

boys like boys

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boys like boys

by [historyofman](#)

Summary

He repeats it like a mantra, “Hockey players don’t like boys.”

Ilya squints, brows furrowed with fury. He challenges, “Who cares?”

“Well, do *you*—like boys?” Shane asks, then. It’s so earnest, his bottom lip trembling like he might cry again. Ilya doesn’t know how to answer, because he doesn’t know *the* answer, but he would move Heaven and Earth to make those tears go away.

Ilya turns his chin up, resolute, “Who *cares*? I like *you*.”

At eleven years old, Shane realizes he’s not like other boys. Naturally, his best friend is the first person he tells.

Notes

hi !! i am new to writing for this fandom so i am nervous to post this although i have been writing for my own fandom since 2022 ahah

probably only like two people will read this but i hope whoever those two are enjoy itttt

i also havent read the books so if some details are out of place im sorryyyy im basing this purely on /vibes/ i garnered from s1 <3 (and /gently/ forcing my friends who HAVE read the books to tell me if any plot devices i utilized were contradicted by book details. so far theyve told me they havent!)

dont be too hard on me please <3

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ilya walks back into his bedroom after brushing his teeth, calling out, “Goodnight, love you!” to his mother. His video games lay strewn about on his floor, and his helmet, tossed aside after practice, atop the mess.

He’ll put them away in the morning. He’ll just have to make sure his mother doesn’t see how haphazardly untidy his room is before he does. It’s okay though, because he usually wakes before her. She hasn’t been much willing to leave her bed lately.

For now, he has more important matters.

“How are you feeling?”

Shane shrugs.

“Have you told your parents yet?”

Shane shakes his head down at his palms, the tips of his fingers ripping apart the hangnails that Ilya knows he always pretends don’t hurt. He’s sitting cross-legged on Ilya’s bed, his feet covered in the fuzzy animal socks he’d arrived at his residence in. Elephants. Good choice.

Ilya frowns, curls still damp after the quick shower he’d rushed through after Shane had arrived, pink-cheeked and nose ruddy from tears. He drops himself down by his side, the duvet shuffling under his weight.

“Hey,” Ilya nudges at his shoulder to ask for eye contact, “Do you want me to be there when you do?”

He tries his very darndest to not focus on the fact that Shane had basically admitted Ilya is the very first person he has told that he likes boys.

Shane finally, finally, looks at him at his offer. He seems to be contemplating his answer before he shakes his head once more, his dark locks bouncing around and about at the motion.

“Just be here, so I can come to you if it goes bad?” His voice is scared, even if he acts like he’s not, and Ilya thinks he’s the bravest person he’s ever met.

“It’s not gonna go bad,” Ilya argues. “Your mama’s—awesome. Cool. She won’t care.”

Shane snuffles, little fingers picking at a loose string, “Hockey players don’t like boys, Ilya. Tyler said—“

“Tyler’s the dumbest prick in the seventh grade, Shane.” Ilya deadpans.

Shane’s gaze is so wide-eyed, pure, that Ilya longs to squeeze his cheeks between his cold, cold hands. He repeats it like a mantra, “Hockey players don’t like boys.”

Ilya squints, brows furrowed with fury. He challenges, “Who cares?”

“Well, do *you*—like boys?” Shane asks, then. It’s so earnest, his bottom lip trembling like he might cry again. Ilya doesn’t know how to answer, because he doesn’t know *the* answer, but he would move Heaven and Earth to make those tears go away.

Ilya turns his chin up, resolute, “Who *cares*? I like *you*.”

Finally, a small smile spreads across Shane's face like the sun rising at dawn, and it's the greatest achievement in all of Ilya's eleven years of life, hockey trophies on his shelf be damned.

He stands to shut his lights off, the only remaining brightness in the room radiating from the nightlight Alexei had gifted him for his ninth birthday, which feels like centuries ago now.

He had named it Miso, after one of Shane's favorite comfort dishes.

("Miso, like the Japanese soup?")

"No, like your mom."

"You are actually deranged, Ilya."

"That's a big word.")

"Okay," Shane says, smiling down at the elephants on his feet. "Can you make sure you're here, anyway? So I have somewhere to go?"

Ilya almost laughs as he slips under the covers, "Of course I'll be here. I mean, literally. Like I'm not even allowed to use the oven on my own. Where else would I be?"

Shane huffs, and even in the darkness, Ilya can see his eye roll, "That's not what I meant, and you know it. You're teasing me."

"I got you to smile."

Shane blinks drowsily at him. With the knowledge that Shane's brain gets all jumbled when he's on the brink of meeting dreamland, Ilya knows the boy probably didn't even realize he had been smiling. For an odd reason that Ilya is too sleepy as of the current moment to sit aside and decipher, the thought makes his toes tingly.

Shane yawns, and Ilya snorts at him, poking his arm, "Are you tired?"

