

Dear Fellow Traveler

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Dear Fellow Traveler

by [frondescence \(axeljeldridge\)](#)

Summary

“We are not taking the same flight,” he said, pushing Ilya’s phone away. “That would be insane.”

“Oh, come on,” Ilya whined. “You are being too paranoid. Nobody cares if two people are on the same flight—we are friends, remember?”

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After Ilya gets an injury that puts him on the bench for a month, he convinces Shane to let him go watch a game against the Washington Capitals. Shane agrees, on one condition: they fly separately. Which works out, until he's stuck at the airport having a sensory meltdown and everything just keeps going wrong.

Notes

Titles are all from Sea Wolf's song "Dear Fellow Traveler;" highly recommend for these two.

Chapter 1: I think I'm growing weary

The radio was tinny, a scratchy old speaker that grated on Shane's nerves as he sat in the airport Starbucks, attempting to pass the time before his flight without wiggling out. Being "in" the Starbucks was generous; it was just counter and a loose cluster of chairs and wobbly tables cordoned off from the bustling walkway with only the limp black polyester of a single crowd control stanchion. Shane had hoped that the illusion of separation would provide him with some relief from the crowds of families and businessmen that swarmed through Dulles International on a holiday weekend, but alas, it seemed his plan was in vain. Instead, he was treated to the grating sounds of a local radio station recapping last night's game:

"With two Russian greats in the stands, it's no wonder that Hollander might be feeling a little tight at the collar," the commentator chuckled. Her voice had a peppy, artificial quality that made Shane's stomach flip. "But it seems like he flourished under the pressure, as usual."

"Absolutely," the other commentator replied more languidly. "While no one was surprised to see Ovechkin at his home stadium overseeing his team in their first playoff against a Canadian powerhouse since he retired last season, it was an unexpected treat to see Rozanov in the box with him. Planning the great Soviet takeover, you think?"

"Probably not," she laughed. "It's been several years since Rozanov has returned to his home country, and Ovechkin remains staunchly apolitical. In fact, the two have rarely interacted—it makes you wonder what brought Rozanov back out to the East coast, huh?"

"Totally—he's probably taking advantage of his injury to get out of Ottawa and enjoy some time in a balmy capital, don't you think?"

"It has been a warm winter, Jim. Speaking of the weather, let's go now to Sam Parnov for today's forecast..."

Shane shook himself, taking a sip of his tea as a distraction. It was too hot still, and scalded his tongue, but at least the feeling took his mind off the radio hosts for a moment. *They weren't even saying anything*, he tried to reassure himself. Still, he could feel his neck flushing. He was furious with Ilya—they had agreed that it wouldn't be too much of a risk for him to come to the game, especially since he wouldn't be playing for a few weeks, but that had been under the assumption that Ilya wouldn't do something as stupid as sitting in the player's box. He was supposed to be incognito! A hat, sunglasses, a scarf, something, and in the regular ass stands, not encased in glass and on display for the world to see!

Shane's breath was becoming ragged with anger the more he thought about it. They had been together the night before, enjoyed a luxurious morning in Shane's hotel room, and parted ways around noon. But they had kept up a steady stream of text messages, both mundane and ...private, as they did most of the time nowadays. *He was probably sitting next to Ovechkin when he sent those*, Shane thought, and wanted to retch. They hadn't talked about where Ilya was going to sit, but Shane had figured it wouldn't need discussing. As per usual, however,

Ilya was the risktaker, seemingly uncaring for the potential devastation he could cause them with just one misstep.

“Makes you wonder what brought Rozanov back out to the East coast, huh?”

They didn't even hardly say anything, Shane tried to reason. But that was the problem. They *did* say something; they had mentioned both their names in the same few minutes, they had questioned why Rozanov was there, and they had moved on without any satisfactory answer. It was certain that some plucky sports journalist would catch on to the oddity, see an opportunity for a story, for speculation, and it would be over from there. From speculation would come interviews, which would mean PR conversations, which would mean more lying and more scrutiny and eventually, inevitably, one of them would break and everyone would know and everything would be ruined.

Shane reached for his phone to text Ilya, to demand an explanation for why he would do something so ruinously stupid, but as he did, the screen lit up with a buzz.

FLIGHT CANCELLED — SEE THE NEAREST SERVICE DESK FOR REBOOKING OPTIONS

“Fuck,” Shane hissed through his teeth, frozen in place. He knew what the fucking options were—there was only one that would get him back in time for practice tomorrow, and he hadn't booked it for a very specific reason: Ilya was on it.

