crystal, come right in

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crystal, come right in

by weeb_grass

Summary

> “You're being cruel, Ilya. Please just— stop.”
>
> Pain blooms across Ilya's expression, a brief lapse in form. He's quick to recover, furrowing his brow and pursing his lips, like Shane’s made more than a simple request, like he's got Rose Landry here in his lap, parading her around like Ilya has with all his women since rookie year. Like he has any right to that pain.
>
> “Oh, so this is what it takes to make you say my name without freaking out.”

Or: Shane does not go home with Rose after the club.

Notes

> me: haha, im like that song from hamilton. you know, "why do you write like you're running out of time..."
>
> bf: ya
>
> bf: except hamilton was writing articles of the constitution
>
> bf: and ur writing gay porn
>
> me: :(

See the end of the work for more notes

Shane exits the bathroom stall, the rank smell of sweat and cologne churning his stomach. He goes to the sink, turning the faucet for cold water and cupping both hands beneath the stream. He bends down, dowsing his face once, twice, like he can wash the night off his clouded vision. But when he stands, toweling off his face with the hem of his T-shirt, he sees a familiar, hazy pair of eyes staring back at him in the mirror.

His eyes are rimmed red, a traitorous giveaway when he tries to conceal his emotional state. His face has always been too expressive, every heightened emotion seemingly hotwired to his tearducts. His cheeks are blotchy and red, *Asian flush* his father calls it, always spoken fondly when his mother has more than one cup of wine, a trait Shane has embarrassingly inherited. He's covered in a light sheen of sweat, a bit of it gathered beneath his armpits, staining his shirt. His jaw is locked, shoulders tense. Everything about his posture screams discomfort, which is a shame. He'd been trying so hard for Rose. She deserves a boyfriend who can walk through a club without suffering a full-blown panic attack. But *Christ—*

He shuts his eyes, the image swimming before him like a hazy nightmare. Ilya, body pressed against that girl's back predatorily, his hips gyrating so smoothly, like water. His gaze, locked on Shane's as he mouths at her throat, her earlobe, her perfect mouth. Her perfect body, small and maneuverable, hips guided so easily by Ilya's large hands. Shane knows, has felt the strength of those heated palms countless times, remembers the first time, one of them pressed against the underside of his thigh, the other reaching lower, lower.

"Is this okay?" he'd asked, not unkindly.

No, Shane thinks, shaking his head and snapping his eyes open. *No, no, Ilya. It's not okay.* None *of this is okay.*

He glares at himself in the mirror, half-expecting to watch as his own reflection jumps at him, strangling him for what he's gotten himself into. He only looks away when he feels the buzz of his cell, Rose's sweet "everything okay?" text lighting up his screen. He sends her a quick thumbs up, letting her know he just needs to get some air.

Want company?

An image flashes through his mind. Vegas, the summer he won Rookie of the Year. Shadowed curls turned away from him, smoke rising from behind strong shoulderblades.

Shane shakes his head, letting her know that, no, he doesn't want company. That she should stay here, have fun.

I'll save a dance for you ;)

And isn't that sweet? Shane hates himself for loathing her kindness.

He sends one last pitiful glare toward the bathroom mirror, the fluorescent lights throwing ghostly shadows over his features. Then, he steps away, exits the restroom and heads for the exit. He pauses when he sees the way's blocked by undulating bodies, a dense mass of

sequins and silk. The dancers are hardly discernible, raised arms blending into shoulders blending into hips. Shane turns, seeking out a second exit through the dim light. He scoots along the side wall, trying not to catch anyone's eyes and praying Rose doesn't see him. He doesn't think he can go back out there. No yet, anyway. Not until he sobers up a bit, his faculties manned and his emotions in check. He wants to touch her and feel something, *anything,* aside from this gnawing ache in his chest.

He slides beneath an indoor balcony and spots a bright red exit sign in the far corner.

Finally.

He crosses the small alcove, wary of the secret rendezvous already taking shape in the booths hidden here in the back. He tries very hard not to look, to search for a familiar head of golden curls. Tries, stubbornly, to race through the exit without letting his eyes settle on any one couple. He doesn't think he could stomach another show. Doesn't think his heart could handle it.

The exit leads him to a back alleyway, the stench of it only slightly less suffocating than the club's atmosphere. He scales the wall, eyeing the rickety stairs of an old fire escape up ahead. He goes to them, walking up a few flights to escape the sickly air of the alley. Two flights up, and his breathing's improved significantly. By the third, he's wobbling, and he sits halfway between the third and fourth flight, leaning his head against the rail. He breathes, in, out, in, trying to calm his body, his racing heart, which feels like it's been working in overdrive since the start of his game. Everything feels hazy and sluggish, like if he waves his hand before his eyes, he'll see the slow-motion lines track his movements. *Woosh, woosh,* the sound of his fingers, like a high-speed rail.

In retrospect, he should have stopped drinking after the third cocktail.

He presses his forehead to the cool metal of the rail and closes his eyes. He tries not to think of tonight's game, of the way Ilya slammed him into the boards so hard he knew bruises would bloom beneath his ribs. Of the way neither of them had smiled at each other, or playfully knocked at one another's sticks during the faceoff. He tries not to think of the way Rose had pressed her body up against his earlier, none of that smooth skin and her gentle squeezes near hard enough to leave an impression. And he tries very, very hard not to think of those grey-green eyes, locked onto him like a hawk. Tries not to recall the way Ilya kissed his dance partner like he'd been mocking him. *Look, Hollander,* his hands said, running down the planes of his girl's petite torso like blades gliding across ice. *Here's how you touch a woman.*

Shane tries not to think of much at all, actually.

