wanna get stuck in your head

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by peculiarblue

Summary

He only realizes he's doing it when it's too late to stop.

He's standing in the drink aisle of the grocery store, checking the expiration dates on the cans of Coke, mentally cross-checking them with Boston's away game schedule, and the reality hits him like someone shook one of those cans and popped it open. A snap. A fizz. A mess.

Shane is making space for Ilya.

(or, lessons in budget-friendly shopping, home decor, and resisting the urge to neatly combine all your situationship's shit into a drawer in your bedroom because you might be falling in love with him: a seven-ish step guide by shane hollander, who is so, so fucked)

Notes

now that i've hacked up a lung clearing away all those cobwebs and the twelve inches of dust…

HELLO WORLD! I AM BACK!

these sad gay hockey players man. i too have fallen victim to that very contagious bug going around where you consume one little piece of heated rivalry media and then all of a sudden it is the only thing you can think about 24/7

seriously though i am so thrilled to be back here, after the brief resurgence of my other account (cloudydaisies, hellooooo to any friends who have followed me back over from there), and cannot tell you what a joy it was to write again. my fingers have been itching to type for months, and i really feel like i've found a new groove. shane hollander you are the greatest pov to write in ever. i owe you everything.

some housekeeping: don't think too hard about the timeline here because god knows i didn't lmao it vaguely takes place over years? months? when they're in a more comfortable place in their situationship. no angst here folks! i hesitate to call it fully canon compliant because while i have rewatched and reread everything at minimum thrice and i follow all of those details as best i can (rip ilya's bear tattoo, that stays canon in my fic universe) i feel like if

you really try to fit these “missing scenes” into and in between book/show scenes, it might not work. like this may imply they meet up more than is strictly possible.

which brings me to my next point: all my hockey knowledge comes from this universe. if you see them always talking about being in the playoffs, know that i think that makes me sound like i know what i’m talking about :)

i fade to black like nobody’s business but sex is explicitly discussed. idk why i’m saying that like a warning when if you’re reading this fic you’ve literally seen or read these men actually have sex but IDK I FELT LIKE I SHOULD JUST SAY. the last fic i wrote was for percabeth so im clearly in uncharted waters here

title is from pancakes for dinner by lizzy mcalpine

this series is the gift that keeps on giving, and i’m so excited to be back on my insane oneshot bullshit. as always apologies in advance for any typos. and see you friday!!!!!!!!

hope you’re all doing well <3 katie

See the end of the work for more notes

“Oh, *fuck*.”

Shane has never done this before. Ever. So unlike him.

Reckless feels too strong of a word, but *shit*, he pushes a long breath through gritted teeth, gripping on to the sink of the hotel bathroom.

Years. He’s been doing this for *years*, and he’s never—his chin drops to his chest with the force of a full body groan.

He was *so* close.

“Have you seen my toothbrush?”

Shane could not believe today started with a game that went into overtime, two delayed flights, a flat tire on their bus, and a defective room key, but *a toothbrush* was what was going to be what ultimately kept him from finally getting some sleep. A toothbrush that he has never, not once in his entire worldwide hockey career, mind you, ever, *ever* forgotten before. Like, ever.

He has lists when he packs for away games for a reason. Everything he needs for before, during, and after a game, and then like three extras of all of that just in case. His lists have lists. There’s *no way* he forgot.

But Shane dumps his bag out over the speckled brown countertop and there is definitely no toothbrush.

“Hm? What’s up?” Hayden slides into the bathroom doorway, ear tucked to his shoulder, phone in between. “Hold on, babe, Shane’s doing his worried face.”

“I don’t have a worried face,” Shane says without an ounce of worry written on his face at all, of course.

Jackie’s voice, albeit a little staticky, chimes in, “Yes you do, and it’s so cute!”

“Is she on speaker?”

“No, she’s just very passionate about making sure you always know how cute you are,” Hayden grins goofily, which Shane has never formed an immunity to. He twists away from glowering at the bags under his eyes in the mirror reflection and presses the right side of his hip into the counter to face Hayden instead, arms crossed over his chest, and a reluctant smile on his lips in answer that he’s fighting to tamp down.

“What’s wrong, Shane?” Jackie asks, still passionately loud enough to be heard, apparently, “What’d he do this time? Do we have to beat Hayden up when you guys get home?”

“Hey!”

“No, no, nothing. It’s dumb,” Shane laughs just a little, “I wanted to be asleep like, yesterday, but now I can’t find my toothbrush.”

“Ah shit,” Hayden winces. Shane’s thoughts exactly. “You checked all your bags?”

“I can’t really imagine me rolling it up with my sweatpants.”

“Maybe it fell out on the bus? You know how they toss our bags.”

Shane shakes his head, “I think I just forgot to pack it.”

“That’s not like you, Shane. Hayden, tell him I said—”

“I heard,” Shane bites his smile, “You sure she’s not on speaker?”

“I don’t know man, this phone sucks ass. I cannot wait until we’re done with these,” Hayden presses frustratingly at the screen of his very expensive smartphone he gets paid to use very badly. Official sponsor of the Montreal Metros! Shane contractually cannot tell you how much he agrees with Hayden’s poor assessment.

“Right. Your bad spelling is *the phone’s* fault.”

“I before E is a stupid rule and you know it!” Hayden flips Shane the middle finger, settling into a lazy sprawl against the doorframe. The phone’s back against his ear, but he’s still distinctly talking to Shane, “Seriously though, I don’t think this is worth a worried face. Just go to bed.”

Shane may not believe he has a worried face, but he knows the one he is making right now is extremely unpleasant. “*What*?”

“Dude, do you know how many nights I forget to brush my teeth?”

“Um no, no I don’t want to know that, like, at all,” Shane grimaces because oh my god, he can physically *feel* the plaque growing on his teeth *and* Hayden’s as they speak.

“Some nights it takes me so long to get through brushing all the kids' teeth that I’m falling asleep standing up at the sink,” Hayden says, gesturing to Shane’s slightly slumped stance that seems to be about to do just that. “All I can manage sometimes is a shot of mouthwash.”

“Ew, Hayden.”

“Don’t look at me like that. Zero cavities!” He points proudly to his over exaggerated smile. “Just brush twice in the morning!”

“Does not work like that,” Shane says, grabbing his own stupid, sponsored smartphone to search *how quickly do teeth rot?* “And even if it did, that doesn’t change the fact that I still wouldn’t have anything to brush with in the morning.”

“You wanna use mine?”

“Oh my god. Jackie, you’re hearing your gross husband right now, right?”

“I’m hanging up on her, and ignoring you. Stay put, I’m getting my mouthwash.”

Shane definitely has his own mouthwash, it’s spilled out somewhere on the counter right now, but he lets Hayden go anyway, just for the chance to groan into his hands dejectedly once more.

It’s not actually that bad, Shane knows, logically, somewhere deep, deep, in his subconscious. It has been one of the longest days of his life, and he had big grand plans to be in his superstitiously favorite sweatpants with his eyes shut for the next several hours. This one little thing should not derail that. Many of his wants right now do not involve this fucking toothbrush, actually. He’s in a nice hotel room with the loudest AC unit ever that’s going to make for the best white noise, the water pressure in the shower he just got out of was really great, and he’s in the aforementioned sweatpants.

Everything is fine!

Except.

He clicks his phone off without even getting three words into the article on cavity growth factors and rates because he knows that the only thing truer than his specific taste in hotel room pillows (one super soft stacked on top of a super firm one, of course) is that he is incapable of letting things go.

His head will hit all the medium-soft pillows (he doesn't wanna talk about it) and he physically won't be able to shut his eyes that have been involuntarily closing for hours now, because he'll just be thinking about dental hygiene.

So he pushes himself off the counter with one last full-body sigh, and looks up the closest 24-hour convenience store.

"Hey, I'll be right back," Shane says, dipping to grab the hoodie off the end of his bed.

Hayden, who has not hung up the phone or found any mouthwash in his mess of an overnight bag, looks up without even the decency to look surprised by Shane's course of action, "I'm gonna have to tell the captain about this. Sneaking out so late."

"You know me," Shane starts, words definitely muffled by his sweatshirt stuck halfway on, arms in protest of movement this late, "Big rule breaker."

"With minty fresh breath!" Hayden smiles, jumping to a seat on the edge of his bed with a bounce, and then, a familiar no-good glint in his eyes, "Wait, how long will you be gone?"

"Oh my god," Shane rolls his eyes and pulls his hood up, all but running out of the room now, "Text me when it's safe to come back."

"God forbid a guy take advantage of how much you care about bristle count!"

He's glad the door swings shut behind him before Hayden can get the satisfaction of knowing that actually got a laugh out of him. He hurries down the hall, tucking his laughter in his exhaustion-rosy cheeks, and impatiently pokes at the elevator buttons.

The lobby is a ghost-town, and so is the quick two blocks he has to walk to make it to the store. He doubts getting spotted in the toothbrush aisle of a convenience store could make headlines, but it's late, and you never know, so he uses the wind chill as an excuse to stay very bundled, even as he passes through the automatic doors and gets washed out in the harsh, retail lighting. There are, mercifully, maybe two other people in this store right now, and both seem to be employees. It's a small store, too, so, in and out. Great. Asleep in twenty, max.

He scans the aisles quickly. *Pantry, first aid, cold remedies, hair care, clearance,* ah! Oral hygiene.

Okay so, three things about Shane Hollander, actually. Can't let things go, the hotel pillow thing, *and* paralyzed by indecision in three seconds flat.

A defenseman twice his size? No big deal! Top to bottom shelving full of nothing but different varieties of toothbrushes?

"Fuck you, Hayden," he mumbles under his breath as he holds two different brands of toothbrushes in his hands, because he's never once in his life cared about bristle count, but now the thought's in his head. Is one of these actually better than the other? Does that kind of thing matter?

He will not take out his stupid phone and look that up right now, in the oral hygiene aisle half past midnight. He will not.

There's got to be three dozen options here, at least. Name brand and whitening and ultra soft and electric. And that's not even factoring in things like size, and does Shane have sensitive gums? He doesn't think so but—and there's two-packs and three-packs and each of these come in at least four different colors.

You know, that might actually be the easiest part of this whole thing. He knows concretely that the color does not matter, so. *One* decision out of his hands. Blue's as good a color as any, he thinks, tilting a nice soft bristled one up on its hook to look at it.

The row above it strays him from his task slightly, because they're the kiddie toothbrushes, and he's not immune to a cute cartoon, sue him! He's half tempted to grab a handful after hearing what the state of dental hygiene in the Pike household is like. He could score some cool uncle points with this glittery one, or the superhero one that comes with bright blue toothpaste.

God, why don't they make fun toothbrushes for adults? Shane doesn't think anyone would forget to pack or use a toothbrush if they had these rainbow flowers and constellations on them. Or, oh my god, Shane cannot keep the smile off his face when he sees this one, it's so itty bitty, toddler sized, with the cutest drawing of a little bear on it, like the cartoon version of the one on Ilya's—

Nope. No. Nooooo no no no. Absolutely not. Not doing that.

It's a teddy bear. Not all bears are supposed to make him think of—*nothing* is supposed to make him think of—

Toothbrush. Right. Shane needed to get a toothbrush, and get the fuck out of here.

He's actually very glad he didn't put a watch on for this outing so he does not need to know how long it takes him to narrow it down, but he's honed in on the most innocuous looking one, finally, eventually.

He'd brushed it off a second ago but the more he thinks about it the more right blue feels. He's a blue toothbrush guy! Like, he's looking at this red one and that feels wrong, and so does purple, and gray. Orange, maybe, but yellow—hard pass. Like, the color your teeth are *not* supposed to be? As a reminder? Who would want a yellow toothbrush?

Rozanov probably, Shane chuckles to himself, that asshole, and just because it would bother Shane. And to match his ridiculous fucking sports car, probably, oh my god. He can practically hear his stupid, smug voice.

If he really had to think about it, though—hm. Has he really never seen Ilya brush his teeth? He guesses not, no chance of morning breath with their arrangement, but. Hm. He's never tasted particularly minty but surely he *does* brush his teeth. He *has* to, right? Does he have a dentist? Does he *hate* the dentist? It's always the people you least expect. But no, he has good breath, and non-yellow teeth, and they feel…Shane runs his tongue over the front of his teeth like he can imagine the feel of Ilya's, the pointy canine and the perfect edge of the cap on his chipped front tooth.

Shane bites down on his bottom lip because he's about to giggle at the thought of the teddy bear toothbrush again. It's smaller than almost all of Ilya's fingers. But he'd—Shane feels like if he bought it, and gave it to Ilya, that just once, maybe, after they—he'd use it, make a show of it, his *"fuck you, Hollander"* muffled by sudsy toothpaste on top of his accent, and Shane would get to kiss the evidence off the corner of his lips.

It'd be worth it, he thinks.

One of the two unlucky employees in this store probably would have caught Shane staring longingly at the toothbrushes if not for his phone chiming. He shakes it off, physically, his hair flopping against his forehead beneath his loose hood, to get out of, *shit*, whatever the hell that was.

He is 99% sure it's his mom, because he's 100% sure among toothbrushes and rational thought, Shane *also* forgot to text her when they landed. Yes, she sits and stalks the airline websites whenever he flies, but she thinks he doesn't know that, so he has to play along and text her, probably until he's at least 47. And that's a generous estimate.

He lets go of the yellow toothbrush he had been toying with and pulls his phone out of his pocket, apology at the ready for—

Lily: *17*

Jesus fucking Christ.

Again, nope. Not doing this! A very hard—no. *No*.

He pushes the screen against his chest so he can't even look at it. What the fuck is Rozanov doing? They *both* had games today and tomorrow. On opposite sides of the country.

Shane: *Unless you invented teleportation without me noticing, I don't know what you want me to do with your room number right now.*

He stares at the message thread, watches a bubble appear on Rozanov's side for a full thirty seconds, disappear, reappear.

Shane doesn't have time for this. He can't look away.

Lily: *Is going to piss you off more than a room number actually*

Lily: *But I like that word. Teleport*

Lily: *I looked it up. You should invent that in all the spare time you have between scoring*

This asshole.

Shane: *Fuck you. 17?*

Lily: *How many goals you need this weekend if you want to stay on top of me*

And Shane *almost* falls for it. Because he knows Ilya knows he has more goals this season than him so far, and tonight didn't do him any favors. Low scoring game for Shane, even if they *did* win. Spending his entirely too-long travel day watching all the playbacks of Ilya's four perfect goals was some very evil salt in the wound. And they cycle the same shit on all

the sports channels everywhere, so he knows Ilya knows Shane knows this. And assuming he's going to keep scoring four times every game for the rest of the long weekend is incredibly presumptive.

But he also knows he wants him to say something about all this so he can make him blush in the fucking toothbrush aisle over that phrasing. *On top of me.* Asshole.

Shane: *Big day for you. Learning new words and new numbers. Seventeen's a big one.*

Lily: *I got a new word in interview today too. Is idiom*

Shane: *"Idiot" is not a new word for you, man. You've been using it since we met.*

Lily: *You always think I typo*

Lily: *I am good speller*

Shane: *Sure*

Lily: *IdioM is a stupid English phrase that makes no sense.*

Shane: *And someone used this in an interview?*

Lily: *Yes. They said my goals look like slice of cake.*

"Hah!" Shane has absolutely no control over a peal of laughter that melodic and bright. He immediately throws a hand over his beaming smile, turns his head down the aisle to catch an employee looking at him. He waves, "Sorry, sorry."

Shane: *Oh sure I know that one. Yes. You should absolutely use that all the time.*

Lily: *I will. I like this stupid idiom so much. I have lots of cake.*

Holy shit. Shane is going to be a big heaping pile of sticky sweet icing from a slice of cake very soon. He can't stop smiling as he types, ***me too. Almost as much as I like the idiot using it.*** And then promptly deletes it. But he doesn't stop smiling.

Shane: *You sure do.*

Lily: *See. Slice of cake to get you to flirt with me*

Shane: *That wasn't flirting.*

Lily: 👀

Shane: *I am in a convenience store, Rozanov. Flirting with you is not on my list of things to do. Ever, but especially not here.*

Lily: *But you are flirting with someone if you have to be in convenience store so late.*

Shane has to push against his cheek with a fist to try to manually shrink his smile. *Convenience.* Spelled *perfectly*. Does Boston have a better official phone sponsor than them?

Shane: *I forgot a toothbrush. Have to buy a new one.*

It takes a very long time for another message to come through, typing bubbles rolling over and over and over, which is strange because it is the most innocuous text he's sent all night. Cold, hard, boring fact.

He uses the time to get back on task, and scans the rows of toothbrushes one more time.

There's a value pack, two for the price of one. A green and a blue one, the blue one flipped upside down, probably for a better packaging arrangement. He takes a picture and loads it into his messages, writes ***Us?*** and deletes it.

Why don't I know your favorite color? he types, before hastily deleting that too.

His phone pings with a new message, finally, after Shane floundered for far too long over whether or not he could justify more toothbrushes than he needs for just tonight.

Lily: *Good. You have a very nice smile. I would not want your forgetfulness to ruin it.*

Three things happen in rapid succession: Shane closes his phone, runs halfway down the aisle with a low and embarrassing squeal, and thanks god he forgot his toothbrush tonight.

He stares at the toothpaste just for a change of scenery, but his fingers are flying to his keyboard without warning.

Shane: *Well now I'm extra upset we haven't had spare time to invent teleportation*

Lily: *Because I can't pick out good toothbrush for you?*

Lily: *Or something else* 😘

Shane: *Fuck you*

Lily: *So something else!*

Shane: *What color should I buy, oh wise toothbrush expert?*

Lily: *I like green.*

Lily: *But I don't even know why you ask. You probably already picked something boring, like blue*

Shane giddily trudges back to his blue toothbrush choice, typing, ***What makes blue boring but not green?*** His question is ignored.

Lily: *You should pick pink. Match your cheeks.*

Shane: *How do you know I'm blushing?*

Lily: *I never said you were, but thank you for idea.*

Fuck it, Shane thinks, and reaches up on his tiptoes for a pink toothbrush all the way on the far top right of the section. He looks to his left and right, not a soul in sight. It's just the surveillance camera that could witness the absolute absurdity Shane is about to partake in, but it's all the way in the opposite corner of the store, and has probably, hopefully, already reduced Shane down to a handful of pixels.

He opens his phone's camera app, holds the toothbrush up to his cheek, and snaps a picture. He hits send before he can get nauseous over it.

Shane: *This work?*

Ilya takes a another ten year (thirty second) hiatus to respond, which does leave room for Shane to spiral a bit about his recklessness. It's really just about half of his face, he'd zoomed in so much, inspecting it now. And he'll delete it, and he trusts Rozanov in this realm enough to delete it too, but still. He gnaws at his thumbnail, slightly panicked.

Lily: *See? Slice of cake. Flirt in convenience store*

Shane: *Not on my bucket list, that's for sure.*

Lily: *Another idiom!*

Shane has to leave. Like really, this time, he means it. He has to get so far, far away from the fucking blush-inducing toothbrush aisle. Top ten least sexy places in the world and Shane is —oh, fuck. *Fuck*. He is so fucked.

Shane: *I should go, get some sleep. I have seventeen goals to score tomorrow.*

Lily: *A typo. You have to invent teleport tomorrow*

Shane: *Right. You know, Hayden swears it's our phones, like they're extra prone to typos or something.*

Lily: *I forget you are always with that loser.*

Lily: *Do not waste your nice minty breath on him.*

Shane: *Of course not. Saving it for my teleporting tomorrow!*

Lily: *Slice of cake!*

Lily: *Goodnight Hollander*

Shane types and deletes and retypes some version of his own goodnight and wonders, since it's come up, if he can get away with putting a heart next to it and chalking it up to his stupid

phone's affinity for typos.

