

Provider

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Provider

by [Moami](#)

Summary

“You can't buy me everything that I look at for more than two seconds.”

“Is not two seconds,” Ilya says. He has already added the protein bar to his shopping basket and is in the process of putting in ten-packs of the other flavours. “I only buy when you look at least three seconds. That is when you want to have.”

Or:

Ilya starts giving Shane gifts at every opportunity. Shane investigates, and retaliates.

Notes

Hello HR nation, how are we feeling? The brainworms this show gave me are beyond description. I couldn't not write about it.

Additionally, I've been listening to more Sleep Token than is probably strictly neurotypical. When I heard Provider, everything clicked into place. That's Ilya.

The taiga flycatcher is native to Eurasia. I saw an article about a specimen miraculously appearing in Vancouver a week ago (coincidence? I think not) and the local birding community going wild over it. The article contains this line: “The species is considered an occasional vagrant to western Europe, and sightings in North America are even more unusual.” So you can see, my hand was forced.

Link to the article (accessed Jan 5th, 2026): <https://dailyhive.com/canada/taiga-flycatcher-bird-native-russia-vancouver-canada>

Special thanks to @bubblline who not only planted the brainworms in my head but fed them so lovingly. You are the worst, I love you <3

I hope you enjoy this, and let me know in the comments if you did. <3

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

It starts innocently.

Ilya still has him on his back, knees held by his ears, pressing kisses to Shane's heaving chest while he grinds slow circles with his hips. Shane's ears are ringing like bells from the orgasm he is only just starting to come down from.

"You were so good for me. Came so pretty all over yourself."

"Fuck, Rozanov," Shane groans. He likes to be called good more than he would admit under torture. Stars are dancing in his blackened view that gradually begins to regain technicolour, the shapes of Ilya's bedroom ceiling returning to focus in hazy patches.

A deliciously skilled mouth trails up his neck. Shane groans when Ilya releases his legs, guiding them back down to the mattress by hefting all their weight with practiced ease. Ilya is so strong. Ilya takes care of Shane so well, especially after he fucks Shane's brains out so hard that he is incapable of forming a coherent thought.

"Can I get water?"

"Mhm," Shane mumbles. His eyes are open, but he is squinting against the light. Ilya is only a shadowy silhouette leaning over him. His biceps are flexing when he pushes himself up... What was the question?

"Listen to me," Shane's favourite voice in the world says. Oh yes, he is going to listen, as long as Ilya doesn't stop talking to him. Ever. "Water? Is okei? Or I stay with you?"

He loves how Ilya says "okay". Like the vowels are different. It sounds so Russian. It's cute. Ilya is the best.

Someone kisses his mouth, the lightest touch. "Water, Shane. Do you want it?"

"s fine. You can go get it." He sounds a bit like a Russian himself, piecing words together through the fog of post-orgasmic bliss. His muscles are unlocking slowly, shifting seamlessly into becoming molten puddles underneath his skin.

The bed creaks. "Will be right back."

"kay."

Footsteps move away from him. While the tap starts running, Shane traces his fingers over the bed, staying exactly like the starfish that Ilya left him as. He doesn't have to do anything after they have sex like this, when he's left feeling a little foggy and Ilya makes sure he floats back down safely.

His fingertips fondle the bed sheets. Is being this happy normal, Shane wonders, watching the ceiling sharpen into focus until he can tell the beige of the walls from the grey overhead. Can he just have this, and for how long?

“I see brain of yours working hard.” Ilya saunters back into the room. Shane is immediately disappointed to see that he is in black boxers again. Luckily there is enough naked skin left to cuddle.

The bed dips when Ilya sits next to him. “Water,” he insists, handing a glass to Shane. “Taking break. When you feel good, then we do rest.”

“I don’t need to rest.” Shane pushes himself up on one elbow and drinks in small sips. He doesn’t really feel like taking a break either. His cock is already starting to get interested in the way Ilya’s arms shift around, muscles dancing deliciously under the skin. Ilya moved to Ottawa two weeks ago, and having him around or being at his place more often only means that Shane is discovering the bottomless depths of his own depraved want all over.

“I mean, we do rest of things after. Like the cuddling that you like so much.”

“Uh-huh. Just me. I am the one who likes cuddling.” He also wouldn’t mind being fucked again. A little overstimulation never killed anyone. Especially not him.

