

decorate my heart

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Summary

“So,” Ilya says, dragging the word out. He’s swiping at non-existent crumbs on the counter, avoiding his eyes. “You have dinner at parents on Christmas, yes?”

“Yeah.”

Ilya nods. “I can house-sit while you are away. Make place pretty, if you have decorations. Make it less boring.”

Shane’s eyebrows fly up. “What? You don’t want to come with?”

Finally, Ilya looks up at him. Hesitantly, he asks, “You want me to come with?”

Frowning, Shane says, “I– yeah. Yeah, of course. You think I invited you here just so you could spend Christmas alone?”

Looking away, Ilya shrugs. “I am intruder here, Hollander. You have family. I do not. Makes situation... difficult, maybe. You forget the world thinks we are rivals.”

“Not difficult,” Shane says immediately. “You want to come, you’re coming.”

Or: Ilya's in Montreal alone during the week leading up to the Winter Classic. Shane doesn't let him spend Christmas alone.

Notes

(cj speaking) we went on a spontaneous double date to drag bingo last night. my date was awful and strange. i then met two beautiful punk tboys who put cigarettes to my mouth (first time smoking) and then they both kissed me 👍 neither of us slept and jo got her gay shit *rocked* by a beautiful woman. she is hungover. her thighs and ass hurt. shane hollander how do you BEND like that.

we got back to the airbnb at 4am and 10am respectively. we then wrote this.

happy holidays gay people

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [装饰我的心 \(授翻\)](#) by [SLoan_1007](#)

23rd of December

Shane finds out that Ilya is in Montreal a week earlier than he has to be by accident. He's not overly fond of spending his days on the couch in front of the TV, but he's been stuck scrolling Instagram for the better part of an hour now, and can't tear himself away from his phone.

Which is how he finds out: paparazzi photos of Ilya Rozanov looking tired and cold, ducking into a hotel.

The Winter Classic game isn't for another six days, and Ilya is already here. In the same city as Shane. Without his team. From what he's seen, no one else from the Boston team has landed yet, likely spending time with their families or loved ones over the holidays. But here Ilya is, in the same city.

He should say something, right?

Anything.

Biting his lip, Shane starts typing.

*JANE: Are you in Montreal alone?
Merry Christmas!*

Shane deletes the message. That was too much. He's being crazy.

*JANE: Happy holidays, man.
You spending time with your team?*

He backspaces immediately, because— no. Just no. Absolutely not. Has he ever called Ilya *man* before? It's barely one step away from calling him *bro*. They are *not* bros.

Finally, he settles on a simple, succinct message:

JANE: Merry Christmas, Lily.

It's a classic. Foolproof. Nothing could go wrong.

His phone buzzes with a notification almost immediately. Heart skipping a beat, Shane presses it.

*LILY: Merry Christmas, Jane.
Are you excited for Winter Classic?*

JANE: Not as excited as you, apparently. You're already in Montreal?

Shane exhales hard through his nose, tossing his phone beside him. When it buzzes again five seconds later, he snatches it back up again.

LILY: It will be interesting.

JANE: Interesting?

*LILY: Yes.
This week is boring*

JANE: No plans?

This time, it takes Ilya several minutes to respond. Shane stares at the TV unseeingly until his phone lights up again.

LILY: No plans.

Oh.

JANE: You're not lonely?

Shane winces at the message, backspacing this one too. Fuck. It's never like this with other people—he's awkward, and struggles to know what to say, but with Ilya it's different. Every text he sends feels like a monumental risk, a landmine, the thing between them so fragile and waiting for collapse.

They don't talk like this. About this stuff. They flirt, they chirp, they fuck with each other. It's not like this.

JANE: Not even with your Russian friend from Boston?

*LILY: Svetlana?
No.
She is busy*

JANE: So what are you doing this week?

LILY: Waiting.

JANE: I'm in my cottage in Ottawa. Don't really have plans till Christmas eve. Dinner with my parents.

LILY: Ok.

JANE: I'm kind of waiting too, I guess.

LILY: If you were in hotel we could wait together

For a second, Shane imagines it: driving to Ilya's hotel, finding a secluded place to park away from paparazzi and onlookers, and sneaking in.

He then promptly realises that's insane. It seems like a lot more hassle than it's worth. Especially since Ilya is *here*, in Montreal, barely thirty minutes away from where Shane is

living.

What's even more insane, is the concept of inviting Ilya Rozanov into his cottage.

And yet—

~~*JANE: Come over?*~~

~~*JANE: You could come here.*~~

Shane sucks in a breath. What the hell is he doing?

Ilya's never been in his space before—not really, only ever the work-in-progress rental and random hotel rooms. The idea of Ilya in his cottage, his safe place, his private oasis, feels like an impossibility, but suddenly, all at once, he can imagine it.

Ilya, wrapped up in Shane's duvet, his curly hair sticking out at the top. In the kitchen, putting together a charcuterie board. Challenging him to a game of cards after dinner. Riding Ilya while the warm fire crackles in the background, his face tucked into the crook of Ilya's neck.

Fuck it.

JANE: My place is more private.

LILY: Is this invitation to your mysterious little lake cottage, Jane?

JANE: I take it back.

*LILY: No, no.
You have invited me.
You cannot revoke.*

JANE: Fancy word.

*LILY: I am smart in Russian
English is stupid
But I am learning*

~~*JANE: You're smart in English too*~~

JANE: I think I sound stupid in French.

LILY: You do

JANE: Do you wanna come or not, asshole?

LILY: You know I love to come

JANE: Lily.

LILY: *I will come to cottage.
And maybe in cottage ;)
Send address*

Shane does, not letting himself overthink it.

LILY: *Ok. I will come in three hours.*

Shane stares at the phone until the screen goes dark, realising in three hours, Ilya will be fucking here. Right here. In his home.

Should he clean? Fuck. He wasn't prepared for guests. His parents aren't even coming over for Christmas; he's going to theirs.

He should shower. And scrub the shower. And check the drain. Maybe polish the windows? Fuck, he should shovel the footpaths leading up to the house and salt them. Does he have time to mop the floors?

SHANE: *SOS*

ROSE: *At your service, darling*

SHANE: *I did something insane*

ROSE: *Did you knock someone up? :o*

SHANE: *This is serious. You're not funny.*

ROSE: *Omg did you actually knock someone up*

SHANE: *I'm gay.*

ROSE: *You slept with me
Multiple times*

SHANE: *As a bit*

ROSE: *Oh okay now who's the funny guy
Sort your own drama*

SHANE: *No.*

Rose *has disliked your message.*

SHANE: *Sorry. Please help me.*

ROSE: *What did you do?*

SHANE: *Rose, I invited him over. To my cottage. For the entire week.*

Rose *has surprise reacted your message.*

ROSE: *What?
Seriously?
Holy shit
SHANE!!!!*

SHANE: *I KNOW*

ROSE: *Start with that next time!!!!*

SHANE: *I don't know what to do!*

ROSE: *I mean, I feel like that's a little self-explanatory.
You're alone. In a beautiful cottage. With a beautiful man. Alone. A man you have sex with
semi-regularly. Alone.
I think you can piece the puzzle together here, babe*

Shane *has disliked your message.*

ROSE: *FUCK
HIM*

SHANE: *Ok.*

Rose *has loved your message.*

ROSE: *:)*

Exactly two hours and fifty-five minutes later, through the window, Shane sees a car he doesn't recognise pull into the driveway. The car is, naturally, a sleek black Ferrari. He opens the front door in time to, in faint horror, watch as Ilya pops the door open and steps out, his sneakers digging into the snow underfoot.

Shane wonders what Ilya has against Jeeps. Or just reasonable fucking cars to drive in this much snow.

Neither of them says anything as Ilya reaches back into the car to grab his duffel bag, slinging it over his shoulder.

"Uh," Shane manages when Ilya approaches, looking as uncertain as Shane feels. They don't do things like this—the last time they did, it just made Shane freak out and run away, but now, here, he's the one inviting Ilya inside. He lifts a hand, gesturing vaguely to the doorway that he's actively still blocking the way of. "Come in. It's freezing outside."

Ilya gives a half-shrug, waiting for Shane to step aside before following him inside. "Not so bad."

Closing the door behind him, Shane watches Ilya toe off his shoes, bending down to place them neatly beside Shane's. For some reason, Shane's heart aches a little at the sight.

“Russia is worse,” Ilya continues, standing up straight again.

He’s so close, like this.

Ilya’s eyes are so blue. Shane has to look up at him to see them. Without permission, Shane’s gaze slides down to Ilya’s mouth. When he quickly looks back up again, Ilya’s pupils dilate.

“So,” Shane blurts. “Do you want the tour?”

Lips twitching, Ilya looks away, toward the kitchen. Shane traces the sharp line of his jaw with his eyes, watching it flex and move as he says, “Sure, Hollander.”

The tour is uneventful, up until he’s showing Ilya around outside, and gestures to a patch of snow-covered grass. “You do yoga out here still? Even in winter?”

Shane turns, almost comically slow, and says, “I said nothing about yoga. Why do you know this is where I work out?”

Ilya’s expression shifts, and for a brief second, he looks like a kid who’s been caught with his hand digging around in the cookie jar, crumbs already surrounding his mouth. The look disappears, and he shrugs. “Is always on television. I am forced to watch you give tour.”

Shane realises that means Ilya already kind of knew his way around, but he got Shane to show him around anyway. He doesn’t quite know what to do with that.

“You could’ve turned it off.”

Ilya leans in, crooked cocky smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. “Well, yes, but then I could not jerk off to you arching pretty for the camera.”

Shane shoves his shoulder, ignoring the warmth that’s creeping up his neck. “You’re such an asshole. We’re going back inside.”

Ilya laughs. “No, come on, Shane Hollander. I want to see your yoga poses.” He grabs Shane’s hips, hands dipping under his winter coat, but not the shirt beneath that. Shane’s breath catches.

It feels different. It feels so different. They’ve touched, and kissed, and fucked so many times before, but here, standing outside his home, two hands, fingers splayed, settling on his hips feel heavy like concrete. Like a claim.

Suddenly, his skin feels tight.

He clears his throat.

“It’s cold, Rozanov. I’m cold. We’re going inside.”

Ilya looks at him for a long second. He pulls his hands back. Shane immediately mourns the warmth of them. Beneath where his fingers had been resting, his skin feels scorched, like it cannot erase that he’s been touched, even once the hands are gone.

Fuck.

Why is he making it weird? Why does he have to make things so weird and complicated?

Ilya doesn't falter, though. He begins walking through the snow back toward the front door.

"Are you coming, Hollander? I am making hot chocolate," he calls over his shoulder.

"Because you are so cold."