Shane nods, and although Ilya isn't, having always been a night owl, he pulls up the duvet until it's snug around their chins, "Let's sleep. Mama would have *both* our heads on a stick if she finds out we're still awake."

"No, she loves me. More than you, probably."

"Hey, she gave *me* the *son of the year* mug."

"Pity gift," Shane slurs, sleep overtaking his features. Ilya isn't tired, and suddenly, he wishes the nightlight his brother had given him, back when he still liked him, was just a bit brighter so he could count Shane's freckles to sleep.

When he arises, it's with someone kneeling by his torso on the other side of the bed. Their knees press into his skin, and he squeezes his eyes shut to chase the remnants of his dream.

His cheek is being poked. "Ilya? Are you awake?"

Ilya groans into his pillow, "It's Saturday, mama, let me sleep."

Whoever's continuously shaking his shoulders like a ragdoll giggles. "It's not your mom. It's *me*, silly."

Ilya blinks his eyes open, and his best friend is peering down at him.

"Hollander, why are you up already?"

Shane flops onto his tummy, his legs bent up at his knees, kicking back and forth, as his hand rests on his curled fists.

"I'm bored."

"So sleep."

"I'm hungry."

Ilya groans once more, knowing this is a fight he won't win. He rubs his eyes awake and promptly sits up. His friend stares at him expectantly.

"Your mom said she could make me eggs. But I don't like eggs."

Ilya hums, holding his palm out to drag Shane out of his bed.

"I think we have cereal. Or we could bake something. Whatever you want," he offers, attempting his best at nonchalance, pretending the way Shane's eyes sparkle at every suggestion isn't making his heart do somersaults behind his ribcage. "I'll go brush my teeth, and you go get the milk and *Oreo O's*. You know where our pantry is."

Without wasting another second, Shane bounces on his heels as he beelines for the stairs toward the kitchen. Ilya has no possible idea how Shane freaking Hollander, shy and quiet in class, apologetic to the other team when he scores a goal, is the complete opposite around *him*. It makes him feel special. Then, it makes him feel silly.

Ilya himself doesn't even like *Oreo O's*, but he knows Shane loves anything Oreo flavored, so Ilya continuously asks his mother to buy them anytime he tags along with her on grocery shopping trips.

So Shane is about to fall over on his tiptoes as he attempts to reach for the chocolate on the tallest shelf in the pantry. Ilya doesn't even know how it got there.

He snorts at his friend's lack of coordination. He shoves Shane aside, "Move. I'll get it for you, shortcake."

"Shut up. You're the same height as me."

"Maybe, but I'll outgrow you one day. My papa's taller than yours."

And seconds later, Ilya is reluctant to admit that he too failed the task at hand. The chocolate bag sits, laughing down at him pitifully, a good three inches above his fingertips.

Ilya knows Shane is about to retort an annoying *I told you so*, when a scolding voice suddenly joins them in the kitchen, "Boys, what are you doing?"

"Mama!"

She holds her fists up to her hips. “Ilya Rozanov, you know you’re not supposed to use the oven by yourself.”

Shane snickers. *You weren’t kidding*, Ilya hears it in the sound.

“That’s just a dumb rule you force yourself to endorse ‘cause you don’t trust me.” He will tell anyone who asks that he is definitively and resolutely *not* pouting.

“Setting the oven alight once was enough for me to ban you, honey.”

Shane barely conceals a laugh. It slips despite his best efforts, and he clasps a hand over his lips.

Irina turns all her attention on him, “And you—Shane, does your mother know you’re here?” Her best reprimanding face is on *Shane* now, and Ilya almost beams in vindication.

Ha karma.

Shane shrugs, “I texted her. She got the message—“ He tacks on at the end, in case he’s wrong and is later accused of being a liar, “—I *think*. Besides, you know she loves Ilya and you and lets me be here all the time.” He provides a forced, innocent grin as evidence.

Ilya may be a B student, but he’s smart enough to know Shane is just trying to butter his mother up to get to stay, but that last sentence makes Ilya feel like Christmas lights had turned on inside his body anyway.

With an amused shake of her head, Ilya’s mother has begun to replace Shane’s spot to reach for the chocolate on the pantry shelf when her phone rings in her pocket.

With great volume, she sighs, “I’ll be right back. Don’t hurt yourselves.” She pads out the door to take the call.

Shane exhales loudly when she's gone, “She scares me.”

Ilya leans against the counter, “She's harmless. She loves you and your family too.”

“I wish I could stay here forever.”

“With my video games and mama to bake us desserts?”

Ilya swears the room’s lighting dims when Shane’s smile falls. “No. With *you*. I’m scared to go home, Ilya.” Shane glares down at his hands. “What if—what if I tell them, and they don’t love me anymore?”

“Have they ever given you the impression that they’d do that?” Ilya finds it hard to believe that Yuna and David would react in such a way. Shane’s family is the sweetest *ever*. Ever.

