

is it the same for you?

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is it the same for you?

by [notwritinganovel](#)

Summary

Shane releases what feels like his first exhale in forever—Ilya Rozanov, taken out by the common flu. Not ignoring him. Not ending anything. Still, the knot in his chest doesn't ease completely with the vision of Ilya unwell and alone in Shane's head.

JANE

Are you at your house?

LILY

Where else, Jane?

JANE

Don't fall asleep. I'll be there soon.

LILY

No, am sick. I told you.

JANE

I heard you. I'll be there soon.

Or, Ilya's sick and Shane *wants, and wants, and wants*.

Notes

i know nothing about hockey and i have not read the books yet, so sorry if the timeline is a little murky.

overall, just know that the present timeline in which ilya has the flu occurs around Feb 2017. this would be after the all-star game in tampa where shane admits he's gay and both he and ilya acknowledge they like each other beyond sex + the winter before the cottage trip.

flashbacks have happened sporadically over their decade together.

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

Shane hasn't heard from Ilya in three days, which shouldn't bother him as much as it does. In their rookie era, sometimes he wouldn't hear from him in months, with nothing more than *'Room number?'* sent his way to break the silence when they were in the same city.

Except they haven't been rookies for years, Shane landed in Boston yesterday, and at this point in seeing each other, Shane's grown used to Ilya sending him random things daily.

Like a picture of a cute dog that Ilya encountered during his morning run. *Is puppy. I told owner I have sweet puppy too, named Jane.*

A circled word in a tweet. *What is this slang word? English is stupid.*

Complaints of missing socks. *Under your bed, probably. I hurry too much to fuck you.*

Instead, it's been nothing but silence. The last time they spoke, they briefly mentioned seeing each other, but, like all their plans, they were discussed vaguely. Nothing ever came to shape until the day of, when they were able to shake their managers, teammates, and the watchful eyes of the media.

It feels like there's a festering wound growing in Shane's stomach. Years of insecurity and hurt and instability are pulled from his insides and to the surface, where they linger, ugly and green and starting to rot. Did he do something wrong? Was Ilya finally done with him? Did he find someone else that he could see without all the secrecy and effort?

Shane paces the length of his hotel room. Hayden and the rest of the Metros have already abandoned their rooms in favor of the gym, but he made his excuses, bore the brunt of the rowdy innuendoes about seeing his *Boston Lily*, and tried to send telepathic demands to Ilya to fucking text him back.

He pulls out his phone again.

Their last true conversation was earlier in the week, on Tuesday, brief and insignificant, but Shane finds himself poring over the messages to see if he misstepped, as he often does.

LILY

What are you wearing right now?

JANE

A white t-shirt. Grey sweatpants.

LILY

Boring. Any underwear?

JANE

Yes, of course.

LILY

Extra boring today.

LILY

You're not going to ask me?

JANE

No, I'm at the gym. Bother your teammates instead.

LILY

Already did. Not as fun as you.

JANE

So you admit I'm fun?

LILY

Can be. More when my dick is in your mouth. Especially then.

JANE

Jesus, Lily, I'm in public.

LILY

I think you would like that. For everyone to see how easily you give in to me. How much you beg for it.

JANE

You're such a fucking asshole.

LILY

You don't deny it.

JANE

Fuck you.

LILY

Soon. Boston waits for you.

And then Thursday afternoon.

JANE

I'm at the airport. Flying out in two hours. Shouldn't land too late. Will you be up?

JANE

You should be glad none of your team has kids yet. Hayden's very proud of his kids' potty training developments. Enough to talk about it for forty minutes.

JANE

Has it started to snow in Boston yet?

JANE

Landed. It's colder than I expected. Going to grab dinner. Dessert at yours?

JANE

Guess not.

JANE

Tomorrow, maybe then?

And then this morning.

JANE

I had morning practice today. No more until the game on Sunday.

JANE

Will I see you before then?

And a final one, sent this morning.

JANE

Lily?

Shane presses a fist to his eyes, where he feels a dull pressure building behind them, suddenly on the verge of tears. His face burns with embarrassment at being so easily undone. To text again feels like a humiliation ritual, but Shane still considers it. He feels flayed open anyway, his insides on display and served on a platter; what could one more text do?

JANE

Are you ok? It's fine if you don't want to meet.

LILY

Am dying.

JANE

What??

LILY

Did not mean to ignore you, just dying.

LILY

On my grave, you must make sure it says, ‘Here lies the most handsome person I’ve ever fucked, the best and only to satisfy me in bed’.

JANE

Explain dying.

LILY

Can’t breathe. Nose is useless. Throat on fire. Room spins. I’m so hot, I feel like I’m a roasting pig.

JANE

Roasting. You mean a roasting pig. You’re sick?

LILY

Yes, flu. Bad one. Lost track of time, sleeping and lying around feeling like shit.

LILY

Phone died days ago, but I had no energy to find the charger. Today, just a little. Crawled to plug it in wall.

Shane releases what feels like his first exhale in forever—Ilya Rozanov, taken out by the common flu. Not ignoring him. Not ending anything. Still, the knot in his chest doesn’t ease completely with the vision of Ilya unwell and alone in Shane’s head.

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JANE

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The first time Shane visited Ilya's house in Boston was also the first time he felt true jealousy towards any of Ilya's past partners.

It was just outside the city and reminded Shane of his cottage, actually, with its floor-to-ceiling windows and sleek, minimal design. *It wasn't much*, Ilya grumbled. Shane supposed that if you ignored the square footage and modern furnishings, it was kind of true. Ilya didn't decorate with anything personal, and if Shane toured the place without knowing whose it was, it could've been anyone's home.