“Ah, we could take the same flight!” Ilya said, turning his phone to show Shane. They were sitting on Ilya's couch together, legs intertwined, trawling through travel sites to figure out which games made the most sense for Ilya to come see while he recovered from his shoulder injury. He wasn't cleared to play for a month, and since he had passed on the captain title for this season, he was free to spend the time doing mostly what he pleased, as long as he attended his thrice weekly physical therapy sessions and kept up with the rest of his exercise regimen.

Ilya knew that this much free time, while it sounded nice, was dangerous. Sitting at home alone, watching the games on television; it would only be a short while before he would start to spiral into a chasm of worthlessness, skipping PT and ignoring calls, that would threaten to keep him on the bench the whole season even after he recovered physically. So he had asked Shane if he could go watch a one of his games in person.

“You can watch your own team,” Shane had dismissed the idea immediately. “Why do you need to see me?”

“Because I like to see you,” Ilya had responded tauntingly. As sassy as he sounded, there was a simple truth to the thought—he liked watching his boyfriend play the sport they both loved. “And I never get to do it.”

“It would be suspicious,” Shane had continued to wave him away. But after some prodding, and slightly more vulnerable explaining, Ilya had been able to convince Shane that it would be an acceptable risk. And Shane, unable to truly refuse Ilya and understanding the need to

have something to look forward to that was scheduled and on a calendar, had finally agreed. But this was a stretch too far.

“We are *not* taking the same flight,” he said, pushing Ilya’s phone away. “That would be insane.”

“Oh, come on,” Ilya whined. “You are being too paranoid. Nobody cares if two people are on the same flight—we are friends, remember?”

“Friends don’t take flights together,” Shane retorted, and staunchly looked at his phone instead of Ilya’s face, which he was sure was showing him just how ridiculous of a statement that was. Since they had become official, it felt like Shane had become more guarded at the same rate that Ilya became more adventurous, a wobbly balancing act that brought him more stress than he cared to admit. He knew it didn’t make sense; his parents were supportive, and his mom had even encouraged him to test the waters with a Pride appearance with his team last summer. But anything that brought them even remotely closer to going public made him absolutely nauseous with fear. Hiding their relationship was painful, to be sure, especially now that they couldn’t dismiss the infrequency of their visits with the guise of being only a casual hookup. But it was a pain that Shane was used to; it was almost reassuring, that twinging ache under his right rib when he thought about seeing Ilya next. He had even gotten used to the sad way his mom looked at him when she caught him texting under the dinner table, the way his dad tentatively asked when Ilya might be able to visit next. Going public would mean new kinds of looks, and new kinds of questions, and probably less time to visit his parents with the influx of interviews and charity galas—

So no, they were not going to take a flight together. He had made sure of that, and Ilya had reluctantly agreed, though not without plying Shane with the possibility of an airplane bathroom hookup (“That makes me want to do it even less, Ilya”). They flew down to D.C. on separate flights, from separate cities, at separate times of day, to separate airports. But the flights back were more restricted; the only options flying out of Reagan had long layovers in Chicago, and Shane wasn’t willing to put either of them through that, even if it did mean taking a slightly greater risk. They would both fly out of Dulles, but Shane would leave first, and his flight should be boarding before Ilya even arrived at the airport. No temptation.

Unless his fucking flight got cancelled.

Chapter 2: and I'm hopin' you'll come soon

Chapter Summary

Schedule changes, sensory hell, and your fuckass boyfriend won't stop texting you - what's a man to do?

Chapter Notes

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

“You’re fucking shitting me,” Shane hissed again, and his body unfroze, vaulting up out of his seat and ready to move, shoving his phone into his pocket and ready to battle march to the service desk. Except that the sudden movement had nearly toppled the wobbly cafe table, and his barely-sipped tea took a frightened leap and spilled all over the surface. And his arm.

The hot liquid soaked into his sweatshirt sleeve immediately, the heat painful but quickly dissipating. What did not dissipate, however, was the awful, disgusting, skin-crawling wetness that was now spreading over the entire underside of Shane’s forearm. The fabric was heavy and the once comforting softness transformed into a cloying dampness that stuck to his skin. It felt like cold, dead hands grabbing him, dragging him down...