“Do not fight after sex,” Ilya lectures, fighting against a smile and losing within half a second. He glances down at the bed. “Why are you harassing my sheets?”

Shane was actually staring at his mouth and debating how he could get it back on himself. “They’re great sheets,” he improvises weakly. “Good, uh, threat count. Is this Egyptian cotton? Silk?”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Ilya stares between him and the sheets, frowning so hard that it turns his eyebrows into a single line.

Shane decides to just run with it. He puts the glass down and runs his hand over the sheets, aiming for seductive. “I mean that they feel really good. So much better than mine. I like when hotels have good sheets, but they’re expensive so I haven’t bought them for myself.”

Ilya looks at him like he’s gone crazy. “Hollander,” he says in that peculiar tone that he gets when Shane does something he can’t place. “What do you want?”

“I think you know what I want.”

“Sure,” Ilya leans in, his mouth ghosting over Shane’s sensitive neck until he can’t stop a moan from escaping. “But I want to hear from you.”

Shane swallows down the dust of the gravesite where he buried his shame long ago. Ilya cracks him open and licks his insides clean every time. Being known like this is terrifying.

“I wouldn’t mind you fucking me again.”

Ilya’s eyes are dark. His pupils have blown as wide as they do during a face-off, or when he’s fucking Shane. “I am glad we do not fight.”

His head dips between Shane’s legs, and Shane enjoys the split second view of Ilya Rozanov on his knees for him before he gives himself over to the feeling of falling apart once more.

Two days later, on Sunday evening, Shane is unpacking his bag at home. His body aches in all the right places, and he wishes it would last until the next time they see each other.

When he reaches for the last three pairs of his emergency underwear, his fingers brush an unfamiliar texture inside his bag.

Shane crouches down. That's weird, he doesn't remember bringing emergency shirts. It's not like he and Ilya go out or spend a lot of time dressed.

When he pulls the object out, it takes him a moment to recognize. A note is stuck to the top of the first sheet, next to the label proclaiming "500 Count Thread 100% Egyptian Cotton, off-white".

I hope they feel good when I fuck you on them next week.

Shane promises himself that he will give the sheets back to Ilya when he sees him next.

But Ilya enters his apartment like a storm when Shane opens the door for him, and then large hands wrap around Shane's waist and Ilya kisses him as if he's been starving all week, so Shane throws all thoughts out of the window and gives himself over.

He tosses his old sheets soon after. Nothing compares now that he has the good ones.

A few weeks later, it happens again.

They're stretched out on Ilya's couch in his Ottawa apartment, Shane's head pillowed on Ilya's thigh, feeling pleasantly fucked out. A warm hand strokes circles over his back, nails pushing in slightly where Ilya feels tension in his muscles. It's so wonderful that Shane almost drifts off to sleep.

He reminds himself that they're waiting for the sushi to arrive. To keep his melting body from dozing off, he goes to the bookmarked tabs in his phone browser and starts the regular chore of reordering his pantry staples.

"What is that?" Ilya leans over him, his stomach squishing against the back of Shane's head, wedging him in. It's sort of nice. For some reason, Shane has always enjoyed being squeezed tightly.

"Athlete supplies. I get my protein bars there."

"You have brand deal, no?"

"Ah," Shane relents, feeling acute embarrassment colouring his cheeks. "Yeah, they send me a bunch of stuff all the time. I don't really like it. Uh, I give it to the others on the team. So it doesn't go bad," he finishes lamely.

Ilya hums above him. "So you only buy this brand."

“Only one specific bar. I know it’s a waste of money when I have free stuff at home.”

“Fuck money,” Ilya says emphatically. “Get what you like.”

Shane snorts and wiggles himself out of his grip into an upright position. “I don’t like to waste things. If nobody wants the brand bars, I end up eating them.”

Ilya tilts his head at him, understanding settling into the narrow angles of his face. “But you only like these.” He taps Shane’s phone screen, moving the website down an inch.

“Yeah, Vanilla Cream. I’m weird like that, I know. Hey, let me see that.” Shane pulls his phone over to himself. There is an ad for a new flavour of his protein bar floating on the page, surrounded by an obnoxiously neon banner.

Ilya wrinkles his nose. “Lemon Raspberry? Is like a dessert?”

