

Ilya Rozanov walks into traffic

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Ilya Rozanov walks into traffic

by [kwiewi](#)

Summary

“You know, statistically, I’m much less likely to get hit by a car. I’m not the one that almost walked into traffic a few minutes ago,” Shane says. “That was all you, Rozanov.”

He winks. “It is okay. I am very strong. A car could not run me over, I would run the car over with my big muscles,” he pats his bicep. “I am like that big green man. Very strong. Very angry. Massive dick.”

Shane flushes. “You’re not the fucking Hulk, man, shut up. You could not fight a car.”

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or: the obligatory hollanov meet-ugly

Notes

This fic was so hard to write because if you'll notice it's just one extended scene. there are no scene breaks or time jumps, this is all a single 10k word scene and I almost pulled my hair out over it. If i go bald blame this fic. I have no idea how my characterization comes off in this work, i have no idea how the prose is and i firmly do not give a fuck because it was silly and fun to write after a writing drought the entire year. This was written in over the course of three days, and about 70% of it was after I came back home from a party with my whole body aching and woke up the next day feeling even worse. Merry almost-Christmas everyone. We're going to the cottage in two days. Alternate titles were Ilya Rozanov jaywalks recreationally and also S.A.D (season affective disorder) romcom

warning: the work is rated T but there are sex jokes and sexual references, thank mr rozanov for that

Also I know nothing about hockey or skating or the russian language, and I don't actually know what english mistakes a native russian speaker would make, so i did my best to write broken english that wasn't terribly unrealistic

There's someone in his seat.

Shane blinks, and shuffles in place uncomfortably, readjusting the strap of his bag. The cafe is quiet this early in the day. Pristine morning light spills in slants over the wood flooring, the air glittering with dancing dust motes. There's only a handful of people occupying the tables: a harried looking businessman squinting at his laptop, a high school girl that he thinks is a regular. They aren't problems. Shane comes here often enough that he's used to the morning and evening crowds, even used to the frenzied afternoon rush.

No, the problem is the man sitting at *his* booth at *his* corner of the cafe.

He casts his eyes towards the counter, hoping for help, but apparently neither Kip nor Maria are working. Just a bored looking guy, probably in his twenties, who seems to be doing his level best to phase into his phone.

He bites back a groan. He's aware that he could sit literally anywhere else, since there are about a dozen unoccupied tables that won't get filled up until later in the day. He *knows* that. Unfortunately, he also knows that he won't be able to focus or relax unless he's sitting in that exact spot.

It's not that the booth— *his* booth— is anything special. It's tucked into a quiet nook of the cafe. The table itself is sticky more often than not and the seats are run-down and peeling, but it's dark and familiar. The lights are always dimmer in that corner, and the buzz of chatter from the other patrons is muffled through the thick walls of the booth. Shane has spent dozens of hours sitting there over the past few months, so much so that Kip has taken to leaving a *Reserved* sign there on the weekends because he knows that Shane will inevitably come in.

Shane contemplates the other tables. Thinks about heading to the library instead. It'll be quieter there, and he might be able to join one of the weekend study groups for a few solid hours of work.

"Ah, fuck it," he mutters under his breath. Steeling himself, he approaches the booth, and swings his backpack off his shoulder, dropping it onto the table with a loud *thud*.

"Hi," he says.

The guy looks up from the book he has folded open on the table, arching a single, perfect eyebrow. Shamefully, Shane's first thought is *oh fuck, he's hot*, followed swiftly by *I think he's going to murder me*. Curled blonde hair hangs over the man's forehead, framing his pretty face. The curve of his nose is sharp and elegant, almost aristocratic. As Shane follows the hard lines of his jaw down to a long, pale neck and sloping collarbones, his mouth grows progressively drier. His eyes are startlingly blue, reminiscent of a cool, clear lake on a summer's day, but there's a piercing quality to his stare that makes Shane's blood run abruptly hot.

“Hello,” the man says. His voice seems incongruously deep for his delicate features, but Shane forgets all about it when he hears that thick accent. Oh fuck, when did he start finding *accents* sexy? Fucking hell.

“Are you Russian?” Shane blurts before he can stop himself. His cheeks heat as he registers what he just said, and he prays fleetingly for a suitably large sinkhole to open in the floor and swallow him whole. “I mean, shit, sorry, that’s rude. I didn’t mean that.”

The man’s mouth twitches, a ghost of a smile passing just as quickly as it came. “What did you mean, then?”

“I meant,” Shane starts. Stops. Blinks some more. “I just– um. Well. I don’t want to be rude, but I think you’re in my spot.”

“Your *spot*,” the man says, with sarcasm that’s heavy enough to send Shane’s anxiety spiking into the fucking roof. Still, he stands his ground, even as his hands start to itch and his throat closes up. “I was not aware that people could have spots in public places. You will have to educate me about this.”

“It’s just. Well. I sit here, usually. On weekends. It’s my spot,” Shane says. “I know it doesn’t like, have my name on it or anything, but I can’t– I like sitting here. I want to sit here.”

“I am sitting here. There is table over there,” he waves at an empty table a few feet away. “Go sit there. It is unoccupied. This table is occupied.”

Abruptly, Shane feels a surge of blindingly hot anger. At what, he doesn’t know. Perhaps it’s this guy’s condescending attitude. Maybe he’s just having a bad fucking day because he stubbed his toe twice before leaving his apartment and forgot to charge his phone overnight and now it’s dead. Whatever it is, he forgets all about his mounting anxiety for long enough that he narrows his eyes, and sits his ass down at the booth. Right across from Hot Dickhead.

“I hope you don’t mind company,” Shane says tightly.

The man has the gall to look mildly amused. “I do not think you are giving me a choice in this, yes?”

In response, Shane grits his teeth, and digs out his laptop from his backpack. Hot Dickhead shrugs, and turns back to his book. There’s a glass mug sitting in front of him– clear glass, because Kip is anal about shit like *aesthetics*– filled with what appears to be thick, creamy chocolate, topped off with a bright candy cane. Vehemently, Shane hopes that it tastes like shit, and instantly starts feeling bad because this is *Kip* and *Scott’s* cafe, and they’ve been so good to him, and he shouldn’t be wishing that their drinks taste like shit, even when the person drinking said beverage pisses him off. He sighs gustily, pushing his laptop open.

After a few minutes of dithering about, checking Instagram and giving a cursory scroll to the news app, he manages to start on an assignment. Clicking open the outline document, he reads through the prep work he did yesterday evening and loads up a blank document for the essay. He starts jabbing half-heartedly at the keyboard, letting his mind drift.

