Family Found

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Family Found

by iffervescent

Summary

Shane’s got to balance being a freshman, a baby gay, and rushing for the weirdest frat on campus.

Plus, unrelatedly, there's this really hot Russian guy.

Notes

I am late to this party but enjoying myself *immensely.* Here is my first fic offering, I have tried my best to capture the squealing, feet-kicking joy of this show.

Also for previous readers, yes, this is basically a remix of my fic Lift. I don't apologise for this. Enjoy!

The guy in the gym is watching him.

It's - it's not a bad thing. Shane's pretty sure it would be hypocritical of him to have a problem with it, considering he's been watching the guy right back, or even started watching him first. He hadn't *meant* to, at the start. The student gym's practically empty this early in the morning, and Shane normally zones out in between reps, stares at nothing, and sometimes when his brain's all foggy from endorphins he'll end up just staring at random people. He's had to apologise to a few girls before, when he accidentally made them nervous. And Shane's pretty sure that's what he was doing to this guy, just staring at him absent-mindedly whilst waiting for his muscles to stop aching.

And then at some point he stopped looking and started *looking*. Because…well…

Okay, screw it – this guy is *hot*, okay? Shane's allowed to think that now. Well, not allowed, that's not…or he allows himself, is that better? Or…it doesn't feel bad, to think another guy is hot, the way it used to make him feel wrong and squirmy and sad. And angry, because wasn't he different enough already, without adding something else to the mix?

The guy glances over at him again and puts an entirely different sort of squirmy feeling in Shane's stomach. Oh shit, they're holding eye contact. Should he – what does he – he tries to nod a greeting, the way he would with any of the guys, but belatedly thinks halfway through that he should probably smile instead? And then his face is doing both, but…badly.

The guy looks away.

Shit.

Shane swallows hard and looks down at his hands clasped between his thighs, the nails bitten short. Well, never mind. The guy probably wasn't looking at him *like that* anyway. Even though Shane's in a place where he can finally…*allow*...himself to look at men the way he's always wanted to look at men, it doesn't seem like many of them ever want to look back. He doesn't…he doesn't know if there's some sort of trick to it, like something he's supposed to do or wear or – something. Or maybe it's just him. He downloaded Grindr, because he was just so desperate for…something...and then he deleted it three racist messages later. And now a month later into the start of a college life where he thought everything would change, and he still hasn't managed to get a single guy's number, let alone anything else.

He's cooled down too much, he realises, sitting here staring at nothing. Shit. He's not really in the headspace to go warm back up either. He feels even shittier realising he's wasted a session. Working out is normally the thing that grounds him when his head feels like it's full of ants.

He collects up his things and does his stretches and heads for the showers. The warm water sluicing over him helps calm him down a bit, and the changing room's empty when he's done. Or it is, until Shane's pulling on his socks and another guy walks in. Him. The guy from earlier.

Shane can't help it. He's *looking*, almost helplessly, trying at least to be discreet about it by keeping his gaze down. But this guy he's…he's just gorgeous. He genuinely looks like a Greek statue, with those golden curls and the perfect muscles in his arms and his waist and his thighs and –

Shane swallows and ducks his head, focusing very hard on not getting his toes stuck in his socks. This guy is so unbelievably out of his league that even if Shane wasn't – well, Shane – then there's still no way this guy would be interested. He probably has people perving on him all the time, Shane should be more respectful and stop ogling him like this and –

"Hey," says a voice, and Shane's head jerks up before his brain has finished processing the sound. The gorgeous guy is looking at him. Oh, yeah, cool, stunning blue eyes as well, yeah that fits.

"H-hey," he says. Gorgeous guy stares at him blankly. Or – or angrily? Shane can't tell.

"You drop this."

"I – oh." Shane stares. How the heck did he forget his air pods? Oh wait, he put them beside the mat when he was stretching. He's an idiot, he –

"I can keep then?" Gorgeous guy says, looking at Shane like he also thinks Shane is an idiot, his hand closing over the airpods. Shane's dad gave him those for Christmas and he will *know* if he loses them, which is enough to jerk him out of his naïve gay virgin trance of staring at the vein in Gorgeous Guy's forearm.

"What? No...!"

"Eh. Finders keepers, yes?" Gorgeous Guy says, his accent more obvious now. What is that, European? He smirks at Shane, which is also unhelpfully distracting. Then he makes to turn away, Shane's airpods still in hand, and Shane jumps up, nearly tripping over his half-on socks.

"Hey, don't be an arsehole. Give them back!"

"Ah, good, he can speak." Gorgeous Guy steps back, grinning, running his tongue along his top teeth. How – how is that attractive? Is this a gay man thing, being attracted to teeth? Shane's so baffled by this revelation he nearly misses Gorgeous Guy tossing the airpods to him, and sends up a prayer of thanks for all those years of hockey as a kid that gave him the reflexes to catch them in a hopefully vaguely cool way. "Here. Yours."

"T-thanks."

Gorgeous Guy Possibly Arsehole Guy nods – in a definitely cool way – and turns away to a locker. That gives Shane a chance to have one last ogle, which he does, ashamedly, but also because he is horny and standing next to an Adonis. And it's a really good ogle. Gorgeous Arsehole Guy has shoulders that Shane wants to *lick*, and a chest that he wants to put his head on and snuggle. Both totally normal urges for gay men, he's sure.

Also, in hindsight, *Gorgeous Arsehole Guy* is perhaps not the best nickname. Although Shane is sure this guy probably does have a – a – um – gorgeous – er –

"You are first year?"

"What – oh, yeah, I'm a freshman." Oh shit, they're having a conversation. "And…you?"

"Sophomore." Gorgeous Guy smirks at him again. "Not baby like you."

Shane has spent a long time learning how to be appropriately polite to people, and definitely missed the course on how to respond to arseholes not being polite to him. He kind of wants to shove this guy, but also say something else to make him smile some more.

"You have, um, an accent? Are you from Europe?

"*Europe*." The guy says, in tones of deepest exasperation. "Americans. You scream like babies if someone confuses New York with Texas, but all of Europe is same, huh?"

"New York is totally unfathomably different from Texas –"

"French are *unfathomably* different from Germans, they are neighbours." Arsehole Guy says disparagingly, sounding out every syllable of *unfathomably* in his accent. Is Shane weird for thinking the accent is kind of hot? Also the way that Arsehole Guy is pouting about this is amusing him a lot, maybe even enough to go back to calling him Gorgeous Guy.

Or, he could, y'know, ask his actual name.

Gorgeous Guy looks up whilst Shane is still smiling and his own face does something weird. He's turned back round now, arms crossed over his chest – that is a lot of bicep for this early in the morning – leaning casually against the locker in a way Shane could only dream of being cool enough to pull off. Shane has no idea if this guy is even remotely queer but – but, maybe it would be nice to have a friend too, y'know?

"I'm Shane," he says, being brave, and sticks his hand out. Gorgeous Guy just stares at him unblinking for another long moment and then…and then his hand is in Shane's, warm and large.

"Ilya. Russian name, because I am Russian," he replies, and Shane grins helplessly with it.

"Russian. That's so cool."

"Uh huh." Is that a tiny smile at the corner of Ilya's mouth? Shane thinks it might be. Also he should probably stop staring at his mouth. Ilya solves that problem for him by swinging a leg over the bench and sinking down so he's straddling it, so that instead of his mouth Shane instead gets to look at the spread of his thighs and the bulge in between. And that's – that's, er, quite a bulge.

Shane drops his airpods. Ilya watches indulgently whilst he scrambles to pick them up. His eyes are still very blue and very intense when Shane's upright again. They're close enough

now that Shane can smell him, musky and sweaty. Shane wants to put his face into Ilya's armpit. Fuck, that's not normal is it? It takes him a second to realise that Ilya's talking again.

"Shane. Freshman. You know the college now yes, or I can give you tour?"

"Oh, oh thanks, I had, er, orientation already." Shane beams at him. Not an arsehole after all! Although there seems to be a vein twitching in Ilya's temple for some reason.

"Okay. But maybe you only know boring places. I can give you tour of interesting places. Say, my r-"

Shane's phone beeps and he looks down.

From: Rose

Shanieeeeeee! why am I here at brunch without you

"Oh shit," gasps Shane, immediately grabbing for his things. The brunch place on campus does bottomless Bellinis on Saturdays and Rose will be down three of them by the time he gets there. "Shit I'm sorry, I've got to run."

"Okay." Ilya's face has gone back to Russian unreadableness, but his foot is bouncing on the floor. "Okay, Shane. You train here another morning?"

"Yeah, sure, definitely. We can work out sometime maybe? I would love, like, some upper body tips." Shane can hear himself babbling now as he scoops up his bag and his water bottle and his phone, and then even more embarrassingly finds himself waving a hand vaguely in the direction of Ilya's pecs. That's – straight guys do that too, right? Shane should really know this, he pretended to be one for long enough. Ilya's giving him that incredulous look again. Shane wants to melt into the earth. "Um. Bye."

"Goodbye Shane." Ilya says, and Shane definitely doesn't look back as he bolts for the door. Three-bellini Rose is an unstoppable force of nature, and even beautiful Russian men have to take second-place to that.

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"Shane!"

Oh thank god, he got here for bellini #2.

"Hey Rose." Shane slides into the seat and immediately leans over for a kiss. Mwah, mwah, one on each cheek, very European. He wonders if that's how Russians kiss hello and feels his face heat, and Rose, who is roughly the most insightful person on the planet, immediately spots it.

“Is that a little blush I spy?” she leans into him, giggling, and Shane hugs her tight. College life so far has been one long confusing blur of orientation and his weird roommate and carrying textbooks and having to relearn Planck’s Law. Why does the astrophysics department still insist on using textbooks? The answer is possibly a bigger mystery than dark matter. But the point is: all of that would have been so much worse without having Rose here as well. Besties forever.

Except for the insightful thing.

