

three times shane hollander attempts at asking ilya rozanov for a break, and the one time he actually gets it

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three times shane hollander attempts at asking ilya rozanov for a break, and the one time he actually gets it

by [mariku](#)

Summary

Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander have been together for over a decade. In this time frame, Shane Hollander asks Ilya Rozanov for a break 3 times.

It's too bad Ilya Rozanov doesn't really understand what a break is or how long it should last.

Notes

my attempt at fluff to prove to myself that i am capable of it. yay!!!!

also, i'm aware they are in school in canada, but i'm operating under the assumption that canada and american colleges are similar. research was minimal for this fic cause i was busy <3

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

I. that boy is corrupt. could you raise him to love me, maybe?

The first time Shane asks for a break from Ilya, it's a few days before they all go home for winter break, except for Ilya, who is staying behind since he doesn't want to go back to Russia.

At that point in their relationship—at least what Shane thinks is a relationship—they're comfortable with each other. It had been three months since they started dating after they met at a boring welcome-back mixer.

It was Shane's first year at the University of Toronto studying computer science and history (because history is his passion and computer science could get him a job) on a hockey scholarship, which already feels like a weird enough combination without everything else that's about to happen to him.

Hayden, Shane's roommate and friend from high school, dragged him out so "they could meet new people and pick up hotties."

Shane hadn't wanted to go. He was more of an introvert, and he came to university to study seriously so he could eventually get a cool, respectable job and not... whatever this was.

But Shane relented after Hayden threatened, "You promised your mom you'd try, and you know I can always text her."

"Snitch," Shane laughed, but he still went because he promised his mother, and she could be scary when he didn't listen.

Not even thirty minutes after they arrived, Hayden—the absolute bastard—ditched him to go talk to a girl he'd just met, who would later become his girlfriend, Jackie.

So Shane is left alone, standing awkwardly near a wall, watching people move in clusters across the room like an anthropologist observing some kind of social experiment, wondering how long he can nurse his ginger ale before safely escaping back to his dorm

And then—because he is the universe's favorite—someone bumps into him.

He startles, sloshing his drink slightly over the rim of the cup. "Shit," he mutters under his breath.

"Oh shit, sorry," the tall stranger says immediately, his voice heavy with a very noticeable and very distracting accent.

"It's fine, it was just an accident," Shane says automatically, looking up.

And then he really looks up.

And—oh.

Oh.

His eyes widen a little because he is suddenly face-to-face with possibly the most gorgeous man he has ever seen in his entire life. The stranger has perfectly messy curls, like he tried to fix them and then gave up halfway through; a mole on his cheek that somehow makes him even more interesting; a sharp, clean nose; and soft pink lips that Shane immediately has to stop himself from staring at.

He's really, really, *really* fucking hot.

"Still, I am sorry," the stranger says. "I will get you another. What do you want?"

"Oh—uh—ginger ale," Shane stammers, immediately cringing at himself. "But, it's fine, really, I'm fine without it."

"You say 'fine' two times," the stranger says, tilting his head slightly. "Maybe you are not really fine."

Shane blinks at him.

There is... a lot happening right now.

There is the overwhelming hotness of the stranger. The accent, which should honestly come with a warning label. Also, the fact that this man is apparently calling him out in the politest way possible.

Shane cracks a small smile despite himself, and that seems to be the right move, because the stranger smiles back, easy and a little amused.

"It's fine, really," Shane repeats, staring at the stranger for more than a socially acceptable number of seconds, and immediately wants to launch himself into the sun.

You're gay, Shane, he tells himself firmly. *Yes, he's hot, but don't be an idiot. He's probably straight, and you cannot be doing this right now.*

"Mhm," the stranger hums.

Shane takes an awkward sip of what's left of his ginger ale, suddenly hyper-aware of everything—his hands, his posture, the way he's standing, and the inevitable fact that he is absolutely going to embarrass himself despite his best efforts.

"My name is Ilya," the stranger finally says. "Is nice to meet you."

"My name is Shane," he replies quickly. "It's nice to meet you, too. I'm a freshman, a computer science and history major, and on a hockey scholarship."

He freezes for a split second after he says it.

That was too much. That was definitely too much. Why did I say all that?

“I am a sophomore,” Ilya says, completely unfazed. “Pre-med track, but really, I am a biology major.”

Ilya smiles again.

And fuck.

May the gay gods forgive him, but Shane is gone. Absolutely gone. There is no saving him.

They end up talking for the rest of the night, which is surprising because Shane usually runs out of social energy after approximately twenty minutes, but somehow Ilya just keeps talking. Shane listens and responds. Somehow it works.

He learns that Ilya lives not too far from his dorm, which feels important for reasons he doesn't look deeply into at the moment. That he's in an indie rock band with his friends and insists they're “very serious musicians,” even though he says it while laughing.

That his father is, in his own words, “some rich asshole” who couldn't wait for Ilya to be out of his life. That he smokes, which Shane discovers when Ilya casually pulls out a cigarette and lights it mid-conversation like it's the most normal thing in the world.

(Shane does not tell him he hates it when people smoke.)

He also learns that Ilya is popular. Like, very popular. People keep coming up to him—girls, guys, everyone—to say hi, to flirt, to linger just a little too long in his orbit.

Ilya entertains it, smiling and cracking jokes in that accent of his, but he always comes back to Shane.

But most importantly—most importantly—Shane learns that Ilya is bi.

Thank the gay gods for that.

At the end of the night, they exchange phone numbers, and then, somehow, they just don't stop talking.

Their texts, over the next few days, are mostly stupid but endearing like—

Ilya: shane shane

Shane: ??

Ilya: u are history major so u must know this

Shane: Okay, I can try to answer, I guess.

Ilya: what happen to the dog in space?

Shane: what? Dog in space?

Ilya: yeah, during cold war

Shane: Oh...Laika. You could've Googled this...

Ilya: Google is liar

Ilya: it tell me that dog died in space

Ilya: but that can not be true so u must know true story bc u are history major

Shane: Ilya.. Laika did die. She overheated and died like hours into the flight.

Ilya: what? how can that happen? Russia is superior...

Ilya: she die alone? in space? with no one???

Ilya: shane, she die alone?

Shane: Yeah. It was pretty sad.

Read

(Shane could never prove it, but he's pretty sure Ilya cried after sending that message.)

It's fun, and Shane is crushing hard. How could he not? The sophomore is funny, hot, kind, and—annoyingly—just the perfect package.

There's just one thing that bothers him.

Shane isn't stupid; he's aware of Ilya's popularity, and he knows that Ilya... gets around.

"Understatement of the century," Hayden had huffed one night, sprawled across his bed like he was personally offended by Ilya's existence.

For some reason, Hayden—who, unfortunately, shared a gen ed class with Ilya—could not stand the Russian.

"He's leaving class with another girl—or sometimes guys—every time I see him," Hayden continued, voice full of righteous irritation. "He's annoying, he's cocky, and he thinks he's the shit because he's in a fucking band. News flash, dude! There are like 500 different guys exactly like you in Toronto!"

Shane had stayed quiet through most of the rant, picking at the edge of his notebook.

“He’s perfectly nice to me,” he’d said eventually, because it was true.

“That’s probably because he wants to fuck you,” Hayden shot back immediately.

Shane had made a strangled noise. “That’s not—we’re just acquaintances!”

“Well, don’t be his acquaintance!” Hayden groaned, dragging a pillow over his face before peeking out again. “He’s an asshole, Shane. He’s going to, like, woo you, fuck you, and then dump you. I’ve heard things. He’s literally the biggest fuckboy around, and he’s only a sophomore.”

Shane had rolled his eyes, equal parts annoyed and embarrassed. “You’re being dramatic.”

“I’m being correct,” Hayden insisted.

Shane, of course, does not listen.