Shane: *Good night :)*

It feels like the only right answer with the smile semi-permanently etched on his face.

He gives this godforsaken aisle one last look, considers all his options, and well. The blue and green combo *is* the economical choice, right? And Shane is, you know, incredibly economical.

In the end, Shane grabs a pink toothbrush, and the blue and green pack, and also every kiddie toothbrush they have because really, he cannot stop thinking about Hayden's teeth-brushing practices (or lack thereof.)

He makes negative three seconds of eye contact with the poor teenager at the register, and all but skips back to his disappointing hotel room pillows. The lights are mostly out in the room when he gets there, one lamp left on kindly so Shane doesn't trip over his own two feet tip-toeing back in, but Hayden is still awake enough to whisper, "All good?"

Shane stops, one hand on the doorway to the bathroom with his bag of a million rainbow toothbrushes, and tucks his unbidden smile as far as he can into the top of his shoulder.

"Yeah, yeah," Shane hums, "Piece of cake."

Shane lasts about 22 hours with the toothbrushes in the bathroom of his Montreal apartment, staring at him, daring him to say out loud what it really means that they exist.

The second hour 23 hits, Shane grabs those green and blue toothbrushes, jumps in his car, and drives to the cottage.

He uses a full day of his weekend off and puts hundreds of unnecessary miles on his car, but as soon as he gets there he knows it's worth it. He reaches all the way up to the top shelf of the medicine cabinet that is way out of his normal line of sight, and shoves them as far back as they can go to collect dust until the season's over.

And by then, Shane is sure, he won't even remember they exist.

Shane isn't sure what he was expecting when he walked out of his bathroom, toweling the water out of his slightly too-long hair post-shower.

Truthfully, he's always sort of *hoping* for some version of…something, but he has that shit shoved so, so far in the back corner of his mind in a neat and tidy box that he can't even recite it to you right now. And he also lost the key to it forever so. He really, genuinely, *realistically* doesn't know what to expect.

But it definitely was not all six feet of Ilya fucking Rozanov on the edge of his bed wrapped entirely in a throw blanket.

"Making yourself comfortable?"

"Oh my god, Hollander," Ilya twists his head to face Shane, the fluff of the blanket on his shoulder swallowing the entirety of his chin in the process, "Tell me where did you get this blanket."

Shane has to pretend to still be drying off his face to hide his smile, "You like?"

"It is the nicest thing I have ever felt. Like pillow," Ilya tuts, shrugging the blanket over his head, like a hooded cape, "I can't believe you hide from me."

"Uh, I'm pretty sure almost everything you come here for is a blanket-less activity, Rozanov."

"Whole world thinks you are very nice. No idea in reality you are so mean you never even offer me this so soft blanket for all my troubles."

"Mhm, this has been a real hardship for you," Shane grins, hopping into some sweats.

"You need to give your fancy designer a raise," he says in answer, the almost giddy swing of his feet hitting melodically against the base of Shane's bed. "I can forgive the million pillows now."

“Oh, can you?” Shane hums, nervously rolling the waistband of his sweats and looking down to add, “But um, they didn’t pick that out. It’s actually a David Hollander original.”

Shane is still largely avoiding eye contact—the swirl pattern of his hardwood floors is real interesting, actually—but Ilya’s little gasped “Really?” is impossible to miss. So then he *has* to look up and well.

It’s late, Shane’s not sure of the exact time, but it’s late enough for no light to be coming from the windows, for everything to feel a touch quieter. His room is all warm lighting and shower steam, smells like sheets he washed this morning in embarrassing anticipation and lingering cigarette. He’s the cozy kind of sleepy that isn’t actually tired yet, despite whatever time it is, and all of the uh—god he can’t even think it without blushing, get a fucking grip, Hollander—*physical activity* he’s partaken in today. Game and otherwise. It was a good day, with a good ending, and Shane’s warm all over. Not just from the hot shower and the tone of the lamps all switched on, but at the sight of Ilya enamored by this blanket, all reason escaping with it.

This guy is, for lack of any higher brain power right now, *huge*. Just like, all muscle and broad shoulder and the most ridiculous curl to his hair that is sticking up at especially odd angles right now. He’s a presence, he takes up space. He is hugely hot.

He should not be able to let Shane’s dad’s arts and crafts swallow every last one of his stupidly perfect muscles whole.

It’s just. It’s so wrong, Shane thinks. Categorically unfair. Shane’s shower is going to go to waste.

If Shane’s being honest, which, well. If he’s admitting to these mortifying feelings about Ilya in his train of thought, he might as well tell the truth about this blanket. He hates it. The yarn feels kinda scratchy on his skin, not a bad itch, but just. Shane’s skin prickles at the thought. It’s three different colors because apparently between both of his incredibly intelligent parents, nobody knows how big a blanket’s supposed to be and they kept running out of yarn. It almost started dissolving the one time Shane tried to wash it. And did Shane mention it itches? It itches.

His parents can absolutely never know any of this, though, so of course, it lives in the back corner of his closet until they visit. They had come for dinner last night, so…

He'd forgotten about it, honestly, until he stepped out of the bathroom a minute ago.

He worries he'll never be able to put it away again, now.

He tries his best to keep any of this inner-monologuing out of his voice when he says, "My mom thought she might find a healthy way to get through watching the playoffs last year. Made it through the first row of stress crocheting before she gave up on that and went back to yelling at the TV. Dad took over."

"Is very nice of them to make you a consolation prize."

"Fuck off," Shane huffs, amused, "It wasn't a consolation prize."

"Did I not use that word right?"

"No, no you—you used it perfect. I just," Shane's lips twist cutely to one side. He might as well flip a coin at this point to decide every day whether Ilya's English or his Russian is going to be his favorite. "I'm glad you like it. I'll ask him to make you one."

Shane is mesmerized by the way Ilya tucks a laugh behind his teeth in answer, "I am sure he would love to, but is not necessary. I will just keep this one."

"What?"

"Clearly you are not using it."

“Clearly?”

“Yes, it does not smell like gross cologne you get paid to wear.”

“It’s very expensive cologne, and you like it!”

“I like this blanket.”

“So you’ve made abundantly clear,” Shane drawls, throwing his towel nowhere near the direction of the bathroom in favor of staying staring at Ilya’s crooked grin. He starts a lazy pace back towards the bed, towards Ilya, “I should have never left it out.”

“Thank god you did. I was sitting here getting frozen cold,” Ilya lilts, holding two sides of the blankets and criss-crossing it extra tight across his chest, clearly for unnecessary dramatic effect. “Hours I wait for you. Seriously, Hollander, you finish everything quick but shower.”

Shane’s gasping laugh bounces off the wall and hits Ilya straight in the shit-eating grin, “You’re such a fucking asshole.”

“Frostbite!”

“I keep this apartment a temperate 72, and I shower in under five minutes,” he huffs, kicking at Ilya’s shin once he’s close enough.

“Ten, at least.”

“I’ll time it next time.”

“And when I’m correct, I keep blanket?” Ilya’s chin tilts up so Shane can get hit with the glint in his eyes full force.

“Absolutely not, but nice try,” Shane nods down, walking between Ilya’s knees.

Without any prompting, or warning, Ilya’s arms reach out, still draped in itchy blanket, and wrap around Shane’s waist, settling his hands on his lower back. So without any warning of his own, Shane lets one of his hands slide over Ilya’s left shoulder, his thumb snagging in one of the early stage loops his dad messed up and never fixed. It’s just about the perfect spot to let his thumb idle over Ilya’s pulse point.

Maybe the blanket isn’t so bad.

He knows Ilya can feel the deep breath he takes because *Shane* can feel the press of Ilya’s smile onto his abs in response. He is so very content.

Except, it’s gonna bug him, “Do I really take that long to shower?”

His laugh tickles.

“I don’t know, feels long,” Ilya shrugs, voice a low rumble, “But maybe I am just waiting for you to come back, so it feels longer.”

Oh my *god*. No. No! Shane Hollander is smart, and casual, and very good at compartmentalization! And sex! He’s good at having nothing but cold, emotionless sex with his bitter, *professional* rival!

A crocheted blanket will not take him out. It *will not*. He is stronger than poorly stitched craft store yarn. He is—

“I’m back now.”

“You are,” Ilya says, directly into his skin, punctuated with a kiss, “You really don’t like this blanket?”

“I do,” he lies, giggling, “It’s just really not all you’re making it out to be, and I’m getting mildly concerned you’ve been sleeping with sandpaper blankets your whole life if this is the best.”

“It is.”

“It’s mediocre.”

“Mediocre?”

“Yeah, like, you know,” Shane waves a hand, trying to find the words to explain, sure his features are all scrunched up weirdly. You wouldn’t know it by the way Ilya’s looking up at him. “Like it’s good, and it’s meaningful, but then you see another one and you’re like oh, no *this* is good.”

Ilya hums, digesting Shane’s words for a beat, one brow very cutely up much higher than the other, “Your dad made you the Scott Hunter of blankets.”

“Oh my god.”

“What? You just gave bad description for this nice blanket, but it works good for Hunter.”

“You are unbelievable,” Shane says, all too fond, “Here I thought we were having a nice moment—”

“We were!”

“—and you have to interrupt it to make fun of one of the best players in the league.”

“*We* are best players in the league, Hollander,” Ilya is standing suddenly, very serious expression nosing up against Shane’s, “And Hunter is…”

Shane’s smile splits his face in two, surely, when he whispers, “Mediocre.”

“Mediocre.”

“Just like this blanket,” Shane says, helpless in his fight against pulling Ilya’s chest to his.

Ilya shakes his head, a still sweat-soaked curl bouncing over his eye, “I just think you are not using it right.”

“I’ve certainly never worn it like a cape, that’s for sure.”

“Hm, shame,” Ilya coos contemplatingly, “We should fix that.”

Shane has a split second to screech a warning “No!” but that’s all, before Ilya and his bright blue eyes grab the blanket at both his shoulders, and he tosses it, with very little tact, but much fanfare, over both their heads.

It falls over top of them, a little haphazard, askew, barely hanging to his mid-back and same on Ilya. The room gets about a million degrees warmer, huddled right up against each other, watching the way the mismatched holes in the knitwork let slivery streaks of light into their little cocoon. Ilya’s got bright spots on the right side of his nose, in the middle of his cheek, on his always crooked brow. Shane wants to kiss them all.

Something tells him he might get away with it in here.

“Oh yeah,” Shane says, all breath, “I totally get the appeal now.”

“See?” Ilya noses over Shane’s cheek. He feels the lightest kiss on the side of his jaw, “Is nice.”

“Yeah,” and forget watching all the places the warm light of Shane’s perfectly warm room hit Rozanov’s stupid gorgeous face. His eyes shut reflexively, his head tipping back a smidge with it. “Really, really nice.”

Another kiss on his neck, and then lower, and lower, in the spot just above his collarbone, “Maybe long shower is good.”

“Yeah?”

A sharp inhale when his skin gets caught between Ilya’s smile, and then, “Wash off all the bad cologne. Now you smell like blanket.”

“It’s *my* blanket, the blanket smells like *me*.”

“Is too easy to piss you off,” Ilya’s laugh skirts back up Shane’s neck.

“Well now you’re really not getting it,” Shane pouts, the thumb of Ilya’s hand that’s found its way to his face just exaggerating it further. Ilya grins like it was his plan all along,

“You’ll keep it warm for me?”

“Maybe,” Shane’s head lolls lazily to one side, letting Ilya’s hand push it back up, “I might take some convincing.”

“Okay,” is all Ilya says, with one peck of a kiss straight to Shane’s lips, and he probably would have dove back in with a more substantial one in a second, after a breath, but blame the blanket, Shane doesn’t even give him the chance.

Shane kisses like Ilya just got here, like he didn’t just have to shower off more than bad cologne, like he has hours and hours of nothing but Ilya ahead of him. His tongue licks into his mouth and catches around a sigh, a groan, and his favorite, a smile.

He’s off kilter after that, but it clearly bothers neither of them, Shane’s lips on the corner of Ilya’s mouth and his hands mapping blanket-warm skin anywhere he can touch it.

“We need a word better than *mediocre* for you,” Ilya whispers, before hitting Shane with the least mediocre kiss he’s ever received. Thankfully he doesn’t seem to be looking for a real answer, because Shane’s entire lexicon is stripped from him. Ilya kisses filthily, judging by the moan it earns him, but intimately sweet at the same time. Everything feels closer now, like they’ve slipped into a secret pocket world.

But it’s just a mediocre blanket, and it falls off them unceremoniously, the light that had been nice just a second ago suddenly too harsh.

The kisses slow until they’re quick pecks, Shane’s head anchored in place by both of Ilya’s hands, which make no move for the blanket.

He almost forgets he won a hockey game tonight, with the excitement of winning Ilya’s attention instead.

“Do you have to go now?”

Ilya nods wordlessly, the flutter of his lashes on the top of Shane’s cheekbone. “I’ll miss you.”

“You talking to me or the blanket?”

Ilya just laughs, and kisses Shane one last time, right below his ear.

It is more of a chore than usual to watch Ilya fully redress to leave, one sock at a time, painstakingly. His t-shirt and jacket have personally wronged Shane, as far as he’s concerned, the way he glowers at them being put back on. He trudges for the door, hopping cutely on one foot as he struggles for balance getting his shoe on.

And Shane trails behind him, blanket wrapped around his shoulders and over his head the way he’d found it on Ilya when he got out of the shower.

“Since I don’t think Montreal will give your dad a chance to make another playoff blanket—”

“Fuck you.”

“I guess I’ll have to visit this one again.”

“I guess so,” Shane nods, swinging his apartment door nervously as Ilya lingers in the doorway.

Ilya winks once, his hands squeezing into fists in his pockets, and then hurries off towards the stairs to leave.

Shane squints his eyes shut, so totally fucked they haven’t made a good enough word for it yet, that all he can do is slam his door shut, and drop his head back into it with a groan.

This is, at least, cushioned by the Ilya Rozanov of blankets he has on.

In their defense, it was a shitty lamp.

“I cannot believe you just did that.”

“*I* just did that? You were the one—”

“No, no, is okay,” Ilya’s smile glints in the dim hotel room lighting, now even dimmer given their uh, predicament, “Is pretty hot you want me so bad that you become vandalaizer.”

“I didn’t—we *both* broke this thing,” Shane gruffs, petulantly knocking his knee into Ilya’s hip for effect, “And I’m not going to *want anything* if you don’t help me get our hands out of —”

“Could be fun challenge,” Ilya flirts, voice low and right beside Shane’s ear, “You do not think we can do it one handed?”

“Rozanov—”

“Because I seem to remember you actually do not need me to use any hands at all.”

Shane's resounding "Fuck you!" gets bitten off into a sigh so high-pitched it would probably be better categorized as a whine. Embarrassing as hell, but unfortunately, the way Ilya kisses every inch of his skin like it's the first time he's seeing it, every time, is never not going to do it for him.

"This is your fault," Shane murmurs, not as put out as he should be.

"You invited me to your room."

"You couldn't even let us make it to the bed."

"You hopped onto this desk pretty willingly."

"Something about you promising to suck my dick, which, still hasn't happened."

"Because you don't believe I can do it with my hand in the lamp."

It's the first either of them have mentioned the elephant in the room: that he and Ilya somehow managed to, mid-late night hotel room makeout, punch their hands straight through the front of the small desk lamp's lampshade.

And Shane can't help it. He cackles, bright and loud, collapsing straight into Ilya's shoulder with it and cutting off their razor-sharp back and forth.

"Something is funny?"

"Our hands," Shane wheezes, wiggling the fingers of said hand over Ilya's knuckles. "They're still in the lamp."

Ilya's giggles burst out of him after a beat too, the absurdity of the situation taking over their arguing, and their want, just for a second. Shane feels like a teenager again, giddy and stupid and on top of the world for making the cute guy he likes laugh. Ilya rolls his forehead onto Shane's, eyes teary with laughter that Shane would be content to drown in.

Getting Ilya into this room had felt a little bit like life or death a few minutes ago. They were at this league-wide event Shane didn't even have the capacity to remember the name of right now, and it left them circling each other all day, but never quite close enough for Shane.

His whole body thrummed with need for so many hours—more like weeks or months, if Shane's honest—that he thought would satiate just at the sight of Ilya at least *here*, with him.

Incorrect.

He couldn't get his lips on him fast enough, couldn't get his clothes off him fast enough, couldn't get him on the bed fast enough. He's willing to admit here, in the safety of his own subconscious, that Shane was just as much to blame for the flurried pace at which they moved, kisses only halfway to their target, clothes only halfway off, and only making it halfway into the room. But he will not let Ilya have that satisfaction.

No, *Ilya* is entirely to blame for this, purring something hot into his ear about needing him so bad and pushing him back against the desk and what was Shane supposed to do? Not let Ilya have him any which way he wanted?

Because Shane *wanted*. Any which. All ways.

But then again…it really wasn't even Ilya's fault, either. The lamp really was shit.

Paper-thin lampshade that happened to be in the direct line of how bad Shane craved Ilya. How bad it looked like Ilya felt the same.

The chair was gone first, kicked and shoved out of the way to who knows where, Shane was too busy getting lifted onto the cool surface of the desk to notice. The box of tissues went toppling next, when Shane's hips scooted back, but hit the floor unharmed, so he barely even registered it. The framed stock image art behind his head clanged once or twice with a hit, but the second Ilya got his hands on Shane's pecs that art could breathe a sigh of relief. He stayed forward, glued to every spot of Ilya he could reach, feeling crazed with all the places he wanted to touch, to kiss, trying to decide where to go first.

So when Ilya laced his hand in Shane's to keep him from traveling lower than his abs, because everything was a goddamn competition, Shane did not have the mental capacity to think of the cheap ass lamp they had left behind them.

Not until a petty wrestle for control mid-make out sent their interlocked hands right through that cheap lampshade.

Two of the best athletes in the world, alright? Not aware of their own strength, and then horny on top of that.

It was not their finest moment.

It was kind of ridiculously incredible.

Shane's going to play the sound of Ilya's absurd laughter in his head whenever he has to drink champagne at one of those stuffy hockey events from here on out. He hates the taste, but this sound—it's like bright bursts of bubbles tingle through his veins. Loopy with joy. And vandalism.

He laughs into a kiss on Ilya's cheek, because why the fuck not, right?

Seconds or hours could have passed for all Shane knows by the time either of them speaks up again.

“I guess it was kind of hot,” Shane admits lowly, eyes peeking up.

“Oh, really?” Ilya buzzes, “I was actually thinking I was wrong.”

“Can I get that in writing?”

“I think it’s romantic. I got you a very nice bracelet,” Ilya says, squeezes Shane’s hand right up against the lamp’s lightbulb. Which is why he suddenly feels hot all over. The um. The wattage.

“Oh my god.”

“Was my plan all along, looks so pretty on you,” Ilya continues, picking his right hand up off where it was pressed next to Shane’s hip and using it to gently rip the shade open, little by little. “And now you can’t say I never got you anything.”

“Right, but *I’m* the one who’s gonna get charged by the hotel for destruction of property,” Shane miffs, trying his best to stay still and help the delicate job Ilya’s doing to get their hands out. “Thank you.”