"Shoes off?" He asked Ilya, out of nervousness more than anything else.

They moved into the kitchen, where Ilya pushed him onto the island, mouth hot and insistent on his neck while Shane's legs wrapped around his waist.

Out of his peripheral vision, Shane saw a few colorful magnets, the standard fare found in souvenir shops in every major tourist city. One for Montreal, another for Toronto, one for Boston, each city spelled out in bold block letters. They were the only color in the otherwise monochromatic kitchen, some of them holding up pictures.

"What are those?" Shane blurted out.

Ilya's head was underneath his shirt, and he was busy working away at a spot just below Shane's armpit and beside his pec, dangerously close to sucking a hickey into Shane's skin. "What?"

"On the fridge, you—magnets? You collect magnets? *Shit*...watch the teeth, asshole, no marks," Shane grumbled.

Ilya ran his tongue over where he'd just bitten, half in apology and half just to taste. He shoved Shane's shirt over his head and threw it across the room. "I try to fuck you, and you ask about magnets?"

Shane squinted, looking closer at one of the photo strips. A much younger Ilya—no more than fourteen or fifteen—had his arm slung around a girl with wide eyes and an even wider grin. Her brown curls fell into his face as he pressed their cheeks together. Both of them were smiling, and their tongues were poking out just far enough to meet in the middle.

Braces, Shane realized. *Ilya used to have braces*. That was a version of him Shane never met.

Ilya grabbed him by the chin, then, forcing Shane to look away from the fridge and at his face.

“Am not doing a good job. You’re distracted.”

Ilya sank to his knees right there in the kitchen, unzipped his jeans and fisted Shane’s cock, which had grown soft while he was occupied. Shane threw his arm over his face. It’d been *so long*. It didn’t take much before his cock was throbbing once more, red and angry, kicking up from Ilya’s expert palms.

Ilya bit the inside of his cheek and smirked up at Shane from beneath his lashes. “Always so wet...like girl. Sometimes more than girl.”

“Not true,” Shane denied, even as another blurt of precome slicked Ilya’s fingers and down his wrist.

Ilya leaned down and smacked a big smooch on the head of Shane’s cock, before looking up, eyes boring into his as he fed every inch of it into his mouth. It was obscene. Shane’s cheeks burned when he hit the back of Ilya’s throat. They’d done everything and then some since they started sleeping together back as teenagers, but it still caught Shane off guard, how unapologetic Ilya was in his desire. It was harder for Shane, sometimes, to be as open in his wants. To take. And each time they met like this, Ilya offered him a level of patience he’d never expected, coaxing Shane from within himself.

Shane bit his lip and swallowed his moan. He resisted the urge to fuck up into the wet heat of Ilya’s mouth as he continued to suck Shane with a single-minded focus. Ilya grabbed his hips and yanked him to the edge of the kitchen island and deeper into his mouth, nose pressed hard into Shane’s pubes, gagging around his cock.

“*Fuck*, oh god,” Shane cried. His body curled forward, hands grabbing fistfuls of curls on either side of Ilya’s head, holding him in place.

Ilya pulled back, plush lips red with effort, voice shot, “Fuck my mouth.”

Defiant, Shane tried to remain still as Ilya went back down with renewed fervour. His ass clenched around nothing, thighs and glutes tensing, his body helpless to the warm cavern of Ilya’s throat. Shane trembled, made an animal noise, and bucked forward again and again. It felt like he was flushing from his head to his toes, listening to Ilya gag against the intrusion, throat tensing around his cock as Shane thrust, gasping for air as Shane gave in and took what he needed.

Ilya rested his hands on Shane’s legs, fingers digging into his thighs hard enough to bruise. Later, when he was home and alone in the shower, Shane would trace his own fingers over the blue splotches and pretend they were holding hands.

Ilya hummed around Shane’s cock, and the added vibration caused tears to spring to Shane’s eyes. His whole body surged forward, the pleasure almost unbearable. Shane was loud then,

unable to silence his moans, reedy *uh-uh-uhs* escaping every time he bottomed out in Ilya's throat.

He whimpered when Ilya released him from his mouth, pressed a kiss into Shane's hipbone, and dug his thumb into the slit of his cock.

"There you are," Ilya said. "It's okay. Good, so good for me."

"Jesus, Ilya, god—I can't, I'm gonna come," Shane warned. Ilya's fist was a blur over him, spit and precome frothing around his hands, dripping down Shane's balls. "Feels good. Please, ungh, more, more..."

"Have you. Will take care of you," Ilya promised. He licked his cock from root to tip, swallowed back down and didn't move, holding Shane in his mouth where he came, yelling, roughly shoving Ilya's head down to *stay and swallow*.

Shane couldn't stand after, and Ilya carried him upstairs like a new bride, laying Shane out on his bed where he fucked him like one too.

Later, when it was over, they would come back to the kitchen. After Shane watched Ilya disinfect the island (twice, at his insistence), Shane sat at the same spot where Ilya had blown him earlier in the afternoon, nursed a ginger ale, and catastrophized while Ilya made them tuna melts, wondering what it meant that Ilya hadn't kicked him out and that he didn't want to leave.

Uneasy, he looked back at the fridge. Beneath the photo strip from earlier sat another worn image of Ilya with the same girl—no longer a girl at all—both of them older now, dressed for a black-tie affair. Ilya bent at the knee, making himself smaller for her as she held up a lighter to the cigarette in his mouth. And another of them again; Ilya's chin on her head as he hugged her from behind, her nose scrunched in fake annoyance.

