

Drawing a Line

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Drawing a Line

by [LovelyRose28](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov have been best friends since they were twelve. They were attached at the hip, as much as two straight guys could be.

Everyone accepted that Shane and Ilya were just being Shane and Ilya.

Or: Shane and Ilya think they know where to draw the line between straight best friends and whatever the hell they keep doing.

Notes

Let me know if I missed a tag, please!

Enjoy :)

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

Chapter 1: Quirks

Ilya moved to Ottawa at the age of twelve.

His mother, needing to escape her husband, took her two boys and fled. He couldn't imagine how difficult it must have been for her to gather the means to leave, settle in a new country with a language she wasn't fluent in, find a job, and make sure her sons were enrolled in a good school.

He was grateful for all of it. For her.

Who knew what would have happened if they stayed in Russia? How would he have turned out? Would he and Alexei have the bond they had now? Would Alexei be about to graduate with a forensic science degree, or would he have become some grimy, scum police officer like their father? Would his mother, even now, still be enduring his father's abuse?

He didn't know.

He didn't want to know.

All he knew was that he was grateful.

Ottawa gave them peace.

Ottawa gave them the opportunity to thrive.

Ottawa gave him Shane Hollander, his best friend.

At the age of twelve, Ilya Rozanov met a boy in middle school.

His very first friend—who couldn't fully understand his English through his Russian accent, but tried anyway. Who loved hockey just like he did.

Shane thought Ilya was funny, an asshole, and secretly caring. He enjoyed competing against him in nearly everything, and felt comfortable talking to him about literally anything.

And Ilya loved to listen. Loved listening to Shane talk about hockey, random articles he'd recently read, and his deep interest in design, from buildings to bridges to landscapes.

He always teased him about how 'boring' he is, but Shane knew Ilya always listened.

They were as attached at the hip as two best friends could be .

That's why when they both got accepted to McGill University, they were ecstatic.

With their other friends Svetlana, Marleau, and Wyatt, they rented a house near campus.

Svetlana Vetrova was Ilya's only Russian friend. She was someone he occasionally hooked up with, but he had never developed any romantic feelings for.

Cliff Marleau, Shane and Ilya's teammate since their old hockey league, was a sophomore at McGill. He'd had his own apartment, but when he and his girlfriend broke up, he desperately needed somewhere else to live. It felt like perfect timing when Ilya brought up the idea of rooming together.

Wyatt Hayes was a late addition, which explained why his name wasn't on the lease. He technically had never asked to move in. After weeks of him staying in their spare bedroom, he strolled into the kitchen one morning on the first of the month while Shane was drinking tea and left a stack of bills on the table right in front of him.

'For rent,' he said around a yawn, then walked right back out.

Shane, who had been mid-sip of his chamomile, watched the whole thing with confusion. He considered giving Wyatt the money back, or at least part of it since he had given too much, but Ilya talked him out of it.

'Good. It's about time. Motherfucker drank half my bottle of elite, top-shelf, Russian vodka. And the worst part is that he mixed it with orange juice,' Ilya said, disgusted.

It was a good setup they had going on, and it helped that they all enjoyed each other's company.

They all had their quirks— Svetlana liked to sing badly in the shower at max volume. Marleau gave himself pep talks about anything, in the mirror that hung in the living room. And Hayes could hardly ever eat a meal without setting his phone up first so that he could watch either *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, or *Bachelor in Paradise*— but they were all accustomed to it at this point.

Shane's quirk was that he needed everything to be super organized— dirty dishes in the dishwasher, books on the shelves, the whiteboard calendar in the kitchen.

Ilya, on the other hand, was the opposite. There was never a day that went by when Ilya didn't leave something of his somewhere in the house. A shirt in the living room, his extra hockey stick in between the fridge and the kitchen counter, his textbook in the bathroom. Hayes once found his razor on his desk... Ilya couldn't explain that one.

Another thing the roommates had become accustomed to was the close bond Ilya and Shane shared.

They were best friends; that was obvious. But over the years since they'd met, they developed a bond filled with comfort, dependence, and a deep understanding of the other person.

After months of living together, everyone understood it was nothing more.

Especially since Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were straight.

In the short time he'd been here, Ilya had come to be known as McGill's freshman womanizer. He made sure to go to almost every party and had been seen making out with multiple girls before deciding on who to bring back to the house. This worked out for Marleau, who was still freshly heartbroken. Ilya made it a point to bring him every time and be the best wingman out there.

Shane had probably been to a total of four parties this semester, very much not into the scene. The only good thing about them, besides alcohol, he supposed, was catching up with Rose, a friend he'd made at freshman orientation.

Another reason he didn't care for parties was that the main reason they were thrown was for people to hook up with each other, and Shane already had a girlfriend.

Shane had been with Jessica since junior year of high school. He'd met her through Hayden Pike, one of his closest friends. Shane had seen Jess around school, but she was never someone he went out of his way to talk to.

Then Shane got invited to a BBQ hosted by the Pikes, Hayden's parents, and Jess was there with Hayden's group of friends. Hayden and J.J. encouraged him to talk to her, so he did. After their second date, he asked her to be his girlfriend. He had been very nervous about it, and she said yes.

After that, they were pretty much always together.

Well, not always.

Shane understood that having a girlfriend meant he would probably have to sacrifice time with his friends. And he did. Hangouts with Hayden and J.J. became fewer. Sometimes Shane would miss family dinner because he was at Jess's having dinner with her family. But in all that time he sacrificed, he made sure to spend as much time with Ilya as he could.

It was something he had to explain to Jess. Ilya was his best friend, and it was really important to spend time with him too. Of course, during their junior and senior year, Ilya and Shane had hung out less, but Jess understood when he turned down an invitation to her house or to go out because he was with Ilya.

Sometimes, all three of them would hang out, and though it took time, she saw that what they had was really special.

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Ilya had walked into the house, feeling the sticky cling of sweat where his shirt stuck to his skin.

"Fuck, man, I can't believe you make me run that fast every time," Marleau said, still panting as he toed off his shoes and left them on the shoe rack. "I've played hockey for years. Won many games. There's no reason for your military-style sprints."

Ilya smiled at him before sipping from his water bottle. He held the cool water in his mouth for a second before swallowing. "No, Marly. I have won us many games. It's not my fault you want to settle for good enough."

"Fuck you." They both started walking toward the kitchen. "The only reason you score is because of my assists." He shoved Ilya playfully.

"Ah, okay. Next time, just choose to shoot it into the net. Simple. Don't let me be the reason you never win an Art Ross Trophy one day when we play in the NHL." Ilya pushed back.

"Nah, just make sure to include me in your acceptance speech when you win one. I'm talking full-section dedication."

They entered the kitchen, Marleau taking a seat at the table with the premade shake he'd bought from the store while Ilya pulled out a blender to make himself a post-workout shake. He wasn't used to doing this until Shane had gotten him hooked on the ones he made.

"...And lastly, I'd like to thank Cliff Marleau..." Ilya began, his voice shifting into something professional as he pretended to give a speech while adding ingredients to the blender. "... for being a slow runner, a slow skater, and slow at picking up women..."

In the middle of his speech, Marleau flipped him off with both hands.

"... he makes me look even better at what I do. Which is really hard to do, because I'm already the best. Don't believe me? Tell it to the Art Ross Trophy in my hand." Ilya turned to look at Marleau. "How was that?"

"Has anyone ever told you how humble you are?" Marleau asked as he lifted his shake to take a sip.

"Ehhhh, no."

Ilya turned on the blender.

While he poured the shake into a glass, he heard the front door slam. From the kitchen, he could hear Shane in the living room, who seemed to be on the phone.

"I don't know what you want me to do. Hockey isn't something new in my life, and it's definitely not something you haven't had to get used to either. I don't choose when we play, Jess. You know this."

Ilya and Marleau went silent, the air filling with awkwardness as Shane continued to argue on the phone.

"Of course I want to see you. I'm not the one who told you to go all the way to fucking U of T. You were accepted into McGill too... I know what I said..."

Ilya and Marleau, who had been silently drinking their shakes, froze when they heard footsteps coming toward the kitchen.

"Okay, but you're acting like you're the only one stressed out and I can just easily drop everything..." Shane paused when he entered the kitchen, not having expected to see his best friend and his roommate. "Fuck," Shane whispered.

From where Ilya stood, he could hear Jessica yelling through the phone.

"I'm not asking you to do that, Shane. I simply asked if you could just, for ONCE, prioritize me over 'something'. Hockey, study groups, school club meetings, Ilya... anything. You TOLD me the six-hour commute was doable, but I've barely seen you since school started. Why are you making it sound..."

"Jess." Shane said lowly into the mic, bypassing the guys to grab a can of ginger ale from the fridge.

"What?" Her voice was laced with frustration.

"Can we just talk later? I feel like we keep talking in circles, and I just... I didn't want the little bit of time that we get on the phone to be like this... I promise I'll call you tomorrow, and we can figure something out... okay... yeah, love you too."

After the call ended, Shane stared at his phone with his back turned to the others before pocketing it.

He glanced at Marleau briefly before looking at Ilya for a long moment, jaw tightened. With a resigned sigh, he made his way out of the kitchen.

Marleau and Ilya watched him leave, his shoulders still tense from the phone call.

"Dude..." Marleau began. "Maybe you should..."

Before he could continue, Ilya cut him off.

"Yes, I know."

Ilya downed the rest of his shake before making his way upstairs and into his bedroom. He grabbed his freshly air-dried towel and a pair of boxers, threw them over his shoulder, and made his way to Shane's room.

He knocked, out of courtesy, before turning the knob and pushing the door open.

Shane didn't look up. He stood by his desk, eyes glued to his phone as he typed something out.

"Hey," he said to Ilya, hitting 'send' before placing his phone down on his desk. He figured he should send a text to Jess, apologizing for yelling.

"You okay?" Ilya, who had been leaning against the doorway, asked.

When his best friend didn't respond, the crease between his brows deepened, and Ilya decided to walk towards him.

He came up behind Shane and wrapped his arms around his torso, hugging him tight against his chest. Shane relaxed ever so slightly. He placed his hands on Ilya's forearms, the embrace helping calm some of his anxiety still sitting under his skin.

"Yeah...maybe... I don't know." He didn't want to talk about the conversation just yet. He and Jess had gone back and forth for about an hour, and now Shane was just exhausted from it.

Turning his head, Shane nuzzled his nose against Ilya's cheek. He could smell the sweat radiating off of Ilya's skin. It wasn't a bad smell, at least not to him. Maybe it was because he had been around him so much, but Shane actually liked the way Ilya smelled after a workout. He pushed his nose further into the crook of Ilya's neck, which Ilya always let him do.

"You went running with Marly?"

Ilya felt the tickle of Shane's nose against his neck but stopped himself from squirming away. He knew how Shane felt about his post-workout musk, and Ilya liked that it provided his best friend with a sense of calm.

"Yes. Had to stop like a hundred times so he could catch his breath."

Ilya felt a puff of air leave Shane's nose as he laughed. Ilya smiled, then pulled back just enough to look at him.

"Wish I could have made it back in time to join you guys."

"Is okay," Ilya dismissed. " You worked long hours this morning. How was the diner?"

"Busy." Shane unwound Ilya's arms from around him so he could turn and look at him without straining his neck. "Francis called out again, and Joe finally fucking fired Antonio. Ms. Rodriguez came in today, sat in my section, so that made the morning better."

"Ah," Ilya took a step back towards Shane's closet. " Regular, who likes to leave only you a hundred dollars."

Ilya reached up to the tall shelf and grabbed what he needed. Then he went back to Shane, took his hand, and walked them out of the room.

"Don't be jealous," Shane teased. "I'm sure it's not just me."

"No, Shane." Ilya flickered on the bathroom light and shut the door once they were both inside. "I've had her in my section four times. I give her the best service ever. Make sure her coffee never runs out, that her butter tarts are hot and fresh, and that her bacon is "extra extra crispy". And I laugh at her terrible joke every time. The one where she says, 'Don't go bacon my heart.' Every. Single. Time. Shane."

Shane started laughing halfway through Ilya's rant, causing his shirt to get caught on his arm while he was taking it off.

Ilya steadied him, laughing at Shane's reaction but not wanting him to fall.

"She's never told me that one," he said through a chuckle.

Ilya's eyebrows shot up, which only made Shane start laughing again.

" And she doesn't even tell you the fucking joke!?" Ilya exclaimed, his voice loud enough to carry around the house. "What the fuck?"

Ilya tossed his shirt onto the floor in faux frustration. He lowered his shorts and underwear, kicking them off his feet.

"I didn't even fucking get it the first time. I needed Bood to explain it to me. All that, and she leaves me thirteen dollars."

Shane stripped the rest of his clothes off and turned the water on, waiting for it to get hot.

This wasn't the first time they had showered together. It was an easier way to continue whatever conversation they were having, plus they had seen each other naked plenty of times in the showers after practice. Ilya and Shane couldn't see why this would be any different.

"Maybe you're trying too hard." Shane teased as they both stepped in.

The shower wasn't big. The house wasn't anything luxurious. If they weren't comfortable with each other, they probably wouldn't do this as often as they did.

Shane got under the hot water first, letting it fall into his hair and over his shoulders. With the lack of space, Shane could feel Ilya standing close behind him.

"I kind of just let her tell me about her day," Shane said. "She tells me about the new book her book club is reading. Complains to me about this lady named Marie who keeps flirting with her husband at the supermarket. Stuff like that."

Ilya rolled his eyes. "So, what? I just let her tell me gossip? Then I get a hundred-dollar tip?"

Shane smiled as he massaged his neck and shoulder. When he turned to face Ilya, his arm brushed against Ilya's chest.

"Uh... I don't know. Honestly, Ilya, you might just have to give up." Ilya saw the glint of mischief pass through Shane's eyes. "Maybe you just aren't charming to every woman. Maybe it's time you retire your womanizer title while you're ahead."

Shane couldn't hold in his smile, not when Ilya's mouth fell open in surprise.

He tried his best to brace for it, but still squealed when Ilya pulled him in by the waist and tickled his side.

"Oh yeah?" Ilya said.

Shane tried to push Ilya away as he squirmed and laughed into his touch.

"Maybe I'll bring Ms. Rodriguez over and fuck her on your bed till she's screaming my name. Maybe then she'll start tipping me two hundred bucks every time she comes in and just completely forgets about you."

Their bodies rubbed together as they kept play-fighting, Ilya keeping Shane planted against him. He still hadn't even gone under the water yet, but his body was already wet.

"Ah, Ilya. Don't go bacon my heart like that." Shane couldn't help himself. His abdomen hurt from how hard he was laughing.

"You fucking—" Ilya shouted, but he was laughing when he said it.

Their dicks were pressed against each other, but neither thought too deeply about it. They weren't doing anything sexual.

Eventually, their laughter died down, and they actually began cleaning themselves. They didn't wash each other's bodies, because that would be gay, but when it was time to clean their backs, well, it wasn't gay to help a friend out.

After they finished, they went back to Shane's room wrapped in their towels. Ilya had made sure to bring Shane's to the bathroom along with his.

"I have a paper I gotta finish by twelve. It's pretty much done," Shane said as they dried themselves off. "I finished everything else, so luckily I don't have to hop on my computer just yet."

"Yeah, it's still pretty early. I did all my shit before my run with Marly." Ilya tapped on Shane's phone to wake the screen. The time read 6:21 PM. "Maybe we can watch that tennis movie with Zendaya. Svetlana said it was really good."

"Yeah, I'm cool with that."

Once he was done drying himself, Ilya forwent putting on underwear and sat on Shane's bed. His body still felt warm, and he liked the way Shane's duvet felt against his skin. He took out his phone and scrolled through Instagram, one hand planted on the mattress as he leaned back, feet on the floor.

Shane hung both towels to dry on the hooks of his closed door, and threw both their dirty clothes in his laundry basket. Before he could grab a pair of underwear, he reached for his phone to see if he Jess had responded.

All he received was a simple '❤️'.

He frowned, nervous that their fight was worse than he thought.

Ilya saw the frown grow on Shane's face, saw the worry etch itself between his brows.

He put his phone down and reached for Shane, who was only about two feet away.

He pulled Shane onto his lap, both of them still naked. Shane went willingly, adjusting himself until he could sit comfortably and recline against his favorite person, his hands on Ilya's outer thighs.

"Okay," Ilya said, his chin resting on Shane's shoulder. One hand lay on Shane's lower abdomen, lazily running over his skin and occasionally, accidentally, feeling Shane's pubes underneath his fingers. "Now tell me what happened."

"Jess is pissed at me," Shane started. He too was running his own fingers along Ilya's skin, finding the hairs on his legs satisfying to touch. "We argued on the phone the whole hour it took me to run errands and drive home after work. "

"Mhmm," Ilya hummed, knowing Shane needed to feel like the other person was listening.

"She says that I don't make time for her. Never go out to visit her. I tried to tell her about my busy schedule, but she didn't wanna hear it. It's been hard for me to find time to go to Toronto. I don't know what to fucking do. It's not like I don't miss her."

"Why doesn't she come here?"

"She doesn't have a car, Ilya. And I can't afford to buy flights for her every time she wants to see me."

"Well, I know it's not ideal. But you're both college students trying to make it through. It can't all fall on you, Shane."

Shane lifted his head from where it had rested against Ilya's to look at him.

"Maybe you can plan for her to come here by bus. It's much cheaper. She has an online class, yes? So maybe instead of being in class there, she can do it here. Bring her to practice, or the diner, or wherever. Gives you guys a few days."

Ilya's hazel eyes met with Shane's brown ones, and for a moment, they just looked at each other while Shane considered it.

Then Shane rolled his eyes.

"She's not going to want to take the bus."

Now it was Ilya's turn to roll his eyes. He'd known Jessica since high school. Had talked to her long before Shane had. And he knew from even then, from that first conversation, how high maintenance she could get.

She was beautiful— wavy blonde hair down her back, breasts that lay perfectly and a sexy body that even sophomore Ilya had wanted to touch. He'd given Shane credit when Shane had told him they were officially together. Not that he thought Shane couldn't have pulled that.

Respectfully, Ilya thought Shane was also pretty attractive.

Shane worked out, and it showed. His hair was always styled. His face, even his nose, had perfect angles. His lips were full and pink, and something that always stood out to Ilya were Shane's freckles. He could only imagine how many girls wished they could bend over for Shane just because of his freckles.

Unfortunately for them, Shane had been off the market for over two years.

"Well, fuck, Shane. If she wants to see you this bad, she can compromise." He waved his free hand in the air to emphasize his point.

Without paying attention, he placed his hand back down. It landed on Shane's dick.

It wasn't where he'd meant to rest his hand, but he left it there anyway.

Shane looked down at Ilya's hand as he considered the idea a bit more.

For a moment, he got distracted as he watched Ilya absentmindedly run his fingers along him. Ilya wasn't doing it to turn him on, seeing as Ilya was very straight, but Shane couldn't deny that it felt good. Shane didn't really have the right to talk, anyway. Everyone in the house knew about his other quirk. This was another one of Ilya's— no matter where his hand landed on Shane's body, he almost always ran his fingers there.

"Yeah," Shane nodded, eyes still on Ilya's hand for no other reason than it gave him something to look at. "You're right. I'll talk to her. If she says no, then the ball is in her court. She'll just have to wait till break."

Shane felt his dick swell up from the soft friction. Ilya didn't stop, though, knowing it would be mean to stop. His eyes dropped to Shane's dick, watching precum coat the tip. The tip was the same pretty pink color as Shane's lips.

"If she says yes, then I'll help you plan it," Ilya said. "Bus routes, best times to take it, stuff like that. Make it easier for you."

Ilya continued moving his hand because it gave his hand something to do. He stroked at a steady rhythm, running his index finger along the ridge because he liked the way it swelled.

Shane could feel his orgasm building up. He involuntarily pushed his hips up, causing himself to jerk into Ilya's hand. When he settled back down, his ass accidentally ground against Ilya's now hardened cock.

That was the thing about biology.

Even though Shane and Ilya weren't attracted to each other, they were only human. Any kind of real friction against their dicks would probably make them hard, even if they didn't mean for it to happen. Luckily, they didn't have to feel the kind of embarrassment that might have come with anyone else. They'd been each other's person since they were kids. They had seen each other grow up, and experience all kinds of things.

Shane and Ilya knew other people just lacked security in their sexuality. Enough to be able to cuddle with their best friend on the couch. Shower together. Sit on the other's lap, even while

naked. Play with their best friend's dick just because they felt like it.

But Shane and Ilya knew where to draw the line.

So even though Shane didn't mean to jerk his hips, causing his dick to push into Ilya's hand and his ass to push back against Ilya's cock, he knew it wasn't like that.

And when Ilya's hips jerked because Shane's ass was accidentally grinding against his hard cock, he knew it wasn't like that.

The moans that escaped their mouths weren't to be taken like that.

The line was drawn when both Shane and Ilya felt themselves right at the edge. Shane pushed Ilya's hand away so that he could finish jerking himself off. Ilya pushed Shane to sit on the bed next to him so he could get a hand on his own cock. And when they were both shooting their load onto the bed and the floor, well, technically, they could say they had never made the other person orgasm.

Because that would be gay.

Chapter 2: Fixation

Chapter Summary

Dinner with the roommates and Shane finding a new way to calm down, with Ilya's help.

Chapter Notes

Your comments on the first chapter made me CRACK UP! (No homo)

Thank you, thank you.

FOR THE SAKE OF THIS STORY I'm using "inches" . I know they're in Canada.

Please let me know if I should add tags I've missed.

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

He lowered the song playing in his ear as he kicked off his work shoes and left them near the shoe rack. He felt the weight of his book bag on his shoulders and Ilya was grateful that it was Friday, and he didn't need to think about his assignments till Sunday.

The smell of garlic and marinara hit Ilya's nose and he felt his mouth water immediately.

No one knew where Wyatt Hayes came from, nor how he ended up crashing at the apartment until he was just one of the roomies— but Ilya was eternally grateful that the man came with high-level cooking skills, and a brain filled with family recipes that extended back for generations, apparently.

The only thing the man had asked from the others was to chip in on the groceries for these dinners, and Ilya definitely had no qualms about that.

"Hey, man. What's up?" Marleau walked into the living room from the hallway, where his and Svetlana's rooms were located. He wore a pair of gray McGill athletic shorts, and nothing else. Ilya understood, since the heat from the kitchen traveled to the rest of the house making it very warm.

"Hey," Ilya greeted tiredly.

Marleau walked to the kitchen as Ilya ascended the stairs. He had been eager to change out of his work uniform, take a quick shower and put on comfier clothes.

After doing all of that and just throwing on a pair of his H&M maroon boxer briefs and a black tank top, he made his way back to the stairs to go see how much more time remained till dinner. His stomach had been growling from the moment he left the diner.

Before taking a step down, Ilya took a look into Shane's room. At the sound of the door, Shane turned his head from where he had been staring at the laptop screen. He was seated at his desk, a pencil in one hand hovered over a notebook, and biting the thumb nail of the other hand.

"Hey, *Solnyshko*. You coming down to eat?" Ilya asked from the doorway.

The exhaustion on Shane's face could be seen from where Ilya stood, and he already knew what his best friend's day must have looked like.

"Fuck, you're already back from work? What time is it?" Shane looked at the corner of his laptop to read the time. He rubbed at his face when he realized the whole day got away from him. He contemplated whether he should call it a day or finish the last two sections he needed to study. "Um, I don't know—"

"Shane, when was the last time you ate?" It was a rhetorical question, Shane knew.

He knew Ilya was starting up on what was going to eventually lead to him calling it a day for Shane instead.

"Exactly. I'll meet you downstairs." Ilya continued. "Also,—" He had just been about to close the door before reentering. "...stop biting your nails, Shane."

Ilya spoke with finality before closing Shane's door and descended the stairs to go to the kitchen.

He greeted Wyatt upon entering the kitchen and joined Marleau at the dining table—a walnut colored round table with four matching chairs they found on Facebook Marketplace, and one orange chair Ilya found at a yard sale. It was his way of welcoming Wyatt.

"What's for dinner tonight, Hayes?" Ilya asked.

Wyatt crouched in front of the oven to take a look through the glass.

"Ricotta and ground beef stuffed shells with garlic knots. One of my mom's recipes." Wyatt stood to give Ilya an excited smile. "Haven't fucking had these in years and I'm so excited." The man practically bounced on his heels as he walked back to the counter.

"I feel like I've been waiting all day for this," Marleau groaned from his seat. "I'm so hungry, I'm legit about to make a bowl of cereal as an appetizer."

Ilya amusedly watched as Wyatt stopped chopping the tomato in his hand to glare at the other man.

"No, yeah. Go right ahead..." Wyatt lifted up the knife, pointing it at Marleau. "I dare you to walk to the pantry right now, and make yourself a bowl of cereal, while I'm pouring my heart

and soul out into this home-cooked meal that I'm making for my roommates." He continued to wave the knife in the air.

Ilya attempted to suppress a surprised smile, not wanting to also piss him off.

Marleau put his hands up in mock surrender. "Shit, my bad." His voice had raised an octave.

It was at that apology that Wyatt looked from Marleau to the knife in his hand. "Oh, fuck. I'm still holding a knife." He laid it down onto the cutting board, letting out a light chuckle.

"Didn't mean to actually threaten you, Marly." Wyatt pushed his curls back.

"I've never heard you sound so scary before." Ilya chuckled. "Almost forgot you were wearing an apron with Baby Yoda grilling a hotdog, on it." Ilya waved his hand up and down at his appearance.

From Ilya's right, he watched as a figure entered the kitchen.

"Forgot? How could you possibly forget the cutest thing we have in this house?" Wyatt said as he threw the chopped tomato into the salad bowl.

Shane walked past the table and to the counter to look at the pasta dish Wyatt had taken out of the oven five minutes ago.

Ilya noticed that the black varsity shorts Shane wore were his. Figures. He had looked everywhere but couldn't find them. As if he hadn't learned by now that half of his clothes were in Shane's room and vice versa.

"And for the lady, perhaps a salad?" Wyatt gestured at the salad he had just thrown together.

Everyone in the house knew how strict Shane could be on his diet, down to the macros. This was a kind gesture from Wyatt to make sure Shane had something he could eat, but Shane felt a pit in his stomach from how hungry he was.

"Perhaps not." Shane finished the movie quote. "This smells so good Hayes." Shane shook his head as he leaned in closer to smell the aroma and then looked through the glass of the oven.

At this response, Wyatt put on a gleeful smile. He never pushed Shane to eat what he wasn't comfortable eating. But on the rare occasion Shane ate one of his meals, well, that was just the best thing ever.

"Yes, Shane! You're gonna love it, I promise. Should be ready in ten." Wyatt said excitedly.

Shane let out a small laugh, finding his roommate's excitement oddly endearing.

"Almost forgot you were here Shane," Marleau said, not looking up from his phone. "Barely heard footsteps coming from upstairs all day."

Shane walked towards the table, stretching his arms above his head. A loud crack comes from his back and he cringed, even though it had felt good.

From where Ilya sat, he watched Shane's white t-shirt raise up as he stretched, his eyes catching the lines of Shane's defined abs and small waist.

"Yeah," Shane doesn't continue to speak right away, as his eyes connected with Ilya's once he was done stretching.

Even though Ilya had been sat at the table, he had pulled his chair about a foot away from it so that he could sit with his legs stretched out comfortably.

Shane took the remaining steps to the chair that was right next to Ilya's and moved it out of his way. Once close, he threw one leg over Ilya's waist and straddled him. Ilya easily adjusted his legs to support Shane's weight. Simultaneously, Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya's shoulders while Ilya placed his hands along Shane's back.

They were both exhausted, if the way they rested their chins on each other's shoulders was anything to go by.

"I've been studying all day. Feels like my brain is gonna explode." He finished, responding to Marleau.

"Did you even take a break in between hours, dude? I can't imagine strictly studying ten hours straight." Marleau asked, unaffected by the sight of his two roommates.

"Uhh, no... I mean. I did to piss, but that was pretty much it."

Ilya pulled his head back to give Shane a disapproving look.

He lightly ran his fingers down Shane's spine, feeling his rib cage under his palms, then brought his hands back up, repeating the motion as he spoke.

"That's not a good way to study, Shane. You could have at least taken a walk or something. Give your brain and your eyes a break from staring at a screen." If Ilya sounded mildly annoyed it's because he was.

He disapproved of the way Shane went about preparing for an upcoming exam. He didn't take care of himself the way he should— skipping out on meals, forgoing resting periods, and just sitting on his desk chair all day trying to drill in the information.

Shane rested his head back down on Ilya's shoulder, wanting to close his eyes for a minute and give them a break.

"I know, it's just that when I'm not studying, all I can think about is how I'm wasting valuable studying time."

His voice was slightly muffled at this angle but he was too comfortable to move. Too comfortable to fix his shorts that had ridden up too. And too comfortable to care.

Ilya kept stroking his back, noting that the thin fabric still let him feel every ridge of Shane's muscles. He hoped that the touch was helping ease them, until he also remembered that Shane had been sitting all day. Taking this into consideration, Ilya ran his hands down

Shane's back once more, but instead of bringing them up he decided to bring them lower. He cupped his hands on each of Shane's cheeks.

These were his shorts, and Ilya was familiar with the way they rode up easily so he didn't find the point in fixing them as his hands massaged at the half exposed skin of Shane's ass.

"Mm,—" Shane moaned out low enough into his collarbone that only he could hear it.

Shane hadn't even paid mind to his ass feeling sore from sitting all day, until Ilya started massaging the area. He readjusted himself on top by pushing his ass back even more into Ilya's hands, making it easier for him to knead at the muscle. Ilya spread his fingers to cover more area, somewhat pushing the shorts up higher so he could do a better job.

"Oop— okay. Right in front of my salad." Shane thought he heard Wyatt say lowly to himself, but he wasn't sure and wasn't going to ask.

"That feels good, thank you." Shane wrapped his arms tighter around Ilya's shoulders, pressing their bodies together even more. He pressed his lips against Ilya's jaw, a small kiss there as a way to say 'thank you'.

The same spot where fourteen-year-old Shane kissed Ilya when he gifted him a signed 'Sidney Crosby' hockey card and has been doing ever since.

"Of course," Ilya responded quietly.

In the middle of Ilya telling Shane about his day, Marleau let out a full on giggle that made every head turn to look at him. Made Ilya stop giving Shane a massage.

It had taken Marleau another few seconds of looking at his phone and typing something out before he sensed that he was being looked at. Upon realization, his face went red.

"What the fuck was that?" Ilya asked, hands frozen where they were.

"Um..." Marleau cleared his throat, and with an unnatural deep voice said, "Nothing."

"Nothing?" Wyatt asked, voice dripping with bewilderment. "For a second, I thought Svetlana was home with that giggle."

Shane and Ilya don't even attempt to hold back their laughs.

"Who got you giggling like that?" Wyatt took a step closer to the table.

Marleau rolled his eyes. "Oh my G—"

His annoyance didn't last, as he apparently received another text that caused him to smile.

"Uh, it's just this girl... She's..." he stuttered through his sentence as he typed a response back. Once done he looked back up at the guys. "She's fucking hot. And she's saying some crazy shit..."

Marleau pulled up a photo and showed all three of them. When Wyatt was able to see the photo, he whistled lowly in approval.

"Shit dude, yeah. A solid ten. " Wyatt complimented.

"Fuck, Marly. How the fuck did you get *her* number? If I had seen her at the club, I definitely would have tried to leave with her." Ilya said as he looked at the photo again, Marleau's phone in his hand.

"Well, thank fuck you left with a different girl before she showed up then." Marleau snapped back.

Ilya tilted the phone for Shane to take a look.

"Yeah, uh, she's..." Shane stuttered. "She's hot. Good job, bro."

Shane wasn't blind. He knew when a girl was 'pretty' or 'cute'. Jess was both 'pretty' and 'cute', he knew this and he also sees it. And sometimes he thinks her actions are cute, like when she has a full on laughing fit or when he genuinely surprises her with a gift and her jaw drops. He thought Rose and Svetlana were also both 'pretty' and 'cute' too.