“I’m not blushing,” he tries, a feeble attempt, and Rose gives him a Look. Shane surrenders immediately. “There was, um, a really hot guy at the gym.”

Rose squeals delightedly. “Oh my god! Describe him. Did you get his name? His number? His d-”

“Rose!”

“What?” she takes a sip of bellini #2 and grins at him over the rim of the glass. “As your best and favourite fag hag, it’s my duty to cheer you on in all romantic and sexual endeavours. Now. Details.”

Shane sighs, as though they both don’t know that he’s dying to talk about it.

“He’s…okay, frankly, he’s gorgeous. He’s got these blue eyes and these golden curls and this mole on his cheek right here…” Rose is nodding enthusiastically. “And his cheekbones are just – fuck. I don’t know what the rest of us are supposed to do with a guy like that wandering round.”

“Shane. Do I need to do the pep talk again? You’re *really fucking cute*.”

Cute doesn’t quite cut it, now that Shane has seen what true beauty looks like, but Rose’s words make him feel a little better anyway. She waves a hand at him.

“Okay, the gym. Did you talk to him?”

“Er, yeah, a little bit. His name’s Ilya? He’s Russian.”

“Sexy. Morally dubious right now, but sexy.” Rose in an international law student. The only thing Shane’s read in the last three years is an astrophysics textbook. “Did you get his number?”

“No. No, I don’t – I don’t think he’s gay?”

“But he was talking to you? Straight guys mostly just, like, grunt at each other in the gym don’t they? If he actually came up and had a conversation, both of you all sweaty and half-naked in the locker room together…” Rose is grinning again. Shane thinks she’s watched too much gay porn. She definitely watches more than he does – he’s seen her browser history.

“Even if he is, he would be way out of my league.” Shane says ruefully, and then immediately shakes his head when Rose goes to object. He loves how much she loves him,

but that does skew her perception a little, when she's gushing about how cute he is. Shane knows he's perfectly okay-looking, he's just not what…not what most gay men seem to be looking for. And that's fine, he doesn't *want* to be what some of them are looking for (especially the arsehole racist ones) but it would be nice just to be…desired. For once.

"Right. That's reminds me." Rose says instead, and starts rummaging around in her bag. Shane orders a ginger ale whilst she searches and steals a bite of her French toast. The best thing about giving up hockey in his teens was getting to relax on the all the insane dietary restrictions. He's kept up his fitness but it's nice getting to have dessert now and then as well. And it gave him the time to find his one true love, if it doesn't make him the biggest nerd in the world to say that about string cosmology and astroparticle physics.

He nearly sloshes ginger ale over his hand when she slaps something down on the table in front of him. Shane vaguely recognises it: it's one of the rush flyers that are everywhere around the campus at the moment.

"You're planning to rush aren't you?" she asks, and Shane nods.

"Yes. Alpha Psi, my dad's house."

"Okayyyy, well, what if you *didn't* pledge for Alpha whatever. What if you went for these guys instead?" Rose jabs her finger at the flyer again, face triumphant, and Shane stares blankly at her before leaning for a closer look.

Gamma Alpha Upsilon, the flyer reads, and Shane coughs slightly at the symbols, the Gamma drawn stylized to resemble more of a G than it should. The pride progress flag features pretty prominently in the top corner of the flyer, but the rest of it talks in strong language about the society's philanthropy and legacy traditions. They sound pretty cool, if Shane's honest. Some of the other societies, well, the way they talk about charity work comes across as a bit insincere, like it's a token effort. This one feels more authentic.

"*And* they're the gay society!" Rose cheers, way too loudly. Shane feels himself blush again as people around them look over. "Do you think they'd take allies? I'd rush for them myself, we could do it together –"

"Rose." Shane swallows around the lump in his throat. "Rose, I…my dad'll be really disappointed if I don't join Alpha Psi."

"Oh come onnnnn. You said your parents were all supportive and everything didn't you? And weren't you disappointed that there weren't any queer clubs to join on campus – this is why! Gamma Alpha Upsilon organises everything, apparently they've done tons to improve safe spaces on campus, they throw a huge pride party every year, they've won tons of awards…" she finishes by dangling her best argument over his head. "There's no way you won't find a boyfriend if you join."

Shane sighs. He knows how lame that sounds. He must be the only college boy who wanted to come to university to *settle down*. But…he does. Everyone seemed to expect him to turn into a massive gay slut when he came out, as though that was all any gay guy has ever wanted. But Shane just wants…he wants what all the straight kids had in high school, the

holding-hands and sharing-clothes and pictures-together and all of it. He wants someone there to rely on, someone who needs him and wants him and loves him.

Is that so much to ask?

“Wellllll?” Rose asks, leaning over the table to beam at him. Shane looks at her hopeful face and sighs.

“I’ll…I’ll check them out, okay? No promises. I don’t want to break my dad’s heart.”

“You’re more than your dad’s son, Shane.” Rose says, eyes clear and seeing straight to the heart of him, and then she releases him from that painful soul-searching moment to wave a hand in the air and beam at the waiter who comes over. “Two bellinis this time please!”

Shane sits back in his chair with a sigh, feeling loved. Not quite in the way he wants, but close enough for the moment to sustain him. He is lucky, to have Rose. He absently folds up the flyer and tucks it away in his pocket. He’ll check them out, he thinks. He promised.

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He keeps his promise. Rose’s friend Miles is hoping to pledge to Gamma Alpha Upsilon as well (Shane has to call them that, because he can’t bring himself to say GAY out loud yet) so at least Shane has company when they go along to the first informal event. GAY runs things a little differently: even for the informal events they have to register in advance and meet with a brother or sister over coffee first before their invite is confirmed. Shane actually had a great time on his coffee not-date, with a super gorgeous guy called Kip who it turned out was actually the President’s boyfriend, and cheerfully encouraged Shane to come along. And it felt nice, knowing that members were willing to give up their time to vet newbies, make sure the society stayed a safe space for people. So all of that, well, it led to here.

“Well they’ve got money behind them.” Miles whispers, waggling his eyebrows at Shane as the two of them drift through the rooms of the main frat house, a huge old villa now converted into rooms for half the society. It’s full of people talking, laughing, but doesn’t feel chaotic or over-crowded the way some of the other society parties have. Shane nods his agreement, impressed, looking around. The pictures on the walls show winning teams from a dozen different sports that a society brother or sister has been in, walls lined with trophies – not just from athletic competitions, but literature awards, economic honours, mathlete prizes, all of it. Shane’s run the full gauntlet of nerd to jock and back again, and quite likes the idea of being in a place that values both equally.

Kip snags them as he comes down the main staircase.

“Oh hey Shane, you made it!”

“Hi Kip. Thank you for the invite.”

“Of course, I’m really glad you decided to come along.” Kip’s practically bouncing on his toes as he turns to shake Miles’ hand. “Hi, I’m Christopher, Kip, I’m the Prez’s boyfriend, I know it’s weird to start with that but honestly, it saves time.”

“He’s basically the sixth member of exec,” a tall butch woman laughs, walking past. Kip blushes furiously and beckons them both to follow him along.

“Here, ignore Alexa, she’s just salty she lost to Rozy for Vice *again*.”

“I am not! No one wanted to deal with the tantrum if he lost!” Alexa calls back over her shoulder. Shane gets distracted for a moment watching her slide a hand around another woman’s waist, looking down at her affectionately. It’s just so…so *normal*. He swallows round a lump in his throat and when he turns back it’s to see Kip looking at him sympathetically, like he knows, he understands, he *gets it*. But he doesn’t say anything, thank god, because Shane would look so uncool if he started blubbering right now, and instead starts giving them a run down of the society as they follow him through the halls.

“Okay, so, Alexa mentioned exec, that’s a great place to start. Obviously there’s my boyfriend, Scott Hunter, he’s President. I’m not just saying this, everyone thinks it, but he’s done a great job as Prez, really fought for greater protections on campus, he set up the queer youth hotline, tons of advocacy stuff, even though he’s only a junior. He’s the best.” Kip lets out a very dreamy sigh and Shane has to avoid Miles’ eyes so they don’t both burst out laughing. Kip tells someone in the kitchen to stop fucking with his sourdough starter and then opens the door to a gaming room to point at two guys overseeing a beer pong game.

“That’s Marly and Hayden, Social and Philanthropy execs respectively. Marly is sometimes Marleau and sometimes Marlene, whatever they feel like, just ask if you’re uncertain. Hayden is our token bi – no, no, I’m joking, we adore him, and his girlfriend, mostly because she bribes us with cookies.”

“I can be bribed with cookies also.” Shane says enthusiastically. He means it sincerely but Kip laughs like Shane’s hilarious.

“Okay so those three are the ones you’ll meet tonight. Then the last two are Svetlana, our Treasurer, and Rozy, who’s Vice Prez and basically handles everything else that the others don’t.”

“And, er, throws the occasional tantrum?” Miles offers, pursing his lips. Kip just grins. He’s really gorgeous, Shane thinks absently. Shame he’s a brunette though.

“Ah, our Rozy. He’s…well, he knows what he wants and he likes to get it. But he’s an absolute pussy cat really. He and Svetlana have off-campus business this week, but you’ll meet them. You’ll *have* to meet them.”

Shane finds out why soon enough. GAY likes to run their whole rush week slightly differently as well. There’s loads of social events to meet the other members, get to know the culture and *vibe* of the society, but the most important thing is getting the literal stamp of approval from each of the five exec members. No stamp, no pledge, no place.

“It’s not, I don’t know, supposed to be a massive mission or anything.” Kip explains to Shane. Miles has been corralled by a tall white dude and is nodding along *very* enthusiastically to everything he says in a corner, but Shane and another two wannabe pledges – JJ, who’s golden skinned with a joyful bark of laughter, and Elena, sultry-eyed and

stunning – are hanging onto every word, sitting in squashy armchairs in a corner of the main room. “They do like to set tasks, but it’s supposed to be sensible things. Like, Hayden will definitely set you a charity-based task. Last year every pledge had to raise five hundred pounds for a charity of their choice – we abandoned that this year though, because there’s way too many rich kids in this college and they all just asked their parents.” He pulls a face, copied by JJ and Elena, whilst Shane shifts awkwardly in his seat. He thinks he counts as a rich kid in this college? His grandfather donated to a new wing of the library at one point. Kip keeps talking, oblivious.