Shane stood there, half hunched, his arm frozen in the air as the tea slowly ebbed over the side of the table and dripped sullenly onto the floor. He needed to move his bag so that it didn’t get wet too, and he needed to wipe off the table, and dry his arm, and probably apologize to the barista, and—

“Here, you can use my napkins,” said the teenager at the table next to him, watching dully as a puddle began to form on the floor. Shane didn’t *want* to use some stranger’s napkins, especially not the crumpled ones that were being held out to him, but it was obvious he had been standing there frozen for far too long, so he robotically took the offering and dumped them on the table to soak up the cooling tea. The teenager moved their bag, put their headphone back in, and didn’t look at him again, which was a blessing. Shane stalked to the counter and tugged at the napkin dispenser, violently flicking away the little thin paper pieces that ripped off and stuck to his fingers before grabbing a large wad and returning to his table. He tried pushing his damp sleeve up before wiping down the floor, hoping that the concentrated area would be better than his whole forearm being covered, but it was decidedly *not*, with the soggy fabric pressing densely into the crook of his elbow. Shane shuddered. He needed to go to the bathroom and swap out the sweatshirt for one of the shirts in his bag (*why* had he not worn a shirt under the sweatshirt like a normal person?) but he also needed to go to the service desk and get on the next flight, because while he didn’t want to be on a flight with Ilya, he even more could not miss practice tomorrow.

Why not? said a voice inside his head, one that rarely spoke and was almost always ignored. *It's not like it hasn't happened to people before. Just tell them that your flight was cancelled.*

I can't, he retorted internally, *because practice is tomorrow, so I have to go to practice.*

His internal argument was interrupted by a text.

| lily: Your flight is cancelled?

“Yes, dumbfuck,” Shane replied, and the concerned, annoyed glance of the teenager clued him in to the fact that this had been an outside thought, accidentally. Shane closed his eyes in defeat and hustled away.

In the bathroom, he managed to wrap his sweatshirt sleeve up inside itself so that it wouldn't get anything else wet inside his bag. With his new shirt on, he was slightly more comfortable, except for the fact that now every slight movement of air could be felt on his bare biceps and the airport's stale, artificial air conditioner was on full blast. Shane took a deep breath, swung his bag back over his shoulders, and shoved his hands deep into his pockets as he stalked his way to the service desk. He was determined, absolutely dedicated to surviving this experience. It was fine, actually, that he was going to be on a different flight. He would just reschedule his Uber, which he had booked three days ago, and make sure there was one for eight hours later. Or he could even cancel it, and just call one when he got there. And he would eat one of the protein bars that he had brought in his backpack, specifically for this occasion. And he would watch the next episode of *Heatmasters* on his phone, in the airport, instead of at home on his couch. And he would see if someone else wanted to eat his lunch that he had meal prepped on Friday to have today, because it would definitely keep and he didn't want to waste it but he also had his grocery order coming and it would be fine on the porch for a few hours they always shipped them with ice packs and he knew that they were food safe as long as they stayed below 5 degrees and it was obviously below that outside in Montreal since the flight had been fucking cancelled—

“Hi, sir? How can I help you?” The airline agent looked surprisingly genuine in her concern, Shane thought distantly as he realized he had finally made it to the front of his line. He blinked rapidly and his vision cleared somewhat; it seemed that staring so intently at the floor while he waited had brought some tears to his eyes.

“Hello,” he began, his voice completely neutral. “My flight to Montreal was cancelled. I need to rebook to the next possible flight.”

“Absolutely, I am so sorry about that, sir,” she said, fingers already flying across the keyboard. “Looks like we have a 4:10pm on—”

“Air Canada, that's fine,” Shane interrupted. The agent glanced up at him, then back down at her computer, clicking rapidly. “Is there a window seat available?”

“Let me see,” she considered. “Looks like this flight is pretty open, luckily, though I'm sure it may fill up as we rearrange the 10:30. Would you like something closer to the front or back?”

“Back,” Shane said hurriedly. *As far back as possible*, he thought, hoping that hiding by the cargo in the back might give him some slim chance of escaping being seen with Ilya.

“Like boarding late, huh?” the agent joked conspiratorially. “I always get on at the very end, no use wasting extra stretching time. People never get that!”

Shane groaned inwardly. He hadn’t thought about boarding later; there was no way he and Ilya wouldn’t be at the gate at the same time if he had to wait until the last group. “Actually, is there any first class available?” he said quickly. Maybe there would be those little curtains. He’d pay anything to get out of this situation at this point. Maybe he could hire a private jet.

