

ode to a conversation stuck in your throat

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/78778406) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/78778406>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Rose Landry/Svetlana Vetrova
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Hayden Pike , Jackie Pike , J. J. Boiziau , Rose Landry , Wyatt Hayes , Troy Barrett , Zane Boodram
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - College/University , Friends With Benefits to Lovers , Crushes , Mutual Pining , Texting , Autistic Shane Hollander , Loverboy Ilya Rozanov , Getting Together , Gratuitous use of italics , i put this tag on like all of my fics i just really like italics ok , Drunken Confessions , Hickeys , set two and a half years into a slow burn , One Shot
Language:	English
Collections:	hollanov secret valentine 
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-14 Words: 22,368 Chapters: 1/1

ode to a conversation stuck in your throat

by [ummrlys](#)

Summary

Ilya's face split into a wide grin. It made his eyes sparkle. Shane wanted to kiss him very badly. "Oh. Oh. You are very drunk."

"I wouldn't say very drunk. I'm normal drunk." Shane corrected, stepping closer to Ilya until they were barely centimeters apart. Shane reached up and wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck. They were so close and he smelled so good. Shane breathed him in for a second. Fuck, he had missed him so badly. It had only been two weeks, but it felt like forever.

"I missed you too." Ilya whispered. Wait, had Shane said that out loud? Oops. Maybe he was very drunk. "More than you know."

Or, the transition from friends with benefits to lovers is far from seamless.

Notes

happy valentines day!! this fic was written for sunandseas as part of a valentines exchange so i hope you enjoy it! i had a lot of fun writing it

fair warning: i am in college but my experiences are at very american (lol) and british universities, so you might have to suspend your disbelief if you are canadian. i tried my best but i definitely leaned a lot into my own experiences so. also i routinely switch between the uk and us spelling of words so you're just going to have to deal with that

before you read please **TURN ON CREATOR STYLE!!!!!!!** i used a work skin for this fic for the first time and i'm very proud of myself so please i'm begging you

the title of this fic is from ode to a conversation stuck in your throat by del water gap. i cannot emphasize enough how much i love this song. i need to spread the dwg hollanov agenda. this might be my first dwg title but it surely will not be my last. anyway you can listen here:

- [spotify](#)
- [apple music](#)
- [youtube](#)

January

It was not a surprise that Shane found himself in Ilya Rozanov's bed on his first day back after winter break.

Looking back, Shane probably should have been embarrassed about how quickly he folded. All it had taken was a few texts and a nude for Shane to be throwing all plans of having a relaxing night in out the window.

Ilya Rozanov

Today 21:15

you are back now?
come over?

Maybe tomorrow. I just spent the entire day driving. I'm exhausted.

i promise i will make it worth your while

And then, he'd gotten a Snap notification. Shane was already typing out his agreement before he even looked at the picture. He wished he could say he regretted it but he'd stopped pretending to believe that somewhere around the twentieth time he'd ended up in this position.

To his credit, Ilya absolutely did make it worthwhile. He always did. That was why Shane had never been able to quit him. Why it had spiraled well past just hooking up for Shane a long time ago.

(He'd stopped fighting the reality of his feelings sometime over the summer. By that point, they'd been hooking up consistently for almost two years. The spark of annoyance that Shane had felt seeing Ilya at the beginning had long since faded, replaced by something softer and scarier. Shane had fought it tooth and nail, until one day he woke up and was confronted with the undeniable fact that he was in love.

Nothing about their arrangement had changed since Shane's internal acknowledgement. As far as he knew, Ilya was still actively hooking up with other people. Shane felt *totally* fine about that. He was absolutely not jealous because that would be ridiculous. They weren't together, so Shane had no expectation of loyalty from Ilya. It wasn't his place to be jealous.

At least, that was what he told himself. Maybe if he repeated it enough times it would become true.)

Shane stared up at the ceiling, panting and sticky and unbelievably satisfied. They were both laying on their backs in the middle of the bed, shoulders pressed against each other. There was plenty of room to get a little bit of space, but Shane was quite content where he was.

"Was good, Hollander?" Ilya asked, turning his head to look at Shane.

Shane blinked, his brain still operating several seconds behind schedule. He didn't have a mirror, but he didn't need one to know he was the picture of fucked-out right now— bright red, sweaty, and still trying to catch his breath. "Do you really need me to tell you that?"

"Always nice to hear." Ilya shrugged. "You have a good break? Parents are okay?"

Shane winced. "Can we please *not* talk about my parents while I'm still actively covered in come?"

Ilya's smile turned wicked. He shifted to his side and went in for a kiss. For a second, Shane was worried he was going to try and start a second round but Ilya was pulling back as quickly as he went in. The kiss itself was relatively PG— or as PG as a kiss between two people still naked and covered in bodily fluids could be— and Ilya was looking at Shane with less lust and more affection.

"No, but seriously. Your break was nice, yes?"

"I mean, yeah." Shane shrugged, moving to sit up against the headboard. He felt gross and sticky, but he didn't feel his typical desperate need to get clean. "I mostly just spent it with my parents at our cottage. We drove back to Ottawa for the week of Christmas and New Year's, but it was pretty chill."

"Yes, I saw the pictures Rose posted with you at her party." He'd also gotten what was probably an incredibly embarrassing string of Snapchat pictures that Shane had no memory of taking *or* sending. Shane was thankful he didn't bring those up.

"What were you up to? Did you go back to Moscow with Svetlana? I saw her Instagram stories."

"Ah. No. I was here."

Shane frowned. "Wait, you stayed over break? You were alone, were you?"

"Not *alone* alone. Troy was also here because his mom is travelling the world and his dad sucks." Ilya laughed, but it sounded uncomfortable and hollow. "I guess we have that one in common. We hung out but... the whole break was pretty quiet for me."

I should have been here with him, Shane thought immediately. He would have stayed on campus or brought Ilya back to his cottage or done *something* to ensure that he wasn't lonely over the holidays. But that was... a lot to say to someone you were casually fucking. So instead, he settled for asking, "Why didn't you say anything?"

Ilya blinked. He looked genuinely surprised at Shane's words, but he quickly schooled his expression back to something neutral. "I did not realise you would have cared."

"What?"

"I just... never mind. It does not matter."

Shane crossed his arms, feeling oddly defensive of the fact that he cared. Why did Ilya think he wouldn't have? "Sorry for worrying about you being lonely. I won't make that mistake again."

"No, no. Hollander—" Ilya rubbed a hand across his face. "I did not mean it. I know you would care. It is just surprising for me to hear you actually say it. I *like* to hear you say it. I am maybe... fishing for compliments, as you say?"

"How is me caring about you a compliment?"

"You are impossible," Ilya sounded both fond and exasperated.

Shane didn't really understand what he was trying to say, but he found it hard to care when he was being pressed into the mattress again with Ilya's mouth on his. They stayed like that for a while, just kissing and breathing in each other's presence, until it became undeniable that Shane was fucking *disgusting*. He'd put off showering for way too long and the sweat and cum had dried on his skin, making him itchy and uncomfortable. It would have been bad enough if it was just his own cum, but Ilya had tugged the condom off at the last second and come on Shane as well.

It had been *really* hot in the moment, though.

"As much as I'm enjoying this," Shane muttered against Ilya's lips in between insistent kisses, "I really need to take a shower."

Ilya pulled back and looked down at Shane's stomach, clearly admiring his handiwork if his smug smile was anything to go by. Shane rolled his eyes and pushed Ilya off of him because if he knew if he *didn't*, he was about to get a lot more disgusting.

"Can I join you?" Ilya asked as Shane slid off the bed, like if there was a chance Shane would say *no*.

Shane didn't bother responding. He just looked over his shoulder in the doorway and gave Ilya a look. Ilya was off the bed and in the bathroom in record time.

Shane knew that walking into Hayden and Jackie's apartment was basically like walking into a business pitch for whoever they were trying to set him up with this week. Especially when J.J. was there. It was an unavoidable part of the hang out. They'd shove pictures of a friend of a friend in Shane's face, he'd politely decline for reasons totally unrelated to Ilya Rozanov, and they'd move on.

"Who do you have for me this week?" Shane asked as soon as he sat down, resigned to his fate.

"You don't have to sound so put off by it," J.J. sighed. "You could at least do us the honor of *pretending* to care."

"If it seems like I care, you'll just do it more. I have met you before today."

"God forbid I invest in my friend's love life."

"Or complete *lack* of one." Hayden cut in. Shane gave him a betrayed look.

"You are so young, my friend," J.J. wiped a fake tear from underneath his eye. "It is time to... I don't fucking know. Sow your oats? Is that a phrase?"

"Can you just show me the guy?"

"It's my turn this week," Jackie climbed over Hayden to sit on the couch next to Shane. She tilted her phone screen towards him, showing an Instagram post from some vaguely familiar blonde guy. "His name is Charlie. We have biochem together. He's really nice and he asked me about you when he got my Insta."

Shane squinted down. He was actually pretty attractive, but Shane kept getting distracted by his hair. It was so blonde it was almost white. That would have been bearable on its own, but he also had an atrocious haircut. Jackie swiped a few times, letting him see the guy from a few angles. None of them made his hair any less horrible to look at. When Jackie turned to him for his verdict, Shane frowned and said, "His hair can't possibly be that color naturally."

"That seriously cannot be what you just said." Hayden pressed a hand to his forehead, like Shane was giving him a headache.

"I'm just saying! He has bad hair."

"You are fucking *hopeless*."

"No, Shane's right. It's totally fried and that haircut is not doing him any favors." Jackie commented, zooming in on one of the photos. "But, ignore the hair for a second. What do you think about his face?"

"It's... fine?" Objectively, he *was* good looking but he just looked too... clean-cut. Too nice.

"Fine? Just fine?" J.J. gaped at Shane. "Even I can tell he's fucking hot."

Shane shrugged helplessly. "I don't know. I'm sure he's great, he just doesn't seem like he's for me."

"How could you know that if you don't even know him?"

"I just do."

"Oh." Jackie blinked, and then smiled. "You have a *crush*."

Shane let out a laugh. It was too loud, too awkward, and too *obvious*. "What? No, I don't. I don't have a crush. That would be crazy."

"What?" Hayden— who had been slumped over in the corner of the couch— was on his feet in an instant. "Why didn't you say anything? Who is it? Do we know them?"

"I didn't say anything because I don't have a crush." Shane winced at the obvious lie the moment the words left his mouth.

"Shane, it's okay." Jackie patted his hand comfortingly. "You're allowed to have feelings for someone. It's a free country."

"Shut up. I'm not talking about this with you. I don't even talk about this with *him*."

Jackie's eyes sparkled as Hayden practically yelled, "Oh, so there is a him?"

"*Shut up*," Shane hissed. He was 100% ready to shut the conversation down completely and find a way to make them forget this ever happened, but then he actually took in their faces. They looked... happy for him. Like truly happy. It made Shane stop and think about why he was even keeping this secret in the first place. "Okay. Fine. There might be."

Jackie and Hayden gasped in unison while J.J. genuinely started actually cheering. He pulled Shane off the couch to pat him aggressively on the back and wiped away a fake tear. "Look at you. You're all grown up."

"Actually fuck off."

"You have a *crush*." J.J. sing-songed. This time, he wrapped an arm around Shane's shoulders and practically put him in a headlock. "This is, like, a once in a lifetime event."

Shane struggled out from J.J.'s grasp with surprising difficulty. "*Fuck. Off.*"

"Does he like you back?" Hayden asked.

"I don't know anything for sure." Shane shifted, feeling oddly vulnerable. He'd never talked about this before. It was *weird* to know he could talk about it. He'd spent the last two and a half years keeping it carefully shielded from view. Knowing it was just out in the open now was... uncomfortable. "You guys know I'm not exactly an expert on other people's emotions."

Jackie pursed her lips. "Well, what do you *think*?"

Shane paused. There were two parts of him that were constantly at war. One thought that Ilya could never want him back because why would he? The other... Well, the other thought that there was a possibility that Ilya might feel the same way. Neither side had much empirical evidence, but Shane tended to lean more self-deprecating. It was a defense mechanism. If he never thought Ilya might be in love with him, then there was no chance that he could get hurt. "I really don't know."

"What's the situation here? Give us some context." Shane opened his mouth to say no, but Hayden literally fell to his knees in front of him. "Please. *Please*. You never tell us anything about your life."

Shane hesitated, then collapsed back onto the couch next to Jackie. "We've been hooking up for like two years. It was just casual sex for a while but... I think I want more. I *know* I want more, I just don't know how to, like, get there."

"*Two years?*" Hayden yelled at the same time J.J. said, "You've had *sex*?"

"What the fuck, J.J." Shane said, more exasperated than offended.

At least J.J. had the decency to look apologetic as he settled on the ground next to Hayden, "Sorry, sorry. I was just surprised. You're not really the casual type."

"I'm not. He's... an exception."

"This guy has been sleeping with you for two years and you don't think he likes you back?"

"I told you I don't know. Besides, I'm pretty sure he's sleeping with other people anyway." Shane tried not to sound too miserable saying that, but based on the pitiful way they were looking at him, it didn't work. "Guys, I swear it's fine. I'm totally fine with it."

The three of them exchanged glances, clearly unconvinced even though Shane was telling the truth. He wasn't jealous. He didn't care. He definitely didn't spend hours each night, staring into space and thinking about if Ilya had another person in his bed because that would be crazy.

"Who is it?" Jackie finally asked.

"I'm not telling you," Shane grimaced, shaking his head. "No way."

Hayden furrowed his brow. "What? Why?"

"You three are the biggest meddlers I have ever met in my entire life."

"We do not *meddle*." J.J. insisted, looking offended. "We advise. We... assist."

"You literally just tried to set me up with some random guy. You try to set me up with people pretty much every week."