Shane shakes his head, “No, but I’ve seen it happen in movies.” He looks at Ilya with wide eyes that hold so many questions that the latter definitely has none of the answers to.

Ilya could only go with what he does know.

He reaches with a careful hand, Shane’s melting in his, and just when he is about to tell him that *well, this isn't the movies and you've got me*, his mama saunters back through the sliding kitchen door to rejoin them.

“Shane, honey, that was your mom. She needs you home.”

Ilya watches as his friend stiffens. He nods, heaving a sigh, and drops Ilya's hand in favor of getting ready to leave. Ilya hops up the stairs to retrieve his things for him, though Shane hasn't exactly brought anything with him besides a jacket.

When he reaches him, Shane is knelt on the ground, tying his shoelaces.

At the front door, Ilya holds his shoulders. He whispers, wary of his mother accidentally overhearing, "Hey, your mama loves you. Whether you like boys or not. Don't be scared, okay?"

"I'll try." Shane wipes his nose with the back of his hand. "Thanks for letting me stay last night, Ilya."

"I always want you here, Hollander. You know that."

Shane gives him a small smile before he slips out the door, and Ilya doesn't close it until his body disappears, watching as his figure gets smaller and smaller in the distance.

His mother whips her head out the kitchen door.

"Sweetheart, do you still wanna bake the cake?" Ilya joins her.

"So, you gonna tell me why you suddenly wanna be Duff Goldman? You trying out for The Great British Bake Off?"

Ilya snorts. His mother grins down at him and, with flour covered fingers, ruffles his hair before heading towards the sink to wash her hands.

"Shane came here 'cause being home scared him. He was sad, and I wanted to make him happy again. He likes cakes," he explains like it's simple enough. Then saying it out loud

makes him second-guess himself. Suddenly, he pauses. “And sandwiches. Maybe I should’ve made him a tuna melt instead. Do we have tuna?”

“Honey, breathe,” his mother chuckles. “One recipe at a time.” Then, she hums, concern lacing her voice. She slides over the batter she had already prepared for him, allowing him to mix the runny concoction.

“Why does he not wanna go home? Is everything okay?”

“I can’t say. I promised him.”

His mother walks over until she stops beside him. “Hey.” Ilya looks up at her.

“He’s not... in danger, is he? Is something happening at his home?”

Ilya’s eyes widen, appalled, “No! Of course not. Nothing like that. It’s just something personal. To him.”

She eyes him for a minuscule moment before she says, “Okay.”

“I just—I wanna help. I don’t like seeing him upset.”

“And baking a cake would help?”

“Everyone likes cake!”

She smiles. She helps him pour the batter into the cake pan. As she begins to preheat the oven, Ilya stands off to the side, lost in thought. He wishes he could do more, help Shane feel

better however he can, help him breathe through this easier the way Shane's mere presence at school helps Ilya focus in class better.

"Hey," his mother rests a warm hand on his shoulder. "I'm sure everything will be alright." She smiles at him, eyes crinkling at the corners. In the face of her comfort, Ilya finds it hard to not smile back. His mother is beautiful, and warm, and kind, and if Shane's family were anything like her, he's sure everything will be.

Shane comes over again the next night.

Ilya's in the middle of cleaning his room, because his mother promised him a second dessert if he did it, when he's being called.

"Sweetheart, Shane's here!"

Ilya takes off his headphones the second Shane finds his room. They'd grown close enough that his home is practically Shane's also, though Ilya knows the boy is sometimes still bashful to walk freely around the rest of the residence by himself.

He at least feels comfortable in Ilya's bedroom.

Ilya would later be ashamed of how rudely he'd blurted out the question, "How'd it go?"

Shane sits at the edge of his bed, smiling. But there's something else dimming in the irises of his eyes.

“Okay, I guess. They understood and accepted me.”

Ilya frowns, plopping down beside him. His fingers fiddle with the edge of his checkered pajama bottoms. “Then, why do you look so sad?”

Shane shrugs only one shoulder, looking at him. “I’m scared to go back to school tomorrow.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t wanna hide, but what if I get laughed at?”

Ilya thinks for a second and exclaims, because *duh*, the answer is *so* obvious, “Well, then, I’ll beat ‘em up.”

Shane laughs, leaning into his side. “Thanks, Ilya, I needed that laugh.”

And well, Ilya isn’t too pleased nor does he appreciate that his bravery is being made fun of. “Excuse me, I could totally beat someone up.” He puffs out his chest for effect.

Shane smiles gently at him, even as the fright in them lingers. “Mhm. I’m sure you could.”

Ilya wraps an arm loosely around his neck.

“But I'm scared for real, Ilya.”

Silence falls. Shane leans his head onto his shoulder.

Ilya doesn't really know what to say—he'd never been in a situation like this before. He wishes he could ask Alexei for advice; to him, his brother knows *everything*, but Alexei hasn't been talking to him much lately. Ilya's eyes fall upon the nightlight.