Shane rolls his eyes and follows after him.

He lags behind when his phone buzzes, leaning against the counter and angling his phone away from Ilya before he unlocks it.

ROSE: *Updates???*

SHANE: *It's weird.
He's making hot chocolate.*

ROSE: *He's making you hot chocolate? 🙄*

SHANE: *Yes. Unprompted.
I don't even know where he found the mini marshmallows.*

ROSE: *Ok. So Fuck Him.*

SHANE: *I'm not going to jump him out of nowhere.
I didn't think it'd be this weird. Tense. I don't know.*

ROSE: *Sexual tension, Shane. Don't be dense.*

SHANE: *I don't think so. I feel like this is my first day on Earth
I'm being so weird*

ROSE: *Awww
Baby's first crush*

SHANE: *Crush?? I'm not twelve years old
I know I'm attracted to him. Doesn't make it a crush*

ROSE: *Baby's first love*

Shane hastily thumbs out of Messages and puts on Do Not Disturb. In his haste, he forgets that Rose is on the list of the few people who can get through his Do Not Disturb.

ROSE: *Coward.*

Maturely, Shane elects to ignore her. Clearing his throat, he pockets his phone and watches Ilya's back. And, well, if his eyes stray to his ass when Ilya is wandering around Shane's house in only a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie, there's nobody around to call him out on it.

Later, after a strange (but pleasant) few hours spent on the couch reading, Shane finds Ilya in the kitchen. Shane had dozed on the couch and awoken to the sun having set, and gotten up in search of Ilya.

Ilya's standing at the stove with an apron on (the one with the words *Bald & Sexy* printed on it that Hayden had gifted him as a joke five years ago, which Shane, to this day, still does not understand), stirring a large pot of something that smells amazing. He's whistling a surprisingly chipper tune, one Shane can't recognise. On the counter, next to a bowl of grated Parmesan, is a bottle of red wine. Two glasses stand beside it, one full, one empty, presumably waiting for Shane's arrival.

In the muted, yellow kitchen light, Ilya's hair almost glows. Shane catches himself cataloguing every inch of him: from his feet – clad in woollen socks that Shane suspects have been pulled on over a pair of regular socks, seeing as Ilya hates how itchy they are – to his sculpted shoulders, to his golden curls.

He's beautiful, and Shane almost can't believe he's here, in Shane's kitchen, whistling to himself.

God, Ilya Rozanov is spending Christmas with him. He would rather be here than in Russia, than in Boston.

"Hey," Shane says, after an indeterminable amount of time.

Ilya looks to his side at Shane, who's leaning against the doorframe. Ilya does not look caught or surprised to see him, almost like he knew he was there. Like he was letting him watch him, completely at ease.

"I made beef stew," Ilya says, and Shane pushes off the doorway, approaching.

The stew looks as flavourful and rich as the aroma it gives off, and Shane's mouth waters. He lets Ilya scoop a little bit of it onto a spoon and blow on it, dutifully opening his mouth when Ilya holds it up to him.

The second the spoon is in his mouth, he moans. The flavours burst on his tongue, and he shoots Ilya a bewildered, happy look.

"It is good?" Ilya asks.

Shane swallows, nodding. "Yeah. That's– wow."

Ilya ducks his head, looking pleased. "The secret is cinnamon. Is good for subtle flavour."

Shane nods, eyes on the stew. He's genuinely impressed. "I never would've guessed."

For a moment, they stand in silence, watching the stew bubble. Ilya turns down the heat and grabs a lid, putting it over the pot. Shane assumes it's meant to simmer until the beef is tender enough to melt in your mouth.

Clearing his throat, Ilya pulls off the apron before folding it and putting it on the counter. It's a somewhat awkward move, one so unlike Ilya that Shane almost teases him about it.

"So," Ilya says, dragging the word out. He's swiping at non-existent crumbs on the counter, avoiding his eyes. "You have dinner at parents on Christmas, yes?"

"Yeah."

Ilya nods. "I can house-sit while you are away. Make place pretty, if you have decorations. Make it less boring."

Shane's eyebrows fly up. "What? You don't want to come with?"

Finally, Ilya looks up at him. Hesitantly, he asks, "You want me to come with?"

Frowning, Shane says, "I- yeah. Yeah, of course. You think I invited you here just so you could spend Christmas alone?"

Looking away, Ilya shrugs. "I am intruder here, Hollander. You have family. I do not. Makes situation... difficult, maybe. You forget the world thinks we are rivals."

"Not difficult," Shane says immediately. "You want to come, you're coming."

Shane almost misses the flash of relief on Ilya's face before Ilya smooths it out, turning to Shane with a half-smirk on his face.

"I want to come, I'm coming?"

Shane rolls his eyes. "You've got a dirty mind, Rozanov."

"You've got a dirty mouth, *Hollander*."

Ilya steps between Shane's legs, nudging his knees to make room for himself.

"You're making dinner," Shane murmurs.

Ilya's nose brushes Shane's. "It is slow cook."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. So I have time to make you feel good."

"Rozanov," Shane says, watching him through half-lidded eyes.

Slowly, eyes locked on Shane's face, Ilya sinks to the floor. He nuzzles Shane's crotch, his warm breath, even through his briefs, enough for Shane's dick to start filling out.

Ilya mouths at him sloppily, eyes flickering closer as he slips his fingers into the waistband of the briefs, pulling them down inch by inch.

He's still only half-hard, and Ilya takes him into his mouth without preamble, swallowing almost all of him down.

A breath punches out of Shane, hand flying out to grab hold of Ilya's curls as his head tips back.

He hardens quickly in Ilya's mouth, stomach tensing when Ilya tongues gently at the slit. He's methodical about it, taking it slow in a way he never does when they're in hotel rooms, sometimes having come directly from the airport. They never have time. They're always stealing an hour here, or a few hours there; they've never been able to take their time before.

Ilya taps his thigh, and Shane drops his head to look at him. Now with Shane's full attention on him, Ilya drops his jaw, pressing forward until his nose is buried in his pubes. A whimper is torn from him, slipping from between his lips and into the chill, winter air.

"Rozanov," Shane gasps, bracing himself on the counter when Ilya groans around him. Ilya pulls back, sucking in a wet breath before he feeds himself Shane's cock again. Shane can't look away, not when he's watching Ilya play him like a guitar, his tongue strumming Shane's strings with practised ease.

His hand curves around Shane's hip, softly pinning him against the counter, his thumb digging into Shane's hip bone. Shane, at the pressure, whimpers again, hips bucking upward. Ilya glances up, Shane's cock nestled in his mouth, and presses his thumb down harder, pushing into the muscle testingly.

It hurts. There's no other way to describe it. It doesn't feel like pleasure. It's pain, pure and simple.

Shane's dick blurts pre-come, twitching on Ilya's tongue. Ilya looks thrilled by the discovery, but goes back to focusing his attention on reverently swallowing him down, his thumb still pushing harshly into the muscle of his hip, rolling in small circles to make Shane whimper and whine.

The normal moans and gasps that spill from him are sharper, distracted and revealing of how dizzied and affected he feels.

His hip is going to bruise. He wishes Ilya's fingerprint would be left behind, but the shape of his thumb will do.

Suddenly, Shane's breathing is coming fast and hard. He hadn't realised he was getting close, and now he's right on the edge, heat pooling in his gut, balls drawing up. He's making little noises that sound *loud* in the kitchen, but Shane can't find it in himself to feel ashamed or worried they'll get caught. They're safe here, away from the rest of the world. They can sound however they want, do whatever they want. Here and now, as far as Shane's concerned, they're the only two people who exist in the entire world.

Inexplicably, Shane's eyes are drawn to Ilya's knees, to his calves, to his socked feet. Ilya looks for all the world like he's worshipping Shane like this. He wonders, half out of his mind, if Ilya loves him. If Ilya loves him the same way Shane loves him.

Shane gasps, eyebrows furrowed as he keeps his gaze locked on Ilya. His hands tighten around Ilya's curls as his balls draw up, breath stuttering out of him.

"I—" *Love you. Love you. Love you. Love you.* "I'm gonna come. Fuck. Rozanov, fuck, *fuck* —"

Ilya groans, mouth full of cock, and swallows him down.

With a wounded, animal noise, Shane comes. His eyes nearly roll back when his cockhead hits the back of Ilya's throat, feeling himself shoot ropes of come

Ilya swallows around him, cheeks hollowed, and takes every drop. He doesn't stop, not till Shane's orgasm has fully crested. He smooths his hands over Shane's trembling thigh, only pulling off after he's wrung the last drop out of him.

Shane looks down at him. Ilya looks a little wrecked, but so unbelievably satisfied with himself. He's so beautiful like this, mouth slick with come and spit, eyes a little wet from burying Shane's dick in his throat, a proud smile pulling at his lips.

Shane drops to his knees. Ilya looks confused, but makes space for him. He captures Ilya's mouth in a searing kiss, hoping the collision of their mouths does something to soothe the giant, pulsing thing in him that demands he tells Ilya everything he feels, everything he's been feeling, everything he's been far too scared to say out loud.

Ilya kisses him back enthusiastically, tongue slipping into Shane's mouth. He can taste himself on Ilya's tongue. He moans, knocking Ilya onto his back, suddenly so grateful for how large of a kitchen he requested when he'd had the place built. He crawls atop his lap, kissing him hard and heated, and Ilya just lets him.

They make out lazily, Shane's softening cock grinding against Ilya's aching, hard cock that's only covered by soft, worn-in sweatpants.

Eventually, after several minutes of grinding, Shane is hard and ready to go again, but Ilya pulls him back by his hair, dragging his lips across the day-old stubble on Shane's jaw. "I have to check stew."

Shane whines. "You said—" A huff of a breath. His chest heaves with the expansion of his lungs. He hadn't even realised he'd been holding his breath. "It cooks slow."

Ilya smiles against his cheek, pecking it. "Yes, but I must check it, Hollander. You can make me come later."

That feels—weird. Couple-y almost. Like he doesn't even care about getting off, even though it's clear he's so unbelievably hard. Shane pulls back, still straddling Ilya's hips, knees digging into the hard tile beneath.

"You're sure?"

Ilya kisses the corner of his mouth, a soft, barely there thing. "Yes. I am sure I will fuck you over your couch later."

“Something heavy like stew is gonna put me to sleep, Rozanov.”

Ilya lifts a shoulder in a half-shrug. “Then we will sleep.”

They don’t have sex again that night.

Shane gets tired after they finish the dishes, just as he had warned he would, and ends up nuzzling his face against Ilya’s neck in the kitchen. Ilya guides Shane to bed, palm resting lightly on the small of his back, but as Ilya goes to leave and sleep in the guest room again, Shane tugs him forward, Ilya’s knees knocking against the edge of the mattress.