J.J. opened his mouth and closed it a few times. "No, yeah. That's a fair point."

"It's not that I don't trust you," Shane paused. "At first it was a secret because I didn't want to be judged. We started hooking up before I even really knew any of you and he kind of has a... reputation."

"You've got a crush on a *fuckboy*? That's rough." Hayden did not look pleased, which was another part of why he didn't want to reveal who it was. Hayden had been Shane's first year roommate, and he'd dealt with Ilya's assholery firsthand. Only, he'd dealt with his dislike of

Ilya in a much more conventional way— constantly complaining and holding a years long grudge.

"He's a lot less of a fuckboy now. Anyway, I didn't even really like him as a person when we started hooking up."

"I feel like my entire view of who you are as a person is shifting right now." J.J. breathed out. He was looking at Shane with a mixture of awe and bewilderment. "You were having hate sex at 18? *You?*"

"Trust me, I know it wasn't my best decision, but I was still sort of closeted back then. He was just convenient at first but sometime last spring, what we were doing changed. He stopped being so much of an asshole and I let my guard down a little," Shane huffed out a small laugh, more air than anything else. "I never meant for it to be more than sex but it's been more than that for a while. I thought about telling you guys or Rose but I just... it's kind of fucked up, but I like that we have this thing that's just for us right now."

"Rose doesn't know?" Jackie asked. When Shane nodded, something in her expression shifted. She bit her lip and Shane could see her connecting dots in her mind. He had no doubt that she would be the first person to put it together.

Hayden took a deep breath. He looked a little sad. "This is a lot to deal with by yourself, buddy."

"I've been... managing. It's not a big deal."

J.J. looked torn. "You really won't tell us who it is?"

"I don't want to jinx it," Shane admitted. "I already told you guys that I'm not sure how he feels. If I tell you all now and then it turns out he doesn't want me, it'll be so embarrassing."

"But as soon as anything real happens, you'll tell us, right?"

"Of course. You guys are my best friends," Shane assured them. Then, he smiled a little, mostly to himself. "Besides, if something happens, I'll probably be too happy to keep it to myself."

"Aw, look at his face!" Hayden elbowed J.J. in the ribs. "He's in *loooove*."

Shane didn't deny it. He just sunk further into the couch and kept smiling.

The thing about living with Rose Landry that Shane learned very quickly was that she liked group activities. If there was a chance to involve another person in a task, Rose would take it. Shane had ended up in a lot of situations he never would have expected to be in as her roommate. Often, Shane would leave his room for dinner and get dragged into another face

treatment or something. Once she made him do air-dry clay crafts which was fun, but really it was all about the self care with her.

Shane really did enjoy skincare and he liked spending time with Rose. He'd let her peer pressure him into doing a detox treatment or a clay mask any day. He liked doing them. They made him feel good. But even he had his limits and he was *very quickly* reaching them.

"Do the sheet mask, Shane," Rose whined. She was curled up on the couch with the remote, a massive glass of wine, and a sheet mask that was supposed to be a panda on her face. Hayden was in a similar state, though his tiger mask was slightly closer to the actual animal. They both had fluffy robes and massive headbands on.

"Yeah, *Shane*," Hayden nudged Shane's shoulder. "Do a sheet mask."

"You both know I'd literally rather die than touch one of those things," Shane said, wrinkling his nose at the thought. They were sticky and wet and cold. The potential skincare benefits could not possibly be worth having to suffer through putting that on his *face*.

Rose clicked her tongue and took a long sip, "Lame."

"Lameeee," Hayden echoed, cupping his hands around his lips to amplify it.

"What are you even doing here, Hayden?"

"Jackie was supposed to come over but her sister went into labour," Rose's nails tapped against her glass as she swirled her wine and clicked through movie options. "She sent Hayden in her place. Not exactly an equal replacement, but he'll do."

Hayden smiled, "I'm just happy to get included for once."

Shane's phone buzzed in his pocket. He probably would have ignored the notification if it didn't come from Snapchat. Only one person would try and use Snap to contact him.

Today

Ilya Rozanov

Snap video sent and opened

i am very lonely

you should come over and fix that

It was a mistake to open the video. Shane 100% should have expected his phone screen would suddenly be filled with Ilya's dick. Thank *god* Hayden and Rose weren't looking at his screen. He was jerking himself off slowly in the shower. Compared to some of the nudes that Ilya had sent him over the years, this one was... almost tasteful. It also made all the blood in Shane's head rush south so fast he felt lightheaded.

Ilya Rozanov

Snap video replayed

Me

Oh my god
Ilya
A little warning next time?
Ilya Rozanov
you did not like?
Me
Ok I didn't say that.
But I'm with Rose and Hayden right now.
They're doing face masks.
Ilya Rozanov
booooo
i am so much cooler than lame hayden pike
Me
Have you two even seen each other since first year?
Ilya Rozanov
few times
he is...
still just as annoying

"Boooo," Hayden waved his hand in front of Shane's face and tried to grab his phone. Shane jerked it away at the last second. "Stop texting! Get off your phone! Pay attention to us!"

Shane shoved him off the couch. Hayden practically shrieked as he fell. His tiger mask slipped off his face and hit the hardwood floor with a loud schlep that made Shane flinch.

"You two are like literal children." Rose rolled her eyes, but she was laughing.

"It's not my fault Shane is being weird." Hayden crossed his arms and looked at Shane suspiciously. "Since when do you have friends?"

"Please pick that shit off the floor and go fuck yourself."

Me
Well, I can't say I disagree with that right now.
Ilya Rozanov
why are you hanging out with annoying people
Me
I'll tell Rose you called her annoying.
Ilya Rozanov
wait no please don't
sveta will kill me
she is very scary and she knows where i live hollander
very real threat
Me
Exactly. She's terrifying.
But so is Rose to be honest.
Ilya Rozanov
they are a very good match

but i do not want to talk about sveta and rose right now
Snap photo sent and opened

This one was a mirror photo. Ilya had a towel draped over his waist, but the rest of him was still dripping wet. He looked... Shane honestly didn't have words. Before he could stop himself, he screenshotted the photo.

"Jesus, Shane. You just got *so* red." Hayden laughed loudly. Shane had genuinely forgotten other people were in the room. "What are you looking at?"

Shane slammed his phone down on the couch face down. "Nothing!"

"Yeah, *that* was a normal response." Rose looked up from her phone with narrowed eyes. "What were you looking at, porn or something?"

"That's gross. It was literally nothing. I swear."

"Right..." Hayden nodded slowly. Shane could see in his eyes the exact moment he chose to torment Shane instead of letting this pass. "It was *totally* not a dick pic from the mysterious guy you have a crush on."

"What? What guy?" Rose practically yelped, her posture straightening immediately.

"Oh my *God*, Hayden." Shane put his head in his hands. "I've told you guys a million times that it's not a big deal."

"Who? What? When did this happen?"

"He's been keeping it a secret for *years*."

"What?" Rose said again.

Shane shot Hayden a betrayed look. "Dude. You're seriously snitching on me to *Rose*?"

"It's been like a week." Hayden held his hands up in defense. "I thought you would have told her by now."

Rose looked between them. "One of you better fill me in before I lose my mind."

"I've sort of been hooking up with this guy since first year," Shane said slowly, watching Rose's reaction closely. It was hard to read her emotions with the stupid panda mask still on her face. "And there might be some feelings."

"Are they... mutual?"

"Yes," Hayden said at the same time Shane said, "I don't know."

Rose blinked. "Those are two different answers."

"Hayden doesn't know anything," Shane rolled his eyes. "He doesn't even know who I'm talking about."

"I would know if you'd *tell me*."

Shane made a face. "That's literally just how telling people things works. Obviously you don't know who it is if I haven't told you."

"So, let me get this straight," Rose waved her hands to get them to shut up. "You have a crush on a guy you've secretly been sleeping with for two years. And you found out about the crush last week but not who it is."

"That's right."

"Okay. Sure. Okay." She nodded a few times. "And why didn't I know about this?"

"Because I'm not sure how he actually feels about me."

She scoffed. "You're never sure how people feel about you."

"I'm often *wrong* about how people feel about me," Shane reminded them. "Why do you think I'm never sure? And how am I even supposed to know?"

"You just kinda know," Hayden shrugged.

Shane rolled his eyes a little. "Wow, Hayden. So insightful. Thank you."

"How does he look at you?" Rose asked, resting her elbows on her knees. "Describe it."

"I don't know. He just kinda... looks at me. He smirks a lot? Does that help?"

"How does he look at other people?"

"Rose, I really don't know."

She pouted. "How am I supposed to help you figure out if he likes you if I don't know anything about him?"

"You don't help me," Shane insisted. "I'll figure it out myself. It's *not* a big deal."

"It's okay if it is a big deal, you know. You're allowed to feel your feelings."

Shane shot an unimpressed look at Rose, "Stop using your education major brain on me."

"You *know* I can't just turn it off like that," Rose slumped back and crossed her arms. "I'm just trying to be helpful."

"The most helpful thing would be *leaving it alone*."

She finally peeled the mask off her face, balling it up and chucking it at Hayden. "You also know that's hard for me to turn off too."

"That was gross," Hayden complained, picking up the mask with two fingers and moving it into the closest trashcan. "What the fuck, Rose?"

"I know. You love drama," Shane said fondly.

"Uh," She held a finger up. "I enjoy the outskirts of drama. I enjoy *other people's* drama."

Shane just shook his head and looked back down at his phone, ignoring the curious looks from both of them.

Ilya Rozanov

Snap photo screenshotted
oh did you like that one?

Me

Shut the fuck up.
You know I did.

Ilya Rozanov

so come over

Me

I already told you I can't right now.
It would be rude to ditch my friends.

Ilya Rozanov

wow you are so nice hollander
so nice to everybody but me :(

Me

Don't pretend like you don't like it.

Ilya Rozanov

yes
i do
you should come over and be mean to me in person
Snap photo sent and opened

Fuck. Shane could feel his ability to resist draining every second he looked at the thirst trap. He was totally going to ditch his friends to go get laid, wasn't he? Did that make him a bad person? Did he even care?

The more Shane thought about it, the more he knew resistance was futile. He was going to go to Ilya's. Of course he was. There was never truly any point where he *wasn't* going. Some part of him was always going to come when Ilya called, no matter how much he tried to convince himself otherwise.

Besides, they both enjoyed it when Shane pretended like he was going to say no.

Me

Honestly fuck you.
Leaving now. I'll be there in twenty.

Ilya Rozanov

good boy

February

Shane's corner of the library was always pretty much deserted.

Okay, obviously it didn't *belong* to Shane, but he'd been consistently sitting in the exact same spot at the exact same table in the back left of the basement for the last two and a half years, so it kind of *felt* like his corner. There usually weren't more than two or three people scattered around the surrounding tables. It was quiet and secluded— the perfect study spot. Nobody ever bothered him there.

Well, *usually* nobody bothered him. Sometimes, when his friends decided he was 'concerningly locked in'— Hayden's words— he'd get a visitor. Either someone there to do work with him, or to make sure he was actually taking care of himself. So, when someone placed a coffee cup directly on top of Shane's notebook while he was in the middle of writing a sentence, he wasn't too surprised— especially considering that this was his fourth day in a row spending more than four hours in the library.

The surprise came when he looked back. He'd expected to see Jackie or J.J. or maybe Hayden, but *Ilya* was standing behind him. He looked a little out of his depth, which made sense. Shane was pretty sure he'd never stepped foot in the library in his life.

"Oh," Shane smiled. "It's you."

Ilya smiled back, his awkward expression melting away. "It is me."

"You're in the library."

"And you're wearing glasses."

"I mean, yeah. I always wear glasses when I'm studying," Shane moved to take them off, but Ilya grabbed his arm before he could.

"No, no. Do not take them off." Ilya squeezed his wrist gently. "You look very good in them."

Shane felt himself flush. "They're just glasses. What are you doing here, anyway?"

"You do not have to sound so surprised that I am here. I go to the library sometimes." Ilya grumbled, walking around the table to sit across from Shane.

"Really?" Shane raised an eyebrow. "When was the last time you stepped foot in the library?"

"It was maybe... First week of first year? I am not sure."

"So what are you doing here?"

"I know you will be here, so I bring you coffee." Ilya shrugged, like it was obvious. Like this was something that they did.

Shane picked up the cup. It was from his favorite coffee place on campus– the only coffee place on campus that was worth going to, in his opinion. "You're here to bring me coffee?"

"You work *so* hard and for *so* long. Even you deserve a little treat sometimes, Hollander."

It was a really nice gesture, but Shane was a little worried. He honestly didn't really like coffee, outside of a few very specific circumstances. If it wasn't just right, he couldn't drink it. But it was so fucking nice of Ilya to go out of his way do this for him, so Shane resolved to suffer through the drink if he had to. He couldn't let Ilya think he didn't appreciate him.

He took a slow sip, bracing himself for it to be too sweet or too bitter or just *wrong* and found that it was... perfect, actually. He turned the cup around to see that somehow Ilya had managed to get his order exactly right. A latte with two shots of espresso, oat milk, and a single pump of sugar-free cinnamon syrup.

Ilya's brow furrowed. "Why do you look so surprised? Is it bad? Did I get the wrong thing for you?"

"No, it's perfect. Thank you." Shane took another sip. He hadn't even realized how tired he was until a coffee was in his hands. "How did you know my order? I know I'm kind of... particular."

"Particular, yes. But you are also very predictable."

"Seriously, thank you," Shane said again. He closed his laptop and set his pen aside. He had one more reading to get through, but he wanted to show Ilya that he was giving him his full attention. "I didn't even realise how much I needed this until now."

"It was not a problem."

"How did you find me if you've never been in the library before? This place is kind of a maze."

