

Man in the Mirror

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Man in the Mirror

by [RedwoodTobias](#)

Summary

The edges of the picture had begun to bend; Shane was like a firework on the very verge of a convulsive explosion. The skirting of the doorway and the hand there gripping it were each as white as the other, and although the phone in his pocket rang and rang Shane made no move to answer it. It had been ringing since he'd last been an idiot, around seventeen minutes ago- when he had sent that stupid fucking message to Ilya Rozanov: "We didn't even kiss".

Or, its 2014 and the NHL has returned to Vegas. Shane sends that text and falls head-first off the deep end with a bottle from the hotel's mini fridge. Ilya must try to bring him back.

Notes

Hi! If you're reading this, what a miracle! I've not written anything for A03, or in general really, for several years. I don't have abundant confidence in my capacity to write but something about this show has unearthed in me a strong desire to put words onto paper (or in this case, a screen) again.

I hope you enjoy! Let me know what you think in the comments. This gets a bit deep but who doesn't love a bit of angst? I'm just a gay man watching other gay men spiral.

Chapter 1: Chapter One

Vegas, June 2014

The edges of the picture had begun to bend; Shane was like a firework on the very verge of a convulsive explosion. The skirting of the doorway and the hand there gripping it were each as white as the other, and although the phone in his pocket rang and rang Shane made no move to answer it. It had been ringing since he'd last been an idiot, around seventeen minutes ago—when he had sent that stupid fucking message to Ilya Rozanov: “We didn’t even kiss”.

You fucked up freak.

His mind raced itself down a long corridor, within which every surface was black, and the floor felt sticky. There was a torrid taste in his mouth and tightly wrapped beneath his spare fingers was a bottle of vodka from the hotel's mini fridge. It went entirely against every facet of his being to drink to excess, but the bottle was already a third empty, and a heat was spreading up through his sternum.

What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, he thought miserably, although already settling like stones in the grooves of his hips were the ghostly hands of his arch rival. Their fingerprints seemed to have left indents in his skin that he could feel as depressions beneath his smart trousers. He was certain that they at least would follow him far from here, even if the vodka managed to flush out the rest of tonight’s memories. Thinking sickly of the last few hours, and of those hands, and of that room, Shane could only desperately crave Canada and the twin-sized bed in his parent’s home, the surrounding walls plastered with trophy display shelves and certificates. But he was not at home, and he was staring through the darkness at a king-sized bed, and the walls were bare and plain. Somewhere in the throng of the cityscape, his teammates were out partying, but Shane had forgone their company for Rozanov’s dark eyes and broad shoulders, and where had that left him?

We didn’t even kiss.

Jesus Christ. He thought, vision tunnelling as he lifted the bottle again to his mouth, and drank from it numbly. *Rozanov doesn’t talk to me for six months and then we fuck and I*

expect a kiss? Class fucking clown, Shane. Grade A fucking idiot.

He started forwards, still drinking, and stumbled sideways into a desk, knocking his wallet and keys off its surface. When was the last time he'd drunk alcohol? He'd already had some of Rozanov's. He stared down at the floor, unseeing, coughing thickly as the vodka swam down his throat. He could not recall the last time that he had eaten; these days, he rarely could. The vodka had nothing within which to seep but Shane's own marrow, and it was settling inside of him like oil on water. His phone rang again but his limbs were molasses and he could not force himself to answer it, to read the name at the top of the call-screen.

Instead, he slouched over to the window and slid down its cold pane. The room was still dark, and he sat, crowded against the glass, on the floor, for a very long time. All the while he was sipping the vodka, and with every minute that passed the world span faster and faster, and the heat in his stomach moved to warm the expanse of his torso and throat. Cotton wool seemed to have begun growing out of his ears, so dampened had become the quiet of his room. At some point he threw up, right into his own lap, and at some point, his phone stopped ringing.

Eventually he became aware of the knocking. An hour or two at least must have gone by since he had left Rozanov's room, but time itself was twisting, becoming a part of the furniture. It was, however, no more solid than he was, and he was paper thin, shuddering against the backdrop of Las Vegas's millions of blinking lights. Shane had thought that the city looked pretty from Rozanov's window, but from his own room, it was an alien world, full of people and things he did not understand.

"Fucking shut up?!" He groaned, almost to himself, when the knocking had not ceased, but in fact, grown more insistent after a few more minutes. He moved to take another sip of his vodka but the bottle was not in his hand. When he'd been sick he must have dropped it, and whatever had been left inside of it was now soaking rapidly into the carpet by the sole of his right shoe.

"Hollander? Open the fucking door." The disembodied voice startled Shane so much that he physically jumped. The intensity of its tone seemed to tear the very bile from Shane's teeth and he theorised quickly that he must be ill; that he was so ill in fact, that he was inventing the sound of Ilya Rozanov's familiar voice. Shane began to cry, and kicked at the bottle. It flew across the room and fractured into a shocking amount of pieces on the leg of a nearby chair. The knocking started up once more, even more furiously, permeated by Rozanov asking Shane to, "Open the fucking door please!"