“Mmm, sorry hon. Doesn’t look like it.” The agent looked genuinely apologetic, so Shane tried not to hate her too deeply as she printed out his tickets and sent him on his way. It wasn’t her fault that everything was about to be ruined. He made his way over to the gate announcement screen, even though he was pretty sure she had just told him that no gate had been assigned yet. Because the flight wasn’t going to leave for seven. fucking. hours.

There on the screen was his previous flight: United, YUL, flight 2172, departing 10:32AM, status: CANCELED. The bright red box stared back at him, taunting. But as the bustling crowd swarmed around him, a bubble seemed to mercifully form around him, no one getting quite too close or brushing against him as he stood stock still, staring up at the screens. The canceled flight shifted up as new flights were added, the red box becoming tinier. Shane read the other flights: PHX, 1017, departing 10:57, gate D32, status: ON TIME. IND, 6191, departing 11:25, gate A1B, status: DELAYED. SLC, 847, departing 12:01, gate B76, status: ON TIME. EWR, 1620, departing 12:51, gate C27, status: ON TIME. It was almost meditative, reading the information, so precisely arranged on the screen, all those hundreds, thousands of people moving in an orchestrated tandem. It reminded him of a hockey line chart, telling everyone where they needed to be and when and doing what. His breathing had almost started to even out when his phone vibrated with another message.

| Iily: So you will be with me after all

Shane closed his eyes, and as he did, a tall, suit-clad man collided with him, seemingly completely unaware of Shane’s presence. The man’s suitcase went crashing across the hall, and while Shane was certainly no stranger to people slamming into him and no small man himself, he still had to catch his balance as he stumbled backwards from the impact.

“Hey, watch where you’re fucking going!” the man shouted, much to Shane’s bewilderment.

“Um, I was just standing here,” Shane said, watching as the man scrambled to pick up his bags.

“Well, then watch where you’re standing!” he spat. The man’s suitcase was not cooperating, and kept flopping over with a loud clatter every time he let go of it to pick up his briefcase. It gave enough time, it appeared, for his child to appear, a twelve or thirteen year old boy who came hustling up and grabbed his dad’s arm.

“Dad!” The kid’s eyes were wide and, oh, Shane knew that look. He steeled himself as best he could. “That’s Shane Hollander!”

“What?” The man whipped around, and transformed into a completely different person. “Oh my goodness, I am sooo sorry,” he began to coo. “My son is such a big fan of yours, he has posters of you all over his room, this is like, insane.”

“Dad!” The kid was turning bright scarlet.

“And that game was amazing, so much fun to see you on the ice here, really. I hope you had a good time in DC? Did you visit any museums?”

“Yeah,” Shane said, not really listening, but fortunately neither the man nor his son seemed to be listening either, so they didn’t ask follow up questions. Except one.

“Can he get a picture with you?”

“No, Dad! It’s fine, you probably have a flight to catch—”

“No, it’ll be so quick! You have to send it to your mom,” the man insisted, and with that the boy was shoved in Shane’s direction. He put a tentative arm around the boy’s shoulders and plastered an attempt at a smile on his face. Why was the boy kind of sticky? This was why he wore sweatshirts, and ideally only did photoshoots with his full kit on, all that nice padding and fabric between him and anyone who wanted to be near him. But it was only one photo, as long as no one else noticed, which fortunately they didn’t, so he was able to scurry away relatively unscathed.

Ilya: Hello? I know you do not hate me that much

Shane sighed, and unlocked his phone.

j: Hey sorry. Yes my flight is cancelled

l: So, did you get a seat next to me? :)

j: No. Not funny.

l: Damn, it’s not that bad

Shane shoved his phone back in his pocket with a huff. It *was* that bad, and it pissed him off to no end that Ilya didn’t see it. That he would make light of something like this. It also pissed him off that he was going to be stuck in this airport for seven fucking hours (six and forty three minutes, now) when he and Ilya could still be at the hotel, doing... *anything other than this*, Shane thought as he flopped down on a chair that was acceptably isolated in a currently-unassigned gate. He almost started to consider leaving the airport, but then he would have to go back through security, and that would have to be by 2, which meant he’d have to leave the hotel by 1, and it would probably take him at least an hour to get to the hotel in the first place so they’d only have like half an hour together anyways... His chest was tightening in a strange way, and he found himself fighting the urge to pull his knees up to his chin and hide in some kind of upright fetal position.