And in this empty space of nothing, arises something. In his drink-idled brain arises another memory. Ilya, splayed out atop the sheets, his body completely bare. Shane had said something, he can't remember what now, but it had been funny. Ilya's laughing. Not a chortle, or that little huff he makes through his nose when he finds Shane's mannerisms particularly amusing. No, a full-bellied laugh. Eyes squeezed shut, arms wrapping around his stomach to clench his sides. He turns, his body taking up the entire bed, and he hides his uninhibited smile in the pillow.

“Interesting place for a nap.”

The words slice through Shane’s daydream like a dull knife, ripping into his memories with a jagged edge. He keeps his eyes closed, willing Ilya away like an apparition. He doesn't reply, keeping his face turned toward the brick building. He hears a long inhale, followed by an exaggerated exhale. The faint smell of smoke hits his nostrils, and he works hard not to pull a face.

“You were not having good time in there?”

Again, Shane doesn't respond, hoping if he remains boring for long enough, Ilya will eventually leave. It's worked plenty of times before.

“Oh, you are deaf now, Hollander?”

Shane opens his eyes, regretting it instantly. His glare is immediately softened by the shape Ilya takes, wool jacket cloaking that hideous tiger print, a checkered scarf wrapped around his neck. It's only when he sees the beanie Ilya's haphazardly pulled over his ears, unruly curls peeking out from beneath the edges, that Shane becomes hyper-aware of how cold it is. Like, really fucking cold. He'd left his jacket in the coat room in the club. What was he thinking?

“Ah, but not blind, I see.”

Ilya's smoking, cigarette held between the V of his fingers as he takes a sharp drag. He breathes out the smoke, lips puckered in an exaggerated “o” shape, and Shane wishes very much that he didn't find it intrinsically sexy. When Ilya catches him looking, he tilts his chin up, raising an eyebrow minutely. He's smirking, and Shane fights against intrusive thoughts battling over the impulse to kiss or punch that stupid look off his face.

Shane blinks heavily, then turns away again, staring at the frost lining the building's brick wall.

Ilya doesn't say anything during the minute or so that follows. Shane listens to his tempered breathing, subconsciously matching his breaths to the heavy push-pull of Ilya’s. He hears a slight disruption in that breathing, followed by the flick of a lighter. When he caves, eyes sliding toward Ilya once again, it's to the sight of Ilya sporting a freshly lit cigarette between his lips. Ilya's already staring at him, meeting his weak glare with a steady gaze.

“What,” he says dully, mouthing the words around the cigarette dangling from his lower lip.

“I thought you quit,” Shane says. It comes out petulant, and he hates himself for it. The tone has Ilya grinning cruelly. He's won the face-off.

“You thought a lot of things.”

Shane doesn't know what he's talking about, too drunk to try to decipher Ilya's cryptic messaging. *I don't know what I thought,* filters through his brain, accompanied by the hazy image of Ilya staring up at him in bed, mouth wrapped lazily around Shane's cock, his fingers

pressing bruises into his hips. His eyes are smiling, and he has to pull off, chuckling at something Shane says, little huffs of laughter tickling Shane's pubic hair and cooling the wet skin of his cock. *What was I thinking, exactly?*

He tiptoes around the response, sticking to his initial point.

"When we—" he swallows, biting at his lower lip nervously. But he's not sober enough to not complete the sentence. "When we'd get together. You stopped smoking. I thought when you said that, you meant, like, stop stopped."

Ilya stares up at him, looking at him like he's being dumb. Which, given his current state, is a fair assessment.

"Stop stopped," he repeats, a small smile tugging at his lips. Shane huffs, looking down at his lap, knowing he's somehow wearing a blush deeper than that of his alcohol-induced flush.

"You know what I mean," he mumbles.

"Mm, yes. Well." Another drag. Another long exhale. "You did not like the taste, so."

This doesn't answer Shane's question. Or rather, it doesn't validate his foregone conclusion. Ilya's being purposefully evasive; he guesses he doesn't have much of a right to ask for anything different. Still, it would be nice to get a straight answer from the man for once in his life. Even now, *you did not like the taste.* It sounds surprisingly similar to, *You want tuna melt?* But completely off kilter from, *I want you to suck my dick.* Shane's suffering a migraine brought on by one too many cocktails and seven years of emotional whiplash.

"You will not have to worry about nasty cigarette breath, though," Ilya says coolly. Shane surfaces from his thoughts, listening with intent. "Not when you kiss beautiful Rose Landry."

Shane's shoulders tense up, his eyes not leaving his lap. There it is again: one minute, Ilya's saying something vaguely sweet, the next he's using the opening to nail you in the heart. It's exhausting.

"My date, though," Ilya makes a *tsk* sound with his teeth, "she will just have to endure, I suppose."

Shane is working very hard not to rise to the bait. He shifts his legs, suddenly achingly aware of how cold it is outside. He feels sharp tingles piercing his exposed skin, and he shoves his chilled fingers between his thighs. He needs to move, needs to go back inside where it's warm. Where his coat is. Where Rose Laundry is. Probably worried, probably waiting for him. She's so sweet, so nice to him. He wishes he'd danced with her longer. She deserves that, deserves someone fun and joyful to be around. Someone who's good to her, who's devoted to her, who doesn't picture someone else's hands on him when he fucks her. Someone else's eyes when he watches her come.