Usually, he would be panicking about the horrid social interaction he just had and the fact that he's sitting right across from a really hot guy who probably thinks he's crazy, hyperaware of every little movement he makes and how he presents himself. But today he's too exhausted to care much about anything at all, even this stupid essay that just can't seem to hold his attention. It's a dull assignment assigned by a dull professor who teaches a class that he can't bring himself to give two shits about and he's *tired*, unbelievably so, even though it's only eight in the morning. His thoughts, as they tend to do these days, take a steep turn towards the melancholy as the last of his sudden rage fizzles out.

Whenever the air gets cold, the days growing shorter, and whenever the sunrise starts coming earlier with each passing week, a heavy blanket of static wraps itself around his senses. It dulls his edges, turns his lethargy into a mountain rather than the molehill it was before.

Deep in the throes of December, with Christmas lights strung up around storefronts and the eaves of houses, Shane has never been more homesick. It doesn't snow much here, not as much as it did in Ottawa, and winter feels more like a passing idea rather than the tempest it was in his hometown.

Shane's fingers have long since stilled on the keyboard. The haze clears briefly, giving way to fatigued clarity. He blinks at the screen, realizes that he has a single line written. He reads it back. It's a terrible hook, and he's not even close to formulating a proper thesis. Swallowing back his frustration, he backspaces aggressively until the sentence is gone, and an empty document stares back at him. The cursor flickers innocently.

8:31 AM. The clock mocks him. The empty page mocks him. It's due on Monday. Even though it's the weekend, if he doesn't get started right away, he'll never be able to finish. He's horrible with deadlines, and he's well aware that if he leaves it all for the last minute, he'll have a panic attack and won't be able to submit the essay in time. He needs to do this right now, he *needs to*.

8:40 AM. The soft *tinkle* of a windchime rings out as the shop door swings open, and a handful of customers spill in. They appear to be college students like him, wrapped up in thick coats and armed with their laptops. A couple of them are obviously hungover and seem to be drowning in their jackets, looking like they'd rather be anything but alive, with dark bags ringing their eyes. Shane spots Harris from his apartment building, who makes a beeline over to the surly barista and starts chattering a mile a minute.

8:50 AM. Empty document. Empty fucking document. He grinds his teeth together, forcibly pushing back the lump in his throat. God, he needs to start writing, he needs to write *something*. His knees are jiggling now, shaking the whole table. His fingers stay glued to the keyboard, and he tries to dredge up a single thought about the topic. Tries to reframe the question in his mind. He dug up the sources he needed yesterday, he just needs to put it together. Clicking onto the outline, he reads through it for what feels like the hundredth time. Clicks back onto the essay, and it's still *empty*.

9:00 AM. Shift change. The dark-haired barista leaves with Harris, and Maria waltzes in, her hips swaying to a song no one else but her can hear. Shane chokes back his panic long enough to give her a cursory wave, which she returns brightly. His mind remains frustratingly blank, and every sentence that he tries to write falls apart halfway through. His knee is still

jiggling. Shane wishes that the other guy would leave, even though he hasn't done anything past getting up to order another cup of chocolate. He hasn't even complained about the shaky table.

9:06 AM. The speakers flicker to life with a soft *crackle*, and then there's Christmas music playing. Soft, slow, stomach turning because it reminds him of home. Of evenings sprawled out across the floor, watching snow settle in the yard through the patio door, his mother and father conversing quietly in the kitchen. Oh god, his *Mom*. He wants to call his Mom, wants her to hug him and tell him that things are going to be okay, that he's doing good, that he isn't a fucking failure because he's going to turn in a shoddy essay. Scrubbing at his eyes, he desperately tries to hold his tears back. Oh god.

"Alright, what is *wrong* with you?" Hot Dickhead says, slamming his book down on the table.

Shane stiffens, heart kicking into overdrive, and presses himself back against the worn leather of his seat. "What?" he says, defensive, his shoulders hunching

"You are going to make me lose my mind," the man accuses, narrowing his eyes. "Shaking the table. Crying onto your expensive laptop. You look like deer that is waiting to be hit by a car."

"Mind your own fucking business, man," Shane scowls, even as his stomach twists. *Deer waiting to be hit by a car* is a strangely apt description of him, he acknowledges that, but it bruises coming from a stranger. "I'm not bothering you about it, am I?"

"Yes, you are. You are bothering me by shaking stupid table, you are bothering me by pressing your keyboard, and you are bothering me with your sad kicked-dog face," he shoves the half-finished cup of chocolate at him. "Drink this."

Shane's lips part in surprise. "What?"

"Do you have problem following simple instructions?" Hot Dickhead folds his book shut, and leans forwards testily. "Drink the goddamn chocolate."

"But it's not mine," Shane protests faintly.

"I do not care. Drink it. This table is not yours either, but you seem very happy taking it. Take the chocolate too," he pushes it some more, until it's bumping the edge of Shane's laptop, tilting dangerously.

Cursing, Shane hastily grabs the cup before the liquid can spill over and ruin his laptop. "What the fuck? You're going to ruin my laptop!"

For some odd reason, the man looks pleased. "Good. Now drink. Before I take chocolate and pour it onto your keyboard."

"I, what? What the fuck are you even— oh my god," he jerks out of the way, cradling the cup close to his chest as Hot Dickhead reaches over to try and shove it out of his hands. "Are you

crazy, are you *crazy*? Holy fuck, you're insane."

"Drink chocolate, or the laptop dies," the man says gravely.

"Are you blackmailing me into drinking your hot chocolate?" Shane questions incredulously.

Hot Dickhead smiles. Sharp, lopsided, a little mean. "Yes. Drink, or else," he wiggles his fingers ominously.

"You're crazy," he says, even while he gingerly lifts the cup to take a sip of the chocolate.

It decidedly does not taste like shit; it's on the sweeter side, definitely one of Kip's concoctions rather than Scott's, who prefers beverages with a little more kick to them, but there's a rich, almost savory undertone that leaves him chasing another taste, and another after that. It makes him realize just how *hungry* he is— he had a dubiously fresh banana before leaving his apartment in the morning, but that's about all he ate. So, Shane swallows his protests and tips the glass back, drinking greedily, relishing in the tingle in his fingertips as warmth rushes through him.

"Good, yes?" the man asks.

Shane grunts wordlessly, and keeps drinking. It's only a few seconds later that he's setting down the cup on the table, empty with the exception of the candy cane.

Hot Dickhead grins, and plucks the candy cane out, sticking the straight end in his mouth like a cigarette. Even the fuzzy bliss of drinking something warm can't distract Shane from the dart of the man's tongue, the plush pinkness of his lips wrapping obscenely around the candy.

"What's your name?" Shane asks hoarsely, tearing his eyes away from his mouth.

