Nothing If Not Dedicated

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by parttimehuman

Summary

“Only one bed, hm?” Ilya said, looking at Shane with raised eyebrows and a smug grin spreading across his lips.

“What was I supposed to tell my parents? ‘Hey, this is my boyfriend, and I’m super excited to bring him around over Christmas, but we need separate rooms to sleep in.’ They’re supposed to believe that we’re like, grossly in love, or whatever.”

Or: Shane needs a fake date to the Hollander family's Christmas celebrations to get his parents off his back about his love life. Ilya fucking Rozanov is very likely the worst possible person to play Shane's fake boyfriend. Except, Ilya is kind of convincing...

Chapter 1

Montreal, December 2

“Please, I’m begging you. Don’t let me down, Rose.” At the other end of the call, Rose was quiet for a moment, and Shane thought she must be contemplating it. She wasn’t a fan of his idea, but she didn’t have to be. She only needed to say yes.

“No.”

Shane couldn’t believe it. “What do you mean, no? Why would you not want to spend Christmas with me at my parents’? You like them.”

He heard her exasperated sigh and could easily imagine the look in her eyes, empathetic and scolding at the same time. “I love your parents, bestie, that’s why I won’t lie to them. If you want me to be there for you at Christmas, you know I will. But I won’t pretend to be your girlfriend just to mess with your parents. That’s fucked up. And not at all like you.”

“You don’t understand,” Shane whined, “they bother me so much. Mom wants grandkids, like, yesterday. And it’s kind of your fault, partially, because they only started to get their hopes up when those pictures of us were all over the news.”

“Careful now, Shane, because you got the best friend in the whole world out of those awkward few weeks of dating. You could just tell your parents that you’re not into me. You can even blame it on me and say I wasn’t into you. But you can’t lie to them like that. They only want to see you happy.”

“Just for the holidays, *please*,” Shane begged, although he knew she was right. Objectively, there was no reason to lie to his parents about what Rose was to him. He knew they would understand. But what if they asked if there was anybody else in his life? They could easily think that Shane’s only reason not to be with Rose must be another person, because… well, because it was Rose. Who wouldn’t want to be with Rose?

“No,” Rose said again, her voice so soft that he didn’t even feel like arguing anymore. It was just going to be Shane again, then, all by himself at a table with his married parents and his married grandparents and his married aunt and uncle and his cousins with their partners. He had thought about inviting Hayden and Jackie, because with the twins causing mischief around the house his mother might reconsider wanting grandkids, but that would add another grossly in love couple to the party and Shane really didn’t need that.

“Fine,” Shane gave in, “no lying to my parents, then. Can you at least tell me when you’ll be back in town after Christmas? You’ll have to help undo some of the psychological damage, since you refuse to help avoid it.”

“You’re such a drama queen.”

“And you’re such a –“

“Hollander!”

Shane rolled his eyes. *Not this. Not now. Not on top of everything.*

“Hollander, what are you doing out here? Everyone is waiting for you inside. You make them wait. Not nice. Is my job, usually.”

“Who’s that?” Rose wanted to know. “Are you busy?”

Ilya fucking Rozanov, that was who. Shane forced himself to turn away from the man stalking towards him and continued speaking into his phone because not today, Rozanov.

“Kind of,” he said, “I’m shooting this commercial today. I probably need to go back in and get my hair done. Are you totally sure that you can’t be my date on Christmas?”

“Yes, Shane. Have fun shooting. We’ll talk soon, okay?”

“Traitor,” Shane mumbled, “but yeah, talk to you soon. Love you.”

Rose said something else before she ended the call, but Shane didn’t fully catch it, because there was Rozanov, right in his face, a cigarette between his lips and a glint in his eye that made Shane uneasy.

“Fuck off,” Shane said, taking a step backwards to escape the smoke Rozanov blew out. “What are you even doing here? I have a shooting here.”

What happened to those messages I sent?

“Yes,” Rozanov smiled, “we have a shooting here. You better get inside so they can get you all pretty.”

“Fuck off.”

“In the meantime, I can find you that date.”

Shane hated him. “I don’t need a date, thanks.”

But I do need to get away from you, now. He wanted to move. To get inside. It was cold outside anyway. And it smelled like cigarette smoke, now. And Shane was probably late for hair and make-up. And…

Rozanov huffed out a laugh. “You lie to your parents *and* me? What happened to that nice Canadian boy?”

Shane glared at him. “Oh, so you were listening to my phone call? That was private. And I’m not lying to anybody. It’s just… Fuck off, Rozanov. It’s complicated, but it’s none of your business. Go away.”

“Can’t,” Rozanov said with a shrug. “Shooting inside. They’re probably waiting for me.”

Shane pressed his eyes shut. “No.”

“Why? Because you’re the only pretty looking hockey player? They were bored of pretty, Hollander. They called me. So now they get sexy.”

Shane thought about leaving for a second. With Rozanov there they would get enough good content anyway. He could make up some excuse later. Maybe he got sick very spontaneously, or maybe a car accident? He could come up with something plausible; some lie that made sense. Apparently, he was a liar now, so what did it matter?

“Hollander, relax,” Rozanov interrupted his train of thought, “I’m sure they can make you look almost as good as me. And I can still help you with that date after we’re done.”

“I told you,” Shane snapped, “I don’t need a date.”

“No? Not even for Christmas with your family?”

“Shut up.” Shane’s legs finally started working again, so he turned away and started walking, hearing Rozanov’s footsteps right behind him. Hearing his breaths, too. And Shane’s own heartbeat. Embarrassing.

“Not even if it was me?” Rozanov asked from behind Shane’s shoulder.

“If what was you?”

“Your date, Hollander. If I was your date.”

Now it was Shane’s turn to laugh at Rozanov. *You couldn’t even answer my texts*. “Hilarious, as always.”

“Not funny,” Rozanov replied. “You want a date? I can be your date. You want your parents to think you’re not lonely, yes?”

“I want my parents to stop bothering me, that’s all.”

Same as you. So get out of my head.

“What will they say?” Rozanov asked. “If you bring me, what will they say?”

“Nothing,” Shane answered honestly, because the thought was so ridiculous that he couldn’t imagine it.