He keeps texting Ilya. Keeps meeting up with him. Keeps letting himself get pulled in by the easy smiles and the stupid jokes and the way Ilya always seems to find him in a crowded room like he’s been looking for him specifically.

He lets himself fall into Ilya because it’s just so easy.

But, maybe he should’ve fucking listened.

Because now it’s three days before winter break, and Shane is not having an awesome time with his friends or packing because he’s lying in his bed, staring at the ceiling with blurry eyes, his chest tight and aching in a way that feels both dramatic and completely justified.

And crying because of Ilya fucking Rozanov.

They’ve been *something* for three months now. Shane doesn’t even know what to call it anymore, which probably should’ve been his first red flag.

They’ve gone on dates—actual ones, not just hanging out.

(He knows these are dates because Ilya made it clear they were dates.)

Ilya had taken him to this tiny café off campus once and made him try an Americano, something bitter and expensive that Shane hated but pretended to like. He’s taken Shane to every exhibition the local art museum puts on because Shane has mentioned a few times how much he loves them. Ilya has taken him on hiking dates, fucking boba tea dates, and movie dates.

Every date a teenager finds in a “fall dates you have to go on with your man” TikTok video, they’ve done it.

They’ve kissed—slow and soft sometimes, messy and desperate other times. Shane invited him to his hockey games, and Ilya showed up in Shane’s jersey, leaning against the railing with that same easy confidence, shouting something in Russian when Shane scored.

Ilya had invited Shane to his shows, too—small venues, loud music, dim lights, and Ilya on stage like he belonged there, like he was made for people to look at him. Ilya winked at him from the stage, making Shane blush. After the show, he hung out with the band, and then Ilya drove him back to his dorm and kissed him goodnight.

They've met each other's friends, hung out together, even though Hayden hates Ilya and Ilya likes rage-baiting him.

(" Rozanov, what the fuck is this?"

"Truth."

"You posted an IG story with my girlfriend and said she deserves better than the 'boring Canadian with bad hair.'"

"Yes, is truth."

"Fuck you, asshole."

"I do not like you.")

And they've had sex.

A lot of sex.

Amazing, hot, slightly overwhelming, completely all-consuming sex that leaves Shane feeling like his brain has been short-circuited and his bones have melted. The kind that lingers, that makes him want more even when he knows he shouldn't.

The kind he misses right now, which is honestly just adding insult to injury.

But he can't have it anymore.

Because he—yes, *Shane*—just ended things with Ilya.

Past Shane from a few hours ago would want to smack him because everything had been fine. More than fine, actually.

Finals were over, and Shane had that light, floaty feeling of being temporarily free from responsibilities, so he'd texted Ilya to come over like he usually does.

Thankfully, Hayden had been out with Jackie, which meant there was no chance of an argument breaking out the second Ilya stepped into the room.

"Come in, I'm just packing for my break," Shane had said, stepping back and holding the door open with a small smile.

"Nice," Ilya said easily as he walked in like he owned the place, immediately dropping onto Hayden's bed and stretching out across it.

Shane glanced over and shook his head, a fond sort of exasperation settling in. “You know he hates it when you sit on his bed,” he said, half-scolding, half-amused.

Ilya didn’t even bother moving. He just grinned, completely unbothered. “I do not care,” he said, lounging like a cat in a patch of sunlight. “You are excited for winter break?”

Shane nodded, turning back to his suitcase and folding a hoodie with more care than necessary. “Very. I kind of miss my parents,” he admitted.

“I think you miss them very much,” Ilya said, voice teasing as his gaze flicked to the framed photo on Shane’s desk—the one from his high school graduation, where he stood between his parents, all three of them smiling like nothing in the world could go wrong.

Shane followed his gaze and frowned. “I like that photo,” he said defensively. “Stop being an asshole.”

Ilya smirked, eyes bright with something that always felt like trouble. “You know you like it when I am asshole,” he said. “Is why you keep coming back, no?”

“Sure, sure, whatever,” Shane muttered, trying not to smile as he shoved a pair of jeans into his suitcase. “So, what do you plan on doing in the three weeks no one is here?”

Ilya shrugged, like the answer didn’t matter, like none of it mattered. “Is Toronto. I can drink. I will go clubbing with Sveta,” he said casually. Then, just as casually, “and maybe find someone to fuck.”

He says it like it’s nothing.

Like he didn’t just take a hammer to Shane’s chest.

Shane stills, fingers tightening around the fabric in his hands. For a second, he thinks maybe he misheard.

“What?” he snaps, looking up.

“What?” Ilya echoes, brows knitting slightly, like he genuinely doesn’t understand.

“The last thing you said,” Shane says, his voice coming out sharper than he intends. His breathing feels off now, too fast, too uneven. “Find someone else to fuck?”

“Yes, why not?” Ilya says, like it’s obvious. “You will not be here. You expect me to be like monk? I can be, but is not fun.”

All the words land wrong.

“No, why are you sleeping with anyone at all or even thinking about it?” Shane shoots back, the frustration rising too quickly for him to stop it.

Now Ilya looks confused.

Then, slowly, that confusion shifts into something. Shane doesn't know what, but he doesn't fucking like it. It makes his heart beat faster in a bad way.

"Chill out, Hollander," he says, pushing himself up to sit properly on the bed. "I will not give you STD. I will be very safe. You come back, and I will fuck you exactly the way you want."

"That's not even what I'm thinking about!" Shane exclaims, the words bursting out of him. "Have you been sleeping with other people this entire time?"

Ilya pauses at that, like he has to actually think about the answer.

Then he shrugs.

"No, not for long time," he says. "But, if I did, I did not think you would have issue with this." His gaze sharpens slightly. "Do you have problem with it?"

"Of course I fucking do!" Shane all but yells, the hurt spilling over into anger before he can stop it. "What the fuck? I know we're not boyfriends, but I thought we were at least exclusively dating each other."

Ilya frowns, like Shane just said something that doesn't make sense.

"Exclusively dating is being boyfriends," he says slowly. "But we are not."

"So that means you can fuck someone else?" Shane asks, his voice tight, like he's trying very hard not to let it shake. "I know we didn't clarify, but I really like you and I—ugh. I can't have this discussion right now."

"Shane, Shane, calm down," Ilya says, already pushing himself off Hayden's bed and walking toward him.

Shane lifts a hand, stopping him before he can get too close. "No—no. I need a break to think about this, I think," he says, words coming out rushed.

"What?" Ilya asks, frowning now.

"I need time to think before we can talk about this," Shane repeats, forcing the words out more evenly this time.

Ilya studies him for a second, jaw tightening slightly. "Okay," he says finally. "But we are talking about this before you leave, yes?"

"Okay, fine," Shane says quickly, because the alternative feels worse. "I'll text you tomorrow. I promise."

So—*technically*—it isn't a break.

Maybe Shane is being a little dramatic. Maybe he's overreacting. He doesn't give a shit.

He's very fucking hurt that the guy he's been dating—not exclusively, apparently—wants to fuck other people because they won't be seeing each other for three weeks. That kind of thing tends to hurt one's very pure, very sensitive heart.

And it's worse because this is his first... whatever this is.

Since he came out earlier this year, Ilya is the first guy he's kissed. The first guy he's slept with. The first guy he's let himself want like this.

"Relationship," Shane thinks bitterly, lying in bed later that night.

Except it's not a relationship. Not in the way he wants, anyway.

He ends up going to sleep early, mostly because he's exhausted from crying and partially because he knows he's going to need all the emotional energy he can get to deal with Ilya the next day.

—

When he meets Ilya the next morning at their usual coffee shop, there's already an iced caramel macchiato waiting for him.

With whipped cream. Of course.

"Here," Ilya says, nudging it toward him as soon as Shane sits down. "Drink, and we talk."

Shane hates him a little for that.

He hates him for remembering his order, for getting the whipped cream, and for looking ridiculously good this early in the morning, like he didn't ruin Shane's entire emotional stability less than twelve hours ago.