His phone buzzed again. It was a selfie of Ilya in bed, shirtless, blankets curled tantalizingly low over his waist.

l: You won't come back and join me?

Shane's eyes pricked. He wanted to, so badly. To be out of the fluorescently lit airport with its loud, jarring announcements and its weird restaurant smells (oysters, in an airport? really?) and its people playing TikToks without headphones and its blowy air conditioning and its stupid cancellations that ruined everything. He wanted to be in that dark hotel room with the curtains drawn, Ilya's arms around him, the smell of his cologne and his skin and his freshly washed hair, the sound of his breath and his heart and his voice.

l: You want me to come there?

Shane huffed, looking off into the corner of the gate area, blinking hard. The offer made him strangely emotional, even though they both knew he wouldn't take it. But he did want Ilya there. He wanted him to make a stupid joke that would distract him, talk about nothing, be unbothered by the cancellation and the missed lunch and the Uber and the grocery delivery. He knew that Ilya would tease him about all these things, help his chest open up and relieve that wound tight feeling that was crushing him.

But Ilya couldn't come, not with all these people around, and even when he would have to come in a few hours so he could catch their (their!) flight he wouldn't be able to so much as nod at Shane. And in this moment, the little ache under his right rib felt a lot more like a stabbing, driving wound, something so open and raw he was surprised people walking by couldn't see it under his thin t-shirt.

But it was fine. Shane could drive to Ottawa on Wednesday and spend the night at Ilya's place, like they had planned. They hadn't even expected to see each other again until then when they had said goodbye this morning, so it was fine.

j: No. Thanks though

l: Let me know if your mind changes

j: Will do

Unhappy and unsettled, Shane tucked his phone away and resigned himself to staring into the middle distance for the next several hours. People bustled by, swirling about in little groups or solo travelers walking on a mission down the hall. He watched, feeling like he was staring through a screen or from behind a glass, as a family gathered their kids, one father calling to the eldest while the other scooped up a toddler and balanced her on his hip. Shane looked away, wishing he had brought a puzzle book or something. He couldn't find the interest to watch anything on his phone, so he just pulled his backpack into his lap and tried to rest his eyes and think about nothing for a little while.

l: There is a single stall bathroom by D12 gate

Shane jolted up from the buzzing of his phone, his leg tingling with blood as the numbness faded away. His PT had told him he needed to stop doing that, staying still for so long his limbs fell asleep, but he never seemed to be able to remember in time. And now Ilya was here, without even half the decency to hide the fact from Shane.

j: That's ridiculous

l: It is fine, it's a hidden corner. No one would see

j: I don't even need people to see me going into a gender neutral bathroom okay

l: Fineee. You say if your mind changes though

j: It won't

But oh was the concept tantalizing. So much so, in fact, that now it felt like his entire body was tingling, electric with need. He wanted to go to Ilya so badly, to find him waiting in that bathroom and kiss him until all the other sensations went away. Shane could practically feel his skin under his fingertips, his tongue against his lips.

Hadn't they done worse? Taken bigger risks? *Fuck it*, Shane thought. It would be so easy to just go over there, nonchalantly use the restroom before his flight, nobody would think twice. It was even in the same wing of the airport. It would only take him a less than a minute to walk over there, and it was right by their boarding gate. He pulled out his phone.

"Flight 1936 to Montreal YUL is now boarding at gate D2."

Shane heard the announcement over the loudspeaker just as his phone lit up, not with another text from Ilya but with a notification from the airline that his flight was now boarding. "God damn it," Shane muttered, and started to gather his things.

l: Too late :(

j: Fuck off and get on the plane

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for the kudos and comments on the first chapter, they really inspire me! I plan to have the rest of this out by today or tomorrow :)

Chapter 3: it wasn't difficult to pull me from myself again

Chapter Summary

Finally on the plane.

Chapter Notes

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

By some stroke of divine intervention, Ilya did not look up at him when Shane passed his seat during boarding. That didn't stop Shane from recognizing those glowing golden curls, however, and worse still, it didn't stop the aching pain in his ribcage from continuing to spread. It was really getting concerning, and as Shane settled in his seat by the window he idly wondered if he might be having a heart attack.

