

Once Is A Habit

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Once Is A Habit

by [Eddywow](#)

Summary

The bus was just a run of the mill charter bus. Nothing special. No obnoxious Greek letters to indicate that-

Well, fuck.

“Mom,” Shane hissed suddenly, getting closer as she waved to bus full of frat boys. “You cannot be serious.”

(Professor/college student AU with a side of frat boy Ilya)

Notes

Hey it's me!

So, this fic involved the power imbalance of a student in university sleeping with a professor! If this isn't your jam, please click out. I won't hold it against you and we'll both be happy 💕💕

Ilya is also vaguely pushy in the beginning, so.

Chapter 1: Doing Charity

The sun was blinding, beams of light seeming to shoot out of every single cloud that barely covered the sky. Beating down over the top of his head, rolling along his shoulders and arms and legs. Reminding him that he had dressed horribly for this. Horribly. Though, in Shane's defense, he had barely been given any warning. Rose owed him big time for this. She knew that he had a lot on his plate right now and here he was, stacking on more and more.

They had leveled a lot of trees for this.

They barely had the subfloor down and Shane was expected to be here at the first crack of sunlight. Just to oversee a group of students. As if Shane knew the first thing about architecture. He could hear Rose in his head, telling him that it wasn't even a big deal, he just had to order them around. Keep up morale. Which was even worse, actually. They had real construction guys here. Shane was entirely unsure of why he was needed.

Right. Stop complaining about volunteer work. You're being selfish again. Right. This is for a good cause. This is for the community.

Shane breathed in deep, coughing immediately at all the unsettled dust that met him. He kept coughing, a loud hack that he was trying to desperately to cover before anyone in the surrounding area managed to notice. Which, in all reality, was way more people than he had expected. Too many students. He already had to deal with enough of those during class.

Again. He was being rude again. Right? That felt- that was a rude thing to think. He had great students.

Shane jumped inches into the air when someone reached out to pat him on the back, distracting from both his near death experience and his panic at being put outdoors.

"Shane!" A cheery voice greeted him. The kind of voice that had never met a day of unrest. His mother. She smiled at him as if she had already had two coffees today. She probably had. "I thought I was hearing things when Rose said you volunteered to take her spot. I am so happy to hear you gave our project a second chance."

Right. Volunteered. He definitely hadn't actually volunteered. More like....coerced.

He wasn't about to ruin his mom's day by telling her he had no interest in this recent philanthropic project of hers, as nice as he was sure it might be. Shane knew where to draw the line. People did not like when he expressed dislike for....normal things. Events. He loved charity, he really did. How could he not, coming from a family like his? But he also liked to try to push himself as far from his mother's community projects as possible. There was no need to keep drawing their connection to the public eye. It only made the students itchier when they found out what level of nepo baby Shane technically was.

He didn't need to give them more ammo. Rose kept saying that he needed to grow more of a backbone. Put his foot down when things got too...rowdy in his classroom. It was hard when

they rarely took him seriously.

Oh well. He had been dealing with college students for a few years now. He could keep dealing with them. No big deal. It wasn't like he was on the brink of collapse or anything. He was actually a pretty solid professor. It was hardly his fault that students weren't very interested in sociology.

"Shane? Honey?"

He was daydreaming again. Talking to himself in his head. Shane shook his thoughts back and forth and gazed back at his mom, schooling his features back to neutral.

"Are you excited for the next few weeks?"

No. Not really.

"Of course I am," Shane answered, creeping sincerity into his voice. He loved his parents, he really did. Sometimes they couldn't fully tell when he was being...whatever this was. This shield he put up when he didn't want to hurt his mother's feelings. This really was important to her, even if half of it was optics. She was a genius of a woman. "What will I- uh, what will I be doing? Do you know?"

Of course she knew.

She definitely picked up on his nerves this time, smiling much more warmly at him as she stepped a bit closer.

"Nothing too wild, I promise. We're outsourcing some of the supervising work. I know you can wield a hammer and a drill, so you might have to do a bit of rough work-" Shane cringed. Yeah, he wasn't out of shape. Not by any means. But. "But mostly, you'll just be the eyes and ears for when our big guys can't give the students their full attention. We were kind of short on volunteers from the University, so I'm overjoyed that you decided to help out."

She was using client speak on him. Shane didn't mind, but it did amuse him. Sometimes he understood where parts of his personality came from. Other times he didn't, not at all.

"No problem," Shane said, loosening his shoulders a bit once his mom's hand fell. He didn't mind being touched, not really. Most days. But he was tense today, his features hard to maneuver. "Have they told you who I'll be in charge of specifically?"

Shane's mother looked just past him and let out a happy noise.

"There they are!" She cheered again, just as happy as she was to see him. A bus had rolled onto the barren land, kicking up more dirt in its wake. Shane coughed again, this time into his arm. He watched as the bus door open and out filtered-

His worst nightmare.

The bus was just a run of the mill charter bus. Nothing special. No obnoxious Greek letters to indicate that-

Well, fuck.

“Mom,” Shane hissed suddenly, getting closer as she waved to bus full of frat boys. “You cannot be serious.”

“Most of them are sports majors,” She hissed back, waiting for the boys to get closer and never losing her grin. “You know how important the schools scholarship program is-“

Of course. Shane wanted to stomp his feet like a child. Right, his mom would have ulterior motive. Get behind the frats and sororities of the school, who were already obligated to do a certain amount of charity work each semester. And then you could weasel money of their potentially wealthy parents who were trying to get their sons a hot spot in whatever sport they participated in. It wasn't the best look.

There was also nothing he could do about it.

“Wave,” His mom instructed, elbowing him in the shoulder. Shane nursed the ache with a pout but raised his hand anyway. “Hi there, so glad you could make it. Oh, thank you. Yes, I do have a husband-“

Shane rolled his eyes and stepped to the side, refusing to play into his mother's act for now. She was great at it, he was not. So no need to pretend.

Shane really did not want to have to deal with this particular group of young men. For a multitude of reasons. He already knew they could be difficult, as seen by their need to try and charm his mother within seconds of meeting her.

But they were also...

You know.

Lugging around lunch bags and wearing tank tops and athletic shorts and-

And Shane really needed to stop focusing on things he should not be focusing on. He had to focus on- on-

Not sneezing in someone's face.

The man in front of him (man? He had to be like, twenty. Maybe twenty-one. God willing. What?) stared at Shane in shocked silence.

He wasn't even-

He was like two feet away.

“Really?” He asked, voice thick with a foreign accent and face unamused. Russian. An exchange student. Shane had only met a few in the past, but certainly never a Russian one. Or maybe he was getting the accent wrong. Maybe he was- “No apology? That is it?”

Really, he had to be Russian. That was like...a place where models come from, right? Because he sort of looked like a model, with the strong jaw and blond hair.

“Hello?” He asked, waving a hand in Shane’s face rudely. His features twisted, beginning to look more weirded out. “Are you having stroke? Is that- are you okay?”

“Yep!” Shane chirped, finally shaking off whatever...that was. “Hi, hello. I’m Shane Hollander. Professor Hollander. Uh.”

A few more guys stepped up behind Russian Guy, as if they thought Shane might be announcing something important.

“I am supposed to supervise you, so. That’s- that’s what I’m doing. And I’m very sorry for-“ He flapped a hand toward the Russian man, cheeks heating at his blue eyed gaze seared into Shane.

“No problem,” The man said, grinning just a bit before stamping down on it a second later. “Ilya. Rozanov.”

Shane nodded, barely having a moment to process the name before the rest of the frat began to bizarrely introduce themselves to him. One by one.

How odd.

—

It was hot.

Too hot.

Shane was actually just-

Just leaning against a truck nearby, pretending that he had any clue what he was doing. He was given a sheet of tasks, embarrassingly handed over by his own mother. The University Center for Civic Engagement covered the title, obnoxiously cursive and obtrusive. Art collective and community outreach center. Shane knew what they were supposed to be doing. It was basically a glorified art museum that would half-house wealthy students projects and also...well, okay. Half would be a public studio that held free classes for the community. Still. Shane knew they had to counter some of the good with...less good. Otherwise they would see no funding, whether they had fingers in the fat wallets of rich parents or not.