“Exactly! They will be speechless.”

Shane shook his head. “They will be nothing. Shut up and let’s get this over with.”

“Fine,” Rozanov replied, “no need to decide now. You can text me when you change your mind.”

If. And no. Why would he text Rozanov ever again? To be left on read?

“That’s not happening,” Shane decided and went inside, hoping the door would hit Rozanov in the face just enough to make it difficult to get him camera-ready. Which also wasn’t happening.

New York City, December 18

“Mom, I need to go,” Shane said into his phone, “we’re about to leave the hotel. It’s just this one last game and then I’ll be home for Christmas soon anyway.”

“Good luck,” Yuna Hollander replied, and then, when Shane’s thumb was already hovering over the end-call button, she hastily added, “oh, Shane?”

“What’s up?”

“You know you can bring whoever, right?”

Not again.

When Shane didn’t reply because he didn’t have any words left in him to describe how much it wasn’t out of fear of their judgment that he wasn’t bringing a date home for Christmas, she added, “We’ll behave, my love. Everyone will be nice, okay? So don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried, I’m just not bringing anybody. Those pictures in the news weren’t… It’s not like –“

“No need to explain yourself, okay? We just want you to be happy.”

What about what Shane wanted? He couldn’t help it, he thought about Rozanov. *What would make him happy was if the entire holiday nightmare ended. Right now.*

“Bye, mom.”

Shane knew she loved him. Both his parents did. He did believe them when they said they wanted him to be happy. He did believe that they truly were looking forward to seeing their son in love. But he wasn’t in love. And he couldn’t even explain to them why he wasn’t, and hadn’t been; that he was all filled up with this other thing, this… *Rozanov.* That thing. That horrible, horrible thing that tortured him by turning into something totally not horrible for a painfully short time every couple of months. His parents couldn’t possibly imagine something so terrifying and deep going on inside of their perfect, polished, professional son.

He put his phone away, shaking the thoughts out of his head. He had a game to play, and Rozanov wasn’t even here, and he hadn’t texted either, so there really was no reason to be distracted, not like some of those other times. Shane willed himself quiet. He had gotten good at that through the years. He focused. It worked. It worked in the hotel elevator, on the road, in the locker room. Then, as he put on his gear Shane caught a glimpse of the showers and suddenly, he was thinking about golden skin and light-brown curls.

Will this ever stop?

He breathed, finished getting ready. He could still send that text. He didn't want to. He only wanted to know if he would get an answer, this time. But he couldn't. Wasn't happening. How many texts had Rozanov not sent? None, probably.

Shane had to get on the ice. It worked, in a way. He exhausted himself. At some point, he vaguely heard Hayden tell him something about giving his body a break, but he couldn't. There was only one way to shut off his brain, and it was hockey. He pushed and pushed himself and almost didn't realize when the game was over and his team celebrated around him. Shane looked at the crowd, let himself hear their shouts, hear his name. He almost wasn't even present. Only hockey could do that to him.

And Rozanov.

Well, fuck. Suddenly, Shane didn't feel like celebrating anymore. Instead, he stormed to the locker room, ripping off his gear. He almost threw it somewhere, but of course he couldn't. He grabbed his phone, fingers hovering, ready to act.

No.

He took a shower instead, way too cold. Instead of cooling him off, it only made him angrier. Showers always made him think of… He wanted to scream. Shane wrapped a towel around his waist and took hold of his phone again, barely registering his teammates as they undressed, showered, and loudly listed all of his proudest moments of the day. Shane only stared at his phone angrily. At *Lily.*

They will be speechless.

Shane couldn't stop himself. He drafted a message.

About Christmas…

No.

He deleted it.

He started typing again, this time only his parents' address.

No.

He couldn't send it. Luckily, someone bumped into him, knocking Shane's phone out of his hands. He reached for it, releasing a deep breath, committed to putting it back inside his bag, grateful that some stinky, unwashed butt had just saved him from the absolute embarrassment it would have been if…

No. Oh hell, no.

Shane stared at his phone. Right where his parents' address sat, right in the chat with "Lily"; under it Rozanov's immediate answer: *When should I be there?*

Shane felt his heart drop. And then he felt something different. He needed to get dressed. And get out of there. And possibly fake his own death. He had managed to accidentally invite Ilya fucking Rozanov to his parents for Christmas, like their history needed any more complications. He was fucked.

Ottawa, December 24

Shane couldn't believe how stupid he had been. He had really invited Rozanov to be his date for family Christmas. *Accidentally.* He hadn't meant to send that message, but there was no denying that he had typed it out with his own fingers. Now Rozanov had his parents' address, and Shane had a mild panic attack waiting to see if he would show up while pretending to care about his cousin's annoying stories.

Why do I keep doing this to myself?

There was no easy answer to this question, or maybe there was one that was *easy* but still unpleasant. Many things were *easy* with Rozanov, like picturing him naked after months without hooking up. Without meaning to, Shane conjured up pictures of Rozanov's curly head in his lap, of hazel eyes looking up at him through lashes, of pink, shiny lips stretched around his dick. *Fuck.*

Thankfully, Shane's phone buzzed before he could lose himself.

Lily: I'm here.

Maybe Shane could pretend like this wasn't his parents' house at all. Like he'd given Rozanov a random Ottawa address just to mess with him. Just to teach him a lesson about making assumptions about how much Shane wanted him as his date. Of course, he wouldn't do that, not even to Rozanov. Instead, he got up and made his way to the front door, throwing back a glance at his family, who were about to see him in an entirely different light. Shane exhaled deeply and opened the door.

"Oh, good," said Rozanov, "I was not sure you were here. Fake address, maybe. Like maybe you try to be funny."

"Don't be ridiculous," Shane replied, "I'm not an asshole like you."

Rozanov's expression shifted from unsure to smiley. "*Asshole* is what you call your boyfriend? Maybe try sweetheart. Or *babe.* Simple, but I like it. Will you let me inside now, *babe*?"

Shane already regretted all of this. He wanted to say something, but it was hard to concentrate with the echo of Rozanov's heavily accented *sweetheart* hanging in the air.

"Sure," he muttered instead, and watched as Rozanov stepped inside Shane's private world as if it was nothing.