Ilya doesn't know a lot of things. But what he does know is his friend, and he knows what makes him smile.

So he walks over to the corner of his room and pulls out the paper bag—*try to help the planet even just a little bit*, Shane always tells him.

"I got you something."

Like stars in the sky, Shane's eyes brighten almost automatically, "For what? It's not my birthday anytime soon."

Ilya rolls his eyes, pushing at his shoulder. "It doesn't have to be your birthday for me to give you things."

He drops the bag onto Shane's lap. Shane makes no move.

"Come on. Open it!"

Finally, cautiously, Shane digs his hand into the depths of the bag. Ilya watches with rapt attention as his fingers emerge from the rainbow colored tissue paper, pulling out the terribly wrapped tuna melt Ilya had indeed succeeded in getting his mother to help him make.

"Your gift is ... a sandwich?"

Ilya's mouth falls agap, shocked that Shane isn't more grateful, "It's tuna! You said it was your favorite fish!"

“In *sushi*.”

“Do I look like a sushi chef to you?”

“You don’t look like a tuna melt chef.”

“That’s not even a—“

Ilya’s mother pops her head in from behind his door. “Boys, do you want cake?”

Shane doesn’t even wait for Ilya to finish saying, “Race you,” before bolting down the stairs.

Later, bellies full, Shane and Ilya hop back up the stairs into the latter’s room, but not before stopping by his mother’s room to thank her for the cake (and in Shane’s case, the tuna melt, which he did enjoy, Ilya so very boastfully points out with an *I told you so*.)

They both get ready for the night, Ilya pulling out the spare toothbrush that had made itself known as Shane’s, officially so, with his name taped onto the end of it.

They slip under the covers, Miso’s light being the only illumination around them. Shane sets an alarm so they don’t oversleep.

When they’re both warm and comfortable, Ilya whispers, “I’ll be by your side the whole time. Rose and Hayden, too.”

“Promise?”

“I solemnly swear on Miso’s *life*.”

“He’s a nightlight, Ilya.”

“He’s my *baby*!”

Chapter End Notes

i actually wanna write a bigger, longer, /better/ hollanov fic so this short thing is rly just meant to ease me into writing for this fandom so i dont expect anyone to actually LIKE it its more just for me to get comfy w hollanov in fic world :P

(i know alexei is a dickwad who should be thrown into the bottom of the arctic ocean but i imagine that he was an okay brother as a child until he and ilya entered teen years and he became the evil piece of shit that we know now.)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

i didnt plan on writing an update it was meant to be a oneshot but i got carried away :')

hollanov are teenagers now !!!! this entire fic is definitely NOT my proudest work, i feel its a little bit lackluster compared to what i typically write (but as i said, its meant to just ease me into hollanovs dynamic) but i think i do like this chapter a lot more than the first one bc i dont think im very well versed in writing in the perspective of young children ... angsty teenagers though? angsty adults? now THATS right up my alley. so here is some teenaged hollanov for ya

happy new year everyone <3

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“You’re my best friend.”

Right.

Okay.

He can handle that.

He can.

Except, he *can't*, because—

How could Ilya tell him *you're my best friend*, follow up that stab in the heart with that stupid, beautiful grin that makes the sun ashamed to exist, and expect Shane fucking *loser* Hollander to breathe normally?

Why can't Ilya see him as *more*?

Shane doesn't know *how* exactly he had begun falling for his best friend like a stupid teenager in a low budget film.

He doesn't know *how* he's supposed to act like all's okay, when the simplest of gestures, like bringing him a muffin before class in the morning, makes his heart feel as though it might implode in itself until he's left with a hole in his chest like the remnants of a grand supernova in the shape of Ilya's smile.

He doesn't know any of it. Nothing makes sense anymore, and he wants to jump off a very tall something because of it. He hates that he doesn't know.

What he *does* know, is *when* it was that he'd realized his feelings for Ilya were more than any average *dudebro pal bestie* infatuation.

What he *does* know, is *what* had helped him come to such a realization—or rather, had forced him to open his eyes and confront the drumbeat in his chest whenever Ilya so much as looked his direction, like *hey yeah so you're in love; what are you gonna do about it, buddy?*

It happened on a Friday night, in mid-October. He was angry at Ilya—angry because, simply put, Ilya had promised him he'd come over for movie night—only to be pulled away for a late evening, extra hockey practice.

Ilya fucking *liar* Rozanov. Hockey is Ilya's first love, and while Shane had initially thought the same for himself, he's quickly starting to understand that *his* first love might just be the liar himself.

So maybe Shane didn't know when these feelings started, but he thinks maybe they'd been lingering inside him all along—all those years ago, when he was eleven years old, lost, confused, and told Ilya he likes boys.