Shane had already read his list four times. Again and again, until the words were basically planted behind his eyelids.

“That should- yeah, you can just- you guys can carry those out.” Shane pointed toward the truck full of drywall, feeling quite useless in his slacks and button up, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and his hair already matting to his forehead.

“Absolutely, captain.” One guy saluted him sarcastically, shirt already wet with sweat as he lifted himself into the truck. Shane was pretty sure none of them were following the proper

procedure or protocol. Then again, no one was stopping them. Jesus Christ, what was he supposed to do? The whole lot of them started lifting dry wall in groups, lugging it down the makeshift steps outside the truck. Okay, that seemed...fine.

“Careful!” Shane called, watching as two of the guys wobbled one piece of drywall dramatically, laughing like little idiots as they looked over at him. “Hey, stop- don’t do that.”

“Just a little fun,” Russian guy- no, Ilya called. Ilya. “No worries!”

Shane huffed and leaned back against the truck behind him, nearly elbowing the metal surface.

Ilya definitely saw, lips tucking to the side as if to hide a laugh. And then he winked at Shane.

Well.

That was annoying.

Annoying. Right.

Shane pulled at the collar of his shirt and ignored him.

—

Lunch with a bunch of frat guys and construction workers was not on Shane’s bingo card for the week. Or year. Or life, really.

He didn’t mesh well with most men. Or people.

It was awkward enough without people trying to talk to him. How was he supposed to relate to any of them? Then again, his mother would say that he would have had no issues before he became a professor. He had sports, sure. He was athletic. He just...couldn’t talk much.

So, he was eating outside.

Technically, everyone was eating outside. Just. Under makeshift tents so that they could finally get some relief from the sun. Realistically speaking, Shane should have wanted to take an ounce of that relief for himself. Or maybe...he should hide in his car. But to do that, he would have to move. Somehow walking to his car was more embarrassing than just...sitting on the edge of a truck and eating his food.

“A meager lunch of...what is that?” A voice asked from the left of Shane, causing him to nearly drop his sad sandwich. “Is that- tuna? Or-?”

Ilya reached out to touch his bread and Shane glared at him, pulling it back instantly.

Ilya grinned.

“It- no, it’s Turkey. Obviously.”

“How many piece? Like...two?”

Shane breathed through his nose. Ilya was kind of...hard to look at, considering all the sweat and his soaked white tank and-

“It’s- processed lunch meat isn’t good for you. I try not eat it very often but I was in a rush-“

“Why do you have it if you are in rush?”

Shane frowned down at his sandwich, confused by this entire conversation.

“What?”

Ilya rolled his eyes, not even trying to hide it.

“In your house, in your- why do you have it if you do not enjoy it?” Ilya asked, sounding his words out better this time. Maybe pure annoyance made him speak better English.

“I never said- I like it, but it’s not good for me.” Shane felt like he was arguing with a child. He sort of was, his probable age occurring to Shane for a second time today. “But I have some if I want to be- uh.”

“Lazy?”

Shane glared again, taking a bite of his sandwich as if in defiance.

“Oh, sorry. Too mean? Not lazy. Not lazy.”

Shane chewed his sandwich and kept glaring.

“Shouldn’t you be eating? We have to start again soon,” Shane concluded, ready to be done with this guy. He smiled too much, it was getting kind of weird. Why wouldn’t he stop smiling? “Hello?”

“Sorry, just distracted.”

Oh, whatever.

“By what?” Shane asked, looking behind for a moment in paranoia.

“Just...” Ilya leaned forward and gazed more intensely at Shane. “All the sweat on your collar. You are very sweaty guy.”

Shane let out a sigh through his nose, choosing to ignore that last statement. And the urge to flip Rozanov off. He left in the next moment. Without even announcing his departure.

What an asshole.

—

Shane was exhausted by the time he left on his first day. He needed a shower and at least one beer. Maybe not. He shouldn't drink on a weekday. He had class in the morning, anyway. It was a bad idea.

He just...

Wanted to relax. So he did.

The wine just sort of happened.

Shane really was serious about not drinking on weekdays. But it had been an exhausting day and wine wasn't even a big deal, right? It was basically fruit juice, that was what his mom would have said anyway. And his father would have laughed and agreed.

Three glasses of wine later and Shane was stuck on his phone, his nose way too close to the screen as he scrolled an app that he had absolutely no business being on.

Instagram.

Tragic, embarrassing. He was too uncool for social media and he knew that, he really did. But...Rose insisted that he keep a locked account and use it to share photos of his mom's cats. So, he kind of just had a lot of cat pictures.

Shane knew he wasn't supposed to be on the app, and definitely not while mildly tipsy. Tipsy? Okay, maybe drunk. Headed toward drunk, while he splayed out messily on his living room couch. He had already turned the volume on his tv down, not quite interested in the random season of survivor he had turned on.

Shane was an idiot.

Ilya Rozanov was easy to find. Probably because his name was unique around here.

His instagram was also...pretty interesting.

Shane scrolled through each photo with no small amount of shame, scowling at each one as he passed it by. Whatever. Typical frat boy stuff. Posing in photos of three, four, ten. More. Smiling at the camera. Glaring at the camera. Wearing stupid little polos and shorts and-

Ilya did seem to dress different than the rest of them. Less clean cut, less pastel. Just. Why did he seem to have such an aversion to covering his chest? Why was he so- he even looked rude in his photos. As if he wanted to fight the person behind the camera. Or he was always winking. Smirking. Shane glared harder, his grip on his phone tightening. He was pretty sure this guy didn't even own shirts that fit. He couldn't. Everything was so tight, so form fitting. All black, everything.

He kept scrolling, reading all the stupid little one word descriptions on his photos. So cool. He must be so cool. Everyone probably thought he was the coolest guy in the frat.

Shane didn't mean to message him.

It just sort of happened. The guy wasn't even- he was barely malevolent. But Shane had an itch under his skin and he couldn't quite stop himself.

Shane Hollander: ur head is massive

He slipped down on the couch, lips firmly settled into a pout. He could message whoever he wanted. Why didn't he do it more often? Wine couldn't be all that bad if it gave him the courage to actually talk to people.

He didn't expect a message back. And so quickly too. He would have thought someone as cool as Ilya wouldn't even bother to get online. He probably ignored every single dm he got.

Ilya Rozanov: are you even supposed to be messaging students?

Shane scowled again. He had to be using google translate. There was no way.

Shane Hollander: I can do what I want. Why are you awake? You have class tomorrow.

Shane didn't have to wait long for another reply.

Ilya Rozanov: are you serious? It is not even 10 pm. Are you an old man?

Rude. Shane almost gave up then. And he would have, if the itch under his skin would just stop growing and agitating him.

Shane Hollander: not old. You're just a baby. Not my problem. Big headed baby.

Shane didn't immediately get a reply this time. He even had time to get up and dump himself into his actual bed, eyes fluttering shut for a second before he managed to pry them open at the sound of his notifications going off.

Ilya Rozanov: you are drunk? You sound drunk.

Shane hated that Rozanov had managed to clock him so quickly.

Shane Hollander: none of your business

Childish. He was being childish.

Ilya Rozanov: why is your profile private? I want to see your photos.

What an odd thing to say.

Shane frowned at his phone and tried to decipher why Ilya would want to see his pictures. They were boring anyway, so it didn't matter.

Shane Hollander: can't follow students

Ilya Rozanov: so you can message me but I cannot follow you? Is that it?

Shane felt a flush pool over his face, spreading down his neck and chest.

Shane Hollander: you should have ur profile set to private if u don't want people to see it

Ilya Rozanov: should I? I like when I know people are looking me up on purpose

Shane let out a huff of air, reaching up to brush his hands over his face. His phone dropped down onto the bed, the screen still lit up.

“What the fuck am I doing?” He asked himself. He didn't know this man. They had never even met before today. What was Shane's problem?

Shane Hollander: I can't do this rn

Ilya Rozanov: because you are drunk?

Shane sighed loudly, leg shaking anxiously against his bed. He wanted to lay down, he did. But he sat propped up against the headboard. His stomach kept flipping uncomfortably, his throat going drier by the second.