Shane takes a sip anyway.

"I want to say some things before you do," Ilya says, watching him carefully. "Is that okay?"

Shane nods, because he's not sure he trusts himself to speak yet.

"I like you, Shane," Ilya starts, and his voice is different. He sounds vulnerable. "When I say I fuck other people, I have not done that for long time. Like maybe after our second date."

Shane pauses mid-sip, eyes flicking up.

"Is true, my friends make fun of me," Ilya continues, a small, almost self-conscious huff of laughter escaping him. "They call me 'whipped.' Whatever." He shrugs. "I only say what I say yesterday because I was stupid, and I did not know if you want to be my boyfriend."

Shane picks at the cardboard sleeve around his cup

“Maybe I was scared, you know?” Ilya adds, quieter now. “Scared that you do not want all of me. Like how I smoke. I know you do not like that. You say it to me all the time—‘Ilya, do not smoke.’” He huffs again, but there’s no real humor in it. “Maybe I think... if I ask for more, you will get scared and leave.”

He hesitates, then looks directly at Shane.

“So I pretend I do not care,” he admits. “But I do. I care a lot.”

Shane swallows.

Ilya exhales slowly. “I want more with you. ”

There’s a brief silence after that. Ilya shifts in his seat slightly, like he’s about to keep talking—because he always does—but Shane cuts in before he can.

“You’re an idiot,” Shane says.

Ilya blinks. “What?”

“You’re an idiot,” Shane repeats, voice thick, but steadier now. “You thought I didn’t want more?”

Ilya opens his mouth, then closes it again.

“I’ve been going to your shows,” Shane continues, setting his drink down with a soft thud. “I let you drag me to those awful clubs. I tolerate your smoking, even though it’s disgusting—”

“It is not—” Ilya starts.

“It is, not to mention you’re premed,” Shane huffs, then continues more seriously. “I introduced you to my friends. I invited you to my games. I—” He stops, exhaling sharply. “I really like you, Ilya. Obviously.”

Ilya goes very still.

“And yeah,” Shane adds, quieter now, “I thought we were heading somewhere. I just didn’t realize you thought we weren’t.”

“I...” Ilya starts, then pauses, like he’s choosing his words carefully for once. “I did not think you would want me like that.”

Shane stares at him. “You’re literally insane.”

Ilya huffs a small laugh at that, tension easing just slightly.

Shane looks down at his drink, then back up at him, his thoughts still messy, still tangled, but clearer than they were last night.

“You really haven’t been with anyone else?” he asks, voice smaller than he intends.

Ilya shakes his head immediately. “No. Not since second date, and was only a makeout with lucky fan.” He smirks cockily at that, and Shane rolls his eyes. “I did not think it mattered to you, so I did not say it properly.” He grimaces slightly. “That is my fault.”

Shane lets out a slow breath. That helps a lot more than he wants to admit.

Okay. Okay. Maybe the gay gods have not abandoned him after all.

“But you would’ve,” Shane says, because he needs to say it, even if it makes him feel a little sick. “Over break.”

Ilya hesitates, “Maybe. Because I did not think you were... mine like that.”

The words hit him sharply, but they’re softer than before because Shane realizes, with a dull sort of clarity, that he never said it either. He never asked, he just assumed they were on the same page.

“I don’t—” Shane starts, then stops, frustrated. “I don’t want that.”

Ilya’s expression falls before his eyes, and his eyes flicker with hurt. “You do not want me to —”

“I don’t want you to be with other people,” Shane says quickly. “At all. Not now, not during break, not—just not.”

Ilya studies him carefully, like he’s trying to understand something important.

“Then say it,” he says finally.

Shane frowns. “Say what?”

“What you want,” Ilya replies simply.

Shane’s heart starts beating a little faster because he knows what that means. He hadn’t planned on saying it like this.

Not in a coffee shop, not after crying himself to sleep, not when he still feels a little raw and exposed. Not 12 hours after, he thought Ilya was treating him like a fuckbuddy.

Shane exhales, dragging a hand through his hair.

“I want—” he starts, then stops again, shaking his head. “God, this is so embarrassing.”

Ilya smiles a little. “Yes,” he says. “Is very embarrassing. Keep going.”

“Shut up,” Shane mutters automatically, but there’s a hint of a smile now.

Shane looks at Ilya. At the man’s stupidly pretty face, the soft eyes that pull him in, the way he’s leaning forward just slightly, like he doesn’t want to miss a word.

“I want you,” Shane says finally. “Just you. I don’t want to share you with anyone else, and I don’t want you sleeping with other people, and I don’t want to feel like I’m just... one of many.”

His voice wavers a little at the end, but he pushes through it.

“I want you to be my boyfriend,” he adds, quieter.

There. It’s out.

Ilya smiles, and it’s not the cocky, teasing smirk that irritates everyone. But the big, wide smile that Shane fucking adores.

“Okay,” he says.

Shane blinks. “Okay?”

“Yes,” Ilya says, like it’s obvious. “I will be your boyfriend.”

Shane stares at him. “That’s it? That’s your response?”

Ilya tilts his head. “You want speech?”

“A little bit, yeah!” Shane says, half-laughing despite himself.

Ilya considers that, then leans back slightly, like he’s preparing something important.

“Shane Hollander,” he starts, far too formal, “I like you very much. You are smart, and you are kind, and you are very cute like angry kitten when you are mad, even if you yell too much.”

Shane glares at him weakly because his heart feels too full, like it’s about to burst out of his chest from happiness.

“I do not want to be with other people,” he continues. “I want to be with you. Only you. So, yes, I am your boyfriend now.”

Shane stares at him for a second longer.

Then he laughs because he feels like he’s floating in the air.

“You’re ridiculous,” he says.

Ilya grins. “But you like it.”

“Unfortunately,” Shane admits.

Shane nudges his foot lightly under the table. “So... no hooking up with random people over break?”

Ilya wrinkles his nose. “No. Sounds very boring now.”

Shane chuckles, shaking his head.

“Good,” he says.

That was the first time Shane asked for “a break” with Ilya. But it’s not the last.

II. heartbreak is one thing, my ego's another. i beg you, don't embarrass me, motherfucker.

The second time Shane asks for a break with Ilya, he’s a sophomore, and Ilya is a junior.

They’re packing for their spring break trip to the Bahamas—together, as a couple—with their friends. It’s been planned for months. There’s a group chat that hasn’t stopped buzzing with ideas and itineraries since January.

Hayden and Jackie are going, obviously. Rose—Shane’s best friend since freshman year—is coming too. From Ilya’s side, there’s Svetlana and Troy from his band, whom Shane has grown to genuinely like, even if they are a lot.

A lot has happened in the year Shane and Ilya have been together.

Sometimes, Shane still catches himself thinking about that stupid mixer, about how he almost didn’t go, about how easily everything could’ve just not happened.

Then he looks at Ilya and thinks, *Yeah. No. That would’ve been a tragedy.*

Because Ilya is—annoyingly, unfairly—the best fucking boyfriend ever.

He’s sweet in ways Shane didn’t expect at first, tucked underneath all that arrogance and charm. He’s attentive to everything concerning Shane, always noticing things he doesn’t even say out loud.

Like for Shane’s birthday last year, Ilya had gotten him a digital camera. When he looked at his boyfriend curiously, Ilya smiled.

“You always send me videos on TikTok, and you say, ‘Ilya, look at these videos, they look so cool,’” he said. “Now you have one for yourself. Nice, no?”

Shane almost cried. But he didn’t because that would be embarrassing.

Also, despite his insane schedule—classes, preparing for med school, band practices, shows, whatever else he manages to cram into his life—Ilya always makes time for him.

He picks Shane up after late classes or practices, leaning against his car like he stepped out of a movie, cigarette in hand, until Shane inevitably takes it away and throws it out with a glare.