The simple fact that Rozanov was now under the same roof as Shane's entire family, of course, was not enough. No, Christmas Eve was bound to test him much more than that. Shane watched Rozanov take off his coat and reveal an outfit that was so outrageous, there was not a single other person in the world Shane could imagine wearing it. Shane wasn't stupid enough to get a closer look at how tightly the dark pants stretched across his thighs and ass, but he wasn't prepared for the shirt that was paired with the pants. It was a white collared shirt with leopard print on the front and back, surely an insanely expensive designer piece.

"You like?" Rozanov teased, and Shane swallowed. "Wanted to look pretty for you tonight."

You could have worn literal rags.

"You want to draw attention, Rozanov. Come inside, I'll introduce you to my family, I guess."

Rozanov huffed out a laugh. "Maybe call me by my first name, then. No?"

It hadn't occurred to Shane that he would have to. Everything else would be weird. Everything *was* weird already, but he couldn't see a way out of the weirdness now that Rozanov was there, so he committed. Shane waved Rozanov to follow him, stepped into his parents' living room filled with Hollander faces, and watched one jaw drop after the other. Suddenly, the room that had been filled with chats and laughter and discussions was scarily quiet. Shane hated being stared at, but he quickly realized that he was not the target of everyone's incredulous looks.

Shane cleared his throat. "Everyone, this is…" *He was going to have to say it. God, he had only said it once before.* "Ilya."

Shane couldn't bring himself to look at Ilya as he simply said, "Hello. Thank you for having me."

"Rozanov," Shane's mother stated drily, like she was unsure if he was real. "Ilya Rozanov."

"One and only," Ilya smiled at her. He seemed to find the whole ordeal very amusing. Shane needed everyone to get over their shock, or else he was going to lose it.

"Mom," Shane said, trying to sound calm, "you promised you weren't going to judge my date. You said whoever I'd bring home you'd happily have with us for Christmas. There, I brought him here."

"Wait," Shane's father intercepted, "does that mean that the two of you are…"

Shane didn't know the words that could possibly answer the question, so he simply nodded. Ilya, on the other hand, seemed to know plenty, despite the limitations of the English language.

"Lovers," he said, "is that the right word? Boyfriends, really. Very in love. I am so happy your son is in my life. And very happy to meet you. About time."

When everyone kept staring, he grabbed Shane's hand and threaded their fingers together. Shane tried to ignore the feeling this caused him, filing it away for later, as he sometimes did with things that were too big to fit in the moment.

"Yes," Shane forced himself to say. "Ilya and I are together. How about we eat?"

It was strange, at first. And then, it was strange how normal it was. Once everyone had picked their jaws off the floor and sat down around Yuna and David Hollander's giant dinner table loaded with food, it was almost as if they weren't pretending. Ilya was allowing Shane's parents to feed him everything Shane wasn't willing to put inside his body, and they loved it.

"This is the best," Ilya said. Shane wondered if he'd ever had a home-made meal like that since moving to North America. He wondered what home-made meals in Russia looked like.

"Shane and Ilya," Yuna said, "I'm sorry, I'm not judging. It's just that we had no idea. Since when has this -" She vaguely gestured at the space between their shoulders. "- been going on?"

Shane kept his eyes glued to his plate as he answered, "Since our rookie season."

"What?" Shane didn't have to look at his mom to know how surprised she was.

"No," Ilya said, "before that."

So much for pretending.

"Yes," Shane agreed, "technically, the draft. Or maybe the World Juniors in Saskatchewan."

"That one," Ilya provided. "Love at first sight. Couldn't help myself. Nice Canadian boy with beautiful freckles."

"He's lying," Shane said, "it did… start then. But it wasn't love at first sight. That happened later."

Ilya smiled and shook his head. "Speak for yourself, Shane."

Shane. He called me Shane.

"But you beat him," Yuna said.

"Yes," Ilya nodded, seemingly happy that it had been brought up. "I told him when we first spoke, before final. The man I love is only second-best hockey player. Is fine. Couldn't get number one because number one is me."

"What he means to say," Shane added, because he couldn't *not* say anything, "is that we are *both* very professional on the ice, and we've never let our feelings for each other affect our

game. Ilya didn't let me win that first time, I didn't let him win the year after. Nobody ever lets anybody win."

"Is true," Ilya said. "Way too much fun beating you anyway."

Shane exhaled. Once it was established that their relationship had been going on for much longer than anybody could believe and that it had never impacted their performance on the ice, the conversations flowed easily. Admittedly, Ilya was better at talking in a foreign language and to complete strangers than Shane was at interacting with his own family in the house he'd grown up in. It almost made sense not to think of the man sitting next to him as Rozanov, because Rozanov was the hockey player, the sexy asshole constantly trying to get under Shane's skin. This guy, he was someone else entirely. He was still sexy, and he still provoked Shane with his jokes a little. But he was polite too, and willing to get to know people, happy to talk about himself. He was generous with his compliments for the food and even more generous with praise for Shane. If he was being honest with himself, Shane had to admit that Ilya was indeed the perfect person to play his fake holiday boyfriend, because the way he was talking, the way he was looking at Shane, the way he was reaching for his hand under the table and drawing invisible circles around his knuckles… He was putting on a very, *very* convincing show.

We could have had something like this for real. You only had to text me back.

Chapter 2

"Only one bed, hm?" Ilya said, looking at Shane with raised eyebrows and a smug grin spreading across his lips.

"What was I supposed to tell my parents? 'Hey, this is my boyfriend, and I'm super excited to bring him around over Christmas, but we need separate rooms to sleep in.' They're supposed to believe that we're like, grossly in love, or whatever."

It was only this one night. Shane hadn't even considered the possibility of them sleeping over at his parents' house together when it had become clear that Ilya was really going to join the Hollanders' Christmas celebrations. Then, he just hadn't been able to come up with a plausible excuse. Shane slept over every year because Christmas with his family meant both dinner on Christmas Eve and brunch on Christmas morning. It made no sense to drive home in between, especially not with Shane's hockey career keeping him busy and on the road most of the time. It made even less sense for Ilya, who lived in Boston. Where would Ilya have spent the night, if not in Shane's childhood bedroom – a hotel? Shane's adult bedroom in Montreal? He still hadn't invited Ilya there, and this was all confusing enough without unpacking all of that, too.