The photos showed an ease in Ilya's body that Shane was unfamiliar with. He felt overcome by sudden jealousy. Shane knew Ilya had a long history of old partners; hell, they'd discussed some of his past conquests in detail, but never her. This was the first person Shane truly envied: a girl who seemed to know Ilya longer than he had, the only one privy to iterations of him that Shane wouldn't.

Who was she? What did it mean for Ilya to make a space in his home for her?

Ilya was flipping their tuna melts over in the pan and looked at Shane from the corner of his eye. He waved the spatula casually at the pictures, "Sveta...Svetlana."

"She's beautiful," Shane said.

Ilya nodded. "Is important to me," he added, offering nothing more.

When Shane left after, panicked, and proverbial tail tucked between his legs, he realized he didn't even know Ilya liked tuna until today and wondered if Svetlana did.

Shane hasn't been back to Ilya's house since he left (ran) the first time. It's like they've lived lifetimes in the years that passed between then and now. Shane feels like he's coming to Ilya's home for the first time all over again.

It's still early in the evening. Fat snowflakes have begun to fall and cling to the ground when Shane parks the rental car in the driveway.

He punches in the door code that Ilya texted him and drops his overnight bag in the foyer, flicking on the light. It's quiet, but Shane immediately notices it's in more of a disarray than when he was here last. Takeout boxes line the kitchen counter. A couple of throw blankets hang from the sofa, spilling onto the floor where they've been haphazardly tossed. Used tissues overflow from the bin in the corner.

"Ilya?"

Shane circles the lower floor before heading upstairs and straight to the master bedroom, tapping his knuckles on the door briefly. He texted Ilya when he was fifteen minutes away, with no response. He pushes the door open.

The room is dark and silent. Ilya's grey duvet has been pulled towards the center of the bed, forming a small heap. Shane can see the tufts of Ilya's blonde curls peeking out over the top, and he rushes over to the side of the bed, leaning over to see where he's curled up.

He looks small. A hurt noise escapes from Shane's mouth.

Shane himself isn't a petite man; he's tall enough, with thick juts of muscle protruding from his stomach and hips, and arms—the body of a professional athlete that can take a beating. Ilya, by comparison, was a hulking machine, and probably the only person in the world who could cradle Shane in his arms like he was something miniature.

But today, Ilya looks tiny, crimped in towards himself in a fetal position. His mouth is curled into a scowl in his sleep, eyebrows furrowed. He shivers, breathing shallowly. Shane kneels, brushing his hand through Ilya's hair. It's damp with sweat, and as Shane feels his forehead, a dawning horror falls on him that Ilya is worse off than he thought, much worse than he sounded over their last texts.

He's burning, abnormally hot to the touch. Shane begins shaking Ilya's shoulders slowly.

"Ilya, you have to wake up now. I'm here."

Ilya groans, muttering in Russian beneath his breath. He opens his eyes, bleary, bloodshot, and confused. "Shane?"

"Hey, it's me. Sorry to wake you."

Ilya's nose is running. Shane aches.

"We need to get your fever down, and then you can lie down again. Have you been taking medicine? Advil? Tylenol?"

“No pills,” Ilya murmurs. “Don’t want.”

“Jesus, Ilya. Do you have a thermometer?”

“In table somewhere.”

Shane fumbles through Ilya’s bedside drawer, pretending he isn’t taking a catalogue of each item inside. *A Russian to English dictionary. Lube. Condoms. Dildo?* Shane pointedly ignores that for another time. *A pocket-sized calendar; the day of their upcoming game against each other circled.* Ilya is lying down on his side, watching as Shane traces his thumb over the red circle, feeling the indentation where Ilya pressed his pen, hard and deliberate. He’s not sure how coherent Ilya is at the current moment, and his face gives nothing away.

Shane moves on. *Peanut butter protein bars. Lip balm.* And finally, near the bottom, a compact first-aid kit, neatly zipped. A thermometer tucked inside—close enough to grab in the dark.

“Open your mouth. Tongue up,” Shane murmurs.

He knows Ilya isn’t feeling like himself when he complies, wordless, no wolfish grin or teasing glint in his eyes. Shane sticks the thermometer under his tongue and pulls it out after it beeps. 39.5°C. He swears, panic rising.

“It’s too high. Ilya, we need to break your fever. I’m getting Advil,” Shane pushed up from the floor.

“No. No pills. Am fine. Will break soon.”

“Yeah, when? How long have you been like this? You said it’s been days.”

“Only a couple and I’m fine to do more.”

“Stop being so stubborn and take the damn medication. You’re going to have to go to the hospital if it spikes any more.”

Ilya mutters in Russian and spits, “I said *no*, Hollander.” His jaw tenses, and Shane can see more sweat bead from his temples, his face flushing even more. “*No pills* or get the fuck out, I didn’t ask you to come here and play nurse for a fucking *cold*.”

Shane flinches, picking a spot on the headboard to stare at.

“*Fuck, fuck*, I’m sorry, okay? I just— *no pills*, I feel like shit and I smell like shit, and now I’m being mean. But I’m tired, Shane, and please, I don’t want the pills, don’t ask again,” Ilya’s voice cracks. He’s nearly worked himself up into a fit, sitting upright and staring at Shane with pleading eyes, face gaunt.