He always makes it to Shane's home games, still louder than everyone else in the stands, and shouting things in Russian that Shane doesn't understand but feels.

He makes sure Shane eats and sleeps. He makes sure he's comfortable in ways that are small but constant, like pulling him closer when it's cold, handing him water without being asked, remembering things Shane forgets himself.

It's a lot in a good way. In a way that makes Shane's chest feel full just thinking about it.

Which is why this feels so fucking awful when other people give his boyfriend attention.

Shane isn't stupid. He knows Ilya is sexy, charming, funny—dangerously all three at once. He knows people want his stupidly perfect boyfriend.

He sees it all the time. The looks when they're out and about, the lingering touches at parties, even though Ilya's arm is perpetually around Shane's waist, and the way people laugh a little too hard at everything Ilya says.

Sometimes, it makes Shane feel lucky. Other times, it makes him feel like he's constantly punching above his weight.

But it's not like Ilya's hiding him or that it's a secret because everyone knows Ilya is dating Shane. It would be impossible not to know because Ilya makes it very obvious.

He's possessive in a way that should probably annoy Shane more than it does. He's always touching him, pulling him close, kissing him like he doesn't care who's watching, and leaving purple hickeys on Shane's skin like marks of ownership and little reminders.

And Shane is all over his Instagram. **Everywhere**. He's in photos Ilya captures during their dates, in videos, and in blurry late-night posts with Russian captions that Shane has to run through a translator.

With him <3

Love of my life <3

My sunshine <3

Isn't he so pretty? <3

So yes, it is very fucking obvious that Ilya Rozanov is in love and happily in a relationship with Shane Hollander.

That still doesn't stop people.

Girls—and guys—still flirt with him like Shane is chopped liver.

So, when Ilya informs him that Troy had invited two girls along to their trip, he is fucking pissed.

Beyond pissed.

He knows these two girls.

Troy had met them at some party and once brought them to a band performance. Then, they decided to latch on like leeches because they wanted to fuck Ilya. He knows because he's an observant human being, unlike his 6'3 Russian boyfriend, who only observes Shane.

So, now, they're in Ilya's apartment, half-packed suitcases open on the floor, clothes scattered everywhere, and something that should be easy is turning into something else entirely in Shane's head.

"I just think," Shane says, trying to keep his voice level as he folds a t-shirt a little too aggressively, "that you could've told me beforehand."

"Told you what?" Ilya asks from where he's sitting on the edge of the bed, watching him with that familiar crease between his brows.

"That you invited people," Shane says, not looking at him. "Extra people."

"I did tell you," Ilya replies, slower now. "I said Troy and Sveta are coming."

"No fucking shit, Sherlock, I've known they're coming for months, so I'm obviously not talking about them," Shane says, finally glancing up. "I'm talking about the other ones."

Ilya frowns. "What other ones?"

Shane wants to bang his head against the wall three times.

Sabrina Carpenter's song comes to mind. Sometimes, half of his brain just ain't there.

He lets out a short, disbelieving laugh. "The two girls Troy is bringing? The ones he met, like, last month?"

"Oh," Ilya says, like it just clicked. "They are not problem. They just come to have fun."

"That's not the point," Shane says, dropping the shirt into his suitcase. "You didn't even ask me. We planned this trip together."

Ilya's expression shifts slightly, something defensive flickering in his eyes. "I did not think I need permission to let friends bring friends."

"It's not about permission," Shane snaps, turning toward him fully now. "It's about... consideration."

"I am being considerate," Ilya shoots back. "Is group trip, Shane. Not just you and me."

"I know that," Shane says, frustration climbing higher. "But it was supposed to be people we actually know."

“They are nice,” Ilya says, as if that settles it. “You will like them.”

“That’s not—” Shane cuts himself off, dragging a hand through his hair. “You don’t get it.”

“Then explain it to me,” Ilya says, voice tightening. “Because right now you are upset over nothing.”

That does it.

“Nothing?” Shane echoes, staring at him. “You think this is nothing?”

“Yes,” Ilya says, a little too quickly. “I think you are making big deal out of small thing.”

Shane laughs again, but there’s no humor in it this time. “Right,” he says. “Okay.”

There’s a beat of silence.

“Are they going to be sleeping with us, too?” He asks.

Ilya blinks. “What?”

“In the house,” Shane clarifies, arms crossing over his chest. “Are they just... there? All the time?”

“Yes?” Ilya says, confused again. “Is vacation house. Everyone is there.”

Shane exhales slowly, something tight and ugly curling in his chest.

Of course they are.

Of course, they’re going to be there. Laughing too loudly at his boyfriend’s jokes. Standing too close to him. Ogling Ilya like Shane doesn’t exist.

“I just wish you had talked to me first,” Shane says, softer now, but no less tense.

“I did not think it was big deal,” Ilya says again, and that’s the problem.

“That’s the issue,” Shane says. “You never think it’s a big deal until it is.”

Ilya’s expression hardens slightly. “And you think everything is big deal.”

“Because sometimes it is,” Shane snaps.

“And sometimes you overreact,” Ilya fires back.

Shane goes very still. “...Okay,” he says quietly.

Ilya exhales, running a hand through his hair. “Shane—”

“No,” Shane cuts in, shaking his head. “It’s fine. Clearly, I’m just overreacting, right?”

“That is not what I—”

“I think,” Shane says, voice tighter now, “I think I need space.”

Ilya freezes. “...What?”

“I’m going back to my place and finish packing there,” Shane says, already reaching for his bag like he needs something to do.

“Space? What do you mean?” He demands. “Like a break up?”

“What? No!” Shane snaps, looking at him like he’s lost his mind. “Why would your mind go there? Do you want to break up with me?”

“Do not do this,” Ilya said, frustrated and angry. “Is not me bringing up breaks and breakups all the time.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Shane demands.

“Nothing,” Ilya snaps.

“No, tell me,” Shane pushes, anger flaring again.

Ilya laughs, but it’s sharp. Bitter. “You are always doing this,” he says, voice rising. “You say you want space, and I give it to you—even though I am perfect boyfriend. Is like you are punishing me or something.”

“I don’t always do this!” Shane yells. “Needing space is not the same as a break or a breakup. I do this when I need space to think. That’s got nothing to do with you or our relationship.”

“Well, I always want to be with you!” Ilya shoots back immediately. “Maybe you don’t love me as much as I do.”

“What?” he says, staring at him. “You’re being stupid.”

“I am not—”

“I’m going,” Shane cuts in, grabbing his bag now, hands shaking just slightly. “Maybe we really do need a break from this relationship.”

Everyone’s walking on eggshells around the couple, and things are tense on their flight to the Bahamas.

Shane sulks next to Rose, ignoring Ilya and his attempts to talk to him because he’s really fucking pissed that, despite their big, blowout fight, the two girls are still there.

Those two stupid girls sitting a few rows ahead of them, laughing like they’re not the reason why Shane is in a terrible mood.

Reasonably, they probably couldn't cancel their ticket without eating the cost, but Shane does not want to be reasonable right now. He wants to be mad and pissed at his boyfriend, who he hasn't talked to in days.

Ilya's sitting across the aisle from him with Svetlana. They were supposed to sit together, but Shane did not want to, and he knew Svetlana was annoyed with him because she really wanted to sit with Rose, for some reason.

At one point, Ilya actually does try. He gets up under the pretense of grabbing something from the overhead bin, lingering just a little too long near Shane's row.

"Shane—" he starts, quiet enough that only Shane and Rose can hear.

Shane doesn't even look at him.

He keeps his gaze fixed forward, jaw tight, like he didn't hear a thing.

Rose shifts slightly beside him, clearly aware of the tension but choosing not to intervene. After a second, Ilya exhales softly, with a note of frustration and defeat in the sound, before he gives up.

He looks like a kicked puppy, and even though it's adorable, it doesn't overcome the pang of hurt in Shane's heart.