Jesus, he thinks to himself, shaking his head like that will somehow dislodge all his self-deprecating thoughts. *Get a grip.*

“You should go back inside,” Shane tries, speaking to his feet. “It's cold.”

“Da, is cold,” Ilya agrees, ashing his cigarette in Shane's periphery. “And is such a beautiful little dance partner waiting to warm me up, I think.”

Shane chooses the worst possible moment to glance up, catching Ilya's eye as he winks salaciously.

“I do not think she will complain about my cigarettes.”

Shane wants to scream, wants to cry. He wants to grab Ilya Rozanov by his lapels and toss him down the staircase. Anything, *anything* to relieve the pressure building behind his eyelids, clogging up his thoughts.

“Please stop,” he says, characteristically blunt, uncharacteristically broken.

Ilya looks thrown, stunned expression morphing into something unreadable. He holds the cigarette at his side limply, head cocked as he stares up at Shane with those eerily perceptive eyes of his. Shane shifts his weight, blinks, then lifts his legs so that his feet are planted on the step directly below the one he's sitting on. He wraps his arms around his knees and rests his chin in the canyon formed between them.

“You're being cruel, Ilya. Please just— stop.”

Pain blooms across Ilya's expression, a brief lapse in form. He's quick to recover, furrowing his brow and pursing his lips, like Shane’s made more than a simple request, like he's got Rose Laundry here, in his lap, parading her around like Ilya has with all his women since rookie year. Like he has any right to that pain.

“Oh, so this is what it takes to make you say my name without freaking out.”

Shane jerks back like he'd been slapped. He can tell instantly that Ilya regrets what he's said, his jaw clamping shut, flexing as he grates his teeth. He crushes the butt of his cigarette against the rail he’s gripping, then throws it over the edge. He turns, walking toward the flight of stairs that will take him back down to ground level. The grate creaks beneath his leaden steps.

“Whatever, Hollander. Just come back inside before you get frostbite.” He scuffs his boot against the edge of the stairs, glancing up at Shane from beneath his fringe of curls. Shane’s brought back to that moment, the hazy line between the *something* and *nothing* they’d come to be. Ilya, kissing his cheek, staring up at him as he is now, a vulnerable gleam in his eyes. *Shane,* he’d moaned, the shape of his name heavy and thick rolling off his tongue. His lips were wet, swollen, his stomach caked in their shared spend. Shane imagines being left like that, arms open and body pliant. He knows, from personal experience, how it feels to be cut by this relationship. He just thought they were above apologies.

He pictures a different night, pulling his dress pants up over his sweaty thighs, Ilya not even looking at him as he smokes his cigarette and finishes off Shane’s vodka. How cold the room had been, how sterile he felt hiding bite marks with his undershirt. He thought that’s what

they are now. Ilya had established this, had drawn the line in the sand when he refused to walk Shane to the front door of the penthouse suite. *You touch me here and here,* Shane envisions him saying, pointing at his mouth, his cock. He moves his hand to his chest, pressing his palm to his heart. *But, you do not touch me here.*

Shane.

"I'm sorry," Shane caves, watching Ilya cock his head in confusion. His thoughts are starting to drift, and he wonders if he's somehow more drunk now than he was leaving the club. Maybe the alcohol's finally hitting him in full force. Maybe that's why he can't keep his stupid feelings from dripping out of his mouth.

"For what? For win?" Ilya waves his hand nonchalantly, but he's swallowing, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down, slow, like he's nervous. "Is how the game is, Hollander. You know this. We will beat you next time."

"No," Shane plows forward, thumbing at his chin. He dips his head a bit to teethe at the nail. "For leaving."

Ilya pauses in his fidgeting. He reaches around himself, grabbing the lapels of his jacket and tugging them tight over his collar. Warding off something. The cold, maybe. Or something else.

They sit in silence for a few seconds, listening to the soft *woosh* of cars driving along the street next to the club. Shane picks at his lip, a nasty habit he thought he'd dropped in high school. But, he's drunk, and apparently reverts back to old, self-soothing habits when confronted by Ilya whilst drunk.

"I think," Ilya breaks the silence, staring down at his feet while he speaks, "perhaps, you are a little drunk."

"Mm," Shane replies, closing his eyes and turning his head so he can rest it against his knees. "Good observation."

"I think—" Ilya starts again. Shane hears the creak of cold steel as Ilya takes one step forward, then another. He's climbing the stairs, and Shane feels the air shift next to him, a warm body taking up space next to his. He fights against the compulsion to reach out, to shove his freezing fingertips into Ilya's jacket pockets. "—maybe is time to go home, da?"

Shane doesn't move. He keeps his eyes closed, wondering if that's the magic to keeping Ilya here, with him. He wonders if Ilya will disappear when he opens them. Or if he'll revert back to cruelty, mock Shane for his terrible dancing, his terrible style, his terrible, *terrible* gameplay tonight.

"I think you are cold," Ilya tries again, the kindness in his voice too much for Shane. He nearly jolts when he feels a warm pair of hands reach for his, wrapping around his numb fingertips. Shane braves opening his eyes, seeing only genuine concern, leveled evenly with compassion, in Ilya's steady gaze.