“You are welcome,” Ilya smiles, their hands finally free. He runs a thumb over the side of Shane’s wrist, “You okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, it was—” Shane starts, a shuddered breath once he registers Ilya has started leaving the gentlest little kisses up and and down and around his wrist, where the lamp shade just was. He stops and sucks at a spot over the bone which has no right to be as hot as it feels to Shane. “If I’m being honest I probably wouldn’t have even noticed it was there at all after a while.”

“No?”

“You are incredibly distracting.”

“And that is—is a good thing, yes?”

“If you get back to it, yeah.”

He’s pretty sure he hears Ilya whisper in wonder, something about when Shane became so bossy, right before he dives back into being perfectly distracting.

God, how is he *so good* at this? How does it *still feel* so good?

Shane kisses the thought away, slinging his arm around the back of Ilya’s neck. He bites his bottom lip and pulls, just a little, relishing in the hiss it earns him, and then happily slouches back to let his mind go blank, and Ilya take him apart.

Within seconds he’s reminded of exactly how they got into their lamp predicament, because everything else that is not one of the points of contact where Ilya is touching his body stops existing entirely. They could be in any room, in any city, at any time. Shane wouldn’t know the difference. But he can tell you exactly when his legs tighten around Ilya’s hips, how many times he fumbles with the buttons on his pants, the exact pitch of the breath that he feels ripple across his muscles. They kiss and they kiss and kiss, and Shane feels like the biggest winner in this whole goddamn hotel.

This hotel, and its doors that slam too loud and terrible pillow ratio and lamps that are so poorly made they got taken out by a make out session.

If Shane had literally anyone to brag about his love life—er, *sex* life, strictly—to, then he would have a field day explaining this one. Shane is *that* good of a kisser. He almost laughs, but Ilya is taking his pants off, so.

He wonders what kind of testing lamp manufacturers do, briefly, in between kisses. Definitely no quality control measurements for being present when fucking your hockey

rival. And the hotel surely doesn't account for—

Oh. Oh no.

Shane's higher brain power comes back for the one split second Ilya is taking his socks off (it's still hot, but there's no real sexy way to do it, right? Exactly why Shane just keeps his on. The only reason, he swears,) and it gives him room to spiral.

His flood of endorphins cannot shake the hardwired instinct to start thinking about how he's going to explain this to the hotel staff, and what happens if this gets back to his team somehow, and the cost of replacing this shitty lamp. Does the hotel sue? Do they just add it to his bill? Or the team bill? Shit, will he get benched?

He pushes less gently than he intends to at Ilya's shoulders, who looks up at him with pupils so dilated and chest heaving so deeply, Shane almost says forget it.

Almost.

"So, uh, I just had a thought."

"Of course you fucking did."

"I'm just trying to figure out how I'm supposed to explain this one. Putting a fist-sized—"

"Two fist."

"*A two fist-sized* hole in the desk lamp in my private hotel room at eleven PM?"

"Tell the truth," Ilya shrugs, "You were very busy not letting me fuck you."

“Rozanov.”

“It is not a lie. Technically, they think no one in the league is fucking so. This includes us.”

“Oh my god.”

“And you do keep interrupting me so I don’t know, I might not be fucking you tonight.”

“Don’t be dramatic.”

“*I* am dramatic?”

“I just think we should worry about the optics of this for a second!” Shane yelps, pushing at Ilya’s shoulder again, stressed, “We’ve never left a paper trail before, and I won’t let a *fucking* lamp—”

Ilya, the asshole that he is, presses the heels of his hands into the tops of Shane’s thighs and laughs.

”What?”

“That sounds like you want me to fuck you with the lamp.”

“I’m going to murder you.”

“Do you want me to fuck you with the lamp, Hollander?”

“Slowly, as maximally painful as possible.”

“Is a weird request for you, not boring enough, but hey, there is no shame here.”

“Can you shut up and be serious for two fucking seconds?” Shane splutters hands balled into fists under his chin, “What are we going to do with this lamp?”

He can see the exact second the thought enters Ilya’s mind, and how hard he fights, biting his smirking lips so hard Shane’s worried he’ll draw blood, trying to keep from letting it out. His resolve loses, “I think I know what you want me to do with the lamp.”

“Oh my god.”

“Okay, okay, seriously, I just—don’t you think we will think better about this *after* we have had sex?”

“Did you meet me yesterday?”

“No, several years ago.”

Fuck this guy. Shane tilts his head all the way back in hopes the ceiling is the only one catching his smile, “I’m not going to be able to think of anything other than this, and yes, that includes how to suck your dick, until we fix it.”

“There is nothing to fix,” Ilya laughs, pulling Shane’s shin down forcefully with his thumb, and leaves it there, “Do you know what kind of shit happens in these hotel rooms? Broken furniture is nothing.”

“You’re right, we should get off the desk. What if we break that too?” Shane worries, trying to hop up to standing.

Ilya stumbles back delightfully with the force of it, falling onto his elbows on the bed, “I promise you they will not care. Come kiss me.”

“They’re gonna ask questions when I check out and they find it! And how do I explain it? And when I can’t, they’ll probably just ban me from the entire chain of hotels, which will cause issues on not just these awards show weekend, but *all* away games, since we stay with them a lot, and then I’ll have to explain it to my team, and they’ll bench me forever!”

“Bench you forever, is that just firing?”

“They won’t be able to fire me because thinking I’m a weirdo who punches desk lamps isn’t just cause. So I’ll just be a bench warmer for the rest of my career. Because *you*—”

“Again, I think it was team effort.”

“Because you are *way* too good of a kisser.”

“Aw,” Ilya sits up a smidge more, head lolled cutely to one side, “I was going to complain that you talk way too much but you really sold it in the end.”

“My brain is only at like, half capacity,” Shane huffs, “Seriously, what do I do?”

“Hide it?”

“They’ll notice it's missing.”

“I can write a note,” Ilya gets back up, crowding Shane’s space by the desk again as he reaches around him for a pen. Totally unnecessary to press his entire front into Shane’s with the motion, but okay, sure. Shane white-knuckles the ledge of the desk behind him to keep from giving in to proximity. “I will say, *so sorry we broke your ugly lamp. Apparently I, Ilya Rozanov, have kissed Shane Hollander too—*”

“Are you actually—?” Shane twists when he notices, to his horror, Ilya has started scribbling around the hole in the lampshade, “Don’t *actually* write that—you made it ten times worse!”

“Was ugly, before,” Ilya smirks, keeps on scribbling, “C’mon, I will take blame. I promise.”

“This is *my* room! And you put my full government name *all* over the evidence!”

“You don’t have a middle name?”

“Your ability to focus on anything other than what’s important is astounding, truly.”

“Astounding, I like that word.”

“Rozanov.”

“Okay, okay!” Ilya coos softly, pulling Shane with him by the hand as he sits back on the bed. Shane stays grumpily standing between his knees, arms crossed over his chest. “How about this? You will stay here, and I will go back to my hotel room, alone.”

“Well,” Shane falters, because this may have been one of his worst over-corrects ever. He still wanted Ilya so, *so* embarrassingly bad. He just also *didn't* want this lamp on his conscience.

Luckily, Ilya keeps going before Shane can be reduced to begging, “And in ten minutes I will come back, not alone.”

“Um…”

“I will bring the cheap, ugly lamp from *my* room, and when we check out tomorrow, your room will look perfect, and the hotel will accuse *me* of stealing instead,” Ilya says, looking like he’s trying not to show off how proud he is of his plan. He can’t resist being a little smug about it, though, apparently, when he finishes it off, “And then I get to fuck you.”

It’s not a perfect plan, by any means. It’s suspicious enough when they come and go from each other's rooms just once, and Ilya’s now suggesting he make multiple trips. And he’ll still definitely be at least mildly paranoid until he’s safely out of this hotel. There’s also the broken lamp that he can’t just throw away for staff to find, now that it’s written on—he’ll have to take it with him, shove it in the bottom of his suitcase and not think about it until he’s back safely in his very private, secluded home.

It’s not a terrible lamp, all things considered, Shane thinks, twisting his head back to look at it.

Strange, he thinks, all the years he’s known him, and he’s just now getting to see what Ilya Rozanov’s handwriting looks like. It’s cute, the double loop of the Ls in his last name, the barely there dot of the i, the over-crossed Os. His name, written by Ilya.

He probably shouldn’t throw it out at home either, right? Just to be safe?

“You would do that for me?”

Ilya nods.

“Okay,” Shane whispers, shoving his hands into the pockets of his sweatpants, bashful all of a sudden. Ilya had his tongue down his throat a minute ago, and yet, this quiet kindness has left him feeling more exposed, closer to him than ever.

“Okay,” Ilya echoes happily.

“I just have one note.”

Ilya smiles in a way Shane can’t remember ever seeing before. Toothy, wide, scrunches up every other feature on his face. “Of course you do,” he reasons, makes a sort of ‘come here’ motion with one hand, “C’mon, let’s hear it.”

“I think I’ll die if you don’t fuck me right now, and get the lamp later.”

Ilya’s smile triples, if you can believe it, “Lamp I can cover up, dead body…I am not so sure.”

“Then you better get to work, asshole,” Shane starts to say, peters off into a yelp when Ilya yanks him mid-sentence by the waistband of his sweatpants forward, and they go toppling into each other on the bed.

“You know,” Ilya whispers, right before Shane’s mind goes blissfully blank again, “You are pretty good kisser too.”

Shane gives him a pretty good kiss, and grins into about a hundred more, “Can I get that in writing? Preferably on the lamp.”

Lily: *Have you seen my sweatshirt?*

Shane has to lean his entire upper body over his kitchen island for his phone, and is more pleased than he has any right to be by what he's met with once he finally flips it over.

Shane: *Technically…*

Lily: *Oh no. You are about to be not funny*

Shane: *I have seen with my own two eyes sweatshirts that you own, yes.*

Lily: *I am not laughing.*

Shane: *I don't believe you* ☺

His already good mood tripled with his obvious success, Shane rights himself back to standing and gets mostly back on task, tidying his kitchen. It's day two of a blissful four off, Rose is in town and on her way over, and he made Ilya Rozanov laugh.

What more could anyone want?

A sweatshirt, apparently. Right. He types out a ***Sorry, sorry. What's up?*** because he is not the asshole in this relation—or, uh. Shane's not the asshole between the two of them, obviously. If Rozanov's having a hard time doing his laundry, he doesn't know how he expects *Shane* to help, but he will one hundred percent offer. With the string of his own hoodie bit between his smile.

Lily: *There is a hoodie I wear after games. I cannot find.*

Shane: *I didn't know you were superstitious!*

Lily: *I am not.*

Shane: *Right. Just like you aren't laughing.*

Lily: *Nothing to laugh about.*

Lily: *I had it in Montreal last week.*

Aha. Got it.

It was sort of cute, Shane thinks as he tries to put the last couple dishes from the washer away with just one hand, that Ilya has a favorite sweatshirt. He must own dozens, Shane knows *he* does. But he likes this one so much he's sort of breaking the unspoken rule that they only text to coordinate hooking up.

Cute, he smiles, but ultimately hopeless, because there's no way he left it here.

Shane has cleaned the place top to bottom thrice since Ilya was last here and he feels incredibly certain that he'd notice an extra sweatshirt that wouldn't even fit him right lying around. Ilya shows up with literally nothing but the clothes on his back when he comes over, so it also feels sort of impossible for him to have gone back to his hotel in…what? A T-shirt? They're quick about it, the leaving, but never *that* quick, Shane thought. Not recently. He thinks about the last time Ilya was here, the look he gave him lingering in the doorway, how different it had felt from other times, how Shane had to ball his hands into tight fists at his side to keep from yanking Ilya back into the apartment by the collar of the hoodie he definitely left in.

But, as previously established, Shane is a nice guy and he's in an exceptionally good mood.

He twists to lean back against the counter, phone in one hand and pointer finger of the other absently spinning a glass he was supposed to be putting away beside him. Rose will still like him if he has three things on his drying rack. Ilya if he half-asses looking for this sweatshirt, on the other hand…

Shane: *Is there something you want to ask me nicely?*

Lily: *Who are you and what did you do with my Hollander?*

Shane: *Was that the question?*

Lily: *Well now I am worried about two things. My sweatshirt and your clone with an attitude.*

Shane: *I have an attitude? Me?*

Lily: *Oh my god*

Lily: *Hollander can you please check to see if I left my sweatshirt in your apartment?*

Lily: *Please.*

Alright. Shane sees the appeal of that. He spots his goofy grin, embarrassingly, in the reflection of his microwave.

Shane: *I don't think it's here but of course. I'll check.*

Lily: *Thank you.*

Shane: *You're welcome.*

With a heave of effort, Shane pushes himself off his slump on the counter and meanders in the direction of his bedroom. He's typing without even thinking about it, a humiliating double text, sort of annoyingly desperate to keep the conversation going.

Shane: *Though I'm not sure you really need it.*

Shane: *You played great last night without the lucky sweatshirt.*

He can see Ilya type and stop typing a few times. He commits to something by the time Shane reaches his room.

Lily: *Is not lucky.*

Lily: *You were watching?*

Of course he watched the game. He thought it was obvious, and the fact that it's not—that Ilya doesn't know Shane is always looking for ways to see him—is both a relief and a let down. He does not choose to look into any of this. At all, ever. But especially not right this second.

He fires off a quick, ***Sure!*** as he hops into his bathroom. It getting lost somewhere behind the hamper is maybe the only place he can think he might have missed the not-lucky sweatshirt. With that in mind, he tries to steer them—mostly himself—back on task.

Shane: *I think my first comment still stands though. I've seen you in a lot of sweatshirts. How do I know what I'm looking for?*

Lily: *Usually people ask for pictures with LESS clothing, not more.*

Shane: *Did I ask for a picture at all?*

Lily: *You are right you did not. You saw me last night!*

Shane doesn't laugh. It's just. His throat is dry. Because he's thirsty. God, he's just making it worse. *Yes,* Shane laughs.

He crouches by the sink as Ilya's next text comes through.

Lily: *Fine fine. Is black, with hood.*

Shane: *Really narrows it down, thanks.*

Lily: *I don't know! Is just a black sweatshirt!*

Shane: *It can't be worth all this trouble if that's all you can give me.*

Lily: *Fuck you. It has um. Swoop?*

Shane: *Swoop?*

Lily: *Like a check. But it swoops.*

"A black sweatshirt," Shane says to himself, squinting at his phone while he stands, his bathroom floor yielding no results, as expected, "With a hood and…"

Shane suddenly catches sight of himself in the mirror, the smile that always comes with Ilya lately bright and high up on his cheeks, hair flopped a little sideways from the sudden upright, and the top half of his body that he can see fully, cozily, delightfully dressed in—

“Shit.”

Ilya was right, Shane thinks, tracing the small white symbol on the black hoodie he’s currently wearing. The Nike logo is a check but it swoops.

Oh god. *Oh god.*

How this happened is beyond him? He swore this was—shit. Shit! Do all sweatshirts start to look and feel and smell the same after a while to the point where he put it on his body this morning without even realizing it wasn’t his?

This train of thought isn’t even correct because now that he’s thinking about it, *nothing* about this sweatshirt is the same. He pulls at the sleeves that he swore he somehow, he doesn’t know, messed up in the wash? They land near his knuckles and the wider-than usual bottom sits below his waist, just this side of too big, which has made it the best sweatshirt he owns.

Doesn’t own. *Fuck.*

It is so soft, so cozy. He’d chalked it up to his mom insisting he use this new fabric softener but none of his other clothes feel like this. They couldn’t. Because he doesn’t own *this* one. He turns the hem inside out like he’s going to find Ilya’s name scribbled on a tag for proof.

It smells like him, he thinks, burrowing deeper into the collar. Lingering sweat, cigarette, and something sweet he hasn’t yet placed.

Is Shane used to his smell now, or just so used to wanting it?

Whole closet full of things to wear and this is what he put on, without even realizing.

He has to take it off, like, immediately.

But it's rude not to respond, right? He'll answer Ilya, give himself a thirty-second internal (or external, it's sort of feeling that dire right now, if he's honest) scream, and *then* take off the sweatshirt. Yeah. Sure.

Shane: *Um actually it's your lucky day!*

Lily: *I told you. Is not lucky.*

Shane: *No I know I know. It's an expression. I found your sweatshirt.*

Lily: *Really?*

Shane: *Why would I lie?*

Lily: *Because you are apparently a jokester today.*

Shane is a lot of things today, *insane* and *fucked* at the very tip top of the list, but *in the mood to joke* nowhere near it. He bites a stressed smile into the top of his knuckles.

Shane: *I really really have it. Black sweatshirt with a hood and a swoop that smells like smoke.*

Lily: *Oh my god Hollander.*

Shane: *What? It DOES. I can smell it from across the room where it's sitting in a ball on the floor that I haven't touched.*

Shit. Overcorrect?

Lily: *I believe that actually. What I do not believe is that you are not fucking with me right now.*

In a brief moment of temporary insanity, Shane thinks up the bright idea to prove it by taking a bad selfie in his mirror. Phone covering almost all of his face, no idea what to do with his other hand—seriously, Shane *never* does this—but black hoodie with a swoop clearly visible.

He thinks Ilya would like it. He thinks this photo can never see the light of day.

Shane gets out of his camera app as fast as humanly possible, selfie forgotten for now, then starts pacing the length of his bedroom nervously, typing, ***I promise I'm not. But I don't know how to prove it other than to give it back to you next time you're here.***

Lily: *I think you know exactly how to prove it.*

Shane rolls his eyes. There is no tonal consistency whenever he's talking to Ilya. What the fuck is the procedure here? Ask for his mailing address? Call him? Was this all some strangely elaborate foreplay?

The logical next step is to double down on his white lie—send a picture of the sweatshirt balled up, forgotten, in the corner of Shane's room somewhere.

But the longer Shane paces, the longer this *other* idea has time to form in his mind.

He gnaws at the little plastic end of one of the hoodie strings and that's—it'd be rude, right? Shane's *used* this sweatshirt. Got his germs on it. It's currently in his mouth.

It's poor form to give it back, right?

He types and deletes at least a dozen different messages:

~~***Are you sure you want it back?***~~

~~***Let's trade.***~~

~~***If you saw how I looked in it I bet you'd let me keep it.***~~

~~***You smell so fucking good. How? How the fuck?***~~

~~***How did you forget it?***~~

~~***Was it on purpose? Did you want me to find it?***~~

~~***Come get it yourself. Get in one of your eight million cars with incredibly poor gas mileage and drive here. And maybe if you make it worth my while***~~

~~***I think this is the best sweatshirt I have ever put on my body and I both hate and love that it's technically yours.***~~

~~***I miss you.***~~

~~***Tell me exactly where you got this so I can buy one for my***~~

And oh. Hm. That's a thought.

As far as Shane is concerned he's already come to the terribly ill-advised conclusion that he *cannot* part with this sweatshirt. In absolutely no circumstance. But Ilya knows he has it now.

No other sweatshirt will ever be exactly this one, pseudo-stolen from his…whatever. From his Ilya.

It would take weeks, *months* even, to get any other sweatshirt back to *this* condition. Getting Ilya to somehow forget it here again, or getting him to wear one of Shane's to simulate the conditions—the stretched out shoulders and sleeves and strings and inexplicable feeling of knowing it lived on Ilya's skin first and oh my god no. No. Shane *has* to have *this one*.

Ilya has like, triple confirmed that the sweatshirt bears no superstitious significance.

So.

He technically just needs a black sweatshirt with a hood and a swoop back.

Not, say, this one exactly.

But Shane needs this one. Exactly.

Shane can replace it.