“Go away!” Shane moaned into his hands. “Fucking go away!”. If by some insane chance, Rozanov really was behind that door, Shane definitely didn’t want to be seen by him like this.

“Open the door in the next minute or I go to reception and get key myself!” Rozanov threatened, his voice a clap of thunder. Shane’s throat tightened and his breaths came faster. His skin felt as though it had melted onto his bones and every clothed part of him itched obscenely. He was struck by the sudden urge to take his shirt off, and he began fiddling with the buttons; his fingers felt thick. Inside his head, in the black corridor through which his mind was *still* racing, he veered suddenly round a corner. A single thought sat there at the forefront of his brain.

I need help.

Shane needed someone to help him, because he could not do this right now. He could not be the big tough strong fucking man he was supposed to be. He couldn’t handle Rozanov’s indifference, he couldn’t handle himself. He found himself suddenly upright and halfway across the room, shirt billowing, fingers palming the bed’s duvet as he passed it, both mindlessly and for balance. When he reached the door, he missed the handle twice, but finally, he grabbed hold of it and yanked the door open wide. Rozanov really was there, in joggers and a white tee shirt, his shoulders heaving as though he’d recently completed a long run. His large hand was still raised as though ready to beat down the door. He was sweating, his forehead shining in the bright hallway light.

Shane cringed away from him, leaning inadvertently into the door. It swung on its hinges and hit the wall with a loud smack, dragging Shane with it. He crumpled to the floor and even Rozanov, star and captain of the Boston Raiders, wasn’t fast enough to stop him from falling.

“Fuck!” Rozanov exhaled, surprised, as he shot forwards through the doorway and almost barrelled the both of them over in his attempts to keep Shane from a complete wipe-out. They stayed like that for a strange moment, their eyes locked, Rozanov’s hands under Shane’s armpits. Rozanov’s mouth was ajar, as though the words he’d been preparing himself to say had deserted him. Shane could feel a pressure building in between his eyes, brought on, undoubtedly, from all the abrupt movement and he squinted. The room was moving. Rozanov had four faces, six. Shane felt himself go limp in his strong arms, head flopping uselessly into the crux of the other man’s elbow. Rozanov did not look angry, as Shane had been certain he had when the door had first opened. He seemed in a daze, flush with confusion and concern. Shane felt abject misery stirring in his chest. He hated this. He hated himself. He hated everything.

Six months. Six years.

He whined and the sound of it seemed to spur Rozanov into action. He dragged Shane far enough into the room to turn and shove the door closed behind them with his foot. Shane followed the dizzying line of his ankle as it emerged from the cuff of his trousers. He wasn't wearing socks.

"What the fuck is this, Hollander?" Rozanov hissed, his voice strained. He'd gotten one arm underneath Shane's knees and was hoisting him up into the air with a herculean strength. Something dribbled down the side of Shane's chin and he tasted vomit again on his tongue. He threw up suddenly and it was a testament to how much good-will Rozanov actually had, because he didn't drop him, even when regurgitated vodka slid over the toes of his trainers.

"I'm sorry," croaked Shane, and he really was. Rozanov set him down gently on the bed, the muscles in his arms flexing. He stood over Shane for a moment, tall and imposing, just looking at him, and then his eye caught the glint of the smashed bottle on the floor, alongside Shane's keys and wallet, and his cheeks depressed as though he was biting them.

"Do not- *fuck*. Did you- you *drank*?" Rozanov gestured vaguely at the carpet. Shane managed to sit up, but though his eyes followed the movement, he couldn't focus. Everything that wasn't immediately in front of him seemed to be stuck in a constant motion blur. "Did you drink all of it?" Rozanov's accent was thick.

He's upset, Shane thought dumbly, but he made no attempt to reply. He couldn't seem to think of any words.

"Hollander, did you drink all of it?" Rozanov was crouching down now, his hands on both of Shane's knees. Shane stared at him through blurry eyes and then shook his head slowly. He began to breathe in deeply through his nose as nausea suddenly clamped around his stomach. He gripped Rozanov's hands weakly with one of his own, and jammed his teeth together. He could feel himself shaking. Rozanov's face came slowly into focus and his eyes were black in the dark room. He was also breathing heavily, squeezing Shane's fingers. His hair was, as usual, curly but it was also unsettled, as it had been when Shane had last seen him. How far away that moment now seemed. His face was pale, a frothy grey, and his lips were parted and

white. "Breathe, Hollander!" He said after a few moments. "Breathe Shane. Come on. Breathe for me. Breathe slowly."