Shane Hollander: yeah, don't feel so good

Shane did not expect a reply now. He had already thoroughly embarrassed himself. His stomach hurt and his head hurt and his eyes were blurry. He never acted like this.

Ilya Rozanov: then sleep.

Shane snorted and rolled his eyes.

Shane Hollander: yeah thx for advice, good advice

Ilya Rozanov: you have such a big attitude for such a short man

Shane stared at his phone in shock, mouth open for a few moments too long. Because? What? Huh? Why would he just-

Shane Hollander: screw you, I'm going to bed

He let his phone fall again, finally giving into the urge to close his eyes. As it turned out, sleeping while sitting up did cause your entire body to hurt the next day. Pretty badly, actually. He could just blame it on Ilya Rozanov.

—

Shane had normal clothing on this time.

He technically wasn't supposed to be at the build site today, Rose was. But again, she had convinced him to drop by after his last early class of the day. Luckily for her, he had no classes after lunch. Still. It was the hottest part of the day and there was absolutely no way he was going to strut around in slacks again. Especially not while nursing a wine hangover. He felt awful enough, no need to add khaki into the mix.

Shane was....

Pretty ashamed, actually. Did that mean he was ready to seek out Rozanov to apologize to him? No, not exactly. If anything, Shane only wanted to avoid the other man. No need to pretend that he wanted to talk to Rozanov. There was nothing to discuss. Shane had been drunk and vaguely lonely in his apartment. Not a big deal. He was pretty sure that people made drunk mistakes all the time, right? That was pretty common.

He just....needed to focus on not over exerting himself for the day. And not looking like he had gone on a confusing bender the night before. The wine had been empty by the time he had woken up, nearly late for his first class. He had to spend most of that class grading papers and assigning busy work, so. Yeah, that was why Shane didn't drink on weekdays.

He nursed a coffee to his chest and pretended that he wasn't violently sweating in his track pants and dark t-shirt. No one could tell. Why was he even bothered by the idea that someone might be able to tell?

It took around ten minutes for someone to finally notice him standing over by the trucks, avoiding his actual responsibilities. The boys had figured out what they were supposed to do, hadn't they? So, they clearly did not need him.

"You are looking...."

Shane repressed a sigh, cheeks flooding with heat. This was the last person he wanted to speak to right now. Rozanov stood in front of him a smirk on his face, already sweaty and somehow still wearing a shirt. Shockingly. Shane had seen what was beneath said shirt on his instagram last night. It wasn't entirely shocking.

"What do you want?" Shane asked, trying to pivot his body language so that he looked less inviting. It was hard when he felt so awful.

Rozanov ignored the question.

"I miss the other clothing," He said, accent thick as he lifted the water bottle Shane had yet to notice and took a big swig. "When you looked like nerd. Tiny nerd. Much better than someone with big head, yes?"

Oh for-

"I did not-" Shane stopped and started again. "I had a weird night, okay? I am sorry for being unprofessional. It was not- I don't do that often. At all. I don't do that."

Rozanov was not going to let it go. He only stepped a bit closer. Too close. Shane looked around, made sure no one noticed.

"You know," Rozanov said, his voice like silk. "I think the school would not like their teachers acting certain way. You agree?"

What the-?

“Are you threatening me?” Shane asked, frowning as his heart rate accelerated. Yeah, he should have maybe thought through his actions a bit better. Sue him for being a drunken idiot, okay? “Seriously?”

Rozanov let out an obnoxious laugh, stepping back again.

“No, of course not. It just- it means you must have really been looking for me.” No, it did not mean that. “Can you imagine? Little, old me? With big head?”

Why was he being so annoying? Shane understood that he had been both rude and obtrusive the night before. Yeah, okay. But he had already apologized. Was that not enough?

“I said I was sorry.” Shane felt wooden now, confused why it wasn’t helping Rozanov any. He only looked amused by Shane. “Is that good? Can we move on now?”

Rozanov seemed to think it over, tapping his chin obnoxiously.

“No, I do not agree to your terms.” Oh my god. “Would be better if you got on your knees and say how sorry you are for crossing boundary of student-“

Shane flushed brighter, stomach turning unpleasantly.

“That’s not funny. I am very sorry, I said- it was a mistake, okay? I don’t even know you. I’m sorry I was so rude to you. I don’t know what came over me.”

Rozanov smirked in silence, choosing to break it after an excruciatingly long stare down.

“Sure, you do not know why you had to find my instagram page. Sure, Mr. Hollander.”

The name slipped off his tongue, a tickle against Shane’s ear drums that had him shifting back and forth on his feet. Whatever. He was just being a dick.

“I think you have wood to move.”

Rozanov seemed to be repressing a childish joke. Shane was just glad to watch him leave, finally able to breathe again.

—

Shane didn’t have to be back at the build site until the weekend. So, he spent his week as he normally would. Grading tests, reading through practice essays, fumbling his way awkwardly through a handful of lectures. He used to be good at public speaking, but lately....he was diminished, his brain too focused on other things.

Like not scrolling through instagram again.

It was stupid, really. He had no reason to sift through his messages, no reason to keep checking for new ones he might have missed.

No reason to look at pictures of Ilya Rozanov and try to decipher what his major might be. It was none of Shane's business, least of all due to the fact that he was pretty much stalking a student. A student. A student who was nearly ten years younger than him. What the hell was wrong with Shane? Why would he even entertain the thought of-

What?

He should call someone. That girl he met last April. He should call her, see if she wanted to go out for a drink or- but he had ended things awkwardly. They had slept together twice and the vibes had been off. She had noticed.

Shane kept obsessing over a boy. A boy. A student, oh my god.

He went so far as to delete the stupid app from his phone.

But you know, Shane could never truly keep himself from doing stupid shit. He was bound to mess up eventually.

Chapter 2: Up To You

Do not download Grindr.

Don't. You don't need it. You have no use for it. You know you have no use for it. All you ever do is download it, scroll for ten minutes under a fake name, and proceed to delete the entire app. You stare at your phone for the next three hours, glancing at it repeatedly as it rests face down on your table. Or your couch. Sometimes the useless second pillow on your bed.

And then you just repeat the process a week later.

Shane was being stupid again.

He had an iron grip on his phone, all the lights in his room dimmed but not turned off. It was easier this way, like he could just hide in the dark and pretend he didn't exist. That he wasn't doing something bad. Not- not bad. Okay, it wasn't bad for other people. Shane didn't care how other people lived their lives. But. But it was bad for him, you know?

Bad to be stuck at home on a Friday night, scrolling through Grindr for no particular reason.

Just to see.

Just to....see if he was right.

It took him longer than his usual ten minutes this time, which made sense. The universe would keep him within temptations reach, wouldn't it?

Shane was right, anyway. Ilya Rozanov was on there. Three miles away. Shane breathed through his nose and exhaled hard. He even had a douchebag photo to go with the entire profile. His visible abs on full display in a stereotypical mirror selfie. He had little to no bio.

Fuck.

Shane swallowed his curiosity and exited out of the app. No. Nope. No more. He was putting his foot down now, telling himself to stop before he went too far. For real this time.

He deleted the app. It didn't matter. He would download it again an hour later.

—

Shane really needed to start getting better sleep. Normally, he slept just fine. He had just been...preoccupied the night before. That was all. But not- no, he hadn't actually done anything. To himself. Or- or anything like that. Not- he hadn't looked through Rozanov's photos. That would have been too much.

But he hadn't slept. Or maybe he had. He mostly spent his night trying to sleep and staring at his blank phone screen, wishing the hours would pass by faster so he could be done with the

weekend. He barely had time to himself these days.

And now he had a random construction worker in his face, screaming about “if you have time to lean” like Shane was sixteen years old again, forced to work retail so that his parents could teach him how to stand on his own. It didn’t mean much then and it certainly didn’t now.

That was how Shane ended up hauling bags of concrete. And the thing was, Shane was not weak. Not at all. He exercised regularly. He was more than in shape and he could lift a considerable amount. But he hadn’t slept the night before and he was more than emotionally exhausted, his body still stiff and painful from falling asleep in awkward positions all week.