“Yeah, Rozy pitched a fit about that, so this year you’ll have to do something more equalising.”

“Can you give us any tips how to get the stamp of approval from them? Especially the Prez?” Elena asks teasingly. Kip runs a hand through his hair and doesn’t even blush at the suggestion. He looks so *happy*, Shane thinks, being teased about his boyfriend. It puts something wistful and wanting in his own chest. For all he’s brushed off jokes about being the sixth member of exec, Kip’s been greeted by every single person who’s walked past, arbitrated three arguments already and given Marly a firm ‘no’ on opening another keg. He’s respected here, liked, admired, and so happy, and that’s the clincher: Kip and Hunter aren’t just happy from being together but from all the rest of it as well, this home they’ve built for all the people like them. This is the sort of legacy that means so much more than whose son or grandson you are, Shane thinks, and then winces, feeling uncomfortably sure he’s going to have to break his dad’s heart after all. He tunes back in to listen to Kit: if he *is* going to disappoint his parents, he’s at least going to have to sail perfectly through rushing for another society.

“Scott cares about how much you care, that’s all I’m going to say. You’ll have to prove to him you’re serious about GAY.” Kip looks as proud of his boyfriend as a mother over her newborn child. “Hmmm, and the others? Well, we accept all types here, even introverts! But seriously, Marly will want to know you’re willing to be part of the social life of the society in *some* way. Svetlana, er, she’ll, I don’t know, make you write one of her essays or something – I’m joking! But yeah, Svetlana will be hardest to impress. She doesn’t like anyone except Rozy – oh! And Rozy! He’ll be hard too. You’ll have to convince him you’re going to be a good brother or sister to the rest of the society, that you’ll have everyone’s backs the way we’ll have yours. Rozy’s big on family.”

“Also on twinks.” Alexa, the woman from earlier, chips in cheerfully as she walks past, a girl on each arm now. “Rozy likes them pretty and subby.” She winks, at JJ, Shane thinks. Kip throws a handful of pretzel bites at Alexa.

“Quit scaring the newbies!”

“He should know what he’s getting into!” Alexa calls back, grinning. JJ just laughs, totally unphased, and Shane takes a sip from his glass, wishing he was that confident. He’s too big to be a twink, he’s pretty sure, or at least that was the impression he got from his bleak half hour on Grindr. But also not big enough, like, muscle-wise, to be at whatever the other end of the spectrum is. He hopes this Rozy won’t mind Shane being…Shane.

“Honestly, please don’t let Alexa freak you out, everyone here is respectful and kind and lovely and –” Kip’s going a bit breathless trying to reassure them, eyes darting nervously between JJ and Shane, even though JJ’s looking off in the distance like he doesn’t think any of this is relevant to him, leaving Shane to smile at Kip.

“Don’t worry, it’s all fine. I just want to try my best. If you think, um, that’ll make…that I’ll make Rozy happy, then that’s all I need to know.”

Kip’s face does…something. Beside them Elena is taking a very large gulp of her drink.

“Yeah…yeah, I think if you say that to him with…with your eyes just like that, I think you’ll be fine.”

Shane has absolutely no idea what his eyes have to do with anything, but at least Kip seems to think he’ll be in with a chance at getting Vice President Rozy’s stamp of approval, and the other four shouldn’t be that hard either. Shane likes the idea of…of being drawn into this wild, cheerful family of theirs, almost more than he secretly loves the idea of being part of a queer society.

And, a wistful little part of his brain says, if there is a tiny chance that Ilya is queer too, then this is best possible way for Shane to find him again. He’s gone back to the gym every morning this week and not seen him at all, which has left him more down than he wants to admit. But even if his beautiful Russian boy is out of reach, maybe there’ll be another chance here for Shane to find someone who’s interested in him. Maybe even find a boyfriend!

Shane tips his drink back to swallow the dregs, and then gets up from his chair. Marly’s still in the games room, and Shane’s hockey reflexes haven’t deserted him yet. Getting a first stamp of approval tonight seems like the best way to go forward.

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“Shane.”

Shane’s been thinking about the way Ilya said his name for the past week, in that husky deep voice of his with his accent curling round the words. So it takes him a second to realise he’s *actually* hearing it this time, like, with his ears instead of inside his head.

“Oh – Ilya!”

The Russian boy is standing next to the table – Shane’s extremely cluttered table, that currently doesn’t have any place for anyone to join him. And Ilya’s standing there in the crowded coffee shop, holding a cup of his own. “Hi! Hi, do you, do you want to sit with me?”

Ilya’s got smiles tucked into the corners of his mouth again, looking down at Shane. Then he nods and Shane has a frantic thirty seconds gathering up pens and highlighters and papers and all the other random detritus he’s collected today alone, until Ilya can sprawl out in the opposite chair. He looks – wow. So good, black tank top under a leather jacket, necklace hanging down on his chest. The curls look a little fluffier when they’re not damp with sweat. Shane wonders if he still smells as good.

“How is baby freshman doing?” Ilya asks, instead of saying thanks, and takes a long sip of his coffee as he picks up the closest textbook. “*Fundamentals of Stellar* – I say that right? – *Astrophysics*? Huh. Baby freshman is smart.”

“I’m not a baby, arsehole.” Shane says, yanking his book back. He can’t help grinning though, both at the teasing note in Ilya’s voice which he’s fairly sure is friendly teasing, and just at seeing him again, here, in warm morning light instead of under fluorescent glare. He’s pretty sure Ilya would look good in all lighting though. “What do you study then?”

Ilya works his jaw briefly as he sets his cup on the table. For a moment Shane thinks he’s avoiding answering the question – he seems more interested in studying Shane’s colour-coded sticky notes, a little smile on his face – but then he looks up, very serious.

“Poetry.”

“Er. Okay.” Is he serious? Ilya looks like he should be in a biker gang or something. Shane knows he’s smiling uncertainly, but Ilya’s expression doesn’t change. “That’s cool. I – I think the stars are kinda poetic sometimes. I’m convinced they sing to each other, anyway.”

Ilya stares at him.

“You think stars sing to each other?”

“Or – or maybe they’re telling each other poetry, I don’t know.”

He’s lame. He is so, *so* fucking lame. Ilya is still staring. Shane clears his throat and nods to his cup.

“What – what’s your usual order?”

“Why, you want to buy me coffee?” The answer comes shooting back instantly and Shane tries and fails not to go pink. Ilya’s leg is bouncing next to the table again.

Be brave.

“I – I, er –”

Be brave.

“Y-yeah, sure. All college students need coffee right?”

Well, that was halfway there. But he said it, technically, said that he wants to buy Ilya a coffee and that – that’s asking someone out, sort of, isn’t it? Shane realises he’s staring very hard at his pink highlighter. He should probably look up at Ilya now, he should –

His phone vibrates on the table and then lights up with an obviously huge wall of text. Shane groans without thinking, reaching for it and scrolling down. A reminder about the task Marly set for him, procuring a whole list of bizarre items for a party tomorrow, half of which can only be acquired from other members of the society. It’s a fun mission actually, because Shane feels so much better approaching people with an actual reason instead of vague ideas

of ‘making friends’, and with every person he meets he feels more part of the family. But still: this is going to be a lot of legwork.

“Big sigh. Hope that’s not your boyfriend.” Ilya says across the table. Shane had, er, sort of forgotten he was there, which in hindsight feels insane. Shane jerks his head up to see Ilya indicate his phone with his chin. “Well? Big message?”

“Oh, oh, no, not a boyfriend, I’m single.” Shane says, gushes. Ilya tilts his head very slightly to the side, his blue eyes feeling very hot on Shane’s face. He’s – is that expression a good thing? Shane licks at his lips. He feels really hot. Is this normal? “It’s, um, instructions for a rush.”

“Oh?” Ilya sits up suddenly. Is his bottom lip sticking out a bit? He starts poking at Shane’s books again. “You are pledge?”

“Yeah I hope so. I mean, I’ve got to, y’know, do all the networking and stuff first.”

“*Networking*.” Okay so Shane doesn’t like networking either, but Ilya’s accent manages to give the word an incredible level of disdain. “That is bad purpose of society. *Networking*.” Shane has no idea how to reply to that, but then he doesn’t have to, because suddenly Ilya is tugging his notebook free. It’s one of the ones his mum got for him, with his name stamped on the front. Shane goes pink. Can – can Ilya tell that Shane’s mum bought it for him? Is Ilya going to tease him again?

Oh please let Ilya tease him again.

“This name. *Hollander.”* Ilya points to the cover, to the letters there in gold. There aren’t any smiles anywhere on his face when he looks up at Shane’s face almost – almost accusingly? “This name is on library door. New European literature wing. I see it every day.”

“Er – yeah. That was – my grandfather – he –”

“Oh, he big donor right?” Ilya sits back with a thump, picking up his coffee again and holding it between them. He’s only on the other side of the table but he suddenly feels very far away. “Let me guess, you’re pledge for Alpha Psi?”

Shane doesn’t know what to say, because…because he went to their socials too, talked to the President and the Brotherhood Chair, made small talk about trips to Aspen and Jackson Hole and what the proposed cap to tax deductible personal allowances means for investments next year. He did it because he wanted to be able to tell his dad he tried, but it had made him feel all weird and wrong even as he did it, the way those guys had clapped him on the back the second they heard his name, as though that was all he needed to do, like they weren’t interested in anything about him apart from that. None of them had laughed with him or reassured him. None of them had thrown pretzel bites at each other.

“I – I haven’t decided yet.”

Ilya nods jerkily, looking away. The flush of pure hope that had shot through Shane when Ilya asked about *a boyfriend*, suddenly all that’s draining away. He thumbs at the edge of the

notebook that Ilya had spotted, at his own name written there, trying to swallow around the lump in his throat.