Shane hardly registered the use of his first name. He just held on tightly to Rozanov's hand and did as he'd been instructed. After an unknown length of time his shoulders slumped and he shuddered. "Fucking shit," he whimpered. "Fucking- I'm so sorry. I'm so--"

"Shhhh." Rozanov interrupted, bringing his other hand up to cup Shane's cheek. It must have been covered in sick and saliva and tears but Rozanov didn't seem to mind. Shane pushed his face into those long fingers and let them caress the space between his eye and his hairline until he felt as though he was on the precipice of sleep. He must have begun to lull forwards because Rozanov gave his cheek a soft squeeze and pulled back. Although he couldn't quite understand why, Shane knew in the depths of his heart that a line had now been crossed that had nothing to do with the threshold of his hotel room.

"You need shower. I think me too. I have sick on me, and I need to make sure you don't fall." His words made little sense to Shane besides the fact that *he'd* said them. *Ilya Rozanov is in my room. He didn't kiss me but he's in my room. He came to find me.*

"Okay," Shane nodded, voice cracking. He felt like a little boy.

Rozanov managed to get him up, and steered Shane on his wobbly legs towards the bathroom, taking as wide a berth as was possible around the glass on the carpet. He sat Shane down on the closed lid of the toilet and released him to turn on the lights and the shower. Blinking, half blind round the curve of his back, Shane caught sight of himself in the mirror and almost tumbled off the toilet in shock. He looked devastated. His tanned skin was ashen and oily, he'd sweated through his dress shirt, and thrown up on his trousers. There was an orange hue to his lips and the same colour followed the curve of his mouth down to his chin; vomit. His hair was a wild spasm of black and his eyes were blown out and rimmed with red.

Rozanov returned and leaned backwards on the sink's cabinet, blocking Shane's view of the mirror. He was *so tall*. Shane's mouth felt dry. "Yes, you look like shit Hollander."

"Don't- don't fucking *look* at me like that!" Shane felt the rough humiliation in his voice, his hackles raising like an animal's.

“Like what?” Rozanov shrugged, “Like you are going to fall over again? Like you are going to throw up on my feet again? Like what, Hollander?”

Shane swallowed and his throat felt constricted. The edge of the toilet seat was both a long way away and also digging into his thighs. He dragged a sticky hand down his face. “Like you care!” He choked out at last. “Like you actually fucking give a fuck!”

Rozanov snorted and simply moved to help Shane up again. He propped him wordlessly against the sink and began to take off his shoes and socks, then his shirt, then his belt. At last came Shane’s trousers and briefs. Shane just let him, raising each foot clumsily when Rozanov reached the trouser cuff. When he was stood there, entirely nude, and as vulnerable as he had ever been in his life, Rozanov just hugged him. He grasped the back of Shane’s neck with one hand, and held Shane’s torso against his own with the other. His stubble scraped the side of Shane’s ear and chest to chest as they were, Shane could feel Rozanov’s every breath as it inflated his lungs.

“I fucking care.” Rozanov said curtly, into Shane’s hair. Then he let Shane go again, and took him by the hand, leading him towards the shower. Shane had not heard him turn it on, or fiddle with the temperature. He sank into its embrace however when he tripped into the wide tray, catching himself against the opposite wall. Apparently sure enough that Shane wouldn’t find a way to kill himself in the next five seconds, Rozanov dropped his arm again and stripped out of his own clothes. Through his drunken haze Shane noticed that socks had not been the only thing that the Russian had neglected to put on that night.

“You came commando?”

Rozanov rolled his eyes and shoved Shane’s head underneath the spray. He got into the shower, “Technically I always cum commando, Hollander. Now, wash.”

“When did you learn the word technically?” Shane asked, and his words slurred a little. He let Rozanov rub shampoo into his hair, even though it was the hotel’s own brand, and Shane never, ever washed with anything but what he’d brought himself. It felt nice though, to have Rozanov’s hands on his head, massaging his scalp and rubbing out the day’s grime. It felt good.

Should it feel good? Shane was abruptly ten again, and in the showers with fifteen other variously aged boys. They had been discussing dick lengths when some of the oldest among them, perhaps thirteen or fourteen, called them all fags for showing so much interest.

Fag?

“I learn many words. I am in an American team, Hollander.” Shane was hardly listening to him though. Through lidded eyes he was devouring every precious inch of Rozanov’s body, and in his mind’s eye he was still in that locker room, so long ago, facing the wall and red with shame.

“Fucking Jesus..” He murmured.

“What?” Rozanov said, pausing with his hands still knotted in Shane’s hair. A foreign sort of concern laced his tone.

“Your body always fucks me up,” Shane said unconsciously, with a light laugh. “I’m literally such a fucking freak. There’s something wrong with me, Rozanov, there’s something wrong with me. Maybe you should stay away, not get too close..” He trailed off at the end of his sentence, tearing his eyes off Rozanov’s perfect cock to look back up at his perfect face instead. Rozanov was staring at him, and his hands were still in Shane’s hair. His unreadable expression sent Shane all the wrong messages. “I’m *wrong*. I’m all wrong, aren’t I?” Shane hissed, and his laughter melted into tears beneath the shower’s rain. When had he started crying again? Or had he simply never stopped?