The guy's still smiling, more than a little entertained. "What is yours?"

"Oh, um. It's Shane. Shane Hollander," he says, suddenly nervous. He pushes the empty cup across the table. "Thanks for the chocolate."

"I would say it was not very much trouble, but that would be lying since it was a lot of trouble, and I do not like lying," Hot Dickhead says. "My name is Ilya Rozanov. You may call me Rozanov, but not Ilya or *Rozy*," he spits the word like it's a curse. "I will call you Hollander."

"You can just call me Shane," he ventures. *Ilya*. Pretty. Really pretty. Fitting, somehow. He wonders how the word will feel on his tongue. *Ilya, Ilya, Ilya*, he wants to say it out loud, barely manages to restrain himself from doing just that.

Ilya shakes his head. "I will call you Hollander, you will call me Rozanov." Abruptly, he stands, retrieving his coat from where it was lying in a heap on the table, and shrugs it on. It's a muted ochre, hanging down to Ilya's knees, reminiscent of a trench coat but with much less pomp and flair. Despite looking fairly expensive, it doesn't appear to be from any brand he

recognizes. Maybe it's Russian? Rose would probably know. "Well?" Ilya demands, after a moment when Shane just stares blankly at him. "Get up."

Shane pauses his inspection of Ilya's attire to give him a confused look. "Huh? Where are you going?"

"Nowhere without you. Get up, put your things away. You are going to repay me for the hot chocolate," Ilya says, rapping his fingers impatiently on the table. "Chop chop. Time is not forever, Hollander."

"What? I'm working," he replies, more out of instinct than anything.

"You are doing no such thing," Ilya snorts. "You are staring at laptop and torturing that keyboard, but you are not working. Work means getting something done. You are not doing that."

"How do you know that?" Shane protests, even as he, out of some strange compulsion, begins packing his laptop and notes away.

"Because I can see your page is empty in the..." Ilya wrinkles his nose, gesturing at his eyes. "Picture in your glasses. I forgot word."

"Reflection?" he asks, struggling to get his coat on.

Ilya nods, snapping his fingers. "Yes, yes, that. I can see reflection in your glasses. It is empty. Just like your brain. You are not getting work done, so come with me."

Shouldering his backpack, Shane takes a brief moment to contemplate this new radical world where he does things like follow hot guys into the unknown, probably to get chopped up and axe-murdered graphically. "My brain isn't empty," he defends weakly. And then, because he can't help but ask, "Are you going to axe-murder me in a dark alley?"

"Keep it in your pants, please," Ilya grins, and starts walking, leaving Shane scrambling to follow him. "Do not worry so much. Maria can vouch for me." He stops at the counter, waving at Maria, who's hunched over by the coffee machines, wrapped up in her phone. She startles and looks up, a confused little smile flitting across her face as her gaze darts between them. "Hello, Maria. Tell Hollander here that I have no axes to murder him with and that it is a very unfashionable way to kill someone."

"Uh," Maria says. "I don't think he's going to murder you? Probably?"

"Aw, try to sound a bit more excited," Ilya frowns. "I am her friend. We are friends, yes, Maria?"

"Sure we are, Roz, but I dunno if I trust you not to murder someone," Maria shrugs. "I mean, don't worry Shane. You'll be fine. Probably. On the off chance that you aren't, I'll tell Elena to put in a nice word about you with the guys who write obituaries at the newspaper." She wiggles her fingers in a wave, and goes back to fiddling with her phone.

"Fucking hell," Shane mutters, and resigns himself to his fate.

Seemingly satisfied with that ringing endorsement, Ilya strides away, escaping into the cold morning air. He doesn't even hold the door open, and it nearly smacks Shane in the face as he shuffles after Ilya.

"You're an asshole," Shane informs him once he catches up. Walking shoulder to shoulder with him, Shane realizes that Ilya is a little taller. It's only a few inches, but his perfect posture and long strides make Shane feel like an ant in comparison.

"I never claimed not to be," Ilya shrugs.

He sighs, and adjusts the strap of his backpack so it doesn't slide off. "Where are we going?"

"To beach," Ilya says. "I have not been there yet."

"In *December*?" Shane blinks at him in alarm. "It's fucking freezing out."

"So? Who cares? It is not like we are going into the water," Ilya says, waving a dismissive hand.

"Then why the hell are we going to the *beach*?"

"Because I have not been there yet. I just told you this, Hollander. Keep up," Ilya bumps his shoulder roughly. "I know I joked about your brain being empty, but it was a joke. I am starting to think that I was right after all."

Shane glares at him, and bumps his shoulder right back, sending them both stumbling. They're lucky the sidewalks are pretty much empty, as are the roads. "Fuck off. Also, why are you taking me to the beach? Don't you have a friend you could take? You've known me for barely an hour."

"My friends are all busy, or in Russia," Ilya says. "Also, you look stressed, which was making me angry. So I decided to take you to beach. Beach makes people less stressed."

"You could have just got up and left if I was annoying you that much," Shane says. "Also like, none of what you just said makes sense."

Ilya frowns. "Leaving would have been admitting defeat, which I do not like. And my English is not so bad, why don't you understand?"

"Your English is fine. That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I— fuck, forget it," Shane sighs. "You're confusing."

"I think you are more confusing," Ilya says. And then, "Beach is ten minutes walk from here, can you handle walking that much in cold?"

"Fuck you, I grew up in Canada," Shane scowls.

He says, “And I grew up in Russia, what does that matter? That was not question I asked.”

“Oh my god, I just meant that *because* I grew up in Canada, since it’s a cold place, which you probably know already, and because I grew up there—” Shane stops short when he notices the telltale twitch in Ilya’s mouth. “You’re fucking with me, aren’t you?”

Ilya barks out a laugh, “Yes I am. You are very fun to fuck with. Too...” he trails off, brows furrowing. “Ah, stupid language. Starts with G, the word. What is the— ah, genuine. I think. You are too genuine. Makes you easy to tease.”

Shane’s heart, God forbid, actually flutters. Butterflies, fireworks, the whole deal. All because Ilya laughed. “You barely know me. How do you know I’m genuine?” he huffs.

“I can see it,” Ilya nods sagely. “I am very good at this. Knowing people. Judging them.”

He purses his lips, biting back a smile. “Okay, then. What about him?” Shane gestures at a passerby across the road. He’s idling at the intersection, holding a briefcase. His hair is rumpled and messy, and his suit has definitely seen better days. And better dry cleaners. There are deep shadows under his sunken eyes, and even as the pedestrian signal flashes green, he shows no sign of wanting to cross the street.