"I... might have asked the nice lady at the front desk where you usually sit." Ilya brushed over his knuckles with his thumb. "She seemed very happy that you had a visitor. She told me to tell you that she was about to come down here and kick you out herself."

Oh god. Shane knew all too well which nice lady was at the front desk today. "You asked *Jackie*?"

"Yes, I think that was her name. Do you know her?"

"Oh, I know her." Shane pulled his bag off the floor, digging through it to try and find wherever he'd shoved his phone. It wasn't hard to find, considering he could feel it buzzing every few seconds.

4 People

Today 13:37

Jackie Bauer

SHANE

IS IT ILYA ROZANOV???

J.J. Boiziau

ilya rozanov?

Hayden Pike

Why do you think it would be Ilya Rozanov?

Jackie Bauer

He just showed up at the library and asked me if I knew where to find Shane

Hayden Pike

What? He hated Shane!

Shane hated him!! He was so fucking annoying

J.J. Boiziau

do i know an ilya rozanov?

Jackie Bauer

Clearly they do not hate each other

He had two coffees!!!

Hayden Pike

And you're sure it wasn't poisoned?

J.J. Boiziau

should i just pretend like i know who this is

It's not a big deal.

And I don't hate him anymore.

Hayden Pike

SERIOUSLY????

Oh my god. You said he was a fuckboy asshole.

I should have known from the moment you said that.

Jackie Bauer

Ignore him. It feels like a big deal

He's not exactly the library type

Which means he went out of his way to bring you coffee

Hayden Pike

Shane. You could have basically anyone you want. Why HIM????

Jackie Bauer
Shut up, Hayden.

J.J. Boiziau
yeah, shut up hayden

Hayden Pike
You don't even know who we're talking about

J.J. Boiziau
yes but i love to tell you to shut up
the important thing is if the coffee is good
i know you are picky

The coffee was perfect.
Now leave me alone.

Jackie Bauer
Awwwwwwwwwwww

J.J. Boiziau
shane has a crushhhhhhhhhhhh

Hayden Pike
Ok. Let it be known that I am against this on principle.

J.J. Boiziau
what fucking principle

Hayden Pike
The principle that I do not like him.
But that still is kind of sweet.

Shane chuckled and put his phone away again. When he looked up, Ilya was watching him with an unbearably fond expression on his face. It made Shane's heart flutter.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Looking at you like what?" Ilya asked, continuing to look at him like that. "I'm not looking at you like anything."

Shane laughed, covering his face with his hands. He hadn't been able to stop smiling. "You're ridiculous."

"Many have said this about me." Ilya nodded very seriously, which just made Shane laugh harder.

"How has *your* week been?"

"Very boring," Ilya let out a large sigh, slumping his shoulders. "Everything interesting has been very busy in the library."

Shane's smile widened. "Oh, so now you acknowledge I'm interesting?"

"Ah, well. You have your moments," Ilya shrugged, his eyes sparkling.

"You could have just texted me to meet you for coffee. I would have said yes. You didn't need to come seek me out in the library."

Ilya went a little bit pink. His voice was slightly uncertain as he said, "I wanted to surprise you. I thought you would like it."

"Oh," Shane's lips parted. He felt something bloom in his chest. "I do like it. It's nice. Nobody's ever done something like this for me before."

"I will just have to do it again to make up for that."

"You don't have to," Shane insisted. "This is more than enough."

"I want to. Now, do you need me to go so you can go back to focusing or..." Ilya trailed off.

If it was anyone else, Shane wouldn't have hesitated to tell them to leave. He had a hard time concentrating when there were other people around. He'd probably have a hard time concentrating with *Ilya* around. But... he also liked having him around. Plus, it would be good motivation to get his readings done quicker. He really only had one mandatory one left. He usually would do the recommended ones, but he didn't have to.

"You should stay," Shane finally said, smiling a little. "I'm almost done anyway."

Ilya smiled back— his expression a mixture of surprise and delight— and Shane knew he'd made the right choice.

There were few places that Shane hated like the grocery store. It was loud, crowded, and impossibly bright— practically *designed* to be overstimulated. Unfortunately, it was also unavoidable if Shane wanted to, like, not starve to death. In theory, he could pass all the shopping off onto Rose, but while he trusted her for a lot of things, brand choices were not one of them. She made strange decisions based more on packaging than the actual product. It clearly worked for her, but Shane wanted to ensure that the staples of his diet were up to his standards.

He'd mapped out an efficient route to get him in and out as quickly as possible. He wore headphones, only bought what was on his list, and he didn't go places he didn't need to be or

linger unnecessarily.

So, how he ended up in the soda aisle—pulling a case of Coke off the wall and stowing it underneath his cart—was beyond him. The only soda Shane drank was Canada Dry brand ginger ale. He hated Coke. Why the fuck was he putting it in his cart? Why the fuck was he actually *buying it*? Why was he storing the entire thing in the fridge instead of shoving it in the back corner of the snack closet? Had he lost his mind?

(The case sat untouched for weeks. It became a fixture of the fridge. Shane pointedly ignored it every time he opened it.)

Despite his hatred of the grocery store, Shane did genuinely enjoy cooking. He was responsible for dinner on Tuesday and Thursday, while Rose handled Monday and Wednesday. Shane typically stuck to things he knew they would both enjoy. He made white meat or fish on Tuesdays and red meat on Thursdays. Rose was a lot more experimental in her recipe choices, but Shane didn't mind. She stuck to his guidelines and managed to create something at the very least edible every time.

However, she did not subscribe to the same philosophy of cabinet organisation. Shane knew his alphabetized system was... intense, but it was organized and easy to navigate. Rose did not care. She just sort of put things wherever they fit. Most nights Shane made dinner, he would struggle to find at least one spice or sauce.

This particular night was no exception. He set out his dishes and collected what he could find for the marinate and then looked over his shoulder at Rose, who was on the floor digging through their tupperware drawer for some reason. "Hey, do you remember where you put the cumin? Also what are you doing?"

"I'm looking for my pen. It's brand new and I left it somewhere in here when I was baking the other day. And yeah, it's in the other cabinet. Behind the olive oil." Shane switched cabinets and reached for the dark bottle two shelves up, but Rose shook her head emphatically. "No, not that one. The other olive oil in the *other* other cabinet. The squirt bottle kind."

Shane rolled his eyes and switched cabinets again. Thankfully, he found the cumin. And also Rose's pen for some reason, which he tossed at her. "I don't understand why you bought that shit. It's so expensive and it's not even that good."

"I didn't buy it. My *parents* bought it and I stole it from them," Rose corrected. She slipped her pen into her front pocket and climbed off the floor, shutting the tupperware drawer with her foot and taking a sip from a bright red can.

Shane did a double take. "What are you drinking?"

"A Coke."

"What?" Shane practically yelped. "Why? Where did you get it?"

"Uh, because it was in the fridge? And because I can?" Rose looked a bit bewildered.

"It was mine. I bought it. Why are you drinking it?"

She gave him a weird look. "Why are you freaking out? It's just a soda. You don't even like soda."

"I'm not freaking out. You're freaking out."

"It's not, like, spiked or anything, right?" She laughed nervously, inspecting the can in her hands.

"No? Why would I buy a case of spiked Coke?"

"Why would you buy a case of any Coke?" Her eyes narrowed. Shane could practically see the gears turning in her mind. "Again, you don't drink it. You hate it."

"No reason. I just wanted to try something new." Shane shrugged. Rose's eyes narrowed even further.

"You hate trying new things. That's your main personality trait."

"Okay, I take offense to that."

"And yet it's still true." She got off the floor, still staring Shane down. "So why would you buy a case of soda that isn't ginger ale?"

Shane quickly realised he'd backed himself into a corner. He was acting strange and there was almost no way Rose was going to drop this. So, he backpedaled. "You know what? It's fine. Drink the Coke. Drink it all, if you want."

"Are you sick? Are you on drugs? What is happening right now?"

"I'm fine." Shane went over to the fridge and pulled the salmon out. His eyes kept darting to the case, tucked neatly in the corner of the bottom shelf. "I found your pen, so can you leave now?"

"Shane."

"Rose."

She gave him a deeply unimpressed look. "You can't just start cooking dinner in the middle of this conversation."

"I was cooking dinner before the conversation," he reminded her. "You're the one who started pointlessly reading into what I was doing."

"You sound like my ex-boyfriend. Are you trying to gaslight me right now?"

"I *am* your ex-boyfriend."

Rose opened her mouth to argue, but then got some sort of lightbulb moment. "Oh. *Oh*. This is about you not-dating Ilya. You bought the Cokes for *him*."

"We're *not* dating and you need to stop gossiping with Jackie."

"I heard about this from Sveta who heard about it from Ilya." Rose paused and tilted her head, clearly putting pieces together in her brain. "Wait, why does Jackie know?"

Shane barely heard the second question she asked. His brain had completely zeroed in on the fact that apparently Ilya had told Svetlana about him. "He talks about me?"

"Constantly, apparently. But don't change the subject." Rose's eyes were sparkling in an almost manic way. "Why does Jackie know about Ilya? Last I checked you hadn't told them and knowing you, you *didn't*. How'd she find out?"

"I don't want to talk about this. I have to make dinner."

"Dinner can wait. Answer the question, Hollander."

"Okay, okay," Shane sighed. "He... might have asked her where I would be in the library so he could bring me coffee."

Rose honest-to-god jumped up and down squealing for a second. "That's *so cute*. Was it up to your weirdly specific coffee standards that even *I* don't understand?"

"It was perfect," Shane admitted.

"Oh, Shane. He's totally in love with you."

"He's probably not. We should stop talking about this. Can we stop talking about this please?"

"You're being very... you about this," Rose commented, resting her hip against the counter.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It's just..." Rose sighed. "You get so lost in your head that sometimes you forget that you deserve to be happy."

"Oh," Shane whispered, his eyes widening. He really hadn't expected her to be genuine.

"You're so closed off with your emotions because you're afraid of letting yourself get hurt. You always have been. I don't want you to think I was, like, offended you didn't tell me about Ilya. I'm really not. I understand. It just really makes me sad to think you've been dealing with all of this by yourself. You have a support system. Let us support you."

Shane was quiet for a second. "I didn't realize... I'm sorry. I know I can be difficult sometimes."

"You're not difficult," she sniffed. "You're human. It's why you're so loveable."

"I don't really know how to talk about my feelings. Feeling vulnerable is disgusting."

"Yeah, well." She shrugged with one shoulder. "That's how it is sometimes."

Shane crossed the kitchen and hugged her. She squeezed him tightly. When they pulled away, Shane laughed wetly. "This conversation got really serious really fast."

"You needed it."

"Probably. Now get out of the kitchen." Shane tried to shoo her away. She didn't budge. "Seriously. Go. I actually have to make dinner."

Rose pulled her phone out of her back pocket and said, "We just had our second emotional conversation ever. I think we can order some takeout."

"Wait, what was our first one?" She raised her eyebrows higher and higher until the pieces clicked together in Shane's mind. "Oh. *Oh*. Fuck. That conversation."

"Yeah. *That* conversation."

They ordered takeout. Rose was right. They deserved it.

The etiquette for seeing someone you sort of know in a public place wasn't really something that Shane had ever put much thought in until he walked into the library to see three of Ilya's friends at a table adjacent to his. He'd met Bood, Wyatt, and Troy a few times, but only in the context of them all having a mutual friend. Was he supposed to stop and say hello, or did he just nod and call it a day?

He decided to wave awkwardly as he passed. All three of them looked up from their laptops and waved back. Okay. That was... normal. Good. Shane had a take-home quiz and a group project to get started on. If he'd totally fucked that up, he'd never be able to be productive.

The quiz was easy, which was actually a little annoying. Five questions, open notes. He'd been stressed about it for days, and it took him less than ten minutes in total. It could have at least given him *some* difficulty to justify his anxiety.

Right after Shane pressed submit and switched tabs to start working on his project outline, Ilya's friends apparently gave up on studying. They kept their voices relatively quiet, but Shane was close enough to hear. He'd fully tuned out their conversation to focus on his readings until he heard Troy ask, "Hey, have either of you heard from Roz lately?"

"I mean I *have*, but he's been so weird," Bood sighed a little.

Shane shouldn't have been listening to their conversation. He knew this. He really did try to tune them back out. Just... maybe not as hard as he could have.

"*I know*. It's like he was bodysnatched or something over the summer."

"Is he okay?" Bood sounded genuinely concerned. "He used to be such a party animal, but I don't think I've seen him go out at all this semester. Or go home with anyone."

Shane froze. Bood couldn't possibly mean—

"The other day when I offered him a cig, he told me he was trying to quit." Troy sounded totally astonished and more than a little worried. "*Ilya Rozanov* told me he was trying to quit smoking."

"Do we need to do, like, a wellness check on him?"

"We might. I don't think he's gotten laid since last spring."

Oh. Shane suddenly felt his heart rate speed up. According to his friends, Ilya wasn't sleeping with other people. Not since *last spring* apparently— before Shane had even known (or rather accepted) he was really in love. He had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep himself from breaking out into a ridiculous grin. They'd never even talked about being exclusive, but at some point in the last year, Ilya had decided that apparently Shane was enough for him.

"You guys are so stupid," Wyatt cut in, chuckling. "He's obviously seeing someone."

Bood and Troy both paused. When Shane chanced a glance over his shoulder at their table, they were both looking at Wyatt with perplexed expressions. "How could you possibly know that?"

"I used context clues." Wyatt looked unimpressed.

Bood blinked a few times before he smiled, "Wait, you *actually* think Roz is seeing someone? You're not fucking with us?"

"Yeah, and they've got him absolutely *whipped*," Wyatt clicked his tongue. "You should have *seen* the scratches on his back the other day. It looked like he got mauled by a bear, and he actually started bragging when I pointed them out. He didn't tell me who left them or anything, but he was so fucking smug about it that it was honestly cute. Trust me, Roz is *right* where he wants to be."