“No. Nooo!” Rozanov murmured. His tenor was one of reassurance and he was shaking his head, but Shane was beyond consoling. Shane heard Rozanov’s breath hitch wildly, and then they were in each other’s arms again. Shampoo ran in white rivers down both of their shoulders. It slid down the dip of Shane’s spine, and had washed itself away by the time it reached his calves. He clung onto Rozanov as though he were a child, and sobbed. Far away, inside of his mind, he watched his ten year old self turn off the shower.

When the light of morning first filtered in through the window, a deep and bruising blue that turned the room and its contents grey, Shane stirred at last from his sleep. He was sticky with sweat and felt feverish. He stayed there, quite still, in the quiet for a few minutes, staring passively out of the windows and trying to place himself. He realised he must have forgotten to close the curtains last night; the daylight was minimal but it was already beginning to hurt his eyes. He squinted and dug out his hand from beneath the covers to knead his forehead. Something rustled behind him and he froze, heart catching in his throat. He swallowed hard, as though a large, splintering rock had lodged itself halfway down his windpipe, and raised himself slowly onto one elbow. He glanced over his shoulder and blanched.

With all the grace of a rhinoceros, Shane was out of the bed. He flew backwards and nearly fell over his own feet, but by some miracle, Ilya Rozanov stayed sleeping. Shane's heart was hammering beneath his ribcage. He felt like a trapped bird, backing up against the window, its surface freezing the exposed skin of his arse and back.

I'm naked? Oh Jesus.

A memory returned to him, and with it the same aching sense of sorrow he'd felt last night as Rozanov had called out simply, "Goodnight Hollander." He could see himself as though perched upon his own shoulder, walking down a long and brightly lit corridor, his phone in his hand and a message on the screen, as yet unsent: "We didn't even kiss". Shane watched in horror as his own finger hovered over the send button. He admonished himself, and howled like an animal inside of his own brain. *Don't do that! Don't do that! Don't be that thick Shane! This can't be anything, don't try to make it something.* But all the same, the message was sent, and all the same, Shane had fled into the stairwell and sprinted down all seven flights to his own floor.

And now Rozanov was here, on that floor, in Shane's room, and Shane remembered enough to feel like he might be dying. Shaking, he looked around for some clothes and picked out from his unpacked suitcase the necessary shorts, tee shirt and jumper to try and outrun the consequences of his own unfathomable choices. He had slid his foot into one shoe and was trying to ignore the way his stomach seemed to be sliding around the inside of his abdomen, when a warm hand grasped him round the wrist.

He spun and came straight out of his Reebok. Rozanov was glaring at him, gloriously nude, his ringleted hair hung across his forehead. A silvery light seemed to highlight the curve of

his shoulders and the wisps of his uppermost hairs. His eyes were small and dark.

“What the fuck are you doing Hollander?” His voice was rough from sleep and with it his accent had become even more pronounced. He cocked his head to one side and appraised Shane’s shambolic appearance; the running shorts, the mismatched T-shirt and hoodie, the phone in one hand and the room key in the other, the bed-head that Shane imagined was tumultuous at best. “Going out?”

Shane struggled to swallow. He took a tentative step towards the door as though ready to bolt, but Rozanov’s fingers tightened around his arm. Shane’s breathing was rapid and his head was burning now, or rather, all of him was burning. Beneath Rozanov’s stern gaze he seemed to have proceeded his fever and become a flame instead. Beneath his clothes he felt moisture building.

“Hollander?” Rozanov asked again. He looked impatient

“I’m going- for a run- yes..”

“Right now? Like *that*?”

Shane’s shoulders rose self-consciously, despite himself. “Like *what*?”

Rozanov shook his head, disbelievingly. “Like you are going to throw up on carpet.”

Shane gave a weak laugh, attempting humour, his favourite coping mechanism, “I don’t think there’s any more vomit left, Rozanov, I don’t think we need to worry.”

His joke fell awkwardly into the air between them, and Rozanov narrowed his eyes. He gave Shane’s wrist a tug and turned back towards the bed. Shane pulled half-heartedly against his hold but Rozanov succeeded easily in dragging him along at his heels regardless. Shane felt like a puppy in training.

“You are idiot, Hollander,” Rozanov sighed and sat down heavily on the mattress. It dipped beneath him and Shane could not stop himself from staring at his chest, and his thighs, and the *thing* sandwiched between them. His face, already aflame, burned impossibly hotter, and he felt the blush as it spread up his throat to his cheeks. He stood awkwardly between Rozanov’s knees, feeling sick.

Six months. No kiss. Shane had even cleaned off his own cum before he’d left Rozanov’s hotel room.

“I need- I need to go for a run, Rozanov.” *And I need you to be gone when I get back.* Shane’s tone was curt. He was relieved his voice hadn’t cracked. The rest of him seemed to be splintering.

