hipbones hard enough that Shane gasped into Ilya's mouth.

He knew Shane's body better than Shane knew it himself. Ilya knew exactly where to touch to make Shane's hips jerk up. He knew the spot on his ribs that made him shiver. He knew how much pressure Shane needed before pleasure tipped into pain. The shower had left Shane's skin oversensitive. Every touch felt amplified—Ilya's callused palms dragging across his chest, the scrape of stubble against his throat, the solid weight of Ilya's body pinning him down. His hands scrambled for purchase on Ilya's shoulders. He needed something to hold onto or he was going to fly apart.

Shane's fingers found Ilya's belt, tugging. "Off."

Ilya caught his wrists and pinned them above his head. "Patience."

And then Ilya's mouth found his throat. Teeth scraped where his neck met his shoulder and bit down, not gently. Shane's hips jerked up, back arching off the mattress, trying to get closer, trying to get more pressure, more *anything*.

Ilya moved lower. His teeth dragged over Shane's collarbone, found his nipple. Shane's whole body went rigid when Ilya's tongue flicked across it, then his mouth closed around it entirely. The wet heat made Shane's thighs clench around Ilya's hips.

"Rozanov!"

Shane's tongue tripped over the syllables. He'd called him that for years—on ice, everywhere, and all to keep distance when there wasn't any. Ilya moved to his other nipple and Shane's thoughts scattered.

"*Ilya.*"

"God—fuck—"

Ilya went still above him. His breath hitched and Shane opened his eyes to find Ilya staring down at him with pupils blown wide. Then Ilya's hands left his wrists and Shane's arms fell back to the mattress as he sat up and stripped off his shirt in a single pull. Shane's hands flew to his chest the second they were free. He spread his fingers wide and pressed his palms against hot skin. The bear tattoo on Ilya's ribs. The ridges of muscle he'd memorized in a hundred dark hotel rooms. He traced down Ilya's stomach and felt it contract under his touch.

Ilya's hands went to his belt. Shane watched him work buckle, button, zipper. Off, *off*. Denim slid down and Ilya kicked his jeans away with his boxers tangled in them. His cock hung heavy and

hard between his legs. Shane stared at it, the wicked curve and how it'd gone flushed dark, already leaking at the tip. He'd taken that before. He wanted it now, wanted to taste the salt beading there, wanted Ilya inside him until he couldn't *think*.

"Come here," Shane said, reaching for him.

Ilya settled between Shane's thighs and ground down. The friction punched a moan out of Shane's throat. Their cocks slid together, slick with precome, and Shane's vision whited out at the edges. Ilya rocked his hips in a slow grind and Shane's mouth fell open.

"You're so—" Shane's hands gripped Ilya's ass, pulling him closer. "I need—"

"I know what you need." Ilya kissed him again, messy and wet. Shane was already writhing beneath him, hips rolling up to meet each grind of Ilya's pelvis.

Ilya stretched toward the nightstand and yanked the drawer open. Shane heard him rummaging, heard the snap of a cap being popped. Lube? Part of him winced that it was there at all, that Ilya might've brought someone else back to fuck, but mostly he just felt relieved. *Thank god*. He needed Ilya inside him *now*. The bottle landed somewhere on the bed and Ilya poured slick over his fingers. Shane watched him warm it between his palms and his cock twitched against his stomach. He spread his legs wider and tilted his hips up in shameless, impatient, invitation.

"Hurry up."

"Bossy," Ilya hummed, hardly bothered.

Fucking dick. Shane was so weak for him, he knew.

He tossed the bottle away and circled his fingertips around Shane's opening, but *slowly*. Shane wanted to kill him, having to bite down on his lower lip to keep from begging again. He was already begging. His thighs fell open wider and his heels dug into the mattress, trying to tilt himself up, to get more contact. Ilya's finger pressed and Shane's breath stopped somewhere in his throat. The pressure built and then—there, inside, just the first knuckle but Shane felt it everywhere. His lungs remembered to work and air rushed back in too fast.

His eyelids fluttered shut. The stretch was nothing yet but his body knew what was coming, knew what Ilya's fingers would do to him, and the anticipation made his toes curl against the sheets. Ilya was still going slow. Too slow. Shane needed more, needed to be filled, needed Ilya to stop teasing and just—

"Look at me," Ilya said.