“I think,” Shane says softly, breaking through the hushed silence of the cold, “I miss you.”

Ilya scoots closer, holding Shane’s gaze the same way he holds his hands: gently, like he is something precious. Something valuable. He brings Shane’s curled fingers to his lips and kisses his chapped knuckles.

“I think I really miss you,” Shane says again, his voice breaking on the final syllable. Ilya shushes him, letting go of his chilled fingers with one hand, running it up Shane’s back, fingers landing in the soft down of his hair.

“Okay,” Ilya says, gripping the back of his neck with a bit of force. “Okay, Shane. Yes. We need to get you home, yes? Can I take you home?”

Shane nods, trying to ignore the fact that Ilya didn’t actually say anything substantial back. He lets Ilya pull him up by both hands. He leads them down the stairs, his arm wrapped around Shane’s waist in a sturdy grip, guiding them down each step with precision. When they make it to ground level, Ilya walks him toward the opening of the alleyway.

“Wait here,” he says, squeezing Shane’s waist before releasing him. “I’ll go grab my rental.”

He leaves Shane leaning against the brick building. Shane uses the time to check his phone, texting Rose that he’ll be heading home, that he’s beat after the day’s game. She sends back a thumbs up, and he pockets the phone, leaning his head back against the cool brick wall. He wonders if he should go back inside for his jacket, but waves the thought away. He can come back for it in the morning. He’s not going to waste whatever kind mood Ilya’s found himself in. He wants to bask in it as long as possible. Also, his hand-eye coordination is pretty abysmal right now, he doesn’t think he’d have any luck navigating through a sea of bodies. He stays where he is.

Ilya pulls up in a sleek, black car about ten minutes later. Shane gets in, breathing out a sigh of relief when he feels the heat wash over him. He presses his fingers against the heater grates built into the dash, willing feeling back into them. His back and bottom warm immediately, and he glances over to see that the heated seat dial is set to high. He smiles slightly, eyes trailing up from the center console to watch Ilya drive. He’s got a sturdy grip on the steering wheel, eyes on the road, but they occasionally flicker over to meet Shane’s. After the third glance, when Shane’s still not looked away, he huffs out a dull “What.” Not a question, and not harsh. He sounds secretly fond, like he can’t help but find everything Shane does slightly endearing. Shane sneaks a hand over, resting it atop Ilya’s thigh, feeling the strong muscle clench beneath his fingertips. Ilya reaches down, grabbing his hand and placing it back in Shane’s lap.

“No. Not while you are drunk.”

Shane frowns, letting out an indignant huff as he slouches into the seat.

“Mm not *that* drunk,” knowing exactly how he sounds. Drunk. Drunk and petulant. Ilya shoots him a knowing smirk.

“Drunk enough.”

Shane hums in acquiescence, resting his head against the window and watching the lights of the city fade in and out of his periphery. The cool glass offers a stark contrast to the warm atmosphere of the car, sharpening his senses briefly. The car ride is silent, save for the blasting heater, but Shane's thoughts are a whirlwind. He wonders if this counts as cheating, if he's somehow slipped into the category of men he so abhors in the locker room. Men who talk about their girlfriends like sex objects, like toys. But Shane's only had sex with Rose once, and it was kind of a disaster. Not to mention that Ilya hasn't actually done anything, and he hasn't allowed Shane to do anything either. He wonders if he will, though, if or when Shane sobers up. He wonders if he'd let Ilya do things to him in return. He thinks he probably would, and he wonders if that makes him a bad person.

Ilya parks the car in his driveway, then holds his hand out expectantly.

"Keys," he quips, making a "gimme" motion with the curl of his fingers. Shane rolls his eyes, digging through the pockets of his jeans, then hands them over with an exasperated huff.

"I'm really okay," he grumbles, completely nullifying his point when he stumbles out of the car. Ilya just raises his eyebrows at him, and Shane flips him off as he rounds the vehicle. At the front door, Ilya slots the key into the deadbolt, unlocking the house quickly, ushering Shane inside with his free hand. Ilya toes off his shoes without having to be asked, and Shane's heart swells. He immediately mentally chastises himself for setting the bar so low. Hell, Hayden's *kids* now they need to take their shoes off before entering Shane's home. It's not a big ask.

Ilya makes his way into the kitchen, opening the fridge and scanning its contents after shedding his winter layers. He's quick to frown at whatever he finds there.

"Jesus, Hollander, do you have any real people food?"

Shane saddles up onto one of his barstools, propping his chin up on his fist as he lazily watches Ilya dig through his fridge.

"Why," he mumbles. "You hungry?"

"No, for you."

Shane frowns down at the marble countertop.

"I'm not hungry."

"No," Ilya shakes his head, "but you need something in you. Soak up some of the alcohol."

"There's rice," Shane shrugs, tracing the marble pattern of his countertop with his idle index finger. "And there's green tea. You could make the congee my grandma used to make. Helped settle my stomach."