Rozanov had the gall to feign interest. “And running will help you, yes? Running will make you feel better? Make you look less like zombie? Make you-“ He faltered beneath the strength of Shane’s glower. He knocked Shane’s knee with his own and said, “You are angry with me, yes?”

Shane didn’t say anything for a moment. Something was bubbling beneath the surface, bursting at the seams of his skin. He wanted to shout himself hoarse, and scream, and cry, but he wasn’t drunk anymore, and he had no more excuses to be more honest than he should. They weren’t anything after all.

“No. We’re *nothing*. I can’t be angry at nothing.”

An alien look of hurt flickered across Rozanov’s face, rapidly replaced by a strange grimace. “We are nothing. And yet you text me after sex and say, no kisses? And you drink until you are sick, and cry and cry and cry. And I come and I comfort you and you hug me and yell at me and touch me and call yourself a freak, and then you stand here in morning and tell me we are nothing?” The silence that followed was poignant. Shane felt sicker. “Do you even believe yourself Shane?”

Shane. “Don’t call me that..”

Rozanov looked angry now. “What? Your name? You can call yourself freak but I cannot call you Shane?”

“NO!” Shane shouted, exploding at last like last night's firework. He ripped himself free of Rozanov's hold and stood there for a long, stretching second, heaving. Words failed him. He could not speak. He was that little boy in the locker room again, he was himself every time someone else had used being gay to insult him. He was trapped inside of himself, and although he knew that Rozanov was not the enemy, Shane shrank away from him nonetheless. Rozanov's face was a frozen picture that Shane could not, in his panic, identify. He launched himself towards the bathroom and slammed the door shut behind him, locking it just as Rozanov crashed into it from the other side. It creaked on its hinges beneath the man's weight but Shane didn't hear it, nor did he hear Rozanov's frantic yelling. He had turned and seen his face in the mirror. His face, cheeks red and imprinted with the bed sheets thick creases. His hair, matted and oily. His eyes, angry and afraid.

He put a fist through his own reflection.

Chapter 2: Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

Chapter Two, I like this one. It's from Ilya's perspective because I felt this brief story needed input from both sides of the coin. In this one, Ilya is upset and confused, and yes, eager to maintain their physicality in order to fix things.

They aren't the best at communicating, but they do their best.

Vegas, 2014 - Ilya

Ilya had not intended to go looking for Shane Hollander. He'd received that text, sent just a few moments after Shane had shut the hotel door behind him, and then sat there staring at it like an idiot. The cigarette between his middle and index finger plumed a small string of smoke that suddenly aggravated him. He'd stubbed it out on the bedside table and chucked it angrily into his empty vodka glass.

He'd hit the call button on his phone but Shane had never answered.

Ilya had spent the next hour and a half pacing his suite, his bare body a silhouette amidst the lamplight. He could not place whether his feeling of guilt was coming from the message that Shane had sent, or the very real fact that Ilya had not kissed the Canadian on purpose. Ilya was not an idiot. He had known since the beginning, as he knew that Hollander had known, that their collectivity was a terrible idea. A sexual relationship between two men was not an entirely irrefutable notion, even in 2008 when theirs had begun. But Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were not just two men, they were the NHL's star hockey players, and each other's arch rivals on and off the ice. In fact, Ilya was not certain that he didn't actually hate Hollander. He'd certainly found himself looking down on him, and judging him, and speaking ill of him to his Boston teammates. He most definitely didn't like Hollander, even if his face *was* pretty. And so, after many months of privately seething and hurting and thinking, Ilya had realised that the only thing left to do was to start pushing Hollander away. If he held him at arms length for long enough, he was sure that Shane would give it up and fall back out of his life again.

But at the awards ceremony Hollander had looked irresistible; irritated and upset in that grimy bathroom in his perfectly-tailored suit. And Ilya had thought, *just one more time. One more.*

He recalled Hollander's slender legs, toned and lithe, as they'd spread slowly apart on Ilya's hotel bed. Hollander had palmed himself through his boxers, and drawn invisible lines across

his own torso, nipples and shoulders. Ilya had watched his flush deepen and sat rigidly in his chair at the end of the bed, trying not to groan. The sight of a man in such disarray was not often what turned Ilya on. But Shane Hollander had burst into his life and his mouth in 2008 with an uneasy grin and a skittish need to please and Ilya could not pretend that he wasn't a little bit glad. Back in the present, in his hotel room, Ilya had paused his pacing and stared fiercely out of the windows.

Las Vegas was an expanse of colour and light. Time was a multitude of things here, but its constancy was clearest. There were always people awake, and if you happened to find yourself alone, there was often no one else to blame but you.

Shane is alone. He's alone because I sent him away.