“Hey. Can I borrow?”

“What?”

Ilya jerks his chin at the notebook again, eyebrows high.

“Borrow this. Paper. And pen. To write.”

Shane hands the items over blankly, blinking when Ilya pulls the notebook towards him, opening it to a random page hard enough to crack the spine, and then hunching over it like a gremlin, scrawling away. He somehow knows without looking when Shane tries to peek, tugging it further under the cover of his arm and scowling at him – why, Shane’s got no idea, because he’s close enough to see that Ilya’s writing in Cyrillic characters anyway. But he backs off obediently, hands up and eyes wide, which seems to make Ilya scowl further and go back to stabbing the page. Shane turns back to his textbook. It’s difficult, at first, to work, when he’s got blond curls less than a foot in front of him and Ilya’s rough voice occasionally muttering bits of Russian to himself, but something about the little circle they’ve created, the background hum of the café around them…it’s soothing. Shane works.

He’s not sure how long it’s been when various urges make themselves known: he needs to crack his spine and use the bathroom and get another tea, in that order. Without thinking he stretches his leg out across the space between them and nudges against Ilya’s foot. The other man’s head comes up and he looks – sweet, and open, and unguarded. Shane smiles at him helplessly.

“Hey. I’m going to get another drink. Want anything?” Ilya’s just staring at him. “Ilya? Do you want another drink?”

“What – oh. Yes. Please.”

“Okay.” Wow, he must have been really deep in concentration. He looks like a flustered duck now and Shane feels stupidly, helplessly fond, for this guy he’s met *twice*. “You’ll need to tell me your order then.”

“Ah, I have…I will have a double shot latte, please. Plain.”

Shane grins. “Don’t worry, I didn’t have you pegged as a double caramel whipped cream guy.”

“I like whipped cream.” Ilya says. “Under right circumstances.”

There is nothing Shane can think to say to that.

The line seems to take forever but he’s too excited to notice, splitting his time between craning on his tiptoes to try and spot Ilya back at their table and peering through the glass of the cake case, wondering if Ilya likes cake. Do Russians like cake? They have some kind of honey cake thing don’t they? Would Ilya want to eat cake with him? With…whipped cream?

He manages to navigate his way back through the crowded café with both cups in hand, feeling vaguely proud of himself both for that and for resisting the urge to buy Ilya half the cake case. But then the feeling turns sour in his stomach, because Ilya's already standing next to the table, his leather jacket back on, talking on the phone in clipped sentences. He mutters something into it when he sees Shane approaching and hangs up.

"Sorry. Duty calls. I have to go."

"Oh. Yeah no worries – I got the drinks to go anyway." Because he'd had a vague plan of asking Ilya if he wanted to walk round the campus lake with him, but yeah, this is convenient anyway. Shane realises he's just standing there holding the cup like an idiot and blushes to hand it over. Ilya opens his mouth, probably about to ask what he owes, which would make it less date-like, so Shane hurriedly interrupts.

"On me, obviously! Don't worry if you have to go. I'll…see you around, I guess? Oh, my…" His notebook's on the table, placed neatly on top of his other textbooks, the pen lined up with his others.

"I tore page out." Ilya says awkwardly. "Hope that's okay."

"Yeah of course. Was it – were you…writing a poem?"

Ilya actually looks embarrassed, or at least Shane thinks he does. That's almost definitely a blush as Ilya determinedly looks off to the distance again and takes a defiant gulp of his coffee. Shane's just impressed. He remembers agonising over every literary essay in high school, the words refusing to come. To just sit down and – write art, that's incredible.

"What was it about?" he asks. Ilya turns to look at him and oh fuck his eyes are so *blue*, so intense, as they trail absently over Shane's face. Shane resists the urge to rub at his stupid freckles there.

"Constellations." Ilya says shortly, and Shane beams.

"Oh! Like my stars."

"Yes. You are inspiration. I have to go now." Ilya says, looking a little wild-eyed, and just like that he marches off. Shane absently watches him go, realises that makes him a perv, and sits down with a thump at the table. And then puts his head down on it with a matching thump. How did he manage to miss getting Ilya's number *again?*

And what will he do if he doesn't get a third chance?

****

"Are we sure this is gonna work?" JJ whispers next to him. Shane claps him on the shoulder.

"Power in numbers. And it's a great idea, a classic – all credit to Elena of course!"

"Charmer," mutters Elena from his other side. Three other GAY pledges are behind them – basically everyone who'd said they were nervous about getting a philanthropy stamp from

Hayden. Shane's so pleased that the little group chat he set up for the pledges is being useful for people. Kip had said it was a great idea when Shane had tentatively asked if it was against the rules for them to all work together. He'd had a whole argument planned about how they were going to pool their efforts for the fundraising, and they'd probably be able to raise so much more that way than as individuals, and how it would really help them form the bonds of brother- and sister-hood that Hunter cared about – but Kip hadn't needed to hear any of it, just agreed on the spot and waved him on. So now they were here.

"Alright." Shane raises his voice. "Put up the signs."

The signs are hauled into place, and JJ and Shane carry the buckets and sponges forward. They've picked a good spot for the fundraising car wash, just off the main road into campus, with plenty of space for cars to pull into and near another campus café. Shane talked to the owner this morning, and they agreed a 20% discount for anyone who brought a car in or donated to the fundraiser – that features prominently on one of the signs.

He recognises the first car pulling off, and waves Elena away as he leans down to grin in the window.

"Morning gorgeous."

"Hey handsome." Rose beams at him, and then frowns. "Shane, what are you doing? Take your top off."

"What? No. It's not that sort of car wash." Even though JJ's already topless, and Elena and Macy are in bikini tops. Shane's in a white t-shirt and board shorts, surely that's fine.

"Shane. You work out like every single day. Your chest is incredible. People make the donation *after* they've watched you wash their car. *Take your top off*."

Shane huffs at her. He needs a new best friend. But Macy's walking past (giving Rose a speculative look as she does) and she grins at him shamelessly.

"Listen to the pretty lady Shane. We all followed you in this plan because we figured you with your tits out would push us over the society fundraising record."

"You are a very smart and also very pretty lady." Rose crows, pointing a finger at Macy, and then uses it to prod Shane in the chest. "Take. It. Off."

"This is sexual harassment." Shane tells her, and takes his top off. Rose beams, leaves her car with him whilst she gets a Frappuccino, and then gives them a ridiculous two hundred dollar donation. The team cheers, JJ tells Shane he's got the most biteable pecs he's ever seen, and then there's no time to banter anymore because they are *busy*.

After the first couple of hours Shane straightens up and goes to check their donations box, stretching out his back and his arms as he does. At first all he can see is Macy's back next to the little table they're using as a counter, weirdly rigid, and then he rounds the corner to see one of the most breath-takingly beautiful women he's ever seen, with Macy gazing in open-mouthed adoration at her face.

Beautiful Woman is rifling through their petty cash box and scanning their list of card receipts, apparently simultaneously. Despite the autumn heat her curls are impeccably bouncy as she glances up irritably at Shane and then pauses, scanning him up and down slowly.

“You are leader here, yes?”

Oh wow, another Russian accent. There must be a community on campus or something. Shane smiles at her, feeling inexplicably fond at the sound of crisp vowels.

“Um, yeah, I’m –”

“I’m Svetlana, Treasurer. These are your accurate numbers?”

“Yes.” Shane hesitates, wondering whether to tell her that he’s very good at math and very confident those are accurate numbers. That sounds a bit braggy, so he doesn’t. “How – er, how are we doing?”

“Good.” Svetlana says. She’s tapping away on her phone now, fingers flying over the keys, and only pauses briefly once to shoot Shane’s chest a considering glance before going back to tapping. Shane risks a glance at Macy, but she still looks like she’s three seconds away from falling to her knees and begging for the chance to put her face in Svetlana’s crotch. Which, to be fair, is the same way Shane felt when he met *his* Russian, so he gets it.

Svetlana’s attention comes back to him abruptly.

“Numbers are very good. Good effort, pledges.”

“So…” Shane gives her a cheeky grin. “Would this earn us the approval of the Treasurer as well as Philanthropy?”

“You want mark of approval?” Svetlana seems more amused than offended. She consults her phone again briefly. “You stay open another forty minutes, yes?”

“Er, yeah, we’re planning to go all morning.”

“Good. Then, maybe.” She pauses briefly to look up at their banners. Hayden told them they didn’t need to put the society’s symbols anywhere – because there’s still some arseholes on campus, and he wanted them to be safe – but Shane insisted they fundraise for a relevant charity anyway, and he’s proud of the way the logo of a local trans support group looks on the breeze. And they haven’t even had any arseholes; mostly people don’t even seem to notice, too busy watching their cars being washed, but whatever, at least Shane knows the money’s going to a good cause.

Svetlana has to leave, but she seems pleased with them – enough to make Macy whimper, at least – and very insistent that they keep going at least a while longer. JJ and Elena are flagging, so Shane tells them to take a break and finishes off the next car himself, whilst Macy and Aiden take care of another. He’s just straightened up, thanking a giggling girl for her eighty dollar tip, when he hears a Russian accent again.

“You do bikes here, or only cars?”

“Ilya!” Shane can’t help it: it feels really good to see Ilya again. The other man is showing off yet another great fit, a white shirt open at the collar and tight black jeans, jesus, Shane was not emotionally, mentally or sexually prepared for a sight this good today. He wrings the sponge in his hands so tight water gushes out over his feet and both he and Ilya have to jump to dodge it. Ilya’s eyes are looking somewhere near his shoulders when Shane stops bouncing.

“What did you say?” Shane asks him, and Ilya’s eyes snap back up.