Ilya looks at him, questioning and unsure.

Shane tugs again wordlessly.

Don’t make me ask, he thinks, *I don’t think I’m brave enough to ask yet*.

Ilya doesn’t make him ask. He pulls his hoodie off and lets it crumple onto the floor beside Shane’s bed, and crawls in beside him.

Shane, warm, sleepy and content, pulls Ilya into his arms and wraps around him, his stomach, chest and legs moulding around the back of Ilya’s body. Sleepily, Shane thinks, *like a little backpack*.

He’s not sure who falls asleep first. It’s the best sleep he’s had in years.

24th of December

In the morning, Ilya abandons his post of perching on a barstool to take a phone call, excusing himself quickly and stepping out of the room. Shane continues working on breakfast, pointedly not dwelling on or even thinking about how domestic it feels—cooking for the both of them, moving around the kitchen while Ilya dawdles like this is normal. Like this is something that could be normal for them.

Moments later, Ilya returns, phone grasped in his left hand.

“Who was that?” Shane asks.

“Car Rental Company. Confirming payment. Is fine.” Ilya hopped back onto the barstool, grabbing a nut from the little bowl of them on the kitchen counter and cracking it open between his fingers.

Shane’s brows scrunch. “You didn’t book it in advance?”

“I did not think I would need car.” Ilya ducks his head, but not quick enough to hide the way his cheeks colour.

Unfortunately for Ilya, Shane catches a glimpse of the apples of his cheeks flushing with warmth.

“You rented a car to come see me,” Shane says, a grin tugging at his lips. The simple thought of Ilya last-minute coordinating some stupid sports car so that he can come spend a few days with Shane strikes him in a way he hadn’t expected—he feels warm inside, something tingly, bright and buoyant blooming in the cavern of his chest.

Shane turns back to the stove before Ilya can see how wide his smile has gotten. He takes his time flipping the eggs, buying himself a second to breathe through the way his chest feels alight with colour, like a firework is exploding within the confines of his ribcage.

“Is not crazy,” Ilya says. “It is long drive to your weird, secluded cottage, Hollander. It is not like I was going to take Uber.”

“Didn’t have to get a Ferrari.”

“I am surprised you know what Ferrari looks like.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

Suddenly, there are hands on his hips, and a mouth against the back of his neck, brushing against the sensitive skin there. He hadn’t even heard Ilya stand. “I *know*. I am worst.”

A lingering kiss against the middle vertebrae of his neck, warm and tender. Ilya’s fingertips slip under Shane’s shirt, settling against the skin just above his waistband.

Shane shivers.

“You are,” he breathes, the words more unsteady than he intends for them to be.

Ilya hums, stepping impossibly closer. His nose bumps the back of Shane’s neck, hips connecting with Shane’s ass.

Shane tips his head back, and Ilya’s head tilts to the side, mouth grazing the side of his neck. The hands on his hips tighten possessively, and heat pools in Shane’s gut, warmth flooding his face.

Ilya, against the skin of his throat, whispers, “You are burning the eggs.”

“Fuck!” Shane startles, eyes flying open, shifting the pan off the burner.

The eggs are not burned. He shoots Ilya a scathing look. “Like I said—you’re an asshole.”

Ilya *laughs*, shoulders shaking. He looks beautiful, and Shane can’t find it in himself to resent him for it. Ilya wears joy like he was born to feel it.

“You are easy to prank,” Ilya tells him, still grinning boyishly.

Shane looks away so Ilya doesn’t see how stupidly, inadvisably, fond he is of him.

“Whatever,” he says, and Ilya tuts.

“Don’t be sore loser,” Ilya says. Shane’s about to protest when Ilya announces, “I need to piss. I will be back.”

Shane shoots him an unimpressed look. “Have a good piss.”

“I will,” Ilya sing-songs, walking backwards toward the hall. “Don’t eat eggs without me.”

“I will,” he threatens. Ilya ignores him.

He resumes cooking them—then plates them up on rye toast, his own unbuttered. He waits patiently for Ilya to return before even taking a single bite.

When he does return, neither of them says anything. They eat in companionable silence, and Shane only spares a second thinking about the fact that they’ve never eaten breakfast together before. Never woken up in the same place. Never spent a morning together like this.

His chest twists. He pushes it down, taking another bite.

When he looks up, he catches Ilya’s eyes. Ilya smiles at him, small and secretive. It reminds Shane of their first year together as rookies, catching each other’s eyes across the ice before they had learned to smile without following it with ribbing— but there had always been something private in the way they looked at each other then, too. An almost-smile.

When Ilya tells him he’s taking a shower, Shane pulls his phone out of his pocket.

***SHANE:** Hey, mom. I’m bringing a friend to Christmas dinner, but you have to promise not to freak out.*

***MOM:** Why would I freak out? Is it one of your teammates? You know our table is always open.*

***SHANE:** It’s Ilya.*

***MOM:** Who?*

***SHANE:** Rozanov.*

***MOM:** Your friend Ilya Rozanov.*

***SHANE:** Yes.*

***MOM:** Okay.
Are you okay?*

***SHANE:** Yes, mom.*

***MOM:** Not being held hostage?*

***SHANE:** I would tell you if I was being held hostage.*

MOM: *Just checking.
Let Ilya know he's welcome.*

SHANE: *Will do.*

Shane feels a little relieved when he exits Messages. He knew his parents would be okay with it, kind of. His parents aren't heartless. It's just nice he's got it out of the way.

With nothing to do besides wait for Ilya to return from his shower (and— is he *singing* in there?), Shane relocates to the living room and lights the fireplace. He collapses on the couch afterwards, half-planning to get back up in a minute and do some yoga, before he opens Instagram.

Ilya's username pops up first on his Feed.

It's an uncaptioned photo of their two mugs of hot chocolate, each containing only five mini-marshmallows, neither of their hands present in the photo. There's nothing identifiable in the picture, nothing that could lead anyone to believe Ilya is at Shane's cottage. It's just a photo. Still, Shane stares at it a little too long.

Thumb hovering over the screen, he decides to do some sleuthing. Some very *mild* sleuthing, seeing as he's simply checking out Ilya's account, which is public.

Three more posts appear, all new. The rest, Shane's already seen.

The post featuring the hot chocolates is the newest one. The one before that is a close-up of a little heart Ilya drew in the snow. Next is an undeniably artsy photo of the stew Ilya had made, next to a plate full of garlic bread, fresh out of the oven. Shane remembers Ilya taking the picture. He hadn't thought much of it at the time.

Now, though... Well, it just seems like— like maybe Ilya's... documenting Christmas, in a way he never has before, in any of the years Shane's known him.

But why is Ilya doing it now?

Ilya's — frankly, a little impressive — singing gets louder, the bathroom door shutting behind him in the distance, and Shane quickly exits Instagram. He grabs the remote off the coffee table and turns on the TV, switching to the Nature Channel at random.

Towel wrapped around his hips, Ilya glances at the TV and then at Shane. "Mating ritual."

"Huh?"

Ilya nods at the TV. "The birds. They sing as mating ritual, to find partner."

"Oh," Shane says belatedly. "Right. Yeah, it's— yeah. It's cool."

"Cool," Ilya echoes, his smile bemused. "Okay, I am going to change."

“Cool,” Shane says again, watching Ilya’s back muscles shift as he walks. He blinks, before scrambling to sit up. “Wait, don’t—”

Ilya turns, looking at him expectantly.

Shane swallows. “Don’t change,” he says.

“You want me naked?” Ilya tuts. “A little cold for that, no?”

“I can get naked too.” Fingers drift to his belt buckle, body leaning back against the couch, making a show of unbuckling it.

Ilya doesn’t even pretend to think it over, dropping the towel immediately. Dazed, he nods once, sharply. “Okay. Deal.”

Shane yelps, grin on his face, as Ilya launches himself at him.

The sex, as always, is mindblowing. Shane doesn’t much feel like doing yoga once they’re done, privately counting what they did as his cardio for the day, and lazily, they make out until Ilya yawns into Shane’s mouth.

They spend the afternoon watching a movie, Ilya’s feet kicked up into Shane’s lap, his hand resting atop Ilya’s shin and tracing along the fabric of his pants. The sun dips below the horizon early, and they begin decorating Shane’s place. He’s got a few boxes of decorations in the garage, half of them gifts from his parents, more than things he’d bought himself.

Dozens of knick-knacks, what feels like endless tinsel, and a few hanging decorations later, Shane finds himself late into the evening of Christmas Eve.

“You have decorations, but no tree?” Ilya asks—sounding curious rather than judgmental.

Shane shrugs. “I’m always at my parents’ for dinner. No one—uh. No one else has ever been here. *So*, felt weird to have one here just for me.”

Ilya pauses, fingers slipping from the tinsel he’s been hanging. “No one?”

“Uh,” Shane says, chest tightening. He wonders why this feels so much like a confession all of a sudden. “Nope.”

He studies Shane for a long moment, then steps forward, closing the distance. His hand, warm and sure, curves around Shane’s neck and pulls him into a kiss—one that knocks the breath clean out of Shane’s lungs.

It’s not rushed, but it’s not tentative or hesitant either. It’s a practised motion, like each movement he makes is from muscle memory alone rather than thought.

Briefly, for a second, Shane wonders exactly how many times they’ve kissed. He wonders how many times they can kiss and it still be something casual. The thought vanishes

completely the moment Ilya's hand slips beneath his shirt, cold fingers skimming over Shane's stomach.

Shane backs him up against the unlit fireplace, Ilya's back coming into contact with the mantle there. He grabs a hold of Ilya's wrist, dragging the hand higher, higher, higher before it skims over his pectoral. On the outside of the shirt, where it's rumpled over Ilya's knuckles, he squeezes the hand gently.

Against his mouth, Ilya smirks, nipping at Shane's bottom lip and massaging the flesh of his tit at the same time, shifting his hand so that he can drag his thumb over Shane's sensitive nipple.

Shane shudders, rolling his hips forward involuntarily, sighing sweetly into Ilya's mouth.

Ilya pays equal attention to both sides of Shane's chest with his wandering hand, but eventually, he breaks the kiss. He pecks Shane's cheek just once before dropping his hand to Shane's hip, using the point as leverage to flip them around.

He goes pliantly, looking up at Ilya with saucer-wide eyes, his breath coming in quiet, heavy pants. In the silent room, the sound of his breathing feels so loud.

Ilya slides downward, one hand keeping Shane's shirt rucked up, exposing the length of his torso to the air. His mouth kisses reverently over the smooth skin there, worshipping every inch of his chest, dragging increasingly desperate noises from Shane. He doesn't touch Shane's dick, just bites, sucks, and nibbles across the plains of Shane's torso.