Shane looked back at his screen and flushed. He hadn't even meant to leave the marks when he went over the other night. He'd been *so* embarrassed that he lost control and dug his nails in like that, but Ilya had said he'd wear them like a badge of honor. Shane hadn't realised he'd meant that *literally*.

"That's... Wow."

"I can't believe you guys didn't see it," Wyatt chuckled again. "He's probably just with someone private. Or maybe they haven't officially gotten together yet. He'll tell us when he's ready."

And then, their conversation moved on to other things like they hadn't just fundamentally altered Shane's life. Shane sat there, staring blankly at his laptop screen. His cursor blinked. He tried to get his mind back on track, but his thoughts were stuck in a constant loop of *Ilya isn't sleeping with anyone else*.

It was something he'd dreamed about hearing. Like several times. Shane had never really understood jealousy until he met Ilya. Until he actually had to *witness* Ilya go home with some girl at a club Rose dragged him to last November. He'd hated knowing that she got to have Ilya the same way he did. It had only gotten worse since the summer, constantly bubbling under Shane's skin.

He had been working up the courage to ask Ilya to be exclusive for *months* and Ilya had just... decided to do it without being asked. Either Shane was more obvious about his jealousy than he intended to be or Ilya actually had feelings for him.

There was absolutely no chance that Shane would be able to go back to studying after this revelation, so Shane shut his laptop and pulled out his phone. Ilya's contact wasn't hard to find. It was where it always was, pinned at the top of his messages, in between Rose and his family group chat. Ilya had pinned himself to be a dick when he'd first added his number to Shane's phone— which he'd only done because Shane adamantly *refused* to allow Snapchat to be their main point of contact— and Shane had never unpinned him. At first it was for ease of access, but now Shane honestly liked seeing him there. His four favorite people all in one place, not that he'd ever admit that if anyone asked him.

Ilya Rozanov

Today 14:24

So, I just overheard an interesting conversation in the library.

oh?

good boy hollander listening to other people's conversations?

Shut up.

Troy and Bood were worried about you. They said you haven't been going to parties or anything this year.

Also, you quit smoking?

haven't felt the need to be honest

for any of that

cigarettes are bad for you

and parties are boring

I thought you liked boring?

i like your boring

there is a difference

Well, Wyatt thinks you're in a relationship.

He said you're "whipped". Apparently, I've got you right where you want to be.

well wyatt is very smart

he saw your scratches 🐾

I can't believe you let him see.

I also can't believe you were actually bragging about them.

i am very proud of them

i said this, not my fault you did not believe

Sorry again for that. I shouldn't have done it.

again. i have told you a million times.

it is so sexy that i fuck you so good you forget you have nails

its like when you start to speak french words because you have stopped thinking so much

tells me i am doing very very good

Like you need me to tell you that.

a little ego boost never hurt anybody

and you are the biggest ego boost around

Shane couldn't help it. He actually fucking *giggled* at that. Loud enough that someone from two tables away shot him a glare. He should have been embarrassed. He was acting like a lovesick fool. But, as he slid his computer back into his backpack, Shane couldn't find it in himself to be anything but pleased. Ilya wasn't sleeping with anyone else and he was fucking bragging to his friend about the claim Shane had left on him. That alone was enough to keep a small smile on Shane's face through the rest of the day.

It wasn't until later that night that Shane realised Ilya had never denied that they were in a relationship.

March

Rose left for break Thursday evening, and by Friday morning, Shane had an idea. To anyone else, it would have seemed normal. Mundane, even. But to Shane, it was somehow both terrifying and the culmination of everything he'd wanted these last few months.

He was going to invite Ilya over.

Ilya had never been to his place, not even when they'd still been in the dorms, living directly across the hall from one another. They'd always hooked up at Ilya's. It was one of a few very intentional choices that Shane had made first year to keep clear boundaries between his actual life and whatever he was doing with Ilya. Don't tell anyone, don't sleep over, don't stay too long, and don't let Ilya into your bed.

Only now, those boundaries didn't exist. Shane had started staying over sometime during the second half of second year. It had been unintentional at first, but now he slept in Ilya's bed practically every time he found himself in it. He had a fucking toothbrush at Ilya's apartment now. Shane's friends knew they were fucking and that he wanted more.

Even though inviting Ilya over seemed like the logical next step, it had always felt a little bit too real. But Shane knew he wanted Ilya in his life properly, and he was starting to think Ilya wanted the same thing. He'd bought that case of Coke back in February for a reason. His brain had started making space for Ilya in *his* space.

That didn't make it any less scary. Shane's hands shook as he typed out the message.

Ilya Rozanov

Today 19:58

Do you want to come over?

Shane very maturely did *not* throw his phone across the room, no matter how much he wanted to. He could wait for a response like an adult.

like you come over to me?

No, I meant you come over to mine. If I wanted to go to yours I would have said that.

you want me to come over to your apartment?

Fuck. This was such a bad idea. Shane had *known* this was a bad idea. Ilya was probably so weirded out that Shane would even ask this. He needed to backpedal before he ruined everything.

It was just an idea. Rose left for break already, so I figured I might as well make use of the empty apartment.

It was probably stupid. You don't have to come over if you don't want to.

nonono

i want

i definitely want

i have already left so it is too late to take it back

will be there soon

Oh. Shane pressed his phone against his chest and smiled a little.

When Ilya knocked twenty minutes later, Shane's body was brimming with nervous energy. He was practically vibrating as he opened the door.

"Hi."

"Hello," Ilya replied. He didn't look nearly as nervous as Shane felt, but he also didn't look completely calm. They stood in awkward silence for a second before Shane remembered he needed to move out of the doorway to let Ilya inside.

"Um. Welcome, I guess?" Shane stepped aside, letting Ilya make his way into the apartment. He looked around with an interested expression. "Shoes off, please."

Ilya kicked his sneakers off immediately. "You have a nice apartment. Good decoration."

"This was all Rose," Shane wandered into the middle of the living room. Ilya followed, stopping a few inches away when Shane turned and asked, "Do you want the full tour or just the highlights?"

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "What are the highlights?"

"Oh, you know." Shane tilted his head slightly, trying to play coy. "Kitchen, living room, bedroom."

"Well, I have seen the living room and I really do not care about the kitchen."

Shane shrugged lightly. "Then I guess all that's left to show you is my room."

Ilya's smile was wicked as he finally closed the gap between them. It was a good kiss. It was always a good kiss with Ilya. Shane braced his hands on Ilya's chest, practically melting into it.

Too soon, Ilya pulled back. His voice was low and gravelly when he said, "You have somewhere to show me, yes?"

Shane was moving before he even finished the sentence, grabbing Ilya's hand and leading him to his bedroom. It was a short hallway, but they still stopped multiple times just to make out again. By the time they actually reached Shane's door, they were both naked and needy, clothes haphazardly tossed across the floor of the apartment.

Shane had had a lot of sex with Ilya. Like a *lot*. He knew how things went between them. This felt... different. Quieter and slower than usual, but not slow in an attempt to make Shane go insane. Ilya didn't throw Shane around or manhandle him into whatever position. He laid Shane out on his back and fingered him carefully and thoroughly, never going more than a minute without kissing him.

"Please," Shane gasped into Ilya's mouth as he slid a third finger inside. "Fuck me, Ilya."

"Anything for you," Ilya whispered back, pressing their foreheads together.

Ilya fucked him like they had all the time in the world. They never stopped kissing for more than a minute. Ilya made Shane come once, and then kept going through the oversensitivity until they were coming together. It was not the first time that Ilya had made him come more than once, but it was the first time it had been so gentle. There were no harsh words tonight. There were hardly any words tonight. It was just... them.

They showered together, as usual. When Shane noticed Ilya growing hard again, he sank to his knees slowly and sucked him off. The tile was rough against his knees, but the pain was worth it. It was always worth it with Ilya. He knotted one hand in Shane's hair and used the other as a shield to keep the water out of Shane's eyes. He didn't last very long. When Shane swallowed without protest, Ilya looked down at him with a lovestruck expression.

This is the moment, Shane's brain was practically screaming. *Tell him. Tell him. Tell him.*

Shane opened his mouth, but didn't say anything. Neither did Ilya.

The moment passed.

They got out of the shower. They dried each other off. They still didn't speak. Shane got dressed and changed his sheets. Ilya collected their clothes from the hallway, putting his underwear back on. They climbed into bed, Shane resting his head on Ilya's chest.

"You'll stay, right?" Shane mumbled, half-asleep already. Ilya's chest was warm and solid against Shane's cheek, rising and falling as he breathed. A perfect pillow.

Ilya's arms tightened around him a little as he pressed a kiss to the crown of Shane's head. "I wouldn't dream of being anywhere else."

Shane smiled a little, drifting to sleep listening to the sound of Ilya's heartbeat.

He woke up to the sound of his alarm, cold and alone. It didn't take very long for him to realise Ilya was gone. The only evidence he'd been there at all was a used condom in Shane's bathroom trashcan and three texts sent in the middle of the night.

Ilya Rozanov

Today 03:08

shane

something came up and i had to leave

i am sorry

Today 06:55

That's fine, Ilya. I hope everything is okay!

I had a lot of fun last night.

Can't wait to see you again after break!!

Ilya leaving in the middle of the night alone (probably) wouldn't be enough to make Shane completely freak out. Except, Shane didn't hear from him *once* during spring break.

Shane really tried not to jump to conclusions, but he was a jumper. It was just who he was. By the second day of unanswered texts, he was already spiraling. He was anxious and jumpy and constantly checking his phone. His screentime had literally never been higher because he spent half the time he was awake staring at his messages with Ilya, willing him to say *something*. He never did, and Shane spent his entire break miserable.

By the time he made it back to his apartment, he'd gone through every possible explanation and come up with the three most realistic reasons why Ilya wasn't responding. None of them were good. One, Shane had completely misinterpreted Ilya's feelings towards him and he was distancing himself because he thought it was weird that Shane invited him over. Two, something was actually wrong with Ilya or his phone. Or three, Ilya was ignoring him because he only wanted Shane for sex.

He wasn't sure which he wanted to be true. He looked like an idiot no matter the outcome.

Shane knew Rose suspected something was up at dinner because he was subdued, twitchy, and stuck in a constant cycle of flipping his phone over and then shoving it back in his pocket, but she didn't ask. She'd just looked at him sadly and wrapped him in a tight hug he hadn't even realised he needed. Then, she forced him to watch some trashy reality TV show with her.

After she finally let him leave, he took a long shower with water so hot it was practically scalding. He put on his favorite pajama pants, a worn cotton shirt that was two sizes too big, and a thick pair of socks. He brushed his teeth and did his skincare. He tried to make himself feel as normal as possible.

It worked for about as long as it took for him to crawl into bed and check his phone for the last time before bed. A notification from Ilya sat on his home screen, timestamped from twenty-one minutes ago. Shane clicked on it without hesitation.

Ilya Rozanov

Sunday 16:41

Just got back to Ottawa and my parents decided we're going to the cottage for the week apparently. Guess who gets to drive!

An extra two and a half hours. Yay! Just what I needed!

Wednesday 10:20

Hope you're having a good break :)

Can't wait to see you when I get back!
I'm kind of counting down the days, to be honest.

Thursday 23:11

Hey, I haven't heard from you in a while. Just checking in to make sure you're okay.

Yesterday 08:24

Ilya?

Today 22:17

come over

His stomach dropped. What the fuck? A full week of radio silence broken by *this*? No acknowledgement of Shane's texts. No apology or explanation. Just two words, asking him to come over as if nothing had happened.

Jesus. That was a clear enough answer as to why he'd been ignoring Shane over break. He had never felt this fucking embarrassed in his life. He'd let Ilya in, thinking that they were on the same page. Guess not.

Fuck.

Whatever. Shane left him on read and definitely didn't cry himself to sleep.

"Shane, are you home?" Rose shouted from her room.

"On the couch!" Shane shouted back. He'd been sitting in their living room for hours, half-heartedly watching a documentary about penguins and constantly checking his phone for a text from Ilya that would never come.

It was probably pathetic. It was *definitely* pathetic, but Shane couldn't bring himself to care. He was just... sad. It wasn't until they weren't talking that Shane realised just how embedded Ilya had become in his life. They'd been seeing each other at least once a week for a long time and for the last few months, they'd been texting pretty much constantly. They fucked, but Shane had also thought they were *friends*.

That was the worst part. Without Ilya, Shane was so lonely. He still had his other friends, but the absence of Ilya was massive. It felt like he was missing an organ or something. His body and brain were functioning, but nothing felt quite right.

Ilya had texted and messaged him on Snap, but Shane was still angry and hurt and confused. He couldn't figure out what Ilya wanted from him. Before break, he'd essentially been acting like Shane's *boyfriend*. Now, he couldn't even figure out if Ilya liked Shane for who he was or

for what he could give. Did Ilya want him or did he want to get laid? Was Ilya only talking to him because he was easy?

Ilya Rozanov

Sun, March 15 at 22:17

come over

Monday 18:28

hollander

Thursday 20:52

shane

come over please

i miss you

Yesterday

Ilya Rozanov

Snap photo sent and opened.

shane

i know that you're reading these

please just come over

please

The photo had been the final nail in the coffin. Shane had felt physically ill seeing it. It wasn't a nude, but it was close enough that it confirmed all of Shane's worst fears. He didn't reply. He wouldn't have been able to figure out what to say even if he wanted to.

And yet, he still sat on the couch, hoping that Ilya would text him again. Because he was determined to make himself miserable.