They have to talk eventually, he knows this. They are sharing a bedroom, after all, and he doesn't want to be mad at Ilya while they're on vacation. He wants to capture wonderful memories using his digital camera.

He resolves to talk to him once they are alone in their room because he doesn't want to subject his friends and the two random girls to an awkward start to their vacation.

Shane lies down on the bed in their room, waiting for Ilya to come up.

The room is nice—too nice, honestly. There are big windows, soft white sheets, the distant sound of waves somewhere outside, but it all feels a little muted right now, like he can't fully take it in. His suitcase is still half-unpacked at the foot of the bed, clothes spilling out in a way that mirrors exactly how his thoughts feel.

He exhales slowly, dragging a hand over his face.

He stares at the ceiling, thinking about what he wants to say because he came to a realization in that god-awful plane ride that made him dizzy by the end.

The truth is, the problem is not the two girls. They're annoying, sure. A little too giggly, and they still definitely want to fuck his boyfriend. But, they're also just excited about the

Bahamas. They're not brazen enough to try anything in front of Shane, not when it's painfully obvious who Ilya belongs to.

He knows Ilya would never cheat on him. He knows Ilya would rather die than even think about another person the way he thinks about Shane.

He knows this realistically, but he realizes that he doesn't internalize it or feel secure enough to believe it. He's insecure because he knows that he is punching above his weight with Ilya.

Ilya is conventionally attractive; Shane thinks he's a 6/10 on his best day despite Ilya reassuring him otherwise. Ilya is fun and outgoing; Shane is introverted and a rule-follower. Ilya is interesting; Shane is boring.

He can go on and on, but he won't.

It's a monster that's been brewing under his skin since the beginning of their relationship, and it's manifesting in an ugly way. It's threatening his relationship with his perfect boyfriend, whom he loves so much that he would do anything for him.

Shane has invested a lot in this relationship.

He might not be as loud about it as Ilya is. He's not plastering him all over Instagram or kissing him in the middle of crowded rooms, but he shows it in ways that matter.

He's there every night Ilya gets a berating phone call from his father. When his voice goes tight and distant, and he just shuts down after. Shane is the one who sits with him through it, quiet and steady, until he comes back.

He's there during Ilya's late-night spirals, when he isn't sure if he's cut out for med school, when he starts doubting everything he's worked for. Shane listens, then reminds him who he is.

He's there on the days when it's too much for him. When Ilya misses his mom so badly, he can't get out of bed, and the weight of everything just presses down too hard. Shane stays and takes care of him. He makes sure he eats, and he runs his hands through his blond curls over and over again. He listens to him when he wants to rant, or quietly sits there if that's what Ilya wants.

Shane is always there in every way because he loves his boyfriend more than anything or anyone in this world, and he wants forever with him. He knows this, and he feels it.

But he also knows this ugly insecurity might land a crack on their glass if Shane doesn't reel it in.

Shane will die if Ilya breaks up with him.

There's a knock on the door, and Shane sits up as the door opens.

Ilya enters the room, and he looks tired. Shane gulps.

Please, gay gods, let him be tired because of the trip and not of me.

“Shane—” Ilya tries to start.

“I’m scared that you want to break up with me,” Shane blurts out before Ilya can even finish saying his name.

The words come out too fast, too loud, like they’ve been sitting in his chest for too long and finally forced their way out.

Ilya freezes. Actually freezes.

His face goes blank for a second, like his brain just short-circuited trying to process what Shane just said. “What?” he asks, the word coming out sharper than he means it to, laced with pure disbelief.

But Shane doesn’t stop because now that he’s started, he can’t.

“I’m not good enough for you,” he continues, his voice shaky but gaining momentum anyway. “And everyone knows that. I know you think I am, but that’s just not the truth. I’m so boring, and you’re so fun. You’re— You’re in a cool indie band,” he lets out a short, frustrated breath, dragging his hands through his hair. “You’re really sexy, and I’m not. I can go on and on about this.”

Ilya opens his mouth, but Shane barrels right over him.

“And I know—okay—I know this is my issue,” he says, words tumbling over each other now. “You’re such a great boyfriend. You love me so much, I know you do, but I can’t help it. I keep waiting for the day you just wake up and realize you could do better.”

His chest tightens, voice cracking slightly as he pushes through it.

“Like a sleeper agent or something,” he adds weakly, a humorless huff slipping out. “You just suddenly realize you’re dating someone boring. Someone who follows rules and doesn’t fit into your world and—” He gestures vaguely between them. “—and you leave. For someone better. Someone who actually matches you. Someone who can keep up with you. Someone who can be okay with your nasty smoking habit. Someone who will want to go skydiving with you. Someone who will want to do fun things all the time. That’s not me.”

The words hang there, and it’s heavy and ugly.

“And then I get jealous,” Shane admits, quieter now, but no less intense. “Because everyone wants you. I see it all the time. And I hate it. I hate how it makes me feel. I hate that I get so insecure about it, and then I lash out and act crazy and—” His voice breaks slightly. “—and you’re going to leave me because of that,” he finishes, breath uneven, eyes glassy.

Ilya stands there, processing his rant, for about three good minutes. It’s the most agonizing three minutes of Shane’s life.

Then, Ilya walks towards him and wraps him up in his arms. He crosses the room in a few quick steps and pulls Shane into him, arms wrapping around him tightly, like he's trying to hold him together.

Shane makes a small, startled sound as his face gets pressed into Ilya's shoulder, his breath catching.

"Baby," Ilya murmurs, his voice softer than Shane has ever heard it. "I can not even begin to say in English how wrong you are."

Shane blinks, his hands hovering awkwardly before slowly gripping onto the back of Ilya's shirt.

"I am not too good for you," Ilya continues, words steady despite the slight roughness in his voice. "You are perfect for me. Perfect. I know this because you make me better person, yes? I tell you this all the time."

He pulls back just enough to look at him, hands coming up to cup Shane's face, forcing him to meet his eyes.

"You make me better," he repeats, more firmly this time. "I do not want partner who is okay with me smoking and ruining my health. I do not want partner who is careless and does not get jealous."

Shane lets out a shaky breath, his vision blurring slightly.

"I like that you care," Ilya says, his thumbs brushing lightly against Shane's cheeks. "I like that you remind me to drink water. That you make me eat real food. That you worry about me."

His mouth twitches, something soft and fond breaking through.

"I like that you get jealous," he admits. "It shows you care about me in all the ways. Maybe sometimes you get little crazy," he adds, quieter, almost teasing, "but I still like it."

A small laugh escapes Shane.

"I like that you are boring," Ilya continues, and Shane lets out a watery scoff, but Ilya shakes his head immediately. "No—listen to me. I *love* it. Is one of my favorite things about you."

He leans in slightly, forehead brushing against Shane's.

"You balance me," he says, slower now, more deliberate, like he's choosing each word carefully. "You keep me sane. You make me feel calm and safe. I do not want someone like me. I want you."

Shane's throat tightens.

Gay gods, did I save the universe in all of my past lives? How did I get such an amazing man?

“I love you, Shane,” Ilya says, his voice soft but unwavering. “I love you more than I can say in English. In Russian is easier, but you would not understand,” he adds faintly, a ghost of a smile there.

Shane lets out a small, breathy laugh through the tears now slipping down his face.

“I am sorry,” Ilya continues, expression shifting again, more serious now. “About the girls. If I knew you feel this way, I would not tell Troy it is okay for them to come.”

His hands slide down, resting at Shane’s sides, still holding him close.

“I do not care about their feelings,” he says simply. “Or Troy’s. I care about yours. Your happiness is number one to me.”

He searches Shane’s face, like he needs him to understand.

“Okay?”

Shane nods, swallowing the lump in his throat because he doesn’t want to sob in front of his boyfriend.

“I’m sorry for freaking out and not communicating with you,” Shane whispers, his voice softer now, a little embarrassed. “I just get in my head sometimes.” He lets out a small breath. “I love you too. So freaking much.”