Shane forced his eyes open. Everything was too bright, too much. Ilya's face swam in and out of focus above him, that sharp jaw, those hazel eyes darker than Shane had ever seen them. He tried to hold the eye contact but his vision kept blurring at the edges, his left eye watering for no reason except that his whole body felt like it was short-circuiting. Two fingers now, pressing deeper, and Shane felt himself falling apart.

"I—" The word came out broken. He didn't know what he was trying to say. *I want this. I've wanted this. Please don't stop.*

Ilya's fingers crooked inside him and lightning shot up Shane's spine. His mouth fell open on a gasp, "More, I can take it."

"Always so good for me."

The third finger breached him and Shane arched off the bed, head pressing back into the pillow. His neck strained and his hands scrabbled for purchase on Ilya's shoulders, nails digging in. The stretch bordered on too much—that edge where his body resisted and welcomed at the same time. His dick was leaking steadily now, smearing precome across his stomach, and he should be embarrassed but he couldn't find it in himself to care.

"You love this, *da*? Love having me inside you." Ilya said, and Shane's brain latched onto those words.

Yes, he wanted to say, *yes*, and *please*, *more*. But by now he'd realized Ilya's game, that they were going *slow*, and he wanted to be good for him. He'd spent his whole life trying to be good: good son, good teammate, good player. It never felt like it was *enough*. But here—Ilya inside him, above him, making every decision—Shane didn't have to be good. He had to be *open*.

All he had to do was let Ilya take him apart, and it was so easy, knowing that Ilya would put him back together.

"No one else could give you this." Ilya's thumb pressed against Shane's rim, stretching him wider. "A 'mistake' you called it. Mm. You are right, it's true, what woman could fuck you like I do. Who could spread you open and make you beg."

Ilya's fingers moved inside him, scissoring, opening him up, and Shane's body remembered this. His muscles knew how to relax around the intrusion, knew the rhythm of give and take. Months had passed, yes, but he'd never forget the feeling; he'd been waiting for this, for Ilya's hands, for Ilya's cock. Everything else—Rose, the club, the running—had been Shane trying to convince himself he could want something else.

He couldn't. He'd never been able to.

"Yes," Shane gasped. "God, yes—only you—"

Ilya pulled his fingers out. Shane whined at the loss.

"Shh," Ilya said, slicking his own cock. "I have you."

The first inch pushed inside and Shane's breath punched out. His hands flew to Ilya's back, nails catching on sweat-slick skin. The burn started immediately—his body fighting what his mind begged for—and Shane forced himself to breathe through it, to relax the muscles that wanted to clench and push Ilya out. His thighs shook where they bracketed Ilya's hips.

Halfway in, and Shane's vision blurred at the edges. His body seized involuntarily and Ilya went still, letting Shane adjust. Shane's fingernails dragged down Ilya's spine, leaving red lines he'd see tomorrow in the mirror and hate himself for wanting to put there. *More*. He needed Ilya deeper, needed to be split open until there was no space left between them, until Shane couldn't pretend this was anything other than what it was.

Ilya pushed the rest of the way in and bottomed out.

Oh.

With a cry, Shane's head lolled back, neck arching, and his legs came up on instinct, ankles locking behind Ilya's back, heels digging into muscle, pulling him in even though there was nowhere left to go. They stayed like that: Ilya buried inside him to the hilt, Shane holding on with every limb.

Like Ilya might disappear if he let go.

This was what Shane had been running from. Not the sex, because they'd had sex before, countless times, but *this*. The pathetic gratitude flooding through him for the stretch of Ilya's cock, for the bruises already forming on his hips from Ilya's fingers. This was peace. This was right. His mind was blissfully quiet without the static, instead filled with him, *Ilya Ilya Ilya*, the taste of him, the weight of him, the *sound* of him and the deep seated twitch of his shaft inside. There was no game plan or exits or autopilot. There was only them, *Ilya*, everywhere, making the choices Shane had been terrified to make himself, *seeing* him and *finding* him and *saving* him.

How could he deserve someone so wonderful? How could it be allowed?

He was the worst kind of mess, nearly crying because Ilya was inside him where he belonged and it had been so *long* and he had *missed* him.