"Okay, I need your honest opinion," Shane finally managed to tear his eyes away from his phone. Rose was standing in front of the TV wearing an equally sparkly and revealing dress. She was also wearing a clay face mask and the otter slippers Shane had bought for her seventeenth birthday, back in high school. Her hair was twisted up in some contraption that was supposed to give her curls and wrapped in a silk scarf. "Is this too much?"

Shane wasn't exactly sure how to answer that correctly, so he stuck with, "The dress looks really good."

"I know it looks good, but do you think it's too... Like, do I actually *pull it off* or does it just look good?"

"Rose, I have literally no clue what that means."

Shane felt his phone buzz. His heart rate leaped, but when he checked, it was just a mass email from the university. He cleared it away.

Rose rolled her eyes fondly, "I don't know why I even bother asking you anymore. You're terrible at fashion."

"I don't need fashion knowledge to know when you look good?"

"Okay, suck-up." Rose wandered into the kitchen and grabbed a metal straw from a drawer and a can of Coke from the fridge. She glanced at Shane to make sure that it was okay and he gave her a thumbs up. It's not like Ilya was coming over to drink them anyway.

Shane flipped his phone over. His notification center was empty. Obviously, because his phone hadn't buzzed. He sighed, and looked at Rose again. "Why are you freaking out about your outfit?"

"This dress was *expensive*. I bought it over break on a whim but now I'm having second thoughts." She took a careful sip from her straw, probably trying to avoid smudging whatever mask she was doing. "I'm going out with Sveta and Miles tomorrow night, so I figured I'd wear it then but... I don't know. I feel a bit self-conscious."

"It looks fucking great. You should totally wear it."

Shane saw the exact moment the idea entered her mind. She was taking a slightly dejected sip when her entire face brightened. She set the can down on the coffee table and fixed Shane with a determined smile that he knew meant he was doing whatever she asked, no matter how hard he protested. "Okay. I'll wear the dress if *you* agree to come out with us."

"Ha. No way. I like the dress, but not that much."

"Come *on*." Rose whined. "You never leave the house."

Shane spluttered. "I leave the house! I hang out with J.J. and Hayden all the time!"

"Jackie told me you blew them off the other day." Rose crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow. Shane was suddenly reminded of his mother. "They haven't seen you in at least two weeks."

"I really never would have introduced you two if I knew you were just going to *conspire against me*." Shane rolled his eyes and checked again. Still nothing.

"That's the third time in less than five minutes you've checked your phone. What's going on?"

"Nothing."

"Shane. Honey." Rose sat gently on the couch next to him and took his hand. "You're not okay. You haven't been okay since break. What happened?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Shane said, stubbornly refusing to look at her.

"Did something happen with Ilya?"

"It's fine. Leave it alone."

"Shane," Rose said sadly. "Remember what we talked about? Please don't shut us out. Spend some time with your friends. It doesn't have to be me. We *all* miss you. And who knows?" She nudged him with your elbow. "Maybe you'll forget about it."

It was a low blow, but it was effective. Shane let out an almost endless sigh. "Fine. *Fine*. But I'm not going to the party."

Shane went to the party.

It had taken very little peer pressure in the end. He'd surprised both himself and Rose with how quickly he agreed. He wanted to get out of the house and stop staring at an empty notification center. Maybe get a little drunk. At the very least do *something* with his time.

He let Miles and Rose use him as a dress-up doll at the pregame for about twenty minutes before he made them decide. The outfit they chose was actually pretty simple— just a dark henley that Shane was pretty sure was a size too small and his regular jeans. Rose wore the dress, and Miles wore a glittery crop top. They tried to convince him to let them do his makeup so he would match the theme which was just *sparkly*, but that was out of the question.

...Until about five minutes before they left, when the alcohol actually hit his system and he was suddenly in a much more agreeable mood. When he said yes, Miles had let out a noise so high pitched that Shane was concerned for his hearing. They didn't have enough time to do any real eye makeup, but Shane let them cover his cheeks, nose, and collar bones in some sort of glitter.

They walked to the party, since the house hosting it wasn't far enough from their apartment to justify an Uber and Shane was decidedly *not* on designated driver duty tonight. By the time they turned up, it was in full swing. The bass was so loud that Shane could feel the ground shaking before they even walked in. If Shane had been sober, he would have turned and walked away, but alcohol had always made him braver, so he went in.

Immediately, the three of them went to get more alcohol. Carter Vaughn— one of Shane's first year floormates— was manning the table and he genuinely choked on his drink when he caught sight of Shane.

"Ho-ly *shit*, Hollander. You're here! I didn't know you went outside!" He poured a few things into a cup and then thrust it into Shane's hands. "Take that. It's strong, you'll like it."

Shane chugged it. It tasted like hand sanitizer and battery acid and death. Carter's face went from shocked to impressed to genuinely terrified by the time Shane was done.

"Wow." Miles clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Maybe you should be depressed more often if it gets you like this. You're *fun*."

Rose flicked Miles's forehead and grabbed a cup. "He's fun normally too. I'm going to go find Sveta, can you babysit him?"

"I don't need a babysitter," Shane grumbled. He grabbed another cup. "I'm a grown-up."

Miles grabbed a can of something and linked his elbow with Shane's. "I've got him. We'll go dance."

Dancing with Miles was always an experience. He was a lot handsier than Rose, often putting his hands on Shane and giving him no choice but to follow the beat of the song.

Miles dipped Shane, just for a second, but it was enough for him to catch a glimpse of the other side of the room. Enough to see that Ilya was here. Even upside down and blurry, Shane's eyes still found him immediately. He was standing against a wall on the outskirts, looking out at the crowd. Looking at *Shane*.

Their eyes locked from across the room. Shane's breath caught and he stumbled, almost taking both him and Miles to the ground.

"You okay?" Miles shouted in his ear. The hands he had on Shane's waist tightened a little.

"I'm good," Shane shouted back. He didn't look away from Ilya. "Let's dance some more, yeah?"

Shane didn't recognize a single song but he still danced because he knew that Ilya was looking. He wanted Ilya to see him. To want him. Miles might as well have not been there. Shane could have been dancing with anyone, and he'd still be thinking about Ilya.

Every single time Shane looked back at him, Ilya was staring. He didn't move. He didn't talk to anyone. He didn't look away. He just held his cup and watched Shane and Miles dance with an unreadable look on his face.

Bit by bit, Shane felt his confidence grow. He felt good. He felt *hot*. He could totally talk to Ilya. Who cares if he was technically here to try and get over him? Certainly not Shane!

"I'm going to go talk to someone," Shane shouted at Miles. He didn't wait for a response before cutting across the crowd. It took him longer than he wanted to. The crowd was dense and Shane was more than a little unsteady on his feet. Ilya had plenty of time to walk away, but he didn't. He watched Shane struggle his way across the room the same way he'd watched him dance.

Finally, Shane made it out of the thick of the crowd. He stopped a few inches in front of Ilya. He didn't know what to say, so he just opened his mouth and said the first thing that popped into his mind.

"So..." He tried to sound as confident and suave as possible. Not that Ilya would be fooled by any amount of fake bravado when he knew Shane so well. "You come here often?"

Ilya let out a long, deep sigh. Shane could barely hear him over the music when he asked, "What do you want, Hollander?"

"What do you mean what do I want?"

Ilya's jaw clenched. "You have not responded to my texts."

"You didn't respond to me first. I thought that was just what we were doing now." Shane knew he sounded bitchy and hurt, but he was honestly too drunk to care.

"I could not..." Ilya shook his head and downed the rest of his cup. He threw it on the floor somewhere. Normally, Shane would have complained but right now, he had bigger problems. "Never mind. It does not matter. Where is your *boyfriend*?" He spit the word like it was a slur.

Shane had literally no idea what he was talking about. He squinted up at Ilya, who was frowning. Or maybe scowling was the right word. Shane wasn't sure, but he knew he didn't like it. Ilya always looked so much nicer when he was smiling. "Uh, I'm pretty sure you're standing right in front of me?"

"What?" Ilya looked genuinely confused, which made Shane confused. "What about the guy you were dancing with? You two looked very... close."

Shane laughed. It came out as more of a giggle. "Miles? No. No, no, no. *Not* my boyfriend. He's Rose's gay best friend. Well, her *other* gay best friend. The one she didn't date. I also wouldn't date him. He's not as pretty as you are."

"What?"

"Not that he isn't pretty or anything." Shane corrected, looking around the crowd to make sure Miles wasn't in earshot. He'd disappeared from the dance floor which *thank god*. Shane would never hear the end of it if Miles had heard him say that. "He's just... not you. Why would I want him when I have you?"

Ilya's face split into a wide grin. It made his eyes sparkle. Shane wanted to kiss him very badly. "Oh. *Oh*. You are very drunk."

"I wouldn't say *very* drunk. I'm normal drunk." Shane corrected, stepping closer to Ilya until they were barely centimeters apart. Shane reached up and wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck. They were so close and he smelled so good. Shane breathed him in for a second. *Fuck*, he had missed him so badly. It had only been two weeks, but it felt like forever.

"I missed you too." Wait, had Shane said that out loud? Oops. Maybe he *was* very drunk. "More than you know."

Big hands settled on his waist, pulling him impossibly closer and holding him steady as he swayed a little.

"Hi." Shane was smiling so much his face hurt.

Ilya smiled back, his hand running up and down Shane's side. "Hi."

"We should... go back to my place. If you know what I mean."

"Yes, I think that's smart." Ilya's lips quirked. "You came here with Rose, yes?"

"Yeah. She fucked off with Svetlana forever ago though."

"You should text her that we're leaving, then."

Rose Landry

Today 00:47

Rosw

I meant Rosd

Fuck

ROSE

literally what do you want

I m going home

With Ilya

rozanov?

Do we know another one??

Ilya Rozanov is bringing me home :))))))

jesus

i thought this was supposed to be about getting over him?

actually you know what

idgaf

how drunk are you? scale of 1-10

Probably very

I am very ahppy

He was not ignoring me!

Where are you?

none of those texts were numbers

im smoking with sveta and miles

just let him bring you home

Cigarette?

weed

well miles and i are smoking weed

sveta has a cigarette

Unfortunately cigarettes are hot
Do not tell him that i said that

ok wow
you are so drunk
i am going to take great pleasure in making fun of you in the morning
please go home shane

Bye I love you!!!

"She says she's with Sveta and Miles." He showed Ilya his phone screen so he could read the messages.

"Since when do you find cigarettes hot?"

"Oh. Wait. Fuck. I wasn't supposed to tell you that." Shane turned his phone off. He pointed a chastising finger at Ilya. "Cigarettes are bad for you. Don't smoke cigarettes no matter how hot you look when you do it."

Ilya looked down at him with a fond expression. "You are so drunk. Wow. I think we should leave."

"Yes," Shane slurred, dragging out the S for an extra few seconds.

"How did you get here?" Ilya maneuvered Shane so they were standing side by side. He wrapped an arm around Shane's waist. "Car or Uber?"

"We walked."

"Oh great. *Walked*. The things I do for you."

Shane's feet felt heavy as they left the house. Ilya was supporting most of his weight, which meant that what should have been a ten minute walk took closer to half an hour. The air was crisp and easy to breathe. Shane was suddenly very aware of how his lungs were moving inside his chest. He stopped suddenly, pressing the hand not wrapped around Ilya's shoulders to his ribs.

"Come on." Ilya shook Shane gently. "We are almost there. I can see the building, I think. Don't freak out on me now. Just put one foot in front of the next one or whatever the fuck."

Shane looked up. Frowned. "It's one foot in front of the other."

"I do not care. Just do it."

Shane did it. It was a struggle— mostly to stay upright— but somehow, he made it. Walking into the lobby of the building felt like how Shane imagined winning Olympic bronze would

feel. Not quite as exciting as gold, but something noteworthy for sure. He half expected the late-night reception worker to stand up and clap for him.

Now that he was in the building, Shane's limbs started to protest. His legs barely worked, and his shoulder felt stiff and achy from how long he'd been holding onto Ilya.

"My joints are unionizing against me," Shane complained as he tried (and failed) to take another step. "I need to provide better working conditions. Better pay."

"Okay, Shane," Ilya chuckled. He was half-dragging, half-carrying Shane into the elevator and through what seemed like endless amounts of hallway until they finally stopped at Shane's door. Shane didn't remember giving Ilya his keys, but he had them and he was using them.

Shane blinked and he was in his bathroom, swaying as he gripped the sink with both hands. The tap was running. Why was he here?

A neatly folded pile of Shane's pajamas sat on the closed toilet lid. Okay. First step, change. Then... brush his teeth? That felt right. Then he should wash his face and do his skincare.

The new clothes were soft and fit him loosely. He went through his nightly routine as carefully as possible, but it was still a little sloppy— water ran down Shane's forearms, product dripped on the counter, hair managed to stick itself to his forehead.

"Drink this," Ilya insisted the moment Shane stepped out of the bathroom. He handed him a cup of ice water with a straw. Shane drank the whole thing in less than a minute, still standing in the bathroom doorway. When he handed the empty glass back, Ilya smiled. "Good. You're so good. You can go to bed now."

Shane took three steps forward and collapsed onto the bed face down. He turned his head a little to peer with one eye at Ilya as he settled down next to him. He'd changed into just his boxers and one of Shane's Centaurs hockey shirts that was a little too small on him. He looked tired and rumpled and gorgeous. "You're here. You didn't leave."

"Yes." Ilya nodded. "And I will still be here in the morning."

"Why?" Shane asked, frowning. Ilya didn't want him anymore, right? That was why Shane was drunk in the first place.

"What do you mean why?"

"I don't know why I'm asking. I want you to stay. I like you here."

Ilya brushed Shane's hair out of his eyes with gentle fingers. "I filled your water and put Advil on the bed table. You will probably need it in the morning."

"Mmm, thank you. Feels so nice," Shane muttered, his face still half smushed into the pillow. Ilya's hands had started running through his hair at some point. "I love you. So much. You take such good care of me."