The only thing that he felt like he had a hard time with, was understanding when a girl was 'hot'. He hadn't even known she was hot and that half of his high school class were thirsting after her until Ilya congratulated him for pulling her.

He had asked Ilya once years ago what the criteria of different levels of "hotness" were. The response he received back was, "Criteria? Criteria is ass and/or boobs, Shane. Bigger ass, bigger boobs, higher level. Duh."

The girl on Marleau's phone had both, so... very hot?

"Yeah, I know, right?" Marly smugly said.

Alyssa with the big titssa: Yea! I got it removed so now I can go the whole length without gagging

Shane and Ilya both read the message that appeared on the top. Ilya let out a surprised chuckle.

"What?" Marleau took his his phone back from Ilya.

"Um..." was the only thing Shane let out, unable to form a coherent thought.

"Wait, what happened?" Wyatt asked.

"I'm.. I'm not sure I know what—" Shane stuttered.

Ilya on the other hand was smiling in the most confused way ever. "No, me neither..."

"Alyssa... with the big titssa? Really? Is that how you think rhyming works?" Shane attempted to sound judgmental but Ilya underneath him was laughing and actively giving Marleau a high five.

"HA! Nice!" Wyatt laughed a few seconds after when he finally got it.

"Where the fuck is Svetlana when I need her to remind you guys that you're idiots?" Shane shook his head at the stupidity. With one arm lazily draped around Ilya's shoulder, he used the other hand to rub at the corner of his eyes.

"Working," Ilya responded. "Anyway, what the fuck does she mean by she 'got it removed' and can now 'go the whole length'?"

"Whoa, what?" It was Wyatt's turn to react.

Marleau let out a breathy chuckle. "She was telling me that she got her gag reflex removed, so now she can deep throat without a problem."

"What?" Wyatt immediately asked, stunned.

"How the fuck—" Ilya said at the same time.

"I don't think that's possible—" Shane began to say at the same time as the other two.

"I don't know! It's what she said." Marleau talked over all of them, before going back to his phone and giggling as he typed up a response.

"You know," Wyatt said. "I think it could be true. I've seen some girls not even flinch when they're attempting to go balls deep."

Shane, with his eyebrows lowered, turned to look at him with a confused face.

"That doesn't mean girls are removing their glossopharyngeal nerve—" Shane tried to argue.

"No, I think it's a thing too. Maybe." Ilya interrupted. "Most girls are gagging on it, but I've had some take all nine inches, easy."

Shane turned his head back to look down at Ilya, who he was still straddling. Shane was almost too stunned to speak with how stupid they all sounded.

"I think that's just a developed skill. Maybe not everyone's gag reflex is as strong as others." He tried again to push back.

"Nine inches? For real?" Shane heard Wyatt ask somewhere behind him.

"Developed skill? Like toothbrush to the back of your tongue kind of thing?" Marleau asked. "I usually can't get it far, and I've tried multiple times."

"Huh?" Shane asked dumbfounded. He didn't think his eyebrows have stopped scrunching since this conversation had started.

"Oh, I've done that." Ilya responded with a mild excitement. "I can go pretty deep. Maybe I have skill."

"Wait, but Ilya. You actually have nine inches?" Wyatt tried to ask again.

"Why are you guys putting your toothbrush down your throat?" Shane asked slowly.

Ilya and Marleau both shrugged.

"Curious." Ilya responded simply. "You've never been curious?"

"Uh... no? Why would I? I've never been in a situation that called for me to test out my gag reflex..."

"Ilya?" Wyatt questioned again. "Fuck! My garlic knots!" Shane heard from behind him what he thought was Wyatt running to the oven. "Ow, fuck! Hot, hot, hot."

"Is not that we are in a situation that calls for it. It's same as when you try to see if you can suck your own dick. So is more like, can I?" Ilya explained, and it only left Shane more confused.

What the fuck was going on behind closed doors?

"Yeah, why not? My first girlfriend could barely put my dick in her mouth before she started gagging. So I got curious." Marleau added, after Ilya.

"I think that was just her not being able to handle your disgusting dick, Marly." Ilya retorted.

"Alright, fuck you guys. I'm going back to my phone." Marleau flipped off Ilya, before bringing his attention back to his phone.

"I mean, I guess, maybe, I get it?" Shane said unsure.

Ilya smiled, amused at how in his head Shane seemed to be.

"Hm. Now I'm curious." Ilya hummed, one of his hands still on Shane's ass, lightly rubbing at the skin.

"What?" Shane asked.

After another second of contemplation, Ilya decided to go for it.

"I just want to see. Open your mouth?" Ilya asked.

Once again confused, Shane lowered his eyebrows.

He opened his mouth , just a tad.

When he felt Ilya insert two fingers in his mouth, he understood where he was going with this.

He opened his mouth wider to allow Ilya to push his fingers in deeper.

Shane had never thought to try this. He hadn't even wondered about Jess's gag reflex, or if he could recall whether she gagged easily or not. He usually didn't really look at her when she went down on him, preferring to just close his eyes, and enjoy the warm mouth.

But now, he supposed he was curious about himself. Unsure why this was even a topic of conversation to begin with.

Feeling Ilya's fingers go in slowly and deep, he could immediately feel the tickle at the back of his tongue. He closed his eyes, attempting to relax, and breathe through it.

Shane closed his lips around his fingers and waited for him to go deeper.

Ilya's goal was not to rush this. Yeah, he could just shove his fingers deep into Shane's mouth until he gagged, but he genuinely was curious to see if he could handle it.

Maybe he would do as bad as Marleau, apparently. Or maybe he could handle it as well as Ilya could.

So when he touched the back of Shane's tongue he slowly pulled his fingers back, noting the thick coat of saliva covering his fingers.

When he thought Shane was ready for more, he pushed in farther.

Shane took another deep and steady breath. They were doing this to test out his gag reflex, but Shane liked the weight of Ilya's fingers on his tongue— Shane liked things in his mouth in general. This was no secret, just a quirk. It wasn't anything he was ashamed of, and didn't think it crossed any boundaries when he began to suck on Ilya's fingers.

Ilya wasn't surprised by this, but that wasn't why he was doing this. Usually any other time, but for right now he continued on his experiment.

Ilya pulled his fingers back slowly before pushing them in even further, and that was when Shane grabbed his hand. Not to stop him but to hold onto it as Ilya pushed further inside.

"*Mm—*" He hummed, starting to feel what they were talking about.

A small smile tugged at the corner of Ilya's lips, as he pulled back a little again before pushing in even more.

He hadn't been sure if Shane could handle it, but Ilya was impressed so far.

Ilya went for it again, going further and pushing his fingers down and that was when he finally heard it. Shane released a gag noise, still holding on to Ilya's hand. Ilya retreated his fingers almost barely before pushing back in and making Shane gag once more.

He smiled. "Fuck."

He removed his fingers from Shane's mouth slowly so that Shane could suck the extra coat of saliva off of his fingers.

"Was that good?" Shane asked, always feeling his competitive side looming. Obviously, Shane didn't plan on giving full blowjobs at any point in his life, but he did want to be better than fucking Cliff Marleau at suppressing his gag reflex.

"It was good. Really good. Not better than me but..." Ilya joked, giving Shane's ass a squeeze.

He knew Ilya was joking. And again, it didn't matter.

But... well, fuck.

Now he knew Ilya had a better a better gag reflex than him, and that somehow made him feel like he lost a competition.

"Alright, food is ready!" Wyatt clapped his hands in excitement.

Everyone got up to serve themselves, making sure to compliment Wyatt on how beautiful it looked. When they all sat back down with their plate and preferred drink , they simultaneously took a bite.

A chorus of moans filled the kitchen, as they savored their first bite.

"Shit, Hayes. Your moms ricotta and ground beef recipe is hitting all the right spots." Marleau said with his mouth full.

Wyatt unable to stop smiling, struggled to chew threw his food.

"I want to marry this garlic knot. " Ilya held up the bitten food in the air, with the most serious face. Shane laughed at the way Ilya looked at it like he was ready to breed it too. He lowered one of his hand to rub at Ilya's leg that had slung over his under the table.

"You guys have made me the happiest, I can't. Thank you."

"No, thank you Hayes. I'm so happy I paused my diet for this." Shane said after he swallowed another bite of the pasta covered in marinara and cheese.

"You guys are going to make me cry." Wyatt's said with obvious emotion.

He cooked for them often, but there are few times where he is this excited for them to try a dish he is making. And as the best roommates, they make it a point to give him high praises.

~.~.~

After their dinner, Ilya and Shane clean the kitchen while Wyatt retreated back to his room.

It was a rule. Wyatt cooks, the others clean.

Marleau was let off the hook when he told all of them that Alyssa had asked him to come over. And because they have all been around mopey and heartbroken Marleau long enough, there was a quick and unanimous 'Yes! Go. Get the fuck out of the house.'

It took them at most, twenty minutes to put the leftovers away, wash the dishes and wipe down everything. In that time, Shane told Ilya about the conversation he had with Jess in the morning. Of how he brought up the plan of bringing her to Montreal by bus.

"And what did she say?" he had asked as while he wiped the dining table.

Shane had been leaning against the counter, watching him. " Well, first. She said 'Ew, Shane. The bus?'" Ilya briefly had paused his wipe down to roll his eyes at Shane and shake his head. " But then I explained it to her, worked out how we could spend four days together. After that, she was pretty excited."

"Good, I'm happy you guys are back to normal." Ilya had meant it, too.

He thought Shane and Jessica were a decent couple. Sure, maybe Shane felt a little reserved when he was around her, but Ilya always assumed that was him reading too much into it. Quite frankly, he hardly ever saw them exchange in PDA— maybe holding hands occasionally, a hug here and there, and a quick peck when Shane thought no one was looking.

Ilya found it odd, and there was only ever one instance where even Jessica "jokingly" pointed it out, back when they were still in high school.

"Wow, Ilya. How'd you get Shane to sit there?" She pointed at them as she walked back from the bathroom— Ilya was sat on the floor of Shane's bedroom, leaning against a wall, knees bent with Shane sat in between his legs, reclined against his chest. "Could barely get him to hold my hand in public." She laughed awkwardly.

"I was showing him something on my phone." Shane went to stand up. "Also, you know how I feel about PDA, Jess."

"And this is..."

"Not that. We're just friends. And I have a girlfriend, remember?" Shane teased.

Jess blushed, a smile creeping on her face. "Yeah, duh. Of course," She laughs. "I know that."

Ilya stood up from the ground after. "Alright, well, me and Svetlana are going to head out now." Ilya waved his hand at Svetlana to stand up from the bed.

"You crazy kids have fun!" Svetlana said as they both left Shane's room.

Since then, he hadn't heard another comment. If it was normal to them, then it was normal to him he supposed.

"Yeah, me too." Shane responded.

Now, Shane and Ilya were on the couch in the living room, TV on and lights off.

Ilya scrolled on his phone as he looked for a bus that Jess could take from Toronto to Montreal, as promised.

"How about this one?" Ilya asked, angling the phone down so that Shane could see.

Ilya was laying on his back, head on a pillow, while Shane laid on top of him sprawled.

Shane raised his head from where it laid on Ilya's chest to look.

"Nah, she would have to sprint from her afternoon class to her dorm to the bus. Is there anything later? And one to go back to Toronto, early afternoon? Nothing by the bathroom." Shane rested his head back down.

"Yeah. There's one two hours later to come here. And one to leave here in afternoon. Window seat, close to the driver."

"Yes, perfect. Book it. Do you need my info?" Shane asked, half watching 'The Bear' on their TV.

Ilya scoffed, rubbing his nose against Shane's hair as he typed. "No, Shane. I think I know where you live."

"I meant my debit card info, asshole."

"No, I know that too." Ilya said absentmindedly.

Once Ilya finished up, he slid his phone on to the coffee table, making sure not to jostle Shane too much.

They lay there through this and another episode, legs entwined while Ilya softly ran his hand through Shane's hair.

When the credit rolled at the end of the episode, Shane shifts.

"Fuck, that has to be the best episode this season." He turned to look at Ilya.

"This season? Shane that's the best episode I've seen in TV history." Ilya countered. "I think my heart was racing the whole time."

Shane laughed, "Yeah, I know. I heard it beating through your chest."

"I know we should go to the next episode, but I kind of want to watch it again." Ilya groaned.

He was so ready to replay it.

"Me too, but..." Shane's eyes drifted down to look at the necklace around Ilya's neck. "I should probably go finish studying."

Ilya's eyebrows raised. "More studying today, Shane?"

"Yeah, I had a little bit left to look over and my exam is in two weeks."

"Two weeks!?" Ilya's voice raised. "This whole time I thought your exam was on Monday, or some shit."

"I would literally die if my exam was in two days, and I hadn't finished studying." Shane didn't even want to imagine the panic he would feel.

"Well, too bad now that you told me when. You're done studying for today, no exceptions." Ilya stated.

"Ilya..." Shane groaned, feeling a small bit of panic grow in his chest.

"No, Shane. You've studied enough for today. You're going to stay here, and re-watch this episode that deserves every award, and you're going to relax until it's time for bed." It honestly was a suggestion, but Ilya hoped that his voice sounded serious enough.

After a sigh, Shane responded with, "Fine... yeah— no more studying." He reluctantly agreed.

Ilya re-started the episode, and a quarter way through he could swear the second watch is just as good as the first.

During one of the flashback scenes, Ilya went to point something out to Shane but stopped when he saw Shane biting on his thumb nail.

"Shane." Ilya said to get his attention.

"Hm?" Shane doesn't look up, eyes still on the TV.

"Stop chewing on your nail." Ilya said at the same time he removed the assaulted thumb nail from Shane's mouth.

"Oh." Shane hadn't realized he was doing it. "Sorry."

"You don't need to apologize to me."

"I'm just," Shane turned his head to rest his chin on Ilya's chest again. "I guess I'm just trying not to think about how I'm not studying and how I might fail, when I really can't afford to do that."

"I know, *Solnyshko*. But you have plenty of time, and you always pass your exams. This time will be no different." Ilya reasons, gently.

Shane doesn't respond. Deep in thought, Ilya watched as Shane once again, without realizing it, brought his thumb to his mouth. Before Shane could bite on his nail, Ilya quickly stopped him.

"Shane..."

"Ugh, I'm sorry. I swear it's not on purpose." Shane deflated. "It just calms me down."

"I know it's not, but you keep ruining your nails this way. And it's just a bad habit." Ilya countered.

Shane sighed deeply. "Fine, then can I just—" He doesn't finish his question.

Ilya ran his hand through Shane's hair, as the other man looked at him with pleading eyes.

"Yeah, of course." Ilya nodded encouragingly, wanting Shane to know he was always here for him. "Whenever you need, you know this."

Shane looked at him one more time, until he felt certain that Ilya was okay with it.

Once satisfied, he pushed himself up enough to slide down Ilya's body, laying himself back down on the couch with his feet half-planted on the floor.

Ilya shifted his legs, spreading them apart so Shane could fit comfortably.

Once settled, Ilya shifted his eyes back to the screen while Shane looked at the imprint of Ilya's dick through the fabric of his maroon boxer briefs.

Feeling the anxiety still building up in his chest at the thought of spending the rest of the day not studying, Shane brought his hands up to the band of Ilya's briefs and lowered it down past his dick and his balls.

Ilya was soft, as expected.

For them, this wasn't what it looked like. But they did know that others wouldn't see it the same with the exception of a few, so they made sure to keep this act of friendship more private than other things.

With Marleau gone, and Wyatt in his room, Shane didn't feel any hesitation.

He brought his eyes back to the TV to keep watching the episode, as he lowered himself down more, and used his hand to guide Ilya's flaccid dick into his mouth. He felt his eyes close briefly as the head of Ilya's cock touched his tongue and his oral fixation was finally met.

He wrapped his lips around the spongy and soft head and sucked on it. Out of everything Shane liked to put in his mouth— nail-biting, the string of his hoodies, Ilya's fingers— this was Shane's favorite.

Ilya knew it too, as he had yet to see something calm Shane's stress down, the way sucking on Ilya's dick did.

This wasn't the same as a blow job.

It wasn't.

Ilya's dick was warm, plump, slightly veiny, and above all, it was the perfect weight on Shane's tongue.

So Shane sucked on it. Lips wrapped around the head, Shane ran his tongue on the soft skin, occasionally running his tongue on the slit. He gripped Ilya's length firmly but gently, and just focused on the tip for the next few minutes, even after he began to feel Ilya harden.

Ilya was just happy to see Shane finally calm down.

Of course, once Ilya felt Shane sucking on the head of his cock, focusing on the episode became a little harder.

He was content to see his best friend finally stop stressing out and, more than that, happy to see him no longer biting his nails. But, he couldn't help but flicker his eyes from watching the episode to watching Shane bob at his cock. Watched Shane lick at it until he's sucking on the tip of his dick again.

Ilya tried to steady his breathing, and calm himself down. He always figured that watching Shane do this would soften his dick, but for some reason it was always the opposite.

Sometimes he'd wonder if this was crossing some kind of line but then an immediate thought would rush to his head right after. The thought that, Shane needed this.

"Moy malen'kiy kotonok" Ilya whispered, as he ran his fingers through Shane's soft hair.

Shane didn't understand his words, but he hummed in response.

They stayed like this through another five minutes of the episode. Shane sucking on the head of Ilya's hardened cock, and Ilya watching him as he does, no longer interested in the episode.

Shane's eyes were glued to the TV but his mind went elsewhere.

With Ilya's dick in his mouth, his thoughts went to the conversation from earlier.

He was annoyed afterwards that he hadn't done better, and he was annoyed now about it too.

But more than anything, now, Shane was curious again.

He had never gone past the tip of Ilya's dick, always comparing this way of easing his oral fixation to basically sucking on a lollipop.

But Ilya's fingers couldn't possibly be the same as Ilya's dick, and while Shane was here well... 'why not?'

He had seen girls do this before, Jess and whatever porn videos he had watched to learn more about sex, so Shane knows he can't just put the whole thing in his mouth. Remembering how Ilya did it earlier with his fingers, in and out, going deeper each time, Shane decided to try it that way.

Feeling emboldened, Shane closed his eyes to focus. He opened his mouth a little bit to let his saliva drip down the head of Ilya's dick. When Shane feels the saliva reach his hand, he stroked it up then down to coat the rest of Ilya's length to get it ready for his mouth.

Ilya scrunched his eyebrows, unsure of what was going on but he refrained from saying anything as Shane stroked his length.

Not wanting to hurt him, Shane used his upper lip and his tongue to block his teeth from touching Ilya's dick as he bobbed his head up and down, slicking Ilya up more with his watery mouth.

"Shane, what are you—" Ilya heard himself start to say but the words taper off. His heart was beating quicker and his thoughts weren't formed as he watched his best friend take more of his length into his mouth.

Shane felt himself getting into it as he continued using his hand to stroke Ilya and suck until he felt brave to go deeper. When Shane went down a little more, he felt the slight tickle on the back of his tongue, and decides to just work on this part until he was ready for more.

Ilya let out an involuntary moan when Shane goes down more.

He's just about to tell Shane to stop until it finally hits him, a thought finally getting through the haze.

"Oh." He growled. "You want to see how far you can go? See how much of my dick you can take before you start gagging, hm? Think you can beat me?" The last question was Ilya knowing that Shane always wanted to win, and Ilya always finding it fun to challenge him.

At his words, Shane nodded before going even deeper, then opening his eyes to look up at his best friend.

Ilya felt chills creep onto his skin, and he tightened his hand in Shane's hair.

"*Fuck*—" Ilya couldn't help the words that tumbled out of his mouth.

The sound of the front door opened, suddenly, but neither of them turned to look at who it was.

Shane felt his throat begin to tighten and he willed himself to relax. Willed himself to breathe through it, as he tried to push down more. At this point he was taking most of Ilya's length and a part of him felt very proud of himself.

"Hey—" Svetlana's voice filled the room along with the sound of the TV, but is immediately cut off.

Though he doesn't want to, Ilya turns his head to look at her.

"Hey," his voice came out strained.

He watched as Svetlana crooked her head to the side, taking in the scene before her. Her eyebrows scrunched, and she looked like she had a few questions running through her head.

Shane removed his mouth from Ilya's dick to turn to look at her. "Hey," he greeted her as he continued to stroke Ilya's dick. "Leftovers are in the fridge." he said before bringing his mouth around Ilya's cock again, continuing from where he left off.

"Right... right. Thanks." Svetlana responded, still not looking away. In Russian she calmly asked, *"What the fuck are you guys doing?"*

Ilya ran his hand through Shane's hair again, lightly pushing his head down to encourage him to take more of Ilya's dick.

"Testing out his gag reflex." Ilya responded after a few seconds, not really interested in talking when he could be letting himself enjoy the feeling. *"Stop watching, you're going to make him nervous. Then he won't be able to see if his reflexes are good or not."*

"Um... Right. So sorry. How rude and weird of me. Would hate to make him... shy and nervous? I'll just—" She kicked off her shoes, louder than she needed, and then headed to her room. *"— let you guys continue doing your very normal, best friend activities."*

At the point that Svetlana closed her door was when Shane was basically at the base of Ilya's dick.

"Fuck, Shane. You're doing so good..." Ilya bit his lower lip to try to suppress some of the moans he kept letting out.

Shane wanted to say 'thank you', but he didn't want to stop, having reached the point where he could no longer stroke Ilya's length and suck at his dick at the same time. So he let his hand grab on to Ilya's balls. He didn't know where else to put his saliva covered hand at the moment.

Earlier when Ilya had put his fingers deep in his mouth and practically at his throat, Shane really struggled to calm down his throat enough to take it fully. But now, he felt relaxed, and honestly he was really enjoying this.

He loved sucking on Ilya's tip, but this was completely different. His mouth was full, in a way he always craved.

So Shane doesn't let up— going deeper, sucking on Ilya's dick like it was his favorite activity, feeling the complete slickness. And when he feels his nose push in to Ilya's pubes and his lips touch the base of Ilya's cock, not having once gagged, he felt victorious.

Ilya was being loud with his moans and cursed words, but the sight of Shane taking all nine inches of Ilya's dick deserved every sound coming out of him. He was painfully hard, and extremely close.

"Mmm—"

Shane felt Ilya's balls begin to tighten in his palm.

"Shane. Off, I'm about to —" Shane removed his mouth quickly from Ilya's dick, and watched as the other man scrambled to put his hand on his dick to finish himself off.

It only took one stroke, before Ilya came in his hand and onto his boxer briefs.

Shane doesn't cower away, as he has seen Ilya jerk off before, but he is almost amazed by how much come he released— some of it landing on his face.

Ilya threw his head back down onto the pillow. Needing a moment from the intense orgasm.

When he caught his breath, Ilya looked down at the mess he created.

"Was that better?" Shane asked, a bit of teasing in his voice. He was still laying down, between Ilya's legs.

Ilya looked up at him, rolling his eyes as a smile formed on his face. With his clean hand, he used his thumb to wipe at the bit of come that landed on Shane's chin. "Yeah, fuck. Think yours is better than mine." He admitted.

At that, Shane's face lights up, completely delighted at the compliment.

If this had been an actual blow job, Ilya thinks that he would say it was the best one he's ever gotten.

"Let me clean up and then we can watch the next episode?" Ilya asked, sitting himself up on the couch. Shane moved, to let him go.

"Yeah, sure. Ask Svetlana if she wants to watch with us. I'm gonna go grab a blanket now that the house is finally cold." Shane said as he stood up, and began ascending the stairs.

Ilya cleaned himself up in the downstairs bathroom, realizing too late that his boxer briefs were dirty until he heard a knock before Shane opened the door and passed him a new pair, and took the soiled one. He smiled in relief.

Once out, Ilya popped his head into the kitchen, completely unsure of when she even walked from her bedroom to the kitchen. "*You want to come watch 'The Bear' with us? It's really good.*"

"*Oh, I could be in the living room now?*" Svetlana teased, standing herself up from the chair with a plate of food in her hand.

Ilya rolled his eyes.

"*Ilya...*" her teasing tone gone. "*What are you two doing?*"

It wasn't the first time she'd ask this question, and Ilya was never a fan of it. Through the years, he had answered it in many different ways. And tonight, was just like any other time.

"*We aren't doing anything... You want to come watch, or not?*" he asked impatiently.

Svetlana rolled her eyes. She gave it a solid ten seconds before she nodded her head.

"Fine..." She said resignedly.

They walked into the living room and all settled in.

Re-watching the episode for the third time, the second time not really counting.

And when Ilya ran his hand through Shane's hair again, them both going back to their previous position of Shane resting his head on his chest while Svetlana sat on the arm chair, the question popped up again in his head. And Ilya, for the first time since he's met Shane, could honestly admit to himself an answer that differed from all of the others.

"What are you two doing?"

He didn't know.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make me smile :)

Chapter 3: Rules

Chapter Summary

Opening night at the theatre gives Shane and Ilya a new excuse.

Chapter Notes

I am obsessed with every comment you all have left me on Chapter 2. I legit cried from laughter. Thank you!

This chapter has more shape to it. Being stupid can only go so far, y'know?

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

"Woah— ew, what the fuck, Ilya?!" Alexei yelled from the hallway.

When Ilya looked up at his brother, he saw the other man covering his eyes with his hand, and his back turned away.

"Sorry, I didn't think you were going to be home, so I left my door open." Ilya lifted his duvet to drape over Shane's shoulders, to cover themselves. "I can close it if you want so the noise doesn't bother you?"

Shane shifted on top of him, still holding both of their dicks in his hand, but no longer stroking.

"That's not—" Alexei risked a glance at them, and fully turned back towards them when he could confirm he would no longer see their privates. "— the fucking problem! Why the fuck, are you guys... I don't even know what to call this. Are you guys jerking each other off?"

Alexei wasn't a homophobe per se. At least he would say he wasn't. He had a gay friend, and it was the card he used any time someone called him out on saying questionable things.

But this, to him, wasn't about homosexuals. This was about years of seeing shit he didn't mean to see. And on a day like today, the mechanic telling him he was going to have to spend a shit load to change the alternator, he wasn't in the mood for other shit. So maybe, the sight of his brother's best friend stroking his and his' brothers cock's together, was making him feel even more irritated.

"It's not like that," Shane said as he brought the waist band of his joggers up. He could tell that whatever he and Ilya started, they wouldn't be able to finish now.

"Oh, fuck off!" Alexei said loudly.

Ilya brought up his pants as well, and proceeded to take a sip from his Gatorade bottle.

Alexei looked at the both of them then drew his eyes to the other people in the room.

"And what the fuck are YOU two doing?" He gestured his hand towards them.

"Uh, playing Overcooked? Duh." Svetlana waved the Xbox controller in her hand as if it was obvious, before going back to the game. "Marly, I told you to chop and wash the dishes. Why are you cooking the steak? THIS is why we keep only getting two stars on this level."

"I am! The timer was going off, Svet. It was going to set the kitchen on fire." Marleau said stressed, sat in Ilya's black bean bag chair.

"I have never burned anything before. Just focus on the fucking—"

"Holy fuck." Alexei said from where he stood, rubbing at his eyes. "You are all so fucking weird."

Svetlana paused the game to look up at him from where she sat on the floor, and spoke to him in Russian. "Me? Weird?"

"Yes! It's weird! That you two are sitting here, while those two are jerking each other off on the bed." Alexei responded back in Russian.

"It wasn't like that." Ilya said from where he sat— Shane sat next to him, unsure of what any of them were saying.

"I am so fucking tired of you guys saying that." Alexei responded in English. "If it wasn't like that. Then PLEASE tell me what my very straight brother and his very straight best friend were doing."

"Those three," Svetlana pointed at Ilya, Shane and Marleau. "Were having a competition on Ilya's pull up bar to see who could hold themselves up the longest. Ilya won. Told Shane and Marleau that they had weak grip strength. And randomly threw in that Shane also had a weak backhand too for whatever stupid reason. And then, I guess, that led to..." Svetlana waved her hand in the air towards them, gesturing at the scene, completely uninterested.

"That's so fucking stupid." Alexei responded after a beat of no one saying anything. "If Marleau lost, then why the fuck is he not a part of the circle jerk."

"Ew— no." Ilya said disgusted. "I am not touching Marly's dick."

"Fuck you." Marleau sputtered from the bean bag chair. "My girlfriend does a better job than you ever will."

"But you can touch Shane's?" Alexei's voice dripped with sarcasm.

"It's not —" Shane began.

"I swear, if one of you tell me 'It's not like that,' one more time..." Alexei said agitatedly, his Russian accent becoming thicker. "I would be so fucking rich if I had a dollar for every—"

Then an idea popped into his head.

"Matter-of-fact, I'll be right back." Alexei sped off to the kitchen, leaving all four of them confused.

It took him a while to return, which allowed all four of them to complete the level that Svetlana had been stuck on for four days.

When he came back, he was holding in his hand a very large mason jar.

Ilya recognized it as one of the jars his mother uses to ferment things.

"What is that?" Marleau asked, confused just like everyone else.

"This," Alexei started, turning the jar so that everyone can read the sign he put on it. "Is the 'It's not like that...' jar."

Ilya immediately rolled his eyes and said lowly, "You're so fucking bored."

Alexei flipped him off before continuing. "For any time that Ilya or Shane say 'It's not like that.' or anything adjacent, they have to put a dollar in the jar." Alexei tilted it so that they could see the insert he obviously created with a knife.

"Oh my, I love this." Svetlana chuckled, standing up to go and grab the jar and look at it closer. "What are we going to do when they fill it up in a week?"

"Oh, fuck off," Shane said annoyed. "That's not fair. The only reason we say that is because all three of you misunderstand everything and we have to explain it to you."

"Not just us three. I'm pretty sure I've heard you tell your girlfriend that a few times." Alexei said smugly. "I don't even really fucking care about the money. I just want you both to physically see how ridiculous you guys are, by having to add to the jar every time you have to "defend" yourselves."

"Yeah, I agree. That's a huge jar." Marly pointed at it. "If you're filling that thing up, then you might just have to admit that what you both are doing is a little taboo."

"'Taboo'... is big word for you, yes?" Ilya asked, knowing it was a little mean, but he was annoyed by the whole conversation. "Fine. Fuck all of you."

Ilya stood up from the bed, and went to where his wallet laid on his dresser. He pulled out a crisp blue five dollar bill and walked to Svetlana to insert it into the jar in her hands.

"There. Five dollars to start." He looked at all of them. "Now, everyone get the fuck out of my room so that Shane and I can finish what we were doing without all of you in our fucking business."

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Ilya stared at the jar that sat on the bookshelf in the living room.

A year and a half later and the jar was over eighty percent full.

A year and a half of them putting money in after having to clear up misunderstandings. Explain their closeness. Pretend to not care about what others say.

Granted, their roommates and friends hadn't made them add to the jar since they had moved in. It had become as normal for them to see, as it was seeing Marleau cry while watching Grey's Anatomy.

They hadn't made them, but that hadn't stopped Ilya from adding.

He didn't know why he did. He just knew that even if he wasn't explaining out loud to his close friends that what he and Shane did didn't mean anything like that, that sometimes he found himself thinking of ways to defend their actions.

Maybe they'd gotten him used to it, after years of being questioned.

Used to explaining the deep seven-year friendship they had and that they simply loved to express that physically.

Up until a few days ago, that was his answer, until it wasn't.

Now his answer consisted of not words, but a feeling of uncertainty and a little bit of nerves.

But, as Ilya found himself unable to find an honest answer, he did know that when Svetlana asked him, "What are you two doing?", he responded with a "We aren't doing anything..." , which was an adjacent version of 'It's not like that'.

Rules were rules.

Ilya pulled a dollar coin out of his wallet and put it into the jar.

The moment he heard Svetlana's door open he moved away from the bookshelf, not wanting to be seen there.

"Ugh, Ilyusha—" She stomped her way over to him. "Can you tie this?"

She turned around in front of him, letting the two strings from her brown cross over halter top hang from her shoulders. She lifted her hair to give him a better view.

"You're not doing too much? We're just going to see a play," He said as he tied the strings into a pretty and sturdy bow.

Once done, she let go of her hair and turned to face him. Her make up and hair were done, and she looked beautiful as always. "First of all, I am never doing too much. I am just that bitch. Okay?"