Frowning a little, Shane clicks on the ad. “Iced Blueberry, Cherry Dark Chocolate,” he reads out loud, considering the combinations. “I could give those a try? I’ve been wanting to get a fruity flavour, one that isn’t just vanilla.”

“Hehe,” Ilya says. He actually *says* it, pronouncing it like a normal word with two syllables.

“Fuck you.” Shane locks his screen, ignoring the sirupy sweet fondness in his throat. He stretches his arms until the sockets pop satisfyingly. “I’ll stick with vanilla. If I get the others and don’t like them, it really is a waste of money. Man, I hope the food arrives soon.”

Ilya makes a non-committal noise. When Shane moves to lie back down on his thigh, he catches sight of Ilya’s own phone screen.

“No,” he immediately says.

Ilya ignores him. His fingers tap away, scrolling through the product list of protein bars.

“You can’t buy me everything that I look at for more than two seconds.”

“Is not two seconds,” Ilya says. He has already added the protein bar to his shopping basket and is in the process of putting in ten-packs of the other flavours. “I only buy when you look at least three seconds. That is when you want to have.”

“I look at a lot of things!”

“Not really,” Ilya disagrees. He flicks his gaze up at Shane, a lazy little grin curling his lips. A shiver rears its head along the length of Shane’s spine. “You looked at me for long time. In shower, in gym, when you first put your mouth on my — “

“Stop it,” Shane licks his lips, desperately trying to redirect the conversation before he gets so horny he can’t think. “Don’t buy it for me, I don’t need a new flavour.”

“But you want?”

“I only *think* that I want it because of the algorithm,” Shane hurries to explain. He feels himself slip into one of his inane ramblings, like he so often does when he has to clarify himself to Ilya (who never asks him to do it, come to think of it). “They develop it so that you always want to keep scrolling, to keep you on their website. The whole marketing, down to the colour of the wrapper. It’s all designed to make you look at it longer. Until you give in and buy it. It’s a psychological trick.”

“That is so fucking fascinating, Hollander. Let me give a shit when I am done here.”

“You’re not ordering all of them! They are literally manipulating you!” Shane pounces for his phone.

“Okei, Mr Marketing Degree - oy!” Ilya swipes to his shopping basket with lightning speed and clicks the buy button before Shane can snatch the phone from his hand. Lifting his arm up in the air, Ilya makes an exaggeratedly serious face at Shane. “Do not touch.”

“Whatever,” Shane scoffs, crossing his arms petulantly. “I’m a millionaire, as you keep reminding me. I can buy my own damn protein bars.”

“But you don’t. That is point,” Ilya counters. Before Shane can even open his mouth, the doorbell rings and Ilya shoots off the couch.

“Fucking finally, I am starving like dog.”

“Yeah,” Shane agrees, watching Ilya’s broad shoulders retreating into the entryway of the penthouse. His heart flutters, a delicate and fragile thing. He wonders what Ilya’s point was. “Me too.”

“Did you send me a package?”

“Yes,” Ilya’s voice says from the tinny speaker of Shane’s too-old phone. “Finally it came. Is gift for you.”

“A little warning would be nice next time. I was about to call a bomb squad.”

“You have number of bomb squad?”

“I — no, but.”

“Is a shame. Would be only time I ask you for other man’s number.”

Shane nudges the box on the threshold of his Montreal penthouse with the tip of his shoes. Nothing happens. “Women can defuse bombs too, you know.”

Ilya blows a raspberry into the phone. “Yes Hollander, I am sure the many women you wish to fuck are happy about this feminism. Take package inside.”

“So just to be sure,” Shane starts, “it’s about fifty to sixty centimeters long. Does that fit with what you sent?”

“Oh my god.” Ilya laughs out loud into Shane’s ear. “Fuck. Yes, it fits. Fits you so well also, that you ask me this.”

Shane bites his tongue. “Sorry.” He is being exhausting again, too literal and pedantic. It’s annoying. Off-putting. People never fail to let him know. He needs to work harder on training himself out of it.

“Take my box,” Ilya instructs, unbothered by his apology. “Do not shake, put on table and open right now. You will like it.”

Shane still eyes the box suspiciously. He had found it there after coming home from a dentist appointment and called Ilya immediately. For all he knows, it could have been a bomb by a crazed fan. “Why, will shaking it make the clown inside pop out?”