Ilya must silently agree, because he digs the tupperware full of white rice out of the fridge, then turns toward the stove. Shane watches him pilfer through the tea tins laid out on his counter, grabbing the one labelled "oolong" and setting it down next to the stove. He then

reaches for the kettle that's already resting atop one of the burners and fills it, flicking on the stove to get it heated. Shane points out where the mugs are, where his tea strainers are kept, and notices Ilya pulling out two of each. He fills one with rice, microwaving it for about thirty seconds. He then fills one strainer with chamomile, another tin he'd discovered in Shane's large stash. The other is filled with oolong. He places the chamomile strainer in the empty mug, pulls the kettle off the burner when it starts to whistle, then pours water over his tea. He then opens the kettle and places the oolong strainer inside, letting it steep.

Shane watches him do all of this as though witnessing each action through a cloudy, glass window. He has a difficult time picturing Ilya doing anything domestic: folding his clothes, pouring out cereal for himself in the morning. It all seems too mundane, like he couldn't be bothered to be the kind of guy who wipes down his own countertops. But, then again, this is the same man who offered to make Shane a sandwich the first time he came over. He supposes most people can't just wade through existence without facing life's little hardships.

While the tea steeps, Ilya pulls the mug full of rice out of the microwave, mixes it around with a spoon he grabs from the dish rack, then sets it down. He tugs at the oolong steeper once, twice, then pours the tea over the rice, letting it fill to the brim. The end result is a bit more watery than Shane would like, but he's too busy trying not to tear up at watching Ilya make his grandmother's bandaid recipe for all ailments to remark upon it. Ilya walks around the counter, setting the mug directly in front of Shane. He brings his own to his lips, blowing over the surface of the water to cool it off before he takes a sip.

"Thanks," Shane mumbles, grabbing the spoon to stir his watery congee. He knows he shouldn't be drinking caffeine this late at night, but he doesn't care. At the first bite, he sighs, letting the tension of the day slough off his shoulders like rainwater. Ilya hums in response, taking another small sip of his tea. He cradles the mug between both hands, and Shane can't help but find the image of it incredibly endearing.

"Sorry I kept you from—" Shane swallows, taking another bite of congee in lieu of finishing his sentence. He gestures with his free hand toward the door, hoping it's enough to convey — *fucking that hot girl you met on the dance floor.* Ilya's brow furrows in a moment of confusion, but he follows with a sharp, "Ah." He sets his tea down, waving his own hand around in this sort of conjoined interpretive dance they now seem to be speaking through.

"Is not a big deal. One night does not mean dry spell."

There it is again, that muddled way Ilya answers all of his questions. Neither confirming nor denying his will to see others, to be with others. *I like girls,* Shane hears reverberating throughout his skull, *But, I like you too.*

What does that mean? Shane wants to scream into his cup of congee. Likes Shane, like— more than the girls? Is he on an equal footing with the girls? What if there were no girls, would that be okay?

What if it's just me? Shane doesn't ask. Even his drunken brain knows that's taking it a step too far.

“Right,” is all he says, swallowing watery congee down around the lump forming in his throat.

“That was not a proposition,” Ilya teases, smiling at him over the rim of his mug. Shane’s heart clenches. He really wishes it were.

“No, right— yeah.” He clears his throat, staring down at his now lukewarm congee with what he hopes is an indifferent expression. “Of course.”

They nurse their tea in silence for a few seconds. Ilya swivels around on his barstool, tapping Shane’s leg with his foot periodically. It’s only mildly distracting.

“Was interesting place to see you.” Ilya tips his cup toward Shane, an act of false nonchalance. “You know. At club.”

“Oh,” Shane nods, “yeah. Well— yeah. That’s Rose, mostly.” He scratches the back of his neck nervously. “She likes to go out. For dates.”

“Ah.”

“I mean,” Shane continues, knowing he’s coming off as nervous. Which— well, he is. “That’s what you do when you’re dating someone, right? You go out to eat. Go to clubs… and stuff.”

Shane flinches at his own words. He feels like a toddler explaining what his father does for work to another adult, like he’s engaging in romance from the outfield. He watches Ilya shrug, swallowing down a large gulp of chamomile before setting his mug down on the counter. He crosses his arms over his chest, toeing at Shane’s barstool mindlessly.

“Wouldn’t know,” Ilya finally remarks. “I don’t really… date.”

Ilya won’t meet his eyes, which— fair. Shane doesn’t really want to be looking at him either. Not during this discussion, toeing the line of their… something. The something they’ve been engaging with for the past seven years.

“Right. Yeah, you don’t— yeah,” he takes another bite of congee and stares down at his empty spoon when he gears up to ask: “What would you do, though? If you did— date, I mean.”

Ilya rests his elbow on the counter, letting his jaw fall to his palm. He shrugs his shoulders, his other hand reaching for the handle of his tea. He thumbs at the rim, still not meeting Shane's eye.

“Don't know,” he says quietly. “You know girls. Dinner, maybe a movie. They like these things, I've heard.”

“Sounds boring,” Shane half-heartedly teases, nudging his shoulders against Ilya's.

“Da, is why I do not do it.”

Shane pokes at the last bit of his congee. He's lost his appetite, thinking of all of Ilya's potentially boring dates.

"They don't have to be boring," he says. It almost sounds petulant, and again, he feels a little out of his depth. "You can do fun things too. Like— well, like, Rose took me to her set last week. That was pretty cool."

Ilya's fist clenches around the handle of his tea.

"Ah," he replies, voice tight. "How nice."

Shane rolls his eyes, turning to glare at the side of Ilya's head.

"Okay? Fine, what's *your* idea of a nice date then?"