He still felt kind of tingly all over, and his breath was coming short and shallow. He was lightheaded and keeping his eyes open was hurting terribly. His mouth was so dry.

j: I don't feel very good

“Good afternoon folks, this is your captain speaking. At this time, please turn your devices onto airplane mode, put up your tray tables, and buckle your seat belts. We are going to begin taxiing to the runway.”

Shane obeyed robotically, observing dimly that Ilya might find that text a little concerning now that Shane couldn't reply. Hopefully it wouldn't send. Right now Shane was mostly focusing on not throwing up before the plane even got off the ground.

It was strange—he didn't get air sickness, and he hadn't eaten anything that could have gotten him sick. Actually, he hadn't eaten anything at all, he realized, but his protein bar was in his backpack and shoved under the seat in front of him, so that would have to wait. But at least that probably explained the lightheadedness. Probably. It was probably not a brain aneurysm.

He tried to focus on the flight attendant's safety presentation, but he could barely make out her words. The subtitles on the little video on the seat in front of him didn't make sense either—were they even in English? French? Shane blinked, trying to make the words coalesce into something meaningful, but even his own thoughts were sliding into something wordless, formless. It mostly just felt like his brain was sounding a dull, helpless alarm that no one could hear, barely even him.

Suddenly, a lump of fabric dropped into his lap. Shane jumped, startled, and whipped around to catch just the barest glimpse of someone entering the bathroom a few rows back. He knew

this sweatshirt. Was this his sweatshirt? Irrationally he wondered if someone had managed to wash and dry it for him, before he realized—he had two of these, and Ilya liked to steal them.

“Fucking idiot,” Shane seethed, but he put the sweatshirt on immediately, immensely grateful for the empty seat next to him. The relief was instant and so nearly complete that Shane almost moaned. He pulled the hood tight over his head and shoved one of the drawstrings right into his mouth, leaning back with his eyes closed. His back protested the change in position but his breathing began to slow, at least somewhat. Okay, probably not a heart attack.

Then, he felt his chair shift and heard someone sit down in the seat next to him. He screwed his eyes shut tighter. Maybe he could manifest a heart attack.

“No. Go away.”

“It’s fine,” Ilya whispered. *It’s not.* “I am wearing a mask and hat.”

Strangely, this conjured in Shane’s mind the image of a balaclava, which was so absurd that he just had to look. He opened one eye and was relieved to see that Ilya was actually wearing a surgical mask and a beanie and looked quite reasonably normal. He also looked very, very concerned, and Shane suddenly remembered the text he had sent.

“I’m fine.”

“You are not” Ilya responded quietly, putting a hand on Shane’s knee. It was warm and heavy and reassuring, and for a second, everything else fell away as all of his focus centered on Ilya’s hand.

Shane smacked it off. “Stop.”

“You assaulting me is much more noticeable than silently touching for one minute.” Ilya smiled at him chidingly.

“I’m not assaulting you,” Shane huffed, but he found that with Ilya there, his anger couldn’t hold. He sighed. “You should go back to your seat.”

“Not until I am sure you’re okay,” Ilya replied, his voice soft under his breath. “And anyways, the seatbelt sign is back on.”

Shane rolled his eyes and put his head in his hands. “Fine,” he whispered. He was so tired. The flight was short, but it was the middle of the day, so he felt like it would be weird to sleep. And besides, he could hardly ever sleep on planes, and certainly couldn’t now after the day he’d had. It still felt like his entire body was a live wire. And yet he was still so, so tired.

“What happened to your sweatshirt?” Ilya murmured. He shifted slightly so that their legs were pressed together, a solid weight against Shane’s side.

“It— spilled,” Shane said haltingly, his breath hitching. This happened sometimes, the words getting stuck and coming out strangely. Damn it, now Ilya would never go back to his seat.

“Your sweatshirt spilled?” Ilya teased with a breathy laugh. “It is lucky I stole the other one, then, yes?”

Shane just nodded, bending over to put his head on his knees. He appreciated Ilya’s attempts at joking with him, but it felt more and more like he might actually throw up. He just needed this day to be over.

He felt a touch on his back and tensed, about to sit up and dredge some admonishments out of his speech. But Ilya applied stern pressure, keeping him folded over.

“This is the recovery position,” he found himself saying. Apparently he had heard the safety presentation after all.

Shane could feel Ilya’s chuckle as he began to rub slow circles into his back, steady and rhythmic. He was sure it would be noticeable if anyone walked by, but his face was buried in his knees and in any case he couldn’t find the energy to care. It felt like all the electricity that had built up in his body over the course of the horrible day was being drawn out by Ilya’s hand, slow and reassuring on his spine. He began to shiver, somehow cold despite the soft, warm sweatshirt.