Ilya’s expression softens instantly, something warm and relieved replacing the tension that had been sitting there all day. He leans in and presses a quick, gentle kiss to Shane’s lips.

“Is okay,” he murmurs. “But maybe we need to work on our communication, hm? Like you tell me why you need space instead of just texting me and making me wonder.”

Shane winces slightly, a flush creeping up his neck and into his cheeks because ... yeah. That’s fair.

He’s been dropping the ball there.

Sometimes he just gets overwhelmed, and it’s easier to retreat than explain, but that doesn’t mean it’s fair to Ilya.

“Right,” Shane says, nodding quickly. “I’m sorry. I’ll be better at communicating with you. I promise.” He hesitates for a second before adding, quieter, “But I still need to work on this stupid insecurity. I don’t want it to be the thing that breaks us.”

Ilya nods, serious now, like he’s taking that just as seriously as Shane is. “Maybe we start by talking about it more when we get back,” he suggests. “And we work on it together.”

Shane nods again. “Okay,” he says. “I’d like that.”

Ilya’s mouth curves into a smirk.

“I do not want us to be serious in the Bahamas. We will have the best fun, most amazing sex, and one thousand pictures,” he says.

Shane huffs out a small laugh, shaking his head. “Oh yeah? You want to start now?”

Ilya doesn’t answer.

Then suddenly Shane is being pushed back onto the bed, a surprised laugh escaping him as he lands against the soft sheets.

“Ilya—” he starts, but it dissolves into another laugh as Ilya leans over him, crowding into his space like he always does.

The tension from earlier melts away in the space between them, replaced by love and extreme horniness.

Ilya presses another kiss to his lips, more passionate, and lingering just a little longer.

“Vacation starts now,” he murmurs against him.

That night, they have sex so loud that everyone is forced to head down to the beach.

That’s the second time Shane asks Ilya for a “break.”

III. oh, he looks so cute wrapped 'round my finger. my twisted humor makes him laugh so often, my honey bee, come and get this pollen.

The third time it happens, it’s really so fucking ridiculous that Shane wants to laugh.

At least that’s what Shane thinks, but not Ilya, because the break almost turns into a breakup.

It’s been years since that Bahamas trip, the one where they fought, made up, and then proceeded to take approximately one thousand photos like they were documenting proof of survival. Shane still has them saved somewhere, organized into a folder on his laptop.

A lot has changed since then.

They’re living together now, in a small apartment in New York City that somehow always feels a little too cramped and a little too perfect at the same time. Ilya moved there first for med school, and Shane followed after graduating, putting his entire life into two big suitcases and slotting himself right into Ilya’s life, like it was always meant to be there.

The year they spent long-distance before that had been hell.

There’s really no better word for it.

Between Ilya's insane med school schedule and Shane trying to finish school, finding time to call each other felt like trying to align two impossible things. Visits were worse because every single one required planning, money, and luck, and even then, something always seemed to get in the way.

There were nights Shane fell asleep with his phone in his hand, waiting for Ilya to call. There were mornings Ilya woke up in an empty bed, too tired to even text back properly.

But they made it.

Through stubbornness, through love, through sheer refusal to let go of something that mattered too much.

Now they're here. Exactly where they are meant to be.

Ilya matched into a cardiology program in New York, to his extreme delight. Shane, meanwhile, had taken a slightly more chaotic path. He started out as a programmer at a startup he thought he'd love, only to realize very quickly that he absolutely did not, and pivoted to writing for a sports magazine, which turned out to be the best decision he ever made. He's an editor now, which is insane.

They're both settled and happy.

Ilya is in his second year of residency and is constantly exhausted, coming home late with dark circles under his eyes and collapsing into bed like he might not wake up for a week. But it's okay because Shane is still there, steady as ever, making sure he eats, making sure he sleeps, existing as this constant, grounding presence in Ilya's life.

They've been together for nine years.

Nine.

It's ridiculous because Ilya is 28 and Shane is 27.

They've grown up together in every way that matters. Every major milestone in their adult lives—graduation, jobs, moving cities, surviving long distance, building a home—they've done it side by side.

They've traveled around the world together, Shane bringing the digital camera Ilya bought for him that first year they were together. They've fought and made up. They learned each other in ways that feel almost instinctual now. Like they just know what the other person is thinking.

They sleep next to each other every night.

They still try to see their friends when they can. Hayden and Jackie visit sometimes, and they go up to Canada to visit them, too. Rose too. Svetlana lives in New York now, which makes things easier, and she shows up unannounced half the time, claiming she "misses her favorite couple," even though she definitely just wants free food. Troy is always traveling, and he drops in whenever he's in town.

Despite how much has changed, they're still the same.

Still Ilya and Shane.

Still teasing each other over stupid things. Still arguing about groceries. Still falling into each other at the end of long days like it's the most natural thing in the world.

Which is exactly why the third "break" is so stupid. After nine years together, they really should've known and done better.

It happens on a random late night.

Like, really late.

Ilya had gotten home maybe twenty minutes ago, looking like he was running on fumes and pure spite, his hair a mess, his scrubs wrinkled, and that familiar exhausted slump in his shoulders that makes Shane's chest ache every time he sees it.

Shane had already been home for hours, laptop in front of him, fingers flying across the keyboard, and dinner half-finished on the coffee table, waiting.

Lately, it feels like that's what he does a lot of the time. Waiting for his boyfriend to come home.

Ilya had come in, dropped his bag by the door, mumbled a tired "Hi, baby," pressed a quick kiss to Shane's temple, and then immediately grabbed his phone when it buzzed.

Shane hadn't thought anything of it at first. Ilya is allowed to text after he comes home; he's not a controlling boyfriend or insecure anymore.

But then twenty minutes pass, and Ilya is still standing there, leaning against the kitchen counter, texting. Not talking to Shane or even sitting down.

Also, he's not even just texting; he's smiling at his phone.

Actually smiling. The kind of soft, amused smile Shane hasn't seen all day.

Something small and stupid twists in his chest.

"Long day?" Shane asks, trying to keep his tone light as he watches him.

"Mhm," Ilya hums absently, barely looking up. "Very long."

Shane presses his lips together.

Okay, what the fuck?

He can feel his frustrations and annoyance bubbling in his stomach. He's been sitting here for hours, waiting for his boyfriend, and he couldn't even spare him a fucking glance or conversation.

“Who are you texting?” he asks, casually.

Ilya shrugs. “Group chat. Residents.”

“Mm,” Shane says, nodding slowly.

He tells himself to leave it there. He really does because he doesn’t want to fight or start an argument with his tired boyfriend.

But then Ilya laughs.

Something about that—about the fact that he can laugh at his phone but barely said two full sentences to Shane since he got home—just makes him viscerally angry.

“Must be funny,” Shane says, his voice tightening.

Ilya glances up briefly. “Is stupid,” he says, a small smile still lingering. “Hannah sent something—”

“Hannah?” Shane cuts in, a little sharper than he means to because he knows Hannah and—

Fuck, yes, he’s gotten over his insecurity, and he knows Ilya would never cheat.

But Hannah is another resident that Ilya has become friendly with, and Shane can’t stand it because he’s always fucking smiling when he texts her.

Ilya blinks. “Yes?”

Shane lets out a small huff, leaning back into the couch. “Didn’t know you guys still talked that much.”

Ilya frowns slightly. “We work in the same hospital. Why would we not talk?”

“Right,” Shane says quickly. “No, yeah, that makes sense.”

Ilya goes back to his phone, and Shane watches him for a second longer than he should.

He knows Ilya is tired and will not want to fight, but right now, Shane doesn’t care because he’s fucking tired too.

Tired of feeling left out of his boyfriend’s life. Tired of waiting for him to come home, only to not even exchange conversation because he’s too tired. Tired of waiting for Ilya to bring up the fact that they haven’t had sex in two weeks. But mostly, he’s tired of feeling like Ilya’s forgetting him at home.