Ilya smiled, and nodded. "Okay."

"Second of all," She had nodded in approval of his answer before continuing. "Everyone is going to be focused on her tonight and I want her eyes to be on me as much as possible."

"Are you going to finally ask her out?"

That must have been a dumb question as Svetlana looked at him so.

"Are you kidding? It's opening night. She's going to be so busy during and after."

Ilya and Svetlana glanced at Shane as he came down the stairs, phone in hand.

"Okay, okay. I won't I promise. —I know, it's very serious for you. I'll take it serious.— I know. Break a leg., bye." Shane said as he approached them, hanging up when he was in front of them.

"My goal is to show her how supportive I am. Surprise her with flowers. And hope that I can steal her away as much as I can." Svetlana continued, letting out a shaky breath once Shane was off the phone.

"She obviously likes you, Svet. Just ask her out already." Shane said kindly, having tried for a while now to encourage Svetlana to work up the courage.

"Why? Did she say something?" Svetlana asked hopeful.

"Maybe..." Shane teased.

"Oh my god, I'm going to throw up." Svetlana said as she walked back to her room.

Shane and Ilya lightly chuckled as they watched her walk away.

"I've never seen her like this before." Ilya stated, always surprised to witness Svetlana lose her shit.

"No, me neither. It's weird." Shane laughed. "But honestly, Rose is the same way. Two confident women completely losing it for each other."

"Ah, that's very sweet." Ilya was touched that someone cared so much for his other best friend.

"Okay!" Svetlana shouted from her room before she emerged again in her jacket. "How far is Juliette? We have to go." She asked Ilya.

"It's Julia. And she is," He looked at his phone for an update. "Two minutes away."

"That's the girl from last week?" Shane asked, shrugging on the jacket he had in his hand.

"*da*."

They stepped out of the apartment and stood outside, waiting.

"I'm surprised, you usually never meet up with the same girl twice." Shane continued.

"*нет*, but she texted asking if I wanted to go and I said I was already going, so... less work for me to have to do later to pick someone up I guess." Ilya shrugged.

"You're picking up Jess from the bus terminal tomorrow?" Svetlana changed the topic.

"Uh— yeah. Late afternoon. Have to run a few errands before she gets here."

"Ugh, I'm excited to see her. Haven't seen her since she visited the beginning of the semester." Svetlana gushed. "Definitely going to take her shopping. I need someone else with similar fashion sense."

"Um, we went shopping on Friday?" Ilya sounded insulted.

"Ilyusha, please." Svetlana shut the conversation down with little effort.

"Yeah, I'm sure she'd love that. While I'm at work or something." Shane agreed, simultaneously stopping an argument from happening. He didn't think he could stand here while Ilya defended his thrifted awful white leopard shirt.

"Hey!" They all heard a voice coming from the sidewalk.

The light outside was almost gone, but they were still able to see Julia as she met them near Shane's car.

She was a tall, ginger haired, Irish girl with nice breasts and a very cute smile. Her face was filled with freckles and Ilya liked that.

'They weren't like Shane's freckles.' He thought to himself, and immediately he didn't understand why.

He shook his head in an attempt to rid of the thought.

"Hey," He smiled at Julia, wrapping his arms around her to give her an embrace.

The rest of the group greeted her before Svetlana was pushing them to the car. She held a bouquet of beautiful pink roses.

As Ilya reached for the handle of the front seat, he felt Svetlana stop his hand from pulling on the door.

"Ilya?" She smiled, confused.

Svetlana pointed her head towards Julia, who was already making her way to the back seat.

Ilya shrugged and spoke with a tone that feigned ignorance. "Sveta?"

She stared at him with raised eyebrows. "*Seriously? You're going to make me sit in the back with your date?*"

"She's not my date."

"Sure, but you literally invited her to go with us?"

"I always sit shotgun in Shane's car, what's the big deal?"

Svetlana scoffed and rolled her eyes. *"You're unbelievable. I—"*

She made her way around to Shane's side and reached for the handle in the back seat. Ilya heard her mutter a few Russian curse words under her breath as they both got in the car.

Shane drove the fifteen minutes to the theatre, as they discussed what the play was supposed to be about, and Rose's character.

In that time, Ilya flirted with Julia from the passenger seat at any opportunity he could. He had to. He saw the way she seemed deterred by him sitting in the front.

From Shane's rear view mirror, he caught a glimpse of Julia leaning forward for Ilya to be able to whisper something in her ear. Something that made her laugh.

He had seen Ilya this way with other women more times than he could count, and Shane could honestly say he didn't feel anything about it. Why would he?

So he continued to drive, continued to listen to Svetlana tell him about the other characters, and continued to catch a bit of Ilya and Julia's private conversation he didn't care for.

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The theatre was packed—a line of people lined up at the box office, others taking photos with their friends, some on the line at the concession stand.

Luckily, Ilya had the bright idea to buy all of their tickets in advance to avoid any sell out.

"Alright, I'm going to find our seats." Svetlana stated.

"Oh, I'll go with you." Julia said then turned to Ilya. "Can you buy us some snacks?"

She grabbed his hand and smiled up at him sweetly.

He smiled politely at her. "Okay"

She kissed his lips, before pulling away completely. He hadn't expected it, but he didn't mind. Her lips were as soft as he remembered them.

"You coming with me?" He turned to speak to Shane who was looking down at his phone while he typed something.

"Sure," He said as he looked up. "Long line, we should hurry."

Svetlana and Julia entered the theatre while Shane and Ilya stood in the slow moving line.

"So, what? Rose's friend wrote this play? How were they able to afford all of these things?" Ilya asked.

"They did a bunch of fundraising. You know how convincing Rose is." Shane pointed out and Ilya nodded, knowing what he meant. " But actually..."

Shane began to speak, chuckled under his breath, before looking up at Ilya.

Ilya immediately lowered his eyebrows in confusion. He wasn't sure what was happening but the sly look on Shane's face made a smile creep onto Ilya's face.

"What?" He leaned in and whispered to Shane.

Shane looked around, making sure no one could hear him, before he too leaned into Ilya. His mouth was at his ear, his one hand covering his lips, and the other resting on the back of Ilya's neck.

Ilya held Shane close by placing his hands on his waist, eager to know what Shane was being secretive about.

"Rose told me earlier that there's a small rumor going around that the set designer received a big donation from someone who dared him to paint as many hidden vaginas as he could onto a bunch of set pieces." Shane said, attempting not to laugh.

Ilya, without letting go of Shane's waist, pulled back to look at his best friend's face.

"No fucking way?" Ilya asked stunned, and then followed it with a snort that went into a laugh. He let go of Shane to topple over

Shane joined him in the laughing fit he caused Ilya to go into. They were only mildly interrupted by the person behind them telling them to move up.

"I'm sorry— Sorry." Ilya tried to calm himself down. "That's so fucking funny. Rose has been talking about this play for a month. About how this was career changing and the most serious thing she's ever done. But this, this also makes a lot of sense."

"How?" Shane's face was red from laughing.

When Rose had told him, he thought it was funny. But not nearly as funny as Ilya laughing hysterically about the rumor. He had that kind of laugh that made you wanna laugh, and Shane loved it.

"We are all broke college students, Shane. It made no sense how the theatre kids were able to produce a play with top-tier set pieces and really good looking costumes in such little time. They posted so much on Instagram about it, were able to promote it like crazy everywhere. A huge donation for the theatre club, and still we have crappy goal posts for Hockey, answered all of my questions." Ilya wiped at his eyes.

"Well, don't tell anyone. I told her I wouldn't." Shane rolled his eyes, a smile still on his face.

Ilya threw his arm over Shane's shoulder.

"Oh, I won't. But I'll be paying a lot of attention on the set design." Ilya joked, guiding Shane closer to the front of the line.

"She told me to let her know how many I spot, if any. She hadn't been told until yesterday and didn't have time to look for herself."

"Oh, I'm so excited for this."

Once they got the snacks— bottled sodas, M&Ms, popcorn, Twizzlers, and Milk Duds— they entered the theatres and headed towards their seats. Ilya got four seats together, near the aisle somewhere in the middle of the theatre.

When they found the seats, the girls looked up at them. Svetlana and Julia immediately stood to move accordingly.

Svetlana slid down one and Julia moved out of the aisle completely. Shane moved in to sit next to Svetlana, and when Ilya took a step to go in and sit next to Shane, he was cut off by Julia stepping in behind Shane, leaving Ilya to sit at the aisle seat.

Ilya didn't sit right away, some what frozen at how he ended up away from Shane ... and Svetlana. Shane and Svetlana.

"You okay?" Julia asked, looking up. She was oblivious to what could have caused him to stand there, seemingly unsure of what to do next.

He snapped out of it when Shane's eyes connected with his.

Shane could see that Ilya was frozen, and he could pretend that he didn't know why if he wasn't also feeling frozen at realizing that Julia was sat next to him instead of Ilya.

The whole moment only lasted at most ten seconds, but it felt like a minute. A very long minute.

Ilya sat down, saving face by leaning in and kissing Julia on the cheek. "Yeah, everything is good. Here," He passed her a bottle of coke, and the Twizzlers.

"No way, you remembered I said I liked Twizzlers?" she sounded flattered.

"да, yes. And that you said the filled twists are superior. But they didn't have any, so..." He hoped that his voice sounded leveled, because he felt a little bummed from the whole seat arrangement. It was not a big deal. And though this was very much not a date, he did have to put in some effort to be able to bring her back home with him. Plus, they were here to watch a play, no talking anyway.

The play was set to begin in eight minutes.

Julia tried for conversation, updating Ilya on whatever was going on in her life.

Shane tried not to listen, honestly not caring about Julia and her Pilates class. He sat there in silence, as Svetlana was texting away on her phone.

To occupy the time, Shane proceeded to look at the program that they handed him at the entrance.

The Fire Escape

He looked at the cover and at first glance he thought it looked cool. It was a colorful painting of a fire escape on a brick building, and the angle captures a set of fire escapes from ground level. It was detailed with lines that captured the stairs and windows, with curtains.

But then he saw it.

When Shane held the program away from his face, and looked at the whole picture, he saw it.

"Ilya." He said, stunned and amused.

Julia stopped speaking mid-way, to turn to look at Shane at the same time Ilya leaned forward to look at him.

He hadn't meant to interrupt their conversations, knowing that Ilya was trying to make moves, but he couldn't help it this one time.

"Yes?" Ilya asked, leaning in, to give Shane his attention.

Shane turned the program, to let Ilya see.

"Notice anything?"

Ilya wasn't sure what he was supposed to see. He had seen this cover art multiple times around campus. The colorful fire escape with the title in big white letter, written across. He thought it was cool.

Obviously, Shane wasn't showing it to him because he thought it was cool. So Ilya looked at it again, but this time he looked at the entire painting instead of each individual part and—fuck.

"Nooooo fucking shit, Shane.— Shit," A chuckle escaped him in surprise. " It was... it's right there. This whole time!"

With all the intricate lines and colors on the program, it was easy to miss at first, but if you knew what to look for, there was a very obvious and big vagina right in the middle.

Shane smiled, feeling just as shocked as Ilya did.

"I can't fucking believe this." Shane laughed to himself.

"Um," Julia interrupted them, with a slight attitude. "What's right there?"

Ilya waved his hand in the air, wanting it to seem like it was whatever. "Just a little joke, is nothing." He suppressed his laugh, but he felt it in his gut.

They went back to their private conversation, but again in the middle of Julia talking, Ilya let the small laugh out and leaned forward to get Shane's attention.

Shane had been reading the 'Cast Bios' section, when Ilya spoke to him.

"Will you kill me if I congratulated her with innuendos."

"Ilya, don't you dare!" He whisper-screamed, leaning forward to not talk directly across from Julia.

"Okay, okay. I'll be normal about this."

"When have you ever been normal about anything?" Shane joked, and Ilya stuck his tongue out to blow a raspberry.

"I am normal about a lot of things." He rolled his eyes.

"Oh, yeah? Says the guy that almost lost it when Svetlana implied he had no fashion sense." Shane immediately regretted the words that came out of his mouth. "Fuck— I shouldn't have said that."

"Yeah, that was very stupid, Shane. Don't get me involved in whatever is about to happen." Svetlana said next to him, not once stopping her fingers from typing.

When Shane looked back Ilya's mouth hung open.

"I have great eye for fashion, you both just don't see the vision." Ilya whisper-argued back. "Who else do you know finds vintage designer shirts for less than thirty dollars?"

"No one, because they probably leave it on the rack for a reason." Shane argued back.

"All you wear is athletic attire, you automatically don't get an opinion."

"I beg to differ, Ilya." Shane leaned even more forward, to respond. "'Apple bottom jeans and boots with the fur' were song lyrics, not something for you to go and wear at your sixteenth birthday party."

"I—okay, that one was bad, I'll admit but—"

"Hey," Julia interrupted their banter, sounding mildly annoyed.

Ilya snapped his head to look at the girl he forgot was sat next to him.

"The plays about to start and I actually, uh— hate sitting in the middle. Do you think we could..." She didn't finish her question, but Ilya understood.

"Oh." He stood up and exited the aisle to let her out.

Once he sat next to Shane, and Julia sat next to him, he completely forgot what he was about to say.

All his mind could drift to was the feeling of Shane's shoulder brushing his.

He didn't miss it, the smallest smile on Shane's face as he looked at the program again..

Before they could continue their conversation, the lights began to dim.

"Conversation not over." Ilya said, whispering into Shane's ear.

"Yeah, yeah." Shane let out a little quiet laugh. He had leaned in to whisper into Ilya's ear again, but found it uncomfortable.

He found the problem and immediately dealt with it.

He gently pushed Ilya's arm off of the arm rest and lifted the arm rest to move it out of the way. This allowed them both to fill in a bit more space, not as squished as before.

The theatre was completely dark and semi- quiet, as they waited for the play to begin.

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From what Shane knew, *The Fire Escape* was about an ambitious college student named Sadie, played by Rose, who had a plan for everything— her morning coffee order, her thesis, her route to class, and how many minutes she could afford to waste on human interaction.

Then there was Ricky, who was the opposite— absolutely nothing planned. He never knew if his paycheck would last till the next time, or what he wanted to order when he got to a counter. He took every opportunity for adventure, even if they consisted of getting into some problems.

One night, while Sadie was studying out on the fire escape, Ricky made his way up from his own. She had never even spoken to her downstairs neighbor since moving in and now he apparently thought he had the right to interrupt her favorite spot.

From what Svetlana explained in the car, the play followed the two of them as Ricky shows Sadie that maybe some things in life don't need planning, and Sadie slowly became the stability Ricky needed.

When the curtains opened, and the lights turned on, the stage was filled with people briskly walking. Sadie walked across with her books tucked into her arm, looking at the watch on her hand. Then the set pieces moved, to then show her on a line at a coffee shop. Next, the set pieces moved again and she was talking to a few students before looking at her watch again and then stepping away and waving goodbye to them. Eventually the scene settled on set pieces moving until it was just of one, that showed an upstairs fire escape and a downstairs one.

Sadie, had her book on her lap, dressed in her pj's, while she munched on her apple.

"Habitus," Sadie began, tapping her pen on the page. "Economic-, Social-, Cultural-, and symbolic capital..."

Ilya leaned closer to Shane and whispered in his ear, " Five."

"Five?" Shane turned to him slightly bumping his nose against Ilya's cheek.

"I counted five vaginas since the play started."

Shane pulled back to smile at Ilya. It was dark but the lights from the stage allowed them to see each other just a bit.

"It just started." Shane responded amusedly.

"да, but... one on the sign above the coffee stand, a few on the painted trees in the background, and—" Ilya paused to point at the painted window next to the window Rose sat in front of.

Shane looked at where Ilya pointed, and man was that one just too obvious he couldn't believe he missed it. The drawn curtains looked like it attempted to give off casually hanging, but really it was shaped like a vulva.

"Jesus," Shane laughed into his hands. "I love this so much."

Ilya smiled, resting his head against Shane's and he felt Shane lean against him as well as they continued watching.

Moments later, after the character is introduced, Ricky made his way up the fire escape.

"Uhh, what are you doing?"

"Well, first, I would really appreciate it if you stopped littering in my neck of the woods." Ricky held out a handful of pencils towards Sadie.

"Oh, sorry. " She took the pencils she had dropped from her fire escape, from his hands.

"And second—"

"Is that Barrett?" Ilya asked lips brushing against Shane's ear lobe.

Shane nodded. "Yeah. I didn't know he was even interested in this but it kind of explains why he hasn't gone to the diner with the guys in weeks."

"He looks stupid."

Usually Troy styled his hair to fall effortlessly, with one curl falling in the front. But with this character, it was obvious they used too much gel to style it up.

Shane snorted. "Yeah, I don't know why they did that to him."

"He looks like Pauly D."

To that Shane buried his head into the crook of Ilya's neck to quiet his laugh. Ilya chuckled quietly, bringing his hand up to run through Shane's hair.

When Shane sat back up, Ilya dropped his hand to rest on Shane's thigh, squeezing once.

They stayed like this for the majority of the first act, whispering to each other every so often but mostly paying attention.

Shane at some point rested his hand on Ilya's thigh and used the other hand to hold onto Ilya's forearm, and when Ilya casually glanced at Julia to see if she was enjoying the play, he briefly caught her looking down at where Ilya and Shane made contact.

'It's not like that.' he thought to himself and then immediately cringed at the mental defense.

"I don't want to talk about this! It's not what I want." Sadie yelled, pacing her bedroom while Ricky followed with his eyes.

"It's not what you want or is it that I just don't fit your plans?" Ricky said leveled, sad almost.

"I don't know." Sadie conceded, sitting down on her mattress. "I don't like this. The not knowing what comes next."

Ricky sat next to her, eyes still on her while she looked every where else. "Hey,"

He placed a hand on her cheek to guide her to look at him.

"It's okay to not always know what comes next. That's part of the joy in life. The thrill of adventure and trying something new. You ever heard the quote 'Do one thing every day that scares you'?"

Their faces were close and Shane was fully drawn into the play at this point, his hands tightening on Ilya's thigh.

"That's Eleanor Roosevelt." Sadie responded, lowly, bringing her face closer.

"Yeah, it is litterbug." Ricky said her nickname fondly. "And when was the last time you did something that scared you?"

The moment held, and the tension built.

In the next beat, Sadie leaned in and kissed him. At first it was soft, because Ricky seemed to not expect it but then they were making out.

The whiplash of watching Sadie be controlled and planning every moment to then letting go for a man she was clearly falling in love made Shane's heart want to burst.

The kiss escalated and the intensity grew, even as they were moving around on the bed. Sadie, on top of Ricky, threw the blanket to cover both of their bodies and then the scene

ended.

When the lights on the stage went out and the curtains were drawn, Shane and Ilya felt themselves being left a little stunned, gripping each other's thighs tighter than they were before.

"Fuck." they both turned their heads to look at Svetlana, simultaneously letting go of each other. "That was so fucking good. My wife is literally going to win an Oscar one day."

"I have actual chills." Julia said from beside Ilya.

Shane and Ilya remained quiet, not knowing what to say and both feeling some way after watching the last scene.

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After the intermission, for which Ilya used the time to hang out with Julia, they sat to watch the rest of the play.

The ending left Shane and Svetlana pissed, and created what Ilya assumed would be the topic of discussion for the rest of the night.

At the end of the play after Sadie graduated, she was offered her dream job at a firm located in Paris. The other offer she received was a lesser paying job, but allowed her to stay in the city.

When Ricky saw her going down to his fire escape, he was almost certain on the path she chose for herself.

"So when do you fly out?" He asked, not wanting to look at her while she broke his heart.

"Fly out where?" She asked, pretending not to understand.

The response gave him pause and without meaning to, he looked at her.

"I didn't take the job." Her voice trembled but she smiled. "I figured..."

Sadie took a step closer to him. "I'd stay and we could create our own adventures. Here."

"No fucking way." Svetlana whispered to herself.

"She's known him for a year, barely. What the fuck?" Shane sputtered.

"I love you." Sadie said to Ricky, before he grabbed her face and pulled her in for a kiss.

"I love you too." Ricky smiled with obvious tears in his eyes.

"Awww. Young love." Ilya trolled, catching glares from all three of the people he came with.

During curtain calls, they all cheered for each character. And when Rose went up to wave and bow, Shane, Svetlana, and Ilya all stood to applaud as loudly as they could.

Rose noticed them and her smile brightened more, waving to them specifically and blowing a kiss towards Svetlana.

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The after-party was located at Harris's place, the guy who played Archie, Ricky's best friend. Ironically, he was Troy's best friend.

The house was packed, filled with the cast members and crew and their friends.

Shane had driven his group. The place was conveniently just a few houses down from where they lived so Shane parked his car where it would stay for the night.

Ilya entered hand in hand with Julia, straight to where the drinks were.

Upon spotting Rose, Shane and Svetlana went directly to her.

"You did so amazing!" Svetlana hugged her tight. "I nearly died when Sadie tried to use the spray can with her eyes closed, and sprayed it on herself and Ricky."

Rose laughed, "The first time we rehearsed that scene we didn't yet have those fake cans that are filled with food coloring and water, so we used Lysol cans. I totally forgot not to actually squeeze it and we went into an actual coughing fit."

All three kept on in their conversation until Ilya approached.

"Rose!" He leaned in to give her a hug. "I actually really enjoyed that, great job."

"Aw, thanks Ilya." her tone sounded a bit surprised by how nice he was being.

"Yeah, you were incredible. And the set had a lot of detail, very professional. Not a lick of paint out of place."

"Uh, thanks?" Rose's eyebrows lowered as she smiled in confusion.

Shane glared at him instantly, over her shoulder. Ilya smiled at him before he looked at her again.

"I felt very immersed, it was a great use of space. The designer really knew when to pull back and when to thrust forward."

"Ilya..." Shane attempted to stop him.

Rose chuckled lightly. "I didn't know you were so into set design?"

"Yes, always interested. Obviously you were the best part but I respect a set that knows how to open, spread, and still stay tasteful." He smiled slyly.

Shane face-palmed at that one.

"Ilya, what are you talking about?" Svetlana asked from where she stood, grabbing the drink out of his hand to sip from.

Rose stared at him, squinting her eyes before it finally clicked.

"Oh my god, Shane!" She turned to look at him, baffled. He felt the guilt creep up his skin. "Of course you told him."

"Told him what?" Svetlana asked, and Julia, hand still in Ilya's, nodded as she too wondered.

"I counted thirty-two." Ilya laughed.

"THIRTY-TWO?" Rose yelled. She looked around the room. "Where the fuck is Miles? I'm going to kill him."

She stormed off and Svetlana followed after her, determined to find out what was going on.

After watching her walk away, Shane turned to look at Ilya annoyed before walking away to the kitchen.

At that look, Ilya felt bad for not keeping the secret even if the moment was hysterical.

"Are you going to tell me what you guys keep talking about?" Julia asked once more.

Ilya considered before leaning in to kiss her quickly. "Yes, but later. I'll be right back?"

"Yeah, sure?" She sounded annoyed again. "I see a few of my friends over there, for when you come back to find me."

Once she walked off, Ilya went to look for Shane.

He hadn't been in the kitchen, nor the back yard.

He went to the bathroom and upon seeing it was locked, knocked.

"Occupied." He heard Shane say from the other side.

"Open, Shane." Ilya responded.

He heard a click a second later and didn't hesitate to enter and close the door behind him.

Shane had just been about to pee when Ilya knocked, so his belt was unfastened.

"You mad at me?" Ilya asked, leaning against the door.

Shane rolled his eyes before he let his shoulders drop. He went back to the toilet and unzipped his pants. "No, of course not."

He lowered his pants and let his dick spring free so that he could finally piss after holding it for half an hour.

"I'm mad that I only spotted twenty-eight though."

Ilya smiled, walking closer till he could pull his pants down and also release himself. They stood side by side, arms pressed together, to be able to aim into the toilet.

"You were probably just paying more attention to the play than me."

"Did you like it?" Shane asked as he watched his stream collide with Ilya's.

"Yes, actually. I thought the acting was really good. I didn't doubt Rose but I'm surprised by Barrett. I also liked the story too."

"Yeah, me too. I know that was my friend up there but she was really convincing as Sadie."

Ilya was just about to pull his pants up as he shook the last drop but Shane stopped him.

Shane grabbed a bit of toilet paper and dabbed at the slit of his penis before dabbing at the slit of Ilya's, making sure they were both clean.

"Uh, actually— I was, um..." Shane stuttered, as they both went to wash their hands after.

"I know we see it on TV all of the time, and I know it's just acting, but I'm so surprised that they're just able to do that."

Ilya squeezed the hand soap into his palm. "Do what?"

"The intimacy. Kissing and making out. Grinding on each other and looking in love, but then the actors snap out of it and everything goes back to normal after."

"Ah yes, I was surprised by that too. The kiss in the first Act looked really real." Ilya agreed, drying his hands with the paper towel that sat on top of the toilet.

"Exactly! And I know Rose. She's not into dudes. So is it just that simple? To pretend something that looks so real, and it not mean a single thing?" Shane asked.

He put his paper towel in the trash, then leaned against the sink while Ilya leaned against the wall in front of him.

"Maybe it's not as complicated as we think? They both know they're just playing a character. Maybe in the moment it feels like something, but then after they don't feel anything?" Ilya suggested.

Ilya didn't understand how the whole thing worked, but he wasn't an actor. He didn't know if he could pretend feelings he didn't actually feel.

"I mean, maybe?" Shane asked. "Maybe two people can be intimate and it really not mean anything? I don't know. I don't know if I could pull that off, and make it look believable."

"It must be a thing or people wouldn't be able to become actors."

"That's true." Shane nodded. "Maybe I'm over thinking it."

Ilya looked at him, and watched as his best friend contemplated the act of intimacy with no meaning. His eyes grazed Shane's face, his scrunched up eyebrows, his brown doe eyes, his pink lips, and his perfect freckles.

"Here," Ilya said quietly, hesitating before taking a step forward.

He gently placed his fingers on Shane's chin, and lifted it up so their eyes could meet.

"Since you and I are so confused by this, maybe..." Ilya felt nervous, something he hardly felt with Shane. "Maybe we figure out if its a thing."

"Ilya..." Shane said uncertain. He placed his hands on Ilya's waist but he didn't pull him closer. "We've never..."

"Yeah, so? Rose kissed a guy believably even though we know she isn't attracted to him. You and I aren't attracted to each other, so..."

They held eye contact for a long moment, until Shane nodded.

"That's true. We're both straight and I guess the best way to get my answer is to try?" Shane said, still unsure but when his eyes dropped to Ilya's lips, Ilya was already set on this.

Ilya held Shane's chin in his fingers, looked at the very slight stubble and how perfect the bow of his lip was. He hesitated, before he leaned in.

Their lips connected slow, and their noses brushed against each other's.

The first thing Shane noticed were how soft Ilya's lips were, and how gently he kissed him.

The breath that Ilya held, released slowly from his nose, as he realized what he had just done. He had kissed Shane, for the first time. It was so weird that he almost pulled back. Almost.

Except he didn't.

Instead, after seconds of just holding their lips together, they moved. Disconnecting and connecting again. Little sips of kisses.

With their eyes closed, they both just decided to go with it and in the process, lose themselves in it.

Their open- mouth kisses grow hungry. Naturally, when making out with a girl, Ilya licks into their mouths. Out of habit, he licks into Shane's mouth and he didn't pretend not to hear the little moan that escaped Shane.

The noise only motivated him more, as he moved his hand to cup Shane's face, and lick into his best friend's mouth again. His skin tingled when he felt Shane brush his tongue against his.

They pressed closer together, licking into each other's mouth, sucking each other's tongue and releasing little moans.

Shane moved his hand to grip Ilya's hair, wanting him closer, wanting... more?

Neither of them knew how long they had been making out in the bathroom at this party. They even forgot they were even here or why they were kissing in the first place.

They forgot all of this until their bubble burst the moment the bathroom door opened.

Hands still on each other, they both turned to look at Julia stunned at the moment she walked in on.

"Fuck, sorry— I didn't know if anyone was in here." She shook her head in disbelief. " I've been waiting for you to come back but I guess you have your hands full?"

"It's... it's not like that... we were—" Shane began, pushing Ilya away a bit so that he could straighten up. Ilya snapped out of the trance he had been in, at the sound of Shane's words.

"Whatever, it's not like I'm surprised. Carry on with—" She gestured between them before walking back to the party.

Shane chuckled, awkwardly. He turned to the mirror to fix his hair, needing something to do with his hands. "Sorry. I didn't mean to steal you away from your date."

"Is okay." Ilya responded automatically.

"Um, should we talk about..." Shane slowly began to ask.

Ilya looked at Shane through the mirror, and felt it in himself that he couldn't talk about it. Not in that moment. He didn't know why, he just knew he felt that uncertainty and those nerves.

"Uh, sure but later. I'm just going to—" he tilted his head towards wherever Julia walked to.

"Oh, yeah. Okay," Shane turned and gave him a polite smile.

Ilya returned it before walking out and looking for his not-date. It didn't take long to find her, she was with her friends. But instead of walking to her so that he could explain the situation , Ilya found his legs making their way to the door, down the stairs and back to their house.

He walked until he was in his room and laid in his bed.

He didn't fall asleep. He just simply laid there, and thought to himself even though his brain struggled to think.

Of course, he received a text from Svetlana and from Shane. He didn't respond to either.

Why was he confused? Confused about what?

Did he like kissing Shane?

He supposed he did. It was fun. Just like everything else he did with Shane was fun.

Did he feel... No, of course he didn't feel. Ilya didn't let himself go down that very pointless path.

Ilya liked girls only. He had never even experimented with a guy.

He thought to himself though, that he was in college, and this was the time to try a bunch of new things, and he had yet to try being bi-curious.

He wasn't fully closed to the idea, and that in itself felt like a step towards possible clarity.

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Shane had stayed at the party longer than he expected to, especially without Ilya there. He checked his phone to see if maybe Ilya had responded, but nothing.

When the night seemed to get late, Shane made his way around to say bye to those he knew.

He walked back to the house, greeting Wyatt who sat in the living room.

They talked about the play that Wyatt was also apparently at. Mostly everyone at that party agreed that the ending was stupid, but leave it to Wyatt Hayes to say he would have done the same thing as Sadie.

Shane had scoffed at him before dismissing himself and making his way up.

He didn't know why he checked, and he was only going to do a quick look inside, but did a double take when he saw Ilya laying on his bed. Shane had gone to his room first to change into more comfortable clothes before going down to the kitchen for a glass of water.

"Oh, hey." He took a step inside Ilya's room, closing the door behind him. "I was wondering where you were. You okay?"

Ilya had decided to watch a hockey game on his laptop, after pondering for an hour.

"Yes, just got tired. Rangers are playing the Panthers." Ilya pointed at his laptop.

He naturally slid over, not a second thought, to let Shane sit down.

"What's the score?" Shane sat beside him, sliding the duvet over his lap.

"2-1 Rangers."

Ilya caught him up on the game, and they both settled in to watch in silence.

After a few minutes, Shane turned to look at Ilya.

"What happened with Julia?" Shane asked, beginning casual conversation.

Ilya shrugged as if nothing. "She was with her friends. I wasn't in the mood to explain to her anything, so I left her alone."

"Ah, okay." Shane nodded in understanding.

After another few minutes, Shane spoke again.

"So, um..." Shane stuttered. "The kiss. Wh- what did you think?"

As confused as Ilya seemed to feel, he couldn't help but smile at how nervous Shane was. "Um, it was really good." Ilya began. "Very fun. I guess,"

Ilya paused, trying to find the right answer.

"I guess, I understand now how actors are able to do it." Ilya scratched at his nose.

Shane hadn't spoken right away when Ilya answered. And Ilya almost thought that maybe he was very focused on the game.

"Yeah," Shane said after a minute.

Ilya watched Shane gather his thoughts.

"Yeah, same." Shane nodded. "It's like, it was fun in the moment. Intense, even. But once it was done, everything went back to normal?"

Shane turned his head to look at Ilya. They sat close, the way they always did.