Shane relents, “Fine.” For a moment, they’re quiet. Ilya has closed his eyes and leans his head back against the pillows. He’s shaking, teeth chattering despite the stifling heat of his bedroom, and coughs, wincing as his chest rattles with each one.

“Should leave,” Ilya says. “I will get you sick, too.”

Shane scoffs, “Not happening.” He was probably already going to catch whatever Ilya had just by walking through his house, but that was a problem for later.

Shane thinks about every cold remedy his mom has ever wielded. He used to get sick a lot as a kid, his body small and unusually sensitive to the elements. He swallows against the lump growing in his throat. He wishes he could call her and ask for her advice. *My partner Ilya is sick. I don't know what to do, but I want to do it right. You'd know how to help. What should I do?* It's unfair, Shane thinks, that he can't even have the luxury of being able to do that.

He grabs Ilya's hand, clammy, in his own and forces himself to breathe.

“Okay...okay,” Shane says. “C'mon, we need to get you in the tub.”

Ilya groans. “No moving.”

“I know, it's gonna suck,” Shane soothes. “You can lie down again after, but we need to try to get this fever down.”

They didn't make a habit of showering together. Shane typically didn't like it. A handful of times, when laziness and recklessness stretched their last hour thin, they'd cram into the hotel shower, roomy for one but tight for two. Separate showers would've meant that one of them would have to show up at their respective airport gate smelling like sex and sweat. So, they would huddle together into hotel shower stalls, and Shane would avoid eye contact and endure.

Once, after a home game in Montreal, Ilya noticed. The spray kept hitting the wrong places on Shane's body, he was embarrassed to wash his ass in front of Ilya, and he couldn't reach his back without his elbows hitting the tiled wall. Frustrated and overstimulated, he breathed through his nose and dropped his arms entirely, hoping that a quick scrub would be sufficient.

“You don't like this,” Ilya remarked, one eye closed and one peering curiously at Shane.

“You need to relax.”

“*You* need to relax,” Shane grumbled.

Ilya crowded him then, pushing him into the corner of the stall and away from the spray of the water. Shane had shivered, miserable, looking down at his toes. Ilya grabbed him by the cheeks, smushed them together, kissed up and down his neck until Shane felt himself loosen.

“There you are,” Ilya said, triumphant. “What is it?”

Shane felt awkward. “I just... I'm not used to showering together. It's embarrassing.”

“I just had my tongue in your asshole, and you're embarrassed to bathe with me?” Ilya replied sarcastically.

Shane didn't know how to explain. He thought about the first time Ilya initiated sex with him, back in the locker room showers, when he felt overcome with both lust and humiliation. "It's different. You don't see me wash my armpits or my ass in bed. My hair looks stupid and I keep getting water in my eyes. I slipped and elbowed you in the stomach earlier. And also..."

"You like to sing badly in shower? You cannot do it with me here? I already know your singing voice is terrible, not a secret."

"Shut *up*. My singing is better than yours," Shane said. "I just—I don't know. I'm guess I'm used to showering by myself. I have my routine. I usually have my own space where I...you know, do my own thing."

Ilya hummed, "You feel unsexy. On display? You don't want me to look at you. And you're used to being alone here."

He grimaced in response. Admitting it made him even more embarrassed. At least when they were about to fuck, Shane made sure he was polished and primed, plucked and trimmed, soft and clean and looking his best. And what did it matter that Ilya was here in the shower with him, when he had just spent the past hour inside of him?

He huffed at Shane, "I see you on ice during games. Sweaty and dirty and stinky."

Shane pouted, "Hey, you reek too."

Ilya nodded, "Yes. But I'm still sexy."

"Yeah..."

"So?" Ilya shrugged. "You think it's not the same for me?"

He licked a stripe up Shane's ear, and Shane huffed, "Gross. I have to wash there again."

Ilya tilted their faces together and kissed him, tongue opening his mouth with insistence. Shane moaned, and suddenly Ilya was reaching for him, touching where he was still wet, open, and puffy from earlier.

"Like you like this, too. You look like a wet kitten. Reminds me of first time I saw you naked, when you were so mad at me in the locker room shower. Mad but couldn't help being hard for me. Makes *me* hard."

Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck and brought their bodies closer together, back under the warmth of the water.

"Always want you. Even if you don't think so. So pretty, how can I resist?"

Ilya pressed two fingers inside him where Shane was still loose and wanting, pleasure curling deep inside his gut that replaced any discomfort from earlier.

"We don't have time," he whispered. "We need to get to the airport. Your flight is an hour earlier than mine."

“You don’t take long,” Ilya smirked.

He fucked Shane against the wall, holding the backs of his knees up as he rucked three fingers up into Shane, pressing intently into his prostate without fail. After, he shampooed Shane’s hair, scrubbed behind his ears, and washed the parts of his back Shane couldn’t reach on his own.

When it was over, and Ilya was pulling his socks on by the door, he said, “We finish fucking earlier next time.”

“Huh?”

Ilya gave him a pointed look. “We finish earlier. No big deal. That way, you have plenty of time to do your own shower. I’m big boy, can wash alone without my feelings getting hurt, Hollander.”

Shane blinked and nodded jerkily. Something warm and tender was unfurling in his chest. “Thanks. Well, sometimes...I think it would be okay. Not always. But I’ll tell you when I don’t want to. Today was good.”

Ilya kissed him. “Okay. Whatever you want.”

Shane thinks that even if his hockey career ends tomorrow, he’d keep lifting at the gym—if not for sports, then just to stay strong enough to carry Ilya to the bathtub whenever he may need it. He gently drops him into the hot water he ran earlier, steam curling up into the air.