Ilya gasped softly. His hands pulled away, which was terrible. Shane lifted his head and squinted at him. "What?"

"You... do not mean that."

"Yes, I do." Shane wrinkled his brow. "Why would I say it if I don't mean it? That's so mean."

"Shane."

"Ilya."

"Why are you telling me this?"

Some distant part of Shane's brain was *screaming* at him to shut up, but the alcohol had made him loose-lipped and honest. Ilya asked him a question, Shane was going to answer it.

"You're so good to me. Always. Even from the beginning when you were an asshole." Shane paused. Frowned a little. "I think I loved you then too. It's been so long, I've kind of forgotten who I am without being in love with you. Isn't that funny?"

"Oh," Ilya put a hand over his mouth. He was looking at Shane like he'd never seen him before.

"Do you love me back? I've never been sure."

"You really have to ask?"

Shane sat up on his elbows. Or, he *tried* to sit up on his elbows but he was too wobbly to hold himself up. He fell back against the pillow after a few seconds. "Of course I have to ask. I'm scared of you."

"You're scared of me?" Ilya sounded a little horrified, which was how Shane knew what he said didn't land the way he'd intended it to. The alcohol had killed the filter in Shane's brain that he ran everything he said through so he didn't come off too weird or say the wrong thing.

"No. That's not right." Shane smacked his lips once. His mouth felt a little dry. "I want more with you. That's scary. But I don't want more more than I want what we already have. Also scary."

"Oh." Ilya said again. Then, he whispered something in Russian, brushing a knuckle across Shane's cheekbone.

"Nooo," Shane complained. "I don't speak Russian yet."

"Yet?"

"I'm gonna learn. I promise."

Ilya swore softly. He whispered the same thing over and over again. Ya teeb-ya loo-blue. Shane tried to commit the way the words sounded to memory so he could look it up later. But right now, he just closed his eyes and let himself drift to sleep with Ilya's words in his ear and hands in his hair.

When Shane woke up, he immediately regretted it.

His head was absolutely *pounding* and his mouth was so dry he could barely swallow. He tried to open his eyes, but even the small amount of light filtering in through his curtains was enough to make his headache flare.

Was this a hangover? Shane had heard that they were bad, but he honestly thought people were exaggerating.

His water bottle was sitting on the bedside table, next to a half-empty bottle of Advil. He grabbed the Advil first, shaking four out into his palm. Was that medically advised? No, but Shane was generally good about taking the proper dosage. Taking four one time on an empty stomach couldn't hurt him more than his headache already did. Ice clinked around inside his water bottle when he picked it up.

The cold water was a shock to his system. It made him feel very awake very quickly. He swallowed the pills and proceeded to drink probably half the bottle. It did very little to quench his thirst.

Ilya was gone. Shane was kind of upset to realise that— mostly at himself for hoping he would've stayed. Why would he? They hadn't spoken in over two weeks. They weren't friends. And, if Shane's memories of last night served him right, Shane had fucking told Ilya that he *loved him*.

Fuck. Shane rubbed a hand over his face. This was a fucking nightmare. There was no coming back from this. It was over. He'd ruined everything even more somehow.

He brushed his teeth and did his morning skincare in a daze. He felt foggy and irritable and a little bit nauseous. He wanted some sort of breakfast, but the idea of having to cook right now made his skin crawl.

Shane's feet were dragging as he walked towards the kitchen. He stopped abruptly in the doorway because *Ilya* was there, standing over the sink washing dishes. The kitchen smelled like coffee and toast and fruit.

"Oh my god," Shane said. Ilya flinched, whipping around with his hands still covered in soapy water. "You're still here."

"Yes. I am still here. I made breakfast? And coffee?"

Shane stared for a second, his mouth slightly open. "Hangovers don't cause hallucinations, right? Like this is really happening?"

"Yes, this is happening. Do you, ah, maybe remember anything from last night?" Ilya asked tentatively as he grabbed the closest dish towel to dry his hands.

Shane remembered. He *definitely* remembered. He could barely look Ilya in the eyes knowing what he'd said last night. But... if Ilya thought he didn't remember what he said, maybe he could get out of this conversation.

"No," Shane lied. To help sell it, he furrowed his brow, "Did I do something embarrassing?"

"Nothing. You were just... forward, maybe. I assumed you were very drunk."

Oh, Shane had never felt more relieved in his *life*. Not only was Ilya not making him talk about it, he was giving him the perfect out. Shane laughed awkwardly, "Ilya. That totally *is* embarrassing. How drunk?"

"For you? Drunker than I ever expected you to get. For another person?" Ilya gave a so-so gesture. "Maybe like 6/10 drunk? It would not be so impressive if you were not so boring."

"Don't make fun of me when I'm hungover," Shane complained, holding his head.

"Who said I was making fun? I was not making fun," Ilya said, completely seriously. "You know I like your boring, I say it like a million times."

"Just shut up."

Shane hovered awkwardly in the hallway for a second, before Ilya seemed to remember he had been doing something before Shane walked in. He shut the sink off and put the towel down, gesturing to a chair, "Sit. Please."

Two places were set. Both had water and bowls of cut up fruit and toast, but only one had eggs. Ilya sat in front of the eggs. Shane sat on the other end, looking between the plates. "You didn't make me eggs too?"

"Do you want them?" Ilya's eyes widened. "You can take my eggs. I do not mind."

"No, it's fine. I really *don't* want eggs, I was just surprised you didn't make the same thing for both of us."

"I noticed you do not like... texture, sometimes. I figured a hangover would make you picky."

Shane immediately felt his eyes burn. He'd never felt as *seen* as he did with Ilya. Before he even really knew what was happening, a sob was building in his throat. He tried to take a few calming breaths, but they didn't work because he was already crying.

Ilya's face *dropped*. He was on his feet instantly, staring at Shane as he cried looking half confused and half absolutely crushed. "Shane? Are you okay?"

"It's fine," Shane choked out, wiping tears away. "Give me a second. I'll be fine."

"Did I do something?"

"You didn't. Well, I mean you *did* but it wasn't anything bad."

"What?" Ilya asked, his voice desperate and confused. He'd abandoned his chair, hovering awkwardly at Shane's side.

Shane felt his bottom lip wobble a little. "You're being so nice."

"You are crying because I am *nice*?"

"Shut up. This is so embarrassing," Shane turned away from him, desperate to try and regain *some* dignity. "Please don't look at me."

Ilya didn't say anything else. He just settled a gentle, grounding hand on Shane's shoulder and let him cry silently to himself. It was the right thing to do, which only made Shane cry harder. Fuck, he was being so *perfect* and Shane's entire body ached *so bad*.

Eventually, Shane managed to get a hold of himself. He took a few shaky breaths and turned back around. Ilya wordlessly handed him a glass of water, which Shane drank half of it one go.

"You are okay?" Ilya finally asked, sitting on the floor next to his chair. Something about how he moved was still awkward. His hand moved to Shane's knee.

"Yes, I'm so sorry." Shane's voice was nasally, which was how he knew he looked a fucking *mess*. His eyes were probably bloodshot and puffy. "I'm just... having a hard week. I wasn't expecting you to be so nice to me."

"I'm sorry for not texting over break. It's not because I don't like you anymore or whatever you think."

"I didn't think that," Shane lied. It shouldn't have surprised him that Ilya was able to see right through him. He'd always had that innate ability. It's what drew Shane to him in the first place, as much as he hated to admit it.

"I know you, Shane. I know you were worried. I do not know exactly what you thought, but I know the truth will help. I was..." Ilya inhaled shakily. "I had to go back to Russia for a bit. My father passed."

Woah. Shane was *not* expecting that. "What?"

"Yes. He had dementia. Long time coming, but I had to get a last minute flight back to Russia and it was a mess."

"*Fuck*, Ilya. I'm so sorry."

"It is fine. He was not a good father. Or man."

"Still, that was your *dad*." Shane paused. Frowned. "Shit, I was ignoring you. Your dad literally just died and I was ignoring you."

Ilya shrugged awkwardly. "You did not know. I did not want to tell you over text."

"So, what?" Shane huffed. "You just let me assume you were being an asshole?"

"I... Yes?"

"*Ilya*."

"I am sorry. It was perhaps not my best moment."

Shane sighed. "Well, I forgive you. There were extenuating circumstances."

"What is... ex-ten-u-ay-ting circumstances?" Ilya asked, sounding the word out slowly.

"It's an additional factor that makes an action, like, less bad. Sort of like a valid excuse."

"Okay. And my dad dying counts as that?"

"Obviously," Shane shook his head, exasperated at Ilya's willingness to make himself the villain in this situation. His hungover brain protested the movement, making him wince.

"You are okay?" Ilya asked immediately, a worried crease between his brow. The hand he had on Shane's knee slid further up his leg, just for a second. "I left you Advil. You took it, yes?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. You know you don't need to take care of me, right?"

Ilya looked unimpressed. "Have you been hungover before?"

"Well, no but—"

"Then, I am going to take care of you. I want to," Ilya said, his tone leaving no room for argument. Not that Shane would have. "Now eat your toast."

Shane ate his toast, unable to keep a small smile off his face.

April

Wednesdays were by far Shane's least favorite day. He had four different classes that were scheduled in a way that made it impossible to maintain his typical daily routine. His alarm was set for half an hour earlier than he liked it to be to account for the 8 AM. The break between his first and second class was just slightly too short to go home, but it just so happened that Wednesday was the day the cleaning staff came into the library. Whatever floor cleaner they used always gave Shane a migraine, so he couldn't sit in the library. His two

hour lab went from noon until two, ending any chance for him to eat lunch at his normal time. And, to top it all off, he still had another lecture at four. It sucked. He hated it.

The only bright spot was the poke place inside the student center. By the time he got out of his lab, there was practically no line. It wasn't the greatest quality, but it was affordable and good enough to tolerate.

However, it also meant having to be inside the student center, which basically had a constant stream of chatty people going in and out. Seats weren't hard to find, but somewhere *quiet* was. Shane had given up actually trying to be productive during this break several Wednesdays ago. Now, he just sat in a corner with his poke bowl, scrolled on his phone, and listened to the conversations happening around him. The two girls at the table on one side were debriefing on a horrible date one of them had, and the guy on the other side was having a very heated argument on the phone about what pasta shape was best.

The doors swung open and half a dozen people flooded inside. Shane glanced up for a half second and saw him immediately. He didn't even have to look for Ilya. His eyes just found him. He was standing in the foyer, holding two cups of coffee and turning in circles as he scanned the room.

When spotted Shane, his face lit up. He crossed the room in a few strides, his eyes never leaving Shane's. He stopped in front of his table and smiled. "There you are."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes." Ilya held out one of the coffees for Shane. Their fingers brushed as Shane took it. "I am always looking for you."

It was so ridiculously cheesy, but Shane could feel himself swoon a little. He took a sip from his coffee (perfect again) to try and hide the goofy smile taking over. It didn't work.

"What are you doing today?" Ilya asked.

"I had two classes this morning. I came here for lunch." Shane gestured to his empty bowl. "Then, I have one more class in... about fifteen minutes. After that, I was probably just going to work out and finish my readings for the week."

"You major in... sports, correct?"

Shane shrugged. "Sports medicine. Officially, kinesiology."

"Does that give a lot of readings?"

"Yes, but I have less than usual this week because I have a few papers due in two weeks. I think my professors are lightening the workload to give us more time to work on that."

"And your lecture?"

"Cardiopulmonary Exercise Pathophysiology."

Ilya stared at him blankly for a few seconds before saying, "I know maybe... one of the words you just said."

"It's kind of hard to explain, to be honest. I'd love to try but..." Shane checked his watch. "Shit. I have to go."

"Oh." Ilya blinked, looking as disappointed as Shane felt. "Okay, that is fine."

He didn't want to go. Like, he *really* didn't want to but this professor was an asshole. He was an amazing lecturer, but he made attendance a significant portion of the grade in a class with very few assignments. Shane had a 4.0 to maintain and he wasn't about to let something as silly as missing a class fuck with that. Still, Ilya had just shown up. Shane wanted to extend their time together as much as possible. Ilya couldn't exactly come to class with him but... maybe he could walk with Shane to his class? People did that all the time.

"Do you..." Shane looked away, swallowed, and gathered his courage. "Do you want to walk with me?"

Ilya's smile widened. Shane wasn't sure how that was even possible. "Of course. I would like nothing more."

"Cool. Cool." Shane stood abruptly, wincing at the horrible scraping sound his chair made against the floor. He grabbed his bag and swung it over one shoulder, then the other.

They walked side by side through the foyer, close enough that their shoulders kept bumping. Ilya held the door open for him, talking about how Boody had managed to piss off Cassie, Lisa, *and* Wyatt simultaneously. It was a funny story, but Shane was probably laughing a little too hard.

As they walked down the steps, the urge to hold Ilya's hand hit him suddenly. It wasn't something he was used to. He'd never wanted to hold someone else's hand before, especially not in *public*. But now that he was thinking about it, he couldn't stop.

Fuck it, Shane thought. Holding hands was normal. People did that. Shane could do that. Before he could lose his confidence, Shane wiped his hand on his jeans to make sure it wasn't sweaty and tangled his fingers in Ilya's.

Ilya stopped walking and stared down at their joint hands in shock. Fuck. Shane had been too presumptuous. Of course Ilya wouldn't want to hold his hand out in public. He tried to pull his hand away, an apology already halfway out of his mouth, but Ilya's grip tightened.

"You... would like to do this?"

"Yes." Shane said, probably too quickly. "Unless you don't want—"

"Of course I want to hold your hand." Ilya chuckled, squeezing Shane's hand softly. "What made you think I would not?"

"I was just... making sure?" Shane practically squeaked.