"Exactly." Ilya agreed. "Now we know, it doesn't have to mean anything. And, now you know..." he didn't finish.

Ilya looked at Shane smugly, causing him to smile.

"Now I know what?" Shane asked, and Ilya leaned in a bit.

"That I am an amazing kisser and there's a reason why every girl wants me." Ilya joked, causing Shane to laugh.

"Oh fuck off." Shane lightly shoved him. "I'm sure if I was single, I'd get as many girls as you, if not more."

Ilya raised his eye brows and slightly pushed his laptop off to the side.

"Oh, you're getting cocky now?"

"Well, you did say I was 'very fun' first." Shane's grin was wide and Ilya couldn't help letting out another laugh.

"You asked me my opinion." Ilya tried to argue back.

"Yeah, but you could have said 'Yeah, it was cool. Didn't feel anything though'. But, no. My bro just haaad to tell me how good of a kisser I am. You should feel grateful that I let every girl think you're the best—AH ILYA— I WAS JOKING, PLEASE—" Shane bursted into a fit of giggles as Ilya tickled him into the mattress. Shane had always been extremely ticklish and Ilya had always used it against him.

Ilya stopped before Shane turned fully red, laughing as he watched him catch his breath.

Ilya was hovering over Shane where he lay beneath him. Shane chuckled one more time before, bringing his eyes to land on Ilya's again as he finally caught his breath. They were smiley, and Shane considered it. It wasn't something they ever did but now that they both agreed that it was fun and nothing more, he didn't feel as nervous as he had in that bathroom.

Shane brought his hand up to Ilya's hair and pulled him down until their lips were connected again.

What was completely new to them just a few hours ago, now felt comfortable. If anything, it felt like they were finding out more about each other when they already felt like they knew everything.

Ilya was finding out the way Shane moaned whenever Ilya licked into his mouth.

Shane was finding out that Ilya exhaled deeply every time Shane sucked on his lower lip.

They repositioned, to get comfortable and settled in. Ilya laid over Shane, their crotch aligned with the other's thigh.

They kissed like this for minutes, maybe even hours. They didn't know. They were too entranced to find out.

Shane had never done drugs but he swore this was what getting high felt like.

Ilya had barely had a sip of alcohol at the party but he swore he felt drunk.

Ilya bucked his hip, needing to feel some friction on his hardened cock, and he knew for a fact that Shane would appreciate the friction on his own hardened cock too.

So he set the pace, grinding slow, until he moved his leg over and then they ground their covered cocks together.

It was Shane, feeling a crazy build up, who pushed both of their pants down, needing to feel ...more.

Against every molecule in his body wanting to keep him there, Ilya pulled back. If they were going to rub their cocks together then he wanted to feel Shane's skin.

He knew it was a weird thought but he didn't care.

His whole plan today had been to get with Julia, and sure maybe Shane would get some action with Jess tomorrow.

But for tonight, they were already painfully hard. Would best friends allow the other to go to bed feeling this way without fixing it? Felt like a dick move.

Ilya found himself trying to defend their actions in the time it took him to remove their clothes completely. And he hated it so he rushed to finish and then reconnected his lips to Shane's.

For Shane, they had rubbed off on each other multiple times. What was another time just with kissing involved.

He could understand people thinking it was gay, but he and Ilya had already established that it didn't mean anything.

He wrapped his legs around Ilya's waist, wanting to feel Ilya's cock pressing hard against his as they continued their grinding. And he wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck as they kissed sloppily.

Ilya held nothing back. Because if he was going to kiss Shane Hollander, then he was going to make sure his lips were swollen after.

He already knew his own lips were.

Ilya moved his hand between them to grab onto both his and Shane's dicks. He moved his hips faster, creating the best friction on their slicked dicks, while jerking off.

The game from his laptop couldn't even be heard anymore with how loud their moans were.

"Fuck, Ilya—" Shane moaned in his mouth.

Ilya knew they were both almost at their climax. He also knew that if he slowed down, he could stretch this out for longer. But he was eager to come, and eager to help his friend come.

They stopped kissing, panting into each other's mouth as Ilya pumped both of them.

When Ilya felt it coming, he let go of Shane's dick, only holding onto his, and letting Shane jerk his own dick. In a matter of seconds they were both coming onto each other's chest, groaning in the other's mouth.

When they were done, Ilya fell onto Shane, feeling weak.

"Fuck. That was so much fun." Ilya muttered, face somewhat squished against Shane's collarbone.

"My legs feel like noodles." Shane unwrapped his legs and let them fall onto the bed.

They stayed like this, both feeling their bodies settle with exhaustion. They stayed like this, until they fell asleep.

Ilya woke up in the middle of the night, finding Shane in his arms and their legs tangled.

He hadn't wanted to get up, but needed to take a leak, so he went.

He went to the bathroom.

But then after, he went downstairs.

Because rules were rules.

And now the jar found itself with another crisp blue five dollar bill.

Chapter End Notes

One time, my ex and I were at his friends house and he told me that his friends dad, a painter, added a hidden vagina in every painting.

Anyway, thanks for reading!

Comments make me smile :)

Chapter 4: Line

Chapter Summary

To hide would mean that there was a secret to keep.

Jess comes to visit.

Chapter Notes

Imagine my surprise when I go on Twitter during my lunch break and see a screenshot of my fic being shared by so many people. ❤️❤️❤️

I'm so grateful for all the new readers and all the hilarious comments you guys have left on my chapters. I was laughing so much this week that my coworkers kept asking me

'Who got you smiling like that???' .. lmao, awkward. Last, week was my birthday 🎂

Thank you all for making it soo good, omg. My heart is full.

Edit: To all of the birthday wishes im currently getting, THANK YOU SO MUCH.

Much love to everyone !!

Thank you for your patience as always!

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

Ilya tossed himself on the bed, feeling the fluffy duvet shape around him before flattening back down.

He could feel Svetlana's eyes on him as she walked around her bedroom to gather all of her things.

He supposed it made sense. He woke up this morning alone in his bed, expectedly. But what he wasn't expecting was the tight feeling in his chest that he didn't have an explanation for. And it must have shown on his face this morning. It was early and Ilya wasn't in the mood.

His eyes didn't find hers, deciding that the sky blue walls were more interesting.

His attention elsewhere, though, didn't last long as he eventually felt the bed dip.

"*Ilyusha...*" he heard how careful the sound of her voice came out.

"*Sveta...*"

"*Everything okay?*"

"Yes, *why?*" He shrugged nonchalantly.

He turned his head slightly to look at her and found her still watching him when she shrugged.

"I don't know. You left the party early yesterday, didn't answer any of my texts, and now you're in my room sulking."

"I'm not sulking." Ilya rolled his eyes. *"It's early, and we have to sit through boring Econ class in twenty minutes. And then I have practice after."*

"Mm. And you left last night because..."

"Because I didn't want to be there, Sveta." He tried to hold back any attitude, not wanting her to question him further.

"Okay..."

He sighed knowing that she wasn't done.

"Shane left?" Svetlana asked casually, looking at her gel manicure hand out in front of her.

Ilya rubbed at his eye in irritation. *"You know his schedule on Thursdays. Two classes early morning."*

"And he's not going to practice?"

"What's with your twenty questions?" his voice struggled to remain leveled. *"No. He has to run errands after and then pick Jess up at the terminal later this afternoon."*

"Jeez, I was just wondering. Shane never misses practice..." She held her hands up in mock surrender. But of course, she didn't let up. *"And I guess I was just wondering if maybe your sour mood had to do with Jess staying here for a few days."*

Ilya scrunched his eyebrows— at first confused but then annoyed.

"Why would I care about that? I'm the one that helped plan this, Sveta." He argued, before sighing.

Ilya stood up from her bed to pace her room a few times, running his hands along her collection of necklaces that hung from a stand on her dresser before turning around to look at her.

She waited until he found his words.

"I've just been in my head a lot lately. It's loud in here—" he pointed at his head, and gave a forced smile. *"But none of the words make sense and I don't know how to get it to stop."*

Besides Shane, Svetlana was the only person Ilya felt like he could be vulnerable with. The only other person that he didn't feel judged by. Even now, as those words came out, he didn't

feel the need to instantly regret the ears they fell on.

Svetlana nodded.

"Is there anything I can do to help you get out of there?" She pointed towards his head.

Ilya shook his head. *"No... maybe... I don't know. But I'm okay, right now."*

"But you would tell me if you weren't, right?"

Though he was already looking at her, his eyes focused even more. She was worried and all he could think now was that he really did love her so much.

His smile this time was small, but it was a reaction to his heart feeling warmer than it did two minutes prior.

He walked towards her until he was pushing her to lay down on the bed and laying over her body.

He kissed her cheek, and heard her surprised giggle.

"Yes, I would tell you."

She wrapped her arms around him in a hug. *"Good."*

"You know what might help?" he began, laying his head against her shoulder. *"A quickie. Like we used to do behind the staircase before P.E."* he joked.

"Ah." She laughed, patting his cheek gently with her hand. *"Sorry, Ilyusha. But I'm into redheads now."*

He scoffed and let out a 'Wowwww' as she pushed him off of her.

"Now let's go before we're late."

~.~.~

The house wasn't crazy dirty— he made sure of that— but Shane still felt like he needed to do a bit of cleaning. Once his room was complete, he started on the bathrooms.

He was wiping the mirror of the downstairs bathroom when he heard the front door open.

He was right on schedule with everything, knowing that Marleau and Ilya had to leave for practice in about an hour. That gave him enough time to buy a few things from the store, and come back to tidy up the living room.

He mostly planned to go out to eat with Jessica, but for the moments they were at the house, he wanted her to have options.

He heard the voices of his four other roommates carry from the living room, while he finished up in the bathroom. Ten minutes later he strolled into the living room, propping the

broom against a wall since he knew he would need it later.

"The comments said it was true." Ilya spoke with his mouth full.

He held a sandwich in his hands with only a few bites taken out of it. Shane knew it was from Vinh's cafe on campus. If he was honest, Shane hadn't even thought about food until just now.

He was sitting on the floor, container on the already filled coffee table.

Marleau and Wyatt had their books splayed out, only leaving small spaces for Ilya and Svetlana to eat.

"I just don't see how that's possible. Like I get that a martini glass is wider on the top. But for a **whole** other martini to be able to fit?" Wyatt asked.

Shane made his way around the group to sit next to Ilya on the floor. He used Ilya's knee to steady himself as he lowered to the ground.

"I've seen that video." Shane said, leaving his hand on Ilya's knee. "Bartenders usually leave just a little over a centimeter of space."

He turned his face when he saw Ilya nodding in agreement.

"Hey," Ilya said after swallowing another bite.

Shane leaned in— and Ilya did too when he noticed the movement— and placed a gentle kiss on Ilya's lips.

After last night, it was clear to them that they enjoyed kissing each other the way a friend kissed another friend. And if there were any friend activities that could be done, Shane and Ilya were always on board to do it. Well almost. Ilya has yet to convince Shane to make friendship bracelets because that was 'weird for two guys to do'.

"What is that?" Shane asked once he tasted lemon on Ilya's lips.

"Tuna melt." Ilya said before tilting the sandwich towards Shane so that he could take a bite.

It was still hot when Shane took a bite, but liked how melted the cheese was. He nodded, signaling that it was in fact good.

"Here." Ilya moved the container closer to Shane, which held the other half of the sandwich. "I'm not going to eat it. Would be too full for practice."

"Thanks, I was starving." Shane picked up the other half of the sandwich and tuned back into the conversation.

"Okay, okay." Svetlana made her way back from the kitchen with two bottles of water, and the 'Birthday Girl' martini glass she got as a gift. "Let's test it out."

Marleau and Wyatt bet it wouldn't work, while Shane, Ilya and Svetlana bet it would.

Shane stayed for the experiment, eating his sandwich quickly.

"No way!" Wyatt said from his spot on the couch when the theory turned out to be true. " You cheated!"

Shane smiled as he stood, taking another sip from Ilya's Coke to wash down the sandwich. "You watched her do the whole thing."

He handed the bottle back to him.

He left his roommates to go grab his jacket, wallet and keys from his bedroom.

"Alright, I'll see you guys later," He said to Svetlana, Marleau, and Wyatt.

Ilya walked out of the kitchen, having just thrown away his trash, and washed his hands.

"Tell me how practice goes." Shane said specifically to Ilya.

It wasn't like him to miss, but when he and Ilya had booked Jess's ticket, they hadn't taken into account how it would affect practice. He couldn't change the plans as that was one of the reasons for their fight—the way Jessica felt like he didn't prioritize her.

Ilya nodded before he stood in front of Shane, and pulled him in by the waist to say goodbye. He only intended for a chaste kiss, but with Shane wrapping his arms around his shoulders, it was more than that.

It felt like a game, Ilya pulling away only for Shane to chase and kiss him back. Ilya smiled, feeling Shane connect their lips together. And when Shane pulled back, well, now Ilya wanted to chase. They both smiled into the silliness of it, going back and forth until one of them laid a long and deep kiss that slotted their lips together perfectly.

"Okay, I gotta go for real now." Shane whispered in between them, rubbing his nose against Ilya's.

Ilya nodded. "Okay."

He kissed him one more time before they both unwound from each other and Shane was saying 'bye' again before leaving.

Ilya watched him walk out, and when the door shut, he turned back to his friends only to find them all looking at him.

"You see..." Wyatt started casually, looking at Marleau then Svetlana. "I too had a childhood best friend. Loved him to death and then we drifted apart senior year." He put his hands up as he weighed imaginary options. "Now I'm wondering if maybe I should have also put my tongue down his throat."

Marleau nodded as he looked from Svetlana to Wyatt. "Y'know, what's crazy about this—" He motioned his hand to where Ilya stood, and where Shane had been standing. "Is that *that*

isn't even the craziest thing I've seen. They once timed themselves to see how many hickies they could give the other in a span of three minutes. And yet,"

Marleau paused when Ilya said "Seventeen, and I won."

"And yet," Marleau said louder. "That goodbye kiss was the MOST confusing thing to date."

"Seventeen in three minutes?!" Wyatt said stunned. "If I was a girl I'd DEF—"

"I love this." Svetlana laughed into a sigh, interrupting whatever the fuck Wyatt was going to say. "Shit like this makes me sit for hours wondering what the excuse was this time. I bet it was something like Shane had something stuck in his teeth and the only way to get it out was with Ilya's tongue."

Ilya rolled his eyes, unsure of why he stayed standing there.

"Or Ilya wondering if his breath smelled bad and Shane went to check by licking into his mouth." Marleau offered, causing the other two to laugh.

"Are you all done?" Ilya asked, over it.

"Yeah. Sorry, man. Just teasing." Wyatt finished with a chuckle.

"Good. Marleau, grab your shit or I'm leaving without you." Ilya said as he went up the stairs.

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Shane stood in the aisle, looking at all the different options.

They didn't use these but maybe if they did, maybe if he felt a different sensation, then he would be able to fully get through it. Maybe he would finally figure out how to enjoy it.

'Her Pleasure', 'Bareskin', 'Extra Sensitive', 'Ribbed & Dotted'

Shane felt overwhelmed by the choices, and he didn't even know how Jess would react if he tried to use a condom with her. Would she get offended or think he was unfaithful?

He hadn't been, and he could just explain to her that he wanted to try something different.

With a final decision he grabbed the Trojan 'Ultra Ribbed' condoms and made his way to the check out.

Within the next few hours Shane found himself standing where he expected to meet her.

He felt nervous, but excited more than anything.

He had spent a lot of time with her back in the day, and he would be lying if he said he didn't miss her too.

It was easy to talk to her, the way it was easy to talk to Rose. She made him laugh, the way Hayden made him laugh. And his parents liked her, which made the future feel clear.

Hockey career, marriage—definitely, kids—maybe. His parents would like that for him.

When the bus arrived and he watched Jess step off of it, he felt the instant smile on his face. It only grew wider when she found him. Without waiting a second, she ran towards him, her own smile wide on her face.

"Baby—" she said as she leaped into his arms. "Oh, I missed you so bad."

He squeezed her, lifting her off the ground just a bit.

"Hey," he laughed.

Once he put her on the ground, they unwound their arms a little to be able to look at each other.

Jessica had her hair tied up into a messy ponytail, bare-faced and yet, still pretty.

With a smile still on their faces, she stood on her tiptoes to kiss him. He unintentionally reacted by turning his face, feeling her lips land on his cheek.

"Sorry. Sorry—" she began to apologize instantly. "I know how you feel about PDA, I was just excited."

"No, it's okay. I didn't mean—" He stopped talking to grab her face and plant a simple kiss on her lips before pulling away. "How was the ride?" He asked as they made their way back to the bus to grab her suitcase.

The drive back to the house was filled with horror stories about the bus trip, and how one of the passengers was so rude to the bus driver leading to him getting kicked off at a gas station.

Shane listened, and laughed, making sure to keep his hand where it sat after she grabbed it from the steering wheel and placed it on her leg.

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"Yuck, no. I'm not sitting in a dingy diner for hours, while you work." Ilya heard Jess say as she and Shane entered the house, from where he stood in the kitchen drinking his shake.

Her complaint being the first thing he heard after not seeing her for months felt so ... Jessica. He couldn't help but chuckle into his drink and shake his head.

"I'd for sure rather go to the mall with Svet." she finished.

"When you see her later, you guys can plan that." Shane offered.

Ilya heard the sound of wheels rolling on the ground and a bag falling to the ground.

"Who's home?" He heard Jess ask.

"In here!" Ilya shouted loud enough for them to hear him.

Footsteps approached the kitchen, and Ilya smiled politely upon seeing her enter with Shane right behind.

"Hey, Ilya!" she smiled, taking a few steps towards him before pausing. "Why— why do you smell so bad?" She asked swiping the air in front of her nose.

He laughed, walking the rest of the steps before he engulfed her in a bear hug. "Just came from practice. Showers don't work, and girls locker room was occupied."

She hesitantly hugged him back before she pressed her hands against his chest to push him away, but he didn't let up. "Okay, Ilya. Get the fuck off of me, this is so disgusting."

"But I missed you, and your loud mouth, and complaining and—" he stopped when he felt her try to knee his groin and miss when he turned to dodge it.

"Jess," Shane said mildly surprised.

"Asshole." Jess looked at Ilya with annoyance once he let go. "I already knew I needed a shower, but now I need to scrub my skin till it turns red."

She walked back towards the entrance of the kitchen.

"I'll make sure to leave my sweaty t-shirt under your pillow tonight." he joked, picking up his shake again and leaning back against the counter.

Jess stopped walking, and turned to look at Shane.

"Does he think I'm above murder?"

"Yes," Ilya answered. "Because then you would have to wear ugly orange uniform and miss the next episode of Love Island."

Shane smiled, because he knew it was true. The smile crept onto Jess's face, admitting that she also knew it was true. It was the main thing she and Ilya discussed, specifically on Twitter.

"I'll bring your stuff up in a few minutes." Shane said to her, knowing she was going to start getting ready for tonight.

"No worries. My toiletry stuff is in my book bag." Jess said, placing a kiss on his cheek, before walking out.

As he walked towards Ilya, he heard her shuffle in the living room.

"Was coach mad about me missing?"

Shane could smell the musk from where he had been standing a moment ago, but had the strong urge to get as close as possible. He put his face in the crook of Ilya's neck to sniff before kneeling down to the ground, deciding he wanted to smell a deeper musk.

"No. I think he knew that you wouldn't usually miss practice—" Ilya shrugged because it was no big deal. His eyes followed Shane's movements as he leaned in and pressed his nose against his crotch.

Shane couldn't understand why she was so appalled by it, but it was fine seeing as he didn't necessarily need to see Jess enjoying the smell of his best friend.

Ilya pulled Shane's head in closer, seeing as he was planning to shower once Marleau was done in the bathroom and wasn't going to smell like this for much longer.

He inhaled the scent deeply. Something about Ilya's sweat calmed him the way lavender did.

He let out a barely audible satisfied moan, before he stood up.

Shane hopped onto the counter and guided Ilya to stand in between his legs. Ilya went easily, leaned his body against Shane's as they wrapped their arms around each other.

He liked him and Shane like this.

Ilya was grateful for every distraction of his sour mood this morning, as it didn't let him ponder. But the feeling was always underneath—the chest ache, and his scrambled thoughts feeling loud.

But this, when he and Shane were wrapped up in each other, felt like the only times where his mind just calmed.

Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya's waist, then leaned into the crook of his neck and smelled him in, half focused on the conversation. It was intoxicating every time.

"Just got to be on your 'A' game, next practice. No slacking."

Ilya felt as Shane nuzzled in more.

"I never slack."

He heard a throat clear from the doorway of the kitchen.

He and Ilya turned to look at Jess, who stood there, face unsure as she looked at them.

"Guess some things haven't changed." Jess said, somewhat awkwardly.

He pulled away just a bit, feeling Ilya's hand in his hair cause some resistance.

He gave her a warm, closed-mouth smile. "You needed something, babe?"

Jess looked down at the floor when she saw Ilya turn away and lean his chin on Shane's shoulder, their arms still around one another. "Can I borrow your towel?"

"Yeah, of course." he said, gently to his girlfriend. "It's in my closet, top shelf." He said a little muffled, as he decided to lean back into Ilya's neck.

He heard her mutter a 'thank you' before walking out.

For the next few minutes Ilya caught Shane up on what they did at practice, and Shane made a mental note to show up to tomorrow's practice earlier than usual.

The day felt long, and busy, and a small moment with Ilya was what he needed even if he didn't realize it until now.

"Hey, so..." Shane started before deciding to hop off the counter and look out into the living room to make sure Jess hadn't still been there. He knew she wasn't but just in case.

Ilya put his empty bottle in the sink, watching Shane as he tried to be discreet.

"What?" Ilya asked, curious.

"I—I bought condoms." He stuttered. "Not because I need them for protection but, uh. They're the ribbed ones. I was kind of hoping that maybe they'd help in keeping me hard."

Ilya's eyebrows rose, voice a little loud for Shane's liking. "Still? You lost your virginity to her years ago, Shane."

"I—I know." Shane hissed, looking over his shoulder, into the living room to make sure she still wasn't there. "I just don't know what the fuck I'm doing wrong."

"Well, I guess it's good that she lost her virginity to you too then. So she doesn't really know how terrible her sex life is." Ilya said, pityingly.

Shane rolled his eyes. "I told you that in confidentiality."

"да, and I kept it confidential that your hand does a better job at finishing you off."

"Ilya."

Shane looked at him with serious eyes, walking back over to the counter.

"She's going to be here for the next few days, and I need to figure this out."

"Well, maybe it'll help that it's been a few months?"

Shane nodded, taking that into consideration. "Yeah, maybe."

Ilya groaned, pushing himself off of the counter.

"It's amazing how confident you are on the ice. You own it, trust all of your movements. But the moment you have to perform in your bedroom with your girlfriend, it sounds like you forget how your limbs work." Ilya teased.

Shane chuckled but Ilya could tell he was feeling insecure about it.

"It's about confidence," Ilya whispered into Shane's ear, thinking it over a second before swiftly turning Shane around and bending him over the counter.

Shane gasped, not having expected to be leaned on his elbows. He felt Ilya running his hands down his spine, to his waist, down to his ass.

He felt Ilya lean over his back and place a kiss between his shoulder blades.

"Foreplay is important— cherish her body, take your time. Is how you're going to connect."

Ilya squeezed Shane's ass in his hands, causing Shane to close his eyes, putting himself into the imaginary scenario.

"Not just pushing in, hoping that poking her repeatedly will do the job." Ilya spoke, "Make her feel good first, as she'll make you feel good. And then when the time comes, you fuck her brains out. Fuck her to the point where neither of you are thinking, just feeling how fucking good it feels." Ilya rolled his hips, his dick pressed against Shane's ass, causing Shane to move forward every time. "But you have to be confident in it." Ilya pulled Shane back by his hips, connecting clothed dick to clothed ass again and then again.

Shane closed his eyes as he felt Ilya's dick get harder every time he rolled his hips against him.

He wasn't getting turned on by it, he was sure, but he did get hard at the thought of what he could possibly get to experience later.

He was sure he didn't get hard because of Ilya's running hands, even as he felt his skin tingle.

"Don't be afraid to touch her." Ilya said as he pressed his hand against Shane's hard cock and stroked him through his pants.

For no particular reason, Shane moved his hand to the wall behind the counter and pushed back, grinding back into Ilya.

"You see how that feels?" Ilya said a little breathlessly as he placed his other hand on Shane's shoulder.

He had wanted to give his best friend an idea of how to be in the bedroom, not even considering how good it would feel to do this.

It had been a week since he had a girl over, and Ilya knew that it was past due for another one night stand.

When he opened his eyes, and saw the perfect arch of his best friend's spine, and the dimples that showed from his shirt riding up, Ilya thought that that was enough.

He pulled back after gently stopping Shane from pushing back against him.

"Fuck." Shane said as he came back to himself. "Yeah... yeah. I'll— try that. I just gotta get out of my head."

Ilya felt dizzy, and hard but he hoped that he could be at least a little bit of help to Shane.

"I'm going to bring her, her stuff now." Shane said before he left the room, still feeling his skin flushed and warm.

As he climbed the stairs, he felt more hopeful than he did before about tonight.

All thanks to Ilya.

Shane felt so grateful to have a friend that was always there for him when he needed. Was always there to make him laugh, smile and comfort him.

As he placed Jess's luggage in his room, a part of him wanted to go back downstairs. Wanted to join Ilya in his shower to talk about their day, and then friendly cuddle on the couch as they watched a movie. He couldn't though, as he knew he needed to use this time to study while Jess got ready for their date tonight.

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The date was going perfectly.

They sat in a corner booth at a Thai spot, sharing a bunch of small plates.

He knew that this week was going to set him back on his diet but he willed himself not to think about it, especially as he added a prawn cake to his plate.

"It was the ickiest thing I've ever seen, and the sweetest." Jess laughed, as she held a bitten dumpling on her fork.

Shane could picture exactly what she was describing, and the thought brought tears to his eyes as he joined her in laughing.

"And I thought maybe the girl would walk away, seeing Hayden dance that awful but nope. Heart eyes the whole time."

"Aw, but that's actually sweet. It sounds like that Jackie girl really likes him." Shane smiled, remembering Hayden calling him up to tell him about the love of his life he met at a house party. "I'm sure they'll make a great couple once he makes it official."

"Oh yeah, one-hundred percent. Then we could go on double dates when you visit." Jess smiled at him.

Shane nodded, with a wider smile on his face.

"Yeah, that would be nice." He leaned in and kissed her on the cheek.

Once they were done eating at the restaurant, they walked around town a bit, looking up at the stars as they did. The air got colder as they walked but Shane had suggested continuing, in lieu of going back home and going to his room.

He held her hand, knowing that she would like that. And kissed her when no one was near, just to see her cute and surprised smile.

As they approached his car, she turned to face him, hand still in his.

"What?" he smiled, as she looked at each of his eyes then his lips.

She gave a small smirk before, going on her tiptoes to kiss him.

His heart jumped, not having expected her to be so bold, especially since they were on a busy street.

He wanted to pull away, but he knew he shouldn't so he brought his hands up to rest in her wavy blonde hair.

She kissed him deeper at his movement, and he went with it.

It was intended to be heated, he knew, so he went through the file in his head of what it was that she liked.

He moaned lowly into the kiss, remembering that she usually reacted positively to it.

"We should," She whispered seductively, lips still grazing his. "get back to the house."

He nodded automatically.

At the same time that she went into give him another kiss, he had accidentally pulled back completely.

It was a weird movement, as he had to catch her from tripping.

"Sorry." he awkwardly laughed into his apology.

She shook her head as if it was no big deal, before they got into his car and drove back to the house.

The drive to the house was quiet, yet filled with anticipation. They held hands again as he drove, but nothing else occurred.

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He and Jess entered the house to find all of the roommates in the living room, watching a movie with the lights off.

The energy changed as soon as Svetlana saw Jess and screamed in excitement, jumping off the couch.

"Ah! Svetlana!" Jess spread her arms to wrap her up in a hug.

Shane laughed at the sight of them excitedly greet each other. Marleau got off the couch happily and walked till he stood leaning against the staircase, waiting for his turn to greet her.

In that time, Shane saw Ilya sitting on the couch with his feet up, watching the girls jump up and down.

Shane and Jess were obviously not going to join the roommates to watch the movie, but he knew this greeting would take a few minutes. He headed over to the couch and sat across Ilya's lap and leaned his body against him.

"Oh, that's crazy." Wyatt said next to them.

Ilya wrapped his arm around Shane's shoulder, half wanting to cover both their ears as the girls continued to squeal.

"How was the date?" Ilya asked loud enough for Shane to hear since the sound of the movie and the girls made it almost impossible to hear anything else.

Shane turned his head to look at Ilya, and smiled.

"It was really fun, food was delicious. Think you'd really like it." He leaned into say.

Ilya nodded once. "Good. Maybe I'll use that as one of my date spots."

Ilya looked down at Shane's lips before pulling him in for a kiss. He tasted the Thai, and pushed his tongue in liking the taste.

"Oh, that's fucking crazy." Wyatt said, only loud enough for Ilya and Shane to hear.

Shane ran his tongue along Ilya's, lowly moaning into the kiss.

"Fuck, Marly! I forgot how tall you are." Shane heard his girlfriend say, excitedly. "How have you been?"

While Marleau went into a quick debrief about his life, Ilya pulled Shane's head even closer.

"Maybe I'm the crazy one because this to me is fucking insane?" When Ilya heard Wyatt speak again, he reached out with his free hand and accidentally smacked Wyatt in the face before finding the man's jaw and turning his face to look away from the sight of Ilya greeting Shane.

Shane's hand rested on Ilya's jawline, and moved up into his curly hair. He tightened his fingers, liking this textured hair a lot more.

Ilya pulled away suddenly, not wanting to start something when he was already determined to finish the rest of the movie. He hadn't even meant to kiss Shane like that, but most of their interactions seemed to escalate in a way neither of them ever mean to.

The light from the TV allowed him to see the shine on Shane's lips so he wiped at it.

"Yeah, I told Shane absolutely not." Shane's ears perked up at the sound of Jess saying his name and turned to find her looking around for him until she spotted him on the couch.

"Good, because there are these cute boutique shops I've been dying to show you." Svetlana said to her. Jess's eyes on the other hand lingered on Shane and Ilya on the couch before putting on a smile to react to what Svetlana said.

"Yes, I would love that. Um," She tapered off, bringing her attention fully back to Shane.
"Shane, we should..."

Jess gestured her head to the stairs, and Shane knew that was their cue to leave.

Ilya leaned into his ear.

"Good luck." he whispered.

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Ilya laid in his bed in his boxers with the lights off, trying to will himself to sleep when he felt his phone vibrate.

He had stayed on the couch long after the movie had ended and the roommates had gone to bed. He had stayed, not wanting to go upstairs and hear anything he didn't necessarily want to hear. When he thought it was safe, he had made his way up and rushed past Shane's bedroom door.

Ilya picked up his phone to read the texts he had gotten back to back.

Shane: 😁😁😁

Shane: Lasted longer than I ever have

Shane: Even almost came. Progress 👍👍

Ilya stared at the messages for a long time, not at all sure of how to respond to his clearly very excited best friend.

'Almost came'

What the fuck did that even mean?

Ilya's thumbs hovered over the keys, wanting to type up a response but he really was at a loss for words.

Shane: Thanks for the advice!

Shane: She's 🙄🙄

Shane: 😏😏😏

Shane: You're the best 💙

Ilya snorted at the new chain of messages, absolutely unsure if any of it was a compliment he could accept. He didn't feel very helpful.

If Marleau had texted him some stupid shit like this, Ilya would text him back and call him a dumb fuck with no hesitation.

But this was Shane.

His Shane.

He needed to call him a dumb fuck to his face.

Tossing the duvet off of himself, he swung his legs over his bed and made his way to Shane's room.

He considered knocking but he didn't want to wake Jess up so he just turned the unlocked door knob and pushed the door open slowly.

"Ilya?" he heard Shane whisper once he was inside the room.

He couldn't see shit so Ilya turned his phone on to get a brief moment of light.