"Fuck, Rozanov," he whispers, head tilting back, colliding with brick. "Please."

Ilya hums, unlatching his mouth from around a nipple. "Please, what, Hollander?"

Shane's thoughts are fuzzy around the edges—all his coherent thoughts dulled by arousal. So, instead of making a genuine request, he just repeats a quiet, "Please."

Unsatisfied with the answer, Ilya straightens up, grabbing a hold of Shane's chin and forcing eye contact. Shane wonders if he looks as wrecked and ruined as he feels.

"Please, *what*?" He repeats.

Shane drops the weight of his head against Ilya's hand, his eyes widening and softening, pleading. "Ilya," he says, "Take me to bed. Please."

Ilya looks a little like he's been struck. Shane, in his head, refuses to acknowledge that it's the first time he's called him that since *the first time* he called him that. Ilya bends, hands curving around Shane's thighs, before he lifts him. It doesn't even look like it takes any effort. Shane gasps, clutching at his shoulders.

"Do not fucking drop me."

Ilya grins, pulling them away from the mantle, both hands squeezing the underneath of Shane's sensitive, parted thighs. "I cannot promise this."

25th of December

Ilya posts on Instagram twice more, late at night. So late, in fact, that Shane doesn't see the posts until he wakes the next morning, while Ilya's in the bathroom. The first post features a corner of Shane's fireplace, the stack of logs assembled neatly at the side. The second is of the book Ilya's been reading, stacked atop Shane's book.

He's not sure if Ilya knows that Shane's seen the posts. He hasn't liked or commented on them, too unsure about the rules here, or if there even are any. He knows, is the thing. He knows that what he and Ilya are doing is more than just... friendship. More than just a buddy helping another buddy out. They aren't even fuck-buddies.

It just— it doesn't make sense when Shane tries to lay out the facts in his head.

1. He really does like Ilya Rozanov, however ill-advised it is.
2. Ilya Rozanov likes him too.
3. They fuck. A lot. So much.
4. Neither of them are out, and neither of them are, as far as he's aware, planning on coming out anytime soon.
5. He can't picture a future without Ilya in it. Now, every time he imagines next summer, coming back to his cottage after the play-offs, Ilya is there. Every single time.

These facts do not, as it turns out, clear anything up for him. So, mustering a smile, he suggests they go for a walk after breakfast. Ilya agrees, smiling with his mouth full, and Shane isn't even annoyed. He doesn't think he's ever seen Ilya this relaxed before. It's a good look on him.

The walk turns into a three-hour hike-slash-snowball-fight-slash-competition. The competition, naturally, revolves around who can find the biggest stick. Shane wins in the end, hoisting a stick so long in the air that Ilya whoops, telling him he looks like Gandalf, if Gandalf had a really inconvenient staff.

By the time they get home, it's lunchtime. Shane makes them both a grilled cheese with a side of salad he had prepped the day before, and watches Ilya painstakingly pick all the tomato out of it. Shane rolls his eyes when Ilya offers them to him. He eats them anyway.

Afterwards, Shane's so sleepy that Ilya all but shoves him into bed. Stubbornly, Shane decides he is not going to nap. He has a perfectly good book to read right there on the bedside table, thank you very much.

Once Shane's head hits the pillow, a wave of exhaustion he'd not fully realised was there crashes over him. He melts against the bed, blinking slow and almost cat-like, eyelids suddenly heavier than boulders.

"You sleep. I will wake you in time for dinner. Do not worry," Ilya says, pulling the blanket up a little higher over Shane's shoulder.

Softly, distantly, a thought occurs to Shane—Ilya is tucking him into bed. The only person in the world to ever do so who wasn't obligated in some way through blood relation. It's soft,

intimate, the kind of thing you do for a lover.

He thinks maybe he'll tell Ilya about that soon. About everything. Or at least something. Tomorrow, maybe. Tomorrow, he thinks he'll be brave enough.

"M not that tired," Shane mumbles. "Just gonna lay down for a minute. Read."

Ilya laughs quietly. "Okay, Hollander. See you in four hours."

Sleep takes Shane before he's able to think of a retort.

Shane wakes late in the afternoon, frowning immediately upon realising he's been proven wrong. The sun had started to set, twilight making the lake outside look spooky and eerie. Groaning, he stretches before sliding out of bed. He pops his head into the kitchen, expecting Ilya to be standing there, either cooking or putting together a pre-dinner snack. But the kitchen is empty. Frowning, Shane makes his way into the living room. Also empty.

They have to get ready for dinner at his parents' soon. Ilya better not have gone off on some sort of meandering adventure. Especially not in the snow, alone.

Movement outside catches his eye, and he squints at the window, stepping closer. And then he pauses, blinking rapidly, because—

Ilya's on a ladder, righting a big star atop a spruce tree. The tree is decorated with twinkling lights, tinsel, and baubles— messily, but with clear intention. The tree wasn't small either— Ilya must've been out here for at least an hour.

Shane slides the porch door open, gaping, and for a second, he just stares. He doesn't even realise he's stepped out onto the snowy porch in his socks until the cold bites feet, and he curls his toes. Ilya is, at least, appropriately dressed. He's donned Shane's winter jacket, a scarf he must've unearthed from the closet, and large boots Shane thinks belong to his father. He looks like he belongs here, and Shane wishes, nonsensically, that he could pause time and preserve the image of Ilya decorating a tree forever.

Just as Ilya hops down from the ladder, hands on his hips as he tilts his head back to admire his work, Shane finally finds his voice.

"Ilya," he says, and Ilya startles, turning with wide eyes before he beams— the full force of it hitting Shane right in the solar plexus.

"I made us Christmas tree!" Ilya exclaims, gesturing toward his creation.

Shane blinks, eyes wet. "Fuck," he breathes. *I love you.*

Ilya grins. "Is nice, yes?"

"Ilya," he says. *I love you.*

Ilya bounds forward, gaze flickering to Shane's socked feet.

“Why are you not wearing boots?” Ilya asks, eyebrows flying into his hairline.

“Ilya,” Shane repeats. *I love you.*

“Inside,” Ilya ushers, hand wrapping around Shane’s arm. The touch burns.

I love you.

“Ilya,” Shane says once more, a little louder, a little desperate.

This time, Ilya pauses.

His eyes find Shane’s. He’s flushed from the cold, concern now warring with the joy on his face.

“Shane,” he says, a touch hesitant.

Shane exhales shakily, unable to tear his gaze from Ilya’s.

“I love you.”

Ilya freezes. The hand around Shane’s bicep goes slack.

For a moment, neither of them so much as breathes.

Shane’s heart is pounding in his chest, like it’s a fluttering, panicked bird trying to escape the cage of his ribs. He’s expecting panic to flood him, for fear to make its familiar home under his skin, but—

It never comes.

Instead, all he feels is a stark, welcome relief.

Unable to keep from smiling, dizzy and in love, he says again, “Ilya, *I love you.*”

“Shane,” Ilya says, voice catching in his throat. His eyes are imploring, hand now tightening around Shane’s arm again. “Shane, are—”

He doesn’t need to hear the rest.

“Yeah,” Shane breathes. “Yeah, I’m sure.”

Ilya swallows hard. His throat works like he’s trying to force words past something lodged in there. Beneath the colourful, twinkling lights above and the setting sun, his eyes shine brightly, glistening. Shane’s pretty sure Ilya’s hands are shaking. He doesn’t look.

“You—” Ilya starts, then stops, his mouth closing. He drags in a breath through his nose.

And then he tips forward, forehead meeting Shane’s.

“Ya tebya lyublyu,” Ilya says quietly, eyes fluttering shut. Shane’s heart skips a beat. He may not speak Russian, but he knows the important phrases. The important words. And Ilya just said—

“I love you,” Ilya says, this time in English. He opens his eyes, and Shane has to suck in a quick breath at the overwhelming emotion he finds there— the same devotion reflected in his own.

God, he loves him. Shane cups the side of Ilya’s face, nose bumping Ilya’s before he tips forward. Gently, aware he’s handling something very precious, he slots their mouths together.

It tastes like the rest of his life.

Ilya melts against him, hands flying to his waist. He presses closer, and Shane smiles into the kiss, eager and willing and *his*.

The rest of the world awaits them, he knows. Outside of his cottage, there is no place on Earth he could kiss Ilya like this. No place he could hold his hand, or even hug him. But that does not stop the love from taking root. That does not stop Shane from wishing things could be different. It is impossible to stop something so innate, something born out of years of stolen moments, hundreds of forbidden looks, touches, wishes.

When they pull apart, Ilya presses his forehead to Shane’s again, the warm puff of Ilya’s breath over his lips a strong contrast to the sharp chill around them.

“Come inside,” he says quietly. “Before you lose toes, Hollander.”

Hand in his, Shane follows Ilya inside.

They’re getting dressed for dinner when Shane — still sort of dazed and very much in love — realises, very quickly, that Ilya is worried out of his mind about the evening. Ilya only packed two nice shirts. Shane watches him cycle through them like a man trapped in a loop: button, smooth, turn, stare at himself in the mirror, then pivot to Shane with frantic eyes.

“Pick,” Ilya says. “Which one?”

Shane, meanwhile, is wearing a hand-knit sweater his grandmother made him. It’s warm. It’s soft. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, fashionable.

“Ilya,” Shane says, gesturing vaguely at himself. “I am not the person you should be consulting about this.”

Ilya rolls his eyes and yanks the shirt off again.

Shane does not mind the fashion show. He cracks open a ginger ale, perches on the edge of the bed, and watches Ilya strip and re-dress with great interest.

Eventually, Ilya settles on a silk, dark shirt, tucked in with meticulous care by slightly trembling hands. He's tucking it in when Shane notices the time.

He takes the final sip of his can before saying, "We should go."

Ilya looks at him. Then—

"Fuck. One second. I have something for you."

Shane frowns, pushing himself up. Ilya holds up a finger.

"No. You stay here. I run out."

"Run out where?"

"Car, Hollander."

"Okay. Sure."

He's already gone—outside in only his nice shoes.

Idiot. Still, better than when Shane went out in only his socks, but idiotic nonetheless.

When Ilya comes back, he's holding a perfectly wrapped present. Neat edges. Delicate paper. A bow tied so precisely that it almost looks fake.

"You didn't—" Shane blinks. "When did you get me something?"

Ilya arches an eyebrow, pink high on his cheeks. "Why do you think it took me three hours to come from hotel?"

"You—Ilya."

"Yes. I am Ilya. Open, open."