Ilya sinks into the tub, groaning, and looks at Shane through half-slit eyes.

“Head hurts. Am dying, Shane.”

He runs the back of his hand against Ilya’s cheek, “You’re going to feel better soon.”

While Ilya soaks, Shane cracks open the bedroom window to let in some cooler, fresh air. He hunts through Ilya’s linen closet, changes the sheets and pillow cases, and replaces his thick duvet with a couple of lighter blankets to help regulate his temperature. He empties the trash can, brings in a new tissue box and a bottle of Gatorade he finds in the fridge, returning to the bathroom where he forces Ilya to drink, tilting the bottle to Ilya’s mouth in one hand and supporting his neck in the other.

He runs a soapy washcloth over Ilya’s chest, arms, behind his knees, over his soft cock, and in his armpits. Lathers soap into his happy trail and belly button, passes over each mole on his torso like a checkpoint. Ilya watches him with dark eyes and a frown, clearly wanting to object but too delirious with exhaustion to bother.

“I think I understand now,” he croaks.

“What?” Shane asks, distracted, wringing out the washcloth and reaching for his toes.

“Why you like your own showers.”

Shane pauses and looks at Ilya, “That’s different.”

Ilya waves a hand over his body. He smiles self-deprecatingly, “Tub or shower, same thing. Am very sexy right now. Do you like washing my feet, Shane?”

Ilya sneezes violently, head banging against the rim of the tub, “*Blyat.*”

Shane watches him warily. Chews on the inside of his cheek, wonders if what he wants to say is what he means, and whether Ilya will take it the way he wants him to.

“You know, we can do...unsexy things together. Unpleasant things. It doesn’t always have to be just one thing. I meant what I said in Tampa. I do like you.”

Ilya coughs, water sluicing from the sides of the tub and to the floor. Shane pats him on the back until he stops hacking, lets Ilya breathe heavily to recover.

“You did not sign up to do *unpleasant* things with me. You like me but not like this,” Ilya mutters.

“What if it were me who was sick?” Shane demanded. “What if we were in the same city and I got the flu like you. Would you help me?”

Ilya rolls his eyes. “*No*, I would let you suffer alone, Hollander. See you next season, hope you don’t die before then.”

“Then why do you think it’s any different for me?” Shane snaps.

Are they arguing? Shane’s angry like they’re arguing. He wets Ilya’s curls, adds some shampoo and begins to lather as an excuse not to look at him, a hot fury building.

“Ridiculous,” he mutters.

“My nurse has anger problem,” Ilya muses quietly, but lets him wash his hair, closing his eyes.

Shane spreads his fingers out over Ilya’s scalp, applying hard pressure the way he personally enjoys during a head massage. *Take it and enjoy it, you bastard.*

After, once Shane’s satisfied with his job bathing Ilya, he brings over a towel, sits him on the toilet seat, dries him, drains the water, and avoids Ilya’s serious stare as he helps him into clean sweatpants and a hoodie.

Ilya reaches for Shane’s wrist, caging it with his forefinger and thumb like a handcuff. He opens and closes his mouth, considering what to say.

“It’s like that for me, but I forget it’s same for you too.”

Shane swallows, feels his heart thumping against his ribs. “Well, it is so...”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

They move back to the bed, Ilya panting with exertion, tiredness taking over his body. Shane fluffs his pillows, tucks him in, and once he’s situated, Shane takes his temperature again.

“38.7°C,” he mutters.

“Acceptable now? Is lower, yes? Will you let me sleep?”

“Barely. And yeah, you can rest, but have you eaten?”

Ilya shakes his head. “Not hungry.”

“Don’t care.”

Ilya’s phone rings, and he groans, lowering the volume of the ringer.

“Sveta... Was supposed to have breakfast with her yesterday. She’s probably pissed.”

Shane doesn’t know what to say. He doesn’t know much about the mysterious Svetlana, doesn’t know if she’s the type to be easily angered by missed hangouts or the type to easily forgive. Just that she’s Ilya’s best friend and the only one who knows him better than Shane.

“Do you—you can call her back? I should probably check in with Hayden, too.”

“Would rather sleep, but yes, I should.”

Shane steps out of the bedroom, giving Ilya some privacy and resists the urge to stay with his head pressed up against the door. He hears the low rumble of Ilya’s voice, congested and apologetic, “*Sveta, ne ori, menya golova ubivayet...*”

He heads downstairs and begins cleaning up the kitchen while he calls Hayden.

He picks up after three rings. “Dude, are you still with your girl? We’re going to dinner soon,” Hayden complains.

“I know, I’m sorry uh— I don’t think I’m going to be back tonight. Tomorrow morning, maybe.”

Hayden whistles.

“What?”

“I don’t know. You guys just haven’t really done the all-nighter thing much.”

“She’s sick,” Shane admits.

“And you’re still there? We have a game *tomorrow afternoon*, Shane.”

“Shut up, I’ll be fine.”

“And she let you come over?”

“I didn’t really give her much of a choice.”

“Oh man...”

“What?”

“Nothing... I’m just thinking about the first time Jackie was ill, and she let me take care of her. God, she was so embarrassed.”

Shane’s brow furrows, “About what?”

“Well, you know how girls are! I don’t know, I mean, I guess it’s not ideal to be seen all sweaty and dishevelled with snot running down your nose. Took me forever just to coax her out from hiding behind her blanket. She was shy even about blowing her nose.”

“Lily’s not really the shy type...”