“Clown, what clown? You are clown. Take my gift inside, Shane.” Ilya exhales obnoxiously loudly into the speaker just to fuck with him.

Ripping the phone from his ear so he doesn’t go deaf from the static, Shane curses. Ilya saying his first name always sends his stomach into teenage somersaults. He nudges the box with his feet until it’s inside his entryway and he can shut the door. “Fine, it’s inside. Happy now?”

“Will be so happy when you open it,” Ilya purrs in the same voice he uses whenever he has Shane on his back and works inch after inch of his big cock into him. Oh, not the best time to remember last weekend.

“Right now?” Shane fights the blush rising on his face. He wills himself into staying soft. “I was sort of making dinner.”

Ilya tuts dismissively. “You have time to call me during cooking, then you can open gift during cooking.”

“Fine. I’m putting you on speaker.” Shane does and sets his phone down on the counter so he can reach for a fruit knife. “Is it a dead rat?”

“Funny,” Ilya drawls. He is moving around on his side of the call, judging from the rustling coming through the speaker. The subsequent flick of a lighter is unmistakable.

“I will unwrap it if you don’t light that cigarette,” Shane quickly says.

“Fuck you.” The flicking stops.

“Well?” He lifts the package onto the counter and pointedly drops it next to his phone. “Did you hear that? That’s me about to open your package. Usually you like that.”

“You are most annoying man on planet.” A thunk, like Ilya dropping his head back against a wall. There is no further lighter flicking. “Open gift. Now.”

Shane wouldn’t admit that the small globe of light coming to life in his chest is giddiness. Instead, he slides the fruit knife along every taped edge of the package while grinning to

himself like an idiot. Looking at it from up close, the box is about as wide as his laptop and half as tall. When he picked it up, it weighed more than he expected. What the hell is in there?

“You don’t have to keep giving me things. I have everything I need.”

“Old friend from Russia helped me,” Ilya says, as if Shane hadn’t spoken at all. There is a slurping sound over the line, filling in the gap of silence when Shane starts sticking his fingers under the tape to pry the cardboard into submission. “Ahh. No cigarette, but good vodka I get to have, yes?”

“Couldn’t keep you from it if I tried.”

Ilya clicks his tongue. “You keep me from cigarettes. You manipulate me into obeying.”

“You literally only listen to me if you get something out of it.”

“Yes.” Ilya says it like it’s obvious. “Because you give such nice things to make me put down cigarette. You open package, you suck my dick.” Something clinks in the phone line, conjuring images of Ilya’s lips around the edge of a glass in Shane’s mind.

“Asshole. Seriously, what’s in here? A pile of your jerseys?”

“Few things. I gave my friend list and he got everything.”

Shane listens to Ilya’s throat work as he takes another sip of a most likely luxuriously expensive vodka, and finds himself struggling for words. It sounds like a lot of effort went into this.

Why though? Shane has everything he needs. His eyes glide over the label. What’s that?

Shane frowns. “Isn’t that dangerous for him, doing you a favour? Also, this was shipped from Japan, not Russia, I think. There are kanji on the packaging label.”

“So smart,” Ilya laughs. “I bet you put on your glasses to read this.”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you.”

“Always do. So.” Ilya’s tone suddenly shifts towards serious on the last word. When he continues, it’s quieter, almost somber. “My friend has Japanese husband. They live there now. I asked them to help find this and send to you. Not dangerous like this.”

Husband, Shane’s brain whispers. *Husband. Husband.*

“Your friend is gay?” It comes out almost inaudible.

“Don’t know, but he fucks men. Well, now only his husband. He knows that I have —” Ilya stops.

Shane doesn't dare to breathe. Ilya hasn't used the word again after they left the peaceful utopia of the cottage. It feels too fresh, raw like a wound which Shane isn't brave enough to put his finger on to test if there's a new layer of skin over it yet.

After a moment, Ilya says softly:

"That I have boyfriend. That you are famous hockey guy. He and husband are also famous. Not hockey, but easier sport to make coming out in."

A breath empties out of Shane's lungs, warmth flooding into its place. His fingers tug hard, ripping the last sticky tape off. *Boyfriend*. "You really didn't have to do this."

Boyfriend.