Shane does. In his hands, suddenly, there is a hardcover copy of *'Team Canada 1972: 40th Anniversary.'* It's worth a few hundred dollars. He knows, because he's been trying to find a copy locally, so far coming up empty-handed. He's only got the e-book on his phone.

"How—Ilya." Shane's heart trips over itself. "This is a limited edition."

"Yes. I know. Open book. Front page."

He flips the cover open, breath catching. There, scribbled on the front page, is two signatures he knows well—both Paul Henderson and Phil Esposito. "It's *signed*. Holy shit, it's *signed*. How did you do this in three hours?"

"I am just this good," Ilya says, watching Shane's face closely. "You like it?"

Shane's hands are shaking. He puts the book down and makes his way over to the closet wordlessly, pulling it open. He grabs a perfectly wrapped gift from the top shelf. On top is a

little sticker with *For Lily* written in cursive.

He holds it out.

Ilya stares at the package. “You did not even know I was coming.”

Shane hesitates, worried. “I was out shopping with Rose a few weeks ago when she was in town. I saw it and thought of you. I thought maybe I’d be ... you know— brave enough to give it to you. I guess.”

Ilya swallows. “You are bravest man I know, Shane.”

“Just—open it,” Shane says, because if he doesn’t, he might cry.

Ilya tears it open, then stares at it. “This is sweater.”

“Yeah. The blue, it’s—uh.” Shane gestures helplessly. “Your eyes. Same colour.”

Ilya looks up at him, expression unreadable.

“You don’t like it,” Shane blurts. “Fuck. It’s stupid. Just give it back, I’ll return it—”

Ilya holds the sweater to his chest, stepping out of Shane's reach.

“You watched me spend ten hours trying on shirts,” Ilya says, incredulous, “and you had perfect little sweater sitting in closet?”

Relief floods Shane, even as he winces, halfway between playful and sincere. “I ... forgot?”

Ilya unbuttons his shirt, revealing the sharp lines of his stomach and chest. The bear tattoo on his pectoral peeks out, before being revealed completely as he shrugs the shirt off and tosses it onto Shane’s bed. He pulls the sweater over his head, curls popping out, his face following promptly after.

He looks beautiful. Cozy. Shane suddenly doesn’t want to leave.

Ilya steps closer, crowding his space, and kisses him—slow, soft, unhurried. Shane melts into it, the book still clutched tight in one hand.

“We should go.”

“Right,” Shane breathes. “Yeah. To my parents.”

Ilya looks so fond that Shane feels the ache of his adoration in his bones.

They walk out to the car hand in hand.

“You’re nervous,” Shane notes, shoes crunching into the snow.

“Of course I am nervous.”

“It’ll be fine. Seriously. My parents are really nice.”

“I don’t know, Shane,” Ilya says, mouth pinched, sliding into the car. “What if Yuna calls me Rozanov the whole night? I will feel like I am player. Like I am at work.”

Shane leaves his own car door open, leaning against the frame for a second as he slides the phone out of his pocket subtly.

“She won’t,” he promises. Then, at Ilya’s questioning look, he says, “I’m finding a playlist.”

SHANE: *Hey, Mom. Please refrain from calling Ilya by his last name tonight.*

MOM: *Okay.*
Why?

SHANE: *He’s weird about it.*

MOM: *Okay.*
Why?

SHANE: *It’s just a thing. I don’t know.*

MOM: *I’ll let your dad know to stick to his first name.*
I don’t think we were planning on calling him by his last name the entire night anyway. LOL.

SHANE: *Thanks.*
See you soon

MOM: *See you!*

He slides into the car and closes the door behind himself, Bluetooth connecting automatically as he starts the car, and the last playlist he’d had on starts up.

Shakira’s *Hips Don’t Lie* starts playing. He shoots Ilya a smile. Suspiciously, with narrowed eyes, Ilya returns it.

They ended up taking Shane’s jeep for the short drive to Yuna and David’s. Ilya hadn’t even tried to suggest taking the Ferrari, which informed Shane of just how nervous Ilya really is.

Shane tries to reassure him in the car, soundtracked to Shakira, but Ilya’s jaw remains clenched for the majority of the drive. He’s pretty sure Ilya’s excited; the tension he’s carrying doesn’t seem to stem from a lack, but rather something private. Something he holds too close to his chest for Shane to see.

It’s not hard to guess what it is. Ilya has been, largely, alone since his mother died. He had been alone before his father died, too. Shane is essentially frogmarching him into brand new territory. Or perhaps it’s like retreading an old path,

“Russians do not even celebrate Christmas now,” Ilya mutters.

Shane shoots him a quick, surprised glance. “Really?”

“Really. We wait. Until January.”

“I didn’t know that,” Shane says. Subtly, he turns the music up a little. Wham!’s *Last Christmas* is now playing. He’s always been fond of it. He hopes Ilya is too.

“Oh, God,” Ilya says when they pull into the driveway. “I am going to die.”

Shane kills the motor and reaches over to him, tapping him gently on the chin until he turns his face, blue eyes a little wider than normal when they find Shane’s.

“You’ll be fine,” Shane tells him. “*We*’ll be fine. My parents are gonna love you.”

If looks could kill, the glare Ilya shoots Shane would’ve evaporated him.

“I mean it,” Shane insists. “They’ve never actually gotten to know you, right? They’ve only met Ilya Rozanov, captain of the Boston Raiders.”

Puffing his cheeks up, Ilya blows out a breath. He shakes himself, kind of like a dog, before he says, “Okay. Will be fine. If not, I go to Russia and stay there until I die.”

“Solid plan,” Shane says, unimpressed.

Ilya looks equally as unimpressed, beneath the nerves. “I am not meeting your parents as Boston Raiders captain, Shane Hollander. I am meeting them as your boyfriend.”

The words zing through Shane like a bolt of lightning, because— oh. *Oh*. There is a word for what they are to each other now, and Ilya seems to already have accepted it, labelled it—already embracing it, already freaking out about the logistics of such an impossible thing.

But Shane finds that when he prods at the tender skin around his heart, he’s not scared. There *is* fear, of course— the kind that sometimes grows loud and makes it impossible to see the forest for the trees, the kind that begs him to retreat and isolate, but ... bigger than that is relief. And *excitement*.

Shane’s never had a boyfriend before, and now he does. Now his boyfriend is meeting his parents. The thought, even through the nerves, makes him feel giddy.

Next to him, Ilya narrows his eyes. “You look happy.”

“I think I am,” Shane admits.

“You are not worried?”

“No, I am. I am.” And objectively, he is. There are a thousand things that could go wrong, but here, isolated in a car in Ottawa with a man who *wants* to be his boyfriend and isn’t scared to call him that, despite all the ways this could blow up in their face, things just seem a little less terrifying. And honestly, it’s easier not to be scared when Ilya is clearly so terrified. He’d stomach a lot more than nerves for Ilya. “But you’re more important.”

At this, finally, Ilya's mouth relaxes a little, eyes softening. Taking a deep breath, he opens the car door. Shane mirrors him, and together, they walk up to Shane's parents' house.

Once they've knocked on the front door, it only takes ten seconds for it to swing open.

Both of Shane's parents greet them, bright, jolly sweaters covering both of them. Yuna pulls Shane in for a hug, kissing his cheek. When David pulls him for a hug, too, Ilya raises a hand.

"Hello," Ilya says beside him, eyes darting to Shane's quickly. He looks more nervous than Shane has ever seen him. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Ilya," Yuna says warmly. "Come in, come in."

Ilya jerks into action, stepping over the threshold stiffly. Shane follows a beat slower, shooting his parents the best *be nice* look he can. They make a show of nodding seriously, stopping the second Ilya looks at them again.

"You have good home," Ilya says hesitantly, stilted in the way he used to be as a rookie, when English was almost entirely foreign to him.

"Thank you, dear," Yuna says, earnest and kind, and Shane watches Ilya's shoulders droop a little.

As often is the case, Shane feels a bolt of gratitude for his mom.

"It's a pleasure," David says, hand outstretched. Ilya takes it, looking younger as he shakes his hand.

"Why don't we head to the kitchen? David's prepared the eggnog, and I've got two pies in the oven I'm keeping an eye on."

"Sounds good, Mom," Shane says, sliding closer to Ilya as they walk, lagging behind his parents to reach out and squeeze Ilya's wrist quickly.

Ilya gives him a weak, but genuine smile.

Right before Shane drops his wrist again, Yuna turns to flash them a smile. He's a second too late retracting his hand, and then he does so with such haste that he looks even more suspicious. Yuna narrows her eyes for half a second, but doesn't say anything.

The eggnog is delicious, though Shane only has a sip before switching to ginger ale.

They relocate to the living room, where the fireplace is lit and three socks or hung up on the mantle. The tree, beautiful and maybe a little excessively decorated, stands tall in the corner.

Ilya and Shane settle down on the armchairs, and Shane's parents take the couch. His parents ask about the cottage, and how they feel about the Winter Classic, and everything feels warm and familiar – if a little mannered – in a way that helps Shane relax.

It's only when Ilya asks where the bathroom is that the butterflies in Shane's stomach return.

He watches Ilya round the corner, then turns his attention back to his parents. His parents, who are staring at him. Intently.

For a minute, they're at a stalemate. Neither Shane nor his parents says anything, and Shane's determined not to be the one to break the silence.

"So," Yuna says suddenly. Shane pretends not to startle. "Ilya Rozanov's a friend, huh?"

Instantly, Shane's hackles rise. "Yeah," he says, taking a long sip of his ginger ale. "He is."

Yuna exchanges a glance with David. Then, gently, she says, "It's okay if it's more than that."

Shane opens his mouth, but nothing comes out.

"I—"

"Bathroom soap smells like honey," Ilya announces, returning to the table with a happy smile on his face. "Is very nice. Reminds me of my mother."

David and Yuna smile.

Then, Yuna claps her hands together. "Well. Who's ready for dinner?"

"Me," Ilya says, and he's so cute that Shane almost leans over to kiss his cheek.

"Can I borrow Shane for a minute?" David says, and Shane looks at his father. "Nothing bad. I need your opinion on something."

Yuna rolls her eyes. "Almost thirty years of marriage, and you're still worried I won't like your Christmas presents."

Haltingly, Shane says, "Sure." He looks at Ilya. "I'll, uh, see you at the dinner table."

Ilya and Yuna head toward the kitchen, presumably to set the table and get the food out. Hopefully, Yuna doesn't grill him.

David leads Shane to the library.

"So," Shane says. "What did you get Mom?"

"A necklace," David says. "She's been sending me Google links for a month. I took the hint."

"Nice." Shane scuffs the heel of his foot against the carpet. "Sounds like you've got it figured out."