He's flying to the internet before he has time to question it any further, stupidly thinking a google search of "black Nike sweatshirt" is going to magically take him to the exact one he wants and not yield hundreds of pages of options. Holy shit Nike makes a lot of black sweatshirts. This could take him hours, days. Does he even really know what he's looking for? He's going to have to scroll and scroll and scroll and—

Lily: *Hollander?*

Lily: *There is only one good reason I'll allow you to disappear.*

Shane: *Shut up.*

Lily: *I do not mind if you have to wash my sweatshirt before you give it back to me* 😉

Shane: *You are so gross. I can't even figure out what you're trying to imply*

Lily: *You have terrible imagination.*

No, Shane thinks, his mind is actually having a pretty fucking advanced field day up there right now! He's seeing and hearing and feeling things in a level of vivid detail he has never experienced before.

Ilya seeing his sweatshirt on Shane, Ilya putting his hands under his sweatshirt on Shane, Ilya pushing the collar of his sweatshirt to the side so he can kiss his favorite spot on Shane, Ilya pulling his sweatshirt off Shane. Ilya insisting they keep his sweatshirt *on* Shane.

Shane's going to be sick. Or hard. He doesn't even know.

He all but jumps out of skin and sweatshirt at the sharp *ding* of a text, too lost in the lamest fucking fantasy in the world there for a second (seriously, he's salivating over loungewear. Who fucking does that?)

This is fine. He can carry a polite conversation in which he procures nothing but Ilya's professional mailing address. He can be normal.

Rose: *Hereeeeeee* ❤️❤️❤️

Oh good. Rose, who can notoriously read him like a book. Wonderful.

Shane blows all the air out of his lungs through pursed lips, eyes squinted shut, like he's gotta work up the mental fortitude for this next task.

He pulls the sweatshirt up and over, off, tosses it on his bed.

His phone buzzes twice in his back pocket in the time it takes him to get to the door, and he resists every urge to check which of his two problems it is.

“Oh my god, finally,” Rose all but collapses into his doorway, several bags swinging in her dramatic entrance. “It is so miserably cold outside. Why do you willingly live here again?”

“Winter doesn’t bother you, huh?” Shane smiles, letting his friend whirlwind her way into the apartment. He missed her so bad.

“I just spent three months filming on a beach,” she tosses her two jackets and a scarf over the back of the couch, “Excuse me for acclimating.”

“You could have visited me in the summer.”

“Do I only get to visit you once a year?” She stops, half of her face quirked up in challenging disapproval, but it melts almost instantly in favor of launching herself at him for a hug instead, “Ugh, Shane Hollander.”

“Rose Landry,” he giggles, his matching the force of her hug inadvertently lifting her feet off the ground. “How was the beach?”

“Eh,” she shrugs, leaning back a smidge to get a hold of Shane’s face in her hands. She sighs into a smile, “Ugh, *of course* you somehow got hotter.”

“I was just thinking of your acclimating.”

Shane has always loved the way she full-body laughs, and right now is no exception. The room feels bright, lighter, not suffocating in the way it had been a minute ago, which is more necessary than he had initially realized. His Nike sweatshirt-induced brain fog clears, at least a little, which is a victory Shane’s rapid heart rate could really take right about now.

“There really is no one I like more than you on any of these sets, Shane. You’ve ruined everything,” Rose teases, switching gears to unpacking the take-out she’d brought in with her. And wow, how thoughtful of Shane to leave all the cutlery they’d need tonight easily accessible on his drying rack!

He slides forks over to her side of the island, “Sorry. I think the only solution is to follow you around to all your fancy beach shoots.”

“Obviously. I don’t think your job would miss you if you quit,” she grins, her words punctuated by the snap of opening container lids, “What is it you do again?”

Shane laughs, sits down on the stool to her right.

“Congrats on your win the other night,” Rose says around an eager first biteful of food.

“You watched?” Shane asks, feeling crazy with the echo of Ilya he can never escape.

“Well,” she tuts, “The in-flight wifi I paid an arm and a leg for was a joke. But if you count the sporadic few minutes it stopped buffering, yes. It looked like a really great game for you.”

“Thanks. It’s an honor to be worth shitty wifi,” Shane hums, pushing the rice on his plate side to side absently, stalling the inevitable, “Where’d you get this from?”

“Why? Is it wrong?” Rose leans over, shoulder pressed squarely into Shane’s as she inspects his plate, “I specifically asked for the blandest salmon possible—“

“No, no it’s fine, it’s perfect. Just not super hungry, I guess.”

“Shane,” she glares, “I have three months of set drama backlogged that I can’t get through on your empty, pouting stomach.”

“My *stomach* is pouting?”

“When did you get this attitude?” She gripes, effectively leaving Shane to sit there and wave all his progress down the drain goodbye.

Because now he’s thinking about *him* again. Something he was supposed to leave far, far away. Like, in a heap on his duvet.

Literally *how* is he supposed to go on existing if even the mere mention of a word, or a hockey game—his literal career—is going to snap him back into his Ilya Rozanov daze. That damn sweatshirt. And he had been doing so good! For a whole five minutes!

Maybe Rose was serious about giving him a career change. At this rate, he’s not making it through the rest of the season.

He could be useful on a movie set, he thinks. Sure, he isn’t built like a defenseman so maybe security is out but you know, Shane’s…nice? He can take average pictures with a phone camera. He takes direction well. He’d be more than willing to help move around set pieces, maybe drive crew members around on a golf cart. If they ever made a movie about hockey he could be, what’s it called? Like, an expert witness! But like, for fun, not crime. He’s pretty good at carrying clothes around a store when he hangs out with Rose while shopping, so maybe wardrobe could—

“Theoretically speaking, if someone wanted to buy like, one specific item of clothing, totally hypothetically—"

“Oh, I already love where this is going,” Rose pushes her dinner forward, leans up in her elbows, chin in hands expectantly.

“Like not, ‘I want a black sweatshirt’ in general, but more of like, ‘I need to purchase this one black sweatshirt exactly’—but like, not a black sweatshirt, I don’t know why I said that. Let’s say, like, fuzzy red socks,” Shane starts rambling, “How would I—I mean, *someone*—how would someone go about finding that—them. Specifically? Like is it possible?”

“Are you asking me how shopping works?”

“Maybe?”

“I love you so much,” she cackles, delighted, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I didn’t think you *had* to buy clothes. I just assumed athletic wear companies were in constant bidding wars to have you wear their stuff.”

“This is um,” Shane clears his throat, already mildly regretting getting her involved in this. Maybe he should have just eaten his bland fucking salmon. “It’s complicated.”

“Mhm,” Rose makes a grabby motion with one hand, “Let me see this sweatshirt.”

“I didn’t say—” Shane huffs.

“Right sorry, *the fuzzy red socks*. Lemme see.”

Shane shifts to dig his phone out of his back pocket, worried if he goes and gets the actual sweatshirt Rose will become even more accurately aware of how fucked Shane is. The smell of cigarettes he doesn’t smoke, the fact that there’s nothing wrong with it that would prompt buying a new one.

He has three unread texts from Ilya that it takes a massive effort to not look at immediately. He swipes them away, zooms in on the picture he just took as much as possible, then passes his phone, reluctantly, to Rose.

It takes her less than three seconds to make Shane’s heart stop, “Oh, okay. I get it.”

“You—you do?” Shane peeks over, like he didn’t spend forever analyzing this picture himself. He watches how she zooms in and out, panicked.

“I did not expect such a bad boy move from you.”

What gave it away? He panics—something in the picture? Did Ilya send a text? Sure, his name’s saved as “Lily” but they’re definitely not as careful as they should be about the content of those messages. Or is he just *that* hopelessly done for that it’s oozing out of his pores?

“Um, it’s not what it—”

“Wanting to wear another company’s clothing you’re not allowed to in public,” Rose tuts, turning his phone back to face him as if this explains it, “I get it, rebellion looks very good on you.”

His sigh of relief is audible, “Right, right yeah. You caught me. Ah!”

“I didn’t realize they were that strict!” Rose ponders, passing Shane his phone back. And she’s right, they really aren’t. Shane’s contracts are more public facing, like, *“Hey! Make sure our logo is clearly showing in your eight million press interviews!”* and less *“You must not purchase outside brands in any circumstance ever!”* He wouldn’t be in trouble for simply wanting to wear a black sweatshirt he finds comfortable at home.

It’s just, this sweatshirt specifically, *would* cause a lot of trouble.

So he lets Rose believe in this contractual nightmare “Yeah, it’s—it’s crazy.”

“Well, give me like, three seconds, I’ll find it,” she waves him off, having no idea the flood of ease her nonchalance has gifted him.

They get back to eating and much more than three seconds (more like twenty minutes) later, her lackadaisical scroll while they talk and eat has yielded success. He has no idea how she did that. And multitasking! Shane was about to be in online shopping hell for weeks.

“Gets here on Thursday, you’re welcome,” Rose smiles proudly, leaning back in her chair and gulping down the last bit of her ginger ale.

Shane almost chokes on a very dry vegetable, “You bought it already?”

“It seemed very important, and I know you. You would have debated buying it for like, 3-5 business *years*,” she shrugs, which is a gross understatement, but not for the reasons Rose is suggesting. Or maybe *exactly* for the reasons Rose is suggesting. Shane is Shane.

Regardless, Rose has saved him heaps of trouble in his pursuit to get himself into trouble. He thinks Ilya would be proud of him. Which, itself, is a counterproductive thought to the cause. But puts a smile so wide on Shane’s face he can’t even be mad he has to hide it in the stainless steel front of his refrigerator.

“Thank you,” Shane replies softly, stacking their dishes on top of each other to carry to the sink, “I wanna say you didn’t have to…”

“Of course, you deserve it. Maybe I should have bought myself one, too.”

“Is that your way of asking me to borrow a sweatshirt?”

“Tropical climate. Three months.”

“Yes ma’am,” Shane laughs, bumping his chair in with one hip, “I’ll be back in a minute. You wanna pick a movie?”

She makes Shane promise to pick her his very best as he goes, flipping his phone out before he’s even anywhere near his bedroom. Everything feels urgent.

The three missed texts from Ilya read:

Lily: *Oh my god Hollander*

Lily: *I cannot believe you will actually make me ask nicely.*

Lily: *I want to see you.*

Shane's heart somersaults. He bumps into the doorframe twice, too busy typing to look up.

Shane: *Thank you for the confirmation that you don't watch my games.*

Lily: *You know I do.*

Lily: *And you know what I mean.*

Shane: *I can't. Rose is here.*

Shane gnaws at his left thumb nervously, displeased with his answer as much as he knows Ilya will be.

Lily: *So you can't send me picture?*

Shane: *You know it wouldn't be just that.*

Lily: *Fuck. Does your girlfriend know how many nights she has ruined for me?*

Not my girlfriend, Shane types, feeling the way his whole body beams with it, ***And you have no idea how badly I want to know that.***

Lily: *Send her home.*

Shane: *Ilya.*

Lily*: Text me when she is home. Finger slipped. Oops.*

Right, Shane thinks as he hums to himself, pleased with how he's turned this whole night around without an ounce of trying. When you look up nonchalance in the dictionary you'll find a picture of Shane Hollander tonight! One night only! Special event.

He grabs the offending sweatshirt off his bed, hugs it to his chest with one hand while he swipes through his closet of never ending sweats that will now never do.

When he finds one for Rose, and one for himself that won't further give himself away to her, he finally answers Ilya.

Shane: *I'll call you.*

Lily: *Yes you will.*

Shane: *So I should keep this until I'm in Boston next week?*

Ilya types and types and types, and Shane knows he has places to be, but he won't get a breath in until he hears whatever he has to say, so he waits, lips swollen red and bit together.

Lily: *It depends. You might wear it better than me.*

Shane: *Always a competition, huh?*

Lily: *Delete this immediately.*

Lily: *But I think I will let you win this one.*

He only realizes he's doing it when it's too late to stop.

He's standing in the drink aisle of the grocery store, checking the expiration dates on the cans of Coke, mentally cross-checking them with Boston's away game schedule, and the reality hits him like someone shook one of those cans and popped it open. A snap. A fizz. A mess.

Shane is making space for Ilya.

Everywhere there can be space, Shane is making it. The stack of towels on the right side of his bathroom closet that he knows Ilya likes best when he's over, spending an hour deleting photos on his phone so he has the storage to keep every single text "Lily" has ever sent, the glass cleaner he keeps embarrassingly at the top of his stairs, the broken lamp on the desk in a guest bedroom that never gets used, keeping considerably less ginger ale in his fridge so he has room for unexpired Coke.

Shane has Ilya everywhere, and also nowhere at all.

It would be frightening how easily Shane could fit him in his life if it didn't feel like *this*. Like pillow-soft blanket and the greatest black hoodie in the world.

He has all this stuff, *all this Ilya*, and it's too late to do anything about it. He collected it slowly, attracting so little attention in the act that not even he could have noticed. To purge it all now, just because he's finally caught on? That *would* attract attention. And Shane is nothing if not cautious. It's just—it's his shit now.

But it's fine, he thinks, hauling the case of soda into his shopping cart. Ilya can be on his counters and his bed and his stairs.

Because it's all over the place.

It's space, but it's scattered, so Shane never has to look it in the eye for more than a second.

A drawer, Shane thinks. Ilya can never have a drawer.

And he doesn't, and Shane won't ever make him one, collect up all his stuff and carve out a section of space in Shane's most intimate space, his bedroom, just to keep Ilya—er, Ilya's stuff.

So, yeah. Everything's fine. And soda's buy one get one free. He really had no choice, if you think about it. Shane pats himself on the back for being an incredibly smart shopper as he picks up some ginger ale without second-checking anything on it.

“You have very good reception on the plane.”

Shane cannot giggle three seconds into this phone call, because he has dignity, if you can believe it.

So instead, he stops his shopping cart smack in the middle of the aisle, leans his elbows on the push handle, and holds the phone two feet away from his face.

Then, he giggles at Ilya Rozanov.

“The game was postponed for weather,” he replies, even though he knows Ilya knows this, returning to a slow roll with only the guidance of his forearms.

“What does that have to do with anything? I did not postpone you coming over,” Ilya croons, “So, you are on plane, right now, no?”

Shane squirms, the flush crawling up his neck already, “You’re ridiculous.”

“Everyone is so dramatic about snow. Plane flies fine. See you in, what? An hour?”

“They got us booked on the first flight out in the morning,” he hums, distractedly trying to remember what was next on his shopping list.

“Ugh, how will I sleep?”

“Perfectly fine, I imagine.”

“No, impossible,” Ilya heaves, his breath so hot on the phone it feels like he’s blowing directly into Shane’s ear. “You have everything I need.”

“Like what? Your sweatshirt? My blanket?”

“Hm, not exactly,” he tuts softly. He blows a raspberry through his lips loudly, which Shane can appreciate as cute for the first time ever, since over the phone the trilling noise comes sans-spit. He just gets to picture how it puffs up Ilya’s cheeks. A quick and not unnoticed subject change, “So, you are in bed?”

Shane smirks. *There he is.* He hates to disappoint, but, “No, no, I’m uh—trying to optimize the sudden schedule change. Get some errands in.”

“Errands?” he quirks, confused for a beat, and then laughs haughtily, “You are *out*? You can drive in snow but not take plane?”

“I don’t control the decisions air traffic control makes, asshole,” Shane counters, unfortunately quite tickled by Ilya’s ire at missing him for a whole extra day, “And you like to act like the big tough guy from Russia, but I grew up in snow too. I’m good at driving through it.”

”Okay Mr Perfect,” Ilya bites sarcastically, then slips into what Shane assumes is supposed to be an imitation of his voice, “*I’m Shane Hollander and I am good at everything*—“

“Oh my god, you’d make a terrible Canadian.”

“Impossible, I am so nice.” Shane can practically hear the little shrug that goes with it. “Maybe I prove it to you one day.”

“Okay,” Shane mumbles, biting the inside of his smiling cheek, “Well, if you’re done picking on me, I’m gonna hang—”

“No!” Ilya yelps, suddenly, so loud Shane has to nudge the phone away from his ear, “No no no, no, stay. I stay, for your boring errands.” He clears his throat after his sudden outburst, “I mean, if you would like the company.”

“I would, I would like that,” Shane says, just above a whisper, pulling his cart to the side of the aisle in case anyone comes since he’s going to need a minute or two to reteach himself basic bodily autonomy, like walking, and breathing, and not being enamored by Ilya Rozanov.

“Okay,” Ilya says, his voice low and soft, “So not in bed. Where are you?”

“Uh, shopping.”

“Ah, shopping. For what?”

“Nothing exciting. Some non-produce grocery store stuff that won’t go bad while I’m away,” Shane answers, avoiding eye contact with his cans of Coke. He tracks through his mental list of what’s still left to get, since his phone with the hard copy is being used for more important things, “I’m almost done. I’m standing in front of the laundry detergent right now, actually.”

“I just promised to be nice, Hollander,” Ilya groans, and Shane laughs at the sound of him banging his head against something. Is he in his bathroom, getting ready for bed? Is he walking aimlessly up and down his long hallway, like Shane does when they talk sometimes, restless? Is he in his kitchen, making dinner? For two? Shane’s internal babble is cut off, “But you somehow made it *more* boring. I did not think it was possible.”

“You should really stop underestimating me.”

Ilya laughs.

“I don’t know, I actually think the laundry aisle might be the epitome of sex appeal,” Shane teases, surprising himself with how well he delivers it, voice earnest. “Dryer sheets for foreplay, I’m sure there’s an innuendo in lint traps if you try hard enough.”

“I knew you would help me fall asleep,” Ilya drawls, earning him another stifled laugh.

“Asshole,” Shane murmurs, which is akin to a pet name by now. “Alright, if you really wanna be bored, I’m actually dying to know: do you buy the gallon you pour into the cap, or do you buy the pods?”

“You want to know how I do laundry?”

“Yeah,” Shane says, and really means it. There’s so much he wants to know about Ilya, and not a lot of it has to do with their shared profession, which is the problem. “Hold on, let me guess. The pods, right?”

“Mm, sometimes.”

“*Sometimes*?” Shane balks. The thought of not having a brand you buy routinely genuinely punching the air out of his lungs momentarily. How is Ilya not constantly shaking with stress?

“Yes, I have been trying many different ones, sometimes they do not make the pods,” Ilya explains, “Everything makes me, um, itchy.”

Shane gasps, “You’re allergic to laundry detergent?”

“No, no. Is not that bad. Team doctor said—”

“You saw the *team doctor* over this?” Shane worries, louder than he probably should be in such a public place, but oh my god. “And you never told me? Oh my god, *my sheets*—”

“Your sheets are no problem.”

“And *my towels*! When you *shower*! Do you itch? Is it a rash?”

“It is nothing! *Nothing*! I am okay, *promise*,” Ilya placates, voice high and soft. Shane releases the grip he didn’t even know he had on his sweatshirt (black with a hood and a swoop, by the way), screwed up in a twist over his chest. “I have uh, what did she call it? Sensitive skin.”

“Sensitive skin?” Shane breathes the littlest, minusculest sigh of relief.

“Yes. What can I say, I am sensitive guy,” Ilya croons, obviously trying to ease a laugh out of Shane. It infuriatingly works very well. “Big softie, big mush.”

“Something about you is big, alright.”

“Shane Hollander!”

I love the way you say my name. It’s on the tip of his tongue. The Tide pods as his witness, Shane has to swallow down every last word. He’s almost unsuccessful. *Nobody else in the world says it like you. I sort of hope nobody else ever says it ever again. It should only be you.*

“So, which one’s best for you?” Is what he says instead. Safe. But just barely. The fucking laundry detergent. He was joking when he said there might be some sex appeal here, but apparently, Shane Hollander loves to beat records in all areas of life.