The result was this: Ilya and Shane together in the room that held so much of Shane's youth. Together in one bed, but not like *that.* For sleeping, this time. Somehow, the thought was more unsettling than anything else that had happened between them.

"You know me," Ilya said, "I am nothing if not dedicated. You want to make them believe we are obsessed with each other. We will convince them."

Shane sighed. "I think you already have."

And it didn't even seem like it was hard.

"Good," Ilya smiled. He plumped down onto Shane's bed.

Ilya fucking Rozanov. On Shane's bed. Fucking hell.

He looked good, too good. Propped up on his elbows, long legs stretched out in front of him, he reminded Shane why it had always been so hard to resist him. His ridiculous shirt was showing off the muscles underneath and a sliver of his chest, just enough to reveal the fact that he had hair on his chest. Not that Shane didn't know already. He could draw a picture of Ilya's naked body from memory alone, down to the exact shade of his skin, including every scar and every mole. Shane swallowed and forced himself to look away. He was already starting to crave this man again.

"This is the time to fuck, no?" Ilya interrupted his thoughts.

Shane wasn't sure he'd heard right. "What?"

Ilya looked at him like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “We are madly in love, yes?”

“Sure.”

“And you bring me to your parents’ place. Show me your room. Your bed.”

“Oh, so you’re making fun of me now.”

“I’m serious,” Ilya said, “if we’re together, this is the time to fuck. No way you resist fucking me in your own bed. Think about it.”

How was he actually being sort of convincing with this stuff?

“We don’t have to pretend that… hard, I guess,” Shane sighed. “I’m not worried about anyone believing us.”

“Is this how you play hockey? Not pretend too hard?”

“Fuck you, Rozanov. You know it’s not.”

Rather than answering, Ilya grinned at Shane and started… *Fuck.* He started moving his hips, bouncing up and down on Shane’s mattress.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Shane hissed.

This only seemed to encourage Ilya to continue.

“I love it when you touch me like that, *Shane,*” he said, looking directly into Shane’s eyes and moving his body in a way that was entirely unfair and infuriating and fucking sexy.

“After all these years,” Ilya went on, his voice low and throaty and too damn hot, “I still can’t get enough of this.” Although Shane was a good six feet away from him, Ilya threw his head back as if reacting to real physical touch. “Just like that, yes,” he moaned. Shane couldn’t help but stare. And feel his dick growing hard in his pants.

“Stop that,” Shane insisted. They couldn’t keep doing this. Not this time of the year, not in his parents’ house. Not after Ilya had sat at the family dinner table and made everyone *like* him. It was too much.

It was not enough.

“Why?” Ilya asked. “You always make me feel so good. I never want to stop.”

He lifted one hand and trailed his fingers down the side of his neck, pushing the collar of his shirt out of the way.

“I feel like I’m on fire when you touch me like this.” Except it wasn’t Shane touching him, it was Ilya himself, and somehow that was entirely too fucking hot.

“Stop.”

Don’t fucking stop.

Shane watched Ilya undo the top two buttons of his shirt. His hand moved further down, across his chest, too much of it still hidden beneath clothes, across his stomach, down to his pants. He played around with his belt for a few seconds, pretending to unbuckle it. Instead, he moved his hand further downward and slid it over the bulge in his pants, releasing a moan.

“Oh Shane, I have waited for this,” he groaned, gripping himself, slowly stroking up and down. “Has been too long.”

It had been too long. But the last time they’d had sex had been real, unlike whatever this thing was. It had been maybe a little too real. It had definitely been real enough to freak both Shane and Ilya out a little. Admittedly, Shane had been the one to leave in a hurry. They’d both been sweaty and spent, but Ilya hadn’t stopped looking at him with want in his eyes, hadn’t stopped kissing him like he wanted more. Shane hadn’t known how to deal with this open, if nonverbal, display of continued affection. He’d simply left, thoughts racing, trying to ignore the way Ilya said “*Hollander”* like it was a prayer. Twice.

So maybe it was Shane’s fault that it had been that long, but Ilya hadn’t responded to Shane’s messages asking him to meet up and talk.

Shane hadn’t thought they’d see each other again in private. Definitely not *this* private. Not with Ilya sprawled across Shane’s bed touching himself.

“Why don’t you join me?” Ilya teased.

“Because you’re just messing with me,” Shane replied. “And I don’t appreciate that.”

Ilya smiled.

Help. Not that smile.

“You don’t appreciate this?”

Ilya stroked himself faster then. He was breathing hard and not holding back the noises pushing out of him. Whatever he had done earlier, now that they were alone together, there was no pretending. He was turned on and ready to play. But Shane didn’t want to feel like his toy. Not this time.

“No,” Shane told him, putting his arms behind himself to stop his hands from doing what they wanted. “I don’t appreciate you still wearing your pants.”

“Fucking take them off me,” Ilya rumbled.

Shane bit his lip. It took everything in him to stay where he was. He liked Ilya telling him what to do. Usually, he was eager to please and listen to Ilya praise him for it. But he had a suspicion that Ilya liked it too, and he wasn’t going to give in that easily.

“I think you can have the bed tonight,” Shane said, trying not to let Ilya hear the need in his voice. “You’re my guest, after all. And you’re only here to do me a favor. I can sleep on the floor.”

He could see the confusion on Ilya’s face, but it was gone within two seconds, replaced by something else, dark and dangerous and delicious.

“Good,” Ilya said, “hope you don’t mind me getting comfortable.”

He unbuttoned his shirt all the way, peeled it off his gorgeous body and threw it away without looking. He made a show of undoing his belt and unzipping his pants. He didn’t get rid of them right away. Instead, he pushed them down until they rested low on his hips, the hair that led from his belly button to his crotch on full display. Shane wanted to bury his face in it.

“Of course,” Shane said, “make yourself at home.”

Shane’s breath hitched when Ilya pushed his pants and underwear down even further. He wanted to touch this man so badly. He wanted to tear his clothes from his body, wanted to take him in his mouth, wanted to reduce him to a mess rambling Russian profanities.