“Divorced. His name must be something stupid like Mark or Steven. He has one million dollars in that bag. Stole it from his ex-wife, because he is boring and bad,” Ilya says. “He is sad because he has to go to work on a weekend, and he doesn’t want to go.”

Shane allows himself a close-mouthed grin, chest tightening when Ilya’s eyes flick down to his lips. “You got that all just from one glance?”

“I told you, I am very good at judging.”

“Yeah, alright Sherlock,” Shane says.

“Sherlock, like Sherlock Holmes the detective?” he arches an eyebrow, looking pleased. “Thank you, Hollander. Your brain might not be as empty as I said. At least you recognize smart people like me.”

“Fuck you,” Shane rolls his eyes. Nudging Ilya, he gestures discreetly at a harried-looking woman who’s juggling three bouquets simultaneously in one hand, holding her purse with the other, and keeping her phone pressed to her ear with the help of her shoulder— all while walking at breakneck speed on high heels. “Okay, judge her.”

Ilya’s eyebrows raise, but he humors him. “She is getting married, so she is looking for the perfect flowers, but she cannot find anything that is pretty enough. She will end up with no flowers and a very sad wedding. Oh, and she might fall and break her back because of how tall her shoes are.”

“Jesus Christ, why are your scenarios so morbid?” Shane says exasperatedly.

“It is not scenario, Hollander. It is the truth. I am good at this, I told you,” Ilya says. “And I am not the morbid one. In that coffee shop, you looked like you were going to ask a car to hit

you.”

“I’m *not a deer*, and I wasn’t going to ask a car to hit me. I’m not insane like you.”

“Do not mistake my smart thoughts for being crazy,” he says. “Also, you were. I know because I am good at judging, and I judged that you were a sad idiot with an empty brain who needed to go to the beach to get less stressed and learn how to have fun.”

Shane purses his lips. “I still can’t believe you’re taking me to the beach in December.”

“You are the one that agreed to come with me.”

“I felt bad because I took your hot chocolate.”

“This is more proof that you’re an idiot,” Ilya informs him. “I gave it to you. Should not have felt bad.”

“But— you said— oh, fuck you,” he seethes, and starts walking a little faster. Ilya, infuriatingly enough, barely has to lengthen his stride to keep pace. “You’re such an asshole.”

“I am glad you know this about me. Your empty brain is good for things sometimes,” Ilya says. He then has the gall to reach over and pat Shane on the head, grinning that mean little grin when Shane swats his hand away.

“Dude, what the fuck? Keep your hands off me,” Shane complains, shoving him away.

Ilya stumbles forwards, laughing. Coat billowing in the wind, he swings around to look at Shane, and starts walking backwards. “Oh, but Hollander, you are so sexy with your hair that has not been washed since the fall of the Soviet Union. And you are so sexy in that coat with so many beautiful stains. I cannot resist you,” he practically purrs.

“Oh my god, oh my god, shut up,” Shane hisses, his cheeks heating. His heart trips all over itself, doing an ungainly dive when he looks at Ilya: his silhouette blue with shadow, limned in gold by the sun, face open with amusement and traces of affection written all over his expression. Shane averts his eyes. “And you don’t have room to talk, okay? Your fingernails have dirt under them, and your cologne smells like shit.”

Gasping theatrically, Ilya presses a palm to his chest. “Oh no, you have shot me. With gun. Right here, in my heart. I am bleeding out. The cologne is so much money. I cannot believe a sexy man hates my cologne.”

“Stop calling me that, Jesus fucking Christ,” Shane mutters, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Just— stop. For two seconds.”

“Stop calling you what?” Ilya grins. “Sexy? Very difficult. I speak truth always. I cannot call a handsome man ugly. It is not in my nature to lie.”

“I thought my hair hadn’t been washed since the fall of the Soviet Union, and that my coat had stains,” he says. “How is that sexy?”

“It is not so much your appearance, I think. Even though you are pretty,” Ilya says, completely serious. “It is that look on your face that makes you very sexy.”

Shane doesn't think he wants to know. Still, he risks asking, “What look?”

“Deer who wants to be hit with car look,” Ilya replies without missing a beat. “It makes your cheeks pink, and eyes so big. And you look like one of those... I am forgetting. Those romance movies. The funny ones. You look like heroine in those movies. Your sadness is very sexy.”

“What the fuck,” Shane mumbles. “You think I look like a... romcom heroine when I'm sad? And it's sexy?”

“Very,” he agrees.

“That makes literally no sense. You make no sense.”

“I make lots of sense, you are just bad at understanding me,” Ilya says. “Do you know what it means that your sadness is sexy?”

“What?”

“That your happiness will be even sexier,” he smiles. “Which is why I'm taking you to beach. So I can figure out how sexy you look when you do not want to be hit by car.”

Blood rushes to his head, making Shane feel instantly dizzy. He almost loses his footing at the warmth that blossoms in his stomach, the feeling strange and new and entirely welcome. Ilya is still walking backwards, still looking right at him with those clear eyes of his. Shane doesn't know what it means, what any of this means. He wants to find out. Wants to reach forwards, let these new sensations guide him by the hand and pull him to Ilya's shore.

Fucking hell. It's barely been ten fucking minutes that he's been talking to this guy. He shakes his head in a futile attempt at dissipating his straying thoughts, and reaches forwards, curling a hand into Ilya's shirt. It's dry, a little warm. He rubs a thumb wonderingly over a deep crease in the cloth, caught off guard by the smoothness of the fabric.

When Ilya stops short, Shane's momentum carries him forwards until they're nearly chest to chest. This close, the height difference between them is more noticeable— Ilya has a few inches on him, and Shane's forehead is level with his jaw. Shane tilts his head up just the slightest amount, and looks up through his lashes to give Ilya a crooked smile. “You were gonna walk right into traffic,” he says, gesturing at the curb in front of them, which drops off into the road. As if in emphasis, the pedestrian light across the street blinks red.

Ilya gapes. Shane's lips curl further into a small grin, but he doesn't pull away, lingering in the shared dry heat of their bodies. “Wow,” Ilya whispers, a little breathless. “Your happiness is very sexy. You should be a model, Hollander.”

“Careful, I still have time to push you into traffic,” Shane warns, his heart in his throat. He ruins it by laughing immediately after, which makes Ilya stare unerringly at his mouth.

Before he can do something stupid, Shane steps away. There's a fleeting flash of disappointment that plays out across Ilya's face, and he tries not to read too much into it.

A beat passes. Fuck, why is he still staring at Shane? It feels almost voyeuristically intimate to be looked at like that in broad daylight.

"I was wrong," Ilya says gravely.

"Wow, you don't say that very often, huh? Does it hurt, admitting that you're wrong? Do you need medical attention?" Shane arches a brow.