So there he was, left alone on Friday, no plans because *his* plan had canceled on him. He didn't know whether to feel betrayed that he was picked second, or angry that Ilya had assumed he'd be okay *with* being picked second. In the end, he chose the first option because it was the one that hurt less.

(And Shane *knows*; okay, he knows hockey is important, that practices are, whether they are scheduled or spontaneous like that night's. But maybe, he'd wanted to feel important too. And isn't that just pathetic?)

He had stalked away from him, away from where Ilya's private coach had been waiting to pick him up, stomping and fuming, his anger thick like gravel, ignoring Ilya's teasing *Hollander... Hollander!* following him.

Shane's feet carried him away, one of them stepping on a flyer for the annual Winter formal. Shane didn't think he would go. He didn't have a date, and when he'd brought it up to Ilya, the latter had smiled sheepishly and said, "I'm going with Svetlana." So not only was Ilya Rozanov a liar, but he's the most sought after one in their school, so of course he had other priorities that weren't Shane. And Shane was not going to stand there, and watch Ilya's eyes do that thing that beg him not to be mad, not when he was bailing on Shane last minute.

Instead, he decided to DM one of his classmates to see if he was free to hang out, because yes, Shane has other friends. Yes, he does.

And that was when *oh*, everything fell down.

(Almost as hard, and deep, and mind-numbingly stupid as Shane had fallen for Ilya fucking *beautiful* Rozanov.)

Ethan was more than welcome with the idea, inviting him over without a second's hesitation. Shane liked Ethan fine. They'd worked on a group project together. Shane was even sure Rose had had a crush on him at one point, and in her own words, Rose had great taste in boys. Shane was sixteen, and his best friend had abandoned on him (read: *gone to hockey*

practice) and it's Friday, for God's sake. How embarrassing was he for not having weekend plans?

So he'd gone. Ethan smiled like it was easy and had a huge selection of video games to choose from.

Shane was going to be a normal teenager, decidedly not thinking about how much fun Ilya must be having with the puck and not him. Because normal teenagers don't constantly think about their best friend's every waking move, and fall asleep dreaming of them still, and not know why.

Ethan was good company, really, and while Shane had only wanted a friend to hang out with, just because he had the time and energy to, certainly not to prove that he can hang out with other people that aren't annoyingly sarcastic Russians with dazzling smiles, maybe in hindsight he should've foreseen what would come.

Eventually, they'd settled on watching an old American sitcom, something quick and lighthearted that Shane's only job was to laugh at. Suddenly, Shane had wanted to curse the universe for making not only Ilya busy, but *also* Rose and Hayden, because what had he been thinking, deciding to hang out with a boy in his class to what? prove he could? He certainly can't deny that was his reason now.

And it got worse. Because as they sat and watched, all Shane could think of was how much funnier Ilya's commentary would be. How although Shane ate, lived, and breathed hockey, he suddenly *hated* it for keeping his best friend away from him.

Ethan was kind, but every time he found something funny, Shane could count just how many breaths his laughs differed from Ilya's; every time he offered popcorn, Shane'd thought about Ilya wiping his buttery hands on Shane's shirt, because *yours is cheaper than mine*, he'd say with mischief in his sweet, green eyes.

And well, this wasn't normal, was it? Normal boys didn't compare every single friend they ever made to their favorite one, did they? Normal boys didn't let their hearts rattle their ribcage, knees get weak, just from their best friend calling them *so boring I could die*, *Hollander*; *seriously*, did they?

And oh God, normal boys definitely, *absolutely* did not run out of a friend's house without explanation, just because their best friend had texted them *practice ended early!!!!!!*

Shane fucking *lame* Hollander. So, so fucking lame.

So, so fucking in love with his best friend he was terribly, pathetically stupid to not see it sooner.

So maybe Shane doesn't know how he had fallen for Ilya. But he knows *when* he realized it. It was that Friday; it was that text; it was the way he'd sprinted home, the way he had replied *come over then !!!!* :), the way he'd subsequently spent the fifteen minutes it'd take Ilya to walk to his house tidying up his room.

It was definitely, irrevocably the way Ilya had arrived on his doorstep, still pink-cheeked from exertion, t-shirt clinging onto barely-there muscles, curls damp with sweat, and Shane thinking *I couldn't ever want anyone else* before the angel on his shoulder could tell him this was a bad idea and that everything was about to change.

Now, reflecting, he realizes that his love for Ilya comes in waves.

Some days, it's easier to breathe with the weight of it holding him down. And other times, his feelings are so overpowering that Shane has to seal his lips shut so that a strangled *I love you!* doesn't tumble out of his mouth. Those little three words knock against the walls of his lips, begging to be freed, but Shane thinks he'd die before he lets that happen.

They'd argued about it. Of course they did. Since Shane could remember, Ilya was the one person he had told everything to, whether it had been news as big as him making the high school hockey team, or a text update as small as his grocery store haul. Only, of course, Shane could not just come right out and tell Ilya what he'd found out then, even if it made his throat close with guilt because this was the biggest and only secret he'd ever kept from him.