He really was the worst. So much had gone wrong and still *would* go wrong in the aftermath. But lying here with Ilya's weight pressing him into the mattress, with Ilya's cock stretching him open and Ilya's heartbeat hammering against his chest—Shane found he didn't care. Let it all burn down. Let his carefully constructed life fall apart. If he was going to be ruined, at least it would be worth it.

At least it would be the two of them. If this wrecked him—and it would, it already was—at least Ilya would be wrecked too. Shane could see it in the way Ilya's arms shook where they braced on either side of his head, in the ragged edge of his breathing. In the way Ilya looked at him like Shane was the only thing keeping him from flying apart. They'd destroy each other.

The fuse was already lit.

Shane forced himself to look up at Ilya above him: dark hair falling forward, damp at the temples, his shoulders trembling with the effort of holding still. The heat in Ilya's eyes could've burned him alive. Pupils blown so wide there was barely any color left, and all of it focused on Shane like nothing else in the world existed.

"Fuck," Shane gasped. His hips shifted, trying to get friction, trying to get *anything* except this frozen moment of too much.

Two months of hell. Two months of wanting this, of trying not to want it. Worth it. All of it worth it for this: Ilya buried inside him, barely holding on.

"Move," Shane demanded, breathless. "Fuck me. Please."

"When I'm ready. For now, I want to look at you," Ilya said, rolling his hips just enough to make Shane gasp and his hands claw at Ilya's shoulders. "I have ruined you, haven't I? For anyone else."

Shane's brain short-circuited. *Yes*. The answer was yes, had been yes since the first time Ilya touched him their rookie year in that awful hotel. He was ruined for this, for being pinned down

and split open, for the weight of Ilya on top of him, for the way Ilya looked at him like he owned him. Like Shane belonged to him. Shane had never wanted to belong to anyone before. Had spent his whole life being self-sufficient, independent. But here, now, held down and filled and stared at like Ilya was memorizing every inch of him, he wanted it. Wanted to be Ilya's.

God, he wanted to be his forever.

"You could never go back," Ilya continued, sounding smug and filthy. "No woman could hold you down like this. Could never take you apart the way I do."

"Never," Shane managed. "Only—fuck—only want you—"

Ilya pulled back and drove in hard. The force of it punched a cry from Shane's throat, sent his nails raking down Ilya's spine hard enough to leave welts. He wanted to leave marks. Wanted Ilya to feel this tomorrow in the shower, wanted evidence carved into skin that this happened, that Shane had been here, that for once he'd stopped trying to be good and just *taken*.

Ilya didn't let up, and each thrust harder than the last, faster, until Shane couldn't think past the next snap of Ilya's hips. This was what hockey had trained them for: the endurance, the punishment their bodies could take, the way they both pushed past limits normal people respected. They were both *strong*, they were both *insatiable*. Shane slammed his hips up to meet him, thighs locked around Ilya's waist with the same bruising force he'd use in a board check. His body remembered the mechanics: angles, leverage, how to use his hockey-built strength to take Ilya deeper. How to clench and squeeze until Ilya's rhythm faltered and he groaned.

Ilya was losing control. Shane could feel it in the erratic drive of his hips, in the fingers digging crescents into Shane's hip bone. Those would bruise. Shane *wanted* them to bruise. He wanted to skate tomorrow and feel the ache with every stride, wanted the physical proof because everything else about this—about them—had always needed to stay hidden.

"Touch yourself," Ilya gritted out.

Shane's hand flew to his cock, stroking in time with Ilya's thrusts, matching the brutal rhythm, and his other hand twisted in the sheets hard enough that his knuckles went white. The headboard slammed against the wall in a steady percussion that should've embarrassed him because it was *absolutely* loud enough to wake the neighbors, but he didn't care, couldn't, not when Ilya was staring down at him like that.

"Close," Shane gasped. "I'm—fuck—"

His hand moved faster. Ilya's cock nailed his prostate with each thrust and Shane's vision went hazy. He was being split apart, unmade, every careful piece of his public self cracking open to reveal the wanting truth of him beneath. This was what terrified him: not the sex, but the way Ilya saw straight through to the pathetic, needy parts Shane spent his whole life hiding. The parts that wanted to be held down and taken apart, that wanted someone else to make the decisions so Shane could finally stop trying to be perfect.

He could feel his orgasm building, coiling tight at the base of his spine. His cock was slick under his palm, so fucking wet, precome making each stroke slippery and desperate. And above him, those goddamn devil eyes, soaking it all in, Ilya's sinful tongue peeking out to lick his lower lip—

"Do it, come for me."