"Shut it," Ilya replies. "This is very, very serious. You need to listen to me."

Shane shrugs, "Go ahead. I'm not stopping you."

"I was wrong. You are not romance movie heroine. You are James Bond movie hero," Ilya says solemnly. "Hero who wants to be hit by car sometimes. It is okay."

He laughs, and shoves Ilya, "I'm not fucking James Bond, shut the fuck up."

Ilya smiles, impossibly bright, and catches him by the wrist, tugging him close. Shane goes without protest, helpless but to follow in Ilya's wake. And there they are again, lingering entirely too close. The sun is in Ilya's hair, his lashes. It spills across the bridge of his nose, pooling in the curve of his cupid's bow. Every part of him Midas-touched.

"I have to tell you something," Ilya says.

"Okay," Shane murmurs back, too busy cataloguing the flutter of his eyes, every single one of his fleeting microexpressions to care much about the stares that they're likely getting.

"I was not taking you to beach," Ilya's hand drifts up, and he skates his fingers across the column of Shane's throat. "I do not actually know where the beach is."

A quiet laugh bubbles out of Shane's mouth before he can catch it. Ilya looks delighted. "I know. The beach is in the opposite direction to the way we're walking."

Tilting his head, Ilya furrows his brows. "Then why did you come with me?"

"Because I was a deer that wanted to be hit by a car, and you looked like you had a really fancy one that I would enjoy my guts being smeared across the hood of," Shane deadpans, pulling away.

Ilya's eyes light up. "Hollander, was that a joke?"

Shane kicks him in the shin, and gestures at the green pedestrian light. "Shut up, and follow me. I know a spot."

"Now I feel like I am the one who is going to be murdered with a very big axe," Ilya says, falling into step beside him. "Where are we going?"

“Not the beach in December. Someplace nice.”

“Where, Hollander?”

He hesitates for a moment, before he hunches his shoulders and rushes out, “Do you know how to skate?”

“Ah,” Ilya says. “Yes, I do. I played hockey for a very long time.”

“Oh, shit. Really? Me too,” Shane blinks in surprise. “Were you any good?”

“I was amazing. I almost decided to go pro,” Ilya scoffs, knocking their shoulders together. “Were you any good?”

“I like to think I was pretty good,” Shane says, scratching the back of his neck. “Why’d you quit? Well, I assume you quit. Did you?”

He nods. “I did quit. And reason is... hard. My father got sick. I had to take care of him. There was no one else.”

“Oh, shit,” he says. “Fuck, that sounds— I’m sorry. I can’t imagine”

“It is fine. I am OK now. Do not imagine this, is not very fun. You are sad enough already,” Ilya tells him, and it’s unconvincing at best. He nudges Shane, “Tell me why we are talking about this. Why did you bring up hockey?”

“Becuase I wanted to know if you skated.”

“Okay. I do. Why?”

“I wanna go skating,” Shane says. “The rink’s not far from here. Only about fifteen more minutes. Are you... are you okay with that?”

Ilya casts a long, searching glance at him. Eventually, he nods. “I am okay with that. I like skating.”

“Me too,” he says.

They lapse into relative silence for a few minutes. As the sun slowly climbs higher in the clean sky, the weather grows warmer, and Shane decides to unzip his coat, hissing a little when a sudden burst of static electricity zaps him. Ilya grins at him, Shane rolls his eyes back. These roads are familiar to him, enough that he doesn’t have to think twice about the directions as he leads Ilya through a maze of street corners and empty intersections. There are only a few cars on the road, even fewer pedestrians, and the winter air that pours over him is as cool and clear as rushing water. He doesn’t like to think much about it, but this place is home just as much as Ottawa was, even though it lacks the cornerstones that made up his childhood.

“Why did you stop playing hockey?” Ilya finally asks.

“I don’t...” Shane trails off. “I don’t know, actually. I liked doing it. I was good at it. I probably could have gone pro too, if I tried a little harder. Actually, my mom wanted me to go pro. She was kinda pushing for it, you know? But I just thought, do I really want to deal with all that? And I’m—” he sighs. “I’m gay, as you probably guessed. Hockey really isn’t friendly for people like me. I know they do pride nights and stuff, but there aren’t any openly gay players out right now, and I don’t know if I would’ve been able to deal with the stress of playing a sport and hiding my sexuality at the same time.”

Ilya’s jaw tightens, and for a second Shane feels a sense of blinding and overwhelming panic that he’s done something wrong. That he was reading the signals wrong, assigning meaning where there was none. It isn’t the first time he’s done this, and it likely won’t be the last.

It’s the searing sensation of Ilya’s rough palm, pressing into the nape of his neck, that jerks him out of his thoughts. Shane swallows. “Sorry.”

“For what?” Ilya arches an eyebrow. “For nothing. Because you have nothing to say sorry for. Get that stupid sad look off your stupid face. I will actually hit you with car if you keep looking like that.”

“I thought you said my sadness was sexy,” Shane says weakly.

“Sexy isn’t always good,” he informs Shane, before drawing his hand away and tucking it into his coat pocket. Shane mourns the loss of the touch, sort of wishes Ilya would touch him again. He’s greedy like that. “I am bisexual. So, I understand a little. I am from Russia, and Russia isn’t nice for people like us either.”

“Oh, fuck,” Shane says, horrified.

“Whatever you are thinking, stop,” Ilya tells him firmly. “I do not need your pity.”

“It’s not pity,” he says.

“I do not care. I am not in Russia anymore. So I do not have to worry. Just because your problem is less... big than mine, does not mean it is not problem still,” Ilya shoots back. “I do not want you feeling bad for me, Hollander. I will hit you if you do.”

Shane opens his mouth. Closes it. Works his teeth around his words, before sighing and deciding to drop the subject. If the relieved slump of Ilya’s shoulders is anything to go by, it was the right decision. “Are you going to hit me with your car?”

“Maybe,” he says. “It will be hard to clean, though. Lot of blood. Will ruin my nice car paint. Expensive to fix, yes?”

“You know, statistically, I’m much less likely to get hit by a car. I’m not the one that almost walked into traffic a few minutes ago,” Shane says. “That was all you, Rozanov.”

He winks. “It is okay. I am very strong. A car could not run me over, I would run the car over with my big muscles,” he pats his bicep. “I am like that big green man. Very strong. Very angry. Massive dick.”

Despite himself, Shane flushes. “You’re not the fucking Hulk, man, shut up. You could not fight a car.”

“I could totally fight a car. I have the biggest muscles. The biggest,” Ilya retorts. “The car would cry like little bitch if it got into a fight with me. Big tears.”

“Oh, go fuck yourself,” he snorts. “You were right about one thing, though.”