Observant and smart as he is, Ilya noticed. And he was *livid*. One thing about Ilya Rozanov was that his anger is not to be messed with, and Shane knew this. He knew, and he pushed anyway.

In hindsight, of course Shane wishes he could take every second back, because maybe there wouldn't be this tension between them now if he had, this feeling like they're walking together on a tightrope and Shane fearing for the very first time that Ilya wouldn't catch him if he falls.

It started out simple. Ilya had asked him to study together, but Shane had declined because he couldn't be trusted to be around him and *not* want to kiss him senseless. Only, this was the third time in a week that Shane had very pointedly, inarguably proved himself to be avoiding Ilya, and of course, he caught on.

He'd confronted Shane right then and there, in the middle of the school hallway.

"What's wrong with you?"

Too much to count, but Shane was sure none of his answers were what Ilya was looking for.

"Did I do something," Ilya had continued, because Shane was sure as hell not going to answer. "You're keeping something from me? Either tell me what it is, or—*stop* doing it."

Shane had scoffed, trying to appear nonchalant, though he was sure he was failing, "We see each other every day, Ilya."

“At school. You don’t let me come over anymore!” Then, Ilya seemed to realize he was nearing a shout, and he pouted instead, and Shane was nothing but a weak, weak man. “You’re my best friend,” Ilya had smiled, equal parts hopeful and melancholic, and Shane was a *goner*.

He might as well have been a pile of goo, and he’d relented, inviting Ilya to come over the next day—forcing himself to endure every second of being pulled into his orbit but not being fully let in, knees brushing Ilya’s under the lunch table but unable to hold his hand.

And Shane was miserable.

And that’s where he is at now. It’s been a week like this. Hanging out with his best friend like everything’s normal, like there isn’t this crushing weight under his lungs, unspoken feelings that had made themselves home inside him. He watches him, Ilya moving around Shane’s kitchen like it’s his own, clumsy fingers assembling a sandwich—tuna melt, because that’s really all he could make.

Fuck. The one thing Ilya had made him to cheer him up, when he’d told him he liked boys—when this entire thing happened. *God, please just kill me now.*

Suddenly, Ilya turns, grinning wide, sticky fingers covered in mayo. Of course, Shane whips around to avoid being caught staring. This results in his eyes landing on the TV.

And it’s like he could feel the words before he hears them, “Are you staring at the blank TV? You’re so boring, Hollander, I could—“

“Die, I know, Ilya.”

Shane smells his presence before he sees it. “Here. Tuna melt *à la* me.”

“Thanks.”

“Sure. So what are you thinking so deeply about?”

And okay, Shane might be a loser, stupid, and so, so lame, but he’s smart enough to let this be his opportunity to save them both from his feelings.

“I was thinking, since finals are soon, I should probably start studying more. Less time for hang-outs.”

“Don’t be silly, we can study together.”

“No!”

Ilya raises his eyebrows, lips twisted in a confused manner, “No?”

Shane turns his face to his side, cringing, then turning back, “No, we can’t. Study together, that is.”

“... and why not? What, you think I’m too stupid to study with?”

It’s not said with offense, just Ilya’s usual deadpan delivery, the one that makes Shane wish he could be more like him so he wouldn’t have to deal with these feelings that make him feel like he’s walking barefoot on hot coals.

Even still, Shane is quick to answer, “No! Look, *I’m* stupid, and I need to study, okay?”

“Okay, Mr *Straight A’s*—“

“Can you just—*stop*?”

Then, it’s silent. Because Shane does not snap. Only, he just *did*—and the easy teasing slides from Ilya’s face, replaced with an expression Shane doesn’t see often. The one that comes only when Ilya’s family is mentioned around him, which Shane has known him long enough to ensure is *never*. This look of unexpected hurt that shocks Shane’s bones enough to backtrack. “I just mean ... I need to focus, okay?”

“*Stop* ... what? What am I doing?” Ilya asks, genuine. Then, “Are you mad at me?”

“No, Ilya, I’m not mad at you—I just.”

Then, Ilya says something that Shane could not have predicted. “You’ve been a bad friend.”

And well, he figures it isn’t untrue, but it *sucks*. His heart pounds in his ears, as he begs his backbone made of glass to not shatter because he needs this. He needs to stay strong, not crumble under Ilya’s piercing gaze.

“Friends don’t treat each other like this,” Ilya continues, his accent growing stronger with frustration that Shane does *not* find adorable. “You get mad when I can’t hang out, and you get mad when I do? What do you want from me, Shane?”

Well, he can’t go back. “I want you to leave, okay?”

“*Fuck*, fine.” Ilya stands, red-faced with anger. Bread crumbs fall from his lap. “Whatever.”