But that wasn't strictly true. Hollander had left of his own accord, Ilya had simply neglected to persuade him to stay. Neither of them had *ever* tried to persuade the other one to stay. Once their allotted hours for sex and fondling and fucking were done, one of them or both of them would get up, say goodbye, and leave.

But you did send him away, said a nasty voice in Ilya's ear. *In every way but with your words, you sent him away. You didn't even kiss him.*

He growled and had gone storming back into the bedroom. He threw clothes on haphazardly and chugged the last of the vodka left in Hollander's abandoned tumbler. He was seven floors beneath his own a few minutes later and banging at the door of Shane's room like a maniac. He must have been a maniac, to be acting so impulsively. There hadn't been anyone else in the corridor, and Shane had been lucky enough to score a room at the end of the row and round a corner, but Ilya had still felt *so* exposed. Hollander was often the one who panicked openly about being caught in a compromising position, but tonight that fear was only his.

A voice had sounded from inside Hollander's room but Ilya couldn't make it out. He'd banged harder on the door and then heard a rough shout and the obvious shattering of glass. He'd heard himself begin to openly beg for Hollander to open up, offering up more pleases than he was sure he'd ever uttered before in his life. There had been something off about it all, though. He'd felt strongly that he needed to be inside of that room.

"Open the fucking door in the next minute or I go to reception and get key myself!"

After some tedious seconds, there had been shuffling sounds and then the door had been wrenched open from the inside. Hollander had appeared as suddenly as a ghost, and for a moment Ilya hadn't been sure that he wasn't one. Then he'd collapsed heavily onto his knees and Ilya had abandoned all other thoughts and dived inside the room to catch him.

Now Ilya was pacing again. To the door, back to the bed, to the door, back to the bed. His legs felt heavy beneath him and his feet were cold on the carpet. The night had gone on for a very long time. Hollander had crashed out at around three, after a terrifyingly long panic attack in the shower, through which Ilya had been able to do nothing except hold him upright. He was certain that Shane's brain had been elsewhere, leading him down passage after passage of rough and terrible memories; of what, Ilya could not know. Eventually though, his breathing had begun to even out, and he'd slumped, dead weight, into Ilya's front and Ilya

had had to carry him to bed. He'd not bothered drying off either of them. Shane had never bothered to switch on the air conditioning when he'd arrived earlier and the room was stifling. The way Ilya's damp skin cooled off the bedspread was comfortable and once he'd lain down beside Hollander's sleeping body, he hadn't gotten up again until the morning.

The morning had brought the night's same stifling feeling straight back down upon them both without reprieve. Ilya had awoken to Shane, still mussed from sleep, trying to go out for a run. Ilya had been quite miffed. The last person on the planet who ever needed a run was Shane Hollander, whose body already seemed to run on air; a physically and emotionally hungover Shane Hollander definitely didn't need a run. The thought alone was implausible.

But then, after a short dispute, Shane erupted. Ilya had not been expecting it. Shane had looked angry, absolutely, but the speed with which he turned apoplectic was unnerving. Before Ilya could stop him, Shane had locked himself in the bathroom and punched the mirror. The moment had taken Ilya entirely outside of himself and his current reality, and replaced him on the landing of his childhood home. He was hovering, hardly seven, a wisp of stringy arms and legs, as his father berated Alexi for something inside of the master bedroom. There had been a loud crash, and the stifled sobs of a child trying his hardest not to cry. All Ilya had wanted to do was walk down the stairs and find his mother, but to do so would have only led the monster straight to her, and so he had stayed there, motionless, until the bedroom door finally opened and the monster had thrown Alexei out into the hall.

Alexei had given Ilya the look that all brothers, neither ally nor enemy, know on instinct alone; your turn.

Ilya had strode stiffly past him, and found his father sitting on the edge of his four poster bed. His form was a hulking one, and when his eyes found his youngest son in the doorway, there had been no kindness in them. Ilya remembered that the ornate, gold-framed mirror on his mother's dressing table had been entirely smashed, but after that, he could recall no more.

Ilya didn't get another word out of Hollander for an hour. He'd attacked the bathroom door handle until it dislodged itself from the fixing and when he'd finally gotten into the bathroom it was to find Hollander hunched over the sink with his left hand held uneasily aloft and his right gripping the rim of the basin. Blood had been spilling from his fingers and Ilya had forced Hollander onto the lid of the toilet again and wrapped his hand up in a towel. All the while, he'd been swearing in Russian, and all the while, Hollander had been silent.

Ilya was pacing the room now, pausing every few seconds to check that Hollander was still where Ilya had left him: on the desk chair. He was paler than Ilya had ever seen him, shades greyer than last night, and the towel in his lap was patched with red stains. The blood had stopped flowing a long time ago and Ilya had made the frightening choice to not call for medical assistance. He was still on google now, wondering if that had been the right decision. The wound looked superficial, and Ilya would rather not take his arch nemesis to the hospital in such a desperate state with no real way to explain themselves. *But still.*

"Ilya?"