A beat. Then David sighs, stepping closer.

“Shane,” he says, hand clasping his shoulder. “Look, son. You don’t have to tell us anything, but you have to know your mom and me, we love you. So much. And if, uh. If he makes you happy, bud, then we’re happy. You’re our son before you’re a hockey player, okay? Always.”

Shane blinks against the sudden swell of tears in his eyes. God, when did he become such a crybaby?

“Dad,” he tries, voice wobbling.

David’s face gentles. “C’mere, kiddo.”

He pulls Shane into his arms, and Shane goes easily. He feels like a little kid again, burying his face in his dad’s shoulder to hide from the world, finding solace in a warm, safe place— a place entirely his own.

Rubbing a hand over Shane’s back, David murmurs, “I love you, kid. You’re the best thing I’ve ever done. You know that?”

Shane squeezes his eyes shut. Tightly, he says, “Thanks, Dad.”

Eventually, they pull apart. Shane’s not subtle about the way he swipes at his eyes, and David sniffs, smiling at Shane.

In the distance, down the hall and to the right, he can hear Ilya say something, loud and cheerful, and Yuna laugh like it’s the funniest thing she’s ever heard.

A little shy, Shane folds his arms over his chest.

“You really don’t mind? That it’s Rozanov?” he clarifies.

David laughs, shaking his head. “Shane, if you’re happy, it’s never gonna matter to me. But he’s a good kid, I can tell.”

“He’s good to me,” Shane says. “He, um. He decorated a pine tree outside, ‘cause I hadn’t bought a Christmas tree. He surprised me with it.”

David raises an eyebrow. “Oh?”

“Yeah,” Shane grins, a little giddy. “And he cooks, and he’s secretly really into Sudoku, and he makes me laugh, and I just— I feel so safe with him. And he *challenges* me, Dad, he’s just— I love him,” he finishes, helplessly fond. He sounds so lame, he knows, but he’s never been good with words. He’d rather sound lame in earnest than keep quiet about Ilya. He wants everyone who’s allowed to know to understand how incredible Shane thinks Ilya is.

Smiling, David laughs gently. “I haven’t seen you this happy since the first time you got on the ice.”

“Yeah,” Shane says.

But this is better than hockey, he thinks suddenly, I could do this with him for the rest of my life.

He clears his throat. “Did you guys make dessert?”

“Dinner first, bud. But, yes, we did,” David says, nudging Shane toward the doorway. “Your mother watched me make a Gingerbread cake.”

“Watched?” Shane teases. “You sure she didn’t do all the work?”

“You know my eyes aren’t what they used to be,” David defends. “I can’t see the measurements right.”

Shane laughs. He wonders if next year the two of them will be here again. If Ilya will help in the kitchen. If he will insist on bringing a bottle of wine, refusing to show up empty-handed.

Shane can’t wait to find out.

They settle back at the table. Beneath the thick wooden slab, Ilya presses their knees together, the pressure firm and grounding. He leans over and steals a particularly crispy-looking roast potato from Shane’s plate, popping it into his mouth without shame.

Overwhelmed with fondness, Shane rolls his eyes, kicking him in the ankle.

Across the table, Yuna cuts in, and Shane suddenly feels splayed open and observed, everything he’s hidden for over half a decade laid bare in the light. “Uh—so, Shane,” she says. “How long has this... been going on?”

Ilya tenses beside him, his fork and knife coming to a halt mid-slice. He doesn’t look at Shane. Shane slides a hand under the table, settling it over his thigh.

“We just didn’t know you two were friends,” Yuna says, cutting through the unbelievably thick tension.

“We’re together,” Shane corrects haltingly, staring down at the large bowl of peas in the middle of the table. “As, like— as a couple.”

When he looks up, his parents are watching him closely. They aren’t homophobic—he never expected them to be—but they also might not be thrilled about him dating the captain of the Boston Raiders. They’ve spent years, mostly Yuna, talking about how much they hate the team, how little they enjoy Ilya’s particular brand of hockey.

But suddenly it isn’t about hockey at all. It’s about him.

It’s nerves. It’s the gay thing. It’s coming out—over roasted meat and vegetables. It’s this thing he refused to look at, suddenly being offered up to be looked at. Scrutinised.

David catches his eye, nodding supportively.

“We kind of... figured,” Yuna says, eyes kind. “Given the, ah, circumstances, with it being Christmas and all.”

Shane exhales.

“It's new,” he says.

“Well,” Ilya adds beside him. “I do not know if you can call almost a decade new. Since draft day.”

Shane elbows Ilya gently. “I mean—we started dating today. We’ve been working up to it for a few years. It’s ... complicated.”

The table is silent for a moment as his parents take it in, then—

“Since *two thousand and nine*?” Yuna asks, looking at David.

“I mean, we suspected something, but—” David says, eyes a little wider. He lifts his wineglass and takes a sip in the middle of his sentence, clearly giving himself a second to process the new information.

Yuna’s attention snaps back to Shane. “Wait, what about Rose? I thought you two were ...”

Shane flushes. “Uh, we were.”

“But you—”

“I’m gay.”

The words are suddenly there, right there, bare and undeniable. It’s the only time he’s said it like that to someone other than Rose—so direct and honest. The words hang in the air above the table, weightless and so impossibly heavy all at once.

Shane is gay. He tried not to be, he tried to be the perfect, straight hockey player—the perfect son, but here he is anyway. Gay. Dating his rival. Telling his parents and hoping that they barely blink.

Please, he thinks, love me anyway.

For a few more seconds, no one says anything.

Shane considers standing up. Leaving.

Ilya’s hand settles over his under the table, interlacing their fingers.

“I am not,” Ilya says.

All attention snaps to him.

“I believe term is bisexual,” he explains.

The tension shatters. A laugh slips from Shane's mom.

Subtly, Shane presses a hand to his chest. His heart's beating a little too fast, a little too hard. Ilya squeezes his hand beneath the table.

"You know we love you," his mom says, suddenly. "No matter what."

Shane smiles nervously, dropping his hand. "I know."

She casts a glance Ilya's way, before looking back at Shane. "Even though he plays for the Raiders."

It's late when they walk back to the cottage. The stars above them are twinkling, snowflakes falling slow and soft in the windless night. Shane watches the snowflakes catch in Ilya's honey-coloured curls, and he doesn't need to resist the urge to lift a hand and ruffle the strands, dislodging them.

"What are you doing?" Ilya asks.

"Your hair'll get all wet if you go inside with snow in it," Shane murmurs.

Ilya watches him, eyes bright, as Shane continues to mess with his hair.

"We should go inside," Ilya says. "I want to make love to you."

Despite the corny line, Shane feels his face turn bright red. "We can do that."

They don't end up having sex that night, too worn by the day's festivities. Despite the week's approaching deadline, Shane doesn't mind one bit. Not when he still gets to fall asleep beside Ilya, his arms wrapped gently around his torso. Not when he loves Ilya, and is loved fiercely, steadily, in return.

1st of January

For a few blissful days, the two of them fall into an easy routine. They go for long walks in the snow, binge-watch a couple of shows Ilya wanted Shane to see, and cook dinner together in the evenings. They fuck (a *lot*) and hit the gym together, and it never feels like a waste of time. Never feels like Ilya's getting bored, or like he would rather be somewhere else.

On New Year's Eve, the two of them fall asleep twenty minutes before midnight, naked and wrapped up in each other beneath the duvet. Shane wakes up to Ilya's mouth pressed gently to his neck, humming a soft *good morning* before catching his mouth with his own. It's the best – belated – New Year's kiss he's ever had.

It's so easy, being with Ilya. So easy to forget he doesn't have this with him all the time, that their days together are numbered. That they always will be, in some way or another. At least until they retire.

And then game day finally arrives. The rest of Ilya's team is in town, and Ilya joins them early in the morning, kissing Shane sweetly on the cheek as he leaves.

Shane kind of does watch his ass as he goes. But that's between him and the universe.

He gets to his own team meeting early as well, unable to fight the nervous energy of the game while loitering around the cottage. Intermittently, he checks his phone subtly, thrilling a little when, thirty minutes before game time, he catches sight of a new post on Instagram.

The photo Ilya has selected this time is of the eggnog David made. In the background, you can just barely make out a table full of food, Christmas decorations artfully in place to make it festive. The rest of the photos Ilya has posted have remained uncaptioned, but this one, sweet and succinct, reads: *Home for Christmas.* 🌲👶

Smiling helplessly, Shane pockets his phone and rejoins his team, coming back to himself in the locker room. His team is in high spirits, jostling each other and cheering as if they've already won, and only minutes before they're due on the ice, Hayden catches his arm and attention.

"Hey," he says. "You seem—" Hayden hesitates, adjusting his own jersey. "Different. You're okay?"

He thinks about Ilya in the other changing room, surrounded by his teammates, hickies Shane left behind hidden between his thighs.

He thinks about his parents, sitting in the crowd, proud of him and finally, finally in the know.

He thinks about how he'll get to go home to his cottage with Ilya after this, even though they'll have to drive separately.

He thinks about the term *boyfriend*, *boyfriend*, *boyfriend*.

He pats Hayden's arm. "Yeah, I'm good. Happy. I had a good Christmas."

Hayden lights up a little. "I'm glad, man. It was hectic at mine. Ruby tried to eat this, like, *Polly Pocket* toy, and—"

The coach's whistle blows. The team all straighten up, and a minute later, they're skating out. When Shane gets to centre ice, waiting for him there is his grinning boyfriend.

"I hope you do not expect me to go easy on you, *Shane Hollander*."

Shane settles into position. "I'd be pissed if you did."

"Yes," Ilya says brightly, "but I love when you are pissed."

Shane rolls his eyes.

The puck drops. Shane takes it and drives down the ice, Ilya instantly on his tail.

Somehow—despite the rest of their teams swarming around them—it feels like a one-on-one game, neither of them pulling a single punch. Near the end of the game, Ilya slams him into the boards, knocking Shane to his knees with an oof. It's a clean hit.

Still, Shane kind of wants to kick his ass about it.

He scrambles back up and gives chase, but he's a second too late. In the final four seconds of the game, Ilya Rozanov scores. The scoreboard above them flashes *3-4*. The whistle blows.

The Raiders collectively crash around Ilya, crushing him into a celebratory hug. Despite the roar of the crowd and the seemingly endless chanting of his name, Ilya manages to catch Shane's eye over all their shoulders. He mouths, *Sorry*, his mouth exaggeratedly downturned.

Shane scoffs and mouths back *No, you're not*.

Ilya grins and is then dragged away out of sight.

JJ skates up behind Shane, smacking his back with a gloved hand. "We'll get 'em when the season starts. You kicked ass out there."