“I don’t have car, only bike. That’s okay?” he gestures behind him, and Shane blinks to see the black motorbike there. He knows absolutely nothing about bikes, has never really even thought about them before – but he’s thinking about them now, about Ilya’s thighs straddling it, about his strong forearms and large hands on the handlebars, about –

“Shane? That okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, sure.” Shane breathes out, hoping he’s not going pink, especially when he’s not wearing anything. Goddamn Rose. “Er, yeah, we can clean it –”

“You. You clean it.” Ilya coughs, and then swallows. “I am – protective. I don’t want strangers touching my bike. Only you please.”

“Oh yeah that’s fine.” Shane has absolutely no idea what he’s doing. “I…I don’t know much about bikes though. You might have to, um, tell me what to do.”

Ilya stares at him for so long that Shane wonders if he actually heard him, but in the end Ilya just nods jerkily and walks off to their little counter. He comes back ten seconds later dragging one of the uncomfortable folding chairs behind him and puts it down almost right next to the bike. Then he sits down and looks expectantly at Shane. Shane stares back.

“That’s – you’re really close, you might get splashed.”

“It’s fine.”

“I, er, sorry if I have to squeeze past you.”

“It’s fine.”

“If that chair’s not comfortable you can go to the café –”

“Shane.” Ilya’s looking at him with those eyes so bright Shane can barely breathe. “It’s fine.”

Okay. Okay. Shane feels hot all over and nervous and also kind of happy? With Ilya’s attention all totally on him. “I’ll…I’ll do my best okay, just tell me what to do.”

Ilya breathes out, very slowly. “It’s fine.”

Shane starts off slow, hesitant, but Ilya’s voice is calm and confident enough for both of them, letting Shane know where to touch and what to do till he can just let it direct him entirely, squeezing the sponge so that water cascades down over the bike’s sides, dripping

down his arms and onto his legs. He's pretty sure he's got soap suds in his hair now – he's definitely sure he's got them everywhere else – but when he glances over at Ilya he's smiling, but not in a joking way, but in a way that brightens even more when he catches Shane's eye. He only stops looking once, to tap something briefly on his phone, and then his attention comes back laser-focused on Shane.

But a bike is an awful lot smaller than a car and it seems barely any time at all before Shane's straightening up with a sigh, rubbing at the ache in his lower back from where he's been crouched over. He senses more than sees Ilya coming up beside him.

"Looks good. You did good job Shane."

Oh. Okay then. That's – that's a thing Shane's just learnt about himself.

"Good enough for a mark of approval I hope." Shane manages to joke, once his tongue's unstuck itself from the roof of his mouth. Ilya blinks at him.

"You – want my mark?"

Something's probably gotten lost in translation, Shane figures. He waves a hand around the space: Macy and Elena throwing buckets of water over a truck and JJ cleaning a windscreen.

"No no, sorry – a, er, a stamp of approval from the Philanthropy exec, for the pledges. We're fundraising."

Ilya pauses where he's patting at the bike's seat – Shane was careful, so it's all pretty dry – to look up sceptically at the banners.

"Alpha Psi supports this charity?"

"What? Oh – no, I'm not, um, not rushing for them…" Shane trails off when Ilya swings a leg over the bike. Fuck he's got nice thighs. Ilya gives him a wicked smile.

"I would offer lift somewhere, but you busy no? Another time maybe?"

"S-sure." Shane manages to say, and then Ilya clicks his fingers thoughtfully. The wicked smile is still on his face, making him look mischievous and younger. Shane watches helplessly as he reaches into a back pocket and tugs out –

"Woah, that's way too much."

"You did *excellent* job." Ilya insists, and Shane hates hates hates the way he can feel his blush spread red and hot down from his face across his chest, hates how obvious it is that Ilya blatantly notices it, watching it go. Then he reaches out and presses the wad of notes into Shane's hand, fingers brushing over his palm.

"Here. Good job, good cause. Worth it."

"Thanks." Shane whispers, and Ilya – surely there's no way Ilya can't tell the effect he's having? Surely he's decent enough either to put Shane out of his misery by letting him down

gently, or letting Shane drop to his knees and – Ilya just grins at him, bright and sunny and still mischievous round the corners, and then he's kicking his bike to life and carefully steering it away, leaving Shane soapy and still-blushing.

"Damn Shane, this was an incredible idea." JJ says, suddenly appearing to drape an arm around his shoulder. "Two execs came along to check out our work, we're all shoo-ins for sure!"

"Yeah." Shane agrees, and then blinks. "Wait, what? What execs?"

"Er…Svetlana? The bombshell Treasurer from earlier? And Rozanov, the Vice Prez?"

"The Vice Prez is here?" asks Shane, looking round, irritated with himself for being such a dumb drooling gay that he totally missed the arrival of the Vice Prez and then he realises JJ is looking at him like he's a dumb gay for an entirely different reason. Oh, no.

"Rozanov…?" he asks, and JJ nods slowly.

"Yeah? Ilya Rozanov, Rozy, the whole, infamous bad boy of the Russian poetry department, the bane of the Dean, the hottest guy on campus, whatever. The guy you were just talking to? Whose bike you just cleaned? Shane, please tell me you know that's the Vice Prez?!"

"I literally do not know anything at all." Shane tells him, and goes to fill another bucket.

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This club is stupid.

The music is stupid the lights are stupid the people are stupid and Ilya does not want to be here.

"You are being goat." Svetlana says in Russian next to him. "Stop being stubborn and stupid. We are here to have fun."

Ilya steals her drink and downs half of it. They're leaning on a railing overlooking most of the club, the lights flashing pink and blue down over them. The dancefloor below is a mass of moving bodies, sweaty and sticky in all good ways. It is a Straight club, technically, but Ilya could find a cute girl, or convince a cute boy, if he was in the mood.

He is not.

"We are here because Marly says so, and then Hunter also says so," he points out. Hunter probably would have let them off except little Christopher batted his eyelashes and talked about *team bonding*, so now he and Sveta are here, waiting for pledges to arrive so they can make sure none of them get lost on way to bathroom.

Ilya has barely met any of the pledges yet. Only one, Miles, who tried to hit on him three times. Miles is attractive, very, but not in the right ways, not anymore. He does not have soft eyes like deer, or pink round mouth, or cute little freckles like constellation over his cheeks. These are the things that are attractive now…

Ilya leans right over so he can rest his forehead on the cold metal railing. This is not good. This is so not good.

“Ah, they are here.” Svetlana says, and Ilya uses all the muscles he has in his arms – which is a lot – to pull himself up and stare down at floor. Hmm. There is Miles. There is other boy, looks familiar, DJ? Some girls too. Some –

Ilya sucks in air too fast, feels his lungs hurt and his heart thump and grabs Svetlana’s arm.

“There! There – you see!”

“What?!”

“Him! Shane! Shane from the gym from the coffee from the car wash.”

“Yes, obviously.” Svetlana’s not even looking, prying his fingers off her arm. “Of course it is Shane. I told you, we are here to have fun.”

Ilya is…confused. If Alpha Psi are here then he is leaving. He stares into Svetlana’s eyes and she stares back and then they share Russian telepathic bond and she sighs and flicks his forehead.

“Мудак! Why do you think I called you to car wash? Why do you think *I* was at car wash. Shane is our pledge.”

Our pledge.

That is too much for Ilya’s brain to take in. He stares helplessly over the railing at Shane – in *very* tight black t-shirt – walking through crowd, and then back to Svetlana’s face, full of little exasperation and much fondness.

“There were girls in bikinis at car wash, why else would you be there.”

Svetlana snorts, but does not deny it. Her messages that day had only told him there was a beautiful boy with pecs big enough to fit in his whole hand at the car wash, and confirming he would be there within forty minutes. She hadn’t mentioned it was GAY’s car wash, and Ilya is so busy now, arguing with the Dean about new contribution rules, that he hasn’t followed what tasks Hayden set this year.

But of course, the car wash had been Shane’s idea. He has heard that, about the pledge organising all the others, about how they follow him, about his leadership and kindness and commitment. He just hadn’t realised it was *Shane*.

Shane wants to pledge for GAY. Shane wants to be in the same society as him. Shane needs *to get Ilya’s mark of approval.*

“Stamp of approval cannot be traded for sexual favours.” Sveta says, and Ilya gives her middle finger, drinks the rest of her drink, and goes.

His feet are moving already, taking him downstairs. He can see Shane by the bar, between Miles and pretty girl, watching the crowd with the little shape in between his eyebrows that he has when he is not sure. It is Ilya's third favourite expression on him, after the way he smiles when he is happy, and then way he looks when Ilya has his legs spread wide.

"Hunter," he murmurs, cool and quiet, as he passes his President. He is on a mission, focused, but as always Hunter is pain in arse and taps him on shoulder.

"Rozanov. Good to see you out tonight? You need a break as much as anyone okay."

"Uh huh, sure, break." Ilya does not have time for this. Shane is most beautiful man in this entire club. What if someone else gets there first? Ilya will have to waste time scaring them off before he can have Shane all to himself.

"Scott, I think Ilya's a little *busy.*" Christopher is there, like always, giving Ilya a smile that is too big. He is always so cheerful, Svetlana and Ilya never trust it, Russian instinct. Then Christopher waggles his finger at Ilya. "Remember, your stamp of approval can't be traded for sexual favours."

Ilya stares at him, then at the ceiling, then back at him.

"Did everyone know I want this boy?"

Hunter snorts amusement into his beer. Christopher grins. Too bright. Shane's smile is nicer, his pink little mouth all curvy. Oh, the things Ilya wants to do with that mouth.

"Like I said," Hunter smiles. "You deserve a break."

Ilya doesn't have response to that, so he ignores them and walks past rest of the society, ignoring all the smiles and winks, until he is finally next to Shane. Shane is drinking…a ginger ale? Okay fine. That is cute, but everything Shane does is cute, so.

"Shane," he says, and Shane turns and his whole face goes bright and happy and Ilya wants to put his face in his neck and never leave that spot.

Oh, and also fuck him till he cries.