Shane's orgasm hit him like a blindside check. Ripping through him without a warning, his body seizing up and then releasing all at once. He came over his fist, stripes painting his stomach, back arching up wantonly. Ilya drove in deep one last time and groaned, the sound rumbling through his chest into Shane's. Shane felt the pulse of Ilya's release, his *growl* against his throat, and then Ilya's hips stuttered and went still.

Shane's legs fell open, thighs burning from the strain of holding on. His whole body felt like he'd played a double-overtime game—wrung out, shaking, muscles turned to water. He reached up anyway and pulled Ilya down onto him, taking the full weight without hesitation. He needed it; the pressure of Ilya's body pinning him down, needed the reminder that this was real and not another pathetic fantasy Shane would hate himself for later.

Please don't be a dream.

Ilya's face pressed into the curve of Shane's neck, breath coming harsh and uneven against his skin. Shane could feel both their hearts hammering, the frantic rhythm slowly settling. His hand came up to cup the back of Ilya's head, fingers threading through sweat-damp curls. This was the dangerous part, the *after*. When Shane's defenses were stripped away and he wanted things he had no right to want, and when he had to remind himself that Ilya had a reputation to maintain too, that neither of them could afford this to be anything more than physical release.

Except Shane had never been good at lying, and lying here with Ilya's weight anchoring him to the mattress, he could admit the truth: he'd trade every trophy, every headline, every carefully constructed media-friendly PC piece of Shane Hollander the hockey player if he could keep this. If he could keep *him*.

He was so fucked.

For long moments, neither of them moved. They both panted and gazed at each other, and there were words that Shane was dangerously close to saying. He could feel them, thrashing around inside him, desperate to get out, but he forced them down.

Ilya shifted, lips brushing the hollow of Shane's throat where his pulse still hammered. "Still have headache?"

Shane huffed out a laugh. "What?"

"Hangover cure," Ilya said, propping himself up on one elbow. "Is working, yes?"

"You're ridiculous."

Shane pushed at Ilya's shoulder but his arm felt like jelly. No strength behind it at all. His whole body felt wrung out, limbs heavy and useless. He could feel sweat cooling on his skin, his hair sticking to his forehead. His lips were tender from kissing, swollen and sensitive. He was wrecked. Completely wrecked.

"You love it," Ilya said.

Shane rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. "Unfortunately."

"Good, because I am thinking," Ilya said, shifting his weight and flexing his hips, "that I have just enough time to make you cum again."

Shane's phone buzzed in his pile of forgotten clothing. No doubt it would be Rose.

They both stared at it.

"I have to—" Shane started.

"I know." Ilya's arm tightened around Shane's waist.

Shane's phone went dark. Then buzzed again, rattling against the nightstand. The sound cut through the haze in Shane's head. His shoulders stiffened automatically, muscles tensing even though he didn't move. Rose. It had to be Rose. She'd be wondering where he was, maybe just texting him a cute *good morning*, and that idea was somehow even *worse*. Reality crashed back in—his girlfriend waiting for him, the life he'd been living yesterday that didn't fit anymore with what he'd done this morning.

She didn't deserve it.

"I'm going to tell her," Shane said quietly. "Today. I have to."

"... I know."

Rose's face flashed through his mind: her laugh at dinner the other night, the way she'd touched his arm. She *liked* him. He was going to hurt her.

"This is going to get complicated."

"It already is complicated." Ilya caught Shane's chin, forced him to hold his gaze. "I do not care it is complicated."

Shane could see the fear in Ilya's eyes even as he said it. The tension in his jaw, the too-firm grip on Shane's face. Ilya was lying, or trying to convince himself, as much as Shane. He cared. They both cared. This was going to be a disaster. Their teams, their careers, the media. Everyone would have an opinion. But Ilya was still here, still holding him, still looking at Shane like he'd fight the whole world if he had to.

He was such a fighter on the ice, a total bully. It almost made sense that he'd be happy to take on everyone else off the ice too.

"So you will call her and tell her and be done with her. But not yet," Ilya sounded like he was pleading. "Five more minutes where nothing exists except this."