Ilya kicked off his pants and looked at Shane as if he was saying *here you go, come and take it.* When Shane did nothing, he cocked his head, looking amused. Suddenly, he turned around, lying on his stomach, showing off his perfect, *perfect* butt. The moment Shane had seen that butt for the first time in the showers after shooting a commercial together as rookies had been as close to a religious experience as he’d ever had.

“Thank you,” Ilya said, “your bed is very comfy.”

As if to prove it, he began moving his hips again.

Fuck. Was he humping Shane’s bed right now? Ilya had no idea how many times Shane had done something very much like this in the same bed.

Of course, Shane imagined being pinned underneath him, feeling every single one of his movements inside him. On the other hand, his current perspective was a pretty good one too. He could see every muscle moving beneath Ilya’s skin, in his shoulders, his back, his ass, his thighs.

“I’m glad you like it,” Shane said. Not a lie. He was very, *very* glad. And very, *very* hard. *So this is what Ilya looks like when he fucks.*

Shane watched as Ilya lifted his hips and ass and bunched up some of the blanket beneath him so have something to rock into.

“Yes,” Ilya said. This was his sex voice. Shane knew and loved it. “I think about this often.”

“About what?”

“Your bed,” Ilya said, turning his head so Shane could see his flushed cheek. “You in your bed. Me in your bed. Naked. When I think about it, it is you touching me.”

Shane knew what Ilya was doing. He was playing a game and wanted to win. He wanted Shane to do what he said. He was spurred on by Shane holding back, by the distance. He wanted to see Shane give in. He probably thought about Shane taking his clothes off, getting on all fours and begging Ilya to fuck him.

Just once, Shane wanted Ilya to be the one to beg.

"Okay," Shane said, "I'll play." He took one step towards Ilya on the bed, who stilled immediately. "No, keep going."

It seemed like Ilya thought about it for a few seconds, but he did as he was told. Shane had always been too busy raging at the power Ilya held over him to consider his own power over Ilya. Except maybe that one night in Ilya's hotel room in Vegas. Maybe he'd gotten a first idea of it that night. He liked the feeling of it.

As slowly as possible, Shane moved closer. He let his eyes wander and took it all in, every inch of Ilya's writhing body. The sight of this man had never not made him mad with want, but this was maybe the sexiest thing he'd ever experienced.

Shane stood by the bed and reached out, touching Ilya's leg, his fingertips making their way up from the ankle to his ass. Ilya shuddered.

"Tell me about it," Shane said.

"What?"

"You said you think about me touching you. That you've thought about being here, in my bed. Tell me about it."

Shane didn't touch him again until Ilya began to speak.

"I think about fucking you."

Shane moved his fingers across Ilya's back and shoulders, keeping his touches light.

"I think about holding you in my arms after."

Oh. This was not what he'd expected. This was not the same thing as *I think about fucking you.*

"I think about falling asleep. I think about you sleeping on top of me. And then you wake up. I fuck you again."

Shane moved his hand to Ilya's moving hip, wanting to be part of that rhythm.

"I fuck you once, maybe twice," Ilya continued, "and when you get up I don't let you."

Fuck. This was Ilya's fantasy? Not letting go of Shane the morning after?

"Stop," Shane said, because he couldn't think about this right now. "Turn around."

Ilya turned around, and he looked breathtaking. He was breathing heavily, and he was fucking *blushing*. Unsurprisingly, his dick was hard and leaking. He looked like the most beautiful thing in the world.

Shane couldn't stand being in his clothes any longer, so he took them off as quickly as he could, not even caring about where they went. He noticed Ilya's eyes, glued to whichever part of Shane was momentarily being uncovered. He licked his lips when Shane finally freed his cock, and suddenly Shane knew exactly what he wanted.

When Ilya moved towards him, Shane pushed him back down onto the bed with a hand on his chest. He straddled Ilya's lap, rubbing himself against Ilya until he felt like this was going to be over too soon if he kept going. Ilya slid his hands up Shane's thighs and grabbed him by the hips as if to pull him closer.

So Shane did move closer. He moved up the bed until he was hovering over Ilya's chest, looking down at Ilya's reddened cheeks and parted lips.

"Have you ever thought about *this*?" Shane asked, taking his dick in hand and guiding it towards Ilya's face.

"Fucking should have," Ilya mumbled before he licked it from the bottom to the top and wrapped his lips around it.

It was the best fucking feeling in the world. Shane was aware that he was on top of Ilya, above his throat and face with the entire weight of his body, so he wanted to be careful, but it was hard not to let go immediately. Ilya had been amazing at sucking cock the whole time Shane had known him, but this was different. There wasn't a whole lot that Ilya could do in terms of movement, but he seemed determined to make up for it with his tongue and by moaning every time Shane pushed deeper inside his mouth. Shane couldn't help it, he leaned forward, buried one hand in the curls on top of Ilya's head and let his body do the rest, rolling his hips.

Fucking the most beautiful face in the whole universe.

Ilya didn't seem to mind Shane taking control more than he ever had before. On the contrary, the noises he made indicated that he loved it. So did his hands. As if their bodies understood each other without words, Shane moved his knees up even higher, to both sides of Ilya's head. This gave Ilya space to move his hands to Shane's ass and push him even closer to his face.

Shane knew he was going to come from this easily, but he didn't want to – not yet, so he reached behind himself and guided one of Ilya's hands kneading his ass to where he truly wanted it. He pulled away from Ilya's mouth for a moment to let Ilya catch a breath and to get the bottle of lube he kept hidden beneath spare sheets in a drawer beneath the bed.

"You want this?" Ilya asked as he took the bottle from him.

Shane leaned over him again and pushed back inside his mouth, causing him to moan around him.

“I fucking want this,” he said.

A moment later, Ilya pressed a slicked-up finger against his hole. Shane slowed down his movements a little, in part because it was hard to choose between pushing forward inside Ilya’s perfect mouth and pushing back against teasing fingers, and in part because he feared it would be over very quickly otherwise.

“I fucking want this so bad,” he panted, which encouraged Ilya to push one finger all the way inside of him.