“Do you ever feel like you have more fun with other people than with me?”

The question slips out before he can stop it.

Ilya freezes and slowly lowers his phone.

“What?” he asks.

Shane immediately takes it back because he can see the dread in Ilya’s eyes.

“Nothing,” he says quickly. “Forget it.”

“No,” Ilya says, straightening now, tiredness momentarily forgotten. “What do you mean?”

Shane sighs, dragging a hand over his face. “I just—sometimes it feels like you come home, and you’re too tired for me. Which, I get, you’re busy, I know that, but then you’re texting people and laughing and—”

“I am allowed to text my friends,” Ilya says, a defensive edge creeping in.

“I know that,” Shane says, sitting up now. “That’s not what I’m saying.”

“Then what are you saying?” Ilya presses.

“I don’t know,” he admits. “It just feels like I get whatever’s left of you at the end of the day.”

“I am working,” Ilya says, voice tight. “I am exhausted. You think I am choosing to be tired with you?”

“That’s not what I said,” Shane says quickly.

“But that is what you mean,” Ilya fires back. “You think I give better version of myself to other people.”

Shane shakes his head. “No, I just—sometimes I miss you, even when you’re here.”

That makes Ilya go quiet, and for a second, it almost looks like he understands.

But then Shane makes the mistake because he’s overwhelmed and tired and still angry.

“Maybe we just need a little space to reset,” he says, softer now. “Not like anything serious. Just a little time to breathe. So we don’t keep snapping at each other over stupid stuff.”

Ilya doesn’t move and he doesn’t blink.

“...Space,” he repeats slowly.

Shane nods, already backtracking slightly. “Yeah, just like—”

“Break,” Ilya says.

“What?” Shane frowns.

“You are asking for break,” Ilya says, voice going flat in that way it only does when he’s trying very hard not to react.

“No, that’s not—” Shane starts.

“You want space,” Ilya continues, like he didn’t even hear him. “You miss me even when I am here. You say we keep snapping. Sounds like break to me.”

“Ilya, that’s not what I meant,” Shane says, sitting up straighter now, panic creeping in.

Ilya lets out a sharp laugh. “Of course,” he mutters. “Third time is charm, yes?”

And oh. That does it.

“What is your issue?” Shane asks, slamming his laptop shut harder than necessary, the sound echoing through the apartment. “Seriously, you think I’m in the wrong here?”

“My issue,” Ilya snaps immediately, all the exhaustion in him sharpening into something defensive and biting, “is that my boyfriend still cannot communicate with me after nine years together, Shane.”

“Oh, fuck no,” Shane fires back, pushing up from the couch, anger flaring hot and fast now. “Do not turn this around on me.”

“When would I have the time to communicate with you, hm?” he continues, voice rising. “When you leave at six in the morning? When you come back at fuck-ass o’clock at night? Or when you do come home and instead of talking to me, you’re texting your coworkers like you didn’t just spend all day with them?”

Ilya opens his mouth, but Shane doesn’t stop.

“Or what—on weekends?” Shane laughs, sharp and humorless. “When you finally sleep in because you’re exhausted, and then you just want to do nothing? Seriously, Ilya, when was I supposed to bring it up?”

“Maybe,” Ilya shoots back, stepping forward now, eyes flashing, “when you finally grow up and decide to talk like an adult, then you can bring it up to me.”

“Fuck you!” Shane yells, the words ripping out of him before he can stop them. “The fact that you don’t even see that you’ve been insanely distant and pushing me out of your life is a fucking tell. It’s a tell that you don’t give a fuck about me anymore and that you—”

Shane chokes.

The words catch in his throat, sharp and terrifying, because if he says them—if he actually says them out loud—

That you don’t love me anymore. That you love me less. He can’t stomach it.

He can’t. He physically can’t.

So he just stands there, breathing unevenly, eyes glassy, the sentence hanging unfinished between them.

Ilya's still angry, but he also looks hurt and frustrated.

“Not everything is about you, Shane,” he says, his voice lower now. “I am busy. I am exhausted. I cannot give you all the attention you want right now.”

“You think this is about *attention*?” Shane laughs, but it comes out wet, unsteady. He shakes his head, backing up a step like he needs space, like the room suddenly feels too small.

“Okay. Okay, yeah. Clearly, we are on two completely different pages.”

He laughs again, softer this time, but it sounds worse somehow because it sounds a little like he’s already grieving something.

“Fuck,” he mutters, dragging a hand over his face. “I can’t do this right now.”

There’s a pause, and Ilya looks at him like he’s looking at someone he doesn’t understand.

“I’m just—I’m gonna go to Svetlana’s apartment,” he says finally, grabbing his jacket from the chair without really looking at Ilya. “Cool off a bit.”

The words come out clipped, rushed, as if he stays any longer, he’s going to say something he can’t take back.

He doesn’t wait for a response.

Doesn’t give Ilya the chance to stop him.

He just leaves.

The door shuts behind him with a quiet, final click that somehow feels louder than all the shouting that came before it.

Shane stays with Svetlana for three days.

Three long, quiet, frustrating days where he ignores every single one of Ilya’s messages and calls, even though each notification makes his chest tighten a little more. Svetlana doesn’t push him—just lets him exist, occasionally handing him food or making some sarcastic comment to keep him from spiraling too far.

Shane spends most of his time thinking. Too much, probably.

He thinks about the past few months—about the distance, about the exhaustion, about how something that used to feel so easy now feels like work in a way that scares him. He thinks about the way Ilya looked at him before he left. About the things they said. About the things they didn’t say.

He doesn’t want to break up.

God, he doesn’t want to break up.

But he also knows—deep in his bones—that he can't keep going like this. He can't keep feeling like he's slowly being pushed to the side of Ilya's life, even if it's unintentional. He can't keep bottling everything up until it explodes.

It makes him feel sick. Makes him wonder if maybe they need something bigger. Maybe they need a real break.

Not the kind they had in college that lasted a few hours or days before they found their way back to each other, but something real. Something that could give them space to figure things out properly.

Something that could maybe fix what's starting to crack. The thought alone makes his stomach twist.

But he can't ignore it anymore.

—

He sighs as he looks at the time on his phone.

6:50 PM.

He's a little early, but it's fine.

He pushes in the key to his apartment because it's been three days, and he needs to talk to Ilya like an adult.

The apartment is quiet when he steps inside, but what he sees makes him stop short.

There are flowers everywhere, not just one bouquet, but dozens, scattered across every available surface. Balloons float near the ceiling, their strings dangling down, some of them tied together to spell out I'm Sorry in big, uneven letters that feel both ridiculous and unmistakably Ilya.

In the center of it all, sitting on the table like some kind of offering, is a box of Shane's favorite Swiss chocolates. The real kind, the ones that are nearly impossible to get unless someone goes out of their way.

"What the..." Shane mutters under his breath, stepping further inside, his eyes scanning the room like he's trying to make sense of it. His chest tightens, warm and overwhelming, despite everything.

"Ilya?" he calls out, his voice echoing slightly in the space.

"I am here."

Shane turns at the sound, and his breath catches.

Ilya is standing in the hallway, looking different. He's wearing a suit and looks nervous. His hands fidget slightly at his sides, and his usual easy confidence is replaced with something

softer, something uncertain.

“What is all this?” Shane asks, his voice quieter now.

Ilya exhales slowly, like he’s been holding that breath for a while. “I was going to wait,” he says, stepping closer, “but I think I am tired of waiting.”

“I thought you would come back and say you want break,” Ilya continues, his voice careful, measured. “Or worse.” He lets out a small, humorless laugh. “I did not sleep much. I was thinking too much.”

Shane swallows, his throat tight.