Gun to his head, Shane cannot think of anything right now Ilya could give him that he doesn't already have.

"Open fucking package, Hollander, before I get in car and drive two hours so I can open for you. And open you right after."

"Alright, calm the fuck down. I'm on it." Shane considers drawing it out even more on purpose, using the rare chance to tease Ilya, but he's actually really excited to find out what's in there now. It could be another box or a pack of tissues, he'd be so happy still.

Ilya *got him* something. Ilya *thinks of him* when he isn't there.

He flips open the cardboard flap on top of the box.

"Looking inside now, fully prepared to be clowned," Shane announces dramatically, and looks down.

There is an assortment of colourful beverage cans in front of him. Shane counts, tallying up to eight in total.

"Did you see?"

"Yeah. It's drinks?" Shane picks one up, wondering how he's going to open this without having it explode all over his kitchen. It probably got shaken to hell on the airplane from Japan to Canada. He turns the can in his hands, brain already working at translating the katakana forming the silver logo.

"You only drink Canada Dry ginger ale," Ilya tells him from the speakerphone. There is a slight tremble to his words now, instinctively making Shane pick up the phone and putting Ilya between his shoulder and ear. He turns the speaker off.

"You've literally seen me drink beer." But Shane still smiles, because this is so sweet of Ilya, getting him drinks from all over the world to help widen his palette. If Shane can find a drink other than ginger ale that he actually likes, he'd be a little less weird.

“Eh, but you do not like. Anyways, this is ginger ales and ginger sodas from Japan.” Ilya pauses for a moment, as if waiting for Shane to absorb the information. Maybe he knows that Shane will need the time, because the next thing Ilya casually drops on him is this:

“Is harder to find Canada Dry in Japan. If you like any of these, you have second option when we go. In case supermarket there sucks and we find no Shane Hollander ginger ale.”

Shane’s vision blurs. He has no power to hold back the immediate tears welling up. He has never cried as much as he does after meeting Ilya, and this is the next instance.

“I hope that is enough options. I wanted to make perfect.”

“It’s great. Uhm. Perfect.” A pathetic little snuffle makes it out of his throat. It’s so fucking obvious that he’s crying. Shane hears the surprised inhale of breath when Ilya realises too, and only then does the dam break.

“Do you not like?”

“Fuck you. Fuck you, *fuck you*. I don’t understand,” Shane whines. “I thought you wanted to me to extend my palette!”

“What does that mean,” Ilya asks, worry seeping into his voice. “Why fuck me?”

“I know you think I’m weird! I thought you want me to, I don’t know, widen my horizons, be normal, drink beer and party and!” Shane furiously wipes at his eyes.

“And?”

“I don’t know, not be the fucking freak that only drinks ginger ale and can’t talk to people and can’t even change a fucking burger recipe!”

“Hey,” Ilya says gently. “Is okei that you only like ginger ale. I make sure you have perfect drink in Japan too, yes?”

“No, you don’t — you don’t get to hey me.” Shane looks up at the ceiling, Japanese ginger ale can in one hand and Ilya’s voice in the other. “What do you even mean, when we go to Japan?”

“Yuna is Japanese. You told me when we were at cottage.”

“I know what I told you!”

“Breathe, Hollander.” Ilya is so, so patient with him, even when Shane snaps at him while sobbing into the receiver of his phone like a bawling kid. He deserves none of it. “She told me that you never went there. Because you are too hockey famous to go.”

“You talked to my *mom*?” Oh, he is not going to survive Ilya Rozanov. Shane slides down his kitchen counter, forehead knocking into his knees as he becomes a curled up ball on the floor.

“Of course. She loves me more than you.”

Shane laughs a little at that. It comes out wet and raspy like he's spent a week doing nothing but cry his heart out. "Fuck you, Rozanov."

"When we are safe," Ilya whispers to him, for once ignoring the insult, "I take you to Japan. We try second best ginger ale and eat best sushi. And you translate for me, yes?"

Shane cradles the phone to his cheek. He pulls away a little when the lockscreen lights up, wet with his tears. A photo of the lake behind his cottage comes to life in blue and grey. The water radiates in concentric circles from the spot where Ilya has submerged himself, nothing but ripples indicating that he was there a moment ago.

"Okay," Shane sniffs.

"Tell me when you find second best ginger ale."