He used it to guide himself to Shane's bed.

"Hi," he whispered back.

Upon reaching Shane's bed, he moved the light to reveal Jess wrapped up in the duvet tucked in the corner where the single bed met the wall. Shane laid on the side closest to Ilya, faced away from her, duvet only covering his lower half.

"I thought you fell asleep, you hadn't responded." Shane whispered as he tried to block out the light Ilya pointed directly at his eyes. "Can you fucking turn that off?"

Ilya powered off his screen.

"No, I just wanted to ask you what the fuck happened that you didn't come? That's kind of the whole point." Ilya was back to being blind in the dark so he patted the bed and maneuvered himself to lay facing Shane. It wasn't much space so they were extremely pressed together.

Shane had moved the duvet to cover both of their bodies.

"I mean, sure but Rome wasn't built in a day, Ilya. I'll try your method again and then again until it happens. That's how progress works." Shane said as if Ilya was the stupid one.

Ilya felt as if he was going to fall off the bed so he wrapped his arm around Shane's bare torso and felt Shane throw his leg over his hip.

Their breath mingled in between them. "That's not how that's supposed to work. You must be doing something wrong."

Shane felt a bit frustrated, having thought he actually did well. "Like what? I did exactly what you said to do."

"Was it the condom? Sometimes that dampens the sensation."

"No? I actually liked using it, made me feel comfortable."

Ilya scoffed, never having heard a man say they *like* using condoms.

He tried to run over the options as to what else Shane could try so that he could get off with his girlfriend the next time.

Ilya ran his fingers on Shane's skin, and it's only then that he realized he didn't have any underwear on. It should have occurred to Ilya, considering Shane had just had sex, but it didn't.

Ilya brought his hand down, cupping his hand on Shane's cheek, always liking the roundness and how firm it was.

"Maybe you should try watching more porn." Ilya suggested, squeezing his ass.

Shane threw his arm around Ilya's shoulder, no longer wanting it trapped between them.

"I have and I don't really care for it."

"What?" Ilya's whisper was a little louder.

"The girls always sound really fake with their moans. And their pubic hair always has a weird shape. Just doesn't do it for me."

Shane pushed his ass back into Ilya's hand.

Ilya laughed. "Mr homo here looking at their pubic hair."

Shane chuckled. "Fuck you."

Ilya didn't stop his hand movement, alternating between squeezing Shane's ass and running his hands back up to his lower back.

He could tell Shane must have gotten blue balled by the way he pushed his ass back against his hand and then pressed his bare cock against Ilya's clothed one.

Ilya felt a little bad, not having given Shane enough advice to get him to finish. So he moved his hand, not being able to see Shane's face but able to picture it exactly. He pictured Shane's eyes closed, and mouth open. He pictured his eyebrows scrunched as Ilya continued to make him feel more relaxed.

If Jess couldn't help Shane finish, the least Ilya could do was make Shane feel better about not having come.

Ilya's fingers ran everywhere, until they found Shane's crack and he pushed in until he found his hole. He only rubbed at it once, compelled to get a reaction.

Shane's breath shuddered, and Ilya pulled his hand back, feeling like he went too far.

"Sorry." he said, breath ghosting over Shane's lips.

"It's— It's fine." Shane breathed. "Just a little tight in this bed."

It was true from the moment Ilya laid in the bed. But even more than that, Ilya couldn't really move his hand without worrying about bumping against Jess.

"Can we go to your room?" Shane asked.

Ilya nodded. "Yeah."

He carefully got off the bed, careful not to wake Jess up with his movement. When he heard Shane stand up, they quietly walked to the door in complete darkness, only bumping into each other when Ilya ran into the wall.

"We probably should have grabbed our phones." Shane said a little too late.

"Thanks for the suggestion." Ilya said sarcastically, feeling his way until he found the door knob.

Shane held onto Ilya's hand, not wanting to get lost on the way to Ilya's. When they finally made it to the room, they both tossed themselves onto the bed.

"Okay so," Ilya began, readjusting himself on the bed until he was kneeling. The Himalayan salt lamp on his desk provided the smallest amount of light for them to be able to see each other. "Tell me. How did you fuck her."

"Ilya," Shane reprimanded.

"Not in detail. Just tell me what position."

"It was just missionary." Shane said awkwardly.

Ilya nodded, as he got between Shane's legs and pushed his knees up towards Shane's face.

Shane was amused by whatever Ilya was doing. Ever so determined to help Shane's sex life.

"Okay. So, you were in this position. And... what?" Ilya asked.

"And what? I fucked her? Ran my hands over her like you told me to."

"Did you do foreplay?" Ilya looked down at Shane's body, the way his legs spread when Ilya pushed them more apart, revealing his perineum.

"Um," Shane hesitated, bringing his hands to hold his knees as he thought. "I played with her breasts while we made out?"

Ilya looked up and waited. When Shane didn't say more, Ilya's face morphed into confusion. "What? That's it?"

"What the fuck else was I supposed to do?"

"Uh, well..." Ilya started, dumbfounded. "Well first, she has a hole you could have played with."

Ilya moved his hand to Shane's hole to drive his point. Before, when he touched his hole, it felt a little too far. But now he was demonstrating.

"Two holes, actually." Ilya corrected himself.

He rubbed at Shane's hole with his index and middle finger.

"Doing this isn't just for her pleasure. It's supposed to be for yours too."

Shane felt his hole clench at the touch of Ilya's fingers rubbing at it.

He closed his eyes and listened to Ilya's suggestions.

Ilya no longer had to imagine what Shane's face would look like, as he was now able to see it. The closed eyes, open mouth, and scrunched eyebrows.

Ilya continued to rub at Shane's hole, beginning to feel his cock stir.

"You could have gone down on her." Ilya suggested next. "Eaten her out maybe?"

"I— I've never..." Shane said in between moans, as Ilya teased his fingers inside.

Now that Shane thought about it, he could have gotten more creative. He and Jess have had sex before— at least the way they thought they were supposed to.

They made out, ran their hands on the other person, and then he aligned his cock to her pussy before pushing in and thrusting.

This time though, he tried to remember what Ilya demonstrated to him in the kitchen. While fucking her he remembered the way Ilya bent him over, then kissed his spine. He thought about the way Ilya ran his hands along his body, and grabbed at his ass. Remembered how good it felt when Ilya rolled his hips, and pressed his cock to Shane's ass and how much better it felt when he pushed back against Ilya's cock.

These thoughts while he fucked Jess were working. Shane had been into the sex more than he had ever been. The only reason he didn't finish was because Jess's loud moan as she orgasmed took him completely out of the memory and he struggled to bring himself back after that.

But he had been close, and he felt excited. He was excited to fuck his girlfriend again tomorrow.

"You've never..?" Ilya asked, voice unsure of what Shane was going to say. "Never went down on your girlfriend?"

Every movement paused, and Shane opened his eyes to find Ilya staring at him.

"Shane," Ilya deadpanned.

"No, okay. I've never... eaten Jess out."

Ilya was again, too stunned to speak.

"Well then did she at least suck your dick after?" he asked once he moved past his friend's revelation.

Ilya shifted himself to lay down between Shane's legs once he noticed Shane had his arms wrapped around his knees, holding them there.

"Obviously not, Ilya."

Ilya groaned, finding everything Shane had said tonight to be completely absurd.

He kissed the head of Shane's cock, feeling bad for the abuse it's faced tonight.

Shane moaned as he felt Ilya's lips run over the length of Shane's dick before kissing the tip once again. He may have been proud of the outcome from earlier, but Shane badly needed a release.

Ilya *wanted* him to have a release, imagining how much it must suck to have been so close only to stop right before.

The problem for Ilya as he kissed Shane's dick and ran his tongue on the slit, was that Ilya could taste the latex that had been wrapped around his dick earlier.

But he wanted him to feel good, so instead of half ass-ing a blowjob— something Ilya found weird to do anyway for his guy friend— he decided to lower himself more until his lips connected with Shane's hole. Ilya had never sucked dick but he has eaten ass many times.

When Shane felt Ilya's lips kiss his asshole, he let out an involuntary moan.

He didn't even know why Ilya was down there. If Shane hadn't been so eager to come, he would have definitely stopped Ilya. But he wasn't mad at it. This was classic Ilya, always there for him.

So Shane let him do whatever it was that he was doing.

Ilya kissed at his hole again, waiting to see if Shane would stop him. And when he didn't Ilya grabbed the back of Shane's knees to help hold them up as he licked at Shane's hole and sucked.

This didn't feel much different than eating a girl's ass. Ilya might even say it was better, with the moans Shane released at each flick of Ilya's tongue.

"Fuck—" Shane said to himself.

Ilya worked at Shane's hole, eventually pushing his tongue in and...

Well.

Ilya wasn't sure what this action would be called, because tongue-fucking sounded way too gay and Ilya would never. Not to Shane at least. Maybe to another guy if he decided to start his bi-curious phase.

So he continued to ... poke his tongue into Shane repeatedly and hummed at the continued moans he managed to get out of his best friend.

Shane rubbed his face into his knee, panting at how good the feeling was. He didn't mean to moan so much, but it was honestly involuntary. And who could blame him? He had never had something in his ass hole before, and as he felt Ilya's mouth suck at his hole and his tongue lick, and push inside, it made Shane consider. Maybe he just needed to incorporate ass play into his sex life with Jess, because this was by far the best thing he had ever felt.

Ilya ground against his bed needing to feel some friction on his dick, and when he did, he felt himself getting closer to the edge. He was surprised that eating Shane's ass had gotten him so close already.

As Ilya shifted his hands to spread Shane more apart, he bumped it into Shane's rock hard cock in the process.

That feeling alone of Ilya's fingers grazing Shane's dick was enough to send Shane over. And as he felt his come half a second away from shooting out, he immediately reached for his dick to stroke at it.

Ilya did a lot of the work that led to his orgasm but just like always, they never actually finished the other person off. It was an unspoken understanding.

Ilya continued to rub his dick against his bed even while Shane came all over his face after Ilya pulled off of him. He hadn't thought about where Shane's come was going to land and had no time to move as it went onto his face and his hair and on his tongue.

Ilya tasted the salty-sweet come on his tongue and was secretly delighted by it. It wasn't bad at all.

Ilya came a few seconds later onto his bed once he finally placed his hand on his dick and jerked it while licking his thumb clean after wiping some of Shane's come from his face.

"Fuck, Ilya—" Shane said when he came down from his orgasm. "Come here."

Ilya moved up from his position to lay over Shane.

They kissed from the moment Ilya rested on top of him and Shane could taste his come on Ilya's tongue. He debated on apologizing for making a mess on him but it was clear that Ilya wasn't mad about it. Probably understanding that it was an accident.

"Thanks for that," Shane said in-between their kisses. "That was the longest edging of my life."

Ilya hummed and nodded, sucking on Shane's bottom lip. "Yeah, I got you."

They stayed like this for a little longer, calming down as their heart rate lowered.

"Alright," Shane said once they disconnected their mouths. "We both have class in the morning. Should probably go to sleep."

Ilya groaned, knowing Shane was right.

He moved off of Shane and reached for his duvet that had been pushed to the side. Ilya threw it over their bodies and laid back down to wrap his arms around Shane and entangle their legs.

Hours later, Shane's body woke him up as if it remembered that he had left his phone in his room. If he fell back to sleep, he would miss his alarm ringing and possibly miss his class.

With that unwanted thought, he untangled himself from a sleeping Ilya and made his way back to his room. It was still pitch black but he found his bed nonetheless. He couldn't see Jess, but when he laid down he could feel that she had moved closer to the middle. He really didn't have any choice but to cuddle her unless he wanted to sleep on the floor, so he did.

He held her and fell back to sleep thinking about blonde curls.

~.~.~

The next day was a busier day for Shane, as he had classes and practice and a test to study for.

He left Jess in the house while he went to class as she too had an online class she needed to attend. But he was able to bring her to his practice which she was excited about.

The morning had started awkwardly when she had found Ilya's phone on his desk. He had explained to her that he had come to the room so that they could talk and forgot it.

That seemed to bother her and Shane wasn't sure why, but she dropped the conversation so that he could go to class.

At practice he could swear that Jess was dead on staring at Ilya every time he went to look at her. He tried not to focus on it too much, as he had promised himself to give his all at practice.

Whatever had put her in a bad mood that morning, Shane tried to counteract. He didn't want to spend their days like this, having looked forward to her coming to visit him.

He saw her crack a few times whenever he made her laugh, or left many kisses all over her face when they were in private.

Once back at the house, he still felt her distance so he suggested they make themselves dinner.

It was sweet, cooking with Jess. And by cooking, it was really just Shane cooking and Jess pointing out every action she deemed odd. She pointed out the way he measured every ingredient, and cut the vegetables very specifically. He didn't mind as this was usually how cooking went.

The end result was a delicious baked salmon with asparagus and a healthy rice pilaf.

"Did you guys ever figure out where Wyatt came from?" Jess asked, hovering her last piece of salmon against her mouth.

They sat at the kitchen table and Shane had his empty plate pushed forward.

"For the longest time we really didn't. We had a running theory that he just came with the house." Shane chuckled. "But, uh, no. It's a funny story, actually. So Marl—" Shane began but was cut off by Ilya running into the kitchen.

"Fuck—" Ilya said, grabbing a water bottle from the fridge and shoving his left over sandwich into his book bag.

Shane and Jess sat there watching him rush.

"You okay?" Jess asked Ilya.

"No, I napped for too long and now I'm running late for my shift." Ilya's eyes roamed the counter until he spotted his car keys on the floor by the fridge.

"Don't speed trying to get there faster." Shane said, knowing Ilya was going to do it anyway.

"Yeah, yeah." Ilya said, rushing back out of the kitchen but not before going to Shane and leaving a kiss on his lips which was reciprocated.

"Bye!" Shane shouted, hearing the front door slam once Ilya was out.

It took a second for Shane to remember where he left off in the story.

"Anyway—" he started again, but stopped when he saw Jess looking at him with eyes wide open.

"What the fuck was that?" Jess asked, voice low and angry.

Shane opened his mouth to talk but hesitated, unsure of what she was talking about.

"Uh—"

"Shane..." Jess snapped. "Did Ilya just fucking kiss you?"

"Um—. I—" Shane looked around the kitchen, feeling the beginning of an argument happening and his heart pounding quickly because of it. "Yeah? I don't—"

"Oh my fucking shit." Jess laughed with no real humor behind it.

She stood and Shane watched her run both of her hands through her hair as she stomped into the living room.

Shane stood from his seat and followed, wanting to try to defuse the situation but was startled when she turned back to face him.

"Jess,"

"There's no fucking way that you guys just kissed, as if that's okay to do. Shane, I don't even know what to say!" Jess yelled.

"Jess, it's not —"

"You don't even fucking kiss me in public, but you can kiss Ilya no problem? Are you fucking serious?" Jess yelled, only becoming increasingly irritated.

"It wasn't a big deal." Shane argued back.

"Don't you fucking tell me what's a big deal! You have a girlfriend. Who traveled on a disgusting bus for hours to visit her boyfriend who can't seem to stop touching and cuddling his best friend." Her face turned red.

"It's not like that!" Shane's voice raised in frustration.

"Oh? It's not like that?" Jess's voice filled with sarcasm. "Dollar to the fucking jar!" Jess pointed at the direction of where she knew the jar sat on the shelf but her movement stopped when she actually looked at it.

Shane turned to look at it himself and his heart dropped when he saw how much more filled it was from the last time he actually looked at it.

"Shane," Jess's voice trembled slightly. "Are you kidding me?"

Jess took a step closer to the shelf and picked up the jar and held it in front of Shane. It looked heavy as it was filled with coins and bills.

"For years, I've been making excuses for all the shit you and Ilya do. Every time you guys tell me and our friends that what you do is normal but this... " She shook the jar and the coins clinking against the glass made Shane cringe. "You think it's normal for two friends to defend themselves THIS much?"

"It wouldn't be filled that much if everyone stopped overreacting to every single thing Ilya and I did." Shane was mad, forcing himself to stop looking at the jar.

"Overreacting would be someone judging you guys for having a special handshake, Shane! Not when Ilya carries you koala style back to your mom's house because you're tired!" She spat back. "I don't even know what more than half of these coins are for and honestly I'm scared to even find out!"

"He's my friend." Shane said sternly.

"Oh yeah?" Jess looked at him, before nodding. "Okay."

She stepped closer to the couch.

"Wyatt's your friend." She pointed at the man sitting on the couch, who had tried to make himself seem small when the couple stormed into the living room arguing. "Why don't you fucking kiss and cuddle him?"

"He's not my best friend." Shane said as if her suggestion was ridiculous. "No offense, Hayes."

"Please," Wyatt shook his head, clearly very uncomfortable. "Don't involve me in this. I'm just watching the Bachelor. He's about to give out the last rose of the night. Please—" Wyatt pleaded.

"Oh, so you would kiss and cuddle Hayden?" Jess went back to arguing with Shane.

"No! He's not—" Shane stopped, not knowing what to say next. This argument was becoming exhausting, and all he had wanted was to have a nice dinner and study for his exam on Monday.

"I don't want you both doing this shit anymore." Jess demanded.

Shane looked at her, dumbfounded. "What?"

She took a step closer, every word holding weight. "I do not want you and Ilya doing these things anymore. I am your girlfriend. Me. You are not allowed to kiss, and cuddle and do whatever else it is that you both fucking do. You hear me?"

Shane shook his head, eyebrows scrunched. "That's my childhood friend. We are comfortable with each other. I'm not just going to push him away like that."

"Then break up with me."

Shane's eyes widened. "What? Why would I do that? I don't want—"

"I'm trying to set boundaries here." Jess's eyes filled with tears. "I should have said something years ago when we first started dating but I was so scared to lose you. And I tried to understand the special connection you and Ilya had even though it never made sense. Best friends don't act like that. I thought maybe... maybe you and Ilya had feelings for each other and I was just your beard. But I knew it wasn't that because I know you care about me."

Shane watched as his girlfriend's anger calmed and sadness appeared tenfold.

"But I can't do it anymore, Shane. It's not fair. This," She held the jar up again before putting it on the shelf again. "is too much. If it's something that you wouldn't do with Wyatt, or Hayden or Rose then you shouldn't be doing it with Ilya. If you have to make that many excuses, if everyone in the room is telling you it's not normal... then maybe you should consider it."

Their eyes locked and Shane felt his chest tighten.

He felt anxious. Angry. Embarrassed, maybe. And more than anything he felt a strong urge to disagree. Disagree to what she's implying. And disagree to those terms.

But disagreeing could mean that he would be single and Shane felt cornered. This was the worst case for an ultimatum because it involved the two people he cared about most.

"I—" Shane stuttered, then shook his head, a part of him wanting to cry.

He looked away from her, and let his eyes wander around the room.

"I need space..." he landed on.

Jess didn't respond, and Shane knew she also didn't know what to say.

"I don't want to break up with you, Jess. But I feel like I'm..." Shane waved his hands in the air unsure of what he was trying to describe. "I need space, to clear my head and calm down. I feel like I can't think right now. Please."

Jess scoffed, looking away from him.

"Fine."

Shane grabbed his books and laptop from his room and walked out, leaving Jess in the bedroom alone, knowing she had nowhere else to go. He wasn't going to be mean and tell her to go somewhere else so that he could study. That was still his girlfriend after all.

He debated on where to go, ultimately deciding on going to Ilya's room to study.

Ilya was at work and Jess probably thought Shane went to the library, so it worked. Giving him the quiet he needed.

It took him nearly an hour to focus in on the material. He replayed the argument over and over again. It was ridiculous how a friendly kiss could lead to such a bad argument.

Shane was able to study over the next few hours as he finally pushed those thoughts aside.

He hadn't even heard the door open until it was closing and he heard footsteps behind him.

"Shane?" he heard Ilya ask, confused.

Shane turned to look at Ilya shuffling off his jacket.

Fuck, he hadn't even realized five hours had passed but he felt grateful for it. The argument had made him feel so angry but now he felt calmer than before.

"Hey," Shane greeted. "Just studying. Hope you don't mind."

"Of course not." Ilya said nonchalantly.

Ilya walked around the room putting his things down before making his way to Shane. He looked at the computer screen to see what it was that he was reviewing before turning to him and leaning into kiss him.

Realizing what Ilya was doing, Shane turned his head away, feeling Ilya's lips on his cheek.

Ilya scrunched his eyebrows, confused at the motion.

"You okay?" Ilya asked slowly.

Shane cleared his throat, trying to play off his avoidance. "Yeah..."

He felt Ilya's eyes run over Shane's face, seemingly not satisfied with the response.

"No." Shane admitted after a beat. "Jess and I argued. Badly."

Ilya sat down on his bed and faced Shane, who remained on the chair.

He listened as Shane recounted the story of his and Jess's argument. Ilya felt his heart sink when he got to the part where Jess demanded they stop being physical with each other.

"Now I have to go back to her at some point with an answer, and I don't know Ilya. I don't know what to say. I don't even know how it escalated so quickly. That jar wasn't even half full when we moved in." Shane rubbed at his eyes, frustration building inside again.

"It was me." The words came out before Ilya could stop them.

"Huh?" Shane looked up at him, confused.

"I kept adding to the jar. That's why it's almost full." Ilya explained.

Shane looked around, brain scrambling to make sense of it. "What? Why? Were the roommates saying something?"

"No. But," Ilya shrugged. "anytime we kept doing something, I kept thinking 'It's not like that' and so I would... put money in the jar." Ilya stuttered as he watched Shane's eyebrows lower.

"You'd think it? Ilya, that jar is supposed to be for when we try to defend ourselves to other people that don't understand our friendship." Shane explained. "Adding to the jar to defend our actions to *yourself* makes it seem like we don't know what this is."

"Maybe," Ilya hesitated. "Maybe I don't *know* what this is anymore."

Ilya heard the words and immediately wished he could take them back.

Shane sat up straighter, looking directly into Ilya's eyes.

"What— What do you mean you don't know what this is?" Shane said stunned. "It's a... deep platonic-friendship between two straight best friends."

"Well, that's the problem Shane. I don't really know if I'm fully straight." Ilya admitted, and the anxiety came full force. He had never truly considered what he might be. He had been considering experimenting but even then he would have still called himself straight.

Shane stood up from the chair, completely taken back.

"You're... gay? Y—you can't be." Shane shook his head as his thoughts scrambled.

"No, I'm not gay." Ilya stood up, and tried to keep his voice low so that no one in the house could hear him. "I'm just not sure if I'm straight."

"No." Shane looked at Ilya, begging for his best friend to walk back what he just admitted. Maybe it made him an asshole. "You have to be straight."

Ilya's eyes widened at the audacity. "I *have* to be straight?" he pointed at himself.

Shane nodded, seeing the anger rise in Ilya.

"Why? So that you don't have to admit that the stuff we did might have been a little gay?"

"Yes," Shane defended. "Because up until now everything was because we were friends who were confident in their sexuality. Now, I'm—. Everything we ever said to anyone could be construed as—"

"It's not like I had some fucking underlying motive, Shane." Ilya said, offended. "I just figured that maybe, if I'm eating out my friend's ass... that *maybe*, I'm not fully straight."

Shane scoffed, taking a step back from Ilya.

"It wasn't like th—" Shane began to argue.

"Don't you fucking dare." Ilya's voice rose and Shane felt his heart drop when he saw Ilya point his finger at him. "Not with me."

They stood like this for a long moment, both chests heaving with anger and confusion.

The tension never broke, but Shane felt the tears from earlier coming back. He willed himself not to let them down so he shook his head and spoke quietly. "We can't do this anymore."

Ilya let his hand fall to his side, his heart beginning to hurt hearing Shane's decision.

"Shane..." Ilya took a step forward.

"No, Ilya." Shane stepped back. "Jess was right."

He felt it in his chest, how much he hated to admit that.

"Shane..." Ilya said again, lower, silently begging for Shane not to do this.

"I—I can't do this. We should have drawn a line years ago when it got too far."

They stood there in silence for a beat, Ilya not having anything else to say.

"You're my best friend, Ilya. That's not going to change. We just can't..." Shane trailed off, his point clear.

Shane nodded, finalizing his decision then grabbing all of his things to make his way back to his bedroom where he would apologize to his girlfriend and tell her he and Ilya were done being so physically close.

Ilya stayed standing there looking at the ground for a long moment, long after Shane left his room.

His thoughts were loud, his chest was tight and he felt hot tears go down his face.

He looked around the room and began pacing, unsure of what to do with himself. He was sad and angry. And the worst part was that he didn't understand why. Shane was still his best friend. So what if they couldn't...

He scowled, before he made his way to his desk and angrily pushed his unplugged Himalayan salt lamp off of his desk, causing it to hit the wall loudly.

His chest heaved, and a part of him felt bad for being loud while the house was probably sleeping.

With one final huff, Ilya changed out of his uniform and into his sweats and a t-shirt.

He made his way down the stairs and walked directly to Svetlana's bedroom.

Upon opening the door, he heard the bed shuffle. His pupils adjusted to the bedside lamp being turned on.

"Ilyusha?" Svetlana said groggily, clearly just having been woken up.

Ilya walked to the foot of the bed and with just one look at his dejected form, Svetlana moved the duvet that covered the other side of her queen-sized bed.

He laid down, his head resting on her shoulder, and her arms hugging him in.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Svetlana asked.

Ilya shook his head. "No."

Svetlana nodded, not wanting to push him.

She simply turned off her bedside lamp, and lay there until she felt Ilya's silent crying calm down. When she was sure he was asleep, she kissed the top of his curls and let her body finally fall back into the deep sleep it had been in.

Comments make me smile :)

Twitter/X: lovely_hollan0v

Chapter 5: Longing

Chapter Summary

Shane wanted to be better to her and Ilya just wanted to be able to live with their new reality.
Neither of them knew how.

Chapter Notes

Whispers "angst."

--- YO, WHO SAID THAT??!?! *looks around* 🤔🤔🤔

I'm so grateful for everyone who keep me smiling every day! I've joined Threads, and it has been the best thing ever. Every comment, every live reaction here on AO3, all of ittttt.

Thank you, thank you!

Spam me all you want, I do not mind a single bit. 💕

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

When Shane closed the door to Ilya's bedroom, he still heard the sound of his heart pounding in his ears.

His chest felt like it was caving in from the moment he declared his decision out loud.

"We can't do this anymore."

It was a fair choice to make, one that would benefit his relationship with Jess. It shouldn't even be a bad thing for his and Ilya's friendship.

Less physical touch was really no big deal. He didn't do much more than shake Hayden's hand and give him a hug when he saw the guy. What was just a simple handshake and a bro hug with Ilya, really, if not for the way best friends acted?

Regular, boring, insecure best friends.

And knowing today could have gone worse, Jess could have told him to terminate their friendship, Shane still felt a tear trail down his face.

The day had gone fine, but the moment Jess asked him to make a decision, he could barely suppress the strong desire to cry.

Shane wanted to *cry*.

But not in the hallway, outside of Ilya's room. Not in his bedroom where his girlfriend was. And not for the silly reasons that caused him to feel this way.

Shane took a deep breath, and shook his head to rein in his emotion.

He let go of the handle and slowly made his way to his room. Before going into his room, he looked at Ilya's door. He left him in there, hurt.

Right choice didn't mean easy decision. And with the heaviness Shane felt in his heart, this was far from easy.

The door slightly creaked as he pushed it open and stepped into the dark room.

Jess was laying in his bed, under the cover. Initially, he thought that maybe she was sleeping but once he shut the door, he saw her phone illuminate and point towards him.

"Shane?" Jess asked, nasally and wet.

He could tell she had been crying, and Shane felt bad for it.

Two people, hurt.

Once he turned his desk lamp on, he dropped his bag down by his desk and threw himself on top of his duvet. He was still wearing his all day clothes, something he would have never let touch his bed, but he was too emotional to care.

"Hey," he said muffled, as he threw his arm over Jess and buried his face in her hair. Her green-apple shampoo was loud and overstimulating, so he turned his face away from it.

She felt stiff under his arm, quiet. He'd been on this side of a bad argument before, so he wasn't surprised by her cold shoulder.

"I'm sorry." His heart beat loudly against his chest as he forced those words out.

Shane wasn't ever above apologizing—he was in the wrong for hurting her, he knew this.

But it didn't feel right, to apologize as if he was sorry for...

Well, he didn't know.

Jess still didn't turn around in his arm so he continued.

"I didn't know that what Ilya and I were doing, was hurting you. I wish I had known." He racked his brain to come up with the words for this apology. "He and I, we met when we

were twelve, you know this. Instant best friends, that just kept getting... closer. I swear, we didn't think anything of the ways we got comfortable with each other."

Shane's eyes traced the line of his shadow on the wall as he spoke softly into his quiet room.

"He's just the person I always went to for everything. And the physical part, was just heightened comfort. I think I leaned into it because I trust him. But," he swallowed. "I talked to him and told him we couldn't be like that anymore."

To that, he felt Jess shift as she turned and faced him, her body still under the cover while his remained on top.

"Really?"

He looked into her glossy, puffy eyes and felt like the worst boyfriend. This wasn't how her visitation was supposed to go.

As Shane went to respond he heard a loud thud against the wall that made them both jump from being startled.

"What was that?" Jess asked as she turned to look at his wall, from where the sound came.

"I don't —" Shane began but cut himself off when his brain pieced together that it came from Ilya's room. His body twitched, wanting to stand up and go find out if his best friend was okay but decided against it.

Another difficult decision.

Shane forced his train of thought to come back to him so he could get through this conversation and finally end this crappy day.

"I'm sorry that you both had to have that talk. I'm sure it wasn't easy to—" Jess began, after she turned back to look at him and neither of them spoke for a long minute.

"We'll be fine... but Jess, you and I have been together for over two years. I should have established boundaries from the moment I made you my girlfriend."

He had cut her off. Shane could not bring himself to think about the conversation again. It was too fresh and he couldn't handle his brain wanting to explode at Ilya's confession, along with wanting to cry and his heart hurting.

Because if he *really* thought about what Ilya had said to him less than ten minutes ago... If Shane thought back to every moment they held each other naked. Kissed each other softly. Ground their dicks together, or jerked each other off. Whispered secrets to each other in the dark and fell asleep after laughing to the point their stomachs hurt. If Shane thought about how that could have been more than what it was, at least to Ilya... then he would surely want to throw up and run away. Not from disgust, obviously. But from the panic attack threatening to make itself present.

"I want to be better to you," he said with a tone that showed he was serious.

His words were true, kind of. He wanted to *want* to be better to her, which was the same as wanting to be better, right?

A better boyfriend.

A better 'normal' best friend to Ilya.

"Baby, I love you and I love us." Jess sniffled. "We aren't perfect but what couple is? It just felt like we would never get to our full potential, if you were just going to be with Ilya the way you *should* be with me."

Shane nodded slowly as he took her words in and tried to figure out how he felt about them.

Jess cleared her throat, bringing Shane's attention back. "Anyway, enough with this. We're okay now. We have one more full day tomorrow and I would love to just have a nice day here in Montreal." she said.

He gave a polite smile. "Yeah, me too."

"I hate that you have to work for part of it." Jess complained, as she untucked her arm from under the duvet and ran her hand through his hair.

"Yeah— uh, speaking of, I should probably go to bed." The argument was resolved, but Shane couldn't do the late-night conversations with his girlfriend tonight. "Don't want to work a shift where I'm half asleep." He gave her another gentle and polite smile.

After placing a quick peck on her lips, Shane got up and went to his dresser to change into PJ's.

His hands rummaged through, eagerly and automatically looking for a specific black t-shirt and Adidas track pants.

Ilya's.

It wasn't physical intimacy to wear Ilya's clothes to bed, and Shane felt like on a night like tonight, with the way the day ended, he badly just wanted to seek comfort from his best friend in *some* way.

He changed into the clothes that were a little bit big on him, and was relieved to discover that it was nice to have at least this.

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He felt a hard kick against his calf that startled him awake.

Ilya heard the last part of his snore before his eyes opened wide and he looked at his surroundings to figure out where he was and what happened.