Ilya chuckled again, shaking his head as if he couldn't believe what Shane was saying. "Only you, Hollander."

They walked the rest of the way to Shane's class hand in hand. Shane's heart rate was going so fast it kind of felt like he was dying. What a way to go. Death by holding hands with the guy he's been fucking for almost three years.

Shane had taken this exact route many times. He knew it was a seven and a half minute walk exactly. But with Ilya making jokes at his side and holding his hand, it felt like he'd blinked and suddenly his class building was coming into view. Shane slowed to a stop near the stairs, trying to ignore the disappointment growing in his chest. "Uh. This is my class, so..."

"Oh. Okay." Ilya frowned a little, but didn't let go of Shane's hand.

"Thank you for the coffee. And for walking me here."

"Any time." Ilya said, incredibly seriously. Like he actually *meant* that he'd do this for Shane whenever.

For a moment they just stood there, holding hands in silence. Shane didn't want to let go, but he also knew he had to go to this lecture otherwise he'd lose attendance points.

"Do you want to come over for dinner tonight?"

"Yes." Ilya replied instantly.

"Oh. Cool. I can cook or we can order something. Whichever is good."

"We can figure it out tonight. You are almost late."

Shane blinked and checked his watch. His class started in two minutes. Shane dropped Ilya's hand. "*Fuck*." He started up the stairs, but before he opened the door, he turned around and shouted, "I'll text you, okay?"

"Okay." Ilya shouted back. "Have a good lecture."

Shane was a minute late to class, but not even a mildly disappointed glance from his professor could make him care.

One of the down sides of being in a major that often required a lot of homework was that Shane genuinely didn't know what to do with himself when he had no work to do. With finals coming up, his readings and assignments had both been scaled back dramatically. Shane managed to finish his entire week of work by Monday, leaving four full days to do... nothing.

He genuinely hadn't had time to do nothing since spring break. Rose had told him to try and relax for once, but by Tuesday afternoon, Shane was kind of going insane. The worst part was that there was really only one person he wanted to see, but he didn't know how to reach out. They were stuck in a weird place. Not quite boyfriends, but not *not* boyfriends. Shane could see the light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak, but he didn't know how to get there without being weird.

He typed and retyped a text about a dozen times before he realised he was overthinking it. It was just a text. He could send a text asking someone to hang out.

Ilya Rozanov

Today 14:43

Are you busy?

ugh

yes

i am literally drowning in homework

i now understand why you like the library so much

very quiet

good place to do evil homework

You're in the library?

unfortunately

i have been here for hours

hours shane

i think i might be going insane

Hours? How long have you been studying?

Have you eaten?

i get to library at 9 AM

because i think "where do smart people go"

and of course smart = you

i ask myself what would shane hollander do

and the answer is library

so i go to library

and i do not leave

Jesus, Ilya. Not even I'm that dedicated.

Come over to my apartment. I'll make you food and help you study if you want.

The walk and the food will be good for your brain. You'll feel nice and refreshed.

Plus, I have caffeine.

you do not need to bribe me to come over to your apartment

knowing that you will be there is convincing enough on its own

i am on my way now

Shane wasn't sure what Ilya would want to eat. He didn't have a lot of traditional snack foods, and he assumed that Ilya would want to eat something quickly and then get back to his assignments. A sandwich maybe? But what kind of sandwiches would Ilya like? Shane had really only seen him eat breakfast and snack foods before. A breakfast sandwich might work, but it didn't feel *right*.

Then, suddenly, Shane remembered a conversation they'd had first year, back when they still had to use a communal kitchen. Ilya had made the whole floor smell like fish because he'd made a tuna melt. When Shane had showed up to bitch at him, Ilya had explained by saying it was his favorite food.

Shane was pulling up a recipe on his phone immediately, trying to match the picture on his screen to what he remembered Ilya's sandwich looking like. He went through a surprising amount of stress to find one that actually worked, only to realise he didn't have canned tuna. Or bread. Or even cheese. He didn't really eat that kind of stuff.

But *Rose* probably did. He dug through her food, successfully finding everything he needed. He also grabbed a bag of chips and one of the Cokes that were *still* in his fridge. He'd replace her stuff tomorrow. She would understand. Probably. Hopefully. She liked a romantic gesture. Shane was banking on that.

The sandwich was, thankfully, simple to make. He spent so long freaking out about what to make and how to make it that he almost ran out of time to finish it before Ilya showed up. Almost. The knock at the door came quite literally as Shane was transferring the sandwiches from the skillet to the plates. He threw some chips on the side and rushed to open the door.

"Come in," Shane grabbed his wrist and pulled Ilya through the apartment into the kitchen. "I made you a sandwich. It's quite literally fresh off the stove."

Ilya stared at the plates, and then at Shane's face. He looked awestruck, like he couldn't believe Shane had done something as simple as making him a sandwich. "You make me a tuna melt?"

"Yeah." Shane shifted his weight between his feet as Ilya took a step closer to him. "You said they were your favorite food, right?"

"Yes." Ilya got closer and closer until the small of Shane's back was pressed against the countertop.

"I hope I did a good job. I've never actually made one before, so I had to steal the ingredients from Rose and watch a TikTok video on how to make it. Did you know you can't watch TikToks unless you have the app? I didn't, but—"

"Shane," Ilya whispered, cutting off Shane's nervous rambling. Their faces were inches apart. "You are making this very hard."

Shane swallowed. He tried to look away, but Ilya put a hand on his jaw. "Making what hard?"

"Pretending that I am not in love with you."

Shane inhaled sharply. "*Holy shit.*"

Ilya pulled away instantly, panic written all over his face. Shane grabbed him by the back of the neck before he could get too far.

"I love you too." Shane pressed their foreheads together, laughing wetly. "*Fuck*, Ilya. I love you."

Shane barely got the words out before Ilya was kissing him. They were both smiling too much for it to last long. Shane pulled back first, resting his head against Ilya's shoulder. "I lied to you the other week. I totally remembered what I said when I was drunk."

"Yes," Ilya cupped the back of Shane's head. "I knew that you did."

Shane jerked back in surprise, but Ilya's grip on him didn't let him go far. "What? You knew? Why didn't you call me out?"

"I take all cues from *you*. You are sometimes very skittish, like baby deer. I did not want to scare you off with something this big. I wait until I am sure you are ready."

"Why now?"

"Because you hold my hand in public," Ilya said, pressing a kiss to Shane's forehead. "You invite me over to your apartment and make me my favorite sandwich I told you about two years ago." Another kiss, on Shane's cheekbone this time. "You worry about me when I do not respond to your texts." A kiss on Shane's jaw. Then another one on his nose. "You get *mad* when I do not respond to your texts."

"I wasn't mad you didn't respond, I was mad you just said come over. I mean, seriously, Ilya. You could have at least told me you would explain when I came over."

"Yes, yes. I was stupid," Ilya squeezed Shane's waist. "I know this. Svetlana yelled at me a lot."

"She's very smart. You should listen to her."

Ilya kissed him. They kissed and kissed and kissed until they were both smiling and laughing too much to continue. Shane was so giddy he felt high.

"I can't believe this is happening," Shane whispered. He kissed Ilya again, just because he could. "I've wanted this for so long."

"Me too."

"I was so scared before. I thought you didn't want me."

"I know. But how could I not want you?" Ilya asked, his thumb brushing Shane's collarbone. "You are... perfect for me."

Shane laughed. "I'm not perfect."

"I did not say you were. I said you were perfect *for me*."

Shane didn't know what the difference was, but he didn't argue. "How much work do you have left to do?"

"Fuck my homework," Ilya scoffed. "I do not care about grades. Not when I have you in my arms."

"I didn't know you were such a romantic."

"You want romantic?" Ilya raised an eyebrow. "I can give you romantic. Your freckles... they are beautiful. They take my breath." Ilya brushed his knuckles across Shane's cheekbones. "Especially when you blush like you are right now. So pretty."

"Oh," Shane breathed. He hadn't even realised he was blushing.

"I am going to take you on a date this week. Our first date."

"What about the diner last spring?" Shane asked. It had been right before summer break. Shane had accidentally stayed the night at Ilya's apartment. Instead of letting Shane run away in the morning, Ilya had taken him out for breakfast. It was really the first that Shane had let his guard down, and it had really been the catalyst to Shane finally realising the extent of his feelings.

"Bah. Does not count." Ilya waved a hand. "I will take you on a *real* date."

"Okay. Sure."

"Does Saturday work?"

Saturday did not work. Shane had plans with Hayden. "Yeah, I can do Saturday."

"Perfect. I will plan you the best date ever."

Shane cocked his head. "Setting the bar high."

"Of course," Ilya gave him a cocky smile. Shane wanted to kiss it off his face. "It is me. When have I ever done anything else?"

Shane opened his mouth to provide examples, but Ilya cut him off with a kiss. He wordlessly lifted Shane onto the counter, letting Shane wrap his legs around Ilya's waist. He moved to brace a hand on the counter, but touched something squishy but also somehow crunchy instead.

"Ew!" He yanked his hand away, looking down to see what he'd touched. Oh fuck. One of the tuna melts was completely crushed. "Fuck. I forgot about the sandwiches."

Ilya stood by what he said. He planned their first actual date completely by himself and Shane was totally, 100% okay with that. He wasn't freaking out at all. He didn't *need* to study menus and dress codes before going to a restaurant. He could totally turn up somewhere with absolutely no research done beforehand. That wasn't anxiety inducing at all.

Shane trusted Ilya. He knew intrinsically that whatever date Ilya had planned for them would probably be perfect. That didn't make the tiny, irrational part of his brain that somehow ruled over his body feel any better, though. He was practically shaking when he got in Ilya's car.

Ilya picked up on it immediately. Shane had barely buckled in before he asked, "You are having a panic attack already?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm totally calm."

"Right." Ilya looked amused. "You will like my plan. I promise."

Shane swallowed. Ilya pulled back onto the road. He took one hand off the wheel and tangled it in Shane's. Shane thought about letting go and giving him a lecture on road safety, but... honestly, he didn't care right now.

"Where are we going?" Shane asked, squeezing Ilya's hand.

"Why would I tell you? That would ruin the surprise."

Shane snorted. "Because I'm so well known for loving surprises."

"You will like this one," Ilya said again, squeezing back. It was oddly calming. Shane wasn't totally back to normal, but he could feel his nerves settling.

They hadn't been driving for very long when Ilya turned into a parking lot. He pulled into a spot and parked the car, looking over at Shane. "We are here."

"Already?"

Ilya didn't reply. He unbuckled and climbed out of the car. Shane was quick to follow, joining their hands as they walked towards the building which was... a skating rink.

Shane stopped short in the middle of the parking lot. "What? Why are we here?"

"There is free skate today. I thought we could go and then have dinner at the falafel place across the street. You have been there, yes?"

He nodded, a little breathless. It was a perfect plan. An activity Shane was good at followed by a meal at a restaurant he already knew he liked.

"I love you so much," Shane whispered. Ilya smiled.

"I love you too."

The rink was almost entirely empty, leaving them plenty of space to fuck around. They had similar levels of skating ability, so they spent practically the entire time coming up with different ways to challenge each other. Ilya couldn't resist goading Shane and Shane couldn't resist a chance to win something. He hadn't been on rink ice since high school. He'd been so busy that the only skating he managed to do for the last few years was at the cottage when the lake was frozen over during winter break. Shane hadn't even realised how much he missed it.

They stayed until they were basically kicked off the ice by the staff. They made out a little in Ilya's car and then went to dinner. The food was incredibly good, but Shane would have eaten anything if it meant he got to eat it with Ilya. They tangled their ankles together under the table and kept making each other laugh so loud that the other people in the restaurant kept shooting them annoyed looks.

Ilya paid for dinner and opened Shane's car door for him. This time, his hand settled on Shane's mid-thigh as he drove. It wasn't inherently sexual, but Shane still felt goosebumps crawl up his skin. He pulled his phone out, carefully tilting the phone so Ilya wouldn't see his screen.

Rose Landry

Today 20:32

Are you home?

yes
why

Maybe don't be.
Please.

oh my god
shane
are you going to get laid

Yes. Please get the fuck out of our apartment.

OH MY GODDDDD

SHANE

THIS IS HUGE

that's probably what you said lolllll

i'm leaving now when should i come back

...

Maybe wait until tomorrow morning.

you dirty dog

i expect details when i get back
INTIMATE details

Ilya stopped the car at a light and looked over at him. The hand on Shane's thigh drifted higher. A lot higher. "What are you smiling about?"

"Nothing." Shane turned his phone off, put it on Do Not Disturb, and shoved it in his back pocket. "Just texting Rose."

"And what are you telling Rose? Anything *interesting*?"

Shane shrugged with one shoulder, trying to give off a cool and casual vibe. Based on the way Ilya's lip quirked, he failed. "Just inquiring about her whereabouts tonight."

Ilya just hummed in response. The light turned green. He kept his eyes fixed on the road, but his thumb started rubbing *dangerously* close to Shane's cock. It stayed there for the rest of the drive, never doing anything more than teasing him.

As they pulled up to Shane's building, Ilya glanced over again. "Where do you want me to drop you off?"

"Oh. You can..." Shane felt his face grow hot. "Rose doesn't use her parking spot. You can park there. If you want, that is."

Ilya smiled and turned into the parking lot. "Okay. I will park there."

The energy in the car had shifted. Both of them knew where this was heading now. Shane's body was practically buzzing with anticipation as he directed Ilya on where to park. He pulled into the spot in one smooth movement, one of his hands still on Shane's thigh. It shouldn't have been hot. He was just *parking*. And yet, Shane still felt his mouth go dry.