“*All* girls are shy to some degree, Shane. I’m just saying, it’s a big step, man. Anyway, feed her some soup, rub her back, and then get back here and quarantine so you don’t get sick, and so *I* don’t get sick.”

Shane grunts, hanging up the phone and thinks about Ilya, skittish in the tub. His phone buzzes in his hand.

UNKNOWN

Ilya will refuse medication.

UNKNOWN

He doesn’t like pills, but you must insist if he needs them. He will be mean and stubborn. But I’m trusting you to take care of him.

UNKNOWN

It’s Svetlana, by the way.

His brows furrow, and he hurries upstairs. When he returns to Ilya’s bedroom, he isn’t asleep quite yet, but almost there, watching an animal documentary with glazed eyes. Shane stands in front of the tv when Ilya ignores him.

“Why is Svetlana texting me?”

“I gave her your number,” he shrugs, avoiding Shane’s eyes.

Shane gapes.

Ilya waves his hand in the air, “Well, I didn’t say it was *your* number, fuckin’ obviously. She wants to text *Jane* to make sure that I’m fine. She wants updates.”

It's as if she can hear their conversation when she texts again.

UNKNOWN

If you can't do it, leave, and I'll come there myself.

"Can I sleep now?" Ilya complains. "Bird documentary super boring, like you, helps me sleep. And I can't watch the ugly pigeons with your head in the way."

"That's a loon," Shane corrects, absently looking at his phone.

"*You* are loon," Ilya grumbles, grabbing a pillow and hugging it.

"I'll be back in an hour to check your temperature," he warns.

"Can't wait."

Shane retreats, shutting the bedroom door behind him and sits on the sofa, picks at his thumb and wonders what to say.

JANE

I understand. I'm monitoring his fever carefully. It's lowered a bit. If I can't get it to break completely, I'll make sure he takes the meds or goes to the walk-in clinic if he needs it.

SVETLANA

Thank you. He's a terrible patient.

JANE

I'm starting to pick up on that.

The sun is beginning to set, casting an orange glow throughout the living room. Outside, the snow picks up, thick flakes drifting past the windows. Shane's stomach growls. The afternoon passed more quickly than he realized.

Shane thinks about his mom again. How, if she were here, she'd be making his comfort meals. Rice porridge with ginger tea, and grated Asian pears. He has no idea what Ilya would want. He's mildly irritated that they've never spoken about this before—that he knows Ilya has a scar on his innermost right elbow, that he's ticklish around his knees, that he comes faster if Shane gets a hand around his throat, that he hogs the blankets after falling asleep—but Shane doesn't have a clue what he'd crave when he's unwell.

JANE

He hasn't eaten. What does he like to eat when he's sick?

Shane always hoped that the Metros would beat the Raiders, not only because he wanted his team to win, but because it meant that Ilya would take his frustrations out on him, destroying Shane with one devastating orgasm at a time. Once, after Boston had lost against Montreal, 3-2, Ilya had worked Shane's cock over with his tight fists for what felt like an hour, stopping each time Shane got close to coming.

He straddled Shane, his thighs bracketing his torso in a cage, holding him down as Shane bucked up like a wild animal, sweating and cursing and yelling.

"Please, fuck, please, Rozanov..." He gasped.

"Will you be good, Hollander? I think you can."

He leaned forward to kiss Shane's neck. Shane rutted upwards, smearing precome over the valley of Ilya's abs. He had whined then, face hot and splotchy, tears dotting his lashline before they fell down the temples of his face and soaked the bed sheet.

"Need it," he begged.

Ilya held the root of his cock in a tight circle, squeezing with punishing force, staving off the explosive orgasm that was building. With his other hand, he fondled his balls, rubbing his thumb into them in circles. Shane kicked his legs, crying harder now with his frustration.

"Are you okay?" Ilya had asked. He bent down, suckling at the purpled, dripping head of Shane's cock.

"Rozanov, Rozanov, please, *please*," Shane chanted.

"*Are you okay?*"

"Yes, fuck! I'm okay, would you just hurry up and make me come?"

Ilya gave his cock a kiss, and it jerked towards his face, slapping him in the jaw. "Eager."

He reached down to Shane's hole, where Ilya prepped him earlier, making him wet and sloppy and ready. It was a weird angle; Ilya had to twist his wrist and could barely wedge a finger up inside him to the second knuckle, but he still managed to graze Shane's prostate, drawing out whiny moans from him.

"More, more Rozanov—I can't, I need you."

"Yeah, yeah, okay," he said. "I got you."

Ilya slid down and off his body, pulled on a condom, grabbed one of Shane's legs and hitched his knee over his shoulder. Shane whimpered when Ilya tapped his cock on his hole, a brief warning before he drove into him and began to fuck him in earnest. It felt like relief, like a sudden exhale of air after holding it in for so long.

Shane clawed at Ilya's shoulders, pulling him down so he had something to hold on to, to ground him in the force of Ilya's thrusts. It felt like he was being fucked up to his throat, Ilya

hitting his prostate and sending lightning up Shane's spine.

Shane was crying without abandon then, hot tears rolling down his cheeks, hiccuping, "Oh god, oh god, oh god."

His body was unsure whether to bear down or away; Shane's pleasure and pain receptors crossed and fried in the aftermath of being edged for so long.

"R-Rozanov," he warned.

Ilya had dragged his hand down from where they were playing with Shane's nipples and down to his stomach, spreading out his fingers, and let out a pained grunt, "Can feel myself here. *Fuck*." Under his hand, skin stretched thin, a bulge pushing in and out.

Impossible.