"We did good," Shane agrees. "They won't know what hit them come January."

"Drinks after the game for New Years?" JJ asks, nudging him.

"No," Shane says. "I've uh—got plans."

It's a little hard to talk over the crowd. Their team is skating over, catching their breath now that the game is finished.

"With your Boston girl?" JJ teases.

"Sure." Shane's eyes drift to the back of Ilya's head in the distance, sweat-damp curls flattened at his nape. "Something like that."

Ilya manages to beat Shane back to the cottage, and when he walks through the door, Ilya is there, waiting—changed back into comfortable clothes. His hair is still a little wet from his shower, and he's leaning against a counter, arms folded over his chest.

"What took you so—"

Shane surges forward, capturing his mouth in a searing kiss, cutting him off completely, pushing their bodies flush together.

Hands fly to his sides, gripping onto him, the kiss returned with equal enthusiasm. He thinks he feels Ilya smiling against his mouth, but he's too distracted in his effort to get his hands underneath Ilya's shirt. He pushes it up, up, up till Ilya gets the hint and breaks the kiss to shrug it off. Shane is back on him in seconds, stealing rough, desperate kisses as he grinds forward.

Ilya squeezes his sides, using the contact as a point of leverage to flip them around, pinning Shane's back against the countertop. Shane gasps into his mouth, digging his nails against Ilya's flank, trying to pull him impossibly closer.

The kiss is broken for a second, Ilya's mouth pressing softly at the corner of his, before he peppers soft kisses along his cheek, drifting toward Shane's ear.

Shane tilts his head back a little. Ilya gets the message, kissing and sucking just under the hinge of his jaw, hard enough to leave a mark. Shane moans, eyes fluttering closed, his hand sliding between them to wrap around Ilya's half-hard dick through his pants.

Ilya laughs against his throat, murmuring softly, "This is my reward for winning? You jump me in the entryway?"

Shane shakes his head and descends to his knees. When he looks up, Ilya's bright blue eyes are focused intently on him, the blue of them slowly being swallowed by expanding pupils. He twists his hands into the fabric of Ilya's pants, tugging harshly till they pool around his ankles. He leans in, inhaling deeply.

"No," Shane says, nuzzling at his crotch. "This is your reward."

Long, slender fingers slide into his hair, "*Fuck*," Ilya exhales. "I love hockey."

Shane nips his thigh harshly.

Ilya laughs. "I love you, too."

Fuck. Shane's dick twitches in his briefs. He pulls back, looking a little dazed. "Say it again."

Ilya cradles his jaw, tipping his head upward, smoothing his thumb over Shane's cheek before dragging it over his bottom lip. Shane's mouth opens easily, pliantly, and the thumb slides in, pressing against his tongue.

"I love you," Ilya says. Shane hollows his cheeks, sucking on the digit. "Now be good boy and suck my dick, hm? I have earned it."

Shane fights the urge to bite his finger. He slides his mouth off, compliantly leaning forward to tug his underwear down, Ilya's cock revealed inch by inch. He drags his tongue along the full length of it, tasting him—he tastes like clean sweat, and body wash, and skin.

He takes Ilya into his mouth, a guiding hand at the back of his head feeding it deeper, and deeper, till it knocks against the entrance of Shane's throat, the soft, wet muscles there flutter, a gentle gag, before it opens, allowing him to push in further till he's fully seated to the base inside Shane's mouth.

"*Fuck*," Ilya exhales, sounding winded.

Around the intrusion, Shane swallows, eyes fluttering closed.

"*Fuck*," Ilya repeats, like the curse is punched out of him.

Shane pulls back slowly, taking his time, savouring the taste of clean skin and pre-come—Ilya's unique musk. He's not quiet about it, scratching through Ilya's happy trail as he slurps, thrilling when Ilya's mouth falls open, stomach tensing beneath his fingers.

"You like?" Ilya asks, and Shane bobs his head, swallowing again. It punches the breath out of Ilya. He huffs a hoarse laugh and says, "You like."

Diligent and thorough, Shane takes him apart. He knows Ilya inside and out, loves every part of him, every quirk and preference and turn-on.

And noise, Shane knows, gets Ilya going like nothing else.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Shane pushes himself down until Ilya's cock breaches his throat, and he has to pull back, gagging.

Above him, Ilya's knees almost buckle, dick spurting pre.

"Bed," Ilya pants, a frantic energy to the way he thumbs over Shane's mouth.

"You don't wanna fuck me in the hallway?" Shane rasps, teasing.

"No," Ilya says. "I want to make love to you in hallway. But we need lube. And condom."

Swallowing, Shane presses his thumb into the meat of Ilya's thigh— gently, a facsimile of what Ilya did to him the second day he was here. "We only technically need lube."

Ilya's dick *kicks*, goosebumps erupting over his skin.

"You want me to fuck you bare?" Ilya asks, pupils blown.

Wordlessly, Shane nods, tongue peeking out to wet his bottom lip. Ilya's eyes trace the movement.

"Fuck," Ilya exhales. *Again*. "Bedroom. We go. Now."

They stumble gracelessly to the bedroom, stepping side by side at first, but then Ilya speeds up, just a little, and Shane matches his pace. Two steps later, and they both take off in sync, racing down the hallway.

Shane makes it through the doorway first, arms shooting up in victory, and Ilya wraps around him from behind, kissing at the space where neck meets shoulder. Shane tilts his head, and Ilya takes a moment to kiss up the side of his neck as Shane huffs a breath.

One of Ilya's hands slides over his waist, then stomach, then dips underneath his sweats. He wraps his fingers around Shane's dick, undeniably hard, leaking heavily.

Against his neck, Ilya smiles.

"You are so wet, Shane," he murmurs. "All for me?"

Shane's eyes fall closed—a soft nod.

“No, no,” Ilya says. “Say it. Say you are wet for me.”

Embarrassment curls in the depths of Shane's gut, cheeks heating. He wants to say it. He wants Ilya to make him say it. Ilya always likes dragging the most obscene shit out of Shane's mouth, revelling in his shame, and the way the embarrassment only ever makes Shane harder.

Still, he fights it, hesitating like he always does, and frustratedly says, “Rozanov. Just ... do something.”

He squeezes Shane's dick, right over the sensitive head, the movement slicked by Shane's pre.

“Fuck,” Shane hisses out, leaning more bodily against Ilya's torso. “I'm—wet. I'm wet because of you.” He's promptly rewarded with Ilya encircling his dick properly, pumping his fist once, then twice over the length before pausing at the head again, squeezing over his tip.

Shane whimpers. “For you. I'm *wet* for you. Please. *Do something*. Fuck—Fuck me. Please.”

Ilya lifts his head, kissing the back of Shane's ear. “It feels good, no? To be good? To do what you are told?”

This is *not* Ilya fucking him. Shane squirms, grinding against Ilya's hand. “Yes, okay? Yes. Please. Ilya, *please*.”

Ilya groans, quiet and against the shell of Shane's ear. He slides his hand out of Shane's pants, abandoning his hard, aching cock. Shane bites back a whine at the loss of contact. He squeezes Shane's hip. “On bed. Go.”

He doesn't comply immediately; instead, he pulls his pants and briefs off completely, folding them quickly before placing them at the edge of the bed. Ilya watches, and in the corner of Shane's eye, he swears he can see him smiling at the sight.

Shane scrambles up to the pillows, settling against them. It's only then that Ilya begins stripping the rest of his clothes off. Shane, impatient, curls his fingers around his now fully visible cock, stroking it slowly, teasing more wetness out of it.

Ilya is halfway through removing a sock when he notices. He pauses, eyes focused in, and mumbles something in Russian that Shane barely catches.

Shane shifts his hips down lower, melting against the pillows, tilting his head back and making a show of jerking himself off. He closes his eyes—fighting through the embarrassment and vulnerability that settles over him, focusing on making himself feel good rather than worrying about how hot it is for Ilya.

Ilya likes to watch him. He knows this for a fact. More than he likes Shane trying to stop, or show off, he likes Shane lost in it, touching himself and losing it.

So, as he listens to Ilya curse and strip, he teases himself, jerking off slowly. His other hand lifts, the back of his fingers dragging teasingly along his own abdomen and chest, goosebumps prickling across his arms at the feeling.

He can't help but smile when he hears Ilya's knees hit the bed. Ilya crawls atop him, grabbing both of his wrists, lifting them and holding them against the headboard. Quickly, effortlessly, he presses both wrists together, a single hand pinning them in place.

Shane's eyes snap open.

Ilya looks dishevelled. His hair askew, his cheeks bright and splotchy, and his eyes full of nothing but lust.

Quietly, almost meekly, Shane whispers, "Hey."

"You are walking fucking sin, Hollander. Fuck." Ilya tightens his grip around Shane's wrist, almost painfully so. Shane's breath catches. "I am going to fuck you till you cry."

The lamp light shines over Ilya, lighting up his curls, which are aglow in a circle, almost like a halo around his head. He's so beautiful. Shane's helpless to do anything but look up at him reverently.

Shane nods. "Yeah. That. Please."

Ilya looks over him like a starving man preparing for a feast. Beneath his gaze, Shane feels warm, every inch of his skin alight with heat.

He releases his wrists, descending downward, lingering at his stomach to kiss at the softer flesh there.

Like he always does, he takes his time fingering Shane open, those torturously skilled fingers filling him up one by one, till he's moaning and writhing as three of them push in and out, scissoring. The stretch doesn't even burn, it just feels fucking *good*. Ilya kisses the inside of his thigh, just a brush of lips, before sliding his fingers out.

Fucked-out and dizzy, his brain syrupy and melted in his skull, whimpers at the loss.

"Shh, shh," Ilya coos, crawling over him, kissing him placatingly. "I will not leave you empty, sweetheart. You will take my dick," Another kiss. "Then my come."

Shane shudders. They've never fucked bare before—it's not a thing he'd ever even considered an option, not when they were only ever something casual, their relationship fleeting moments in hotel rooms— not intimacy like this, not skin against skin, Ilya coming deep inside him, claiming him.

He slides a hand around the side of Ilya's neck, thumbing under the line of his jaw. "Hurry up."

Ilya snorts. "You are so impatient."

But he lines his dick up anyway, tapping the fat head against Shane's now slicked, loosened rim before pushing it in. Shane's eyes fall closed. Just the tip enters him at first, the stretch comfortable, but unbearable at the same time. Shane waits for him to push more in, but instead, he slides out again.

The head is then guided inside again, nestled just inside him, before it's teasingly taken away again.

Shane whines, eyes closed, trying to push back against it. A hand finds his hip, pinning it in place. He clenches around nothing, eyes flying open. Ilya's not watching his face; instead, he's looking down—watching himself fuck just the tip of his dick in and out of him.