The sound of the doors unlocking pulled Shane out of whatever competency-induced haze he'd entered. Ilya was looking at him expectantly, so Shane unbuckled and stepped out of the car. Ilya wasn't too far behind him, which was expected. Still, Shane raised an eyebrow. "Presumptuous of you."

"Is it not traditional to walk your date to the door?" Ilya asked, taking Shane's hand and brushing a kiss against his knuckles. "I am being a gentleman."

"Well, alright."

They made their way into the building hand in hand. Neither of them spoke as they wandered through the halls and up the elevator. The silence felt comfortable, but the air was practically thrumming with anticipation. Shane had to put real effort into keeping his breathing steady as he watched the floor number go up.

Ilya dropped his hand when the doors opened. He walked closely behind Shane through the hallway, until they reached his apartment.

"So." Shane stopped with his back to the door. Ilya stopped as well, barely a few inches away from Shane. "This is me."

Ilya didn't respond. He just bent down and kissed Shane, soft and sweet. As soon as Shane tried to deepen it, Ilya pulled away. He chuckled at Shane's put out expression and raised an eyebrow. "Are you going to invite me in?"

"I don't know," Shane pretended to think about it as he dug his keys out of his pocket. "I don't put out on the first date."

"Because you put out sooner?"

"Fuck you," Shane rolled his eyes and pushed Ilya away from him.

"Yes," Ilya said as he moved to stand somewhere behind Shane. "That is my plan."

Shane shivered as he turned to unlock the door. His hands were visibly shaking. The key missed the lock. Ilya chuckled softly. Shane didn't need to see him to feel the intensity of his gaze. He missed again. And again and *again*.

After his fifth failed try, Ilya pressed himself against Shane's back, wrapping a hand around his waist. "Having a hard time?"

"Fuck you," Shane breathed out. Ilya chuckled again.

"We need the door open for that, yes?"

His big hand wrapped around Shane's wrist, guiding the key into the lock and twisting. The door opened.

"There we go," Ilya whispered, pushing Shane inside. He took a few dazed steps forward, hanging his keys on their hook and kneeling down to untie his shoes. Ilya just toed his off, never looking away from Shane.

The moment he was back on his feet, Ilya was pressing him against the wall. It was a much filthier kiss than the one in the hallway— more tongue than anything else. At some point, Shane's hands found their way into Ilya's hair and Ilya's mouth had found its way onto Shane's neck. He could feel Ilya's teeth scraping gently against his skin as he kissed his way down. Shane couldn't help the way that he moaned.

"Fuck, Ilya," Shane panted, tightening his hands in Ilya's hair. "More. Harder. Please."

Ilya pulled back, a devastating smirk on his face. "You want me to leave you marks?"

"Yes." Shane said, probably too quickly.

Ilya groaned. He sucked a mark deep into Shane's neck. Then he was pulling back and tossing Shane over his shoulder like he weighed *nothing*. Both of his arms were wrapped against the backs of Shane's thighs to stabilize him.

"What the fuck," Shane half-moaned, half-yelped. He felt more than heard Ilya's laugh as he moved them to the bedroom. Thankfully, Shane had left his door ajar because he did not want to think about the logistics of using the doorknob.

Ilya tossed Shane on the bed and was on top of him in an instant. The blatant display of his strength had managed to make Shane somehow *more* desperate. He was practically panting into Ilya's mouth, rolling his hips up to chase any friction.

"So impatient," Ilya chuckled darkly. He wrapped a hand around Shane's hip, effectively pinning him to the bed. "Good boys wait for what they're given."

"Fuck you," Shane gasped. He opened his mouth again, but Ilya chose that exact moment to yank Shane's shirt off. Shane expected him to toss it somewhere on the floor, but he took the time to fold it and place it on the bedside table. He did the same with Shane's pants and underwear, grabbing the lube from the drawer when he was finished. It would have been a kind gesture if he wasn't using Shane's chest as a fucking table.

When he was done, Ilya leaned in close to Shane's ear and whispered, "You waited your turn. *Such* a good listener."

It was condescending in all the right ways, especially since Ilya had yet to take off a single article of clothing. Shane physically shivered in anticipation. Ilya kissed him once and then spent the next Shane didn't even know *how* long systematically taking him apart. He kept Shane pinned in place and kissed his way down his chest, leaving countless hickeys in his wake. It only got worse when Ilya reached his thighs. He fingered Shane open carefully, but not gently, avoiding his prostate as intentionally as he avoided his cock. Shane was openly sobbing and begging by the time Ilya decided he was done.

"So good," Ilya whispered, pressing a gentle kiss against Shane's hipbone. "Don't worry. I'll give you a reward."

Shane propped himself up on his elbows, glaring down at Ilya through his tears, "If you don't take your fucking clothes off soon, I swear to god—"

"Needy," Ilya said, disapprovingly. Still, he climbed off the bed and stripped quickly. Shane melted back into the mattress as he watched Ilya rip a condom packet open with his teeth.

"You shouldn't—" Shane's breath hitched as Ilya rolled the condom on, "shouldn't do that. It compromises the structural integrity."

"I am not doing my job well if you can still say words like *structural integrity*."

Ilya moved to climb back on top of him, but then paused. Instead, he grabbed Shane's legs and rested them on top of his shoulders. It wasn't the most comfortable position, but Shane stopped caring the moment he felt Ilya pushing in.

"Fuck, you feel—" Ilya cut himself off with a moan as he bottomed out. He leaned down, practically bending Shane in *half*, to kiss him. Then, he braced a hand on the bed and started moving.

It became apparent very quickly that Shane was not going to last. Nothing had touched his cock this entire time. Hell, Ilya had been inside him for barely five minutes and *still* he could already feel his orgasm growing and growing.

"Ilya," Shane whined in warning, nails digging into Ilya's shoulders to pull him closer. The position was incredibly unsustainable. Shane didn't care. "Ilya, I'm— *fuck*— I'm close."

"Good," he grunted. His thrusting had grown erratic— a telltale sign that *he* was close.

Shane reached down to wrap a hand around his cock, but Ilya grabbed his wrist and pinned it to the bed before he could. "No."

"*Ilya*," Shane begged. Sobbed, actually, because he'd started crying again at some point. "Please. Let me come."

"You can come without it," Ilya assured him, leaning down to lick the tears off of Shane's face. He was lucky Shane was so fucking horny that the hotness outweighed how fucking disgusting that was.

He was right, though. Shane didn't last much longer. When he finally came, it hit him like a fucking *truck*. It was unlike anything he'd ever experienced. Waves of pleasure cascaded over his entire body as he came so hard his vision blacked out for a second. Ilya fucked him through it, but he barely lasted a minute before he let out a strangled noise and stilled.

For a second, Shane wished he wasn't wearing a condom. The idea of feeling Ilya's cum leaking out of him was... *fuck*. Shane tucked that idea in the corner of his mind for another time.

Carefully, Ilya pulled out and lowered Shane's legs back to the bed. Shane couldn't stop the needy whine he let out at the loss. Ilya shushed him, and then proceeded to collapse directly on top of him. His weight felt nice, even if they were both oversensitive and gross. Shane could already feel a growing ache in his hamstrings from the strain, but he was too fucked out to care. That would be tomorrow's problem.

"We need to shower," Ilya said eventually. He rolled off of Shane and the bed. Shane followed. Or he *attempted* to follow. He wasn't very successful, because the moment he put pressure on his muscles, they promptly gave out from underneath him. Ilya watched him collapse back onto the bed with an unbearably smug expression on his face.

"Stop looking at me like that," Shane complained. "This is your fault."

"Yes," Ilya said, far too pleased with himself.

Shane tried to stand again, managing to take one step this time before he fell. Ilya was there to catch him. He quite literally swept Shane off of his feet, into a princess carry. Shane was not impressed. "This feels demeaning."

"Shh. I take your ability to walk, I carry you to the shower. Easy trade off."

"You took my ability to walk," Shane snorted, wrapping his arms around Ilya's neck. It was technically true, but the wording made Shane laugh. "That sounds like you put a curse on me or something."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "How do you know I did not?"

There was a beat of silence before both of them started laughing. Ilya carried Shane into the bathroom and supported him as they both showered. He could definitely stand up straight now, but he liked the feeling of Ilya's steady hands on him too much to say anything. It was very unlike him to accept help he didn't absolutely need. Maybe relationships really *did* change people.

When they stepped out, Shane caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. He couldn't help but gasp, "Jesus, Ilya. What the fuck did you do to me?"

"You look so pretty, yes?" Ilya asked, pressing a kiss to the back of Shane's neck.

"I look like I got mauled by a fucking bear."

"I would not call myself a bear," Ilya mused. "Though, bears are a symbol of Russia so not too far off."

Shane shook his head, tilting his neck to get a better look. Most of the bruises would be easily hidden by just putting clothes back on, but Ilya had put a few marks quite high up. "How am I going to hide these?"

"You do not."

"I'd like to maintain *some* dignity," Shane said dryly. Ilya dug his thumb into the bruise on Shane's hipbone, making him yelp.

They brushed their teeth together. Shane dug a spare toothbrush out from under the sink. When Ilya was done with it, he didn't throw it out or toss it haphazardly on the counter. He carefully placed it in the holder next to Shane's. The sight made him a little giddy. Real, tangible evidence that Ilya was here and staying. There were no more lines between what they were doing and Shane's life. He *was* Shane's life.

Shane put on a pair of briefs and tossed a pair of boxers at Ilya, who frowned at them when he caught them. "I have been looking for these forever."

"I've had them forever," Shane admitted. "I must have stolen them from you at some point."

He knew exactly what point he'd stolen them. Last November. He'd come in his underwear and adamantly *refused* to go home wearing them. Ilya had told him to go commando, but Shane had swiped those boxers from his drawer while he was in the shower.

"I liked these boxers," Ilya said, sliding them up his legs. "I am taking them back now. You can steal other clothes."

They climbed into bed. Shane *intended* to cuddle with him for a little, but the sex had clearly tired them both out because one moment, Shane was spooning Ilya in the dark and the next, light was filtering in through the curtains.

Shane had fallen asleep with his arms around Ilya. He'd *woken up* with his arms around Ilya. He pressed soft kisses against Ilya's shoulders until he groaned and turned around.

"Good morning." His voice was low and gravelly. Shane had never really gotten the whole "morning voice" thing until right now.

"Morning." Ilya moved to kiss him, but Shane pulled back. "There's no way I'm kissing you before we brush our teeth."

Breakfast was simple. They didn't bother to put more clothes on. Shane made a smoothie while Ilya made eggs. They worked around each other in the kitchen in silence. They ate on the couch next to each other. Ilya did the dishes. It was disgustingly domestic. Shane wanted to do this every day for the rest of his life.

When he was done with the dishes, Ilya returned to the couch and wrapped Shane in a tight hug, squishing him into the cushions. "I missed you."

"You were gone for like two minutes."

"And I missed you in those two minutes."

"Jesus, you're so sappy." Shane cupped Ilya's cheek. "I can't believe you're secretly a softie. Nobody is going to believe me when I tell them."

"No. You cannot tell. I have a reputation to maintain." Ilya whined.

Shane rolled them over so he was on top of Ilya and kissed him. It started sweet but did not stay that way for long. Ilya's hands dug into his hips as Shane slid his tongue into his mouth. Things started to pick up and then—

Keys jingled in front of the door. The lock clicked. *Fuck*. Shane had forgotten about Rose. He practically *threw* himself out of Ilya's lap and onto the furthest possible couch cushion. They made panicked eye contact, but the door was already half open before either of them could even form a thought on what to do. Shane closed his eyes and resigned himself to his fate.

Rose screamed and slapped a hand over her eyes the moment she caught sight of them. Shane thought that was pretty rich of her considering they were both at least partially clothed. He'd reacted a lot less dramatically to catching her in much more compromising positions with Svetlana.

"Jesus fuck, Shane," she yelled. "We share that couch!"

"We are not having sex on the couch," Shane said calmly. He briefly held his hand out to try and reassure her, but he dropped it because it felt like he was trying to soothe a wild animal.

"Now that I'm here you're not."

"There were no plans to have sex on the couch," Ilya assured her, sliding down the couch so he could wrap an arm around Shane's shoulders. "I was going to take him to bed. I have standards."

Rose peeked through her fingers. "You're not naked?" She dropped her arm. "Lame. I mean, thank god I don't have to see that, but lame."

"Sorry? I mean, you did ask for intimate details," Shane offered awkwardly. She glanced at him, and then physically did a double take.

"Shane, you look—" Her jaw dropped. "Holy shit, Rozanov. What did you *do* to him?"

"You should see what he did to me!" Ilya replied cheerfully, turning around to show her his back.

"You know you two are in a committed relationship, right? Like you don't need to prove anything."

"I know I do not *need* to," Ilya shrugged. "I want to. He is irresistible."

Shane flushed. "Ilya."

"What? It's true. You are."

"You don't need to *tell my friends that*," Shane said through gritted teeth.

Ilya— clearly not caring that Rose was still in the room— manhandled Shane back into his lap. "You like it."

"I do *not*." When he tried to climb away, Ilya just tightened the hands on his waist. Shane practically melted into his arms.

Rose made a horrified noise. "Oh my god. Please tell me you two aren't going to be that disgusting PDA couple."

Shane didn't get a chance to respond. He was too busy kissing Ilya.

End Notes

a lot of how i write shane is influenced by my own personal experiences as someone w/ autism and this fic is no exception. his early conversations with rose are closely based on conversations that i had with one of my close friends last year... she basically was like "let's put our thinking caps on" and then refused to elaborate further

initially this fic was a lot more ambitious and i cut a couple of really interesting scenes... i might make it a series and write the previous two and a half years of their relationship but i am not making any promises because i'm also working on something else right now on top of university and all the traveling i've been doing... it's a miracle i managed to get this fic done by the exchange deadline

i can be found on the following platforms!!

- [twitter](#)
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