His eyes landed on Svetlana, who was lying next to him, looking directly at him.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Did I wake you? I didn't mean to." She smiled and he rolled his eyes as his body settled back down.

Ilya groaned, his mouth feeling dry. *"Right. I'm sure you didn't."*

"Ilyusha," Svetlana said sweetly as she ran her hands through his hair. *"I need you to get out of my bed, so that I could stop listening to you snore and get a few more hours to sleep—"*

Before she could finish her sentence, she was interrupted by the sound of Ilya's alarm going off in his pocket.

"Oh, thank god. Your alarm. You have work. Get out." She sighed, relieved.

Ilya groaned louder than before. *"Sveta! I could have slept for that whole minute."* He complained, rolling until he star-fished on top of her, his back to her front, squishing her into the mattress.

"Ilya..." Svetlana said breathlessly. *"You are way too heavy to be doing this."*

After sighing deeply and stretching, Ilya sat himself up on the mattress and rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"Fine," he hit the snooze button. *"Fine."*

Before he could stand up, he felt a hand on his forearm.

"Wait," Svetlana stopped him.

She looked all over his face once he turned to face her.

"Are you... okay?" She asked with a hint of concern in her voice.

He hadn't been fully awake yet to remember the events of last night, nor to tune in to how his body was feeling. But as he took in her question, it all came flooding back to him and he instantly felt a kick to his chest.

He inhaled deeply and slowly released it as an attempt to steady himself.

He didn't want to talk about Shane. Not when the sun had just woken up and he had to get ready for work. Wait on people. Have conversations he didn't care to have. Make mediocre tips.

Not when he had to work a whole morning shift with him.

"Ilya?" Svetlana attempted again.

Ilya quickly looked down at the duvet and then right back up at Svetlana. He didn't want to talk about Shane, but that wasn't his only problem.

"*I think... I am having a crisis.*" Ilya tried to find his words but he didn't exactly know what the fuck he was trying to say.

"*About?*" Svetlana's eyebrows raised, confused.

"Um, *like with my... identity... or sexuality?*" He shrugged. "*I'm not really sure.*"

"*Okay... what made you —*" Svetlana waved her hand in the air.

This was where Ilya needed to tread carefully, as to not bring Shane's name up.

"*I don't know exactly. It's been bothering me for a couple of weeks, maybe? I feel very... confused.*" Ilya ran his hand through his fluffy hair, as a way to fidget with something.

Svetlana nodded, signaling that she understood what he meant. "*So you think that you might not just be attracted to women?*"

Ilya nodded. He'd admit, he wasn't giving her much to work with but he himself didn't have much to add to his answers.

He couldn't tell her that Shane ended the physical part of their friendship and that was why he came to her last night and cried for hours. She would just use that against him or as a reason for his confusion. And maybe it was, but not for the reason she would think.

Ilya didn't think he might be in to men, because of Shane. He thought that he might be in to men because of what he was willing to do, and has done, with a man— who happened to be Shane.

"*Well... there's no rush to put a label on your sexuality, Ilya. But if you want to understand what it is that you're confused about, you have to go find answers.*" Svetlana said gently.

Ilya rubbed at his face, recognizing that some of her words sounded like what he had been telling himself to do for days now.

"*Yeah... I know. It's just,*" he leaned forward, elbows on his thighs. "*— been a lot these past few days.*"

"*Well, you don't have to feel so alone in this, Ilyusha. You have me... and Shane. We would be more than happy to help you figure yourself out. Judgment free-zone.*" She smiled at him.

Ilya let out a snort, but then tried to cover the reaction by nodding quickly. "*Yeah.*"

He gave her a warm smile, specifically to her and not to what she had just said.

"*Yeah, I have both of you,*" he said as a way to bring the conversation to an end, even as the words caused a pang in his chest.

He left her room a few minutes later, only after she kicked him out again.

Ilya decided that he was going to try his best to get through the morning with his mood pretty much on the ground.

He could only hope to avoid Shane as long as possible. And he did, making it to his room, grabbing his towel and taking a quick shower without running into him.

He knew Shane was up and getting ready when he passed his room, having heard voices when he had walked the hallway to the bathroom.

With a towel wrapped around his waist and water trailing down from his hair and onto his shoulders, Ilya stood at the sink and reached for his toothbrush.

It was a habit for him to run his thumb along the bristles, before wetting them and then adding toothpaste. What he hadn't been expecting was to graze his thumb along the bristles and feel dampness.

Ilya paused, doing it again and seeing a shine on his thumb. He then brought the toothbrush to his nose and inhaled the fresh mint.

It wasn't unlike him and Shane to share a toothbrush. One of them would brush their teeth while the other had their morning piss, and then hand the toothbrush over while the other person pissed. It made it easier to fully wake up when one person talked and the other listened, and then switched roles instead of them both being in the bathroom in silence, brushing their teeth.

But what actually surprised Ilya was that even after last night, Shane had still used his.

Ilya debated using Shane's untouched toothbrush, but ultimately decided against it.

This wasn't physical intimacy but it still felt like *something*.

Unfortunately, for him, the events from last night played on repeat in his head. He hated it and it gave him a mild headache.

And though it hurt his heart, he wanted to respect it. Or wanted to *want* to respect Shane's relationship. As well as treat his Shane like everyone else in this house.

But, fuck, Ilya didn't *know* how to do that.

Holding the toothbrush still in his mouth, Ilya looked deeply at his sad face in the mirror for a long time, and decided he needed to get it the fuck together.

They managed to avoid each other most of the morning, until they both found themselves in the kitchen with Marleau who was also getting ready to go to work.

"Good morning," Shane had directed towards Ilya, when he didn't receive a response after the first greeting.

"I said 'Good Morning' already—" Marleau began from his seat at the table, looking up from his phone in one hand and coffee mug in the other.

"Not you," Shane, who was sat next to him, responded annoyed.

Ilya cleared his throat, and made a dramatic showing of pouring coffee into his mug and loudly putting the pot back into its place.

"Morning." he said once he turned and leaned against the counter.

Ilya had made it a point not to look at him when he walked in, but now he had accidentally found his eyes.

They looked at one another, Shane attempting to read Ilya's demeanor and failing. Ilya kept a blank expression on his face, feeling that he expressed too many emotions to Shane yesterday only for it to bite him in the ass. He averted his gaze, not wanting to look at him for too long.

"I made eggs and turkey bacon. Left some on the stove just in case you wanted." Shane offered. He knew that he could just eat some food at work, but he'd seen how much butter they added to the pan and was not a fan.

Ilya took a sip of his coffee, giving the air another long pause.

"I don't like eggs." Ilya said, dryly.

Shane scrunched his eyebrows in confusion. "You don't like eggs? Since when?"

Ilya shrugged, taking another sip of his coffee.

"You guys alright?" Marleau looked between the two, the air filled with weird energy.

"I'm perfect." Ilya said coolly.

Marleau stared at him for a second before tilting his head. "You sure? Because I've seen you devour a carton of eggs once before a game. I had even asked you if I could have one and you said 'Fuck off Marly, eggs are the breakfast of champions and you are not this'."

"I'm a changed person." Ilya argued. "Can't a man just want to drink black coffee in the kitchen with his two... *friends*?"

Shane slightly winced at that but tried not to let it show. Ilya hadn't said anything crazy or untrue. So the reaction was completely unwarranted.

Ilya downed the rest of his black coffee before putting the mug in the sink.

"I have an errand to do before work, so don't wait for me." Ilya said to Shane.

Shane felt instantly bummed, having looked forward to carpooling to work with Ilya like they always did when scheduled together.

"What errand?" Shane asked without thinking and Ilya only gave him a look before walking out of the kitchen.

Shane sighed down at the table before forcing himself to stand up and follow Ilya to the living room.

"Hey," he said, trailing Ilya. "Do you think we could talk really quick?"

Ilya didn't bother turning fully as he began putting on his jacket.

"For what?" Ilya's voice stayed even.

"I- I'm sorry, about last night. I—" Shane stuttered.

Ilya put his hand up to stop him.

"Is fine. Nothing to apologize for." Ilya tried to shrug as if he was unbothered. "See you at work."

Ilya grabbed the rest of his things from the console table near the door, and then made his way out of the house.

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After devouring three sausage, egg and cheese McGriddles in the car, Ilya quickly made his way inside, not wanting to be late two days in a row.

The shift started slow, as the customers trickled their way in. Soon enough all four scheduled waiters were running around in the small diner.

It was a mix of customers— truck drivers, older folks, families with kids, and regulars.

For the most part Shane and Ilya were able to do their jobs just fine— taking orders, pouring coffees and delivering food to tables.

They were able to forget until they accidentally make eye contact and both find themselves needing to take a deep inhale to regulate.

The morning had been easier, even with Ilya holding him at arm's length.

Easier despite Shane wanting to greet him with a morning kiss the second Ilya walked into the kitchen— something that had become another form of comfort the past few days.

Easier despite wishing Ilya had been in the bathroom with him when Shane used his toothbrush.

All of that had been easier than this.

"Everything looks delicious, please, enjoy." Shane told his guests with a smile, after dropping off their order.

He turned around, preparing to head to his new table to take their order. He paused briefly as Ilya passed by with a pot of coffee in hand. Naturally, Shane brought his hand up to touch the

back of his arm as he walked by. He felt his fingers on the back of Ilya's arm until he remembered he was no longer allowed to do things like this and removed his hand as if he was burned.

Ilya hadn't noticed, as it was something they both did multiple times out of habit. But when he heard Shane do a sharp inhale and felt his hand jerk, Ilya turned his head to look at him in response, almost concerned. Ilya hadn't stopped walking towards his table, but it only took him half a second to understand the reaction. And as composed as he was trying to be, Shane's reaction made him angrily huff.

Ilya's table was next to his, so Shane watched the whole thing up until Ilya shifted his facial expression back to a friendly one for his customers.

This happened a few more times in the first hour between both Shane and Ilya.

Realizing he had forgotten his customer's ramekin with the single serve butters, Ilya briskly made his way back to the pick-up window. He had momentarily stopped when he found Shane in the middle of where he was trying to walk, and grabbed his waist to move him over without interrupting his conversation with his customer. He swallowed, when Shane stopped speaking anyway to look at him for a second. If Ilya knew any better, he would think Shane looked softened by it.

The feeling of ease didn't last for Shane as his skin would tingle any time he had to get close to Ilya. Usually when it was time to run their table's check and the other person needed to grab something.

The register was located right above the shelf that held the silverware. It was a terrible placement— Ilya had always complained about it to the managers— but especially today.

Ilya had been running his table's credit card when Shane approached and bent down to grab four sets of silverware.

It was an awkward reach and Shane used Ilya's leg to steady himself before removing his hand.

"Sorry." Shane muttered.

It was an odd thing to apologize for— touching Ilya. Shane couldn't lie to himself about how much he hated having to think so much about where his hands landed. In the seven years they had been friends, Shane was never sorry for it.

Ilya rolled his eyes, knowing Shane couldn't see his face. He wanted to take every 'sorry' and apologetic expression from Shane, and shove it up his—

"It's fine." Ilya said annoyed.

Shane could hear it in his voice that Ilya was frustrated with him.

Was he doing too much to avoid contact?

It wasn't like they were doing anything odd. They were at work. Casual touches were bound to happen. Jess couldn't get mad over something like this.

And even more...

It wasn't 'gay' to do casual touches.

The suppressed thought about Ilya's confession blossomed to the front of his mind and Shane needed a brief moment to pause.

He had been moving around the diner very quickly for the past hour, but Shane took that pause to help clear his mind and refocus. He didn't want to think about the *conversation*. Not completely and not yet.

He had wanted to apologize for his reaction, earlier, but that was the only part he was willing to think about.

With one hand holding the set of silverware and napkins, Shane willed himself to stop overreacting to everything, and used his other hand to grab on to Ilya's pant leg to help himself up.

Shane had felt good about the move, but Ilya hadn't been expecting it.

Upon fully standing, Shane was met with Ilya's face turning to look at him. Ilya was still sporting a blank expression but with their faces only a few inches apart, Shane caught Ilya looking between his eyes. Shane had done the same, frozen to his spot as he felt compelled by Ilya finally fully looking at him today.

Obviously he wouldn't, but Ilya briefly wondered what would happen if he reclaimed his morning kiss. A thought that went against the wall he had put up in his mind.

If they were standing in an empty diner, and he kissed Shane, would Shane kiss him back?

Ilya wasn't sure, but with the way Shane's eyes dropped to look at his lips, he thought 'maybe'.

And Shane thought to himself, as he felt a desire creep up, 'maybe kissing could be a casual touch in private', but then was set on a hard 'no' immediately after.

'No' not because of Jess. But because of what Ilya told him last night about not knowing if he was straight. It would be a selfish thing for Shane to do, to kiss his best friend and maybe confuse him more just because Shane longed to feel Ilya's lips on his. Longed to wrap their arms around each other, faces buried in each others necks like they *would* have done this morning in the kitchen if they could.

Shane snapped out of the unwanted thoughts when Ilya grabbed the receipt paper from the printer, and resumed working by stepping away from Shane and going to his table.

In the next hour of the shift, Shane found himself trying to embrace the new normal of 'casual touches'.

Ilya hadn't known what shifted, or why Shane was touching him a lot more now— almost every time they passed by one another— but the wall he had put up crumbled a bit more. He didn't want it to. The facts were still there, the line was drawn, his heart still hurt. But every time Shane's hand lingered, Ilya felt himself relax.

"Ilya, your recommendation to add cheddar to the omelette was the best thing ever." His customer raved, bringing Ilya out of his head.

"Ah, thank you. Yes, I know," he said cheerfully, happy that they liked his suggestion. "It's my favorite thing to get from here."

From where he stood Ilya looked up and found Shane at the table next to his, pausing mid-listening to his customer to give him an angry kitten-like glare before continuing his conversation.

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"Hey," Shane walked up to Ilya who had been standing facing the pick-up window. Shane stood the opposite way, his side leaned against the wall below the window.

Ilya turned his head to look at him, not moving from his spot even with Shane standing so close.

"Uh," Shane held up his order pad up to read his scribble.

Aware that another waiter was trying to walk through the narrow space, Shane rested his hand on Ilya's abdomen and pressed closer to the wall to let her pass.

When she was gone, his hand stayed.

"Your table seven stopped me to ask if you could order them an extra hash brown with sour cream and bacon, and if you could make the son's pancakes with chocolate chips but not to burn them. Also, the lady said if it was possible, to keep her fries as keto-friendly as possible."

Ilya briefly looked down at the hand pressed against his clothed abdomen even after his coworker was long gone, and wondered if Shane could feel him tighten his stomach as a response.

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Did you explain to her that's not how it works?"

"Did I explain to your guest that half-keto does not activate ketosis as I watched her dump a shit load of white sugar in to her mocha latte?" Shane asked, sarcasm spilling into his voice and Ilya felt the slightest curve on his lips appear. "No. No, I didn't. I told her 'Yeah, of course. That's no problem'."

"Ah okay. That's probably the correct answer." Ilya agreed. He cleared his throat, still feeling Shane's hand on him. He took the paper out of Shane's other hand and read it over before saying, "Thank you."

Ilya only stuttered once while repeating the change to the cooks, feeling Shane's hand fall from his stomach as the other man walked away.

Ilya wasn't any better at his version of 'this is okay?' touches.

"Excuse me," he said to Shane, who was using the register, before lowering himself to grab utensils for a party of six.

While one hand grabbed the appropriate amount of forks and knives and napkins, Ilya steadied himself by holding on to Shane's other calf.

Simply because he wanted to, and because he heard Shane deeply exhale, he gently squeezed. On his way up, he let his hand trail the back of Shane's leg, intending to walk back to his party soon after.

Except, when Ilya's hand trailed up and came off of Shane's body, Shane quickly grabbed his hand to stop him from walking.

"Can you help me?" Shane asked.

"Yeah, of course." Ilya said easily, taking a step closer in to Shane's space, and putting that same hand on Shane's waist.

The reassurance came when Shane gently placed his own hand over where Ilya's rested.

Shane explained his confusion to Ilya, an issue Ilya was sure Shane could figure out on his own. Ilya was more than happy to help, a small part of his chest filling up with warmth at the fact that he was basically holding on to Shane and Shane was holding on to him. If Ilya leaned in closer, he would basically be able to hook his chin over Shane's shoulder, but they were at work and that would be too much.

"Thank you." Shane said, after they figured out how to resolve the problem. He ran his thumb along the back of Ilya's hand before returning to focus on work.

They continued on like this for another hour even as the breakfast crowd slowly made their way out, leaving only just a few tables filled.

Ilya had been counting the cash tip his customers had left him when he heard the bell on the door chime.

He hadn't bothered to look up until he heard a familiar voice that made his rising mood drop back down.

"Hey, baby." Jess said, strolling in with shopping bags on either side of her.

Ilya caught Shane's head turning at the sound of her voice, and the slight drop of the corner of his lips before putting on a face.

"Hey," Shane said with a warm smile, meeting Jess half way and giving her a hug.

Ilya greeted Svetlana who trailed right behind.

"I didn't know you were coming in." Ilya directed to Svetlana.

"Yeah, I thought you girls were going to that brunch spot with that iconic flower and moss wall, to take pictures in front of." Shane added.

After Svetlana put down her bags on the booth across from the countertop where Ilya stood, Ilya walked to the register and grabbed two sets of silverware to hand over to Shane.

"We were, but Jess *insisted* on coming to eat here." Svetlana casually shrugged.

"I missed you." Jess smiled sweetly at Shane, walking to the booth with him. "And this place is so... cute."

Ilya forced himself to turn away so that he could roll his eyes. He luckily still had a table so he occupied himself for the next few minutes with them.

"How was the morning?" Svetlana asked after walking to the counter and taking a seat on the stool once Ilya returned.

"It was good, lots of people as usual. Tips were good today." Ilya couldn't really complain. "*How was shopping?*" He switched to Russian.

Ilya asked but he didn't really care, not when it involved Jess.

He didn't hate her—he had no reason to. In fact, he always considered her more than an acquaintance even before Shane started dating her. They got slightly closer because she was dating his best friend, and after over two years he was bound to have gotten to know her slightly more than others.

But for today, even though he didn't hate her, he wasn't necessarily fond of being around her.

"*Oh my god, I found this cute shimmery gold dress that would go perfect with—*" Svetlana began but Ilya couldn't help but bring his attention to Shane and Jess.

They were having casual conversation, Shane standing by the table while Jess was sat in the booth.

"Can you get me a drink?" Jess asked with puppy dog eyes.

While Shane stepped away, Ilya brought his focus back to Svet.

"— *Maybe my hair pinned back, with my curls coming down to my shoulders. And I would do sort of like a smokey eye look, the way I did for prom—*" Svetlana rambled.

Shane approached the table again with a Coke in one hand and a tall glass with ice in it and a straw in the other hand.

He placed it on the table and was just about to open it.

"Babe, I don't drink Coke. I always get a Diet Coke, remember?" Jess asked with a little laugh in her voice as she questioned her boyfriend.

Ilya watched the whole interaction, but didn't think much of it. It was an easy mistake.

"Oh. Fuck, sorry." Shane said before retreating back to where they kept the sodas.

On his way there, Shane took a glance at Ilya who was leaned over the counter, attention fully on Svetlana. It was only brief that Ilya looked his way and they held eye contact.

Shane hoped that Ilya didn't catch his little mix up, and realize what he had done.

A little mix up that frustrated Shane more than it needed to, as this was some sort of showing that he was just not as good a boyfriend as he meant to be.

Determined to do better, Shane grabbed a Diet Coke and made his way back to the table. He didn't have any more tables but he was still on the clock so he couldn't sit for too long with his girlfriend. Not that it mattered too much since their boss wasn't there, having built trust with Shane and Ilya by this point.

Ilya averted his gaze from them back to Svetlana again, the sight of Shane sitting next to Jess making him uncomfortable.

He hadn't even realized Svetlana pulled out her phone to show him the dress she had tried on in the fitting room until she held it close enough to blur his vision.

Ilya pulled the phone away far enough to be able to look at the image.

"Oh, wow. Yes. You look very hot." Ilya acknowledged.

Svetlana pulled back the phone to look at the photo again. *"I really do, don't I?"*

Ilya laughed at how in to herself she was. It slightly distracted him until he saw Shane do something that made his heart fall.

Shane had worked himself up to be more open to the few things she mentioned yesterday that had stayed on his mind.

And if he was honest, she wasn't asking for too much. So he tried.

They were sat shoulder to shoulder, with Jess slightly turned to be able to look at him.

In the middle of Jess listing the places her and Svetlana had visited and how it went, Shane threw his arm around her waist and lowered himself a bit on the seat to be able to rest his head on her shoulder, nose nestled against her neck.

The shape of her felt wrong to him, but it wasn't. This was Jess after all— smaller, and easy to tuck against his side.

Ilya watched the movement, and that hurt. Watched Jess pause briefly at the new action from Shane that he had never done before.

But what killed him was Shane lifting his head a bit to kiss her jaw— the same spot where fourteen-year-old Shane had been kissing Ilya.

Something Shane had kept as theirs all these years.

Shane had done it to be better to her— only ever leaving a peck on Jess's cheek prior as a way to keep her content— but he hadn't expected his own action to cause such a strong visceral reaction of betrayal. His heart twisted, and bile raised in his stomach, and yet he remained there.

Ilya felt his throat constrict, unable to look away. He wanted to even when Jess, in her shock, looked directly at Ilya.

It wasn't vindictive. She didn't look like she was trying to rub it in his face. She didn't even smile as a reaction.

She was just... surprised.

Just as surprised as Ilya.

"Ilyusha, love, are you okay?" Ilya felt Svetlana's hand on his forearm, eyes wide in concern at seeing her best friends face flush.

Ilya forced his eyes to look at her, and forced a closed-mouth smile.

"Yes, sorry." he sighed, quietly. *"I'm going to check on my table again. Go order your food with Shane and I'll meet you back here?"*

"You don't want to just sit with us?" Svetlana asked, still obviously worried.

Ilya shook his head. *"No. I can't. Not while I still have customers."* He lied.

"Okay..." Svetlana said, despite knowing that Ilya had sat down with her and friends multiple times even while he had tables.

Ilya hadn't bothered stopping by his table, knowing they were fine. Instead, he went straight to the bathroom, locked the door and leaned his head against the tile wall. He scrunched his closed eyes, not wanting to cry. He heard himself breathing in shudders, trying to regulate in a way he hadn't been able to figure out since yesterday's argument.

It didn't fully work as he felt a few tears slide down his cheek. He sniffled and refused to let any more fall down.

Whatever part of his wall that had crumbled, he would reinforce with the strongest cement.

He had cried for hours last night, and now he was crying again?

And for *what*?

That was the part that had been driving him the most crazy.

Why the fuck did it matter what Shane did with Jess?

Why did it matter if they couldn't touch physically like before, anymore?

Earlier when Ilya looked in the mirror of his bathroom, he looked sad.

Now, as he looked into this mirror, he looked and felt angry. Angry at himself for letting someone control so many of his emotions. Angry at himself for acting so wounded like he didn't have free will to just do whatever the fuck he wanted.

With one wipe at his teary eyes, Ilya made his way out and walked straight to where Svetlana was sat again.

"Let's go out tonight," he said determined.

Svetlana startled a bit, not having expected his mood to shift so much. *"You want to go out tonight?"*

"Yes. My shift is over in about three hours. Well, four hours with the side work I have to do. We get ready, pre-game, and go to the club. You can even wear your new dress." Ilya suggested, knowing Svetlana would be completely on board.

"Fuck, yes! That's perfect." Svetlana cheered. *"Buy the bottle after work?"*

Ilya sighed in relief. *"Yeah, no problem."*

For the rest of the shift, Ilya talked to Svetlana and busied himself up until the girls left. After that, he pretended to be the busiest person ever, completely avoiding Shane in every way. In touch, and in eye contact. He refused to be where he was.

Shane noticed it.

Of course he did.

But after kissing Jess in *that* spot... after trying to treat her the way he does Ilya. Well...

He felt a little nauseous and anxious the rest of the three-ish hours of his shift.

Ilya ignored him completely, he noticed. But he deserved it.

He deserved it when Ilya didn't even bother to say 'bye' once their shift ended.

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Ilya stopped by the liquor store to purchase a medium-sized bottle of vodka for him and Svetlana. Along with that, he stared at the packs of cigarettes on the wall.

He hardly ever smoked, knowing Shane hated the smell. Ilya had always aimed to be a comfort for him.

And because of that, he purchased two packs of Marlboro Reds.

With the windows down, Ilya smoked a cigarette and drove around town. He decided to take longer to get home as he wasn't yet ready to be around *them* again.

It wouldn't take him long to freshen up and put on his sexy outfit of the night. But it would definitely take Svetlana a while, and she hated to be rushed. So he took his time.

By the time Ilya decided to go home two hours later, he felt pretty calm.

He had smoked two cigarettes in the car and one at Casgrain Park on one of the wooden benches. It was chilly but the cigarette had kept him warm.

Apparently three cigarettes weren't enough though as he walked into the house.

"No, but those heels are going to hurt after an hour. Just wear those." Svetlana instructed, pointing at a different set of heels in Jess's hands.

Ilya looked at the girls standing in the living room in dresses, weird-looking makeup on their faces. Then he noticed Marleau on the couch in a stylish button-down with the first few buttons open. Slacks, too?

Wyatt stood against the kitchen entryway in a fitted olive green mock neck, one hand full of Oreos.

"What the fuck is happening?" Ilya asked from where he still stood, with the door still open.

Everyone in the room simultaneously looked at him, and it made him even more frozen to the spot.

"Where have you been?" Svetlana asked, displeased. "It's hard to pre-game when there's nothing to drink."

Ilya held the black plastic bag up in his hand that contained the bottle.

"Um, first, it's only six. Relax." He reasoned with an attitude. "And, second—"

Ilya looked around the room again, still trying to process the sight.

"*Why the fuck is everyone dressed?*" He asked dumbfounded and annoyed.

Svetlana approached him, dropping the heels she had in her hand in favor of reaching for the plastic bag.

"*Didn't you say you wanted to go out?*" She asked, confused.

Ilya accidentally scoffed. *"Yes, but i didn't mean with the whole fucking house? I meant just you and I."*

"What're they saying?" Wyatt walked up to Marleau and asked him.

From the corner of his eyes, Ilya caught Marleau look up at Wyatt.

"Woah! How'd you know I became Russian overnight?" Marleau asked, sarcastically.

"How was I supposed to know? You said you wanted to go out. We all have gone out together almost every time?"

"Yeah, but..." Ilya wiped at his eyes, a sign that he grew irritated. *"Not when—"*

The issue in not having known how to tell her his dilemma, was that Svetlana—who was usually good at these things—didn't know what, or who, he was trying to avoid. He hadn't given her much to work with.

He sighed.

"Ilya, do you want me to tell them not to come? Or maybe we can go somewhere else and ditch them at a club?" Svetlana offered and it wasn't a bad idea. He knew Marleau and Wyatt couldn't care less. And if Jess was getting ready well then that meant Shane was coming. But it still felt a little mean to do.

"No... no, it's fine." He shook his head, feigning acceptance.

He smiled at her after she still remained unsure. He didn't blame her for anything. And it shouldn't matter who came with them, he was determined to have fun regardless.

"What the fuck is all over your faces?" He asked Svetlana, and then looked at Jess, who hadn't looked at him once since he walked in until just now. "You both look like mimes."

His heart dropped a little as he looked at her, dreading having to go out with her and Shane a bit. And it was such an odd feeling to dread that. Dreading being around Shane. Dreading being around Jess—who ultimately was someone he got along with for the most part. All because Ilya didn't know how to control his emotions.

"It's setting powder," Jess said, as she took off the heels she was wearing. "We don't keep it on our faces. It's just to help the makeup remain intact. "

"Ah, okay good. Would hate for you to scare off all of the people in the club. Empty club is boring." Ilya toed off his shoes, and felt Svetlana push at him gently before going to the coffee table and placing the bottle on top.

"It's going to be an empty and closed club by the time we get there if you don't get ready soon. You take longer than all of us." Jess said.

Marleau chuckled as he reached for the bottle.

"Lying liar. Toronto has made you forget important facts. I can be ready in ten minutes." He responded to her before he practically ran towards the man attempting to open his bottle. "Eh, no! I bought this bottle for me and Svetlana. You want a shot, go to the store." Ilya took the bottle right out of his hand.

"That's like a whole bottle, Ilya." Wyatt argued.

Maybe it was enough for them each to take two shots. But with the way Ilya wanted to get out of his head tonight, it was too small of a bottle.

"It's not enough for all of us." Ilya screwed the cap back on. "If we are pre-gaming we need more than this."

Marleau groaned before he stood up. "Alright, alright. Let's go, Hayes."

The two guys walked to the door.

"Good! Also grab me a Coke," he said as they walked out of the house.

He smiled when he heard a 'Fuck you.'

"Okay, Ilyusha. Come on. Jess is right. You take an hour just styling your hair. And that's after taking an hour to pick an outfit." Svetlana said, exasperatedly.

Ilya's jaw dropped in mock betrayal.

Jess paused looking in the mirror to look at Ilya and point at him.

"Ha. You see. Forgot important facts, my ass." she said, smugly.

"Et tu, brute?" Ilya said to Svetlana as he walked to the light switch and turned off the light in the hallway where Jess was standing, returning to look at herself in the mirror.

"You're so fucking annoying!" Jess exclaimed, as he quickly ran away before she could aim the heel in her hand at him.

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It took Ilya exactly an hour and a half to get ready, less time than the girls had claimed, and part of him wanted to say 'Ha' right back at them.

He decided to go for his animal print shirt, knowing a certain someone hated it, but he himself thought it looked hot. Along with that, he sprayed himself with the Tom Ford 'Black Orchid' cologne his mom had gotten him last Christmas.

He looked and smelled good, and it was something Ilya needed— or wanted, after experiencing a sort of rejection last night.

He hadn't seen Shane go downstairs but he did hear him when Ilya had almost stepped out of his room at the same time. Ilya gave it a full minute before he opened his door and made his

way down the stairs, his black boots in his hand to leave by the front door.

When he took the last step, he found everyone in the living room, pretty much ready. Shane had his back to the stairs, and Ilya only briefly looked at him. He wasn't surprised that Shane had settled for a white t-shirt and black jeans.

On the coffee table sat a bigger bottle of the one he had gotten, as well as a coke, and a bottle of cranberry juice.

"Ah, Canadians and their chasers." Ilya said, as he approached his friends.

Shane immediately turned around, not having realized Ilya had been upstairs with him that whole time. He took in the sight of Ilya wearing that awful shirt that clung to him in a way Shane always thought worked for him.

"Aren't you technically Canadian now?" Wyatt asked from his seat on the couch.

Ilya wasn't oblivious to the fact that Shane was looking at him, but he pretended not to notice.

"Uh, yes. But I wasn't born here and do not have Canadian blood. Fuck you very much." Ilya responded as he walked to the kitchen to grab six shot glasses from the cabinet.

"You look so hot, babe." Ilya heard Jess say from the living room, and gave himself a few seconds before he entered and saw something he didn't want to.

"Alright, everyone! Come on. First of the night." Ilya poured all of the shots and passed them out one by one.

He felt his heart stammer when he went to pass Shane his, and accidentally brushed his fingers against his.

They held eye contact for a half a second longer, not meaning to, before Ilya looked away.

Shane was at a loss for words ever since the diner, and he hadn't been able to remove the doomed feeling in the pit of his stomach. Ilya finally looking at him didn't make it better. It only reminded him that his friendship was falling apart right in front of him.

He was grateful that Jess had gone downstairs to get ready and left him to get some homework done before they went out. He barely got it done as he was unable to get out of his head.

After everyone received their shots, Ilya held his out.

"Here's to new experiences." Ilya toasted, and the rest of the group followed.

Everyone except Shane, who didn't understand what that was supposed to mean, but drank his shot half a second later than everybody else.

They all slammed their shot glasses down on the coffee tables, showing different expressions of disgust.

"I hate that one." Ilya said, taking a sip of his coke.

"That's what you say about every non-Russian brand." Shane responded, automatically.