Shane thrashed his head back and forth, jaw open, drooling. "*Rozanov*."

Ilya was petting his hair, grunting into his neck. He leaned in for a messy kiss and hissed, "Yesssss, good Hollander. Come on my cock."

His body jerked, a mindless, heady thing. Distantly, Shane thought he might be screaming. His ass clenched furiously around Ilya's cock, and he came, releasing messily across Ilya's stomach, his cock kicking back and spurting out more come high onto Shane's chin. Ilya yanked him down onto his cock once, twice, three more times. He grunted, swearing profusely in Russian, and buried himself deep into Shane where he was still pulsing.

That night, Ilya ordered room service for the first time while Shane was in the shower, ravenous in the aftermath.

"My reward for working hard," he smirked, eyebrows wagging. He had a spread of breakfast foods laid out, some eggs, bacon, fruits and pancakes.

He grabbed a plate and piled it high with an assortment of food, shoving it towards Shane.

"Oh," he said, surprised. "I should get going."

Ilya cocked an eyebrow at him, "Is just food. Will Hayden send search party if you stay ten minutes longer?"

"No, but uh, I'm on a macrobiotic diet."

"Ah, yes, bird food. But we are athletes, and we need fuel. Plus, you were working very hard for it," Ilya grinned, leering at Shane.

His stomach growled, and Shane gave in, taking the plate and starting in on the fruit, allowing himself a few bites of bacon and eggs. They had eaten in silence in bed for a bit, Ilya stealing blueberries from his plate every so often.

"You like breakfast?" Shane asked.

Ilya hummed non-committally. “It is okay. Fast and easy.”

“Do you do this a lot in Russia? Breakfast at night?”

“No, not Russian thing.”

“Are you tired of Canadian food?”

“Used to it now. But yes, it can be too salty, too sweet.”

“Well, do you—”

Ilya had barked out a laugh, “What is this? A, what’s the word, *int-erro-gation*?”

Shane flushed, “Oh, no, sorry.” He shoved a piece of bacon in his mouth and stared at his shoes by the door, wondering how fast he could finish the plate before leaving.

Ilya sighed, “What?”

“What?”

“Ask your other question. Go ahead, I can practically hear you anyway. You think very loud, Hollander.”

“Well-uh, I was just wondering if you get homesick? For Russian food, I mean.”

He hummed and cast his eyes down to his plate, where he stabbed a strawberry with his fork, “Sometimes.”

Ilya is asleep when Shane gets back from his run to the grocery store. He’s not a light sleeper, so Shane doesn’t worry too much when he starts moving around in the kitchen, exploring drawers and cabinets to find the cutting board, bowls, and utensils he needs.

He dices onions, carrots, potatoes, beets and cabbage. Sautés them and adds vegetable broth, tomato paste, garlic, and dill, re-reading Svetlana’s text to make sure he doesn’t make any mistakes. Shane isn’t the best cook by nature; he lacks the instinct to know what flavors pair well together, and because of his strict diet, he doesn’t have a lot of experience cooking dishes outside of his usual rotation. But he *is* good at following directions. He sniffs the air and thinks maybe he’s doing an okay job so far. As his soup simmers, he pours out the frozen pelmeni into a pot of boiling water.

Shane has just turned off the stove and is cutting into a loaf of rye bread when he hears Ilya groaning, stomping down the stairs. He rounds the corner with a blanket wrapped over his shoulders and head, cheeks pink, curls in disarray, looking every bit like a disgruntled cat, and Shane bites back a fond smile.

“Feeling better?” Shane asks, turning back to finish plating the food.

Ilya takes a seat at one of the barstools by the kitchen island. “If I were dead when you found me, then I am now the slightest less dead.”

“Improvement.”

Shane walks to Ilya, slots himself between his legs, and reaches for his forehead. It’s still hot to the touch, but Ilya isn’t sweating or shaking anymore. He slides his hands lower to cradle Ilya’s cheeks between his palms, leans forward to touch their foreheads together. Ilya closes his eyes.

“What are you cooking? I can’t smell well out of my nose, but it doesn’t smell like shit.”

“Fuck you,” Shane scoffs. “I’m a better cook than you.”

He leans back and moves to grab Ilya a plate, piling on pelmeni with sour cream, fills a bowl with the borscht and tops it with a slice of rye.

“I made borscht!” Shane grins. “And pelmeni! Well, it’s frozen, but Svetlana told me you wouldn’t care anyway. It would’ve taken too long to make them from scratch. But uh, the borscht I made, and the rye bread is fresh.”

Ilya is silent as Shane slides the food across the kitchen island to him. Stares at the food and then back at Shane. Swallows. His ears are red, and his eyes are a bit damp. He looks dazed, and Shane worries silently that his fever has risen once more. He makes a mental note to check Ilya’s temperature again after dinner.

“It actually wasn’t that difficult. I mean, I don’t know that it will taste as good as it might back at home, but I think it’s edible. I asked Svetlana for the recipe. And I know you don’t want food, but you have to eat, at least a little. And if it all tastes like shit, I also bought some cans of chicken noodle soup,” Shane babbles.

Ilya is still and makes no move to grab his bowl. He stares at Shane with such incredulity that it makes him blush, “You made me borscht? Pelmeni too?”

“Do you—do you not *like* borscht?” he asks, unsure, starting to frown. “I thought... I mean, I checked with Svetlana, and I asked her what you would want while you’re sick. Listen, if you don’t want it...”