"Okay. Ilya?"

"Sweetheart."

"Ah, fuck. Stay while I cook dinner?"

"Sure. Ah, Shane?"

He sniffs. "What?"

"Why do you not like getting my gifts?"

Shane drops his head against the kitchen counter. His tongue tastes salty, the taste similar to the skin on Ilya's neck where Shane likes to fasten his lips when they fuck face to face. "I do. I think they're very thoughtful."

"Good." From Ilya's side, Shane thinks he makes out a nervous intake of breath. "I want to give what you need."

This man. This ruination of everything Shane built. "You do. Gifts or no gifts."

"You feel loved?"

His eyes slide shut. "Yeah," Shane tells the darkness of his eyelids, mouth so close to the phone that he can almost imagine their lips touching across the Canadian night. "Of course."

"I hope you enjoy drinks." Ilya shuffles around, clearing his throat in an effort to seemingly banish all softness from his voice. "Also, if you are freak, I am too. We can freak out together. Is what people say?"

Shane can't help it. He laughs out loud, heart hammering a million times a minute against his ribs. "Not quite. But I know what you meant."

Hours later, when Shane has eaten dinner that tasted slightly saltier than usual and his phone battery is alerting him that it's at five percent, he hangs up on Ilya with a whispered pet name in Russian. Online forums told him that it roughly translates to sweetheart, and the effect of it is a beautiful thing to behold. He doesn't hear the second syllable of the curse word Ilya starts to say before he cuts the call, but feels a little more centered in himself afterwards.

It's not good for his teeth to drink carbonated, sugary drinks before bed. This is especially true if he's been to the dentist on the same day. They tell him every time he goes, and he's turned it into an automatic rule for his life.

Shane considers both of his options and tells one of them to go fuck itself. Staring over the cityscape of Montreal, forehead against the cold glass, he cracks open the first can of ginger ale he pulled out of the package.

It's tart and a little sweet. Shane drinks the entire can.

The next morning, he texts Lily.

J:

I found a second option. Let's go to Japan one day.

L:

was that good?

J:

It was perfect.

In the afternoon, Shane starts plotting.

He gets the email address he needs from the package label. Wisely, the name of the Japanese husband was used as the sender, spelled in neat kanji. Underneath sits Shane's name in blocky letters written by a hand clearly unused to the Western alphabet. The email required for international shipping is a random string of numbers registered to gmail.

The Japanese husband has been smart about this. Anonymous. Safe.

So much so that Shane doesn't even know the name of Ilya's Russian friend.

He spends half an hour typing and deleting a draft. This is the strangest, wildest thing he's ever done. It's either incredibly stupid or stupidly brave. Both, Ilya would say.

He settles on starting with *Здравствуйте, Ilya's old friend.*

“I got you something.”

Ilya lifts his head from the vegetables he’s chopping. His brow furrows. “You got me something”, he repeats slowly. “What does it mean?”

Shane fiddles with the gift box in his hands. He’s standing in his own kitchen, feeling stupid and useless because Ilya is cooking (macrobiotic, of all things) and doesn’t allow him to help. “Sit and be pretty,” Ilya had told him with fondness crinkling his eyes at the corners.

So Shane had no choice but to get up and dig the box out of his nightstand drawer, out from underneath the new bird encyclopedia. He tried to fight back the nerves, but still feels them now that he is facing Ilya with his measly little - well. Ilya can always throw it away if he hates it.

Shane steps up to the counter. “It means that I bought you a gift. To get someone something means giving them a present.”

“Did you really do this?” A smile spreads over Ilya’s face before his expression shifts to a thoughtful one. He waves the knife around in a little circle. “I thought that when you say ‘you get me’, you mean that I understand you. That I know what happens in your head.”

“Different uses of the verb.”

Ilya points the knife at him, full-on grinning now. “Hooray, grammar lesson. This is so sexy of you to do, telling me new words. Is good trade because I make you forget words in bed, so one day I will speak English well and you just moan.”

“Don’t — put the fucking knife down!” Oh, his face burns so much. “Here,” he sets the small box down a bit too roughly.

Ilya looks at it. Shane wills the heat of his cheeks to settle and watches him pick it up with his free hand.

“Is for me?”

“Yes.”