He felt like shit, to put it lightly.

He had only transferred about three bags before someone stepped in and-

“What are you doing?”

Shane groaned and wished he could wipe the sweat from his eyes. There was a blond Russian standing in his pathway and he did not have the time to deal with him. Shane could see Cliff and Hunter standing in the background, awaiting their instructions for the day.

“What? I was just- I was told to help, so I’m helping.”

Ilya frowned. The two other man got the hint and started lifting bags, bypassing the two of them as Shane sagged beneath the weight of his concrete bag. If only Ilya would just-

“Would you-?” He asked, finally getting Rozanov (that was his name, get it right) to move to the side. Shane trudged by, head pounding as he walked off and piled the bag next to the others near a wide expanse of palette.

And then he had to deal with Rozanov again.

“What do you want?” Shane asked, walking off and grabbing his water bottle off the back of a nearby open truck bed.

“You should not be doing this,” Rozanov said, frowning as he gestured to the line of frat boys moving bags. What? Doing what? “You are ill, yes? It is not good idea. You should- you should be sitting.”

Shane had no clue what....this was. Was he being made fun of? Was- what in the world was Rozanov getting at?

“You should sit. You should not be working, it is not part of- part of-“ He gestured in the air as if he could not find the right word.

“My job description?” Shane asked, wiping sweat from his brow. He did not like how intense Rozanov was focused on him right now. Or how bizarrely concerned he was for Shane. “No, it- it technically isn’t.”

Rozanov threw his hands up in exasperation.

“So, sit down!” Just like those messages. God, Shane really was feeling dizzy. He hadn’t gotten dizzy like this in ages. It was too hot. “Why are you- why? You do not need to be doing this, that is why we are here.”

Yeah, Shane was- he needed water but he- he felt a little too wobbly to lift his bottle. He should have slept more. He should have- he wasn’t taking care of himself again.

“I’m fine. I can do whatever you guys do, I’m not some delicate-“

What an embarrassing time to stumble, knees wobbling weakly beneath him and sending him tipping forward. Toward Ilya. Rozanov.

Toward. Rozanov.

He caught Shane around the middle immediately, arms wrapping safely around his waist and pulling Shane up like a rag doll.

Ugh.

“You are dizzy, I can tell. You need to sit. Now.”

Shane grumbled, fully aware that he had his face planted in a student’s sweaty chest. At least Rozanov was wearing a shirt today.

Unlike his Grindr photos.

“Fine. Whatever.”

Rozanov laughed quietly and released Shane, still keeping an arm around his shoulders as he helped Shane walk to the other side of a nearby truck. It was secluded enough, the sun not quite as bright in the shade. And less people to gawk at him. They probably hadn’t even noticed his embarrassing fumble or his need to be cared for by a grown man.

A younger grown man.

“You are brat when you are tired. Did you sleep at all? Last night?”

Why was he even asking?

“Do I look that bad?” Shane asked, reaching up to rub at his eyes as he finally sat down on a nearby barrel. It was sturdy enough. He was pretty sure he wouldn’t fall again. Rozanov began to smile, something suspicious beneath the layers. “Don’t answer that.”

Shane was beginning to learn that Rozanov was...maybe a flirt. Or just an asshole. It was possible. But Shane had no use for either of those things.

“Wild night?” Rozanov asked, inching forward just a bit. Too much. It was too sunny out, too visible. Even as Shane sat with his legs dangling off the edge of the tall barrel. “Were you up late texting student again?”

Oh god.

“I told you I was sorry,” Shane groaned, reaching up to rub his head now. He felt a headache beginning to bloom. “Was that not good enough for you? I don’t- I said I don’t make it a habit, okay?”

Rozanov did not look convinced.

He moved on anyway.

“I looked you up,” He told Shane, reaching out to poke him in the chest. Oh good, now he had no physical boundaries. Good. “You are teacher of...socio-socio- what was it?”

“Sociology,” Shane answered, taking a sip of water and mostly ignoring Rozanov. He was difficult to look at right now. “It’s- not important, actually. Why were you looking me up?”

Rozanov had no real shame, it seemed.

He was the polar opposite of Shane.

“To see you,” Rozanov answered with a shrug. “You are hard man to find. Saw you on registry, wanted to know what subject you teach. Sounded boring.”

Of course.

“Well, I doubt you’ll ever have to take it, so-“

“Sadly,” Rozanov interrupted, deadpan in the face. “You are correct. No socio for me. But... maybe I sit in on seminar. Next Tuesday?”

Oh god, no. How did he even-

“Did you look up my course schedule?” Shane asked in confusion, completely abandoning his water bottle at this point. There were more interesting events occurring. Rozanov looked like a little boy who had gotten caught stealing, but knew he was going to get away with it. “You can’t just-“

“It is public information, yes?”

“Well, yeah. Technically, I guess-“

“And my instagram page is public information too, yes?”

Shane clenched his jaw. Rozanov was never going to let that go, was he?

“So, I see you Tuesday. Wear red for me, okay?” Rozanov asked, eyes lighting up as he finally stepped away and gave Shane some space.

“I- I am not- you can’t just tell me what to do and- and expect me to do it,” Shane stuttered in shock, his dizziness an afterthought now. “Hey, did you hear me?”

“Sure, I did hear you. I know you’ll listen.”

Shane didn’t get to ask him anything else before he was gone, too busy ordering everyone around again to actually talk to the stupid Russian.

—

Shane was not a puppet.

No, he hadn’t spent the entirety of Monday staring at his stupid red shirt and wondering if maybe it was too bright for his usual wardrobe. It wasn’t something he would normally wear to class, was it? Then again, a little color couldn’t hurt. Right? He spent so much of his time decked in boring clothing. Why shouldn’t he make it more interesting?

It definitely had nothing to do with Ilya Rozanov. Who was a student, Shane. A real life student at the university that you teach at, by the way. There was no reason to take his advice on clothing or color theory or- or whatever it was that Rozanov was trying to pull. It felt like a joke, like a set up.

He wore the red shirt anyway.

He felt sort of like an idiot, going about his normal routine as he wore the article of clothing beneath his usual blazer. It was barely visible. It didn’t even matter. No one noticed and no one commented on it, so. Oh well.

Shane definitely didn’t care, as he droned through the first thirty minutes, his voice dry and tired from another night filled with restless sleep.

He was stupid.

An idiot.

Why had he ever thought-

Shane was mid sentence when one of the back doors to the lecture hall opened, a noise that didn’t arouse nearly as many stares as it probably should have.

Rozanov.

He was hilariously incognito, sunglasses settled onto his nose as he shuffled into a seat, hands buried in the light hoodie he wore. He sat close enough that Shane could just make out his face, devoid of emotion for the time being.

Shane wasn’t happy or excited or- or pleased.

No.

He was a professor and he needed to focus on unsticking his jaw so that he could get back to doing his job.

Shane shook his head and cleared his throat, continuing on. The topic was Deviating from Social Norms. It wasn't the most interesting lecture, but it would work just fine for the middle of the month. Shane had no want or need to delete any deeper right now. He had too much going on.

Which probably made him a bad professor.

He tripped over his feet for just a second and ignored the quiet noise of giggling that met him. Rose was right. Half of his students did not respect him. But hey, if laughter was all he got today, he would probably be fine.

He looked up again after five minutes of speaking.

To find Rozanov scrolling through his phone.

Shane tripped again.

"As I was, uh. As I was saying-" He said, voice stuttering at the audacity. Was it even a big deal? It wasn't the first time a student had used a phone in his class. "There was a research study done in-"

He continued on, aware that a percentage of his class were slowly nodding off.

Rozanov glanced back up.

Shane wasn't sure what came over him.

He reached up, fingers tickling nervously at the buttons on his blazer. He popped one open and the second followed, leaving the front completely open. Giving anyone a full view of the red shirt beneath.

Rozanov scanned him, eyes tracing a path down his body. As if they weren't in public, as if Shane wasn't a decade older than him and a professor.

Fuck.