Shane reaches to tug the bowl and plate away, but Ilya is faster, grabbing the bowl in his haste and sloshing borscht up the sides, his thumb dipping into the red soup.

“No, I want it. This is mine.”

Shane throws his hands up, “Okay, make up your mind, Jesus Christ.”

Ilya still stares at him intently, even as he grabs his spoon and fork and digs into the pelmeni first, scooping generous amounts of sour cream onto the dumplings, shovelling them into his mouth. He takes a big spoon of borscht, eyeing Shane the whole time, and shoves it into his mouth, moaning.

“You don’t have to do all that,” Shane mutters, shifting.

“Taste for yourself. It’s good. Great.” He shoves another mouthful into his mouth and pauses, lifting his hands, palms up, and spreading them apart like he’s presenting a title. “‘Shane Hollander: Borscht Master.’ One more thing he’s perfect at.”

Shane rolls his eyes, but grabs his own bowl, trying for himself. He’s not really a fan of beets, but he can admit it’s objectively good; flavorful and hearty...comforting.

“I think I added too much dill.”

“Is perfect. Tastes like home.”

“Svetlana did share a recipe.”

Ilya shakes his head, “She does not have my family’s recipe. Is...lost. Yours, strangely, tastes very similar.” He quiets across from him, swallows more spoonfuls of the soup, dips his rye bread into the borscht and eats with vigor.

“When’s the last time you’ve eaten this stuff? She mentioned there’s only like one good Russian restaurant around here, and it’s kinda far from your house.”

Ilya shakes his head. “Haven’t tried that place yet.”

“So do you make it yourself?”

“Don’t like to cook meals that take much time. I don’t know the last time I ate this,” he says, voice soft. He pauses with his spoon in the air, “I was eleven, maybe.”

“Oh.”

Ilya is still staring at him with that inexplicable look. He coughs. Shane clears his throat, hesitates, then asks, “What?”

Ilya says nothing. They slurp their soup and dip their pelmeni in sour cream, and Shane worries that he’s misstepped somehow. He looks at the magnets on Ilya’s fridge, the old photos of Svetlana and him, if only to avoid looking at Ilya, who snuffles and scrapes the bottom of his soup bowl with his spoon.

“You’re missing some magnets,” he mumbles.

“Hmm?”

Shane points at the fridge. “Those are from game cities, right? You have Montreal, Toronto, Boston. And new ones like Nashville, Las Vegas. Tampa. But Boston’s played in other cities recently. You’re missing Philadelphia, Washington, San Jose...what, you couldn’t find magnets you liked there?”

Ilya brushes at the crumbs on the counter, shrugging. Picks at a piece of lint on his blanket. Suddenly, he’s not interested in looking at Shane at all. “Not game cities. We face-off first

time in Montreal. We have our endorsement commercial in Toronto. We fuck in almost every hotel in Boston. Nashville is our first All-Star game. Las Vegas is MLH awards, where we also fight for first time,” he explains.

“I think we’ve fought before that,” Shane interrupts, faintly. His legs feel weak, and he leans against the kitchen island for support, heart in his throat.

“And Tampa, of course, you have realization you are gay. And we don’t take any pictures together, anywhere, and I could not put them up even if we did, so...”

Shane swallows. “So, magnets.”

Shane remembers, months ago, being sick with jealousy for the Svetlana-shaped indent in Ilya’s home, and this whole time, Ilya had been making space for him, too.

Ilya dips his chin down once and, voice rough, repeats, “Magnets. I think I need to find a beet one, for the Borscht Master now.”

“That joke is lame,” he whispers, voice cracking.

“Have the flu. Not exactly at my best.”

Shane’s lip trembles, eyes wet. He thinks he must be the biggest fool in the universe to have ever tried to convince himself it could be just sex between them—that when Ilya somehow saw him, chose him, plucked him out of that locker room shower where he’d been drowning and alone, he could still simply walk away from this.

Ilya reaches out and grasps his hand in his, “I haven’t said thank you yet. For the food and for coming here. Thank you. I know I can be...difficult. You could find easier patients, easier than me.”

“Not interested. The one I have keeps me busy.”

Shane doesn’t know how they’re going to make it work between them. If it’s always going to have to be stolen hours in secrecy until they retire. But he doesn’t want Ilya to be ill and alone ever again. Every cold, flu, stomach ache, Shane lays claim to. *He’s mine. I will take care of him.*

Ilya smiles, a gentle and secret thing and Shane’s chest lurches, *mine, mine, mine.* Shane moves to him, wraps his arms around his neck and leans in.

“You’re going to get sick.”

“I’ll be okay.”

They kiss, slowly, mouths stained red and soft. Outside, the snow picks up, blanketing the windows with thick sheets of white.

“Will you stay tonight?” Ilya whispers against his mouth.

“I’ll stay.”

End Notes

shane: i made you beet soup 😊

ilya: i will marry this man and if anyone tries to stop me i will kill them

i haven't written in *years*. hollanov has bewitched me, heart, mind, and soul. if even one person makes it here to the end, thank you so much and i hope this didn't completely suck ass.

and yes, irina also made borscht with a heavy hand on the dill. ilya doesn't like to eat russian food because it reminds him of his mom. ilya's fever breaks later that night. shane does get sick but plays anyway and they still win 4-3. after, shane's back in montreal and ilya sulks and frets that they aren't in the same city where he can tend to shane too and the guilt eats him up inside. he sends a delivery of like ten different soups to shane's apartment and makes him do a taste test over skype to rank them all, only to find out that shane doesn't even like soup when he's sick, he eats congee.

xoxo

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