Only now does Ilya set the knife down. He wipes his hands on a kitchen towel and unceremoniously starts tearing into the gift. It reminds Shane of a kid that’s far too eager to find out what Santa brought for Christmas.

He steadies himself with a deep breath, planting his feet wider like he’s about to receive a tackle that gets the attacker sent straight to the penalty box.

Ilya lifts the keychain out. His eyes are narrowed, confusion creasing his brows together. He regards it for about half a minute.

“Is a bird?”

Shane swallows, and lets the rush of words he prepared spill out of him.

“It’s a taiga flycatcher. Uh, I know you don’t care about birds, but they’re native to Russia —

“Ah,” Ilya begins, softness dawning on his features. “I see.”

“No, it’s not — let me explain!” Shane snaps at him roughly.

Blinking, startled, Ilya’s hand with the keychain drops to the counter. A high sound rings from the metal keyring when it scrapes across the granite. The red throat of the fine-boned bird, stitched in abstract red patterns, lies between them.

“Sorry.”

“Okei,” Ilya says. He puts his elbows on the counter, keychain cradled in one fist, and fixes his gaze onto Shane. “Explain. I shut up.”

Shane hates interrupting people. It’s impolite and he was raised better than this, but Ilya unhinges him. He’s speaking too loudly now, voice rising into heights that always, always make him sound unprofessional, he knows this, nobody takes him seriously when he gets too into it.

This train is off the rails. He has opened his chest and dumped all of his strange insides on the table in front of Ilya, as if expecting him to pick up the knife and carve out the only good meat for his dinner. Blood whistles hot in his ears, a teakettle brought to a boil, but he has to man up and explain. Lay out why his heart is on the kitchen counter, staining the stone.

He needs Ilya to know.

“The taiga flycatcher is native to Eurasia. In Russian, you call it Восточная малая мухоловка,” Shane clumsily shapes his mouth around the unfamiliar words as carefully as he can, too focused to really understand why Ilya’s mouth drops open, “which means Eastern red-breasted flycatcher, if I can trust the three translation websites I ran it through. But you know what it means, of course. Uh, there’s a lot of them in Russia, and there shouldn’t be any in Canada. They aren’t native here. I follow some nature websites - it’s not important, actually. There was this article about a birder who recorded a sighting of a specimen in Vancouver last week. I read it by accident. And I thought about you.”

Shane feels like he is sprinting. He is out of breath for no reason, and inhales as fast as he can before he runs out of courage. His fists are clenched so hard that his knuckles creak.

Ilya hasn’t said a word. His head has dropped. He is looking at the keychain, and Shane cannot see his face.

Might as well.

“Because it shouldn’t be here, but it is. We shouldn’t have met like this, shouldn’t have done what we did. It didn’t go as planned. It probably wouldn’t make sense to anyone else, that we fell,” Shane closes his eyes, because yes, he is going all in, fuck it all, “that we fell in love after fucking, even though we were rivals. God, this all sounded better in my head. Basically

I saw a bird far from home, resting at the coast of a country where it's the only one of its kind, in an environment it wasn't made for, somehow surviving, and I wanted to get it for you. Maybe you can put it on your keyring. It's small so nobody should recognize it. Who cares that much about birds, right? Or uh, don't keep it. You don't have to," he tacks on, feeling the metaphorical blade of the guillotine graze his neck. "You don't have to take it if you don't like it."

Gently, Ilya's thumb touches the edge of the wooden frame encircling the bird. "This is Russian fabric art. What is word for it? Stitches." Shane can barely understand him because he speaks under his breath, his handsome face turned away from Shane.

"Embroidery. Yeah, I had to contact your Russian friend to ask for help. Sorry if that was rude, but you said he knew about us. I figured he was safe."

Ilya's head flies up. "You what?" His eyes are wide, and as Shane holds his glance, disbelief drops Ilya's mouth open. "You talked to Viktor?"

"I sent him an email, yeah. Was that okay?"

"But," Ilya says. He looks so lost and young, holding the dainty keychain in his large hands, that Shane wants nothing more than to kiss him senseless, curl around him to keep the world out. "But Viktor cannot make this?"

Shane smiles. "Well, turns out your friend is really nice. So is his grandmother. And she knows a lot of people, one of which was really happy about being commissioned into embroidering a bird for the grandson of the woman who makes the best blini west of the Ural Mountains."