“Fuck, Ilya,” Shane heard himself say, although he barely recognized his own voice. It sounded *filthy.*

Ilya seemed to agree, and he seemed to love it. He sucked at Shane’s cock that was almost not moving inside his mouth anymore now because it had simply become too much. At the same time, he moved his finger in and out until he carefully added another one.

Shane was reminded of the first time he’d let Ilya fuck him. Then, too, he’d felt so good with Ilya’s fingers inside him that he’d thought he’d simply come from that. He tightened his grip on Ilya’s hair and totally forgot to control the noises slipping out of his mouth.

When he felt like he couldn’t take it any longer, Shane pulled away again and blindly fished a condom from the same drawer the lube had come out of.

“Here,” he said, throwing it at Ilya and moving down Ilya’s body, contemplating sucking his dick to get him caught up.

“No good idea,” Ilya groaned, “won’t last.”

Shane had been aware of Ilya’s enjoyment of everything that had happened but, *fuck,* him being this affected by something that hadn’t involved his own dick at all was the biggest fucking turn-on.

Shane could barely wait long enough for the condom to go all the way on. A moment later, he was on top of Ilya, sinking down on him, letting himself be filled completely. He’d often taken a moment to let himself feel the initial burn and stretch, but he didn’t have the patience. Instead, he began riding Ilya’s cock hard and fast.

“This is not going to last long,” he warned.

“No,” Ilya replied, grabbing him by the hips and meeting every downward movement with a thrust. “Not after what you just did to me. Fuck.”

“Oh, did you like that?”

“Fucking. Loved. Every. Second.”

It was the look on Ilya’s face more than the words that pushed Shane over the edge. He cried out and came all over Ilya’s stomach. He felt the waves of pleasure ebb as Ilya stilled inside of him and came with a low murmuring of something Russian.

“That was so fucking hot,” Shane said.

Ilya smiled at him. “I always wanted to know if it’s better. As boyfriends, you know.”

Right. Boyfriends. Fake boyfriends.

Shane climbed off Ilya and the bed. “You can have the shower first,” he offered, “I’ll change the sheets so we can actually sleep in here.”

For a second, Ilya looked like he was going to say something, but then he seemed to change his mind. *Maybe some asshole joke about Shane finally getting in touch with his dominant side.* Ilya said nothing. Instead, he took the towel Shane handed him to the bathroom.

By the time Shane had showered, Ilya was in bed, just awake enough to register Shane joining him. Shane was careful not to disturb him, getting into bed without touching him, lying down as far away as physically possible. Ilya wasn’t having it. He moved closer and wrapped his arms around Shane, pulling him against his chest and holding him there.

I think about holding you in my arms after.

Shane closed his eyes and tried not to think too hard about whether Ilya had said this in the heat of the moment, whether it had been dirty talk or an earnest admission.

Then, another thought occurred to him, and he couldn’t shake it as he drifted off to sleep.

We didn’t even kiss.

Chapter 3

Ottawa, December 25

There was no logical reason for Shane to assume Ilya would be gone in the morning. Yet he woke up feeling anxious, needing to make sure Ilya was still there. He wanted to turn around and see for himself, preferably he wanted to find Ilya still asleep because he had never had the time and quiet to just look at him for as long as he wanted.

Once Shane tried to turn, he was immediately stopped by Ilya's arms tightening around him. He couldn't help but feel relieved. And he couldn't help that other feeling either, the one that came from being wrapped up in Ilya fucking Rozanov.

"Morning," Ilya mumbled. Shane could feel his lips moving against the back of his neck. He realized that he had a new thing to lose now.

"Hey," he said, trying not to let the anxiety seep in. "Sleep well?"

"Like a fucking baby."

"That makes no sense," Shane said. "Babies are terrible sleepers. You would have woken me up a million times."

"Thought about it," Ilya replied while he flattened his hand against Shane's stomach. "Would have been very different than a baby though. Very adult stuff."

"Oh yeah, like in that fantasy of yours?"

"Maybe."

Shane had completely forgotten about the existence of the world outside of his childhood bedroom. He almost had a heart attack when someone knocked on the door.

It was Yuna. "Take your time, boys," she said through the closed door, "but eggs are fresh *now.* Just letting you know."

Shane grabbed his phone from the nightstand. It was 10:30. "No way." He was used to getting up way earlier than this. In fact, he didn't remember the last time he had slept this long.

"Mh, yes. You were sleeping like little angel."

Oh, so you *got to watch* me *sleep.*

"We need to get dressed and get downstairs," Shane said. He was so hungry that he planned to eat whatever the fuck he wanted for once.

But Ilya buried his face in Shane's neck. "Five more minutes," he whispered, "please."

“My family’s waiting,” Shane answered, although what he really thought was that five fucking minutes were not nearly enough. “Realistically, there is a chance that someone heard us last night. We could at least not make it look like we’re… you know… doing it again.”

“I will tell you one more thing,” Ilya offered.

“This is not a negotiation.”

“You loved hearing it last night. What I think about. When I think about you.”

It wasn’t a negotiation, but Ilya had very good arguments.

Shane sighed.

“Fine. Tell me one more thing.”

Ilya’s lips were touching his ear as he spoke.

“I think about kissing you.”

Shane froze, so Ilya continued.

“Yes, I think about that one most. I like sex. I think about it. A lot. Sex with you. But I think about kissing you more.”

Slowly, Shane turned around. This time, Ilya let him. They were so close that Shane had to lean back a little to look at Ilya.

“Don’t lie to me,” Shane whispered, “this is not a game. This is not like last night, like you can just say stuff because it gets me going.”

Ilya smiled softly, but his eyes looked… *hurt.* He touched Shane’s jaw with one hand, very gently stroking his skin.

“Is not a lie,” he whispered back, “and wasn’t lies last night.”

Shane stared at him like he was going to find proof of the lies in his eyes.

Nothing.

“I don’t lie to you, Shane,” Ilya said. “So you don’t lie to me now, okay? Tell me you don’t want to kiss me.”

Shane closed his eyes. He leaned into the touch of Ilya’s hand. Of course he couldn’t. Of course he wanted to. He always wanted to kiss Ilya Rozanov.

He turned his head slightly and pressed his lips to the inside of Ilya’s palm. They’d never done something like this before. A kiss that was not sexual at all, that wasn’t intended to lead anywhere.