“I am really not able to exist without you,” Ilya says, stopping just in front of him now. “I do not want life without you. Not for one week, not for one day, not even for a few hours, apparently.” His mouth twitches faintly, but his eyes stay serious. “I know things have been hard. I know I have been distant. I did not mean to hurt you. I am just tired all the time. But that is not an excuse.”

Shane’s chest aches at that, at the honesty in it.

“I should still choose you,” Ilya continues, his voice softening. “Every day. I do choose you. I need to be better at showing it.”

Then Ilya reaches into his pocket. Before Shane can even process what’s happening, Ilya lowers himself onto one knee.

Shane’s breath leaves him in a rush, his brain going completely blank for a second.

“Ilya—what are you—” he starts, but the words fall apart halfway through.

Ilya looks up at him, and there’s no teasing in his expression, no arrogance—just sincerity, raw and a little nervous.

“Maybe this is bad timing,” he says, a small, uncertain smile tugging at his mouth.

“That’s an understatement,” Shane manages weakly, his heart pounding so hard it feels like it might burst.

Ilya huffs softly, but he doesn’t look away. “But I love you,” he says simply. “I have loved you for a long time. Almost ten years, which is insane, and I know I will love you for 100 more.” His voice softens further. “So, I do not want a break. I do not want space. I want you. Always.”

He opens the small box in his hand, revealing a ring that is simple, elegant, and so perfectly them that it makes Shane’s eyes sting.

“Marry me,” Ilya says, his voice steady despite everything. “Then, we figure everything else out together. Like we always do.”

Shane's brain is screaming at him to be logical, to slow down, to think this through properly. This is terrible timing. They just had a massive fight. Things have been strained for months. Getting engaged right now is, objectively, one of the worst decisions they could possibly make.

Every rational part of him is telling him to pause, to talk first, to fix things before making something this permanent.

But Shane has never been very good at listening to that part of himself when it comes to Ilya.

Because before his brain can catch up, his body has already moved. He's crossing the small space between them, dropping down just enough to wrap his arms tightly around Ilya, pulling him into a hug that feels a little desperate and a lot like relief.

His mouth, completely unhelpful, entirely ahead of his thoughts, is already saying, "Yes. Of course I'll marry you."

The words come out breathless, immediate, like they've been waiting for permission.

Ilya stills for a second, like he didn't quite expect it to be that easy, that quick. Then he exhales, something almost disbelieving slipping out of him as his arms come up around Shane, holding him just as tightly.

"Yeah?" he asks, quieter now, like he needs to hear it again.

Shane pulls back just enough to look at him, his hands still gripping onto Ilya's shirt. His heart is pounding, his thoughts still spinning, but there's a certainty underneath it all that feels steady and unshakable.

"Yeah," he says again, softer this time, but no less sure.

Ilya lets out a small laugh, something warm and relieved, before carefully taking Shane's hand. His fingers are just slightly unsteady as he slides the ring onto Shane's finger, like even now, he's half-expecting this to disappear.

Shane watches him, chest tight, eyes stinging a little. Before Ilya can say anything else, Shane speaks again.

"I'm saying yes because I have faith in us," he says, his voice quiet but firm. "Because I love you too much."

Ilya's expression softens instantly, something deep and emotional flickering across his face.

"And," Shane adds, letting out a small, shaky laugh, "we still have a lot to figure out."

Ilya huffs softly at that, his forehead pressing briefly against Shane's.

"Yes," he murmurs. "We do."

But his arms tighten around him anyway, like he's not letting go.

So, that's the third time Shane asks Ilya for a break.

Then got engaged.

+I you know I just might let you lock me down tonight. one of me is cute, but two, though? give it to me, baby. you make me wanna make you fall in love.

"We need a break," Shane pants, getting off of his husband after riding him like a cowboy for the fourth time. His chest rises and falls as he tries to catch his breath.

Yes. His husband.

His motherfucking husband.

The thought still hits him sometimes out of nowhere, like now, when he's lying naked and half-tangled in sheets in a luxury villa in the Maldives, sunlight spilling through the windows, ocean just beyond, and Ilya is—well—Ilya.

Ilya lets out a low chuckle, clearly not taking him seriously at all as he presses closer, wrapping himself around Shane. His skin is warm, a little damp, and his lips find Shane's throat without hesitation.

"No," Ilya murmurs against his skin, voice rough and pleased. "I need to keep fucking you. No break. Is our honeymoon."

Shane lets out a small, helpless sound, tilting his head back despite himself. "Ilya," he whines, though there's no real bite to it. "We're in the Maldives, and we've barely been out of our room."

"That is because the room is very nice," Ilya replies immediately, kissing along his jaw now, completely unconcerned.

Shane huffs, pushing lightly at his shoulder. "We're supposed to explore. There's, like, an entire island out there. Water, activities, and culture."

Ilya hums thoughtfully, like he's genuinely considering it, even as his hands continue to wander in a way that says he is absolutely not done.

"Fine," he says eventually, though it sounds reluctant. "But then how will I get pregnant, hmm?"

Shane freezes for half a second. Then he slaps his shoulders.

"Fuck off," Shane huffs, rolling his eyes, though there's a smile tugging at his mouth now. "You keep making that joke, and it's not funny."

“Is funny,” Ilya insists immediately, grinning against his skin like he’s very proud of himself. “Come on. Let me get you pregnant.”

Shane groans, dragging a hand over his face. “You’re insufferable.”

“And yet,” Ilya says, lifting his head just enough to look at him, eyes bright and smug, “you marry me, Mr. Rozanov.”

“Rozanov-Hollander,” Shane shakes his head as he corrects him, fond and exasperated all at once, reaching up to shove at his face lightly. “I’m starting to think that was a mistake.”

“Too late,” Ilya says easily, catching his wrist and pressing a quick kiss to it. “You are stuck with me forever.”

Shane snorts softly, but he doesn’t pull away.

He shifts slightly, settling more comfortably against the pillows, Ilya still half-draped over him like a human weighted blanket. The room is warm, filled with the soft hum of the ocean outside, the kind of quiet that only exists on a honeymoon.

“We should actually go outside,” Shane says after a moment, softer now, less insistent. “Like... for real this time.”

Ilya makes a noncommittal sound, clearly unconvinced.

“There’s snorkeling,” Shane continues, nudging him. “And like, those overwater villas you can walk to. And I want pictures. We didn’t come all the way here for you to keep me trapped in a bed.”

“I am not trapping you,” Ilya protests. “You are staying willingly.”

“Barely,” Shane mutters.

Ilya huffs a laugh, then finally lifts himself up a little, looking down at Shane properly. His expression softens, something quieter slipping in between the teasing.

“You are happy?” he asks, sudden and simple.

Shane blinks at him. Then smiles at his husband.

“Yeah,” he says. “I am. Very, very happy, and in love.”

Ilya stares at him for a second longer, like he needs to see it, to believe it.

Then he leans down, pressing a softer kiss to his lips this time.

“Good,” he murmurs.

Shane exhales, eyes closing briefly as he melts into it, his hand coming up to rest at the back of Ilya’s neck.

He still can't quite believe this is his life.

This is it.

Him and Ilya.

Fighting, making up, growing, figuring things out, loving each other in ways that are messy and loud and sometimes imperfect, but always there.

Forever and ever.

"Okay," Shane says after a moment, pulling back just slightly. "We're getting up now. I'm serious."

Ilya narrows his eyes at him. Shane narrows his back.

Ilya sighs dramatically, rolling off him with the energy of someone making a great sacrifice.

"Fine," he says. "But we will come back soon."

Shane laughs, pushing himself up.

"Yeah," he says. "We'll see about that."

End Notes

thank u for reading <33

wasn't this fluffy and sweet and happy? :)))) i really appreciate all comments and kudos
<333

pls read my other fics if it's ur cup of tea and plsss come find me on twitter. [hollernov](#)

edit: i think the verdict is in that i was right to delete the "mostly fluff" tag LMAOOO

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