"Ilya – oh, er, *Rozy*." Hmm, now Shane is going pink, which is also excellent look for him. Ilya watches the pink travel below the neckline of the black t-shirt and thinks wistfully about Shane's pecs again. He wants to put his hands all over that chest and *squeeze*.

But Shane is still pink and also not looking at him. Unacceptable.

"Shane," he says, a little more force in his voice, and Shane jerks and meets his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he gasps. "I – I never realised that you were, um, the Vice Prez? I hope you didn't think that I – although obviously I wasn't – with the coffee and – I wanted –"

Ilya holds up a finger. Miles and pretty girl are still standing next to them, spectators, and Ilya gives them long look until they both pick up their drinks and leave, and then there's space for

Ilya to slide in next to Shane against the bar. Then it's just the two of them, the way it should be.

"Rozy is stupid nickname," he tells Shane. "Even stupider than Kip. Exec all call me Rozanov, but you, call me Ilya, please."

"Okay, Ilya." Shane is happy again, which is only solace for losing blush. Ilya tucks himself in a little closer. Their hips are very close now, their chests, and Shane is looking at him through his lashes the way he did that very first time, when Ilya would have sucked him off in the gym showers with zero hesitation. Ilya was…hmmm…ninety-nine percent sure Shane liked men too, but there was still that one percent, that maybe Shane was oblivious, or playing trick, or bought him a drink from kindness. So better to wait. But now Ilya is here, and Shane is a pledge for queer society, and Shane is looking at Ilya like he wants Ilya to tell him what to do again and –

Ilya is not good man. Mostly, he is horny man, who will try to make things good. For Shane, he will try *really* hard, and thinks that will be worth it. But for now, he should make first move and –

"Be brave," he hears Shane mumble, and then there are fingertips on his arm and Shane is leaning closer, soft and warm and so nervous he is trembling but...he is brave.

"Ilya? Could – could I…buy you a drink?"

Oh, Ilya is fucked.

"You have already bought me drink, on first date. This turn is mine, yes?" Ilya says, and has to take deep breath when Shane's eyelashes flutter and his mouth does a little gasp. He has stars shining in his eyes – to match the ones across his cheeks – when they open to look at Ilya, overjoyed.

"That was a date? In the coffee shop? Definitely?"

Ilya shrugs a shoulder. There is a fizzy feeling inside his chest that makes him want to smile more. Maybe later he will, when there is only Shane to see it.

"Yes. I hope."

"I hope too – I mean, yes, I know, for sure. It was a date." Shane's grinning at him again. Ilya would like to kiss that smile, but he can feel *much too many* pairs of eyes on them.

"We should go somewhere more quiet, to talk?" he offers, and Shane nods instantly. He follows, lovely and obedient, as Ilya leads them over to a quieter part of the club and sets their drinks on a ledge on the wall. It's calmer here, no one watching them, which means Ilya will get to chat to Shane as much as he wants and –

He turns, and Shane is kissing him.

Oh, Shane has not done this a lot, he can tell, but it's still good, and the way Shane presses against him is even better, when Ilya grips his jaw and moves him how he wants, teaching

him with his lips and his tongue how to open his mouth and take Ilya's. Shane is warm and strong and is pressing his hips against Ilya's in needy desperate little movements that are so fucking hot Ilya almost cannot bear it.

Ilya is so gone for this boy. It feels good to be gone for him.

He pulls away and holds up a finger. Sometimes, his friends do make good points.

"Shane," he says, waiting for Shane's eyes to focus on him instead of his mouth. "Shane, I do not trade sexual favours for marks of approval."

Shane nods, but still does not appear to be totally paying attention. That is the impression Ilya gets when Shane leans forward and puts his mouth on Ilya's finger, wrapping his tongue round it. Ilya feels his knees wobble. Shane sucks his finger like a cock for another thirty seconds whilst Ilya does not breathe, and then pulls off to smile like sweetness.

"Okay. Can I have your marks and approval anyway? The sexual favours I'll do for free."

Ilya does not whimper. Or, only a little bit. Mostly all he can think about is Shane, Shane, Shane, and making them both feel so good they can't breathe. Shane agrees with this plan, because he lets Ilya push him back, more into the corner, where it is dark and safe for them and they can kiss until Ilya is dizzy with it. He has one hand on Shane's chest, feeling the thick muscle there, a perfect good handful, and the other one stroking the dimples in Shane's back, keeping their hips pressed close and snug. Everything is good and perfect and then Shane is…wriggling?

"Hey, hey, I want to – let me try…" Shane whispers, and Ilya would let him do anything, so he shifts apart and then nearly swallows his tongue when Shane slides to his knees. "Can… can I have you in my mouth?"

"Yes. Yes, yes, солнышко**,** you are sure?" Ilya whispers back. He is hard length inside his jeans and Shane's fingers are rubbing at him, so sweet and eager. He strokes a thumb over Shane's bottom lip. "You are sure?"

"Please?" says Shane, and Ilya is only a man. He rests his arm against the wall so he can lean and look down and watch, watch as Shane takes him out and rubs his cheek against the length, looking starry-eyed and dazed and like he is in love with Ilya's cock. That's okay. Ilya is pretty much in love with all the pieces of Shane, he is sure of it. Especially his mouth and his tongue, when he opens wide and takes Ilya in, sweet and careful. Ilya cups his jaw and holds him there.

"Careful Золотце. Not too fast. I am not leaving, you can go slow with me."

Shane blinks up at him and smiles, pink mouth wet round his cock and Ilya groans and moves, just a little, in and out. He is almost there already, just from how good that tongue feels, flicking over the tip. Will Shane let him come in his mouth? No, no, Ilya must be considerate. Save it for another time, to come all over his face and rub it into his freckles.

“You do so well,” he murmurs. “So well, Shane, make me feel so good.” He can see Shane’s arm move, pressing between his legs. That is something else for another time, for Ilya to get himself between those legs and press there himself. “So good – ah – so fucking good, so sweet for me. You are so good already – your first time at this yes? And already so good…if you want to practice, I am here, yes? Whenever you want. I’ll…ah, I’ll teach you. How to please me.”

Shane moans so loud Ilya can hear it over the music. There’s pretty little tears sparkling on his eyelashes now and he’s moving his mouth, hungry. Ilya rests both hands on the wall and rocks forward, just a little, just enough to nudge firmer inside. Shane is so pretty and perfect, sitting there rubbing his own cock, with his mouth open for Ilya to enjoy. He’s so close, he’s –

“Fuck!” he gasps, and drags himself out. Shane whines, grabs for him, tries to put his mouth back on and *oh fuck* how much Ilya wants to let him, but he knows he cannot control himself when he comes and he’s *big* and he will need to train Shane to take him all, the whole hot length of him, and that is it – that’s enough – the thought of training Shane to swallow his whole cock, and he’s coming into his hand, groaning, feeling pleasure like a bomb at the base of his cock.

And then, in the moments after when his brain comes back, he feels another thing too. Little licks of a tongue. It’s Shane, lapping away, licking the strings of come off Ilya’s cock and his fingers. Ilya stares at the top of his head. He wonders how many dates until it is acceptable to propose marriage.

“Shane,” he croaks out. Shane looks up at him. His pupils are blown wide and his mouth is very red. Ilya cannot trust his knees right now, but he can bend, to kiss that beautiful mouth and murmur sweetness in Russian and English. Shane deserves all of it, everything Ilya can give him.

He also deserves an orgasm that Ilya gives him instead of his own hands, but Ilya cannot deny that he is flattered when he tugs Shane to his feet and finds that Shane is already boneless and sated in his hands, grinning woozily at him. Ilya cups him anyway, just to watch him rise to his toes and hiss from the touch. Something else to explore for another time.

“I think I will take you home now,” he says, and Shane brightens up all over again. Ilya gives him a peck on the forehead and then clucks his tongue. “No, no, to your home, to sleep.”

“Can’t I come back with you?” Shane asks, because apparently he has gone from virgin to minx in ten minutes flat which, really, is quite impressive. But Ilya will do this right for once in his goddamn life, and kisses his forehead again. And then the bridge of his nose, and then his cheeks, and then every single one of those goddamn freckles, and then his mouth.

“No. Not tonight. Proper date first, and then we will see.”

“Okay.” Shane grins dopily at him. Ilya smiles back. He’s stroking his hands all over Shane, up and down, just because it feels so good to touch him. “And…and then you have to tell me. What to do. To get your stamp of approval.”

Something thumps in Ilya's gut, despite only coming seconds ago. He could go again, right now, right at the thought of *telling Shane what to do*.

"Would you?" he asks softly, taking Shane's mouth in kiss that is gentle and filthy at same time. "Would you be good boy for me? Whatever I want, you will do? Would - would you be mine?"

Shane sways in his arms, nodding, joyous. His freckles are stars across his face and Ilya wants to speak poetry to them. He tucks filthy thoughts away for another time. He has Shane properly now, no longer beautiful boy who drifts past him across campus, as far beyond him as those stars. He can wait. He can do this properly.

Shane's looking at him now, soft and sweet again, that makes Ilya want to tuck him under his arm and take him home. So he does. As soon as they leave corner there are too many eyes on them again, but at least they are all happy ones: Sveta laughing with her eyes from the balcony, the pledges cheering Shane on, and Hunter and Christopher saluting them with their drinks. Ilya rolls his eyes and ignores them all. Shane is warm against his side and their hands are tight together, and he is the only thing that matters.

"Ilya," he hears Shane murmur as they leave, and Ilya takes him home.

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"Shane? Shane darling, you're very distracted this evening."

"I –" Shane stares at his parent's faces, his dad blinking at him, his mother already reaching across the table to squeeze his hand. He's fairly sure he shouldn't admit that he was daydreaming about his almost-boyfriend's dick at the dinner table. "I'm fine."

His parents exchange a look.

"Shane, sweetheart…you're looking a little tired. If you need a break from college for a day or two just say, we can whisk you off skiing or –"

"What? No, mum, I love college. My course is great and my friends are there and –"

"It's fine to have an adjustment period," his dad says soothingly. "It's natural, normal even. That's why I suggested you get in touch with the Alpha Psi guys – they'll all be going through the exact same thing. Brothers-in-arms, that's what you need."