Ilya doesn't respond, glaring down at his mug of tea like it's personally offended him. The silence stretches on, and just as Shane gears up to change the subject, Ilya speaks, his voice slightly subdued.

"I suppose… first I am making us breakfast. Early, before they wake up."

"Oh, is this like… not the first date? Did they stay over?"

Ilya waves his hand at him.

"I assume they made it to my bed the way they normally do. This is fantasy, Hollander, but not unrealistic."

Shane laughs at that.

"Okay, so you're wooing your hookup."

Ilya nods.

"Is the best I can do. *Anyway*—" He takes a sip of his tea, grinning at Shane conspiratorially. "I make us breakfast. Something healthy, like pancakes."

"Healthy," Shane nods. "Right."

"Mmm, and then we get ready for the day. Probably with shower sex, though."

Shane lets out a small huff of laughter.

"Of course. This is still a Rozanov fantasy we're talking about here."

"We go out, take my dog on a walk. Maybe around the block, to the park near my neighborhood."

"You don't have a dog."

"Is my fantasy. I have a dog."

Shane wrinkles his nose, but gestures for Ilya to continue.

“We play fetch, maybe. Hang out in the grass. This date, they love my dog, you see.”

“Right, I get it. Your fake date loves your fake dog.”

Ilya nods with false solemnity.

“Is probably not going to work if they don't love my dog. She's precious. The best girl.”

“Your date?” Shane asks, smiling. Ilya gasps, clutching his chest in mock offense.

“My dog!” He waves his hand, like he's batting away Shane’s purposeful ignorance. “So, we take the dog home. And now date really wants to go out. So, we pack up, and I take them to the rink.”

“Naturally,” Shane teases.

“Naturally,” Ilya repeats. “We scrimmage until we want to throw up. They're so competitive, you see. No ties allowed when up against the best player in the league.”

Shane's smile freezes on his face. When he speaks, it feels robotic, like the words are being spoken by someone else, someone outside his body.

“Of course,” he agrees.

“And so we are playing, and playing. And I let them win, probably, because it is first date. I want them to like me.”

Shane doesn't say anything after that, listening intently as he stares down at his cold congee.

“Afterward, we are tired. So we go back to my place to nap. Maybe watch movie afterwards. Or play videogames—?”

It's a leading question. Shane answers timidly: “Movie.”

“Okay, movie. Something easy, I don't want to pay attention to it. I'm too busy trying to convince my date to let me suck his dick.”

That gets a smile out of Shane, but he still won't look up. Embarrassingly, tears have risen to his water line, threatening to spill over at the first sign of weakness. He focuses very hard on one spot of marble directly in front of him, the grip he has on his mug bordering on painful.

“We make dinner together. Probably baked chicken, or fish, because he hates joy. And fun.”

“Yeah,” Shane agrees, barely choking out the word. He feels Ilya shift next to him, sees his head tilt closer in his periphery. When he speaks, his breath ghosts over Shane’s cheek.

“And then, I am thinking I'd like to take him dancing. Properly this time. At a nice club. VIP, so he is maybe not so overwhelmed.”

Shane shrugs his shoulders helplessly.

“He's not very good at it.”

“Ah, I think he just needs a good partner, is all. Someone to lead.”

Shane chooses to look up then. A terrible mistake, as Ilya’s so close their noses nearly brush. His edges are blurred, softened by Shane's unshed tears, and he looks— so beautiful. So, so beautiful. Shane misses him dearly.

“That sounds really nice,” is all he manages to choke out, eyes meeting Ilya's. Soft, but still unreadable.

“Yeah?” Ilya asks, voice barely above a whisper.

“Yeah.”

“Could redo that last part now, if you like.”

“I don't wanna go back to—”

“No no no, shh shh shh, here. Come here.” He grabs Shane's hand, tugging him towards the open floor of the living room. With his free hand, he unlocks his phone, scrolling until he must find what he's looking for. Soft R&B music resounds from his little phone speaker, and he sets it on the corner of the coffee table.

“I think you need to give me more alcohol before trying to get me to do this,” Shane tries to tease as Ilya grabs him by both hands. “I'm not kidding when I say I'm really, *really* bad.”

Ilya ignores him, lifting his hands and sliding his palms down Shane's arms to position them around his neck.

“Is my fantasy,” Ilya reminds him, stepping closer so Shane can wrap his arms loosely around his neck. Ilya's hands grip his hips loosely, and he tilts his head up, a silent invitation for Shane to rest his cheek against his collar.

“Now what?” Shane whispers, ear pressed to Ilya's pulse point. He can hear the rapid-fire pitter-patter of his heartbeat.

“Now,” Ilya speaks to his temple, “we dance.”

Ilya's hips move, gyrating in an exaggerated arc. He guides Shane's hips with his hands, tilting them to the left, then the right, helping him match the motion of his own. Shane tries to follow his movements, his arms naturally winding tighter around Ilya's neck to maintain his grip. His mouth and nose are pressed to damp skin. Ilya smells so good, like pine soap and sweat and the faint hint of cigarette smoke. Shane can't help but contrast it against Rose’s perfume. She smells lovely, like flowers and citrus. But Shane's intimate with this smell, has wrapped himself in it for seven years. He wishes the scent would linger on his clothes, his sheets. That, when he's feeling lonely, he could roll onto his stomach and shove his face in his own pillow, smelling Ilya's body soap, the musky scent of his shampoo.