Not true. Ilya had kissed him like that after the first time he'd fucked him, on the stairs to the apartment he'd bought just to meet Ilya without anyone finding out. Shane had kissed Ilya like that too, right after sex that same night, on the forehead.

"Okay," Shane said quietly, "I won't lie to you."

He opened his eyes and looked at Ilya. He reached out for him, putting a hand against his cheek. He let himself feel the stubble on Ilya's chin, moved his thumb across Ilya's bottom lip. He'd thought this forbidden.

"I think about it too," he finally admitted.

And then he leaned in and brushed his lips against Ilya's very carefully. It was different than before. It was soft and slow, like they were discovering something new. Ilya pulled Shane closer against his chest and held him with one arm while the hand of the other gently stroked his arm. Shane played with Ilya's hair. They stayed like this for a long while, content with what they had at the moment, not pushing for anything else.

When they broke apart, Shane buried his face in Ilya's neck and breathed him in. Ilya kissed him on his hair.

"We should probably get dressed and go downstairs," Shane said a few minutes later.

"We should probably never leave this room again," Ilya replied.

If only.

"Let's go eat. I'm starving."

"Yes," Ilya said, "is no wonder. Look at the stuff you eat. You *are* starving."

"Shut up."

Ilya laughed. "We are honest now, no?"

"And I'm regretting having invited you again," Shane replied, but he really, *truly* wasn't.

Of course, everyone was done eating by the time Ilya and Shane joined the table. It didn't really matter to Shane, and Ilya didn't seem to have a problem with it either, he was only happy to see all the food Yuna had placed in front of him.

"Sorry," Ilya said with an apologetic smile. "We don't usually sleep in. I wanted a slow morning just this one day of the year."

“No worries,” David told him. “We wouldn’t have bothered you at all if it weren’t for the food.”

“Is very good,” Ilya said in between bites.

“At least someone appreciates my cooking,” David laughed, clearly happy with his son’s *boyfriend.*

Who would have thought? Ilya really had them wrapped around his finger already.

“Sorry about yesterday, by the way,” Yuna said to Ilya. “We were surprised. Shane didn’t tell us about you at all. We had no idea. And to think that it has been going on for so long. We would have welcomed you into our home earlier, just so you know.”

Ilya looked at Shane like he was unsure how to handle this. “Thank you,” he said finally. “Means a lot.”

“What about your family?” David asked. “You celebrate Christmas in Russia?”

Ilya shrugged. “Not really. Some people do, but not like here. New year is different. New year is very big. Russians go take a bath in some… very cold water. Outside.”

Shane tried not to imagine Ilya in the snow, wearing a thick coat and only swim trunks underneath. He tried not to picture him dragging himself out of the water, wet and cold and… well, hot.

Shane cleared his throat. And his mind. “Really? You’ve never told me that.”

“Yes, really,” Ilya nodded. “I remember when I was a kid, my family went. There was some lake near the house. Always frozen that time of the year. My father hacked a hole into the ice with an axe, for swimming. He took my brother too. They loved it. Made them feel like men. Is supposed to be… fresh start. Fresh start for new year.”

“That doesn’t sound very fun to me,” Shane admitted, “and I’m kind of a fan of ice.”

“Yes, me too,” Ilya smiled. “I only went in when he made me.”

Made him? Shane didn’t know what to say to that.

Ilya seemed to think for a moment. Then he continued, his voice very quiet.

“My mother did not care for it. She only came to watch me play on the ice. One year she brought real ice skates. No idea how she got them.”

“Is that how you got into hockey?”

“Yes. And no. Maybe. Wasn’t really hockey. Just a kid having fun.”

“Shane was like that,” Yuna said. “Oh, you should have seen him. When he got his first pair of skates, he refused to take them off. One night, we had to wait until he was asleep in the car

until we could take them off. He was so mad when he woke up wearing his little sneakers."

"Did he get that look in his eyes?" Ilya wanted to know. "Like angry kitten?"

"Yes!" David exclaimed. "That is exactly what it was."

"Oh shut up, all of you," Shane murmured, feeling heat rising to his cheeks.

"Anyway," said Yuna, "speaking of New Year's traditions, Ilya. I know you already have plans, but if you change your mind, you are very welcome to celebrate with us. We'd love to have you again."

"I already have plans?"

Fuck.

"Ugh, yeah," Shane stammered, "remember when I invited you to spend New Year's Eve with us at the cottage and you said you had that… *thing*."

He was a terrible liar. And ashamed of it. Or maybe ashamed of something else.

"Oh, *that* thing, right," Ilya nodded, thankfully playing along. "Thank you very much for inviting me, but I did make plans before Shane asked."

He emphasized *asked* in a way that let Shane know he was mad. Or maybe disappointed, which was much worse.

"Well, there will be many other years that you boys can begin together, right?" David offered with a smile.

What if there won't?

"Of course," Shane said.

"Sure," Ilya said, but it totally didn't sound like he was sure about anything.

"I should probably go," Ilya said.

No. No! Everything was fine two minutes ago. Better than fine.

"Ilya…," Shane began, but Ilya shook his head.

"This has been lovely. Thank you for inviting me. Very nice to meet your wonderful parents. But you know I have to go back to Boston. We still have a hockey season to play, no? We plan to win the cup this time. Don't you?"

Shane could feel everything slipping away from him. He wanted to stop it, but he had no idea how. He wanted Ilya to stay. For now. For New Year's. But this was still an arrangement.

Was it?

“Of course.”

Shane sat on his bed while he watched Ilya gather his things and get ready to leave. Leave *him.*

“It’s not like you think it is,” he tried to say, knowing that people only ever said this when things looked bad.

“I know how it is,” Ilya replied. “Is fine.” He picked up his bag and threw something at Shane. No, not *at* him. Next to him. A… something wrapped in shiny, Christmas-y paper.

“Merry Christmas, Hollander.”

Hollander. Not Shane. Hollander.

Fuck.

“Wait,” Shane told him once he’d realized what was happening but Ilya was already out of his room and on his way down the stairs.

When Shane caught up with him, Ilya was wrapped in a hug by Yuna.