“Why? So you can buy?” Ilya asks, scolding tone to his voice, “Do not do that, Hollander.”

“No, no,” Shane insists, pushing the items in his cart around to make space for an extra laundry detergent bottle that he’s absolutely going to buy, “I told you, I really just wanna know.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really,” Shane implores, pushing his back against the mop display behind him and tipping his hat over his eyes to let another customer pass him. “Would it help if I told you mine first?”

“No,” Ilya says, but then quickly amends, “I mean yes, *yes*, I want to know, but it will not help. I don’t remember the name.”

Shane chuckles, “You can’t go check?”

“I am too comfortable here, talking to you.”

“Where are you?” Shane can feel his whole body go oozy-gooey soft, his voice with it, so Ilya must hear it too. He doesn’t call him out on it, which is a small blessing, because when Shane’s body leans, melts with warmth, it makes his cart push forward a little and knock three cases of wet wipes off the bottom shelf.

“My couch,” Ilya answers simply.

Shane can see him perfectly in his mind, but asks anyway, “Right in the middle?”

“Is the best spot.”

“You’re such a weirdo, the end’s the best. Right up against the arm.”

“So you can watch TV from the side?”

“I don’t watch a lot of TV.”

“I knew this.”

“Because I’m boring, right?”

“Because I know you.”

First aid’s how many aisles over, again? Shane’s just checking because, well, he’s never been asthmatic but, *woah*. His chest heaves, and the fist he presses to his forehead is hot, and he feels…sensitive. All over. Maybe he’s catching the draft coming in from the front doors. Ilya will kill him if he misses his flight tomorrow because he got the flu standing in the laundry aisle. Realizing even *these* thoughts inherently become about Ilya is not as surprising as it should be, but then again, he’s already preparing for how he’ll explain to Ilya that his sweatshirt is cut to shreds because the EMTs had to make space for the defibrillator pads. See? He just did it again. *Ilya, Ilya, Ilya.*

“Is um, is a white bottle.”

“Hm?” Shane blinks back into the world, barely catching whatever Ilya had just said.

“The detergent that does not make my skin itch,” Ilya restarts, “Is a white bottle with a purple cap, and blue uh, blue butterflies on the label.”

“Yeah?” Shane nods to himself, holding the phone up with his shoulder as he immediately goes scanning for bottles that match Ilya’s descriptors, “That’s *so* you.”

“You do not think I am like butterfly?”

“A worm, maybe,” Shane ribs, “Wormed your way into my life years ago and here you still are.”

“You cannot even insult me correctly,” Ilya’s voice feels far away, like he too has to do the five-feet-away to laugh trick. Shane pushes his own phone closer like that’ll bring him back, “Is caterpillar, that turns into butterfly.”

“I know,” Shane smiles, and then, as a substitute for what he really wanted to say, before, “I love the way you say caterpillar.”

This laugh is loud, rumbled right next to the microphone, like he couldn’t have helped it, even if he wanted to.

“*Caterpillar*.”

“Amazing,” Shane echoes Ilya’s low tone, delighted both at the crisp pronunciation of each syllable, and at successfully finding the white bottle of detergent with butterflies on it. *For sensitive skin*, the label reads. Shane holds his breath when he heaves it off the shelf and into his cart so Ilya won’t hear a thing. “Well um, I think the store’s gonna close soon.”

“Ah, yes, yes, you should…” Ilya’s voice trails off, uncertain. Then, “What time is your flight tomorrow?”

“Um, I don’t know.”

"*You* don't know?"

He thought they'd been over this before, the distraction that Ilya is, on even a good day, not factoring in things like the way he's cooing sweet nothings about insects directly into Shane's ear in public.

Shane answers, "I'll send you a picture of my boarding pass when I hang up."

"Perfect, I can stalk airport website."

You would love my mom, is the next absolutely bonkers thought he bites back. He doesn't even know where it comes from, or if it has any plausibility at all. But the thought worms, pun intended, it's way into his brain, and sticks. Will sit there for hours and days and weeks, and Shane will play made up memories of his mom and his—*Ilya*, his mom and Ilya, making fun of him for his airplane hair from the front two seats of his Jeep.

"You still there, Hollander?"

"Yes, yeah, sorry," Shane replies, pushing his cart out of this aisle as fast as he possibly can. "Um, thank you, for coming with me on this boring errand."

"Thank you for taking me," Ilya voice croons with what sounds like genuine thanks, "Hey, I know you are big tough guy from Canada—"

"Shut up."

"But drive safe, okay?"

"Okay. I can, uh, I'll text you when I get home."

Ilya's quiet for so long Shane worries, briefly, that he missed him hanging up. But then, a very soft, "I will see you tomorrow, on the end of my couch."

By the time Shane actually does hang up, he has navigated to a very important detour in the freezer section.

He swings a door open with unnecessary force, leans his upper body in as far as he can, and while he cools his nervous system, sends a giant "Fuck you" to whoever invented laundry detergent, and caterpillars, and snowstorm delays.

His parents are usually very good about this kind of stuff, but tonight, there's a newspaper with Shane's picture plastered across the front left sitting on their coffee table.

"Sorry, hun," his mom squeezes his shoulder, tucking one foot under herself and sitting in the middle of the couch, "*Somebody* forgot a coaster the other day and thought the paper was an appropriate alternative."

It's clear who her pointed glare and tone are meant for when his dad grumbles back from his chair at the table a few feet away, barely peeking up over his glasses, "I was gonna get up at the next commercial break, I told you."

“It would have taken you ten seconds,” his mom tuts, clearly having had this argument several times in the few weeks since Shane last visited between games. She leans into Shane, her shoulder bumping him into the arm of the couch, and smiles conspiratorially, “Wait until you hear the riveting show he *could not* miss to spare my nice furniture.”

“Sorry that I enjoy watching my son,” his dad defends, the scrape of his chair punctuating his attitude as he stands a smidge, looking for a puzzle piece.

“You guys were at my last game,” Shane smiles, scooting his hands back nervously under his thighs, “You couldn’t have been watching—”

“It was a replay of that silly documentary you did last year,” his mom cuts in, her lips pressed together like she’s holding in her real amusement.

“It’s not silly,” his dad finally looks up, eyebrows high over his glasses and glints directly at Shane, “I don’t think your yoga is silly, Shane.”

“I don’t think his *yoga* is silly, I think *you’re* silly for being afraid of a cliffhanger after his downward dog, because we can watch him do yoga whenever we want. And in 3D!”

Shane’s eyes bounce back and forth between his parents, unable to wipe the smile off his face. His apartment’s nice, he loves his own calm, quiet space, but he misses living so close to here, being just a drive away from mundane fights over coasters. He sips happily at his ginger ale, the tab twisted around and a straw stuck through the opening, the habit his mom doesn’t know he’s kicked since childhood.

The documentary, and replays of games for that matter, both sort of fall into the same category: pictures of himself that make Shane uncomfortable to look at. Terrible thing to hate in his career, but it doesn’t matter how many times he sees himself on a TV, or a magazine, or an ad on a bus someplace—Shane doesn’t think he’ll ever get used to it. It’s so *weird*, and he’ll find at least twelve different spots on the picture that *look weird*, and then he’s left for hours *feeling weird*. Even just pictures his teammates take, like the hundreds that circulated from their celebration in the locker room last year, make Shane squirmy. And he loves Jackie so much, but that woman swears everything has to be documented. If he bothered with social media outside of sponsored posts and resharing things his publicist says he should, Shane knows he’d bump into his stupid smile everywhere.

Among other stupid smiles. Not important right now, but he can't stop himself from thinking it. How much more of Ilya could he see if he got over his own weird feeling about—

Off topic. Pictures. Pictures *of himself.*

He hates them, and he's made that abundantly clear enough times that he knows he's always safe at his parents'. They love watching hockey together, but not replays of his own games, or documentary segments. Shane has come to terms with the few obligatory proud parent things they've got hanging up, but it's not like he's gonna come face to face with his ad campaign for deodorant taped to the fridge.

Which is why the newspaper was so surprising, at first, but their story checks out. Very his dad, very his mom.

He'd be content to let it go, snuggled back into the worn couch cushions with their idle chatter and indeed, a hockey game on the TV as soothing background noise, if he didn't catch who his mug was sharing the headline with.

Ready to Tie it Up? Rozanov On Track to Settle Cup Score with Hollander, as Boston Pulls Ahead of Montreal in Race to Playoffs

Bit wordy, isn't it? And not even that clever.

Shane presses all his weight into his feet, planted firmly between the couch and the coffee table and leans, inspecting. Sure, he faced off with Ilya during the game, last week, but this looks…*intense*. More intense than it should. Or ever feels, lately. Ilya says something funny and Shane tries not to smile and it's…is this what he really looks like? Is this how he looks at Ilya, professionally? Is this what people are seeing?

Have people started catching on? Can they tell Shane always skates just a smidge too close? Can they tell Shane's every other thought is about the way Ilya's mouth guard muffles his

accent, and the sweat pooling on his brow, and how easy it would be to rip his helmet off and —

He shoves that traitorous thought away. He has *no idea* how anyone got such a clear picture of that moment, but it just reinforces Shane's belief that it's all just so fucking *weird.*

"This looks photoshopped," Shane finally says, trying to keep his voice level.

"Photoshop, *right*," his dad mumbles, then, to his mom, a touch lower, like Shane's not supposed to hear, "Do we know that word?"

"It's a good picture of you," she placates, a non-answer, taking a slow sip from her mug.

"I can't believe they're still printing corny stuff like this," Shane remarks, finger tracing some of the words on the headline, "I don't think Il—*Boston* wants to win another cup *just* to spite *me*. I think they just want to win, like everyone."

"Most people don't think that logically, Shane," his mom shrugs,"And until they get a better story, everyone knows you two get views, and reads, and clicks."

"Shame he was rude to you all those years ago, Shane," his dad says, intently sifting through a new pile of pieces at his seat, so he doesn't even look up to deliver this next blow, "He looks like a really nice guy."

"Um, what do you—what do you mean?" Shane stutters, gaze flitting rapidly between his unbothered dad, and Newspaper Ilya.

"I mean, I know he has a reputation. But you wouldn't know, by just the look of him, that he's not that nice," his dad gives very little further explanation. "It's the eyes."

"What about his eyes?" Shane asks, knowing how eager he sounds.

He's an expert on Ilya's eyes. Straight A student, graduated with honors. If his dad asked for a millimeter by millimeter breakdown of the way every shade of blue blends into the next in the ring of each of Ilya's pupils, Shane could deliver. Shane could *willingly* deliver. Shane would deliver for free. Shane would *pay his dad* to *let* him deliver.

"He has kind eyes."

"Ignore your father, he's been busy trying to make us look even less cool and much older by developing an affinity for romance novels in his spare time," his mom waves him off, which is good, because Shane was about to say he didn't know about all of that, but Ilya's eyes definitely were *one* of a kind.

"I um, I think that makes you sound less old? Romance novels are cool again."

"Are they?"

"I told you," his dad laughs, "All the best main characters get their eyes described as kind."

"Whatever that means."

"Which is why it doesn't make sense that boy has them," his dad says, like this has seriously troubled him. Maybe Shane shouldn't be worried. Thinking an abnormal amount about Ilya Rozanov's eyes could be genetic. "Because *you* are the best main character."

Shane switches sectors of mortification for one second, feeling the flush in his cheeks, "You have to say that, you're my dad."

"No, I don't," his dad shakes his head, "I have no problem telling you your eyes are not kind."

“Oh my god.”

“You get them from your mom, the coaster police. Very unkind,” he smiles, proud of himself. “Doesn’t make you any less the best.”

His mom gets up from her spot on the couch to bother her dad directly at the table, swiping around pieces he had sorted, one for every thing he had to say about her coasters, and her eyes.

And while they bicker in between bright spots of laugher, Shane finds himself pulling the newspaper closer to him, looking at it closely, one more time.

If he had been shocked to find out what he looks like on the ice with Ilya, there is no word strong enough for the sight of Ilya, here, on this paper.

What do the romance novelists have to say about smiles? They couldn’t write enough—pages and pages and pages they could attempt, and Shane feels certain they’d never get Ilya’s smile right. The exact curve of his lips, the bead of sweat in the dip under his nose, the precise shade of pink.

Shane knows, with certainty, that this is what *he* sees: Ilya Rozanov, with the best smile in the world.

It’s never been laid out on paper like this for him before, and it’s stunning. Shane’s used to it when he closes his eyes, when he opens them, when he’s in the middle of a game, and after, thousands of miles away, or pressed right against his own.

And whatever the people printing and reading this paper do or don’t know about them, Shane himself has definitely caught on. He knows exactly what this is.

“I don’t know about all this eye stuff, but I personally think the kid looks like he stinks.”

“Yuna!”

“Not only does he seem terrible, and we know he’s been an ass to Shane, but every time the camera’s on him, he’s sweaty.”

“The kids are into that, I think.”

“I mean it’s just—every close up of his hair! Is he really that sweaty, or is Boston dumping gallons of water on each other in the locker room? When was the last time he showered? Well, based on how close you are in that picture, clearly, you would know best, Shane.”

Shane bites his lips into the thinnest line possible to keep any trace of a smile from peeking out.

Because Ilya showered about an hour after that photo was taken. Twice. Shane is certain.

But he steadies his voice, and is pretty proud of his very normal response, “I mean, yeah, most players are sweaty. And nicer than Rozanov.”

He rolls the paper up, slides it off the coffee table and into the large pocket of his sweatshirt, and adds, “But you’re right about his eyes.”

You know that saying, the sock that broke the camel's back?

No? That's not how it goes? Are you sure?

Shane could have *sworn* it was a sock.

"How about this?" Shane whispers, chin propped on Ilya's bare shoulder, "You stay as long as we're awake. Soon as one of us starts to fall asleep—"

"This is a bad deal for you," Ilya answers, the small shake of his head landing his lips on Shane's forehead. He stays there, and murmurs, after a kiss, "I'm not even tired."

"No?" Shane's half-smile grows, "You just yawning for fun now?"

Ilya nods, sighing, "I won't fall asleep. You'll never get rid of me."

If this is supposed to be a deterrent, it does not work. Not even a little. Shane couldn't think of a better plan for him, actually, as he snuggles deeper into Ilya's hold.

This has started happening more and more, lately, the impossibility of getting the other to leave. It used to be easy, but now, it feels so, like, clinical? To be like, "Hey, Rozanov! Come fuck me in my apartment from 9:30-11?" and that's just it? It hasn't been like that in years, but it leaves so much gray area. Maybe that's the point.

Shane can't sit in bed with Ilya's fingers that had been inside him ten minutes ago now tracing patterns underneath his shirt on his abs and say with certainty that he'll get Ilya to leave in another ten.

Making little deals like this is easier. They'll adhere better than they would just passing a never-ending "Five more minutes!" between each other, competitive to a fault.

"Do you know scientists don't actually know why we yawn when we're tried?" Shane says, lazily crossing his ankle over Ilya's. "I mean they have theories, but nothing confirmed."

"How many times do you think I will yawn while you tell me about them?"

Shane perks at the subtle invitation to babble, "The leading theory used to be that it was a way for your body to take in more oxygen, since yawning is essentially a giant inhale, but they disproved that."

"Really?"

"They think it could be a way to like, 'wake-up' your brain, when you're tired or bored. Yawning increases your heart rate and involves several facial muscles, so it kinda keeps your body from slipping into its sleep-regulation system."

"Ah, so when I yawn at you, it is compliment."

"*What*?" Shane's incredulous laughter sputters.

"Clearly, I want to be awake to hear every single boring thing you have to say so badly even my body knows it," Ilya states, as if this were obvious, "Wakes me up on reflex so I do not miss you."

Oh my god. Shane just wanted to nerd-out about bodily reflexes and Ilya somehow made even that effortlessly romantic. Fuck this guy, man.

Shane fiddles with the hem of his t-shirt, “I’ll try to remember that next time you’re being an asshole, thanks.”

“You yawn at me too,” Ilya says, and just to really sell the point, smiles around a yawn of his own when he catches Shane trying to stifle one too.

“Not because I’m an asshole,” Shane yawns again in rapid succession, “Some people believe they’re contagious.”

“Contagious? Like cough?”

“Sort of,” Shane shrugs happily, “They think it’s more of a social signaling, empathy thing. Like showing the people you’re with how you feel without having to say it.”

“You seem very interested in this, you want to change career?”

“And let Boston off easy just in time for playoffs? Not a chance,” Shane shakes with confident laughter, “No, I’ll just have a good hobby after I retire.”

“Your hobby is *yawning*?” Ilya balks, swiping a distressed hand over his face with a groan, “Shane, you make it so, *so* hard for me to not be asshole.”

“What can I say,” Shane rolls onto the side of his hip, so he’s half on top of Ilya, and peeks up through his lashes, “I like making things hard for you.”

The rumble of Ilya’s full-body laugh tickles Shane’s torso. His whole face is scrunched up in delight when he manages, between laughs, “You think you are very clever.”

“I do, yeah,” Shane peels Ilya’s hand off his chin, where it must have been trying to hide his smile, and slowly places kisses between each knuckle. When he’s done, he watches Ilya’s

eyes sweetly droop, and grins with the motion of tenderly running his own knuckles soothingly up and down Ilya's arm. "Hey, sleepyhead—"

"No, no," Ilya jolts, "I am so awake."

"It's okay. It's late and you had a long day," Shane trails, "Long flight in the morning, whole afternoon of me kicking your ass…"

"Is not at all what happened."

"Mhm," Shane hums, pats Ilya's stomach, and even though it pains him, says, "C'mon, I'll walk you out."

"My eyes are open," Ilya says, and when Shane looks up, he's got his pointer finger and his thumb physically holding his eyelids apart.

"Oh my god, don't do that."

He dodges the hands Shane swats, and insists, "I am not doing anything, I am awake."

"That's actually so bad for you. We blink for a reason, you know?"

"Oh, really? Are you going to explain to me the history of blinking now?"

"Excuse me for not wanting your eyes to dry up and fall out of your head," Shane sits up and twists back for better leverage.

"That's not what happens."

“You don’t know that,” Shane snaps back petulantly, but fond, because the way he loops both of Ilya’s arms in the crook of his elbow lands Ilya’s hand on the side of his face. Shane bites the finger that gets too close to his mouth playfully. “Let me get some eye drops.”

“You are so dramatic. My eyes are fine.”

“I’m not taking any chances,” Shane scoots to the edge of the bed, back to Ilya before he can say anything too revealing.

Beyond the mortifying fact that Shane cares deeply about Ilya’s eyes, he actually is slightly, *scientifically* worried. There *was* a reason we blink, and dry eyes can lead to a whole host of other issues, and Ilya’s a creative liar, but he didn’t want him to have to, you know, work around the truth that his vision’s funny right now because he was busy stalling leaving Shane Hollander’s house after fucking him.

Shane could stall in a safer way. He’d briefly attempted contacts and hated them, still has some eye drops for how dry they made his eyes feel somewhere in his medicine cabinet. Even if Ilya was definitely blinking now, creating tears and not strictly needing these eye drops, he knows they’ll both pretend he does, just for five more minutes.

He tosses Ilya his shirt from where it had ended up on the floor before and then heads into his bathroom, takes his time fiddling around in the cabinets.

“Don’t be falling asleep on me out there,” Shane yells after a beat too long of silence from his bedroom, worried Ilya has lost the bet and will actually have to be on his way right now.