“We don't have to eat my boring food,” Shane says mindlessly, feeling Ilya's fingers spread across his lower back, pressing their pelvises together.

“Hmm?” Ilya breathes into his hair.

“Your fantasy. We— I mean. You don't have to eat boring food for dinner. You can have something normal,” Shane's voice dies out as he speaks, until the end of his sentence comes out a near whisper. “Like tuna melts.”

Ilya hums, grinding against him lazily. He's no longer guiding Shane, easing him into the slow pace of the music. Shane caught onto the rhythm relatively quickly and is matching the undulations of Ilya’s hips with his own lascivious little movements.

“As long as my date promises not to leave me after I feed him this time.”

Shane buries his head in the crook of Ilya’s neck. He's hard, and Ilya's hard too; he can feel him pressed against his upper thigh. But neither man appears particularly inclined to do anything about it.

“He won't,” Shane whispers, pressing his mouth to Ilya’s damp skin, not a kiss, but a near thing. One of Ilya’s hands stays splayed across Shane's lower back. His other slides up the notches of his spine until he reaches Shane’s nape. There, he buries his fingers in Shane's hair, holding his head to him, turning his face to press a kiss to the crown of his head.

“Maybe my date breaks up with his movie star girlfriend. Is hard sharing, you see.”

Shane's head jerks back, jostling their shared movements. He meets Ilya's eyes, staring pointedly.

“Yeah,” he says dryly. “It is.”

Ilya, the fucker, has the audacity to smirk. He plants a quick kiss to Shane’s nose, then spins him around by his hips. Shane’s now facing the floor-to-ceiling windows acting as the walls to his living room. He can see his reflection, hazy against the backdrop of city lights and a crescent moon. Ilya’s arms wrap around his torso, fingers spread out across his lower abdomen. His thumbs tease the sharp jut of both hipbones. Shane watches him tilt his head, blond curls tangling with Shane’s sweaty locks. He mouths at Shane’s ear, kissing the tendon of his neck beneath it before peppering open-mouthed kisses on his lobe. It’s messy and hot, giving Shane whiplash as he recalls this scene playing out before him not three hours prior. Illya’s assault on his ear lets up, and he whispers to him, eyes catching his in the window.

“If you wanted to be my girl,” he grins, hips swaying, hand sneaking down to palm at Shane’s hard-on through his jeans, “baby, you only had to ask.”

Another non-answer. Shane’s going to kill him— right after he gets off grinding his hips into Ilya’s sturdy palm like a wanton whore.

“Ilya,” he groans, throwing his head back against Ilya’s shoulder, pushing his hips forward to meet the pressure there. Ilya’s free hand moves from Shane’s hip, coming up to grip his jaw,

forcing him to watch them in the window as they move.

“Look at us,” he rasps, eyes piercing where they watch Shane in their shared reflection. “Look at *you.*” He punctuates the remark by popping the top button of Shane’s pants and sliding the zipper down, freeing Shane’s cock from its confines. Ilya sneaks his fingertips beneath the waistband of Shane’s briefs and wraps them lazily around his cock. “Nobody can make you feel the way I do. Nobody *touches* you the way I do. *Fucks* you the way I do.”

“No,” Shane whines, shaking his head in a minuscule manner. “No, nobody.”

“Nobody,” Ilya repeats, tightening his grip on Shane’s cock. It’s dry and riding slightly on the edge of painful, but Shane’s high on the feeling, chasing it with unsteady thrusts. His eyes are hooded, palms sweaty where they tighten their grip on Ilya’s forearm. Ilya releases his cock briefly, holding out his palm face-up expectantly, and Shane spits in it. When his hand returns to his cock, Shane gasps.

“Oh,” he moans, watching with rapt fascination as Ilya jerks him off quick and dirty. He feels the other man’s hard-on digging into the meat of his ass, and he grinds back against him, lurid and unthinking. “Oh, Ilya.”

“Yes,” Ilya breathes into his ear, panting from the exertion. “Yes, baby, yes. You say my name so pretty,” he bites at Shane’s earlobe, a sharp pleasure.

“Say it again.”

“Please,” Shane begs, turning his head to pepper sloppy kisses along Ilya’s jawline. “Please, Ilya, I—”

Suddenly, he’s flipped again, and Ilya’s walking him backwards a few steps until his back meets the cool surface of the window pane. He slides down without instruction, eyes locked on Ilya’s as he pops the button of his jeans and drags the zipper down with his teeth. Ilya has one hand in Shane’s hair, the other pressed palm-down against the window to maintain his balance. His eyes remain predatory, watching as Shane pulls his cock out swiftly, licking up the full length and deep-throating it all in one go, no warning.

”Fuck,” he spits, pressing his forhead against the windowpane. *”Shane.”*

Shane groans around Ilya’s cock, spreading his legs as wide as he can. Ilya sees this, must understand what he’s asking for, as he repositions one of his legs so that it's slotted directly between Shane’s. Shane’s mind alternates between focusing on giving Ilya the sloppiest blowjob of his life, and grinding against his shin like a dog in heat. Ilya can’t seem to figure out what he wants Shane to do. One minute, his fingers are tangled in Shane’s hair, pressing him so close to Ilya’s body that his nose is buried in coarse pubic hair. The next, he’s being ripped off, mouth gaping, teary eyes staring up at Ilya like he carries the sun on his shoulders. During one of these moments, Ilya presses his thumb to the corner of Shane’s mouth, gathering the precome that’s leaked out there and pressing it back into his mouth. Shane sucks his thumb eagerly, eyes closing as he licks Ilya’s thumbprint.