Rozanov lip curled softly to the side, the ghost of a smirk. Shane stuttered again, distracted by the way Rozanov's thighs spread beneath the desk, his back sliding against the chair so that he could sit more comfortably. So that Shane would have to see the stretch of athletic fabrics over his thighs, over-

He had a class to teach. He couldn't be doing this right now. Or ever.

He needed to focus.

—

Shane knew Rozanov would stay after class.

He knew and yet he jumped in surprise when he turned away from his whiteboard and saw him standing there, hands still buried in his hoodie. At least his sunglasses were pushed up this time.

“You have nice voice,” Rozanov said, walking toward Shane’s desk with too much confidence. He clearly did not care. About much. “Almost made me sleep.”

Hm.

“Are you saying my lecture was boring?” Shane asked, moving right past his own question. “Why are you here?”

He knew why.

“Wanted to see what your class was about,” Rozanov said, shrugging casually as leaned against the desk like he owned it. “And, you know...”

He was being deliberately mysterious. But that kind of thing would not work on Shane. It never did. It just left him more confused.

“I don’t know.”

Rozanov examined the papers on his desk as if he found them particularly interesting.

“Wanted to see if you would wear red.”

Shane could not cover his shirt fast enough, hands reaching out to grasp the edges of his blazer, pulling at the fabric so that he might close it and make the shirt less visible.

Rozanov didn’t like that.

He automatically stepped closer. Too close for a public lecture hall. Just to the side of Shane’s desk. But he examined more papers, fingers trailing them as if he wanted to-

As if he wanted to appear to be doing something else. Asking questions about the class, maybe.

“Don’t do that,” Rozanov said, voice lower now. More gruff than Shane had ever heard it. “Did I tell you to do that?”

Shane felt his spine turn into jelly, heat tracing a pathway down his limbs as he tried to keep his knees from buckling. No one- no one had ever- no one talked to him like that.

“No, you didn’t,” Shane mumbled, swallowing until his throat clicked with sudden dryness. His hands fell and the blazer opened again. Rozanov’s gaze focused on Shane’s stomach then, eyes hot as he stared with an intensity usually reserved for much more lewd things. “Sorry.”

Rozanov bit his lip, teeth sliding against pink flesh.

“You are sorry, aren’t you?” Shane needed to leave. Right now. There were windows in this room. Windows and chairs and unlocked doors and students walking back and forth, attempting to get to their next class on time. “Listen next time. Use your ears, yes? Isn’t it nice to just listen?”

Shane had never felt dumber in his life, his brain made of jello as he tried to retain even a modicum of his dignity. It was humiliating, being talked down to by a 21 year old who barely knew him at all.

And yet.

“Sure- yeah, it is- it’s-“

Rozanov pulled his hand out of his hoodie pocket, revealing a small piece of paper. He slid it onto Shane’s desk, fingers tapping the surface before finally pulling back.

“Since I know you will not ask.”

Shane had no clue what that meant. But Rozanov did not explain, instead turning and walking away. Leaving Shane just as confused and befuddled and- and fucking hung up to dry, that too.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Shane examined the piece of paper with shaking hands.

It was a number.

—

Rose had this look on her face.

Like she knew something Shane didn’t. It was a typical thing these days, this look of discernment that she gave him when she was trying to figure out if he had a secret he needed to share. It wasn’t just for the love of gossip, either. She genuinely wanted to know. She would wheedle whatever it was out of him eventually and she was pretty much an expert at doing it.

Shane wished she’d stop staring at him though. It was getting hard not to blurt something stupid out. And Shane had plenty of secrets to keep. Too many. He had only known Rose for a handful of years and yet, she knew the most about him out of anyone. Even his own mother.

She could tell when he was acting weird.

And staring at his phone too much.

“What are you up to?” She asked, finally giving up on chatting about her next vacation. Her new boyfriend seemed to be in a different tax bracket. And normally, Shane would be deeply invested in her bleeding the pockets of another man, but...he was distracted.

“Huh?”

Rose rolled her eyes, setting her drink down and raising an eyebrow at him. She sat across from him in their favorite cafe near campus, more dolled up than she usually got for classes. She had a day date planned for later, Shane had gathered that much info. Despite being on another planet.

“You keep staring at your phone like it’s going to bite you. Are you convinced you’re getting fired again?”

Shane shook his head and turned his phone around, screen facing toward the table.

“What? No,” Shane said with a laugh. “I’m not- no, I’m fine. Just. Had a weird week, I guess.”

Three days. Three days and he still hadn’t decided if he was going to text that number or not. What if it was a fake number? What if it was real?

What was he supposed to do?

He shouldn’t have even put it on his phone, labeled as just an initial for now. R.

“Yeah? Are you talking to someone?”

What?

“No,” Shane mumbled, nearly stuttering in self defense. Though, he was sure being defensive wouldn’t convince her otherwise. “No, of course not. It’s not- you know me.”

She did know him.

Shane did not date people. He barely interacted with them.

“What’s her name?” Rose asked, leaning forward like a gossip. She had no clue how much those words sent a chill through Shane. He should have just acted normal, acted like he always acted. “Oh my god, you really are talking to someone. Are you waiting for a text? You’re never this nervous.”

He wanted to backtrack immediately, but he couldn’t come up with a good excuse on the spot.

“I wasn’t- no, I’m not-“ She so did not believe him. He gave in. “Yeah, I’m waiting- well, no. I have someone’s number, but I don’t know how to text them and it’s- I don’t think I should. It’s a bad idea.”

She was too used to his catastrophizing. Shane was known to blow small things out of proportion.

“You should! Seriously? Give it a shot. It’ll take you out of your comfort zone-“ She really had no idea, oh my god. “And I know you hate that, I do. But it could be good for you-“

Shane allowed her to rant, his mind going other places.

He could lose his job. He could be shamed.

And Ilya Rozanov was a man. A real life man, despite his age. He was a man and Shane was a man and Shane knew better. He knew better than to keep prodding and looking and searching.

He had no experience here. He would just embarrass himself and possibly ruin his entire life. For what? Some college kid? Why would he even do that?

But Rose kept talking and Shane felt himself settle.

He really was such an idiot.

—

Shane: hello?

His palms were sweaty, his head swimming with a headache as he sat alone in his silent living room. He couldn't have background noise right now. It would be too much, too overwhelming. He had to get this out of his system, had to touch the hot stove and prove to himself that it was nothing.

He wouldn't get burnt.

He waited for a reply.

It took fifteen minutes to come.

By then, Shane had basically shaken his left leg into an oblivion, a nervous tick he couldn't quite get rid of.

R: who is this?

Right. Shane hadn't-

Shane: the one you gave your number to.

Hopefully Rozanov would take the hint. Shane was not willing to use his own name.

R: ah, red

Shane felt his face heat, a common occurrence these days. There was nothing red about him. He didn't even look good in red.

Shane: sure

Why argue?

Shane: you wanted me to text you, so I'm texting you

He wasn't sure what else to say. How do you communicate with an egomaniac frat boy? He was in the dark here.

R: you take instructions like a dream

Shane sneered at his phone, already regretting giving in. His entire body felt hot now, his button up stiff on his body as he rolled the sleeves up and cleared his throat. The noise was loud in the silence, a stark reminder of his perpetual loneliness.

Shane: I'm not a car

Shane: or an animal

R: no, no. Of course not. My apologies

R: but you are good

Shane felt as if someone had reached into his body and taken hold of his lungs. They squeezed them tight and twisted them, trapping all the air inside his body and causing his brain to stop working for a solid minute.

Shane: what did you want?

Because again, what was he supposed to say to that? Rozanov was fucking with him again, wasn't he?

R: just wanted to talk to you

R: ask how your week has been

R: ask if you only own one red shirt and did you dig it out of your closet especially for me?

What the fuck?

Shane: I have other red shirts

No, he didn't.

Shane: why are you assuming I don't?

The reply was quick enough that it surprised Shane. He wondered if Ilya was much more fluent in writing English than he was in speaking it.

R: you do not wear color

R: ever

R: sad grey boy

Shane licked his lips he tried to discern why this was getting to him so badly. He wasn't upset, not like he might normally be at an obvious insult. No, he was....burning up.