“What?” Ilya narrows his eyes.

“You are a massive dick.”

Ilya laughs. Loud and free, ringing as clear as a bell across the crisp stillness of the December morning. It makes Shane’s stomach turn, and there goes his damned heart again, beating madly against the cage of his ribs like a hummingbird. “You are funny, Hollander. You should try to be less sad. You are much more fun when you do not look like future dead deer.”

“Oh my god, will you fucking drop the deer thing?” Shane groans. “You’re really milking the shit out of that one joke.”

“I do not think it is possible to milk shit,” Ilya says contemplatively.

Shane grimaces. “Ew. That’s disgusting. Stop.”

“I am just speaking the truth,” Ilya replies. “You Americans have very strange way of speaking. Shit and milk are different things.”

“I’m fucking Canadian, you asshole,” he snipes back. “Don’t call me American.”

Ilya puts both hands up in surrender, grinning unrepentantly. “You know, you are like little dog. Very loud bark, very small bite.”

“I thought I was a deer.”

“You can be both. Deer in front of car. Small dog that rich woman carries around,” Ilya says. “It makes you a very entertaining person. I would not need a television if I lived with you. I would spend all day watching you do stupid things and laugh at you.”

Shane pinches the bridge of his nose, “I need an Advil. Talking to you is giving me a headache. Do you even think about half the things that come out of your mouth?”

“Oh, baby, I can make a lot of things come out of my mouth,” Ilya says silkily. “You just had to ask.”

Holy fuck. Baby. A full body shudder racks up his frame, and a low coil of desire tangles at the base of his spine. Resolutely, Shane ignores it, tries to forget all about the sparks racing under his skin. “You do realize that’s like, the least sexy thing ever, right? It sounds like you’re going to vomit all over them.”

“Hollander, you are no fun,” Ilya declares sulkily. “You could at least pretend that it was sexy.”

“Didn’t you just say that I was so fun that you wouldn’t need a TV if you lived with me? That was two seconds ago, Rozanov.”

“See? No fun. What is that phrase... stick in the mud, yes. Stick in your ass too. Very big, and hard to remove,” he says. “You should see doctor about it. Tell him it makes you boring and sad and no fun at all.”

“Like a deer who wants to be hit by a car,” Shane says quietly.

Ilya smiles. It’s just a small flash of teeth, passing quicker than it came, but Shane finds himself wanting to press his mouth to it. Drink in Ilya’s happiness, the brittle edges of his acerbic wit. It’s a dangerous line of thought, one that pulls at him like a riptide, inevitable and inexorable. “Exactly like that,” Ilya murmurs. “You learn very fast, Hollander.”

He chews at his lip, and looks away. The side of his face prickles sharply from the weight of Ilya’s gaze. They’re still walking, shoulders bumping. Ilya is a line of heat against Shane’s side, and Shane wants. He wants so badly that he’s dizzy with it; sick with this unnamable, inescapable urge that tells him to be brave in ways that he’s never had to be before. Throw all caution to the wind and jump the proverbial gap.

“I’m a quick study,” Shane says, smiling slightly.

“I think you are,” Ilya agrees.

“You don’t even know me.”

“I know enough,” he says. “You used to play hockey. You wear stupid jackets. You are going to murder me with big knife in a dark place very soon. You are like a small dog and a sad deer.” Endearingly enough, he puts up a finger for each item on his list. He holds up four fingers, and wiggles them at Shane. “See, I know so much about you, Hollander. We should get married right now.”

Shane’s eyes widen, and he chokes on his reply. Ilya, the bastard, just laughs at him. “I hate you so much. You fucking suck— *no*, don’t make an innuendo. Do not. I know you want to. Don’t.”

“I do not know what that big word means,” Ilya tells him smugly. “Also, I am very good at sucking.”

“You totally know what innuendo means, you fucking ass,” Shane narrows his eyes.

Ilya bares his teeth. “Well, right now, my ass is not being fucked, but I think we could change that if you really wanted to.”

He groans. “Shut up, shut up. Oh my god, shut up. Can you be normal for one second?”

"I do not know what you mean. I am very normal. You are the one who is weird," Ilya replies. "You get so embarrassed at one sex joke."

"It wasn't just one. It was multiple. One after another."

He grins. "I could have turned that into a sex joke, but I didn't. For you, Hollander. Because of how sexy you are."

"I wish I had let you walk into traffic," Shane mutters.

"Aw, then you would miss me," Ilya frowns. It looks ridiculously cute, and Shane resists the impulse to reach up and touch his lips, just to find out if they're as soft as they look.

"I've known you for like an hour."

"But we are soulmates," Ilya exclaims, clutching his chest. "You have shot me in the heart. Again. I am bleeding so much because of you. My heart is broken. I will never recover."

"That's awesome," Shane tells him. "Can you stay alive for two more minutes? We're almost at the rink, and I'd rather you bleed out on the ice than on the sidewalk. It looks less suspicious that way. I'll pretend it was a skating accident."

"I knew you were going to kill me in a very scary dark place with big knife."

"We're out on the main road," Shane says, gesturing at the open stretch of road tucked between squat buildings and frosted over storefronts. "There's too many witnesses."

Ilya sighs. "You are very bad murderer. Too nice."

"I'm not a murderer at all. If I was, I would've let you get hit by a car."

"I would win in fight with a car," he dismisses. "I told you this."

"Jesus Christ," Shane mutters.

After a few more turns, they stumble out onto the correct street. Across the road, there's a bland, nondescript building with a wide parking lot flanking it. Only the flickering sign and glass doors provide any indication that the place isn't completely abandoned. Hurriedly, Shane crosses the street. Ilya follows at a more sedate pace, flipping off a car that honks at him.

"Wow," Ilya says, craning his neck to take in the building. "It looks like a big murder building. Easy to store body here, yes? So much space."

"For the last time, I'm not going to murder you," Shane says exasperatedly. "And I know it doesn't look like much, but the rink is big, and I can get us in for free."

Ilya's eyebrows raise. "Seriously?"

“Yeah,” he says. “The guy who basically runs the place is a friend of mine. Uh, his name’s Hayden. Hayden Pike. He teaches hockey to kids, and he gave me a key so I can get in and out whenever I want to.”

“You have key?” Ilya questions incredulously. “How do you know this person?”

“It’s a whole complicated thing. He’s the son of one of my Mom’s old hockey buddies, and we used to hang out whenever —“ he cuts himself off when he realizes that he’s rambling, a swell of embarrassment making his gut churn. “Shit, sorry, you probably don’t care about that. He’s a friend. I know him. We hang out sometimes.”

Rolling his eyes, Ilya flicks him. “Hollander. I asked you. So tell me.”