“I miss this,” Ilya lets out, gruff and a bit parched. “I miss you.”

Shane can't tell if the tense is messed up because of Ilya's English, and half his brain has currently melted down into his dick, or if he really means it. Either way, it has Shane's eyes flying open, his mouth dropping Ilya's thumb so he can swallow his cock back down. He breathes in deeply through his nose, trying to focus on every sensation assaulting him. The cool wood digging into his knees, strong fingers tangled in his hair. His cock, getting just enough friction to lead him toward the edge, eyes squeezed shut, saliva and precome dribbling down his chin, jaw aching as he takes in Ilya's cock, over and over. He listens to Ilya's broken moans, the raspy, erratic breaths he sucks in, sharp and quick. He's panting, both hands moving to Shane's hair, then his shoulders, eager, seemingly unable to still his movements. Shane reaches up with both hands to find Ilya's. He drags them back to his hair. "Here," the motion says, and Ilya's fingers still, rooting themselves in Shane's locks where they rest. Shane moves one hand to the base of Ilya's cock, jerking him off quickly as he slides his mouth back until Ilya's dick rests against the pad of his tongue. His other hand moves to Ilya's upper thigh, gripping the back of it tightly as he rides out the beginnings of an orgasm. Ilya must sense it, eyes widening and a broken *"Shane,"* falling from his lips. He lets go then, coming on Shane's tongue, his cheeks, his chin, painting Shane's face with his spend. He lets out a low grunt, but keeps his eyes peeled open, the two of them watching each other as they fall apart. When Ilya's tension eases, his muscles turning to putty beneath Shane's hands, he sinks down atop Shane's lap, settling on his spread thighs. He licks up Shane's chin like a dog, then offers Shane a lurid, open-mouthed kiss, pressing his tongue inside Shane's mouth so they can both taste him. Shane wraps his arms around Ilya's shoulders, wiping his face off on Ilya's shoulder playfully and giggling at the face he makes.

"That was hot," he sighs, burying his face in the crook of Ilya's neck. "Take me dancing more often."

Ilya hums, neither an agreement nor an admonishment. He pets the back of Shane's head with one hand, the other moving to Shane's face, cupping his cheek and holding him close to his chest. They sit there for a moment, rocking back and forth, Ilya watching the city lights beneath him, Shane with his eyes closed, picturing their bodies together like this in a *real* club, on a *real* date. Another mirage to add to the beautiful list of dreams he'll never enact. He sighs, pressing a kiss to Ilya's collarbone.

"Since we started this whole thing backwards," Ilya interrupts their silence, planting a quick kiss atop Shane's tangled head of hair, "is now time for a movie, I think."

Shane knows he's too tired to make it through a movie, but he'll take any excuse he can get to keep Ilya here. They rise, relocating to the upstairs shower. They clean off relatively quickly, both too fatigued to start anything new. Once they're both dried and changed into Shane's loungewear (Shane can't help but giggle when he sees the cuffs of his sweatpants barely reach Ilya's ankles), they tread back downstairs. Ilya brews them both a second cup of tea (chamomile for each of them this time) while Shane picks out something on Netflix. He settles on some new action film, sure it must be up Ilya's alley, then settles back into the couch cushions. A moment later, Ilya joins him, setting their mugs atop the coffee table— "Coasters, Ilya!"— before he spreads out across the couch. He tugs at Shane until the other man is lying on top of him, face pillowed on his chest, legs tangled together at the opposite end of the couch. One of Ilya's hands instantly moves to Shane's hair, curling little tendrils of it mindlessly between thumb and forefinger. The other smooths down Shane's spine, resting

between his lower back dimples. Shane, for his part, has tucked his hands beneath Ilya's armpits, nudging his head up beneath the other man's chin. The movie plays on low volume, and Shane can already hear Ilya's breaths evening out, his body relaxing back into the couch cushions.

"When do you fly out?" he whispers, eyes locked on one nameless character shooting another on the television. Ilya's arms tighten around him for a brief moment before releasing their tension.

"Nine."

"Mmm," Shane sighs, closing his eyes and shuffling impossibly closer. "Wake me before you leave. To say goodbye."

Ilya's fingers still in his hair, trailing down so his thumb can brush against the smattering of his freckles. He tucks his chin in so he can breathe out into Shane's hair, tickling his scalp.

"Of course," he answers quietly, thumb brushing back and forth against his cheekbone. "Of course, solnyshko."

Shane's quick to fall asleep after that, his eyelids heavy and his body lax. The last thing he feels before drifting off is Ilya's fingers tucking beneath his chin, tilting his head up so he can press a warm kiss to his forehead.

"Goodnight, Shane," is whispered against his ear. Shane burrows closer, allowing his thoughts to settle as he drifts off.

When he wakes, it's to the smell of pancakes wafting in from the kitchen.

End Notes

the title comes from my misinterpretation of the lyrics of a song by Cigarettes After Sex, titled *K.*

also, the congee is from Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous.* it was his grandma's recipe. y'all should read his book. And *Emperor of Gladness.* they're both incredible pieces of art.

im not sponsored by Ocean Vuong. I just love him. Ocean Vuong, if ur reading this, your poetry collection changed my life ❤️

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