Had it been anyone else, Ilya would have given a snarky response back. But with Shane, he wasn't particularly in the mood to banter. Not with only just one shot in his system. Maybe after five shots. *Maybe*.

Instead, he just nodded.

The nod only worked to hurt his feelings, but Shane tried not to let it show.

"Ilya. You think we could talk?" Wyatt asked him, gesturing his head to the kitchen.

Ilya's eyebrows scrunched in confusion but nodded and followed the man into the other room.

"What's up?" Ilya asked once they stood by the kitchen counter.

"Hey," Wyatt greeted, somewhat nervous.

Ilya raised his eyebrows, asking a silent question before speaking. "What the fuck do you want, Hayes?"

"Damn, chill." Wyatt put his hands up to attempt to calm him. "I was just... wondering if you've had any interesting conversations lately?"

"Interesting conversations?" Ilya questioned.

"Yeah... possibly with anyone in this house?" Wyatt failed to elaborate.

Ilya's eyes looked around the room, unsure of what the question was. "Huh?"

Wyatt cleared his throat. "I don't know if Shane told you, but I happened to be in the living room when he and Jess..." he trailed off.

It took Ilya a second to catch up. "Okay...?"

"And I heard some things. So I was just checking up on you. Making sure you and him were good." Wyatt asked nervously.

Ilya nodded, finally understanding. He rolled his eyes. "Yes. We are fine."

"Okay, great!" Wyatt said happily. "Good. That's good to hear."

Wyatt patted him on the shoulder but didn't walk away, still looking pensive.

"Is there anything else?" Ilya asked, suspiciously.

"Um..." Wyatt looked elsewhere before looking back to Ilya. "I just— think it's important that we maintain the balance of the house. I've really come to love all of you as roommates

and would be so heartbroken if that changed." He began to explain.

Ilya steadily sighed, a part of him sad that his dynamic with Shane was already affecting the house.

"So, um... I was wondering," Wyatt continued.

Ilya watched Wyatt audibly swallow, and the sadness immediately gave way to amusement at whatever the fuck was going on with his roommate.

In the span of a second, he watched him go from nervous, to then taking a deep breath followed by forced determination.

"If you ever need someone to, like, cuddle with or kiss or whatever you look for in a close friendship. I can be that for you."

With everything inside him, Ilya suppressed the surprised laugh that bubbled in his chest. Struggling to do so, Ilya pressed his fist against his lips. "Mhmm."

"I'm serious. Whatever you need man." Wyatt said, seriousness dripping from his voice. "You guys always told me it was just a bonding thing and I— I think I can do that. Whatever it takes to keep everyone in the house happy."

Ilya nodded, only letting slip a silent short laugh. "You're a good friend."

"Thank you." Wyatt said, touched.

Ilya looked around the kitchen before he looked back at Wyatt, and tried to remain calm even though this was the lightest he'd felt all day.

"Can I get a kiss now?" he sniffed.

Ilya tried not to give it away that he was bluffing. From what little he knew of Wyatt, he was certain that the other man wouldn't.

"Wait— like *right now* right now?" Wyatt's eyes widened.

Ilya nodded. "Да, yes. Please."

Wyatt stared at him before dropping his eyes down to Ilya's lips.

He nodded, audibly swallowing again.

"Yeah, sure." He shook his head, trying for 'determination' again.

Ilya tried not to smile as Wyatt leaned in close.

He was impressed that the man had gotten a centimeter away from his own lips before completely pulling back.

"Fuck!—" Wyatt took a step back. "Fuck. I'm sorry. I can—"

"Is okay." Ilya smiled wide, laughing a bit in to his hand before reining it in.

Wyatt placed both hands on the kitchen counter and muttered another curse word under his breath.

A part of Ilya felt bad even though he was mostly amused.

He gently patted Wyatt on the shoulder. "Come on. Let's go take another shot."

"I really tried, Ilya." Wyatt said, apologetically.

"I know. Is okay."

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The club was packed the way they expected it to be on a Saturday night.

It took them half an hour to get through the line. The wait was worth it for the crowd alone. The red and blue strobe lights moved across the room, illuminating the space. The music played loudly—a mix of house, electronic, and techno.

Clubs weren't usually spots Shane preferred to be at but it was where Jess wanted to go on her last day. A part of him felt like Ilya hadn't necessarily wanted him here, but there was no way for him to avoid it.

He knew the way the night was going to go. The way it always did.

The only difference was that his girlfriend was here, and he could leave with her while Ilya left with whatever girl he sought out.

"Let's go to the bar." Svetlana said loudly to the group.

After waiting for a few people to clear the area, some of them began to order with the bartender.

When it got to Jess, Ilya unwillingly overheard the conversation. He had made sure to keep Svetlana in between him and Shane.

"Can I get two Bulleit on the rocks." She ordered, with Shane standing right behind her.

"No." Ilya said loudly so that the bartender could hear him, then he turned to Jess.

By this point they were all lightly buzzed, except Shane who had only drunk the one shot so that he could drive everyone home.

"He already had vodka." Ilya explained directly to Jess, not wanting to overstep but wanting to save his... friend from a mean migraine. "If you give him bourbon, he's going to have a hangover for two days."

He and Jess had been pretty civil the whole time she was visiting, but this was the first time Ilya noticed her actually looking annoyed with him for real.

"Thanks, Ilya, but I think I know my boyfriend better than you do." Jess said, matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, I'm sure you do." Ilya responded back, somewhat sarcastically. "But he has an exam on Monday, so maybe, listen to what I'm saying."

"Ilyusha..." Svetlana gently pushed him away after he began crowding her space.

Shane watched their discussion, and found himself quiet, surprised that Ilya felt compelled to speak up.

He brought himself back to the moment though when he caught Jess's anger begin to rise. "Jess," Shane put his hands on her shoulders and leaned in so that she could hear him. "It's okay. Just get me a Belvedere on the rocks."

Ilya turned away once he saw Shane standing closer to her.

Before, when he was fully sober, he could avert his eyes and be fine as long as he didn't have to watch him. But now, many shots in, Ilya felt a part of him hating watching them be physically intimate.

A lot of Shane's actions were new, and Ilya couldn't stand it.

But how could he explain to himself what it was that he was feeling?

Jealousy?

'Fuck—' Ilya thought to himself.

"I'll get a Corona." Ilya asked the bartender. "And a can of ginger ale." He added after, for the stupid and annoying reason of him knowing that Shane didn't like his liquor straight unless it was to take it down in one shot.

Ilya handed over his card to pay immediately, and gladly accepted his beer and the can of ginger ale.

Before Shane could begin sipping on his vodka, he felt Ilya push something against his shoulder for him to grab quickly, not pausing his walk to the other guys to look Shane's way.

Shane looked down at the object and his heart swelled slightly as he saw the can of ginger ale.

With Jess's back still turned to him as she talked to Svetlana, Shane quickly poured the can into his cup. He hadn't wanted to offend her for guessing his drink order wrong especially since he guessed hers wrong earlier. But Ilya was right. He would have been so frustrated if he had gotten a hangover that would last him through his exam, and then found out he didn't do as well as he could have.

It took them all a few minutes to fall in tune with the vibes of the club before they all found themselves on the dance floor.

Ilya had wanted to come here to let go of all of his problems for a night. Granted, his problem was here with him, dancing awkwardly with his girlfriend, but still. Ilya was beginning to have fun, as long as he didn't look at Jess dancing with Shane.

Any outing with his group, especially with Marleau and Svetlana, was a great time.

Shane wasn't drunk, he didn't intend to be, but he was also having fun. His favorite parts were his friends dancing ridiculously. It made him laugh.

During a Bad Bunny song, Rose appeared, and soon the three girls were dancing together. Marleau and Wyatt threw their arms over Ilya and Shane's shoulders, attempting a loose semicircle with Shane and Ilya in the middle.

In one awkward pause, not expecting to be pushed together, Shane and Ilya hesitantly placed their hands on each other's backs.

After swallowing a big gulp of his beer, Ilya joined Marleau in attempting to recite the lyrics. Ilya surprisingly was very good at it, even though he didn't know what the words meant.

Shane smiled through the whole thing, and even bounced on his feet with their movements.

When Ilya took a brief pause from singing loudly, he turned his head and found Shane looking at him.

He didn't look away. Instead he nodded, and took a few sips from his beer.

Ilya felt light, only having had enough drinks to have a good time. He had a higher tolerance than most.

Cigarette smoke clung to Ilya beneath his cologne, something Shane had noticed in the car on the way over. If they had been fine, he would have called him out on it.

Instead, Shane nodded in response, then took a sip of his vodka ginger ale.

If Ilya felt Shane move his hand to the small of his back, he pretended not to notice.

And if Shane felt Ilya's thumb rub at his side, he pretended not to notice.

During the next song, Shane noticed Jess's eyes on him and then moved to Ilya before she moved away from the other girls and made her way over to him.

He let go of the other guys right away to put his hands on her waist, as a way to reassure her they were all just having fun. Luckily, she only smiled before throwing her arms around his neck.

Ilya moved away, not needing to be so close to them and attempted to find whatever good mood he had been in.

It didn't take long, as he continued dancing, with Svetlana and Rose.

"We're just gonna go to the bar." Wyatt said loudly to Ilya, and Ilya just nodded as Wyatt and Marleau walked away.

Svetlana was good at not making him feel like a third, or fifth, wheel as she held his hand while they danced.

Ilya had his eyes closed as he danced to the music, and was content, until he opened his eyes and saw right before him, Jess grinding against Shane.

Shane wasn't necessarily dancing. More so just holding on to her waist with one hand as she swayed side to side. He looked uncomfortable.

But still, Ilya's suppressed rage became present again.

Wiping at his face, Ilya leaned in to Svetlana's ear. *"Okay, I'm going to go do my own thing. Are you good here?"*

He pulled back to find Svetlana sporting a wide smile, clearly somewhat tipsy. *"Yes. Was just about to head to the bar. Go. Have fun."* She encouraged, giving him a knowing look.

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When the song ended, Shane maneuvered himself and Jess back to the bar, having seen his friends over there.

"Do you want another drink?" Jess asked him.

He held up the half empty cup in his hand and she rolled her eyes.

"Jeez, you are babysitting that drink like crazy."

Shane smiled before looking around, casually.

He was only able to spot the girls, and Wyatt.

Not wanting to raise any flags in Jess's mind, he leaned towards Wyatt and asked, "Where's Marly?"

"Oh!" Wyatt gently smacked Shane on the chest with the back of his hand. "That girl. Alyssa? She was legit at the bar when we walked over."

Shane laughed. "Wait, the girl he hooked up with and never texted him back after?"

"Yeah, her! By the way, respectfully, she is way hotter in person. Which is crazy because..." Wyatt paused to look at Jess. "Jess, I kid you not. That girl is chef's kiss."

Jess shook her head, amused. "Wow, she sounds hot!"

"Okay," Shane jokingly rolled his eyes. "So then what happened?"

"Shane. Brother." Wyatt placed his hand on Shane's shoulder, while holding a drink in the other. "I have never... and I mean NEVER... have seen Marly spit such game before. I'm talking 'God tier'"

"Marly?!" Shane's voice raised.

Wyatt nodded exaggeratedly.

"Yes. *She* asked *him* to dance." Wyatt then motioned his hand in a way to express his head exploding.

"I would have never seen that coming. Wow." Jess reacted.

They all laughed.

After a minute, Shane looked around again and then asked the main question. "And, uh... Where's Ilya?"

That question gave Wyatt pause. He looked around too, suddenly resembling a lost duckling. As Shane watched him, Svetlana and Rose approached.

"I have no idea." Wyatt concluded.

"What happened?" Svetlana asked.

"Guys..." Jess said, her voice making Shane pause in his search and look at her.

She stared off to a specific spot somewhere behind him.

"Is that Ilya?... Dancing with a guy?" Jess asked and pointed towards where she spotted Ilya.

Shane felt his heart fall before he could find him.

And once he did, it felt as if the whole room froze. Directly in his line of sight he watched a man's back pressed against Ilya's as they ground their hips to the music. Ilya had his lips pressed to the stranger's neck, while the stranger had his hand reaching behind to run it through Ilya's hair.

"Holy fuck— it is." Rose said. Shane was surprised he was able to hear her words despite the fact that the blood rushing in his ears was loud.

"I think I know him? He's that Russian guy that doesn't go to McGill but is always at the parties." Svetlana explained.

In a movement that Shane swore was meant for him, Ilya looked up and made eye contact with him before guiding the Russian stranger to turn in his arms.

Ilya leaned in and began making out with the stranger while continuing their dance, and that completely gutted Shane.

"Oh, wow. That's— wow." Jess stuttered.

Shane couldn't breathe. He didn't know what this feeling was but he thought that maybe he was on the actual verge of having a panic attack in the middle of a fucking club.

"They're just... kissing. Just like that?" Wyatt asked the group and if Shane wasn't too stunned to speak, he would tell Wyatt to shut the fuck up.

"I mean, yeah. Obviously." Rose responded.

"Hmm... I can't believe Ilya found another straight guy in this club that would kiss him." Wyatt said, amazed.

"Hey pal... you just blow in from stupid town?" Jess moved, to look directly at Wyatt.

"Fuck. I think my brain's been infected. I didn't hear my words until you just said that..." Wyatt huffed a laugh before shaking his head. "I need to disinfect my brain with another vodka orange juice."

Shane felt as the group moved away from him, but he remained. He felt his eyes fill with tears that wouldn't fall. And his body filled with an anger he couldn't describe. Whatever anger that made a person want to set the place on fire.

A sight like this forced him to face something he had been avoiding all day. Coming to terms with Ilya not being straight.

Ilya was kissing a man.

A man that wasn't Shane.

This was different from every other time Shane had seen Ilya kissing a woman. Shane had been used to that.

Not this though. This was...

"Did you know about this?" Jess asked, forcing Shane to look away.

"About?" His voice wavered. He cleared it, and realized he should probably control his face.

"This. Ilya being in to guys."

In an attempt to not make it seem like a big deal, Shane grabbed both of her hands and shrugged nonchalantly.

"I knew he was... open to guys? You know how it goes. College student trying to... experiment?" Shane responded.

This was a topic Rose had explained to him after she told him Myles had a threesome with two girls, after thinking he was fully gay.

"Oh. Yeah, I guess that makes sense?" Jess agreed. He felt relieved, because any answer he gave could have led to a really bad conversation about him and Ilya again.

Against his will, the group pulled Shane back to the dance floor and Shane didn't know how to do this. Dance when he had no desire.

All Shane could manage to do was look at Ilya every few seconds. Watch as Ilya and the stranger, 'Sasha' as Svetlana clarified, danced and then kissed.

Ilya knew Shane was watching.

He hadn't expected to find a guy so quickly to dance with, but Ilya wasn't an idiot. He was hot. He looked good. And when his eyes met with Sasha's, someone he'd seen at a bunch of Troy's parties, it was easy.

Was he trying to get a reaction out of Shane? Not necessarily.

Ilya had been nervous to dance with Sasha, this being the first time he'd be dancing intimately with another guy. But he found that his body moved naturally.

Sasha knew how to dance.

Sasha was also... hot. It took Ilya forcing himself to stop thinking about Shane for a second to realize, Sasha was actually very attractive.

And most importantly, he actually didn't mind kissing him. Not at all.

It wasn't anything like kissing Shane, he'd admit. Sasha moved his lips differently and was more aggressive.

That was what Shane noticed, as he watched Sasha kissing Ilya.

He didn't do it right.

Sure, Ilya looked like he was having fun, but he wasn't lost in it. Not the way he lost himself with Shane.

In a moment of frustration, Shane turned a dancing Jess around and connected his lips to hers.

This was a surprise as Shane was adamant on keeping PDA to a minimum, but in this moment he just couldn't fucking care.

In the middle of Sasha biting on Ilya's lip and tugging on it, he opened his eyes to find Shane looking directly at him.

Shane, who had both hands on either side of the back of Jess's head, kissing her.

At this, Ilya felt his jealousy coming back so he decided to make a show of his makeout.

Shane decided to do the same.

They kissed their partners passionately and deeply. And whenever given the chance, they opened their eyes to watch the other person.

Shane kissed Jess in a way he never had. And he knew she was enjoying it with the way she kissed him back with the same intensity.

Shane hated seeing Ilya be like this with someone else.

Memories flashed in his head, back to every moment they shared getting lost in each other.

Watching Ilya run his hands down Sasha's back, down to his ass made him feel sick.

Ilya licked into Sasha's mouth, and though it felt good, his whole body wished he were doing this to Shane.

Wished it was him, that Shane had his arms wrapped around instead of Jess.

They were under a spell, trying to get a reaction out of each other. A spell that broke, when Jess pulled back to take a breath.

Shane looked at Jess as if he'd forgotten she was the one in front of him.

"Wow, baby. What's gotten in to you?" Jess asked, breathlessly.

Upon seeing Shane's attention elsewhere, Ilya stopped the little show.

"Fuck. I knew you were 'bi' this whole time with the way you and that guy always acted at the parties, but I didn't think you were open to the rest of the guys on campus. Feels like a wasted semester." Sasha joked and Ilya reacted with an honest laugh.

He couldn't stop lingering on the word that stuck out to him. One that should have been obvious this whole time.

'Bi.'

'Bisexual.'

Ilya being into women, and into whatever he had been doing with Shane, meant he was... bisexual.

Ilya couldn't help but shake his head at how stupid it all was to realize *now*.

"Wait. Rest of the guys on campus?" Ilya questioned. "You don't even go here."

He joked, making Sasha laugh.

"I'm pretty sure your major is just 'College Parties'."

Shane didn't know what Sasha and Ilya were talking about from where he stood, but with the way they were laughing, he knew he no longer had Ilya's attention.

The comedown was brutal, and it made it even worse that he had to keep fucking dancing. He badly just wanted to leave and end the night, not caring anymore that this was Jess's last day here.

Needing a break from the lights, Shane lowered his head on to Jess's shoulder and closed his eyes.

He thought he had only done that for a minute, maybe two. Not a long time at all. But clearly long enough to no longer be able to spot Ilya in the same location he was before.

A thought flashed through Shane's brain, as he looked around to see if he could find where they went.

A thought of Ilya having *new experiences*.

A flash of Ilya and Sasha kissing until it led to something else.

And that, that was what undid him.

In a moment of panic, he pushed Jess off of him. Not aggressively, never that. But enough to startle her.

"Shane, are you okay?" Jess asked, concerned.

"I-I have to—" He dizzily looked around the room covered in purple and red.

Whatever control he had all day over his expressions, was lost.

"You have to...? What?" Jess put her hands on Shane's arms but he jerked away.

He looked back to the spot Ilya had been, regretting not having kept his eyes on him. For not holding Ilya's attention. For treating him like shit all day.

He felt Jess look all over his face before turning to look to where Shane was staring.

"You..." Jess said slowly but loud enough for him to hear. "Oh my god. You—"

Shane looked around again, and felt his leg take a step towards whatever direction. He didn't go anywhere though when he felt Jess grab his arm with a little force.

"You kissed me like that because of him?" The look on Jess's face was one of deep hurt and confusion and pure anger. "To what? Get him jealous? I— I thought you were finally starting to... but..."

Jess was a pretty confident person. Always had been since he met her. But looking at her now, he could see the mask had fallen and she was spiraling as well.

"I didn't mean to. But Jess—" Shane shook his head, tears glossing his eyes. He tried to take a step around her but she blocked his way again.

"Fuck!" Jess ran her hand through her hair. "I'm... I'm in love with someone that's in love with someone else."

"I'm not..." Shane shook his head even harder, stopping his attempt to leave.

That wasn't what this was, was it?

Fuck... was it?

"Are you kidding?" Jess's eyes snapped back to his, tears finally falling down.

Shane couldn't hear it but he could tell she was breathing quickly, trying to catch a real breath.

"Shane, you could barely stand still, you're so eager to go find him! All day, you were doing things you had *never* done with me and you didn't even look happy about it." Jess argued.

Shane closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. He was taking too long here. By this point Ilya could be fuc—

"Jess, please." Shane pleaded, opening his eyes to look at her.

"If you walk away from me right now, we're done." Real tears streamed down Jess's face. "I can't compete with Ilya forever."

Those words hurt Shane's heart. He had tried so hard all day to be better, but just... couldn't.

Shane wiped the tears from his eyes, not bothering to look at her again as he walked away to look for *him*.

Shane ignored his friends, asking 'what happened' and 'Shane, are you okay?' as he briskly walked past them.

He felt like he was going insane as he looked every which way, trying to find blond curls and an ugly animal print shirt. He searched at the bar, along the walls of the club, and even pulled out his phone to check their shared location.

It said he was still here.

Shane decided to check the last place that made sense. He made his way to the bathroom. If he couldn't find Ilya there, then at least he could finally throw up.

Luckily there wasn't a line, not that that would have stopped him. Shane walked in and noticed two guys at the urinals, but paid no mind to them. He pushed open every stall and one by one found them to be empty until he reached the last one.

Through the little crack of the stall, he caught a glimpse of blonde curls and without much thought, forcefully pushed the door open with his shoulder. The lock gave easily.

Ilya snapped his eyes up to find Shane heavily breathing and taking in the sight of Sasha on his knees, holding Ilya's condom-covered cock in his hand as he was just about to begin sucking on it.

Everyone froze in that second, and Ilya knew that the image of Shane's face falling would forever be ingrained in his mind.

Shane barely registered Sasha's stunned reaction.

For Shane, it was overwhelming. Every bad emotion hit at once, but defeat and embarrassment were the strongest.

He really just stormed into the bathroom and stopped Ilya from getting a blowjob from another guy. He really ruined his best friend's fun for his own selfish reasons.

"Fuck— I'm... I'm sorry." Shane ran his hand through his hair and looked up at the ceiling before willing himself to leave.

He needed to leave this fucking building.

The moment Shane stepped out into the cool outside air, it filled his lungs in the way he badly needed. He walked down the sidewalk, no destination in mind.

Jess's words played over and over again in his head.

And he, again, thought to himself...

Was it?

Was it that he was in love with his best friend?

Was that why his heart felt completely shattered. Not even because his girlfriend had just broken up with him, but because his best friend had just been, and still might be, about to do something intimate with another guy.

Was that why the flashes of Ilya's naked body moving with Sasha's, of them laughing themselves to sleep, were killing him?

Shane stopped moving, and pressed his palms against his crying eyes.

Fuck.

It *was* that.

Author's Comments!! :)

- Please don't hate me too much... 🙄

-I'm super allergic to eggs so for a good amount of time I was like 'is it case of eggs? container? What is it that they put it in?' and then I was left wondering how much you people can actually eat in one sitting.

- My head started hurting after listening to Bad Bunny club mix the whole time I wrote the club scene.

- If you're curious, they were dancing and singing along to 'Efecto' and 'Titi me Pregunto'

- Wyatt is the bestest friend and roommate. His mind has been poisoned by what Shane and Ilya think is normal and what isn't.

- So proud of Marly frfr

-Lastly, PLEASE do NOT ask me when the next update is. I know it's coming from a good place, but I get instantly anxious. I write when I can and am not working. I don't know when the next update is. But if it helps, it's always been around every other week.

Chapter 6: Truths

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya figure some things out about themselves. Apparently, they were wrong about what they believed the whole time.

Chapter Notes

This has been a fun journey and I'm more grateful than you all know. I started this as something fun to do over the summer, and was very content even if no one had actually stumbled across it.

You have all made my heart 1000x fuller.

Thank you for your patience, and please enjoy! ❤️❤️

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

Ilya looked around the cafeteria at all the kids who he didn't know yet, but recognized after just a few days of being there.

There was the girl who wore colorful tights under her skirts.

The kid who always ran from their ESL class to the next class once the bell rang, even though Ilya seemed to always make it in time with no problem, at a regular pace.

And another kid who, so far, had brought gourmet lunches every day and showed them off to his friends while everyone else had to eat whatever the school provided.

Ilya hadn't talked to anyone, but he watched everyone. He listened.

He tried to understand what some of them were saying with his very limited knowledge of English. It was something he was working hard at.

His teachers tried to slow their speech even when they said words he had no idea the meaning of, such as 'curriculum' and 'meatloaf'.

Of course, now that he had 'meatloaf' in front of him on his tray, he understood that it was 'мясной рулет' with no stuffing— not even a boiled egg. It was okay. Nothing to be super excited about the way they seemed to be when they told him.

Ilya poked at it with his fork as he looked at the kid at the next table over showing his friends what he got in his lunch box. A sandwich that was made to look like a dinosaur.

He wondered if maybe he should go over and try to make friends with them. His mother had encouraged him to try putting himself out there but it was hard.

Ilya had pretty much remained silent since starting and everyone seemed to already have their group of friends. What if when he finally tried to make an effort, everyone would know he could barely speak and understand English and then not want to befriend him? What if instead of leaving him alone, they all started making fun of him?

Ilya, while still resting his face in his propped hand, continued to play with his food instead of eating it.

"Hey," a stranger's voice came out of nowhere.

Ilya blinked hard, snapped out of his daydream to find a kid standing next to where he was sitting. Ilya was at the far end of a long cafeteria table, while the other half had been occupied by a group of girls.

He looked at the other kid— hair spiked with gel, wearing a blue short-sleeve Henley.

Ilya nodded in acknowledgement, still not confident in speaking.

"I'm Shane. I'm in your math class. You've probably never noticed me, I sit all the way in the front." The kid stuck his hand out.

Ilya only caught some of that. Shane from math was speaking faster than he probably realized.

Ilya studied the hand in front of him.

He took it hesitantly.

"Ilya," he said lower than he should, considering the cafeteria was pretty loud.

"Ilya. That's a cool name." Shane shook his hand.

Ilya felt a barely-there smile creep onto his face at the proper way Shane shook his hand.

"Uh, I've seen you sitting here alone these past few days and I was wondering if you'd like to come sit with me and my friends J.J and Hayden. I'm sure being the new kid probably sucks."

Again, Shane was speaking too quickly for Ilya, but it helped that he pointed towards another table, where two kids were staring at them. The other kids waved their hands as if to say 'hello'.

Shane turned back to him, waiting for an answer.

The invitation was a surprise. Ilya was inclined to say 'нет. no' — a habit he'd formed where he'd say a word in Russian first and then in English right after. But Shane looked ... nice. Ilya could be wrong, but a part of him felt like Shane wouldn't be the kid that would make fun of

his English. And if after today they never spoke to each other again, at least Ilya would have had someone to eat lunch with.

Ilya nodded. "да... yes. Okey."

Ilya tried not to let the slight excitement he felt build. It was hard though, Shane smiled brightly and it made Ilya want to smile back.

They walked to Shane's table, and he sat beside him in the empty chair Shane had gotten from somewhere else. J.J. and Hayden greeted him— not as enthusiastically but still kindly.

"Are you eating that?" Shane asked him, and Ilya looked at the finger that was pointing at his food.

Ilya shook his head, deciding that he had no interest in taking another bite. "нет. No."

"Here."

Shane reached into his lunch bag and pulled out a container that looked identical to the one that was opened in front of him, and placed it in front of Ilya.

"My mom always gives me two meals on Tuesdays and Thursdays to bring with me even though I tell her Mrs. Pike, Hayden's mom, always makes us something to eat after school. Usually I just give it back to her and my dad sometimes eats it or whatever but you can have it." Shane shrugged.

Ilya gave a nervous, closed-mouth smile, having understood almost none of that. He stared at the unopened container in front of him, unsure if he should open it.

"It's spaghetti." Shane clarified, and at that Ilya perked up.

'Spaghetti' was the same word in any language, just pronounced slightly different.

Before he fully went and opened the container, he stopped himself and looked at Shane.

"Is okey?" he asked him, not wanting to be impolite.

Shane gave him a warm smile and nodded.

"Yeah, my mom won't mind. I think she'd be happy I shared with a classmate instead of it going to waste."

"Спасибо (Spasibo)— Thank you."

Ilya took a bite of the still-warm pasta and was delighted to find how good it was. As he and Shane went about eating their spaghetti, Ilya tuned into the conversation at the table.

Shane, J.J. and Hayden went right into a conversation he couldn't keep up with but he tried.

"No way! He should just sit out for a few more games. Make sure his ankle is healed first and not do anything stupid." Shane argued.

"Shane, how could you say that? The Metros suck right now without him!" Hayden argued back and J.J. nodded as if to back him up.

Shane scoffed, and rolled his eyes before looking to Ilya.

"What do you think?" Shane asked him.

Ilya, with a mouth full of pasta, tried to replay whatever words he had recognized in their back-and-forth.

When the words 'games', 'ankle', and 'without him' failed to give him context, he swallowed down the pasta.

"I— I don't know what..." he tried to find the words but just shrugged his shoulders.

While Hayden went about saying something to J.J., Shane brought his full attention to Ilya.

"We're talking about hockey. Do you know hockey?"

'Hockey' was the same word in any language.

Ilya perked up again. "Hockey. да. Yes. I... uh— played?" His last word came out as a question as he was unsure of his phrasing.

"You did?" Shane's eyes widened.

Ilya nodded. "In Russia."

"Woah, that's awesome. All three of us play too." Shane gestured to each of them. "What position do you play?"

Ilya understood the question but didn't know how to answer. Was the word 'center' in Russian the same in English?

Not wanting to say the wrong word, Ilya put his fork down and pulled out his notebook from his backpack along with a pencil. He placed the notebook on the table and drew every position as well as the goal.

"Here." He pointed to center position once he was done.

"Oh! Center. Same as me." Shane said excitedly. Ilya smiled. Actually smiled big— happy that the English pronunciation was extremely similar to the word in Russian.

"Yes. Center."

Shane went over the positions that both Hayden and J.J. played and for the rest of the time, talked about the hockey team they were a part of. Ilya didn't understand everything Shane

said but it didn't matter.

Shane talked about the sport excitedly and when he thought Ilya didn't understand, he slowed down to explain it to him as best as he could. Ilya would respond here and there, trying his best to be present in the conversation. But he was content with just listening to Shane.

"There's this frozen lake near Hayden's that we sometimes like to skate on after school. I think we might go Tuesday. Would you like to come? I have an extra pair of skates." Shane asked him, and though it took him a minute to understand, Ilya felt touched when he finally did.

Shane from math was asking him to hang out next week. Shane from math gave him someone to sit with during lunch. Shane from math shared his food with him and talked about his favorite thing in the world.

As the bell rung, they all went about cleaning after themselves and grabbing their things. Ilya found his way back to Shane once his book bag was back on his shoulders.

"Yes. I go— Tuesday. I tell my mama." Ilya walked next to him as they made their way out of the cafeteria.

"Oh, I should probably..." Shane paused in his steps for a moment before pulling Ilya gently by the arm to stand near a wall.

Ilya wasn't sure what Shane was doing but he watched him as he tore a piece of paper from his notebook and wrote something down.

"This is my mom's number. If your mom is okay with you going, tell her to call this number so that my mom can tell her where it is and plan pick-ups or whatever. She always wants to make sure my friends can get home safely." Shane handed Ilya the piece of paper and Ilya only stared at it.

He smiled to himself.

Shane from math just called him his friend.

"Okey." Ilya said lowly.

"Anyway, don't want to be late. I'll see you later in math class?"

Ilya nodded and watched Shane take a step away from him before he shot his hand out to gently grab onto Shane's wrist.

"Uh, Shane?"

Shane stopped himself from walking to turn to look at him. He gave Ilya a curious look.

"Tell your ... mama? Tell her I said— thank you for pasta."

Shane smiled gently and nodded before walking away.

Ilya scanned the paper in his hands, scribbled with a messy phone number, and smiled before folding it and tucking it into the front pouch of his backpack.

~.~.~

Ilya felt a sudden wave of vertigo as he watched the stall door slam against the broken lock a few times until it slowed to a close.

It took him ten seconds to form a coherent thought— *'what the fuck'*— and another ten seconds to decide to move.

"Fuck—" Sasha chuckled in surprise as he stood up from the dirty tiled floor, probably realizing that their night together was over before it started. "Boyfriend caught you cheating?"

Ilya ripped off the condom and tossed it into the toilet.

"Not my boyfriend." Ilya responded weakly.