Ilya, blindsided moreover by the sound of his own first name than the fact that Hollander was speaking at all, dropped his phone. It thudded against the carpet and bounced towards the

door. He made no move to pick it up, whipping round. “Yes?” *God, desperate much?*

“Did you clean up the glass?” Shane’s voice was hollow-sounding.

Ilya’s brow furrowed. “The glass?” Yes, he had cleaned up the glass. He’d picked shards of it out of Shane’s hand and thrown as much of it into the bathroom’s bin as he could-

Hollander looked up at him, his expression wrecked, and then gestured vaguely at the floor with his good hand. “From the bottle. From.. last night.”

“Oh,” Ilya grunted. He moved like a shadow, silently, and slowly, until he was perched on the end of the bed. He wiped his hands on his knees. He’d gotten dressed earlier in a panic, when at first he had thought he’d *have* to call 911. Now, his joggers, which were actually Hollander’s joggers and a size too small, seemed to be stifling him. It was all he could do not to itch himself raw. “Yes. I cleaned it- that- the bottle. And- and the mirror.” Ilya felt oddly frightened. He did not want a repeat of recent events; he didn’t want to give Shane any more reasons to cry.

Hollander nodded, looking numb. His face was almost translucent and Ilya was getting worried again. Had there been more blood than he’d first realised? Should he have acted differently? He thought poignantly of his mother. A different bathroom, a different day. Pills and not blood.

She would’ve called for an ambulance.

“My hand hurts,” Hollander winced, too casually, unwrapping his injured fist slowly from the towel and bringing it up to his face to inspect it. “I’m such an arse hole. I’ve *been* such an arsehole.”

Ilya tried for a smile, but couldn’t bring it forth. “To yourself, maybe. To me, no. Only I am arsehole to you. *Have been* arsehole, at least.”

Hollander looked over at him through his fringe and fingers. “You just want something.. different. That’s okay. I can live with that. I *have* to live with that.” The words sounded rehearsed and pained, particularly to Ilya’s ears, which had already endured so much of Hollander’s agonising upset over the last twelve hours.

“What different do I want?” Ilya asked, though he was sure he knew what Hollander’s answer would be. He had, of course, led them both down this path of his very own accord. Ilya could be bisexual, and Shane could be gay, but they could only be those things together in secret. And their secret was becoming a bigger and harder one to hide.

Hollander’s nose scrunched. His freckles moved with the skin and Ilya couldn’t take his eyes off them. It was so unlike him to find himself enchanted by the finer details of another person’s face. Usually everyone he fucked was just hot. They weren’t cute. They weren’t *Shane*. “You just want... sex,” Hollander said at last.

Ilya hummed non-committantly whilst Hollander fiddled with the edge of the desk. “I do want sex. But also, I think I am wanting more than sex”

There was an unidentifiable emotion on Hollander's face, but a flush was spreading up his neck. Some colour was returning to his cheeks but he still didn't look well. He flexed his cut up hand. "But you can't have it? That's what you're gonna say, right? You can't have it. I can't have it. We can't have it."

Ilya pushed his hair out of his eyes. It was not like him to feel so agitated, but today had undone him already and it was hardly 7am. "I don't know, Hollander. No? Yes? What should I say? Both things will be wrong." He reached over and took Shane's wrist between his thumb and index finger, leaning over it to better inspect the injury. It was a simpler thing to touch someone than to tell them that you might be in love with them. It was easier too, to keep on redirecting their conversations. "But if this is how you treat yourself when I am not there to stop you--"

"This isn't how I treat myself!" Hollander cut in quickly. He was shivering. "I'm not insane, I don't do this. This is- this was a one off."

Ilya scrutinised him for a long moment. "You hurt my head like you hurt your hand. Hockey gloves will sting for a while now, no?"

Hollander flicked his mouth up at the corners. It surprised Ilya; the Canadian had an aggravating habit of managing that. "What, is that funny to you, Hollander?"

"I don't know, a little?"

Ilya released his hand again, leaning back on his elbows on the bed. He should have let Hollander leave when they'd both still had any chance at all. "What about this is funny?"

Hollander was grinning now, properly, it was utterly bizarre. Perhaps he was still a little drunk? "Well, you're giving me whiplash, Rozanov. You're- you're confusing!" He added when Ilya threw him an unsure look. "I don't know half the time if you have two shits to give about anything, and yet you're here, and you were here last night. I'm- fucking I don't even know what I am!"

"Not a freak, I know," huffed Ilya. He was tired and they had never spent this long together before. He was very much a fish out of water. "Nor are you asshole. You are Shane Hollander and you play good fucking hockey and you have good fucking mouth." *And you're a lot of other fucking things too, if only we existed in a world wherein I could say them.*

"You didn't seem to want my mouth much last night," Hollander replied pointedly. The changes in his mood were coming as rapidly as Ilya had ever seen them. He was leaning heavily into the back of his chair now, and had lifted one leg to hang it over the other. Ilya had found him some briefs to wear earlier, but other than that he was bare. His arms were covered in goosebumps despite the warmth of the room. "You kept me at such an arms length."