Shane's phone buzzed again. He didn't look at it. Instead he leaned in and kissed Ilya... slowly, too, so he could enjoy it. Ilya's lips were soft against his, smiling again into the kiss as he too, sank into the stolen moment. The knot that lived in Shane's stomach, the one that had lived there for months, maybe years, felt like it was finally starting to untangle and while it was still a mess... it was more bearable now. Especially so when Ilya's hand came up to cup the back of his neck and Shane felt himself melt into it, all that tension draining out through Ilya's fingers.

Rose. His parents. The team. Everyone who'd built *their* version of Shane Hollander in their heads would have to reckon with this version instead. The one who needed this. Who needed *him*.

Maybe they'd hate him, that'd always been his fear. Not being *the* Shane Hollander, upstanding role model and all around good boy had always felt like the worst possible outcome in a precarious

life. Lately, though, Shane had learned the truth: a life without the man in his arms was the worst thing. He couldn't be the league's Shane Hollander, straight and well behaved all-star, and have Ilya. So they'd hate him, right?

Right?

The fear was still there. It would probably always be there, humming under his skin like pre-game nerves that never quite faded. But beneath it—steadier, stronger—was relief. He'd stopped running and he'd somehow stopped pretending. And... Ilya was still here. That had to count for something. That had to count for everything.

Right?

And he could *breathe* now.

The phone buzzed a third time. Shane broke the kiss just long enough to reach down and silence it completely, then settled back against Ilya's chest. Ilya's arms wrapped around him and pulled him closer.

"Five more minutes," Shane murmured against Ilya's collarbone. He'd spent so long running from this, from Ilya, from himself, from the inevitability of it. And now, surrendering felt like the first honest thing he'd done in years.

Beyond the hotel room, outside, Montreal was waking up. Shane could hear the distant scrape of snow plows, the first rumble of morning traffic. Soon they'd have to face it, but Shane let himself have this for now: Ilya's warmth against his back, Ilya's heartbeat under his palm, Ilya, Ilya, Ilya...

"You're thinking too loud," Ilya murmured.

Shane huffed a laugh against his collarbone. "Sorry. Can't help it."

"Try."

So Shane tried. He focused on the rise and fall of Ilya's breathing, the way their legs tangled together. He focused on how he'd never, ever, felt so close to another person. He... oh... oh he *loved* this man, he did, and it was going to be messy and—

"Hollander," Ilya said softly, then again: "Shane."

"Yeah?"

"We will figure it out."

Shane didn't answer, or rather he *couldn't*. The lump in his throat wouldn't let him. But he nodded against Ilya's skin and felt Ilya's arms tighten around him in response.

They would figure it out. Or they wouldn't. Either way, it'd be together.

Outside, the sun broke through the clouds.

[Bsky](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [My Hollanov fics on AO3](#)

I couldn't help myself. Enjoy.

Where Ilya is a ruminator and waxes poetic while he spirals, I headcanon that Shane is a lot more straight forward with his thoughts and is more anxiety focused than outright guilt. It was a CHALLENGE to write this from an opposing viewpoint, especially since I've come to really love Ilya's POV. Digging into themes a little bit, while I was writing both POVs for this I had this mindset that Ilya's struggle with ruin was deciding whether or not to reach for it; him wanting Shane enough to BE ruined, so to speak. And then there was Shane, whose struggle was more aligned with finding relief in that submission to ruin. It's okay he isn't perfect.

I am not sure how well both came across, so if you want some pseudo book club questions...

- Do you think the boys are 'ruined' at the end?
- It's clear that Ilya and Shane care for each other and are happy to be together, CAN they ruin each other if this is what they both actually want?
- Did you have a fave line?

Anyway. Thank you for reading (again).

Not sure what to say? Comment anxiety? How about...

- ❤️ "I liked/loved it!"
- 🌈 "this wasn't my favorite"
- 🤪 "save a horse, ride a Rozanov"
- 🏒 "dumb hockey boys make me happy"
- 🗡️ "this usually isnt my thing... and yet"
- 💀 "how dare you (affectionate)"

Chapter 3: Illustration

Chapter Summary

A commissioned illustration of the taxi scene by the talented and wonderful Martovski
Zayac!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



By Zayne A

Chapter End Notes

Please, if you liked this art, I encourage you to check out Martovski Zayac's wonderful work on: [Bsky](#)

You will not be disappointed!!

End Notes

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