“Just busy snooping,” Ilya replies, a cute lilt to his voice. “These hockey history books you have are okay, but I am really on the hunt for a middle school yearbook.”

“Good luck, I had every last one wiped from existence.”

“That is a shame, I bet your freckles were even cuter when you were little.”

“I don’t get your infatuation with them,” Shane shakes his head, weighing the pros and cons of continuing to stall if it means he has to listen to Ilya compliment him instead.

“Did you have braces?”

“No,” Shane says, grabbing the eye drops at last, turning on his heel to jog back into his room. “And I don’t wanna hear any of your Mr Perfect nonsense, it’s *totally normal* for your teeth to grow in straight—”

The rest of his sentence dies on his tongue when he finds Ilya twisted at his hip, leaning over and inspecting something very carefully in the small drawer of one of Shane’s bedside tables.

“If you found my dildo, you should probably get your jokes out while I’m still standing several feet away and can’t strangle you.”

“I, ah,” Ilya sits back up, face blank, “Is this my sock?”

Ah, shit. Shane kinda wishes he had found the dildo instead.

It seems strange to recognize a lone, innocuous sock as being your own, but it is very clearly Boston colors, and sitting alone in a drawer full of books and receipt paper and spare reading glasses and other mismatched junk, not the rest of Shane’s socks so. It’s not a wild conclusion. Not wrong either.

“Sorry, I—I was trying to help, I swear. I know you were not kidding about the eye drops, so I thought maybe I would find them here for you,” Ilya sighs, looking suddenly skittish, apologetic, “I wasn’t really snooping.”

“No, it’s okay. I mean, you’re barely a guest here anymore, you can look at my stuff.”

“So?”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s yours,” Shane nods rapidly, “I can explain.”

“Okay.”

Shane clasps his hands behind his back, bouncing on his heels, impressed by how quickly he can switch up the vibe in a room. It’s a gift, really.

That really was a junk drawer, that Ilya had stumbled upon. Shane can’t remember the last time he opened it himself. But just because he had forgotten about this big, ridiculous, embarrassingly mortifying thing he did, does not mean it takes any more than the sight of it to remember, with perfect clarity, just how embarrassingly mortifying this ridiculous thing Shane did is.

It’s been so long that he swore it would never come up. He’d take it to his grave.

Well, fuck it. He’s already shown at least 51 cards in his deck. What’s another? (To really hammer the ridiculousness of this whole situation, Shane has a passing thought that Ilya would love this idiom.)

When he chances a glance up and finds Ilya still quietly staring at him, he sputters, “Oh! You want me to explain. Right, yes. Yes. Sure, hah.” He tosses the eye drops onto the corner of his bed, watching the fluffy duvet all but swallow it. He needs both his hands for all the nervous gestures he’s going to make to get through this.

“You’re gonna laugh, honestly,” Shane says, laughing by example. Ilya doesn’t budge, “I don’t know how you got out of here with only one sock, but I found it after you left one night, years ago.”

“Years?”

“Yeah,” he scratches the back of his neck nervously, “And we weren’t really talking that much back then so, I don’t know, I figured I’d just, stash it somewhere safe where I wouldn’t lose it until the next time I saw you.”

“But it is still here.”

“Well yeah, we, you know—sometimes we’d go years between seeing each other, right? At first I genuinely forgot I had it, and then,” Shane says, kicks at the corner of his bedframe.

“Then…”

“Then I came up with the sock clause,” Shane says shakily, and tries to come up with an explanation before he has to hear Ilya repeat his stupidity back to him, prompting. “It’s really dumb, and again, I think you’ll laugh, but uh. It was kind of nice to keep, in case of emergency.”

“My sock would help you in a snowstorm?”

Ilya doesn’t laugh, but Shane sure does, biting his bottom lip with it, “Maybe!”

He notices, for the first time, how delicately Ilya flips the top stitching of the sock back and forth, like this makes him nervous too. Which is ridiculous, because he didn’t do anything but lose a sock. Shane was the weirdo here.

“No, uh, I mean—you know me, I overthink everything, and sometimes I thought—I *worried* I’d eventually run out of good reasons to ask you to come over,” Shane admits, his heart rate more rapid than any yawn could ever get it to, “But if I had something of yours, a sock to insist on returning, I could always—I always had a reason, then, just in case.”

He feels so small, suddenly, standing here, at the edge of his bed, that seems bigger than it ever has before, revealing the dumbest secret he's had for years and years, to the very reason he kept it.

Ilya is quiet for a very long time, or maybe only a second, Shane can't tell you, his face clear and blank.

But then, Shane gets the privilege of watching Ilya's smile form in real time, starting with the right side of his mouth, the droop of his brows, the squint of his eyes.

Despite his insistence that he'd laugh this off, Shane can't tell you how good it feels to see Ilya not laugh at all.

His real, bright and genuine smile stays put, even as he starts talking again, "Eye drops?"

"Um, you don't wanna talk about—"

"My eyes are very, very, very dry and I need you to come here right now and fix them," Ilya insists, backing himself up against the headboard, beaming, and pats the top of his thighs, "Please."

Shane cannot get back into his bed fast enough.

The sheets tangle around his legs a little, but the clunky movement it creates doesn't bother him one bit, seeing as it doesn't stop him from crawling up Ilya's body and settling with his knees on either side of his hips, sitting back.

"Very dry, huh?" Shane quirks, holding Ilya's face and swiping the reflexive tear he expected from his bottom lashes.

"Like parchment paper."

“I think you mean sandpaper,” Shane laughs, his hands swiping down to Ilya’s shoulders.

“No, I mean parchment paper.” Ilya drapes his hands over either of Shane’s wrists, his fingers pressing gently at his pulse point. Despite the intimacy of their position, Ilya carries on rather matter-of-factly, “The dry scratchy stuff you put on a pan to keep from making a mess in oven, no?”

“I mean, yes, that is what parchment paper is—”

“Oh, this is a good thought,” Ilya peeks over Shane’s right shoulder, “We use parchment paper next time.”

“Next time…?” Shane puzzles. Things have gotten a lot less hook-up-ish, sure, but still. *Baking* seems like an extreme inference, even for them.

“You hate mess on the bed!”

It takes Shane a second to connect those wildly out of left field dots but once he does, “You want us to fuck on parchment paper?”

“Is brilliant idea from me, no?” Ilya smirks, but delivers his replies with nothing but sincerity, the asshole.

“Oh. My *god*,” Shane yelps, elbowing Ilya in the pec. He just squirms happily, catching Shane’s torso in his hands and holding him close. His smile shows all his teeth.

“Easy cleanup! It would make you very happy.”

“What would make me happy is you shutting the fuck up.”

“I think that can be arranged,” Ilya affirms, then kisses Shane quiet.

This is the problem, or, one of the problems, Shane thinks.

Time ceases to exist whenever Ilya does this, when he makes Shane *feel* like this. How are they supposed to put a timer on this, an expiration, a concrete start and end? It’s impossible to keep track of anything other than Ilya’s kisses, which are so thorough that not one single bit of Shane’s body is not left vibrating with want, and feeling wanted in return.

His hands can’t settle, touching everywhere, like they’re all good spots to be, and Shane concurs. He presses up on his knees just for the little bit of leverage it gives him to lick into Ilya’s mouth.

Some indeterminate amount of time later, Shane feels Ilya pull back just the necessary centimeter from his lips to take in a breath—only, it’s not a regular breath.

He yawns, and Shane falls. This is fucking hopeless.

Shane nudges his nose against Ilya’s as he laughs through the end of his yawn, “This is a compliment, right?”

“Right, you are about to yawn too,” Ilya kisses up Shane’s jaw, “This feels very contagious.”

That’s one word for it.

He mouths at Shane’s ear, which is a weird thing to find hot, but it’s Ilya, he could make anything look hot. Like yawning.

Yawning back to full attention, like the scientists promised, he waits for Ilya's voice hot against his ear, "We should make a new deal."

"What do you have in mind?" Shane presses intently into Ilya's hips with his own, making his own wants here as transparent as possible.

"I make you come one more time tonight, while we are both so wide awake," Ilya whispers, "And then I forget my sock here again."

Shane crashes his mouth back into Ilya's so fast he barely has time to croak out a very, very enthusiastic, "Deal."

So.

Ilya's getting a drawer.

Shane stares at the tall column of options in his closet, biting his thumbnail nervously down to the bed. When he got this apartment several people—the building manager and his realtor and even his mother—assured him walk-in closets with more drawers than anyone would ever need built in floor-to-ceiling were very cool.

But now, because of them, many of these drawers are half-full, at best, which means he has no logistical excuse to get out of this, of giving Ilya a drawer in his closet.

The irony is not lost on him, okay?

The first one he picks is on the right side, right next to the door, and previously housed athletic shorts from a brand thing that ended two years ago. Shane pulls the drawer out, picks up all its contents in one arm full, and tosses them on the floor.

Once he gets Ilya's things into it—collected in a near-manic race around his apartment at a very sane 2 in the morning—Shane is ready to slam that motherfucker shut and be done with this brief bout of insanity.

"You've got to be kidding me," Shane groans, watching the drawer refuse to close.

It catches on the fold of that itchy fucking blanket, over and over, with each forceful push Shane gives it. He leans up on his tip toes to press all his body weight into pushing the blanket flat, but still nothing.

Fuck it. He needs to be done with this.

Shane empties the drawer again, kicks the athletic shorts into a pile out of sight because that's a problem for another day now, and starts flinging open every other drawer.

His socks, his pants, his t-shirts his mom is always saying he needs to throw away. He likes Ilya, but not enough to let his mom know she's right. He shuts that drawer quickly.

He pulls at the ends of his hair that's getting a little too long, and paces.

What if he just got a box, like a shoebox that he wasn't using? That's—that's fucking brilliant, he smiles at himself in the full length mirror that is apparently also a very cool feature to have in your walk-in closet.

No one has had a good, healthy breakdown about the domesticity of your love life in one, apparently.

Fancy designer shoes that he only ever takes out once a year for the MLH Awards are the first willing victim he spots, and he holds the box upside down, hearing them crash to the floor.

He gets the newspaper in the box, the sock, and—*fuck*. That's about it.

So maybe sleep deprivation makes all his ideas sound brilliant, even when they are most definitely not.

Shane starts at the top, and peeks his way down, one by one, making a pros and cons list for each one. Is it too visible? Too close to the door? Too close to a drawer he uses all the time? Too big? Too small? Can he combine what's already in that drawer with another? If he takes the socks out of this one, and moves them to where his t-shirts are, and then he combines the t-shirts with tank tops? And then maybe tomorrow, when he's more awake, he'll just change all of them all over again.

He falls backwards, off the precarious balance on his toes from crouching at the bottom drawer. He leans back, palms pressing into the cool floor, and his head falls back, sighing at the ceiling.

His phone rings.

Lily: *Just got back to my hotel. Think I forgot something.*

Attached is a picture of Ilya in his bathroom mirror, his long winter coat that had been buttoned and bundled up to his chin when he was leaving Shane's, now open to reveal him

completely shirtless.

Shane: *How the hell did you get out of here without me noticing that?*

Lily: *I saw you on your phone looking up when parchment paper goes on sale because you love my idea. It was perfect distraction.*

The lie makes him laugh, which Shane is sure was the point, and how silly. He misses the sound of Ilya's already.

He heaves himself to his feet with more effort than a pro-athlete should need, leans against the doorframe of the closet with his arms crossed over his chest, and starts to scan.

Ah. There it is. On the bedside table where the sock used to live. Folded.

Shane decides then, his stomach flip-flopping over and over itself, to stop overthinking it.

It doesn't matter where he puts Ilya's stuff, because he's already exactly in the place it matters most. Shane's heart thumps on cue.

He opens the first drawer he can reach and places everything inside, the newest addition to his collection neatly on top, then watches it shut, perfectly in place.

“Big plans tonight?”

“You know on principle, I love that your wife is well-loved and popular enough to have this many friends, but—”

“Oh my god dude, no,” Hayden laughs, his bag bumping into Shane as they head out into the parking lot after a late afternoon practice, “Why do you always think I’m setting you up?”

“Because you usually are,” Shane deadpans, the door swinging shut behind him. He’s usually the last one out, and even though he has told him a million times not to wait, Hayden always does. Usually it’s sweet. Today, it clearly has ulterior motives, “Either that or you want a babysitter.”

Hayden’s breath pushes through a gritted, lopsided smile.

Shane stops short in the middle of the lot, and glares, “Dude.”

“You know what Amber was saying the other day?”

“Your infant?”

“That you are all my kids’ *favorite* uncle!”

“*Dude*,” Shane repeats, because quite frankly, he doesn’t know if Hayden really understood the severity of the first one, “How am I supposed to watch *four* kids? Alone?”

“It’s just the twins!” Hayden exclaims, “I swear, this was not the plan. Sitter bailed last minute. We begged Arthur’s friend from one of those mommy-and-me classes for a play date, and the baby’s still too little to be left alone so we’ll keep her.”

Shane sighs, fiddling with the strap of his practice bag on his shoulder. He has absolutely no plans whatsoever tonight, and two kids is definitely better than four, but…

A car screeches to a stop, suddenly, crooked in the spot right in front of where Shane and Hayden are standing. The passenger window rolls down, and though there is no one in that seat Shane can see, the tune of a cartoon musical he’s sure he’s supposed to have remembered from the last time he got roped into this blasting gives him a good enough guess who it is.

“Wow,” Shane says, curtly, rolling his eyes at his friend beside him, “Made Jackie bring your cute kids all the way here to guilt me.”

“No, I had Jackie bring my cute kids all the way here because the dinner reservation I made is in 20 minutes.”

Shane gives Hayden a scrutinizing look up and down once, “And that’s what you’re wearing?”

“Man, you date one actress,” Hayden laughs, just in time for the back door to swing open and usher in a cacophony of twin girl giggles.

“Uncle Shaaaaaane!” Ruby leaps seemingly directly from the car into Shane, and he thanks god that if this is his fate that he at least has the athlete reflexes for it.

She’s practically hanging off his bicep when he answers, “Ruby! Did you get bigger since I last saw you?”

“I lost a tooth!” she screams at an octave not at all necessary directly into his ear, and not at all answering his question.

“No way,” he feigns awe, “Did the tooth fairy come?”

“Of course she did!”

“Of course she did,” he echoes, hoisting her more comfortably onto his hip, “So you’re gonna pay for our dinner tonight?”

It earns him a very big giggle, and a snuggle so cutely into the crook of his neck, Hayden and his guilt-tripping ways could not have planned it better if he tried. Let’s be real, Shane was never saying no, but watching where Emma has occupied herself with jumping back and forth over the white line of the parking space would have really made it impossible. They really were cute kids.

He looks directly at Hayden, and tries not to let a smile crack, “Go, go enjoy your date night.”

”Uncle Shane!” Hayden yelps, “I owe you.”

”No, you don’t,” Shane smirks.

“I love you, I love you,” Hayden jumps forwards to press a sloppy kiss to Shane’s temple, and then an identical one to an incredibly entertained Ruby, “I’m gonna go move the car seats.”

“Here,” Shane says, maneuvering his one free hand to his pocket to toss Shane his car keys. When he goes, Shane steps up to the open window and peeks in, “Happy birthday. I uh, I didn’t know I’d see you today. I have a gift I was gonna bring over this weekend.”

Jackie's smile sparkles in the first licks of sunset streaming in from her side of the car, "You're ridiculous, Shane Hollander. You didn't need to get me anything."

"You're right,, now that I know Ruby's a millionaire, I should have waited and had her help me bankroll it."

Ruby squeals delighted at this again, and Jackie's eyes as good as go heart-shaped watching her. She smiles at Shane, "Thank you for this. We'll get 'em by seven, I promise."

"Take your time, seriously," Shane waves her off, half-aware of whatever braid-like thing Ruby has started to make with the hair behind Shane's left ear, "If it was just Hayden asking, I don't know, but as soon as I heard it was for you…"

"I cannot believe someone hasn't snatched you up yet," Jackie coos, just as Hayden returns for the second car seat, taking Emma by hand with him. Jackie blows kisses as they all head for Shane's car to get loaded in, "Girls! Be good for Uncle Shane!"

Shane likes kids a lot, and these ones especially, but good lord. He didn't know you needed a PhD to figure out how to buckle a car seat. Hayden takes pity on him after he finishes getting Emma in hers in three second flat, and only laughs twice at the way Shane watches him do the same to Ruby, but somehow even faster. He waves a quick goodbye before dashing back to Jackie, leaving Shane out of his element for the next three hours, at minimum. But with two very cute kids, at least.

"Alright," Shane says, slipping into his seat and clapping his hands on the steering wheel, "Let's do this. We got this, right?"

There are some enthusiastic cheers from the backseat, which is encouraging. Shane cautiously starts the engine, and turns to back out of his spot.

That's as far as he confidently makes it.

“Can you play the princess music?”

“Princess music, right,” Shane slams his brakes, only halfway out of the spot, resting his chin on the arm he still has propped up on the opposite headrest so he can look at the girls, “Remind me again, what your favorite princess music is.”

“From the movie!”

“Mhm, mhm, yeah, yep,” Shane nods, wracking his brain for an answer. There’s about a million different princess movies Shane has either seen bits of, or heard about from Hayden. Not that he can name a single one of them now, but that doesn’t really narrow it down even if he could.

No. He will not be defeated before he even makes it out of the parking lot.

“You know what, why don’t you guys just—you can pick something yourself,” Shane takes a deep breath, and passes his phone back to them. He starts driving again, because everything is fine! “You probably can’t even read—I don’t—whatever, have fun, go crazy.”

“I like your phone, Uncle Shane!”

“I figured you would,” he grits, successfully making it to the road. Small victories. “If this isn’t allowed, don’t tell your parents. If it is, uh. I think I have that game where you match weird looking candies somewhere—”

“Hollander, you look prettier than usual.”

Oh fuck. *Fuck*.

“Ruby!”

“It was an accident!”

“Girls, did you—” Shane tries to role model good, calm, responsible adult behavior, which means he does not drive his car directly into oncoming traffic to stave off mortification. Doesn’t calmly pull over and assess the damages either. He drives on, “Did you call someone, Ruby?”

“No,” she shrugs, simply, which—oh, okay. That’s good. Maybe Shane has gone so insane with his repressed yearning that he’s started *hearing* Ilya places too, not just—“I can see him!”

Fucking hell. Hayden Pike’s kids just video called Ilya Rozanov from Shane Hollander’s phone. Shit, it’s like the start of a poorly set up joke. There’s a punchline in there, somewhere.

“Are you friends with Uncle Shane’s?”

“*Uncle Shane?*”

“Yes, yes, everyone say ‘Hi, Uncle Shane’s friend!’ and ‘*Bye*, Uncle Shane’s friend,’ okay? Pass me the phone, we’re hanging up,” Shane waves a hand blindly behind him, grabbing for the phone unsuccessfully.

“I did not know I was going to get to meet princesses today.”

So Ilya’s charm extends to people of all ages, not just Shane specifically. The twins are puddles of giggly goo after that, enamored enough to keep poking at Ilya over the phone, much to Shane’s horror.

“What’s your name?”

“Not important,” Shane intercepts, because the last thing he needs is his blabbermouth nieces name dropping Ilya at the next team barbecue, “He’s my friend from hockey, that’s all.”

“You play hockey with Daddy and Uncle Shane?” Ruby squeals, just as Emma excitedly leans over to grab her sister, “Maybe we saw him on the TV!”