Shane: I'm older than you

Shane: you can't just call me a boy

He could practically hear Rozanov's loud laugh.

R: oh, I know how old you are
R: doesn't make you less of a boy
R: proud of you for wearing what I asked you to wear, by the way

Shane couldn't keep up. His leg was shaking again, his heart going wild in his chest as he tried to type and fumbled twice.

Shane: thank you-

Nope. Too nice. Why are you thanking him? What is going on with you? You never act like this. He's just a guy. Worse, he's a student.

Shane: I wore it because I wanted to
Shane: stop trying to tell me what I like

See? He could stick up for himself. Even if it was in a massively convoluted manner.

He couldn't let Rozanov continue this abomination of a conversation. Not when he had questions. A question. It has been bugging him for days.

Shane: why red?

The reply took a moment.

R: because I wanted you to match your cheeks when you look at me

Shane nearly bit a hole through his lip, rubbing sweaty palms over his sweatpants covered thighs. As if he might be able to dredge the panic and anxiety out of his body by self soothing. It was fine, he was fine. His hands were shaking, but he was fine.

Shane: I don't blush
Shane: not for you
Shane: why do you keep bothering me?

Shane should start biting his nails. It seemed to help so many people. He should just...start doing it. Maybe it would regulate him better.

He couldn't wait for a reply this time, staring at his phone like he might compel it to send faster.

R: why did you listen?

Shane had no answer for that.

R: I can leave you alone
R: it is up to you
R: I'll make it easy for you. Wear blue this weekend. Baby blue. I think it will look even better than red. Then I'll know. If you don't, then I will also know.

Shane wouldn't listen. He couldn't.

Ilya Rozanov was fucking with him.

What was Shane supposed to do about that?

Chapter 3: Baby Blue

Shane had to go shopping.

He had to actually get up and leave his apartment and go twenty minutes out of town to find a suitable place that sold men's athletic wear.

All so he could buy a baby blue shirt.

He didn't own one, to nobodies surprise or shock. He had plenty of black. He had one red shirt. A few different subdued colors, washed out and neutralized. But no baby blue.

He felt insane buying it, red in the face as he tried to avoid the cashier's eye. As if the cashier might be able to figure out that he was a dirty old pervert. God, everyone could probably see it on him. And not just that.

The male part.

Shane was being forced to confront too many things about himself lately, things he had been avoiding for years. His entire life, really.

Shane knew he was different. He had known since he was a child. Different in too many ways.

He wore the stupid baby blue shirt.

All because Rozanov asked him to.

There was something seriously wrong with Shane. All of this was...too much. Why did he feel the need to listen to a man he barely knew? He knew Rozanov by name and face alone. He needed to find out more, needed to do his own research.

Maybe.

Or he could just...keep ignoring the red flags.

Rose always told him to live life on the edge.

So, he stepped out of his car and onto dirt ground on a Saturday morning and tried to pretend that he felt confident in a shirt that he would have never worn before. No, not even if Rose or his mom had told him to. He would have hated it.

He didn't hate it.

He had a task list again, much simpler for the day. And the same construction worker from the week before was strangely absent, so Shane didn't have to deal with him.

He just...had to deal with frat boys.

They were mostly malignant. Scott was okay. Kip was fine. There was a handful of others that Shane didn't mind being around. A few were too rowdy for him, too loud. For the most part, they left him alone.

Alone enough to sneak away and get some air.

He didn't want to see Rozanov yet, so of course, that was the perfect time for him to confront Shane.

"Do you have a gps tracker on me?" Shane asked in exasperation, already settling onto the same barrel from last week. It was far away enough from the build site that no one could see him playing hooky. And the truck helped too, providing enough shade for him to cool down in.

"No, but I should. Your little legs move fast."

Shane rolled his eyes and ignored the urge to smile. It was a stupid joke. No one else thought he was short.

Rozanov leaned against the side of the box truck, head resting against the metal surface as he gazed at Shane. It was just as intense as every time before, eyes searching as he scanned over Shane's shirt.

"This is nice shirt," He said, inching just a bit closer. Shane froze in place, unsure if he should get up and move. Leave. This was too close to everyone else. Literally students and workers, any of them could walk past at any moment. "It looks new."

Shane wasn't sure how Rozanov had managed to figure him out again.

"It isn't."

Before he knew it, Rozanov was in front of him, hand reaching out to lightly touch the blue fabric.

"It feels new," Rozanov said, voice going throaty. He couldn't look up, still entranced as he spread his fingers out and pressed his palm against the center of Shane's chest. The touch was searing, a brand of heat even through the single layer of fabric. He could barely breathe. "Did you buy this shirt just for me, Hollander?"

Shane blanked, too distracted the hand touching him. The way that Rozanov loomed over him, his form imposing, but not threatening.

"No," Shane lied. Right through his teeth. Rozanov smiled at the lie, lips curling silently as he waited. "I found it. In the back of my closet."

Rozanov clearly did not believe him.

Not even a little bit.

"You are bad liar."

See?

“I like this better. Baby blue, makes your eyes stand out.”

Shane really did not want to blush now. He couldn't think straight, too caught up in Rozanov's charm to really form a full thought.

“Are you gonna start calling me Baby Blue now?” Shane asked, aiming for sarcastic. The band on his chest dipped down, fingers trailing lower. Until his stomach, resting and tapping against the fabric before ultimately pulling away. Shane leaned with it, following it. Fuck.

“You want me to call you baby?” Rozanov asked, eyebrows raising. “Two days ago, you did not want to see my face.”

Shane swallowed. Looked away.

“No, no. Look at me.”

Why would he listen?

Shane looked up, breath stuttering as Rozanov smiled wider this time. Pleased that Shane had listened again.

“Thank you for wearing the shirt,” Rozanov said. “I will give you token of my appreciation.”

And then he stepped back.

Shane frowned, confused by the wording. Token of-? What? What did he mean by that?

“What are you talking about?” He asked, jumping off the barrel as Rozanov turned to leave.

“Check your phone in-“ He made a contemplative face. “Five minute. You will see.”

—

Shane opened the message as soon as it pinged, eyes growing wide as he tried to hide the screen closer to his chest. He wasn't sure why Rozanov would wait for him to be back in public view to send-

A photo of himself.

Obviously. It had to be him. Lying in a bed, from the chest down. Just. Just his chest and his happy trail and a pair of sweats that Shane could probably have seen through if he tried hard enough.

He nearly dropped his phone, fingers sweaty and shaky as he scrambled to close out of the lewd photo.

And when he looked around for Rozanov, perhaps to admonish him, he was nowhere to be found.

—

Because he left early.

Because of course he did. Rozanov had gotten what he wanted by messing with Shane and immediately leaving.

And now Shane was left to deal with the aftermath. The aftermath of knowing he had that photo on his phone and didn't have the balls to delete it or even reply. He should reply, he knew he should. But what was he supposed to say?

Shane: thank you

It felt like an incredibly dull reply to such a- such a specific photo.

R: that is all?

Shane snorted loudly, falling back onto his bed a moment later. He felt calmer when he was back in his apartment, less unsettled by the prospect of being caught. He could pretend here.

R: not one compliment?

Shane rolled his eyes.

Shane: you have nice skin

Shane: I'm glad it wasn't in front of a mirror this time

It took Shane a few moments to realize he had made a grave mistake. Rozanov did not have mirror selfies all over his instagram.

R: oh?

R: interesting

Shane buried his face in the palm of his hand and groaned, thumping himself in the forehead for good measure. He was so stupid.

R: where have you seen a photo of me in a mirror, Hollander?

Think fast, Shane.

Shane: I probably imagined it, sorry

Rozanov was clearly ready to reply quickly tonight. Perhaps Shane was just entertaining enough for him.

R: don't lie

R: where did you see it?

Shane refused to answer, staring at his phone and resisting the urge to just outright turn it off. He could, if he wanted to. He could turn it off and just ignore Rozanov, give him a taste of his

own medicine. He probably deserved it, realistically.

But then his phone began to ring.

Shane stared at the screen like it was a bomb waiting to go off. It was Rozanov, of course it was.

He shouldn't answer. He did anyway.