“Oh,” Shane flushes. “Well, that’s about it. He used to live in Ottawa— that’s my hometown — and our parents were friends. He was always nice to me, even though he was older. He moved out here a few years back when he got married, and started coaching at this rink. I’m pretty sure he’s saving up enough money to buy the whole place at some point.”

“I see,” Ilya says, his eyes pinning Shane in place. Shane looks away quickly; he struggles with eye contact on a good day, and Ilya’s steady gaze makes him feel stripped raw, vulnerable to the point of discomfort. In fact, he’s having a hard time looking at *any* part of Ilya at all. “Well, are we going inside? Or will you kill me by talking so much that I decide to jump into traffic?”

“Asshole. You’re doing a good enough job of walking into traffic without my help,” Shane says. Shuffling up to the door, Shane digs his wallet out of his coat pocket, and retrieves his keys from one of the sleeves.

“You keep keys in wallet?” Ilya asks. “Hollander, you are weird.”

“Go fuck yourself, I always forget where they are if I don’t keep them in the same place,” Shane fiddles with the keys until he finds the right one, and slips it into the lock. When it clicks open, he makes a triumphant noise, and pushes the door. “Come on,” he says, his whole body thrumming with excitement.

Frosty stillness greets him. Cool, quiet, familiar. Ilya goes silent, for once, and his expression settles into calm placidity. There’s an odd reverence to his mannerisms as he takes in the interior of the building, spinning in a slow circle to scan every inch, his coat flaring around him. Blinding white lights, tall, curved ceiling, the flat plane of ice nestled carefully at the very center.

“It is a very beautiful place,” he says.

There’s nothing remarkable about it, but the simple fact of *what* it is, what the ice means to people like them, is enough to make it beautiful.

Shane ducks his head, hiding a pleased grin behind the collar of his coat. “I know.”

“Yes. You probably do,” Ilya murmurs.

“I’ll be just a minute,” Shane says. “I’ll get skates for us.”

“Okay. I will stay here and try very hard not to miss your sexy body, Hollander.”

“Fuck off,” Shane huffs. He jogs towards the locker room, slipping past the door easily on account of Hayden always forgetting to lock it when he closes up. The light switches are all still flicked on, probably haven’t been turned off since yesterday— he *really* needs to talk to Hayden about wasting electricity— and the floors are spotless, reflecting warped images of the endless rows of lockers. The silence is untouched, clean. He catches his breath, presses his hand to his chest and wills his rabbiting heart to still.

The ice, for as long as he’s known it, has been his sanctuary. Until a few years ago, every sense of accomplishment he had earned in his life had been derived from hockey. Until a few years ago, he had thought hockey, the thrill of the win and the bitter pill of defeat, was his forever. He had lived it, he had breathed it in, had broken bones over it and had thrown himself into growing better, stronger. Braver. On the ice, he is everything that he can’t be outside of it. He is graceful, he is fearless.

There’s a greater significance, he knows, to his desire to bring Ilya here. Whatever it is between them, whatever man Ilya sees when he looks at Shane, that image cannot be complete without knowledge of who Shane is on the ice— the place he is, arguably, more himself than anywhere else.

“Hollander,” Ilya’s echoing voice brings him out of his thoughts. Shane startles, whipping his head back, and sees Ilya’s distant figure leaning against the boards, hands cupped around his mouth as he shouts. “I am growing old. Be faster.”

“Shut up and be patient,” Shane yells back, already hurrying towards his locker. He fumbles it open, and grabs the bag with his skates, slamming the door closed with a resounding *clang*. There’s a low cabinet by the left wall where Hayden keeps extra skates, and Shane hefts a pair that he guesses might be Ilya’s size, ducking out of the locker room.

“Finally,” Ilya strides towards him. “I thought I was going to die of being very bored. You are so slow. Slow and sad. Not very good together, yes? Makes you boring.”

Shane snorts, passing the skates over. “Check if these fit. If they don’t, there’s a bunch more in the cabinet in the locker room.”

Ilya pokes at the skates, turning them this way and that. “I think they will fit. But I do not know, you Americans have very hard to understand shoe size numbers.”

“Just try them on,” he says. “Also, I keep telling you, I’m Canadian.”

“Same thing,” Ilya shrugs.

“No the fuck it is *not*.”

“Keep your panties on, Hollander. I was joking. You are familiar with joke?”

They lapse into silence, lacing up together. Evidently, the skates seem to fit, because Ilya doesn't complain as he puts them on. When they push off onto the ice, Shane feels a heavy weight lift from his shoulders, and he can, all of a sudden, breathe so much easier. He's unrestrained, free. Shane lets his eyes flutter shut; inhales, exhales, relishes in the cold in his lungs and the lightness in his limbs. He's meant to be here, every bone in his body knows this.

He opens his eyes. Ilya is staring at him, studying him. For some reason, it doesn't give him that stomach-curling impression of unease anymore. He cants his head in acknowledgement, "What's up?"

"Nothing. I was just..." he stares some more. Looks his fill. Shane lets him. "You are very beautiful."

Shane's breath hitches. Letting a shy smile flicker across his mouth, he says, "Thanks."

Ilya skates closer, and brings both his hands up, hovering over Shane's forearms. It's only when he nods that Ilya allows them to descend, fingers loosely gripping the fabric of Shane's jacket.

"I am being serious, Hollander," Ilya says. "You are beautiful."

"I bet you say that to all the boys," Shane has to look up, up, up to meet Ilya's gaze. "And all of the girls."

"Maybe."

"You're shameless, huh?" Shane laughs.

"No. Just very honest," Ilya replies, thumbing the curve of Shane's jaw. His fingers drift higher, and, strangely enough, he starts tapping the soft skin of Shane's cheeks.

"What're you doing?" Shane squirms, wrinkling his nose.

"Counting spots on your face."

"You mean my freckles?" he blurts.

Ilya hums. "Is that what you call them? Very pretty. Look like... stars. I do not know right word for it. Group of stars? Together in sky? Sometimes look like animals?"

"Constellations," Shane breathes.

He makes a pleased noise. "Yes. I think that is it. Your freckles look like constellation. Very beautiful."

"Shit," Shane says, electricity dancing under his skin. He remains carefully still as Ilya keeps counting, a small smile on his face that looks entirely too affectionate. "I don't think you can count all of them. There's too many."

“Probably,” Ilya agrees. “But I like challenge. With lots of time, I can count all of them.”

“Right now?” he asks. “I don’t think we have enough time for that.”

“Fine, maybe later,” Ilya sighs, releasing Shane from his grip, making to pull away. But Shane doesn’t let him go far. He catches Ilya by the hands and tugs him close until they’re sharing breath again. Chest to chest.