“Ah, no, I play against them.” Shane can hear the smile in Ilya’s voice. “You like watching hockey? That is very cool.”

Emma nods vigorously, “Mommy let us stay up soooooo late two days ago and we saw Uncle Shane score soooooo many goals on the TV.”

“No way, could not have been your Uncle Shane. He stinks.”

Ruby’s laugh with her hand pressed against her mouth comes out more like a raspberry, sputtering and adorable. “No! He scored *this* many, we saw!”

Shane chances a peek in the rear view mirror and sees both of them holding up both hands with all ten of their fingers spread open, which isn’t at all true, but his heart triples in size at the girls’ defense of him anyway.

“Hm, we have to show you girls Boston game, you will not believe. I score so many goals I need to use my hands *and* my toes to show you count.”

Another gaggle of laughter. Ilya being really good with kids isn’t surprising any more, but the effect it has on him isn’t at all lessened with exposure. Shane thinks it actually gets *worse*, so it might be good the screen of his phone is behind him right now. He’s blushing in the rearview mirror.

“Please tell me you girls will give Uncle Shane a makeover tonight. He would look so good in pigtails,” Ilya is saying when they finally are pulling into the parking garage under Shane’s building, after checking through the heart-attack-inducing topics of: what everyone learned in school today, the best color in the rainbow, and helpfully, princess music.

“No, that’s not—” Shane shakes his head, turning into his spot, "I don't think I have anything in my apartment you would need for a makeover.”

“We can make you a bracelet!” Ruby cheers, “Mommy helped us pack the beads in my backpack.”

“Oh that sounds very good. I owe Uncle Shane a real, nice bracelet.”

Thank god the car is already in park. Shane thinks of shitty hotel lamps and very good kisses, and bites his smile away as best he can, but it’s a losing battle.

“We can make you one too, Uncle Shane’s friend!”

“I would like that so very much, thank you,” Ilya coos sweetly.

“What color should we make it?” Emma wonders out loud while Shane discovers unclipping car seats is nothing like putting them together. Very easy. He grabs her hand and scurries her around to the opposite door to get Ruby, and when they reappear, Ruby is screeching in delight.

“Your favorite color *can’t* be *brown*!”

“Sure it can.” Shane gets his first glimpse at Ilya on the video call, sees his nonchalant shrug with it, “But seriously, you can use any color you like. I will love.”

“How will we give it to you?”

“Uncle Shane can hold on to it, until I come there to beat him in hockey game again.”

Ruby giggles, pleased with this answer, but Emma still looks perplexingly worried about these logistics.

“It’ll be safe, I promise,” Shane cuts in to assure her, “I have a special drawer we can keep it in, okay? I’ll show you when we’re inside, which, speaking of…” Shane tries to segue out of this with alarming speed, both because they do need to get inside, but also in hopes his fast English throws Ilya enough that he won’t catch what he just roundabout admitted.

“Alright,” Shane says, once Ruby finally hops out of her seat, “Let’s say thank you to my friend for talking to us on the car ride. Time to hang up.”

“No! *Uncle Shane*,” Ruby sounds so much like her father here it equal parts terrifies and amuses Shane, with her pouty eye roll, “Its not fair, you have *the best* friend ever.”

“Mhm,” Shane hums, pivots quickly before he can swoon over that, “I think you need two hands to push the elevator buttons, yeah?”

Shane holds one hand out expectantly, and like magic, the phone is placed in it without so much as a second thought. He yells after the girls to be careful and they skip, chasing each other to the bank of elevators a couple feet from Shane’s car. A small war starts to break out in which they go back and forth pressing the ‘Up’ button over and over, but it has nothing on the war going on inside Shane’s chest. His heart bounces around in his ribcage when he finally rights the phone in front of him, and he sees the voice that, without even meaning to, or knowing he had to, kept Shane calm the entire way here.

“So, you are babysitter today?”

“Sorry, they—I was trying to avoid a meltdown in the car when I handed my phone over.”

“They do not seem like girls who throw tantrums.”

“Oh no, I was talking about me,” Shane says, slinging both girls’ backpacks over his shoulder, leaving his own bag in the trunk to retrieve later, “I felt a meltdown coming three inches out of the parking spot.”

“You made it,” Ilya says, his phone flipping, like he’s just laid down on his side. His couch it looks like. Shane can tell just by the way the light hits his face, because he remembers how the windows are positioned in his living room versus his bedroom. Which is totally normal.

“Barely,” Shane scoffs, and squeezes this in before he’s technically within the girls’ earshot, “Sorry again, for the butt-dial, or, toddler-dial. Thanks for entertaining that.”

“Of course. I love kids,” Ilya nods, “You okay?”

“Sure,” Shane starts, tapping his foot as they wait for the elevator to get to them, and Ruby and Emma start singing what Shane deduces to be the elusive princess music, twenty minutes too late. “Practice was long and I filmed another stupid commercial all day yesterday. And then this was a very last minute thing so I’m just, trying to get myself together. It’s Jackie’s birthday and—Jackie is Hayden’s wife, by the way. Their parents, which, I assume you assumed.”

“Yes,” Ilya says, “Has your father made her a condolence blanket?”

“A condolence—no, what?”

“Was that not the word—ah, no, *consolation blanket*, anyway, sentiment is the same,” he snickers, “To say sorry that she is married to Hayden.”

“Oh my god.”

“She must be very wonderful, to have such great kids. Is really a shame she is with Hayden, of all people.”

“Ruby, Emma, I give you permission to make this guy the ugliest bracelet possible, okay?”

“So no, you did not make her one? I give permission, she can borrow mine.”

“It’s not yours,” Shane says, even though that might not be true. Not a single other person has touched that blanket since Ilya discovered it, Shane won’t let them. “You have the day off?”

“Early morning practice, we are done. I just got up from nap.”

“Lucky you.”

“And now I am hungry.”

“Watcha gonna make?” Shane asks, holding the elevator door open to watch the girls run up to his apartment door, their matching light up sneakers bouncing bright pinks and purples off the beige walls.

“I am *so* tired, I want to make *nothing*,” Ilya complains, and Shane can see how he rolls onto his back, the phone now propped at a weird angle on his chest. He still looks good, somehow. Shane’s so busy trying to train himself out of always making his first thought be how good Ilya looks, that he doesn’t notice the no-good glint in Ilya’s eyes when he raises his voice, “I think I will just order a pizza.”

Both little heads turn sharply to face up at Shane at the very mere mention, “Pizza?”

“You’re the worst,” Shane holds his phone up right to his lips to whisper, using his free hand to unlock the door.

“No, no,” Ilya shakes his head, amused, “I am the best friend ever, remember?”

Probably an understatement, Shane thinks, because he can’t say it. He tosses the bags on his couch for the girls, and leaning over the back of it, elbows sinking into the cushions while they waste no time spilling their toys and crafts and things all over Shane’s living room.

“I should probably focus on uh,” Shane clears his throat, suddenly thick with want. Ilya and kids, fucking lethal. “Focus on supervising, before I end up with permanent marker on my walls.”

“Would be an improvement, is very beige apartment.”

“Hey, last I checked *yours* is all white and gray.”

“*Last you checked,*” Ilya quirks, winking, “How do you know I haven’t painted all my walls bright blue since you were here?”

“Because you wouldn’t have painted them bright blue. They’d be brown,” Shane smiles, “Is brown seriously your favorite color?”

Ilya fiddles with the string of his hoodie between his teeth, looking—embarrassed? That’s new. And adorable. He tries to pull the hood tighter, like he can shrink into it.

“Is new thing, wasn’t always,” Ilya says, by way of explanation. “Shut up.”

“I didn’t say anything!”

“Your eyes are screaming.”

“I’m just surprised, I genuinely thought you only said that as a way to tease me,” Shane murmurs, unable to keep the fondness out of his voice, “That’s a very me answer.”

“You have no idea.”

A comfortable silence settles between them, backlit by the sweet laughter of bracelet plotting, beads bouncing with a clink off the glass top coffee table and rolling under the couch. A blue and a brown bead land right by Shane’s feet.

The past half hour has presented a kind of life Shane didn’t even know how to dream about thirty one minutes ago.

He doesn’t know how he’ll dream about anything else for the rest of forever.

“Well, I guess—”

“Do you want—”

“Oh, sorry.”

“No, no, you go ahead,” Shane says, cutting off their awkward, stuttering overlaps.

“No, really. You first.”

“Um, I guess, I just wanted to ask,” Shane gnaws at his bottom lip, trying not to lose the nerve. “Do you wanna stay for dinner?”

Ilya's lips pop open in a cute, surprised 'o'. "What?"

"I mean, the girls really didn't wanna hang up, and I guess, if I'm honest, neither do I."

Ilya murmurs something Shane can't make out, both because it's so low, and because it's in Russian. It has its usual effect on Shane's already fried nervous system.

"Uh, if I order pizza right now, it'll take like, 20 minutes to get here. You?"

Ilya shakes his head like he's just now waking up, even though he told Shane he napped well before this call, "Yes, yes, um. Probably same."

"Cool, cool," Shane nods, "So it'll kinda be like we're having dinner together, right?"

"Yes," Ilya finally relaxes, his whole body melting with the brilliance of his smile. Toothy and wide, Shane's favorite.

"Okay," Shane can feel himself mirroring Ilya, before he squints his eyes shut in lieu of a curse, "I just realized I actually *am* gonna need to hang up, to order."

"Yes."

"But I'll call right back."

"Not if I call back first."

Shane could kiss the phone screen.

He settles instead for simply smiling back at him, and mustering his best Ilya Rozanov for a wink, “You’re on.”

Lily: *I had a thought.*

Shane: *Wow congratulations. This is a big day for you!*

Lily: ☝️

Lily: *You still have my sweatshirt.*

Shane: *I do.*

Lily: *Well I was thinking. Maybe you want complete set. For completeness sake. I know this bothers you.*

Shane: *It’s part of a set? Like a matching set?*

Lily: *Yes.*

Shane: *Are you offering to give me your sweatpants?*

Lily: *One sweatpant.*

Shane: *One leg of your sweatpant? What am I supposed to do with that?*

Lily: *Fuck off. Do you want it or not?*

Shane: *Sorry I'm still trying to process the fact that you had a thought.*

Lily: *Fuck OFF*

Shane: *This is nice of you. And random. What's the catch?*

Lily: *No catch.*

Lily: *I just want you to have. You want or no?*

Shane: *I mean yes obviously but I mean. Are you sure? You know I'm not playing right now, right? Like you can't bribe me to go easy on you.*

Lily: *I never need to bribe to beat you. But if I did I would not use sweatpants.*

Shane: *What would you use? And a reminder I am staying with my parents right now before you answer that.*

Lily: *I remember. How is it?*

Shane: *How is staying here?*

Lily: *Yes.*

Shane: *It's nice.*

Lily: *You took very long typing that.*

Shane: *I think this is the first time in three weeks one of them hasn't literally attached themself to my hip.*

Lily: *Very good I only learned how to have a thought today, then.*

Shane: *We have to ban jokes. My ribs*

Lily: *Impossible I am just too funny*

Shane: *Try to reel it in you comedian.*

Lily: *What else hurts?*

Shane: *Everything LOL*

Lily: *Did we not just ban laughing?*

Shane: *Honestly I'm a lot better. I'm moving good just a little achy still but the doctors said that was normal. And I get these headaches*

Lily: *Headaches?*

Shane: *Yeah couple times a week. One just came on actually.*

Shane: *His name is Ilya.*

Lily: *You can't even follow your own rule.*

Shane: *That wasn't a joke!*

Lily: *I just threw my sweatpants into the fireplace. You'll never see them now.*

Shane: *Alright let's not get crazy now.*

Lily: *Seriously are you okay? I worry all the time.*

Shane: *All the time?*

Lily: *This morning I get dressed and worry more about what you are wearing than me. What if your fancy stylist did not let you keep sweatpants? And then you are stuck in jeans trying to recover on your couch.*

Shane: *You're crazy. Jeans are perfect loungewear.*

Lily: *Okay I have another ban. Jeans*

Lily: *If you come anywhere near me in denim when I see you next month…*

Shane: *I sleep in them. You didn't know?*

Lily: *And I sleep naked.*

Shane: *A chafing nightmare for us! It's good I have lots of guest rooms.*

Lily: *I need to get this out of your system fast. I will get priority shipping for sweatpants.*

Shane: *Well I feel special now. Big spender!*

Lily: *This is dire situation.*

Shane: *Thank you, seriously. I haven't gotten a package that wasn't some PR from a brand trying to take advantage of my time off in weeks. I'm in hell. Actually starting to feel bad for my mailman.*

Lily: *Because you trick him into believing you have so many friends?*

Shane: *Because they've had to make so many trips, asshole. And I've gotten tons of get well soon gifts from my tons of friends, just do you know.*

Lily: *Ah, but none have sent sweatpants so. You still need me.*

Shane: *I still need you.*

Lily: *I am confused about this though. How can you promote hockey things when you are not playing hockey*

Shane: *That's the thing, most of them aren't even slightly hockey related. Yesterday my mom told me we got dog food.*

Lily: *You do not have a dog?*

Shane: *We do not.*

Lily: *Shame. I might like you.*

Shane: *You want pets?*

Lily: *Impossible with schedule but I would love.*

Shane: *You know now that I think about it, you're right. You look like the father of a really fucking annoying chihuahua. I don't know how I didn't see it sooner.*

Lily: *You are going to bruise my ribs with all these jokes* 😑

Shane: *Might put you on the same playing field with Scott Hunter for your game coming up though.*

Lily: *I am such good influence on you!*

Lily: *And fuck Mr Mediocre. He will not take this cup from me.*

Shane: *Speaking of cups*

Shane: *Would you use a reusable water bottle?*

Lily: *???*

Shane: *Trick question! Yes! Yes you will!*

Lily: *Should I ask or*

Shane: *Because I have five, Ilya. FIVE. Does that not defeat the purpose????? I could put one in every room of my apartment and still have a leftover. Which is why you're getting one.*

Lily: *I do not understand. Is this metaphor? Or do you really mean water bottle?*

Shane: *What would "water bottle" be a metaphor for?*

Shane: *You know what. Don't answer that.*

Lily: 😏

Shane: *For that, you can have the kiddie cup.*

Lily: *That is not the punishment you think it is. I bet it is the only not boring one.*

Lily: *But you do not need to give me anything.*

Shane: *Well you're giving me some sweatpants.*

Lily: *One sweatpant.*

Shane: *But all I own are khakis! And dress pants! And terrible, horrible jeans!*

Lily: *OK I will send two.*

Shane: *I'm injured! Withering away! Sustained only by microplastic water bottles!*

Lily: *I miss you so much.*

Lily: *Sorry. I just*

Lily: *That was so cute*

Shane: *I can't wait to see you.*

Lily: *Are you counting down like I am?*

Shane: *No. But just because I can only count one thing at a time and currently it's days until I get out of here and get to go back to my own apartment.*

Shane: *Four!*

Lily: *Convenient. Is when your sweatpants will arrive.*

Shane: *Plural!*

Lily: *Smug does not look good on you, Shane Hollander.*

Shane: *But you know what WILL look good on me?*

Lily: *Tell your mother your screen time is up.*

Shane: *And I was just about to thank you!*

Lily: *You still can.*

Shane: *Fuck you it's like you actually summoned her. She's yelling from the kitchen that my twenty minutes of daily screen time are up.*

Lily: *I am sorry* 😁

Shane: *I guess instead of talking to you now I'll have to go back to my regularly scheduled programming of just thinking about you all the time instead.*

Lily: *All the time?*

Shane: *All the time.*

“I just got these, you know?”

“Did you?”

“And you already want me to take them off?” Shane murmurs mid-kiss, putting a lot of blind trust in Ilya’s ability to walk backwards through this house he’s only been in less than 24 hours. His own eyesight is down for the count, unable to take it off exactly what’s in front of him. “Real shame. Didn’t even give yourself a chance to appreciate them.”

“I am very familiar with them, actually.”

“Did you see how good they make my ass look?”

“Is exactly why I need you to take them the fuck off,” Ilya growls into his ear, his hands seeking purchase in the waistband of Shane’s—*Ilya’s* sweatpants.

“Taking them off faster than they got here,” Shane laughs, doing his best to steer them towards the couch. “I was starting to think that priority shipping thing was just a line.”

“I already told you Canadian postal system is stupid,” Ilya gruffs, hot into Shane’s ear as the back of his thighs hit the arm of the couch. “And fuck your mailman.”

“Yeah? Should we have invited him over?” Shane pokes, the asshole seeping into him via sweatpant, he’s sure, “Montreal’s about an hour drive, at least, from this cottage so—”

“Fuck you,” Ilya spits, “You look so good in my clothes.”

“Yes, yes,” Shane pants, letting his weight press in and send them toppling back onto the couch, pointedly leaving out the cold hard truth, that they’re Ilya’s clothes in name only now.

They’re not even gonna go in Ilya’s drawer.

They land in a heap on the floor, and Ilya’s never, ever getting them back.

Shane has never done this before.

Perfect feels too little of a word, but *god*, a whole lifetime of vocabulary escapes him at the moment, eyes fluttering open to nothing but golden sunlight, golden curls.

Years. They’ve been doing this for *years*, and they’ve never—his chin drops to his chest with the force of a full body yawn.

He was *so* close.

If Ilya woke up in the next ten seconds, Shane wouldn’t be able to stop himself. He’d tell him he loved him.

No sense denying it. Not when everything in this room is warm and slow and simple, and his defenses are so down.

He doesn't know what time it is. There's a real scarce amount of clocks in this house, not a deliberate design choice in the beginning, but one Shane grows more and more grateful for with each passing summer he spends here. For just a few perfect weeks, time really does get to cease existing. But judging by the way the light slopes in through the windows, it's a late and indulgent morning.

Ilya's chest is still rising and falling so regularly under Shane's cheek that he must still be asleep. The sheets are pulled up to just around their torsos, which is unusual for Shane, who always runs so cold. But Ilya is solid heat, and he's pressed to Shane in a direct line from the top of his head to his socked toes. Better than any blanket ever made, Shane smiles to himself.

Ildy adoring Ilya leads to his fingers running everywhere. His relaxed muscles, the delicate chain he wears, the crease of pillow etched into his cheek.

He could wake up like this for the rest of his life and never stop finding new details to be enamored with.

He could wake up like this for the rest of his life, period.

Ilya must agree, because it feels like as soon as Shane's had the thought, Ilya's eyes are opening too.

He looks—again, perfect doesn't even feel like a strong enough descriptor. His eyes are bright blue, glassy with waking, and the best part, right on Shane.

"Good morning," Shane whispers, the smile evident in each syllable.

"Yes."

“You know,” Shane says, twists a little so their faces are aligned, “Most people say good morning back.”

“I was agreeing,” Ilya rebuts around a yawn, “It is a very good morning.”

Shane’s stomach flips, “It is.”

“You awake long?” Ilya soothes a hand up and down Shane’s arm, the simple motion feeling more wonderful than it has any right to be. Shane’s already relaxed muscles tingle with further ease.

He shakes his head, “Bit of a miracle, given how you snore.”

“You are lying.”

“I’m not,” Shane says, serious, but he can’t wipe the smile off his face. What a thrill it still is, to file facts about Ilya away. *I know he snores now*, he thinks, giddy with it.

“Well, you sleep talk.”

“Now *you’re* lying.” He’s pretty confident in this fact, because it’s Ilya, but also, he guesses you can never be too sure.

“No is true. All night I hear you,” Ilya quips softly, “‘*Ilya Rozanov is the most beautiful man I have ever seen.’*”

Well. There you have that.