"Um, hello?" Shane mumbled, too self aware now. Did he sound stupid? Tired? Out of it?

"You are very bad liar," Rozanov said, just as amused as he had been earlier in the day. "I know where you saw me, Hollander. It is okay, you can admit."

Absolutely not.

"No," Shane choked out, wiping his palm over his bare thigh and immediately wishing he hadn't touched himself. "I don't want to."

Rozanov made a tsk noise.

"See, now I know you are playing with me." Shane remained stoic, jaw clamped together so he wouldn't do or say anything weird. "My favorite is getting men to do what they do not want to do. What they think they do not want to do. You are no different than other men."

Shane snorted softly, ignoring the pang in his chest.

"Gee, thanks," Shane joked. "So glad you find me uniquely thrilling. Would you like to keep complimenting me by insulting me or--"

"Did I hurt your feelings? It is not bad thing," Rozanov continued, unbothered by the conversation. Of course. "Don't think it is bad. It is good. You are like little doe--"

"Stop calling me little," Shane groaned, his irritation growing by the second. He hated that this was even working on him. "What does that make you? A predator? I think that might be that makes you a creep."

Rozanov hummed.

"Could be creep," He agreed, voice smoother than ever. Shane should hang up, but all his previous qualms had left him as soon as he had answered the phone. "What would make me creep? If I watch you on weekends? On build site?"

Shane should be bothered. He should be.

"Depends. Are you following me around with binoculars?"

Rozanov laughed this time, a cheery noise that had Shane's heart stuttering.

“No, no. I could be. Do you want bi-noculars?” Rozanov asked, sounding the word out. Shane was surprised he knew the English word for them. “I just see you and...have to know more, that is all.”

Shane frowned.

“But why?”

He didn’t expect a real answer.

“I can tell what type of man you are, Mr. Hollander. Repressed. Secret. I can see it all over you.”

Shane was mildly offended this time, the truth stinging. He had to put his foot down.

“We can’t- I can’t do this,” He said, chest tightening. “You realize that, right? I could lose my job. I could- I could-“

“I did not make you wear red shirt.”

Okay, but.

“No, you- you did. You told me to wear it.” Shane felt he was fighting a losing battle here.

“Sure, I told you to wear. But you were the one who listened. Why did you listen?”

It was a hard question. One that Shane did not feel like attempting to answer tonight.

So he panicked. He ended the call abruptly, hands slipping over his phone case as he shut the phone off and flung it to the other side of his bed.

It didn’t feel as good as he had thought it might.

—

Shane knew better than to keep looking Rozanov up. But he couldn’t help himself. It seemed like an intrinsic need, delving into any personal detail he could find and eating it up like he was starved. He had never been this reckless or idiotic. He liked routine. He liked following the rules.

He shouldn’t be searching for one of his students online just to figure out what his major might be.

Sports medicine. Not shocking when you considered the reasonable scholarship Rozanov had been granted for the upcoming ice hockey season. Okay, it made sense now. He wasn’t just a frat boy. He was a collegiate athlete.

It made things worse somehow, knowing he had something vaguely in common with Rozanov.

And then Shane got onto google images and- and that was a rabbit hole like no other. He didn't need to see Rozanov in uniform. It wasn't helping his....situation. Not even a little bit.

He could just text Rozanov.

No. He would have nothing to say. He needed to stop looking at that stupid photo. He needed to stop fantasizing and imagining.

It was hard not to when he knew Rozanov was just a text away. He was in the same town. He could just drive over and be inside Shane's apartment, if he wanted to be.

Shane went to sleep instead.

—

Shane was sweating again, distracted by how bright the sun seemed to be today. No cloud coverage, not even a little bit. The frame of the building was already set up, taller than he had expected. It was clear that they had plans to gentrify the shit out of this thing. Which. Yeah, he had known from the beginning what it might look like. Without needing to see the actual blueprints. Still. It was much more imposing than he had expected.

The frat boys didn't have as much to do today, considering they were not allowed to be too hands on with laying drywall. They could only help. Which meant that they were bugging Shane instead. Asking him personal questions and slapping him on the back. He seemed to amuse them, his facial expressions stoic and bored as they chattered to him about classes and each given sport they played.

He found that he didn't completely hate some of them. They were okay kids.

Shane cringed at the thought. Why was it that he couldn't see Rozanov in the same light? What black magic had Rozanov done on him to make him so...blinded?

He shouldn't be trailing after a college boy. He should be focusing on teaching. Doing more charity. Spending time with his family. Anything but lusting after-

And that was all part of it too, wasn't it?

The biggest part. Shane hated admitting anything too himself. He had gotten into his thirties and had managed to bypass temptation along the way. He had gotten through college without a blip on the radar. He was good. He studied, he spent his time alone and far away from drugs and alcohol. He was so good.

Everyone always told him so. When he was growing up, they all talked about how well mannered he was. How his parents probably saw no trouble from him. He was reserved and sweet and he never misbehaved. But those same qualities became a problem when he hit adulthood. He was distant and unable to relate to his peers. He struggled with bluntness. He kept parts of himself hidden so that people would continue liking him.

He was no longer good. No one marveled at his manners because now he was just seen as anti social and standoffish. His reservations were no longer sweet and enviable.

Maybe Shane wasn't good after all.

—

Shane had to leave soon. He had papers to grade and a sad dinner to eat. An empty apartment with cold lights and some tv show his mother recommended to him the week prior.

He had to let go of whatever this was. Before it festered too much and got out of hand.

But then he saw Rozanov, wandering around near the trucks. And the bus was gone, you know? So...Shane had to ask. Because Rozanov did look worried. Pacing back and forth and scrolling on his phone as if he was trying to figure something important out.

Shane was a fool for walking over.

"It's getting dark out," Shane said, cringing at his own lack of social skills. Rozanov glanced up at him, face wooden and stoic. Though, maybe not in his usual way. He looked... annoyed? Was that it? "Did uh- did you get left behind? From the bus?"

Rozanov sighed.

"I did, yes."

Oh.

Shane cleared his throat. He wondered why Rozanov wasn't just calling an uber or-

Right. He was a college student. He probably didn't have uber money sitting around, waiting to be spent.

"Do you need a ride?" Shane asked, shifting from one foot to another. Rozanov seemed to contemplate this question for too long, finally rolling his eyes and sighing in quick succession.

"Yes, fine."

So, no thank you then. Okay.

Shane led Rozanov to his car anyway, despite the pit in his stomach telling him this was a bad idea.

—

The car ride was awkward.

Mostly silent as music played lightly in the background. It had only been a few minutes, but Shane wasn't the type of person to not prod at a cut, so. He couldn't be stopped.

"Is there, like- is there something wrong?" Shane asked, feeling quite stupid as he took a quick glance toward Rozanov.

“No.”

Shane gulped hard, throat constricting.

“Did I- did I do something? Or was it just- it was hot today, I know. Did they overwork you?”

“No, they did not.”

“Okay,” Shane said, trying to let it go. “Was it something I said? Or?”

He just couldn’t let it go.

“Park.”

What?

Shane frowned at Rozanov, eyes back to the road. Park? What did he mean?

“Park car,” Rozanov said, voice leaning softer this time. “Now, please.”

Oh.

Shane felt jittery, pulling onto the shoulder of the dead road, hands shaking as he put the car into park.

He couldn’t put his finger on why, but he felt like he was in trouble. For what? What had he done? He barely knew Rozanov. What could he have possibly done to offend him?

Rozanov unhooked his seatbelt and for a startling moment, Shane thought he might exit the car entirely. Maybe he would walk home alone. In the middle of the night.

But he didn’t. He turned in his seat and faced Shane. He nodded for Shane to unclip his own seatbelt.

Shane listened.

“You ended phone call with me.”

Shane was confused. Yeah, he had. Should he apologize for doing that? He figured that Rozanov would understand he had just been overwhelmed.

“Did that...upset you?” He asked, trying to clear his face of any anxiety or panic. He wasn’t there, not yet. But he felt stupid again, like he was doing something bad and no one would tell him what it was. “I thought- it was nice. Thank you. I’m sorry, I didn’t know what to do. I’m not great with....talking.”