Fuck.

He does it again, the repeated motion not even slightly less teasing the more he does it.

“Why are you—” Shane begins.

Ilya squeezes his hip, hard, digging his thumb into Shane's hip bone. “Just take it,” Ilya says simply.

Desperate, Shane squeezes around him, trying to fuck back onto Ilya's dick, but again, unrelenting, Ilya doesn't let him, holding him in place as he drags the tip in and out of him, watching as Shane's body accommodates it, attempting to drag it in every single time.

He doesn't beg. He fucking wants to. He wants to squirm, and pout, and plead. The sensation is overwhelming, the feeling of only ever *almost* being fucked devastating.

He digs his nails into the back of Ilya's neck, biting into the skin, leaving half crescent moon indentations in their wake.

Finally, Ilya looks back up at him, mouth parted and breathing heavy. “Fuck. I could do this for hours. Just watch you take my dick, over and over. No one takes it like you. No one is like you.”

Quietly, chest tight, nerves frayed, Shane whispers, “Need you. Please.”

Careful not to jostle him, Ilya leans in. His mouth hovers over Shane's, arms straining. He looks struck, almost, just looking at Shane. Heart pounding, Shane looks right back at him.

“Shane,” Ilya says, quiet and hoarse. An inch of his dick slips in deeper when he ducks low to lick into Shane's mouth, wet and thorough. Shane whimpers, hands scrabbling to find Ilya's shoulders, skipping over the hollow above his collarbones.

Ilya pulls back, placing his hand over Shane's neck. He doesn't press down, the touch gentle and claiming. Shane pants up at him, resisting the urge to beg. Gaze never leaving Shane's, Ilya lowers himself, inch after inch of his dick slipping inside.

Once fully seated, Ilya grinds his hips in a delicious circle, hard and aching inside of Shane. Hypnotised by the fluid movement of Ilya's hips, Shane stays silent. He can be good. He can

wait for Ilya.

Or not.

“F-Flip me,” Shane whispers, “Need you deeper.”

Ilya shakes his head, slowing to a stop before sliding a hand under the back of Shane’s thigh, bending his leg up, up, up, till his knee is nearing his head. He thrusts, just once, sharply, letting Shane feel the new angle. He’s so fucking deep in Shane that he swears he can feel it in his throat.

“Need to see you,” Ilya tells him. He shifts his hips, pressing himself in fully, stuffing Shane to the brim with his cock. All of Shane’s nerves feel electrified, like cut wires sparking.

Shane nods. “Yeah. Fuck. Like this. Like—”

Ilya doesn’t let him finish. He finds his rhythm again, pinning Shane’s leg in place as he fucks into him, hand squeezing around the meat of the back of his thigh. His thumb and fingers dig into the flesh there, far past what is necessary, and Shane’s dick is bouncing with every thrust, leaking against his stomach, the wetness smearing as his cock shifts across the hard lines of his stomach.

The new angle is devastating. Shane’s brain is fuzzy around the edges, all coherent thought fucked out of him. He tries his best to meet Ilya’s movements, but he’s mostly left scrambling, fingers twisted in the sheets.

Shane manages one word, though, punched out of him between desperate little *uh, uh, uh* noises.

“*Harder.*”

Ilya picks his speed up without hesitation. Shane shakes his head, and Ilya slows instantly, confused. He lifts a trembling hand to his own thigh, sliding across the side of it to brush his fingers over Ilya’s wrist.

Ilya understands immediately, His hand shifting to a higher spot on his thigh, pressing it down even further, the hinge of his hip burning with the pressure, before Ilya unkindly pushes his thumb into the muscle. Pain shoots through him, twisting with the pleasure just behind his naval, elevating it rather than distracting from it.

Shane whines, spine arching further, and Ilya falls back into rhythm. “Fuck. You like it, yes? You want it to hurt. You—”

A particularly well aimed thrust makes Shane cry out, throat tight around the noise.

Ilya repeats the motion, digging in harder.

Shane feels tears prick at his eyes. Quiet, more whimper than words, he says, “It hurts.”

Ilya curses, hips stuttering. “You want me to stop?”

Shane shakes his head, a few tears slipping loose, hot and wet as they slide from his eyes, dragged down his temples by gravity before getting lost in the sweat-damp mess of his hair.

“Shit,” Ilya pants. “Baby. *Baby*, sweetheart, you look—”

Ilya kisses him again, hard and possessive. “Beautiful,” he says when he pulls back. “You look beautiful.”

Right now, covered entirely by Ilya’s body, trembling full-bodied beneath him, Shane believes him. He *feels* beautiful. He feels— perfect. Claimed. Loved.

And— oh, God, Shane’s going to come, breathing coming quicker, thighs shaking as they part further, inviting Ilya in, in, *in*.

Ilya pistons his hips, fucking into him, the headboard banging repeatedly against the wall, in time with every thrust. Shane matches his body to the movement, rocking against him, back arched slightly, voice wrecked as he breathes, “I love you.”

Ilya *moans*, mouth falling open as he pants, hips losing rhythm.

It’s not often that when they fuck, Ilya comes first, but almost like the words have struck him deep in his core, Ilya falls apart. He presses down on Shane’s thigh, the bend of his hip aching at the pressure, and pumps his hips sloppily, spilling inside of him.

It’s so different from how it is with a condom. Warmth fills him, rope after rope of it, and he can feel it. Fuck, he can feel every pulse, and twitch, and shift as Ilya fucks his come into him. Shane’s stomach *swoops* with arousal. The lust makes him feel gutted, the pleasure hitting him with such full force that it borders on painful.

Shane, drunk on the feeling, lets his hand snap down and it encircles his dick, flying desperately over it.

One pump, and then a second, and he careens over the edge, following Ilya.

Shane is crying. He’d like to think it’s pretty, or not obvious, but a sob shaped like Ilya’s name is torn from him as he comes, tears streaking down his face, mouth ajar and body quaking.

Ilya doesn’t ease up, despite the fact that Shane’s sure he must be oversensitive, he just keeps thrusting into him, fucking Shane through the peak of his orgasm, and then, into oversensitivity.

He doesn’t push him for more than a minute, slowing down to nothing, before easing his thigh down and pressing his face into his neck, catching his breath. Shane lifts a hand into his hair, pushing him deeper into the crook, grounded by the closeness and Ilya’s breath hot against his skin.

After a brief moment, he pulls back, kissing him slow and sweet. Shane melts into it, his entire body feels molten and saccharine, like sugar and butter melting together into toffee on the stove—warm, thick and syrupy.

They breathe the same air, mouth to mouth, until Ilya squeezes him, pulling him into his arms. Into his hair, he murmurs, “I love you. You did so good. You are amazing, Shane.”

Shane smiles with his eyes closed. Tongue heavy, he says, “Love you too.”

For a while, Shane floats. He listens to Ilya’s steady heartbeat, eyes half-closed. The silence, comfortable and soft, lingers. Neither of them moves. Shane finds himself staring at the window, watching the snow coming down, as he thinks about how he’ll have to kiss Ilya one last time tomorrow, before not seeing him for months.

He doesn’t think Ilya will notice that he’s lost in thought, but quietly, into his hair, Ilya asks, “Lyubimiy, where did you go?”

Shane tilts his head up, meeting his gaze. “Just thinking.”

“About?”

“You,” Shane admits. He doesn’t understand it—he can be right here, touching Ilya with every inch of his body, and still want more. He already misses him, and he’s *right here*. It feels like preemptive grief. “You’re leaving tomorrow.”

“Pretend,” Ilya murmurs, dragging his fingers over Shane’s bare bicep. “Pretend it is not goodbye.”

Shane closes his eyes, pressing his mouth to Ilya’s collarbone. Sighing, he nods mutely.

2nd of January

Ilya leaves in the morning. They eat breakfast together and make out against the fridge, knocking several of Shane’s magnets to the floor, and then—inevitably—the time comes, and Ilya has to go.

Shane is standing on the porch, wrapped in his winter jacket that smells like Ilya now, watching as Ilya loads his duffel into the car. He wishes he could take him to the airport—but there’s no way someone wouldn’t notice them arriving together, even if they attempted to disguise themselves. It’d be the front page of every newspaper for weeks, even if it was seen as platonic.

The driver’s door opens. Ilya looks over his shoulder, smiling at Shane, something painful flickering in the blue of his eyes—visible even from a distance. Maybe this is agony for him, too.

You could stay, Shane thinks. I want you to stay.

Ilya closes the car door and pulls out of the driveway.

Shane didn’t know it would hurt this bad. He’s never loved anyone like this before.

He goes back inside.

Hours pass.

He's completely alone in the cottage, which is how he's spent every summer since the year it was built.

It feels so empty without Ilya here. It's only thirty minutes past midday, but by now, Ilya is thousands of miles in the air, heading toward Russia. He's loitering in the kitchen, pacing mindlessly as he tries to decide what to eat for lunch.

He feels like a ghost haunting his own home. His cottage has never felt like this before. Like it's missing something. Maybe it always has been, and he just didn't know it yet. He doesn't know what he's supposed to do with that.

Ilya couldn't have stayed. He has a home. A life. His brother. Friends, surely. How could Shane ask him to stay?

Maybe he'll call Rose later and update her. Mope a little.

Or a lot.

Suddenly, startling him from his pouting and aimless wandering, his phone vibrates in his pocket. The name *Lily* flashes across his screen. He scrambles to answer it, picking up on the first ring.

"Aren't you supposed to be in the air right now?" Shane asks, in lieu of a greeting. "Did they cancel your flight?"

Shane tries not to sound excited about the concept.

"Not cancelled," Ilya says. "Delayed. Two hours. Due to bad weather."

He suddenly imagines Ilya in Russia, thousands of miles away, their only contact through the phone, and his stomach hurts.

"Oh," Shane says, heart sinking. Carefully keeps the disappointment out of his voice. "Do, uh. Do you have to go?"

"I want to go home," Ilya admits.

Shane closes his eyes, ignoring the way they burn. "Right. No. Of course."

Of course, Ilya wants to go home. Of course, he's not ready to just stay. Shane can ask so much of him, can tell him he loves him, but the idea of begging him to pick him, to choose to stay, to spend weeks by his side, it's insane. It's asking too much, even if Ilya is his boyfriend now.

"No," Ilya says. "I want to go *home*, Shane." The word is emphasised, and a heavy weight is suddenly pulled off Shane's chest. He leans back against the kitchen counter, letting out a sigh of relief, his shoulders going lax as tears pool along his water line.

God. He really is a crybaby these days.

Softly, despite the fact he's home alone, he says, "So come home."

End Notes

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

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