“*He is so big and strong and nice—*”

“If you’re gonna lie, at least make it believable,” Shane tuts, nosing at the dip of Ilya’s collarbone happily, “Nice? Really?”

“You are right,” Ilya concedes, though the tone of his voice says otherwise. He hovers right above Shane’s lips, intention clear, “A nice person would never be able to do—”

“Oh my god,” Shane sits up with a gasp, bumping Ilya’s chin the process, and faintly registering his groan in the background, “We didn’t brush our teeth last night!”

“There goes the good morning.”

“You’re not funny,” Shane covers his mouth with a hand and blows a short breath, trying to assess the damage. It’s not great. “I’m serious!”

“I know you are,” Ilya rolls his eyes all the way into laying back against his pillow, “We were tired, we fell asleep. Is okay.”

“It’s a bad habit,” Shane huffs.

“It’s one night,” Ilya reaches lazily but petulantly out for Shane, fingers landing somewhere in his hair and starting up a soothing card, “Come back. We have never gotten to have morning sex.”

“You have morning *breath*!”

“My breath always smells good.”

Shane turns his chin over one shoulder with a pointed glare.

“How would you know!”

“I can smell it from here.”

“You love a hyperbole.”

“Hyperbole?” Its shocks a giggle out of Shane, “I don’t think *I’ve* ever even used that word.”

“I read dictionary while you were in shower yesterday,” Ilya says, “Is the most exciting book you own.”

“Shut up,” Shane relents, leans back into his elbows on the pillow beside Ilya’s.

“You know,” he starts, dangerously walking his fingers up Shane’s chest, and leans into the crook of his neck, “You cannot taste my morning breath like this.”

He kisses up Shane’s neck, the slope of his jaw, right behind his ear, clever fucking bastard. Shane always feels so desperate with it, the way Ilya is so gentle, and so thorough with him. Shane would multiply every cell that made up his skin just to ensure Ilya would never run out of surface area to adore, to kiss.

His tongue circles a bloomed bruise from last night, and that’s how Shane *knows* Ilya is masterminding some evil, deliberate shit here. He knows what that's going to do to Shane, how it sets him on the fast track to folding.

What kind of rival would Shane be if he didn’t try to beat him at this game?

“Not gonna work.”

“No?” Ilya piques, all cocky and confident and so fucking attractive with it. Shane squints his eyes shut and bears down.

“Get up and brush your teeth.”

“We already missed last night,” Ilya tries, rolling his body more fully on top of Shane now, “What’s a few more minutes?”

“It’s actually crazy you and Hayden dislike each other so much,” Shane stands firm, even if the goosebumps on his skin where the kisses get lower and lower don’t get the memo, “You have such similar dental beliefs.”

“Well you win,” Ilya huffs, “The mood is killed.”

Shane laughs, and feeling generous in the face of victory, and smacks a big *mwah*-ing kiss to Ilya’s cheek, “It’s just a five minute delay. It’ll still be morning sex when we come straight back to bed with clean teeth.”

“I’m not kidding, I’m not even in the mood anymore,” Ilya teases, rolling off Shane and throwing the sheets off them, ushering the cold of the world outside their sleepy wake-up cocoon. Shane shivers reflexively as he swings his feet over the edge of the bed, rubbing out the residual sleepiness from his eyes and fishing around for his lost t-shirt on the floor.

Ilya can grumble all he wants, but Shane knows they are both feeling the surreal weight of this morning, and nothing can take that away.

It’s a domestic dance, the slip-slide of Ilya’s socks as he rounds the bed, the ripple of his muscles as he stretches his arms all the way up, the soft way he drags Shane behind him by the hand, shirt only halfway on, to follow him into the bathroom.

He shoves it the rest of the way on while Ilya settles with his back against the sink counter, “Have you seen my toothbrush?”

“Pretty sure you didn’t bother with *any* of your bags past the front hall so,” Shane laughs, trying to reach around Ilya for the cabinet, and coming face to face with how embarrassingly smitten he looks this morning in the tall mirror, “I imagine it’s still there.”

His head drops back with a dramatic groan, “You will make me go all the way down there? Now?”

“Yes,” Shane says simply, a delighted twinkle in his eyes at getting to use Ilya’s signature curt response against him.

“No,” he shoots back, “I use my finger. Or I borrow yours?”

“You are so fucking gross,” Shane twitches, face scrunched up with ick.

“Shane, anything in your mouth has already been in mine.”

“Oh my god, hold this, do not put it on your finger,” Shane shoves the tube of mint toothpaste into Ilya’s chest with a thud that bounces a sweet rumble of laughter out of Ilya. He leans them to the side just a bit to swing the medicine cabinet open, “Let me see what I’ve got, you big baby.”

“Thank you,” Ilya sings, holding Shane in front of him by the hips, distracting to his task, but still so surreally good.

“Yeah, yeah,” he hums, lifting just the tiniest bit on his toes to check each last shelf.

Shane has a very strong feeling Ilya is still going to end up winning this round, because for as prepared as Shane is for everything ever because he can not be relaxed about anything ever,

he doubts he's got extra of anything here. Sure, he made sure to stock the fridge well, and made sure they had other essentials for cooking and cleaning and living in this bubble, but he didn't pick up an extra pack of toothbrushes, that's for sure. Couple of other things on his mind, leading up to this.

He's only at the cottage, what? Every few months? He brings his own toothbrush with him, throws it away when he leaves because he really absorbs those little pamphlets they give you when you're leaving the dentist and Shane doesn't wanna fuck around with dental hygiene. You're supposed to replace your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months.

So yeah. Ilya and his bad morning breath are gonna drag him plaque-ridden back to his bed and he's not even gonna complain. Whatever.

But he's nothing if not thorough, and he won't complain about the position looking for a toothbrush has put him in, Ilya's chin hooked over his shoulder. He'll take his sweet time checking every last shelf.

Nothing on the first, or the second, he peeks behind expired multivitamins on the third and sort of has to swipe his hand blindly for the fourth, too tall for his eyeline, and—

A crinkle of convenience store plastic bag.

Shane should probably be more careful, but care and tact have escaped him with the urgency of this discovery.

This can't be—*can it?*

A memory pokes forward unbidden, of Shane, small and uncertain but wildly, recklessly hopeful because of a couple of colorful toothbrushes, in a 24-hour convenience store.

Shane had completely forgotten about that, and the feeling of it comes up on him suddenly, justifying buying the cute boy he liked some toothbrushes because it was the economical

choice. A money saving decision. The two pack.

In a way, here now, Shane guesses it might have been.

“I could have sworn you picked green,” Shane says, holding the pack of toothbrushes up between them, still pressed facing each other, hip to hip.

“You found,” Ilya smiles, covering Shane’s hands with his own.

“I did, yeah,” Shane follows everywhere Ilya’s eyes flit, finding it difficult to speak so softly when smiling so big. “I actually bought them for you. Um, before I knew your favorite color was brown. I really remember you saying green, or pink. Which, I also have.”

Shane twists just a smidge to grab the pink one too, holds it up against his flushed cheek like an echo of all those years ago. He can see the exact second it clicks in Ilya’s mind.

His jaw drops cutely, “These are—”

“Yeah, yes,” Shane nods. “You remember?”

“Of course,” Ilya swears, pressing a hand over his heart, “I hated to delete that picture. But I think this is an even better replacement.”

It still stuns Shane how his whole face seems to fit right in the palm of Ilya’s hand. He leans into it indulgently.

“You know what color your eyes are?” Ilya asks into the quiet, seemingly randomly.

“They’re brown.”

“Yes,” he chimes, “My favorite.”

“Oh,” Shane stuns, brown eyes going wide, forehead falling into Ilya’s, “*Oh*.”

“I know, I know—”

“I mean, I bought a blue one for myself so,” Shane shrugs, not leaving Ilya’s orbit, “If you’re bad, so am I.”

“Is not bad is—is just us.”

“Us,” Shane echoes, his vision suddenly swimming. He has no idea where it comes from, even if he’s felt the emotion thick behind his eyes for this entire conversation. That one little word, opening floodgates Shane has kept trapped shut for years and years and years.

He can’t believe he’s here.

“Hey, no, what is wrong?” Ilya’s brows crinkle, dipping to try to catch Shane’s gaze again, “You are okay?”

“Yes, yes, I’m fine,” he tries to laugh, to show Ilya they’re nothing but happy tears, as he pushes the few that fall away.

He does not look convinced. He looks about ready to pummel some toothpaste and smash the necks of every toothbrush in sight.

“I just—just realized how long I’ve been waiting for this,” Shane whispers, “Waiting for you.”

Ilya pouts, whispers something in Russian as he holds Shane's face with both hands.

"I am so happy."

"Me too," Ilya says, "Even though you won't let me kiss you."

Shane's head goes back with the force of a full body laugh, "I think I have something that can fix that."

And then Shane Hollander gets to stand in his bathroom with his arms around the love of his life, and listen to the way the sudsy toothpaste muffles his accent while he spells out all the dirty things he's going to do to him once their teeth are so very clean from being brushed with a pink and a teddy bear toothbrush.

And he gets to kiss him. Anywhere and any time he likes.

"No don't worry, I got it."

“Someone needs to get the door,” His mom yells, as if this were obvious, and continues up the path to the house, leaving Shane at the car with at least a dozen shopping bags.

“Well, maybe if I had a hand I could text him and say we’re back so he could open it,” Shane sighs loudly when he finally catches up, embarrassingly out of breath. If anyone asks, it’s the off-season, okay?

“I got it,” His mom waves him off once again, digging through the purse on her shoulder to produce.

“You have a key?” Shake balks, jaw-dropped, and some of his bags too, “*I* don’t have a key.”

“I guess he loves me more than you,” she smirks, twisting the key smugly into the lock, and pushes the door open. “After you, my love.”

“Gee, thanks,” Shane quips sarcastically, but takes the opening and stumbles inside. “We’re back!”

Just past the entryway of this beautiful, big new house that Shane doesn’t have a key to sit his dad and his boyfriend who, despite not giving Shane a key to his house, perks up at the sound of his voice, that he did not give a key to. Shane is feeling normal, as you can see.

“You are back!” Ilya echoes, chin resting atop the back of the couch in greeting, “How were your boring errands?”

“You’re actively crocheting with my father,” Shane grits, plopping the bags down on the kitchen counter, “But sure, I’m boring for wanting you to have some household essentials in your brand new house.”

“But I already have all essentials,” Ilya smiles dopily, “Now that you are here.”

“That’s not gonna work,” Shane says, watching the way it absolutely does, a smile blooming onto his face, visible in the reflection of all the brand new kitchen appliances he’s facing, “You gave my mom a key before me?”

“Ignore him, he’s just jealous,” his mom sing-songs, tossing a roll of yarn over the couch to his dad and Ilya, who still cannot figure out how much yarn they’re going to need for a full blanket. She stops to ruffle a hand through Ilya’s messy hair and bends to place a kiss smack on the top, “You smell nice.”

“Thanks, I try that shampoo you told me about.”

“You did? It’s good, right! My dermatologist said it’s the best for sensitive skin.”

“Yes, I do not itch at all.”

“Oh, I am so glad, Ilya. You know, I—”

“Can we get back on task for a second?” Shane claps his hands together to break up the love-fest happening between Ilya and his parents that he used to literally dream about. It loses its novelty after you watch yourself fall in the favorite son ranking in real time. He waves a hand towards the door that has now shut that he couldn’t open because he doesn’t have a key, “There’s still stuff in the car from our appropriately engaging and very necessary errands.”

“Uh oh,” Ilya ekes, making a face, “Somebody woke up on the warm side of the bed.”

As cute as his incorrect idiom is, Shane stands firm in his glare until Ilya heaves himself up off the comfort of the couch and heads towards the door, but not without first making a pit stop.

“Hello,” Ilya says, as he plants hands on the counter behind either side of Shane’s hips, and really goes for the jugular when he punctuates it with calling him *my love* in Russian. “You want to come help me unload the rest of the stuff?”

“Not particularly, no,” Shane says, finding it very difficult to remain actually peeved. Ilya looks so good. The way happiness fits on him, how it droops his shoulders and crinkles the skin around his eyes, is the most beautiful thing Shane has ever seen.

“But we could make out in the car for probably, hm, a good seven and a half minutes before they come looking for us.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Shane says, with no real bite. God, he is too fucking easy, “You have neighbors.”

“They are kids. Not home, in school.”

“They have parents.”

“Ugh, you are *so boring*,” he repeats, in a way Shane has learned sounds very, very similar to his pronunciation of *I love you*, so he is not fooled. He pulls at the strings of Shane’s black hoodie in a last ditch effort. “Fine. I hope you have the worst seven and a half minutes here without me.”

“You too,” Shane agrees, smiling.

He watches Ilya go, calling something out to Shane’s dad about starting their next row and helping Yuna with dinner when he gets back, which is making Shane crazy for a whole host of reasons.

“I’m gonna put some of this stuff away,” Shane gestures idly to the bags, starts poking through them for things. Ilya moved into this house in Ottawa maybe a week or two ago so it was still bare bones, and in the least shocking move ever, Shane’s the only one between the two of them to have made any sort of list. He picked up some things on his initial drive here, and his mother, who he inherited lists from, was more than happy to make a return outing for more today.

“You need help?” His dad asks.

“No, no, I got it,” Shane smiles, slinging an extra set of sheets under one arm, looping a bag of air fresheners on his wrist.

“I still don’t understand that, it’s a terrible housewarming gift,” his mom laughs as she slides around the counter, looking for pots and pans (of which, she will be lucky to find Ilya has only unpacked one of each by now, at most). “And really, a very ugly lamp.”

She had urged Shane on three separate occasions in the store to put the lamp she’s referring to, that he’s now holding in his left hand, back down and not purchase it.

“Long story,” he repeats, smirking at its familiar paper-thin lampshade, “I also don’t think technically *I* need to be getting Ilya a housewarming gift.”

“And you wonder why you don’t have a key!”

“I had literally just gotten that fact to stop actively looping in my head, thank you,” he grumbles, her twinkling laughter receding as he stalks out of the kitchen and down the hall towards the stairs.

Only having been here twice, and once when it was still totally empty, Shane has to take an educated guess as to which of the bedrooms is Ilya’s. He worries about this only for as long as it takes him to make it up the stairs, because as soon as he’s up there, it is quite obvious.

Ilya’s bedroom looks so perfectly lived-in, which is a sign Shane really must be in love, because a still unmade bed past noon from anyone else would have stressed him out. There are clothes on the floor, a laundry hamper not yet acquired (on Shane’s list for errand trip #3, don’t even worry,) and all the warm lamps still switched on. There’s one framed picture only, a terrible one Shane’s dad took of them at Shane’s last visit a month ago, printed out on the old-school ink printer at his parents’ that doesn’t even have color. A bracelet that is

predominantly pink and blue glittery beads with one lonely brown one sits in a little glass dish, like it's the only, and best jewelry he owns. And in the corner…

Shane places his ugly lamp on the nearest dresser and walks over to the corner by the window, where there's a box with Ilya's messy handwriting scribbled in permanent marker on the side, ***Jane.***

"I um, I didn't want the movers to guess," Ilya's voice comes from the doorway, his shoulder pressing into the frame lazily, hands in his pockets.

"That wasn't seven and a half minutes," Shane smiles, but is too busy sifting through the contents of this box to see Ilya's reaction.

"Well you know," he shrugs, "I always miss you."

"Clearly," Shane says, holding up things he didn't know he lost. A phone charger from three phones ago, cheap earplugs from a plane, socks and hats and jackets and little post-its he scribbled on, dog-eared books the library's been asking him to return for ages. "I didn't know you did this too."

"Too?"

Shane nods, holding up a lone blue sock.

"Well, I guess now you have to stay the night."

"Guess so," Shane is dangerously close to blinking back tears. He starts flipping through a magazine from the box, which feels random until, "I knew you liked this cologne."

"It smells awful," Ilya insists, slowly walking over and peeking at the magazine ad Shane has flipped to, "But you look hot."

“You should have really done more ads, I have no pictures of you.”

“You really want a picture of me posing with, what? An energy drink?”

“No, energy drinks are terrible for you,” Shane shakes his head, “But if you’re stuck on a birthday gift for me and wanna hold up a can of ginger ale shirtless…”

“Even faking an ad for ginger ale would give me gray hairs.”

“You are going to look so good gray. I don’t think this conversation is going the way you thought.”

“No, it is not,” Ilya laughs, crouching beside Shane, tilting his face up to his with his fingers pinched under his chin, “You want to pick out a drawer?”

“A drawer?”

“For your stuff,” Ilya repeats, his whole face lit up, “Maybe two. I know how many sweatpants you have.”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe?”

“Did my mom get a drawer first?”

“Oh my god, Hollander,” Ilya groans, shoving his laughing face away, and reaching for his back pocket, “You ruin everything. I had a whole thing planned.”

“A whole thing?”

“Rose petals, sexy music.”

“No you didn’t,” Shane sputters, but accepts his key on a blue key ring that looks handmade. He rolls it over in his fingers, feeling every inch, the thorough and genuine care he knows only from Ilya present even here. In a little bit of a wonder, and almost more to himself, Shane awes, “You do arts and crafts with my parents.”

It feels like a weird thing to focus on, but it’s the best his brain can do, making sense of the jumble of love he feels, overflowing, oozing out of him.

Because, he realizes, with this innocuous little keychain of all things, Shane has never had the patience for something like crocheting, but Ilya is eager to try. His dad hates boring errands, but now he has someone to sit at home with him while Shane and mom nerd-out over lists. There are finally enough hands to hold all four Pike kids when Shane has to babysit. There are sweatshirts to steal because Shane is hopeless with shopping. There are socks to mismatch, and t-shirts to wrinkle, and cans of soda to expire. There is someone to use that second toothbrush you wanna buy because everyone knows the 2-pack is cheaper.

Every day it feels less and less like Shane had to make the space for Ilya, the once terrifying act of sledgehammering his life as he knew it and hoping the dust would settle.

Because maybe his drawers were always going to feel too big, half-empty.

They were waiting for the other half.

He never understood when people described love like that, but now he’s not sure there’s any other way to understand it. This feeling of knowing how full-to-the-brim Ilya has made his

life, like he really had to force the drawers shut with all his body weight if he wanted to, there's so much good to fit. How loving him was seeing him slip into a place that had always been there for him, before Shane even knew it.

"Were you serious about the rose petals? Because I'm starting to feel bad."

"If I say yes, will you feel bad enough to make it up to me with something we can only do after your parents leave?"

"I can't believe I love you," Shane whispers, before crashing his lips into Ilya's, "I can't believe I *get to* love you."

"I love you more."

"Not possible."

"Yes possible, I said it first," Ilya shrugs, and Shane can feel his heartbeat against his own, "You are just too slow, that's on you."

"Oh, is that how it works?"

"Yes," Ilya nods, kissing Shane once, twice, and again for good luck, "Better luck beating me tomorrow."

"Is this gonna be a thing now? Beating each other to the first *love you* every day?"

"Every day, forever."

“Alright, you’re on,” Shane smiles, diving head first into the life he didn’t know he could ever dream about, and now gets to hold on his own two hands, “Think this is going to be a slice of cake for me.”

End Notes

writing this was no slice of cake. i owe every ounce of crazy in here to my favorite people in the universe, bella and orion <3 this one is for you my sillyas

we've got so much to scream about from now until s2 together. if you can't tell i'm going to be insufferable the second i get yuna and ilya on my screen together. so.

come say hi on twitter! @pecuiiarblue :)

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