“Again,” he smiled politely. “Thank you for having me.”

Shane’s parents told Ilya goodbye and left the two of them alone, probably thinking Shane wanted to give his boyfriend a kiss. He wished a kiss could fix this mess.

“I’m sorry,” he said instead.

“No, I’m sorry,” Ilya said.

What could he possibly be sorry for?

“I… intruded, yes? Was your family Christmas and you didn’t want me there. I will not mess with you like this again.”

Wait. Does he know what intruding means?

“No, Ilya…”

“See you on the ice, Hollander.”

“Ilya, please.”

But Ilya left.

Shane felt like crying. He had really fucked it up this time. And it wasn't even like he'd freaked out again. Last time, he'd been scared because it had felt like they'd been *something.* It had felt like *something* this time too. Ilya in his parents' house. Ilya in his bed. Ilya kissing him like *that.* And instead of being freaked out, Shane had enjoyed it. He had loved every second.

He went back to his room and wrapped his arms around the pillow Ilya had slept on, seeking his scent. His eyes fell to the present Ilya had left him.

Fuck. Shane hadn't even thought about getting Ilya a present. How could he not have thought of it?

Although it felt like he didn't deserve to have it now, Shane peeled back the shiny paper carefully. Inside was a book. *Hockey's Most Heated Rivalries.* When had he told Ilya that he liked to read books about hockey? Shane flipped through some pages.

Oh.

This wasn't just a book about his sport's history's most famous rivals. It was annotated, every blank space filled with pencil scribbles.

And they were Ilya's.

Shane took a closer look. Here and there, Ilya had circled words and written "*means what???*" in the margins. On one page, he'd underlined a whole paragraph that consisted of just one sentence and commented "*u want me to read this shit?*" It made Shane smile. It was so *Ilya.* Then, he found a passage highlighted and marked "*reminds me of you. but you would have done better*".

The whole book was full of them. Ilya's thoughts. His handwriting. Shane felt like he was holding the most precious thing in the world in his hands. Ilya was funny. He'd written down whenever he hadn't understood something. He'd admitted when something reminded him of Shane, or of Ilya himself, or of any of the games they'd played against each other. He'd rated teams and cities one to five stars, only Boston getting five, only Montreal getting four and a half.

"*You remember watching this too?*"

"*I wanted to be like this guy when I was little. Now I'm better.*"

"*Can you believe someone wrote about these boring Canadian guys?*"

"*WRONG! Book is LIAR"*

Shane didn't know whether to smile or cry. He was doing both, probably.

And then he turned to the last page. The final chapter ended in the middle of the page, leaving the lower half blank. Ilya had filled the space:

"*Stupid book. Forgot the best rivalry of hockey. Last chapter must be about Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov.*"

Shane closed the book. It was his favorite thing in the world, but he had no time for it now. Instead, he hopped off the bed and ran down the stairs. He grabbed his keys and gave his confused-looking parents some half-hearted excuse about having forgotten something. Then he was in his car on the way to Boston.

It was a long car ride to think about all the things he needed to say to Ilya. Shane played it out in his head, taking into consideration the different scenarios that would unfold depending on how mad Ilya was. Depending on how *hurt* he was.

When he was finally at Ilya's door, he didn't remember any of them.

Ilya opened only after Shane had rung the bell four or five times.

"What do you want?"

You.

I want you.

"I want to apologize," he said instead. "And I want to ask you something I should have asked earlier. And I want to give you this."

He held out the gift bag he'd found during the brief stop at his place in Montreal. It said *Happy Birthday.*

Ilya let out a sigh. "Come in."

They sat down on Ilya's couch and Shane placed the gift bag on the coffee table.

"What is this?" Ilya asked.

"Your Christmas present."

Ilya looked skeptical, but he took it anyway, pulling out the two pieces of black fabric Shane had placed inside hurriedly hours earlier.

"Hollander. This is my own clothes, yes?"

"Yes."

"Wow. You suck at presents."

Shane knew he had to explain.

“It’s symbolic.”

“What does that mean?”

“Your clothes are not the real present, obviously,” Shane elaborated. “They’re a symbol. Like the book you gave me. It’s not really the book. You gave me your thoughts.”

“And you give me my own clothes back.”

“Remember why I had them in the first place?”

Shane would always, *always* remember the day because it had separated Ilya and his relationship into a before and after, but he didn’t know whether the same was the case for Ilya. More than a year had passed.

“Yes,” Ilya said, “I gave them to you last time you were here because you were meant to stay. But you ran away.”

Shane swallowed. If only he hadn’t run that day. They could have had Christmas, maybe. No pretending.

“Ilya, listen. I’m sorry about that. I freaked out. It was… different. Nice. I didn’t know we could have *nice.* I panicked. I’m sorry.”

Ilya nodded but didn’t say anything.

“I’ve been holding on to these clothes like they’re my lifeline.” Shane said. “These past months, they’ve felt like everything I have left of you.”

“Ah. But now you give them back.”

Shane put his hand next to Ilya’s on the couch between them, just close enough for the pinky fingers to touch.

“I don’t want to need a lifeline anymore.” He took a breath. “I don’t want to keep some small little thing that belongs to you hidden in my closet. I want *you* in my home. I even want you in my parents’ home. I want you to spend New Year’s Eve with me. I want to kiss you at midnight. I don’t think I can keep pretending not to want this anymore.”

Ilya’s little finger touched him back.

“You really want me there?”

“Yes,” Shane said. Because Ilya didn’t make a move, he got up and settled into Ilya’s lap. He took Ilya’s face into both hands and gently forced him to look up. “Ilya.”

“Shane.”

“I think about kissing you all the fucking time.”

“So much that you drive to Boston to do it?”

“Yes,” Shane nodded, “I want to kiss you so bad I drove all the way to fucking Boston.”

“And people say you are boring.”

“Only you. But I don’t think you mean it. You think they should write a book about me.”

Ilya smiled at that. “A book about *us*.”

Because he had waited long enough, Shane kissed him. And Ilya kissed back, wrapping his arms around Shane. They only broke apart so that Ilya could rub his face against Shane’s chest while hugging him close.

“Okay, Shane,” Ilya said. “I will come to the cottage for New Year’s.”

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