“Hey,” Ilya hushed, “It’s okay.”

I’m not crying, Shane wanted to protest, but he was shivering so much now that he thought maybe it was less weird if he let Ilya just believe he was crying.

“I am going to cancel my connecting flight, okay? I will come with you to your apartment and make sure you are okay, because you are still not and you cannot argue. And if any person asks I will say it is food poisoning, okay?” Ilya’s voice was soft but firm.

Shane wanted to protest, wanted to argue about all the ways that such a ridiculous offer was stupid and unnecessary and risky, but he was having trouble really thinking of reasons why, and in any case it *did* sound nice, to have Ilya come home with him and cuddle with him and fuck him until he forgot about all this bullshit.

“Okay,” he whispered into his knees.

“Good,” Ilya murmured, and squeezed the nape of Shane’s neck. “Now take a nap. I’ll see you when the plane lands.” He moved, Shane’s leg suddenly cold where the air rushed in.

“Nnn,” Shane protested, grabbing Ilya’s thigh. He wasn’t sure if he was protesting the concept of sleep or Ilya leaving.

“Okay,” Ilya said softly, and Shane could hear the fond smile in his voice. “I am going nowhere.”

He shifted back against Shane’s side, and the shivering finally started to ebb. Incredibly, the pull of sleep did begin to tug at the edges of Shane’s consciousness, and with Ilya’s thumb again rubbing slow circles at the small of his back, he decided to let it in.

As the plane hit the tarmac, rattling with the force of the landing, Ilya watched Shane stir from his sleep. He had slept the entire short plane ride, and Ilya had done nothing but stare at him, marveling at how the tension in his shoulders slowly eked away as he slid deeper into unconsciousness. As he sat up stiffly, he looked around, brown eyes blinking into the watery winter afternoon sunlight that filtered through the window. His eyes met Ilya's and cleared, a soft smile dancing across his face. His sweatshirt hood had fallen back, and Ilya gently tugged it back over Shane's head, stroking his cheek as he did so.

"My back is fucking killing me," Shane croaked.

"So we did not need to meet in the bathroom for you to be folded in half after all," Ilya teased, and Shane rolled his eyes.

"Your bag," Shane whispered. "At your seat?"

"I'll get it when we are going out," Ilya reassured him, and watched as Shane just nodded, head falling back against the chair with his eyes closed. No arguments. "You are tired still."

Shane just nodded. "Go home," he muttered, the beginning of the sentence lost in his throat.

"Yes," Ilya said softly. "Just follow me and we will go home."

As the plane cleared, he tugged Shane up, helping him put his backpack on over his sore shoulders. He'd have to give him a proper massage when they got back to Shane's apartment. He pulled his duffel from the overhead compartment when they passed his seat, keeping one hand on the small of Shane's back, guiding him forward.

When they stepped onto the ramp, the biting cold leaking in, Shane began to shiver again. "Let's go," Ilya hushed, steering him towards the exit. He pulled out his phone as they passed under the Taxi & Ride Service sign, but Shane swatted at him.

"What, I am calling a car," Ilya admonished, dodging the weak smacking at his wrist.

"I have an Uber," Shane said, and jabbed Ilya's bicep with his own phone.

"What?" Ilya said, confused, before taking Shane's phone. Sure enough, there on the screen was a map showing the little icon arriving at the airport. "When did you call this?" He was sure Shane hadn't left his sight for a second since the plane landed.

"Scheduled it before we left," Shane said, eyes half closed against the sun as they stepped outside. Ilya grabbed his sunglasses case from his bag's side pocket and handed them to him.

"This is why we are good," Ilya said, waving at the silver sedan as it pulled up against the curb. "You plan, I am chill, we get where we need to be."

"I'm totally chill," Shane protested, sliding into the backseat.

"Right, and you will not have a breakdown about this tomorrow," Ilya said incredulously.

"No," Shane murmured. "Breakdown is over. You're with me."

“Okay,” Ilya said, patting Shane’s knee. They were headed home. Together.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed!! I had a lot of fun with this - if anyone is inspired to take this and actually make it smutty, feel free (trust me though, y'all would not want to read my attempts at that lol)

As is true of all writers, kudos and comments are my lifeblood!!

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