Shane runs his hands over his warmed face, fighting the urge to take his words back, keep Ilya standing there, waiting for Shane to change his mind. But he knows this is good. This is necessary. He will never be a good friend again if he spends any more time like this, with these inappropriate feelings toward the one person he'd never wanted to hurt.

As Ilya takes one last survey of the room, Shane has to clench his jaw shut to avoid apologizing. He begs the feelings that had taken the passenger seat within his body to take a day off, just this once, just until he feels okay again.

But as Ilya leaves, Shane feels anything but.

"Friends don't treat each other like this," Ilya's words ring in his head, loud enough to make his ears bleed, as he lays across his bed, eyes lasered at the ceiling.

Days after they're done spitting venom at each other, Shane refusing to text and Ilya refusing *harder*, Shane isolates himself in his room, tucks himself under the safety of his duvet where nothing can get him, not even stupid, smart boys with stupid, gorgeous curls.

Underneath it all, he's horrified to find that he feels *relieved*—to have Ilya very so clearly mad at him.

Now that he won't have Ilya glued to his side like a moth to a flame, time away from Ilya sounds freeing almost—not that he ever wanted to feel *free* from Ilya, but he can breathe easier without the constant three words around his neck, choking him like hands clinging onto life.

He briefly begins to wonder if maybe he's the problem. No, he knows he is.

The idea that maybe he just ruined the best thing he has is one that enters his mind in a whirlwind of overthinking. It's one that ached beyond words, but it's a thought that he needs to consider because he doesn't know how else to breathe otherwise.

God, what is he going to do? What does he want to achieve, really? Is he supposed to never speak to Ilya again? Never lay his eyes upon him, smile at his jokes like his heart isn't screaming for him to grab his face, and say *I love you, please love me too*? How the fuck is he supposed to do that?

He feels the familiar prickle of tears building behind his eyes, a pressure he only lets himself welcome when he's alone.

No, that won't happen. It won't, because Ilya said it himself. He's his best friend. Best friends don't never talk again with ease, with the knowledge that they will be buried six feet under mad at each other. Best friends don't let each other hurt forever, without following each other through the afterlife.

No, he and Ilya will get through this, the same way they'd gotten through middle school when their entire class found out Shane liked boys. The same way they'd gotten through wicked sneers and ridicule, by Ilya—beautiful, popular Ilya who could command a room with the wave of a hand—glowering and saying, “So what?” to the girls snickering at Shane, “I like boys, *too*. So *what*?”

Shane remembers asking Ilya after that ordeal if that was true, or if he had said it to share the weight of Shane's embarrassment. Ilya had shrugged and said the same words that he'd said on the night of Shane's coming out. “I don't know. I don't care. I just like you.”

And God, Shane prays for it now. Prays to a God he doesn't believe in that one day Ilya will say those words a third time, only meaning it the way Shane means it now. That he likes him. That he loves him. In a way that no one else walking this Earth could ever compare.

He and Ilya will get through this. Shane will bury these feelings until they're as dead as he feels when Ilya isn't by his side. He will get over it, and he and Ilya will be okay. Ilya will call him Hollander with that goofy, wide grin, and he will wipe his dirty hands on Shane's clothes because he can, and they will be normal.

It's a bullshit plan. Of course it is. Because when has Ilya Rozanov ever been the type to not get what he wants?

He chases Shane down.

He puts up a fight, until predictably, his best friend is able to knock his walls down like he always does. Because Shane is sixteen, and weak, and oh so in love that he feels it bloom beneath the quiet place under his ribs.

And—

“You’re my best friend.”

This time, that sentence is followed by, “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have walked away like that.”

He’s right back to where he stood just a few weeks ago, chest heaving from arguing. Except, now, he is no longer angry. Now, Ilya’s hugging him, which he almost never does. Now, everything feels okay again, but it’s not, because God, really, why can’t Ilya see him as *more*?

Ilya Rozanov is... well, to put it simply, he might be the best person Shane’s ever met. He’s practically his family, and Shane loves his parents, but he’s sure these days, he talks to Ilya more than he does them. He knows him better than anyone, and Shane would steal him the moon if he’d asked.

Not to mention, he’s, like... *incredibly* attractive. (*Weak, Hollander, you’re weak.* The voice sounds scarily like Ilya’s.)

Okay, Shane has known he was gay since he was eleven, so even if he didn’t like Ilya like that, he’s not blind.

Except—

He *does* like Ilya like that—that much is clear—and he’s almost 99.9% sure his feelings are unrequited.

And it would be totally fine, if that was the case, okay? It’s fine, because Ilya is completely entitled to his feelings, but... Shane wouldn’t mind it if the universe would bless him with a miracle and, with an otherworldly power, make Ilya fall in love with him in a snap of a finger.

Only this is real life, and while he believes in the tale that the stars are watching out for him, he’s sure the universe doesn’t set out to help boys get their crushes to like them back.

And just exactly, what is Shane supposed to do with that?