"We fucked, Hollander. How much closer did you want us to be?"

"We fucked. Yeah," Shane said, shrugging, closing and opening his sore fist. "But it was different. *You* were different."

Ilya opened his mouth to dispute this statement, but closed it again slowly. He realised suddenly that he didn't want to lie to Hollander, to *Shane*, about this. Not when he looked so fucking fragile. Had Ilya known in 2008 that *any* hockey player could be more delicate than the ice upon which they played, he might have been more careful with his feelings. Now they were here in a stalemate, and with nowhere else to run, Shane had come to him.

We didn't even kiss. This wasn't something he could leave alone this time. Having seen the way Shane fell apart last night, and then again this morning- *well*.

"Fuck!" He groaned, and reclined completely, his arms spread wide upon the unmade bed. He heard Hollander shuffling about at his feet, but was still surprised when his face popped out of his peripheral on the side of the bed closest to the window. Did Shane really still crave his closeness? Ilya craved his.

Ilya reached out for him and Shane took his hand tentatively, sitting down beside him. This was easier, Ilya thought again, gratefully. They could say more things like this, without having to say anything at all. The mattress dipped beneath Shane's weight just enough to excuse the way they fell suddenly and desperately together, in a hard tangle of limbs.

Lips on lips and hands in hair, Ilya smelt and tasted blood but he didn't have a single ounce of shit left to give. He gnawed passionately at Shane's lips and forgave the taste of vomit that still lingered there. He grabbed Shane around the waist and flipped them both over so that he was hunching over the Canadian's toned chest. The breathy way Shane gasped out his name, his *first name*, sent Ilya into a frenzy. His hands grabbed urgently for everything they could reach. Shane's shoulders, Shane's collarbones, Shane's neck, Shane's biceps, Shane's nipples, Shane's jaw. Then Ilya was licking a long stripe of saliva up Shane's cheek, and feeling the moans as they rose out of his mouth as hot breath on the skin of Ilya's throat.

They made out for a long time. The sun had risen substantially in the sky outside the window when finally Ilya pulled back just far enough to admire the way Shane's face looked in the clear daylight. It was such a handsome face, and full to bursting with all the things that Ilya had ignored on the faces of his prior partners; the freckles particularly. Ilya loved Shane's freckles. Ilya loved-

"Rozanov?" Shane's voice was strained and his hands were gripping Ilya's arms with vivid strength.

"Yes?" Ilya grinned. *This he could do.*

"I think I'm bleeding again."

"Fucking don't care." Ilya dove back down and attacked Shane's exposed neck. How he had ever been able to tell himself that he hated Shane, Ilya did not know.

Shane struggled underneath him and he was breathless when he spoke again a few minutes later. "No but- it's going everywhere, I'm ruining the sheets!"

Ilya groaned but held himself aloft on his arms, aggravated but not displeased. The tension had dispersed into the air around them. It was still evident, but not so viscous as it had been.

Shane was right though. Thick beads of blood were dripping down his arm and onto the duvet. Patches of it already caked the places on Ilya's body where Shane had been holding tightly onto him. Rosey fingerprints littered the outside of Ilya's muscular thigh- at some point Ilya had undressed them both. "This bed is now lost cause," Ilya smirked. "Looks like murder has happened here."

"Yeah, my dignity is definitely dead," Shane huffed, though the words were light and held no weight. "Get off me, I need to sort this out, this is a mess!"

Ah, he's back. Ilya thought. Boring, careful, precise and polite. Shane Hollander had found his way back into his body again.

"*A bloody mess!*" Ilya crowed, mimicking a strong English accent in such a manner that Shane stopped what he was doing to laugh.

"Where the hell did that come from?" His freckles looked so cute, his eyes big and bright. Ilya realised with a lurch that he would miss this moment when it had finished. That when Shane returned his key card this morning and left with the Montreal Metros to head back to Canada, Ilya would miss *him*.

"From your stupid Netflix shows," Ilya said simply. Shane had recently started putting things on in the background when they fucked- in his words, "to drown out the noises". Ilya might admit to Shane that he'd started watching all of those shows on the flights between games. He would not admit to himself that he had done so to feel closer to Shane when they were apart.

"You mean Peaky Blinders?!" Shane was sitting up now with Ilya half in his lap. He was trying to push Ilya's larger and heavier frame off his legs with little success.

"Yes! Boring show for boring you."

Shane rolled his eyes and Ilya went in for one more kiss. He felt Shane grab him passionately by the neck for a moment and then retract his hands as though he'd been burned. "Sorry!" He moaned into Ilya's tongue. "Think I just got more blood on you."

Ilya just kissed him harder. He couldn't have given less of a fuck if he'd tried.

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