Shane chanced a look toward Rozanov.

He wasn’t upset now, it didn’t seem. Or- okay, Shane wasn’t good at discerning emotions. On other people or on himself. But.

He seemed fine.

“Okay. But did you like?” Rozanov asked, leaning his chin against his hand as he shifted more comfortably in his seat. Hadn’t Shane said so before? On the phone? Shane cleared his throat and reached for the overhead light, switching it on. Lighting up the front seats. Definitely not so he could see Rozanov better, no.

“I did, yeah.”

Why was it easy to admit now? It should have been easier on the phone.

“You do not seem to know if you liked,” Rozanov said, a simple fact that left Shane sweating. “You are very nervous.”

Of course he was. When was Shane not slightly nervous?

“I guess-I guess I just don’t understand what you want from me,” Shane replied, not quite aiming for blunt but landing there anyway. “Or why you’re interested in...”

“What do you think I want from you?” Rozanov asked, voice dipping low. “Is it hard to wonder why I would be attracted to you?”

Yes.

Or no. Shane wasn’t sure.

“Come here.”

Shane took a deep breath, brow creasing.

“Like, you want me to...” He stared at the small gap between their seats and licked his dry lips.

“Yes, climb over. Come here.”

Shane felt like a puppet with tight strings, climbing clumsily over his center console and into the lap of a much younger man.

He had never-

Shane arranged his knees into the tight space, head bowing down so as to not hit the ceiling. He just- it was too tight, so he- “Just a second, I can, uh-“ He offered as he reached below Rozanov’s seat and pulled the little lever and-

Sent the seat back far too fast. Rozanov let out a gasp and a giggle, hands grabbing Shane by his waist to keep him steady.

And then they were face to face.

Shane could feel his heart in his throat.

“Hi,” Shane managed to say, breathless as he shifted fully into Rozanov’s lap. Just that like. “Um, what are we- what are we doing?”

“Anything you want,” Rozanov said, shrugging as he got more comfortable. His palms skimmed down the smallest part of Shane’s back, warm and confident as they settled. “Are you okay like this?”

Yes.

Shane nodded, voice locked up again.

“Have you ever...?”

Shane shook his head.

“That is fine,” Rozanov murmured, reaching up with one hand to brush some hair back from Shane’s face. “That is fine.”

His hand rested on Shane’s neck, finally pulling him down into a kiss.

Shane had kissed people before. A few. More than a few. Drunk kisses with strangers or girlfriends who hadn’t lasted through the new year.

He had never kissed anyone like Ilya.

His lips were warm and wet and he pulled Shane closer, his body heat cloying as he guided Shane into a deeper kiss. Lips parting, an aching stretch of time where Shane shook against Ilya and couldn’t- couldn’t quite control the noises that slipped between the two of them. Especially when Ilya- Rozanov. When Rozanov licked into his mouth and kissed him like they were- god, like he was a porn star or- it was so stupid, it was stupid that this was all Shane could think of while he rested in Rozanov’s lap. His hands were warm. His mouth was warm. He was so-

“Fuck,” Shane whined when they broke apart, head tilting to the side to allow Rozanov to kiss down the length of his neck, despite the angle being difficult. It still feel good, it still felt like melting wax against his skin. “Please, please. I need-“

“What do you need?” Rozanov asked, voice husky as he licked a line up Shane’s neck and whispered into his ear. It was the type of thing that would have grossed Shane out on any other day. But not today, absolutely not. This was- it was too good. Shane felt how hard Rozanov was beneath him, the line of his cock thick as Shane pushed their hips together with much less restraint than before. He didn’t care now. He couldn’t care now.

“Need- need you.”

“More words, baby.” Shane buried his face in Rozanov’s neck and whined, too turned on to really speak. But Rozanov wanted him to, so. So, he would. He had to. Because Rozanov wanted him to. “I know you can do it.”

“Please, touch me. More. Please?”

Shane felt a little pathetic, already leaking into his pants as Rozanov grabbed his ass and pushed their hips together. It was rough from there, Shane's arms winding around the headrest, one hand buried in Rozanov's curls. Tugging at them and panting against his neck, moaning louder than he probably ever had in his life. He felt less stupid now. He felt wanted.

"That's it, that's it. Just like that," Rozanov moaned, voice breaking as he held Shane closer. It was hard to move like this, just short bursts of energy against each other as they tried to get off. It was ridiculous. Shane had never even- sure, he had gotten off before. But his repression had been awful growing up. Never relating, never being able to form close enough bonds. He had never assumed he would get to the point of- oh, to the point of Rozanov pushing a hand below his pants and underwear, cupping his bare ass. Getting more leverage.

And kissing him again.

Shane didn't want to cum like this. Still in his pants, still so far behind his peers. And people younger than him, people like Rozanov.

He broke away and began wrestling with the button on his own pants, trying his best to get them open.

"Hey, hey." Rozanov reached out to stop Shane, sensing his panicked breathing. "Slow down, it is- it is- not a race, okay? It's okay, just. Slow down."

Okay.

Shane nodded, mouth open and panting as Rozanov took over for him. He opened Shane's pants slower, fingers slipping against his zipper.

Touching Shane through his underwear, feeling him out. Shane could barely move, too scared to ruin the moment.

"Is that good?"

Yes. Another nod.

Rozanov pulled his boxers down even slower, revealing Shane's cock. Wet at the tip and shading purple as he waited. Too much, he was feeling-

A lot.

"There you go," Rozanov soothed him, accent thicker now as he wrapped a dry hand around Shane's cock and began to stroke him. "Was that so hard?"

"No," Shane mumbled, watching Rozanov's hand. The way his fingers wrapped around, the clauses on his knuckles. "No, it wasn't."

"And it feels good now, yes? Better?" Yeah, it did feel better. Shane couldn't help but to thrust into the circle of Rozanov's fist, body shaking with restraint. He needed this, he did. Fuck any of his reservations from before. "Look at you, look how pretty you are."

Shane's eyes felt wet, his throat tight.

Rozanov was watching him, but-

"Can I touch you too?" Shane asked, the question costing him a lot. It was difficult enough to get out without Rozanov staring him in the eye. "Please?"

"Yes."

Shane moved fast, as if he thought Rozanov might change his mind. He was quick to push down the band of his track pants, hand delving in to finally touch Rozanov. Shane couldn't believe he had gotten this far, fingers slipping over the wet head as he pulled it out.

Shane had seen dicks before. Plenty.

He had never touched one.

He was endlessly fascinated by the length of it, the velvet feel of skin beneath his fingers. The sticky touch of precum that did not belong to him, for once. The way Rozanov stretched his neck out and covered his own mouth with a fresh moan.

Shane felt more powerful now than he had in his entire life.

Until Rozanov readjusted his grip and began to stroke Shane faster. It was a tipping scale after that. Shane had to adapt fast, his fist moving clumsy over Rozanov. Back and forth, a rhythm that he couldn't quite match. Because he was inexperienced, sure. But also because his focus was shot, his balls tightening as he felt himself inching ever closer to-

"You are so good, did you know? Look at you, wearing colors I tell you to. Doing what I say. Being so, so good."

Shane didn't mean to cum.

It just happened.

He tipped forward, hand seizing around Ilya's cock as he spilled into his fist and- and he realized that Ilya was cumming with him too, a shocking revelation that had Shane whimpering against Ilya's shoulder and biting his skin through his shirt. He couldn't help himself, eyes rolling back and finally closing as he finished.

One, two, three. Breathing.

He was fine.

He felt weightless.

The world wasn't ending.

Ilya Rozanov was beneath him, petting at his back with his non-soiled hand. It felt good. Better than good.

Shane should have known then.

—

Shane's apartment was lonely, sure. It always was. He had dropped Rozanov off at his dorm an hour ago. He had eaten dinner. He had showered.

He had looked at his phone ten times between all these events. Because he couldn't help himself.

Was this the type of torture people talked about? Was this normal? Did people feel this way all the time?

It was the eleventh time that he broke the cycle, his phone screen lighting up as he watched reality tv and pretended to not care about a college boy texting him back.

R: thank you for tonight

R: sleep good, baby blue

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