"бабушка. I remember her." Ilya closes his hands fully around the keychain. "You made people make this."

"That's what commissioning is. I paid them to make it. Oh, the red pattern is a sun chariot, made from a Japanese stitching technique, sashiko. If it interests you. I thought I'd put a little of us both in there, and Viktor's babushka said it was alright culturally." Now that he's said everything, bared his soul, Shane feels lighter. He is standing straight, holding Ilya's glance across the kitchen counter. All his cards are on the table.

"For me," Ilya repeats. He puts the keychain onto the counter with a click, not unkindly.

"Believe it or not, but I also make money that can buy gifts." Shane runs a hand through his hair, deciding to switch directions before he embarrasses himself any further. "Will you give me something to chop now? I'm good in the kitchen, you don't have to do everything on your own —"

Ilya vaults the kitchen counter. Before Shane can get the first consonant of "holy shit" out of his mouth, Ilya tackles him to the ground.

They fall hard. It's nothing compared to crashing on the ice, but Shane still groans when his ass hits the floor. "Jesus Christ, was that necessary?" And how has he not hit his head?

“Shane,” Ilya says. He is leaning above Shane, one hand cradling Shane’s skull. Something wet rolls drips down on Shane’s cheek.

His lover, his man, his Ilya is crying, and even Shane can tell they are tears of happiness for once.

“I love it.”

“I’m glad,” Shane begins to say. He isn’t allowed to finish.

Ilya kisses him tenderly. His hand curls into Shane’s hair, fingers reaching to the edges of his jaw, framing him in the grip of Ilya’s palm that is gentle when Shane needs it, hard when he wants it most. Ilya’s weight comes to rest on top of him all at once, forcing the breath out of Shane in an involuntary “oof”.

“You’re heavy,” he complains, when Ilya’s mouth pulls back, more half-hearted than anything. Ilya traces his nose lightly against Shane’s, one side of it wet, sending shivers up and down Shane’s limbs to the tips of his fingers. He grips onto Ilya’s shirt for safety. “I take it you like it then?”

Ilya kisses him again, just a peck. There are no more tears falling from his face, but his expression is star-struck, like Shane has handed him his twelfth Stanley Cup and not a wooden bird.

“I will carry it every day,” Ilya tells him. He sounds deadly serious. Some of the old fire has returned to his eyes, but Shane still finds a vulnerability there that he only saw once before. It had been at the cottage, in the car on their way back from his parents.

“I would like that.”

“You do not have to buy things. I am also millionaire.”

Shane kisses Ilya, then, and tells the lovely dip of his Cupid’s bow:

“Yes, but that is not the point, is it?”

Speechless, Ilya stares at him.

Shane grins. “You looked at me for more than three seconds, too. I guess you wanted to have me.” When Ilya says nothing, he continues still, feeling strangely bold for once. Maybe it’s the cold kitchen floor against his back, or Ilya who doesn’t look away even when Shane brings his fingertips to tangle into Ilya’s hair.

“You have me.”

Ilya hauls him upright in the way that only a star hockey player lifting his rival off the ground can. “Good,” he says, grabbing Shane underneath his thighs and marching them both to the bedroom while Shane muffles his laughter into Ilya’s shoulder. “I will keep bird and you forever.”

At 3 am Canadian time, an email finds its way into Ilya's inbox.

He will not open it until the next morning, upon which Shane is delighted to learn a new Russian curse to add to his vocabulary. The sender mail address is a string of random numbers that Shane recognizes instantly (he is good with numbers, what can he say).

"That's so nice," Shane exclaims after taking the phone from Ilya to read the email. "What does the second word mean?"

"It means that I am going to kill my old friend," Ilya growls. "Give me my phone."

"I have a better idea," Shane says, and tests out a private theory of his by tacking the new Russian pet name onto the end of his sentence.

The phone, abandoned by two men jostling each other for who reaches the bed faster, still displays the email.

Dear Илюша,

congratulations on finding someone who is just as obsessed as you. We recommend Denmark for a honeymoon with sufficient amounts of ice and the straight forward marriage requirements.

We look forward to having you here one day.

All the love,

Viktor Nikiforov-Katsuki and Yuuri Nikiforov-Katsuki

End Notes

Hands up in the comments if you remember Yuri on Ice and understood the references ;)

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