Shane inhales, breathes him in. His warmth, his heavy presence.

“Are you smelling me?” Ilya asks.

“Don’t ruin the moment,” he says. “Also, your cologne still sucks.”

“Then stop smelling me, Hollander,” his voice is amused, heavy with fondness and shot through with affection.

For a brief moment, Shane feels gutted, bowled over by the burden of trust– if this can even be called trust. Uncertainty creeps in. They barely know each other, and already Shane feels so *much*; a massive unnamable behemoth of an emotion that lurks behind his ribs. Surely too much for any one man to handle. Surely too much, too fast.

A hand cups his jaw. Shane swallows, goes pliant and still. Ilya nudges his head up until their eyes meet. He loses himself a little in that pale, pale blue; imagines fractured ice, a deep lake. The air is brittle in the spaces between their bodies, pulled taut with tension. He wants to open his lungs, drink Ilya in. Would he be sweet? Would he be clear and clean, crystalline? Shane wants to press this moment into the pages of his memories, run his hands over the edges of their tangled silhouettes, sink into all of the places where their shadows intersect. And they don’t even *know each other*.

“You are thinking too much again,” Ilya chides gently.

“I can’t help it,” he argues. “It just happens.”

“Then stop it from happening. It is simple.”

“You’re impossible.”

“No,” Ilya says. “I am very possible. You are just an idiot, thinking too hard all the time, missing all signs I give you.”

Shane sighs. “I barely know you.”

“Do you not know enough?” he asks, and Shane should say *no*, should pull away. It’s difficult to remember why when he’s this close. Ilya’s heat is addictive, so is his touch, and affection in his gaze chips at Shane’s inhibitions. Inexorable as a tide.

“What signs?” he replies.

“You are so stubborn,” Ilya exhales, and kisses him.

Helplessly, Shane melts into it, lets Ilya skate them backwards until his back is hitting the boards and Ilya is nipping at his mouth, slipping a tongue between his lips. Shane shudders, wrapping his arms around Ilya's neck, and Ilya's body moves in counterpoint to his, hands dipping low to rest on Shane's hips, drifting over the waistband of his jeans. Fingers restless, never settling at a single spot for long. The soft, sweet scent of Ilya's cologne surrounds him and then Shane's throat is closing up because he's been lying all this time. He loves how Ilya smells. They kiss until they're panting, but it doesn't evolve any further than that, staying chaste and firmly above-belt.

It's who Ilya pulls away first, leaving Shane to chase his lips. There's a telltale burn in Shane's eyes that he's trying desperately to blink back, a familiar thickness in his throat.

"Shane?" Ilya asks, brows furrowed with concern. "You are crying. What is wrong?"

"Not crying," Shane rasps, dragging Ilya closer by his coat, and tucks his face into the crook of Ilya's neck.

"You are," Ilya lays his palm on the nape of Shane's neck, fingers tangling in his hair. "Did I do something you did not like?"

Shane shakes his head mutely, pressing impossibly closer. There's a terrifying beast of a feeling unfolding itself in his chest, a colossus with wings, with teeth and claws. He knows he's trembling in Ilya's steady hold, and he's horribly, horribly afraid.

"You are scared of something" Ilya says.

"Yeah," Shane whispers. "I'm sorry, I don't— I don't know of what. I just am. I didn't... you can leave, if you want to. Sorry. I know this isn't probably what you expected.

"Why would I leave?" Ilya asks. "I came here with you. I will leave when you will also leave."

"Why wouldn't you? You don't know me," Shane chokes out.

Ilya sighs. "You keep saying that."

"Because it's true."

"Maybe it is," he acknowledges. "But that is not bad thing, not knowing you. It means that I get to spend time knowing you. Lots of time."

Shane pushes his nose into Ilya's throat. Inhales, exhales. "You really want to?" he risks asking.

"Of course I do," Ilya says. "I am here with you, yes?"

"Yeah. I guess so," he exhales. "Sorry I fucked up our first kiss."

Laughing, Ilya flicks his cheek. Shane grimaces, squirming in his embrace, but Ilya doesn't let go. It's soothing beyond belief. "It is fine. It was not good for me to kiss you here anyway.

Should have waited after first date. I am not very good at being a gentleman, you see. I get distracted by sexy sad people with their sexy mouths.”

“I am not a sad person,” Shane huffs.

“No, you are sexy sad person. There is difference.”

“Dumbass,” he mutters.

Ilya’s chest shakes around a laugh. Shane’s heart unmoors, catches like a kite on a clothesline. He brushes a kiss over the pale column of Ilya’s throat, letting his lips linger.

“You like hugging, Hollander?” Ilya asks, deadly serious. There’s not a hint of humor in his tone.

“Yeah,” Shane blushes. “I don’t know. It just feels nice. Really nice.”

“It makes you not sad?”

“Yeah.”

“I see.” A beat. And then, “See, now I know this about you. I am getting to know you.”

Shane smiles. “I guess you are.”

They stay like that for a few minutes, after which Shane works up enough courage to pull away– but not far. Never far. He risks a glance up at Ilya and smiles some more. “Thanks.”

“For what?” Ilya questions.

“You know. Everything. Letting me freak out without being a dick about it, whatever,” Shane shrugs self-consciously.

“I did not think you were freaking out,” he says. “It is okay to need time to understand things. I do not think that is a bad thing.”

“No, I know. It’s just... I dunno. I guess people get weird about it sometimes. And I didn’t want to be a burden,” Shane says.

“Burden,” Ilya makes a face, like he’s sucked on a lemon. “You are not burden, Shane. Do not say stupid things. You are too smart for that.”

“Oh,” Shane says, looking away. “Okay.”

“You are nice to look at, nice to be with. I am having fun with you. And I do not think you are burden. To anyone.” Grimacing, Ilya says, “I am not very good at this. Especially in English. It is a very stupid language.”

Warmth pools low in his stomach, in his chest. Shane bites back a smile, and maybe it’s the ice, maybe it’s the extra burst of adrenaline that Ilya’s words give him– but he decides to be

brave. Darting forwards, he presses a delicate, lingering kiss to the corner of Ilya's mouth.

"Your English is just fine," Shane says. "And I agree, it is a pretty stupid language. My mom complains about it all the time."

Ilya grins at him. Shane grins back.

"Does that mean we can finally skate?" Ilya says, like the dick he is.

Shane laughs, shoving him away. "Sure. Let's start right now. First one to the other of the rink wins," Shane tells him, before taking off.

"Oh, fuck, Hollander, not fair! You have head start. Ah, stupid, stupid," this time, it's Ilya who's left struggling to catch up. "Damn it. You should have let me get hit by car. Better than losing to you."

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