Well, the answer is—

He may be a bit of an idiot, so he invites Ilya over. Because avoiding him didn’t help. Maybe the opposite will. Maybe it will if he spends time with Ilya and picks up on all his annoying habits. Because Shane knows he has a *lot*, objectively speaking, Big Fat Crush aside.

Like the way Ilya never lines his shoes up by the door when he comes over, dropping them in a haphazard manner that leaves dirt smattering all over the doorway, anyway.

(But at least he’s taken his shoes off, familiar and caring with Shane’s culture. How cute.)

The way he pulls at Shane’s sleeve when he wants his attention, instead of calling Shane’s name like a regular person, even when his hands are wet from washing and making Shane’s shirts wet in the process. Which is—gross, okay? Shane hates wet clothing.

(But aw. He wants *Shane's* attention, his eyes on him, his focus at him. The thought makes Shane's heart heavy like molten lava in his stomach. How fucking precious.)

Or the way he licks his fingers after they polish off all the chicken wings within five minutes, which is—unsanitary and *not* at all hot, no it is not.

(The sight of his lips snapped in a pout, his thumb between them, tongue darting around any sauce he's missed—Shane is so incredibly weak, oh God—)

Shane all but squeaks when Ilya makes eye contact, green irises twinkling, while his finger is still in his mouth. Okay. The annoying habits thing isn't working.

Being in his company for longer than that twenty minutes maximum that Shane had grown accustomed to in the recent weeks quickly smashed any hope of him moving on from his Big Fat Crush harder than the asteroid struck the Earth and extinguished the dinosaurs, because he found that he simply can't just *not* look at Ilya and imagine his callused fingers running through that blonde hair that always got caught in his eyes, sitting by him while Ilya drank one too many black coffees, resisting the urge to drop his head onto his shoulder and fall asleep without a second's hesitation.

It isn't until Ilya goes home, that Shane is left alone to do nothing but doodle Ilya's name in the margins of his homework until he falls asleep for real. It's a lame attempt at manifestation, something Rose taught him but he doesn't fully believe in.

The plan fails, because... well, first, he'd forgotten to lock the door after Ilya parted, and second, more importantly, Ilya is suddenly back, sweaty and glistening clearly from having run back over to Shane's midway home. He hops back into the room with an all too exciting invite.

Shane looks up at him from where he sits at his desk, and—

Damn, he wishes he would've asked Irina what she had put in her water when she was pregnant with him, because just how is it possible for someone to have been able to create such a beautiful specimen?

He feels his cheeks grow warm at the thought, and he hopes the dark lighting of the room is able to cover the way he's undoubtedly blushing at the floor.

"I meant to ask earlier, but I forgot; do you want to go to the Winter formal with me?" The way Ilya asks is so uncharacteristically shy, his signature grin smaller than usual, his thumb tapping against his thigh. Shane might know all of Ilya's annoying habits, but he knows all of his nervous tics too.

He's so... *Ilya*. Dumb, suave but dorky all the same, and God, how has Shane not realized he was completely in love with him all those years ago?

He's just Shane's person.

He almost slaps himself, because *Jesus Christ calm down, you had already concluded that he does not feel the same, stop being you.*

But for once, he doesn't listen. His person.

His best friend.

Well, fuck.

Ilya had made it blatantly clear that that's all they are to each other. *All* they are. Shane shouldn't say *all*, like that. Like something is lacking. It should be enough. It *is* enough.

("You're my best friend.")

"I thought you were going with Svetlana."

Ilya doesn't lose eye contact as he says, "She decided to go with her girlfriends. Something about *fuck modern expectations*." Then, he snorts in that classic Rozanov way, digging a hand through his hair. "And besides, I'd rather go with you."

"Yeah?"

"Of course, Hollander." He scoffs, even as his pale cheeks are suddenly dusted pink, "You're —"

Finally, Shane smiles, like the sun breaking over the horizon, "—I'm your best friend, I know, Rozanov. I'd love to go with you."

Please, God, let that be enough.

Chapter End Notes

okay i THINK this is where i actually will end it now :P i FINALLY killed the baby hollanov monstrosity thats been taking over my brain !!!!!

thank u everyone for the love, i could not have in a million years expected this reader response as this is my first ever hollanov fic and i obviously dont have a hollanov audience. i was genuinely expecting maybe like ten readers max. i am so grateful ppl seemed to enjoy this !!!! <3 <3

EDIT as of february 19: i decided to write a sequel where we see the boys' friendship & relationship develop in college. subscribe to the series i placed this fic in, if you want to be notified when that's up! it will be a whole new fic but you will be able to find it in the series once i post it <3 im working on the fic now!

(the series is called "hollanov diaries" in case you cant see it on this somehow. its on my profile)

see ya if u wanna <3

End Notes

if you enjoyed this someway somehow please click [here](#) for my twitter if youd like to chit chat :)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!