Shane swallows hard. He…he knew he was going to have to have this conversation tonight, but that doesn't mean he's managed to prepare for it. He hates letting his parents down. He's already disappointed them so much – first giving up hockey, then coming out – okay, so they weren't *disappointed* by that last bit but…but it hadn't been in his mum's plans, he knows that. And now he's upsetting things again.

"Shane?"

"Yeah?"

Oh shit, now they're looking at him like they're even more worried. His mum is shuffling her chair round to get a bit closer to him.

"Shane honey, you're starting to worry me a little. You know you can tell us anything, right?"

Be brave, Shane thinks, and then hears in his head, in Ilya's voice: *would you be mine?*

"Dad, I'm sorry," he blurts out. "I…the Alpha Psi guys were great, really, um, really friendly, but I just…there's this other society that I – I went to some of their events and they were amazing and I just – I think I might…I might pledge for them instead."

There's a long silence when he's finished speaking, or babbling, if he's being honest. His dad looks – Shane can't tell? Not too upset, he's pretty sure. But a little taken aback maybe. Shane can tell his mum is giving him a Look though, so after a second his dad coughs and shifts a little.

"Well, I…well that's okay, of course. If you've found somewhere that feels right for you, that's all that matters."

A line of tension down his spine that Shane didn't know he was holding suddenly gives out, and he takes a deep breath for the first time in weeks. He manages a weak smile and his mum smiles back and then his dad does too, a bit more wobbly but there.

"Was that really bothering you sweetheart?" his mum asks quietly, and kisses his head when Shane nods yes. "Well, I'm glad we got it resolved then. Do you want to tell us about the fraternity you've chosen for yourself? They're all good people I hope."

She's dying to ask if they're good connections, Shane knows, but he appreciates her managing to hold back. But he loves his mum, so he at least did his research a bit before he came.

"It's Gamma Alpha Upsilon. They're, er, a mixed society, with…with a focus on LGBT+ issues. But they're involved in a lot of post-graduate programmes and have some great work placement opportunities with former members. The President's already offered to put me in touch with a couple of guys at CAL."

"Oh, well that sounds good, doesn't it hun?" His mum asks, looking approvingly at his father. "I know Alpha Psi wasn't quite as invested in the STEM side of things. So, if you're sure this is the right fit for you Shane..."

"I am."

"Well, good, great." She shuffles back to her side of the table and flashes him a quick smile before picking up her cutlery again. "And here I thought you were going to tell us you maybe had a boyfriend now."

Shane has an immediate flashback to taking Ilya's cock halfway down his throat last night, kneeling on the floor beside his bed whilst Ilya's husky voice talked him through it, praising

him all the way. Are they boyfriends? Almost-boyfriends? What do you call a guy whose come you've swallowed but you don't know his favourite food yet.

"Shane? Are you okay, is the food too hot? You've gone red."

Tomorrow, Shane thinks. That's the night of their first proper date, and the ceremony at the house. Tomorrow, he'll know for sure.

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Ilya's room in the house is somehow sparse and snug at the same time. It's not scrupulously organised the way Shane's is, but he also just seems to have a lot…less. There's only a single photo of him and Svetlana on the desk, and one wardrobe, which mostly seems to be hoodies and black tank tops. His bed is a massive pile of dark pillows and duvets and Shane is absolutely 100% sure that it will smell like him when Shane finally gets in there. The most interesting thing is the bookshelf, which is filled – *filled* – with poetry books, all of them with a dozen paper bookmarks sticking out, stacked high and haphazardly, the spines cracked in a hundred places.

And there, taped to the wall next to the desk, is a single torn piece of paper.

"Hey, don't look there." Ilya says when Shane bends to peer at it. "Look – another way."

"Is that the page from my notebook?" Shane asks, feeling silly and happy. Turns out he quite likes teasing Ilya as well. "The poem about constellations?"

"…no." Ilya says, unconvincingly. Shane resolves to start learning Cyrillic immediately. Ilya frowns at him.

"Stop it. Do not learn Russian."

"I learnt French in like three months." Shane tells him, and Ilya huffs even as he pulls Shane in to kiss his forehead.

"Yes, yes, my very smart boyfriend."

Shane breathes in too fast and too obvious, enough that Ilya cocks his head to look at him. They've just got back from their first proper date – because Ilya had insisted that him coming round to Shane's room two days ago to feed him his cock didn't count – and it's been everything Shane has ever wanted, Ilya holding his hand outside the restaurant and even grumpily posing for a selfie together. But he doesn't understand the rules about boyfriend-declarations. He thinks there's some rules about length of time dating or milestones reached or other unspoken indicators that everyone's always seemed to know but him...

"What?" Ilya asks, but he looks a little nervous. Shane is cataloguing all his reactions now, as fast as he can, determined to learn every little shift of Ilya's face. "Is…too fast?"

Shane swallows. *Boyfriends.* "I don't know. I think it would be too fast for others but…not for us maybe? It…does it feel okay? It feels okay, for me."

“Feels good for me also.” Ilya says, and kisses him again, lower this time, across the bridge of his nose and then his cheeks. Shane does not understand why Ilya keeps kissing his cheekbones like that, but he’s decided he’s not going to argue about it. Having Ilya this close feels like it’s turning his head inside out enough as it is, all that muscle pressed up against him. He clutches blindly at Ilya’s jacket, remembering the way his biceps had looked in the gym, and tries to push the fabric off him. Ilya makes a harsh breathy sound.

“So needy. So pretty and needy for me.”

“For you.” Shane agrees, ignoring the rest of it, and lets Ilya push him backwards, towards the bed. Oh god oh god is this actually happening? He lets himself flop backwards delightedly – *yes* the sheets do smell like Ilya – and beams up at *his boyfriend*. “Are you going to fuck me now?”

“You know, I think you were slut in past life.” Ilya tells him thoughtfully, sliding to his knees to tug one of Shane’s feet into his lap and start unlacing his shoes. “Never have I ever met a virgin like you before.”

“Semantics.” Shane tells him cheerfully. He likes to think he’s a virgin by accident but certainly not by attitude. And this is *Ilya*. Who wouldn’t be over the moon to have sex with him?

Ilya shoots him an amused look as he tugs the other shoe off, and then Shane’s trousers along with then. Then he pauses, kneeling there between Shane’s legs. He’s got one hand wrapped around Shane’s calf, his thumb lightly stroking the hair there, and it’s making it very difficult for Shane to concentrate, except that Ilya’s handsome face is serious where he gazes up at him.

“You want this? It does not have to be tonight.”

“It should *definitely* be tonight.” Shane informs him, and makes grabby hands at him until Ilya leans up and over and their bodies are pressing together and *fuck* that’s good, that’s really, really good. “I wanted to suck you off in that locker room the very first time,” he mutters against his lips, and Ilya makes a sound deep in his throat.

“I wanted to pin you down on my cock and fuck you,” he shoots back, and Shane hears himself whine, knows he’s rubbing up against Ilya helplessly, but he’s never wanted something as bad as he wants Ilya’s dick in him right the fuck now. He pulls his legs up, making space, and whines again helplessly at how Ilya’s weight settles between his legs. Like a weighted blanket but sexier. And with a dick.

“Come on come on,” he mumbles, and Ilya says something in Russian which is definitely a swear word, leaning up to yank his shirt off and then scramble for his jeans. Shane thinks it would be helpful to take his own top off so he does and then Ilya makes a little whimpering noise and faceplants pretty much directly into Shane’s chest.

“Um,” says Shane.

“I like your chest,” comes the muffled reply. Ilya’s sort of…nuzzling. Shane tentatively lifts a hand and strokes through his hair, and then again when Ilya doesn’t complain, just nuzzles harder. It puts a wriggly squirmy floaty feeling in his stomach, the way Ilya seems to like his body so much.

“Sorry, I’m, uh…not more twinky,” he offers. There is a long beat of silence and then Ilya’s head lifts up just enough for his blue eyes to appear over Shane’s pecs.

“You say this why?”

“You, um, I thought, someone said, you liked twinks. Or…pretty and subby guys?” Shane decides not to mention Alexa’s name, not with how Ilya is already staring at him blankly.

“*Twinky.* That is…whatever.” He drops a kiss against Shane’s nipple. “This is better. I like all of this. I like all of you Shane. Just as Shane.”

Shane can’t help it: his whole body jerks a little, straining upwards towards Ilya’s weight, where he can feel Ilya hot against his thigh, proof that he means it. Ilya rides the motion easily, his eyes never leaving Shane’s face, something intense and hungry there. Shane would swear he deliberately rubs them together as much as possible as he shifts up to reach Shane’s face.

“And as for rest of it….hmm, that much is true. I do like them pretty, and you are prettiest,” he drops another kiss on Shane’s mouth, his cheek, his chin. “Prettiest man in whole campus, and all mine now.”

“Ilya…”

“And…” Ilya pulls away, his face mischievous like a boy’s again. “And maybe subbiest too, hmmm? We will see. After all...you still have mark to earn. And a promise, to do whatever I would say.”

The words are offered up gently, ready for Shane to accept or reject however he wants, which Shane would think was a lovely gesture except for how there's a roaring sound in his ears and he swears his vision is going sparkly round the edges with how quickly every remaining drop of blood in his body just rushed to his cock.

His voice comes out in a croak when he finally manages to speak.

"I...I have to do a good job, to get your stamp of approval. Otherwise I won't get into the society right?"

"You have to please me, to earn it." Ilya agrees. He's looking at Shane like he wants to devour him. Shane's heart is thumping in his chest, loving the thought that he has - he has to let Ilya do whatever he wants, has to let Ilya *use* him, has to just take whatever Ilya wants to do to him...

Suddenly Ilya's tugging him closer, burying his face in Shane's neck. His breath comes out hot and sensitive there and Shane clamps his thighs around Ilya's hips.

"Is game, yes?" Ilya whispers, and Shane nods vigorously. Yes, yes, just a game, but fuck he wants to play. He puts his hands back in Ilya's curls to drag their faces together again, kissing him with everything he has.

It's good. It's so unbelievably good, better than anything Shane thought it could be, his mind going slow and warm as Ilya directs him, his hands and his voice guiding Shane to where he wants him. He seems to like how overwhelmed Shane is as well, how he can't do anything except whine and gasp when Ilya puts his hand between his legs, first to fondle him for a bit and then further back, to tap his finger possessively against where Shane is waiting for him. The strength of him is almost unbearable and Shane feels greedy, drunk on it, running his hands up and down Ilya's arms and the muscles of his back.

"Do you - should I turn over?" he murmurs, gasping when Ilya bites down on his nipple. His chest is red now, covered in teeth marks, and when he objected Ilya had pinned his arms down above his head and told him to be a good boy and keep still, and Shane would have come on the spot if Ilya hadn't moved away in time. Now Ilya licks over the bite mark he's just left and hums thoughtfully.

"No. All this is mine to enjoy, so I want to see it. Your cock all wet for me, your hole all hungry. Your face all desperate."

"I - I can't -"

"Psh. Shush. You want to earn mark, yes? Then I get to fuck you how I want." Ilya smirks at him, his own cock leaving damp smears on Shane's thighs, and Shane whines and spreads his thighs further. The breath Ilya lets out is ragged and he reaches for his bedside drawer.

"Sweetheart, Золотце, let me in. This is mine, let me in." Ilya murmurs, his fingers wet now, and Shane breathes out so deep his stomach muscles feel loose and tight at the same time, and Ilya slides inside. Oh – oh – that's – that's *really good*.

"Ilya…" he gasps, and Ilya peppers his hips with kisses, pressing deeper.

"Shane, fuck, take it. Pretty little slut." Ilya's hand has crept up to squeeze his pec again, a tiny tremble to it, but the hand between Shane's thighs is moving sure and confident, like Ilya's hyper-focused on getting Shane open enough to take him. Shane is very supportive of that focus. He wants Ilya inside him roughly as much as he's ever wanted anything.

"Come on, next bit," he whines, and Ilya laughs against his stomach. Shane didn't know sex was like this – pauses and laughter and Ilya swearing when his hand is too slippery to open the condom so that Shane has to help him. It feels nice. It feels perfect.

It feels *so* much better than Rose's porn.

And then Ilya's pushing inside him, and *oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck* –

"Shane…" Ilya groans. His arms are shaking where he's propped up above Shane, his hips twitching helplessly. Shane feels delirious, hungry for more. He wriggles – Ilya's eyes fly open and he groans – and manages to fling a leg up. But he can't get it high enough, sliding

helplessly back down Ilya's flank, until Ilya grabs it and pushes it up to Shane's chest. He grins down at Shane, hair damp with sweat again.

"Imagined this when I saw you stretching in gym. Imagined bending up underneath me."

"Should have just fucked me on the gym floor." Shane gasps out and Ilya laughs, bending down to kiss him. They pant helplessly into each other's mouths, Ilya's hips nudging in and out, till the movement is easier, and then he's sliding deep with every stroke whilst fireworks go off behind Shane's eyes. He gives into it, into the command in Ilya's hands, one of them pressed to the middle of his chest to hold him down and the other keeping his thigh up, holding him open, all of him there and ready for Ilya to fuck.

Ilya's muttering in Russian again and Shane needs to learn that language *stat*, but right now all he can do is gasp back helplessly. Ilya's cock is huge inside him, so big he can feel it in his throat, and Ilya's hips are moving more ruthlessly, fucking him harder. It's all building inside Shane, overwhelming, and he clutches helplessly at Ilya and blinks away tears.

"Ilya – *please*."

"Shane, oh fuck." Ilya's mouth is on his cheeks, his nose, licking away the tears. "Oh baby, I made you cry on my cock huh?"

Shane whines, twists his hips, and Ilya pins him down harder.

"You want to come, hmm?"

"Yes! Ilya, fuck!"

"You will make me come too." Ilya groans. One arm slides behind Shane, under his hips, tilting him up so that Ilya can get an inch deeper, fucking into him ruthlessly. "So tight, so good. Shane…*fuck* –"

Shane wants it. He wants the final proof that Ilya desires him, wants Ilya to enjoy Shane's body so much that he comes harder than he ever has before. His own brain is nothing but sparkles and pleasure, every thrust turning him inside out. His fingers sink into Ilya's back and he lets his hips tilt, lets himself be used, just a warm wet hole for Ilya to come in, and everything is *perfect*.

And then Ilya hits him deep inside, his hand twisting over the head of Shane's cock, and Shane is moaning and sobbing *like a pretty slut* as he comes in frantic helpless jerks. His whole body clenches down hard enough to hurt and Ilya feels *huge* inside – too big, too much, too – and Ilya's pulling out, stripping the condom off and pumping himself frantically, staring down at where Shane's covered himself in strips of come, and lower, thumbing at Shane's pink and puffy hole.

"Mine…" he groans, and then he adds his own mess to Shane's belly.

The mess ends up on his belly too, because he promptly collapses down on top of Shane. Shane lets him, feeling floaty and tingly and perfect. Ilya is broad and heavy on top of him

and this is pretty much all everything Shane has ever wanted.

Well, there is one more thing.

“So...did I earn your stamp of approval?” he asks, smiling helplessly when Ilya barks a laugh into his neck. “The ceremony is in…like an hour. So we could probably fit in another blowjob if I needed to.”

“Hmmm. Maybe we need long-term arrangement.” Ilya says, and rolls his hips against Shane’s, dragging their limp cocks together. “Maybe be my sex slave first.”

Shane thinks about it for three seconds.

“Okay.”

“Oh fuck, Shane, do not say things like that.” Ilya bites him lazily a few times. “Or will wake up chained to my bed.”

Shane thinks about that for less.

“Okay.”

That gets them both distracted then, for another twenty minutes, Ilya slicking up his hand with their come to jerk them both off. It takes a long time for Shane to get close to the edge again, too sensitive and too soon, but Ilya’s relentless, stroking him gently and murmuring praises and not showing him mercy at all, until Shane shivers apart into pieces again under his hands.

He then has to practically carry Shane to the shower, but he seems quite pleased with that, and Shane is too busy feeling blissful and floaty to object. Ilya’s hair is dripping onto his shoulders as he busily towel-dries Shane’s by the time his brain comes back online.

“Hmm. Good now baby?” Ilya asks. His smile isn’t hidden in the corners anymore; it’s wide across his face, bright and happy. Shane nods helplessly, gazing up at him helplessly. He feels stupidly in love.

“You were right,” he murmurs, and Ilya cocks his head and lifts an eyebrow.

“Yes, probably, but about what specifically?”

“Such an arsehole.” Shane kicks him on the shin, and then looks up at him through his lashes. He can read Ilya better now, can see the open want on his face when Shane does that – or anytime Shane does anything, really. It’s a heady feeling, being wanted, in a way that Shane has only been able to dream of before.

“Shane?” Ilya nudges him gently, face soft. “What were you saying?”

“Oh – it’s stupid. Just…” he waves a hand at their surroundings, Ilya’s poems and clothes and the dark covers smelling of both them now. “You, er, said you'd give me a tour of the most interesting places on campus. And now you have.”

Ilya actually laughs at that, bending down to cup his face and kiss him.

“Eh. I was half right. Will be more interesting when your room too,” he says, and Shane leans up to return the kiss, and again, and again, and again. When they finally pull apart his mouth feels swollen and his heart feels huge. Ilya winks at him.

"Ready for ceremony?"

"I - I think so." Shane wriggles a little in happiness when he sees Ilya tugging a spare hoody out of his wardrobe for Shane to wear. "I mean, your stamp of approval is the only one I'm actually sure about, but I'm pretty sure I've made a good impression in general so hopefully that'll get me across the line - what?" he asks, because Ilya is laughing silently to himself.

"Shane. Shane, are you serious?" Water drips off golden curls as Ilya shakes his head. “Hayden says you have broken record for pledge fundraising. Marly says you are good at beer pong, and best at encouraging others. Svetlana says you will make us money. Hunter says you will be great President one day. And Christopher says you are already one of us, and really, his stamp is only one that counts. You are family now, okay?”

"President?" asks Shane, his heart in his mouth, and Ilya laughs again.

"Yes of course. Last year and this year, Hunter is looking for his successor. You should run in junior year I think, so I can be your Vice Prez as well. Good? Good."

"Good," says Shane, because it is good. It's better than good. It's more than he ever dreamt of.

“Hey, boyfriends, stop banging bedframe and move arses downstairs.” Sveta’s voice comes loudly through the door, and then her bell-like laughter when Ilya shouts something irritable back in Russian. Then he tugs Shane up, their hands clasped together, and leads him down the stairs.

Everyone’s there – Rose (how did she get in?) and Miles beaming to the side, JJ and Elena and the rest of Shane’s gang of pledges all bouncing with excitement, Alexa rolling her eyes at the sight of them, Svetlana smiling softly at Ilya whenever he’s not looking. Marly and Hayden are chivvying people into the main room for the ceremony and Hunter and Kip are waiting there at the front, watching the wild crazy family they’ve created come together. The one that Shane will inherit, the legacy he'll carry on.

“I feel I missed chance.” Ilya sighs, his arm tight round Shane’s waist as he guides him to the front. “Should have extorted even more sexual favours for approval stamp.”

“We can revisit the sex slave thing.” Shane mutters back, and Ilya actually blushes, which makes Svetlana shriek something probably insulting and Ilya start shouting back.

Kip comes sidling up beside Shane.

“That’s our Rozy for you,” he grins, and Shane smiles back. Then he shrugs.

“Your Rozy, my Ilya,” he says, and Kip laughs and tugs him forward, to swear into his new family.

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