His mind wasn't in the room with them. It was wherever Shane had just stormed off to.

Ilya brought up his pants quickly, not sparing Sasha a glance as he tucked his flaccid dick back in.

"Yeah, okay. *That look gave completely heartbroken if I've ever seen it.*" Sasha wiped his hand on his leather pants, switching to Russian. *"And you're clearly wrapped around his finger, or else my lips would have been wrapped around your cock right about now.* But alas, I'm not here for drama so..."

Sasha walked out, waving a hand in the air as a way to say 'goodbye', before leaving Ilya in the stall alone to finish adjusting his clothes.

He was somewhat grateful that Sasha left on his own because he would have probably just left him there on his knees otherwise.

Ilya rushed out of the bathroom soon after— not bothering to think twice about anything Sasha had said.

He didn't care what Sasha— or anyone— thought of him and Shane.

He didn't even care that he didn't get a blow job just now.

Granted, he had been enjoying Sasha's company. It was nice to dance with him. To kiss him. To almost fuck his mouth. It was nice to take a break from what had been hurting him most of the day, and to explore himself in a way he hadn't before.

It was a nice surprise to know that he wasn't just attracted to Shane but men in general.

But it didn't matter to him to follow through with a physical experience with someone else, if Shane was out there somewhere looking completely crestfallen.

None of it mattered if Ilya's heart was going to beat out of his chest the longer it took to find Shane and make sure he was okay.

Ilya scanned the club, continuously bumping into people as he walked around.

He spotted Marleau dancing with a girl and Wyatt at the bar with what appeared to be Jessica sitting on a bar stool with her head down. No Svetlana nor Rose. He didn't care to talk to any of them anyway.

He just wanted Shane, who was definitely not in here.

Not bothering to give anyone a heads-up that he was exiting, Ilya left.

He dialed Shane's cell, hoping that the other man would pick up. And as the phone rang, Ilya walked to where the car should be.

It was still parked where they had left it, and Ilya wasn't sure if he was relieved or even more stressed out by that fact.

Upon hearing Shane's voicemail, Ilya didn't bother to call again. Instead, he checked Shane's shared location.

At one point in his life, Ilya had wondered if it was odd for him to always know where Shane was, just for the sake of knowing. Then one night he had turned his location off, not wanting Shane to discover Ilya had been at the frozen lake planning a surprise for his Christmas present, when not even two minutes later he had received a call from Shane asking him where he was and why he had turned off his location.

Ilya was grateful they did this, as this made it way easier to discover that Shane was only a block away from the club.

Ilya quickened his pace, practically running towards his best friend.

It took him two minutes to catch up to him.

"Shane..." Ilya said, approaching the other man leaning against a brick building.

Shane jumped, his head snapping up to look at Ilya.

The last thing he expected was to see Ilya there. The last thing he wanted was for Ilya to see him after he had *just* managed to stop crying.

"Shit—" Shane said lowly, turning his back to Ilya to wipe at his face.

Ilya being here meant that he wasn't fucking Sasha.

Fuck, did Shane feel like he could finally breathe.

Ilya approached him slowly, unsure of what to do.

"Shane," Ilya placed a hand on his shoulder, trying to get him to turn back around. "What's wrong? Why did you just—"

He shook his head, shrugging Ilya's hand off of him by taking a step away from him.

"I'm, uh—" Shane cleared his throat. "Sorry about that. I didn't know you guys were in there."

He tried to level his voice— make it sound deeper so that it wouldn't sound nasally.

Ilya raised his eyebrows. "You didn't know we were in there? I think you broke the lock..."

Shane cringed at that comment, feeling embarrassed all over again.

"Can you, just, turn around?" Ilya asked, softly.

Shane took a deep sigh, wiping at his eyes again before turning back to face Ilya.

Ilya's heart fell at the sight of Shane's red rimmed eyes.

"*Solnyshko*," Ilya whispered, his eyebrows lowering in concern. He raised his hand to swipe over Shane's cheek. "What—"

Looking at Ilya's worried face only served to worsen Shane's heartache. His best friend— the guy he was in love with— was here instead of doing what he had intended to do with Sasha.

Shane felt like such a fucking asshole.

"Look," Shane interrupted him. He grabbed the hand that was on his cheek and held it with both of his hands before letting it go. "You don't have to do this. I'm fine. *Please*, just go back inside, have fun with that Sasha guy."

Ilya didn't hesitate to shake his head. "You know I can't do that."

Shane knew he was being honest. Had it been Ilya outside crying, Shane wouldn't have been able to fathom the idea of just going inside and having fun.

Even leaving Ilya in his bedroom last night, sad, was difficult for him to do.

"Tell me what happened."

Shane connected his eyes with Ilya's, heart beating a little harder at how beautiful he was. He had always known that, though. One doesn't spend years cuddling their best friend in silence as they both trace their eyes over every detail of their face, and *not* notice that.

The realization, though, that maybe Shane had been in love with him this whole time, was a punch to the gut.

Because while Shane was having an epiphany about his feelings, Ilya had only had an epiphany about his sexuality. And that fucking sucked.

"I don't want to talk about it right now." Shane shook his head. He couldn't. Not when they were so obviously not on the same page. Not even in the same book.

Shane walked to the curb and sat down, needing to look at something else.

Ilya sighed, hurt that Shane didn't want to open up to him. But regardless, he wasn't intending to let him be alone like this, so he sat down next to him.

"How was— uh," Shane cleared his throat again. "How was it, with Sasha? You toasted to 'new experiences'. Did it... give you any clarity?"

"We don't have to talk about that..." Ilya swiped his hand in the air to dismiss the topic.

"No, I want to." Shane nodded, trying to convince Ilya and himself that it was okay. It killed him a bit inside, but Shane wanted to be a friend to Ilya more than he wanted to selfishly protect himself from whatever he was about to hear. "I was kind of an asshole yesterday when you told me that you might not be straight."

Ilya glanced at Shane's side profile once before blowing out a burst of air. "Um, I don't know?" He shrugged. "The kiss was... good? Fun. I think I am... bisexual. Probably."

Shane hearing that Ilya enjoyed the kiss obviously hurt, but it wasn't the worst thing. They could have been having a whole different conversation if Shane hadn't interrupted what looked to be an almost blowjob.

"Good. I'm glad you got that cleared up."

They sat in silence for another minute before Shane's phone started vibrating.

"It's Svetlana." He said as he read the caller ID. "She hasn't stopped calling me since I left."

"We should probably go back, then." Ilya suggested, and Shane sent a quick text letting her know he was coming back.

After showing the bouncer the stamps on their hands, they headed in. It didn't take long for them to spot Wyatt, still at the bar.

"Dudes! Where have you been?" Wyatt asked once they got closer.

Shane went straight to Jess when he saw her form on the bar stool.

"Jess?" he asked, shaking her shoulder to get her to sit up straight.

Ilya stood on her opposite side, concerned and confused about everything that had happened since going off with Sasha.

"Mm, Shane?" Jess said groggily as she lifted her head and attempted to sit up.

Ilya moved his hands quickly to catch her from falling and held on to her upper arm— not trusting her ability to not sway.

"Hayes, she wasn't like this when I left." Shane said as he crouched down to look at his drunk girlfr— ex-girlfriend. The lighting in the room didn't help as he tried to get an idea of how much worse off she was.

"Where's Svetlana and Rose?" Ilya asked, looking around the room.

"I think they went to Rose's when you told her you were coming back. It was crazy." Wyatt exclaimed, moving to stand behind the stool. It was only then that Ilya noticed the girl next to him, nodding to his statement. "Jess downed like three or four shots of whatever the fuck, even though Svetlana and Rose tried to cut her off. And then she started yelling at both of them about how they 'knew', but no one knew what the fuck she was talking about." Shane gulped at that part, but continued to listen to Wyatt. "Then we all saw Shane storm out of the club looking upset, so Rose insisted on following him out. Svetlana told me to stay with Jess so she could go with her. Next thing I knew, I turn around to make sure Jess is okay only to watch her trip and fall on top of Lisa."

"F-fuck you, Wyatt. Y-you *all* know what the fuck, I'm talkin' about." Jess slurred her words, waving a drunk finger in Wyatt's face.

"Who the fuck is Lisa?" Ilya asked, confused, while watching Wyatt attempt to bring Jess's finger away from his nose, only for her to smack his hand away. Wyatt glared at her and tried again when she went back to pointing at him and accidentally poked his eye from drunkenly swaying.

"I'm Lisa." The girl next to Wyatt waved and ultimately just tugged his arm until he took a step away Jess's mild assault to his face. "My girlfriends are over there but I just wanted to make sure Wyatt here was good, with Jess. She looked like she was going to throw up everywhere."

"You're so great for that. Thank you, truly." Wyatt turned to look at Lisa and was clearly very moved by her kindness.

Ilya felt dizzy with wanting to leave this loud building, watching Wyatt in his own little world, and trying to stop a drunk Jess from falling.

Jess abruptly stood up from the stool, stumbling into Ilya, who made sure to catch her.

"Fucking s-stop touching me." Jess tried to push Ilya away from her.

"We're trying to help you from falling, Jess." Shane said, moving to stand in front of her and help her find her balance.

"Yes, no one told you to drink the whole bar barely two hours after we got here." Ilya said, not actually annoyed by it, but it wasn't like him if he didn't give her shit.

He took a step back to let Shane help his girlfriend. Not that it was good for her to be in this state, but Ilya hoped that she hadn't noticed them coming back to the club together. He wasn't in the mood to deal with Shane pulling away from him again. Not right now.

"Fuck you. Y-you're the reason..." And within just a second of speaking, Jessica started crying.

It startled Ilya completely, because Jess wasn't cursing at him in the way she usually did. Her words held meaning— said with a bite.

"Jess, stop." Shane tried to control her arms that flailed around as she tried to push away

"I h-hate you Ilya. He was never goin' — never goin' to love me, the way h-he—" Jess said through her tears and slurred speech.

"Jess." Shane cut her off, voice sterner than anyone was expecting. It made Ilya freeze where he stood.

"Hey, maybe you should sit back down?" Lisa suggested after a minute of awkwardness filling the air. She and Wyatt tried to stop the drunk girl from making another scene, but they struggled as she shrugged them off.

Ilya looked between Shane and Jess, more confused than before.

"Um," Ilya heard his voice, even though he didn't know what to say. "It's probably best to take her home."

"Yeah, Jess." Shane agreed. "Let's go."

"No. I don't want to be near either of you! Y-you—"

"Jess, please. Let's get back to the house." Shane pleaded with her, holding on to her upper arms to steady her again. "I'm sure you want to get the fuck out of here too. Get out of those heels. We can talk tomorrow if you want, but please..."

Jess rubbed at her face and clumsily pushed her hair back. She didn't respond, but she did stop trying to push him away.

"You need a ride home?" Shane asked Wyatt.

"Uhhh—" Wyatt turned to look at Lisa.

"Night's still young if you wanna come hang with us." Lisa suggested, pointing over at a group of girls.

Wyatt eyed the girls and then looked back towards Shane and Ilya. "Gentlemen, I think I will find my own way back home. Thank you for offering." He nodded and smiled politely.

Ilya knew the man was more excited than he was expressing.

Ilya could feel Shane's distress radiating off of him and without any context of what happened, Ilya felt lost.

The car ride was dead silent.

From the backseat, Ilya could see Jess's body was completely resting against the car door.

"Mm..." Jess groaned from the passenger seat.

Slowing his car down at a red light, Shane turned to look at her. "You alright?"

Instead of giving a response, Jess's breathing increased before she opened up the passenger door quickly and leaned outside of the car to throw up while still seated with the seatbelt on.

"Oh my fucking —" Shane groaned, gripping the steering wheel and throwing his head back against the headrest.

Once it was okay to move, Shane drove back to the house as safely and as quickly as possible. The rest of the drive was only another five minutes— enough time for Jess to completely pass out.

If Shane wasn't worried about Jess throwing up again, he would have just tossed her over his shoulder and carried her up so he could lay her on his bed.

Without asking, Ilya stood by the passenger door as Shane tried to pick her up, ready to assist if needed.

"Fuck— she's heavier than she looks, like this." Shane groaned, as he tried to use his knee to help him adjust her in his arms.

Shane carried her while Ilya opened up the door to the house for them, and then the door to Shane's bedroom. He helped Shane lay her down, and tucked her in while making sure she had a bottle of water and a trash can nearby. They did this all while remaining quiet, both deep in thought.

Jess hadn't really made sense in the club, but Ilya now knew that whatever happened, had something to do with him in some way. Maybe not entirely, considering she did argue with Svetlana and Rose, but still.

Ilya didn't know what to do as he stood in Shane's room.

"I think I'm just going to get ready for bed." Shane said, adrenaline leaving his body and shame creeping in. He kept his eyes on the ground, not wanting to look at Ilya and reveal more of his emotions than he already had for the night.

Ilya only sighed, eyes moving around the room for another second before walking out and shutting the door behind him.

Shane leaned against his desk for a long moment, legs and arms crossed as he tried to appreciate the silence and darkness he had been craving ever since he saw Ilya and Sasha dancing in the club.

Shane stared at the figure under the blanket, finally rattled by the fact that he was in a relationship not even an hour ago and now he was supposedly single.

Single.

Shane hadn't been single in nearly three years.

What did it say about him that he felt 'okay' with it? Relieved, even... Knowing that he wasn't obligated to climb into his bed and hold her. Kiss her in the morning and try to play the role of boyfriend. Relieved that he could grab the extra blanket and pillow from his closet and sleep on the couch, and it would be considered the right thing to do.

With all of the dancing and crying and dealing with a drunken Jess he had done, Shane felt completely dehydrated. So before changing out of his clothes, he went downstairs— putting the blanket and pillow down on the couch— and then headed to the kitchen.

The moment the cool water touched his tongue, he felt the beginning of his headache going away. If only it did anything for his heart.

Having just gotten used to the silence of the night, Shane slightly jumped when he heard footsteps coming down the stairs in the living room. He tried to prepare his body to look relaxed, even though his heart began to race.

No one besides the three of them were home, so Shane knew it was Ilya.

The moment he heard Ilya enter the kitchen, Shane took another sip of water. The only light he had turned on was the one above the stove, so the majority of the room was lit in a warm glow.

Ilya cleared his throat upon seeing Shane and walked right to the fridge to grab an orange Gatorade. He had seen the blanket and pillow on the couch, so he wasn't completely surprised to see Shane here.

From what little information Ilya had gathered tonight, he must have missed a pretty big fight between Shane and Jess. But with missing information, Ilya couldn't figure out why Shane barged into his bathroom stall. Couldn't figure out why Jess yelled at Svetlana and Rose. Or why Jess said... what she said.

"He was never goin' — never goin' to love me, the way h-he—"

What the fuck did that *mean*? Shane was never going to love her...?

The same Shane that had kissed her on the jaw in the diner earlier today— a kiss that was only ever for Ilya? The same Shane that had ended the physical intimacy of his and Ilya's friendship for her?

What was love, if it wasn't being chosen?

Ilya hadn't been... Not that he had *wanted* to be chosen by Shane... right? They were friends, after all.

But none of it made sense.

Ilya wanted to be able to give Shane space if he needed but today had been the worst fucking day he'd had in a long time, and Ilya couldn't stand the rift anymore.

"Shane." Ilya placed his Gatorade down on the kitchen counter. His voice dripped with gentleness, not wanting to scare Shane into leaving the room and ending the conversation before it started.

Shane didn't respond, going for another sip of his water before putting the glass down. His body was facing the counter while Ilya was directly facing him.

"Can you please tell me what happened?" Ilya asked. His mind was racing with a million explanations.

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it before finding his words.

"Jess and I broke up." He said flatly.

Ilya blinked, surprised by the revelation. "Oh."

His heart didn't ease at the new piece of information, but it did freeze whatever he was feeling inside.

"Fuck— I'm sorry." Ilya took a few steps closer to Shane, meaning what he said. His hand automatically went to reach for Shane, to pull him into a hug, before he stopped himself.

It was what Ilya had been doing all day, reaching for him and having to stop himself before making contact.

Shane bowed his head to show he acknowledged Ilya's words before taking another sip of water.

"Why did you guys break up?" Ilya hesitated to ask.

Shane let out a slow sigh. "It doesn't matter."

"Don't do that." Ilya said immediately, and at that Shane turned his head to look his way. "Since when do you not talk to me about your shit, Shane? I'm still your best friend, no?"

"Of course you are, Ilya. Don't be ridiculous." Shane said mildly annoyed. "But it's not... the same." Shane explained.

Ilya's eyebrows creased slightly, offended and confused at the comment. "What's not the same?"

"I— I don't know." Shane's eyes saddened looking into Ilya's hazel eyes. He didn't know how to explain that this wasn't something he could talk to him about.

"I'm still the same person, Shane. The only thing different is..." Ilya searched all over Shane's face, suddenly wondering. "Is it because I'm bisexual? You don't trust me at all anymore?"

"What?" Shane asked confused, turning his body to face him. "That's not—"

"You said we couldn't be physical anymore, because I was questioning stuff. And now you don't want to tell me what's going on with you..." Ilya explained, mouth remaining slightly open during a pause, as he actively tried to solve a puzzle. "Or is it because you blame me for your breakup?"

Shane looked at him dumbfounded.

"Ilya." He quickly took the few steps to get to Ilya and put his hands on his ribcage, confidently shaking his head. "That's not it at all."

The touch felt mildly foreign to Shane after a day of avoiding this, and he kind of hated that feeling. This was his Ilya.

"I mean—" Shane hesitated, feeling the tears threatening to come out again, but strongly willing them away.

This conversation was going terribly and he felt bad that Ilya would ever think such a thing. But Shane couldn't tell him the real reason. At least not all of it.

"It's..." Shane started, then stopped—picking at his eyelash with one hand as he worked his way toward an explanation. "kind of both our faults? Or mine. Mostly mine."

Ilya stayed quiet, and felt his nerves slightly calm at the feeling of Shane's thumb gently grazing over his animal print shirt. It was a very welcomed feeling.

"Jess thought me kissing her had to do with you. Thought that I was trying to prove something or make you—I don't know. Which is ridiculous. I was *just* trying to make out with my girlfriend, it wasn't a big deal."

Ilya's expression shifted slightly, but still let Shane continue.

"And— and then you left with Sasha and I got worried because we don't know this guy and you hadn't told anyone where you were going. So I wanted to make sure you were okay. She made it into this whole thing about how she couldn't compete with you and that if I left then we'd be broken up. "

"So... you left?" Ilya asked slowly, trying to make sense of it.

"Yeah? I don't know. I guess I didn't care in that moment. It's not fair for her to give me an ultimatum when I was worried about you."

"Ah. Okay..." Ilya nodded.

His eyes moved off to the side, putting together some of the puzzle pieces.

"What?" Shane asked him after not being able to figure out what Ilya must be thinking.

Ilya shrugged, unsure.

"I don't know. It sounds like you were... jealous?" Ilya caught the moment Shane's eyebrows twitched before lowering in annoyance.

"What? I wasn't jealous." Shane spat, pulling his hand back.

There was a slight tug at the corner of Ilya's lips, more thrown off by the reaction than actually amused.

He tilted his head to the side. "Shane, I've left with plenty of women without telling you where I was going."

"This was different." Shane defended himself.

"Different enough for you to also watch me make out with someone? And, I'm sorry, but you also don't ever kiss your girlfriend. Not in public, like that."

"I *have* kissed her in public before," Shane said matter-of-fact, "And I wasn't *watching*." Shane denied.

"Could have fooled me."

Shane scoffed, taking a step back from Ilya and walking out of the kitchen. He hadn't even bothered to put his cup in the sink.

"I can't believe you're taking her side." Shane said, offended. To him, Ilya wasn't just siding with Jess, he was also pointing out something Shane had struggled with all day. No matter what he did or how much he tried, he just hadn't been a good enough boyfriend.

"I'm not taking her side." Ilya trailed behind him right out of the kitchen, and into the living room. He reached for Shane's arm and stopped the both of them from walking any further. After a small huff, Shane turned to look at Ilya again. "But I do think that you were possibly watching me and Sasha more than you were focused on her."

"Fuck off, Ilya. I might have been curious, but I wasn't just blatantly watching you make out with another guy. You asshole."

Ilya almost dropped the topic, wanting to bring the conversation back to the ultimatum, or even to just the breakup itself. But instead, he clung on to one word.

"Curious?" Ilya questioned while his eyebrows scrunched. He dropped his hand from Shane's arm.

Shane opened his mouth to respond, but nothing came out as he too didn't understand what he meant by that.

"Curious... like about other guys?"

Shane let out a scoff. "No, of course not, Ilya. I'm not gay or bi or whatever."

He wasn't.

Shane didn't have a problem with anyone that was, either.

He didn't partake in any homophobic locker room talks. Didn't get weird when Rose talked about her sexual experiences with women. He even promised Troy he wouldn't tell anyone about his secret relationship after Harris drunkenly and accidentally called him 'baby' at the cast party after the play a few days ago.

But Shane simply just wasn't *that*.

Being in love with Ilya was its own thing. It just meant Shane was attracted to women AND Ilya.

Ilya made a face, one that caught Shane's attention.

"What? I'm not." Shane defended again. "It's never crossed my mind to fuck a guy or to get on my knees on some dirty bathroom floor to suck their dick. I'm the one that decided to set the boundaries with you, remember? I think I would know if I wasn't straight."

"Okay... sure." Ilya shrugged, eyes roaming around the somewhat dark living room that was only illuminated by the street lights that came through the windows. "Maybe you're not gay. But... you were setting boundaries based on whether or not it was okay to have your tongue in my mouth or for me to put my tongue in your asshole."

Shane swallowed, getting increasingly annoyed but also flustered that Ilya said that outright. A lot of what they'd done had been easy to move on from because they had never really talked about it after.

"Yeah, because I was trying to respect my girlfriend and what she wanted. Before that, you and I were just having fun. At least that's how it was for me." Shane shook his head, not backing down. "You, almost getting a blowjob from Sasha to the point of gaining clarity about your sexuality has nothing to do with me."

Ilya's eyes flickered to Shane's lips before he connected their eyes again.

"Well, I think it has a little bit to do with you." Ilya sniffed. "You're still the only guy that's had his lips wrapped around my dick, so..."

Shane didn't know what was happening or why his abdomen tightened, but Ilya's words made it harder to breathe.

"Is that what this is about? That didn't *mean* anything." Shane's voice trembled slightly, and for the first time during this whole conversation, he was no longer sure if he was *just* lying to Ilya anymore. "God forbid I need something to help me relax, in the same way you felt the need to smoke a pack of cigarettes... that you still reek from by the way."

"It was just one." Ilya interrupted Shane in the middle of his nagging. It was three cigarettes but no one needed to know that.

"My reasons for doing what we've done haven't changed, Ilya." Shane continued. "You've said 'It's not like that...' more than I have. Or did you completely forget the last few years?"

"Yes, exactly! I've said it more. Me. Ilya. 'McGill's freshman womanizer', apparently. Isn't this what you were mad about the other day? Because I was questioning our 'reasons'. You're saying *you* never have?" Ilya asked incredulously.

Shane turned his attention to the floor as he considered the question.

He gave a humorless scoff. "No. I really haven't."

'Not until today.' Shane thought afterwards.

For a long minute, Ilya just looked between Shane's eyes. He took in everything Shane had just told him since they started their conversation in the kitchen.

Sure, Ilya was able to answer some of the questions he'd had— such as why Shane had been crying. He was obviously upset about his breakup with Jess.

But for some reason, even with the new information Shane had given him, Ilya still felt... perplexed. Not about Jess, or the breakup. But just about Shane in general.

For some reason, Ilya didn't believe him.

When it had been both of them making excuses for their actions, Ilya hadn't thought twice about it.

Now with his realization about himself, Ilya felt as though he had gained a new perspective to their situation.

And he just simply didn't believe that— standing here now after spending a whole fucking day trying to keep their hands to themselves— that Ilya was the only one feeling relieved that Shane had touched his ribs or that Ilya got to grab Shane's arm. That it had only bothered *him* to stay away from Shane. To not hold him or kiss him.

Because to Ilya, now that he was seeing everything for what it was, it *all* meant something to him. And to Shane it didn't?

Ilya just simply didn't believe him.

"Okay, so kissing me. Me kissing you, didn't mean anything to either of us. Was just... fun for the both of us." Ilya stated with finality, even though it felt like a question.

Shane nodded, trying to convince himself that that was all it was this whole time, even though he had accepted earlier on that it wasn't.

"And you weren't jealous earlier. Watching me kiss Sasha... that didn't mean anything?" Ilya asked, his voice low.

"I don't care what you do with someone else. I've seen you get with half the freshman girls." Shane continued on with his ruse, accidentally looking down at Ilya's lips for less than a second. "You can kiss whoever you want."

It didn't feel fair that Shane had to be both in love with Ilya and struggling to hide how he felt about seeing Ilya with someone else. But fucking hell if he wasn't going to deny it.

Ilya nodded, accepting Shane's words and giving the moment another pause.

"Including you? Or boundaries are still there?" Ilya asked lowly, taking a small step closer.

"... I guess I don't see why they would be," Shane responded weakly.

It was silly that Shane felt his heart beat against his chest as Ilya put his hands on his waist, considering it was something he had done so many times.

"So this," Ilya ran his thumbs back and forth. "Me touching you... is okay?"

"You've touched me plenty. Just because I enjoy it, doesn't make me gay."

Ilya's motives for putting his hands on Shane's waist had been led by curiosity, originally. But now, being this close to Shane, his head felt fuzzy like it always did.

Shane felt dizzy, too, at the change in energy of the room— skin tingling with how close they were.

A pause filled with held breaths made the air in the living room feel thick. That was until Ilya leaned in after a beat, and connected his lips to Shane's.

It was a single suction kiss that lasted just a few seconds but both exhaled into it. In those seconds, Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya's shoulders.

For some reason it felt like they were testing out some uncharted waters by simply doing things they'd already done before.

Neither of them opened their eyes when Ilya whispered between them only a moment later.

"Nothing?" Ilya asked, and he didn't know what he was trying to do, but his heart was beating hard.

This morning, Ilya had tried to respect the line Shane had drawn between them. Had tried to accept that they would be just regular friends going forward.

But Ilya couldn't do it anymore. Couldn't resist not being physically intimate with his best friend when both of them were clearly struggling to keep to themselves.

Shane shook his head 'no', in that he hadn't felt anything.

It was an obvious lie. Of course he felt something when *Ilya* kissed him.

But Ilya was trying to make a different point.

He was asking him if a guy — who happened to be Ilya— was making him feel *something*.

"What's the point then? Why not just stick to women?" Ilya asked.

"It feels good?" Shane responded, unsure, many seconds later.

"But not more than kissing Jess or any other girls?"

And *fuck* did Shane feel his heart fall after he registered the question.

Not because Ilya mentioned Jess, though it was a sore subject, but because—

Shane *didn't* think kissing Jess was better... or whatever girls he had kissed before her.

He actually didn't know if he liked it at all.

"No, actually," Shane spoke before he could stop himself. Before he could really understand the implications. "I think I like kissing you more."

Ilya felt winded after that, and his eyes dropped right into Shane's eyes, which also seemed taken aback by what he said.

It was one thing to think Shane wasn't being honest and another thing for Shane to actually admit something.

Ilya didn't know what it meant but the admission eased some tension he had been feeling in his heart.

For Shane, the realization that he might have gotten *something* wrong about himself meant something.

But he couldn't think about that right now.

Not when he had the strong desire to kiss Ilya. Because he didn't just like kissing Ilya more than kissing girls—he liked kissing Ilya in general. A lot.

In the next second, before Ilya could muster up a response, Shane kissed him.

Shane, somewhere in the back of his head, knew that this reaction probably didn't bode well for him, but a simple taste of Ilya had him feeling every fight and thought leave him. He had to hope that Ilya believed him when he said he wasn't gay because Shane pressed their cushioned lips together until there was no space in between them. Ilya easily moved with him, parting Shane's lips then pressing his tongue inside.

It was deep and felt familiar. It had only been three days since their lips had met for the first time, but if there was one thing they had always been good at, it was knowing each other.

It didn't matter if Shane was trying to deny his feelings. It didn't matter if Ilya was only just now realizing his.

Their bodies moved as if they had always known something they didn't.

This was intoxicating in the same way it felt necessary.

Nothing he had done with Jess had ever made him feel like this... like his heart was going to burst every time Ilya licked into his mouth or every time Shane heard the sounds Ilya made when he gently sucked on his bottom lip.

And it wasn't just their lips that made their thoughts go hazy, but also Shane's need to run his fingers through Ilya's curls. Ilya's need to run his hands all over Shane's waist, up to his ribs and back down to his sides. These were the ridges of muscle he *knew* and craved to touch.

They both felt the distinction in the air that was palpable— whatever they had done before, compared to what they were doing now. Their actions weren't new, but their excuses for all of their past actions didn't translate over. They didn't have a list of reasons. Just one. This was want.

Ilya moved to kiss the corner of Shane's lips, then his cheek, before landing on his neck. His kiss lingered on that one spot, sucking it into his mouth as they turned their bodies till he could push Shane against the wall next to the TV.

Shane's chest heaved against Ilya's, his eyes scrunched closed as he felt the friction Ilya created against their now fully erect dicks. It was delicious and not enough.

"Fuck—" Shane moaned before redirecting Ilya's lips back to his and filling the space back up with their moans and the wet noises of their kisses. "I need—"

Shane didn't finish his sentence. He didn't need to.

'More.' It was always more. More friction? More skin-to-skin? He never knew, but Ilya always seemed to.

Ilya bent down slightly to hoist Shane up and carry him. Their lips only parted briefly before they reconnected as Ilya blindly carried Shane to the couch.

He laid Shane down and settled over him. The change allowed him to grind his covered cock against Shane's with better access, as Shane's thighs were spread apart.

It was a slow grind, the way Ilya liked to do to drive Shane a little crazy. It did exactly that, and Shane remembered a time when he used to just have to accept Ilya's pace that brought him close to an orgasm that fully consumed him.

But they were long past dry humping. Shane was grateful for it, as there was no reason for Ilya to think that Shane unbuttoning his animal print shirt and pushing it off of his shoulders was anything more than Shane wanting to get closer. Just like Ilya practically ripping off Shane's shirt wasn't anything more than hating the feeling of it against his skin.

"Please touch me—" Shane said, quietly and desperately. His words were muffled by Ilya's lips, but he knew Ilya heard him when his hands paused their roaming on Shane's soft and muscular abdomen.

Shane said it because he knew Ilya wouldn't, unless he verbalized it. Not after Shane had pulled away from him as much as he did today throughout the day.

"You sure that's not... gay?" Ilya asked. It was said like a tease and rightfully earned a gentle shove from Shane on his shoulder.

Shane groaned. "Shut up."

Shane felt Ilya press his forehead to his as they both went about unbuttoning the other's pants as fast as they could. Their breaths mixed in the space between them, frantic fingers finally getting to push the rest of the offending clothing off of the other person's body until they were fully naked.

Ilya hissed when Shane's throbbing cock bobbed against his, and he was able to start back up on the slow grind again. Ironically, Ilya preferred it fast, but there was something appealing about watching Shane fall apart underneath him. It was something Ilya never wanted to look away from.

But because this felt different, Ilya wanted to try something new. He was pretty sure that his tongue had been on every inch of Shane except one. So after grinding down one more time to feel Shane's dick against his and leaving a peck on his lips, Ilya sat back on his heels and pushed Shane's knees towards his face.

Shane hadn't been expecting Ilya to reposition himself until his head was between Shane's thighs, but he definitely wasn't going to stop him. All Shane could do was hope not to come while Ilya wrapped his hand around his cock and started jerking him off.

Ilya knew Shane liked it when he stroked his whole length and occasionally ran his thumb along the ridge, so he did just that. And just the sight of precum and the way Shane's tip swelled made Ilya's mouth water.

Shane sucking Ilya's dick for comfort was something he had gotten used to, but there was never a real reason for Ilya to suck Shane's dick before.

He supposed he could come up with one after, if he needed to, because right now as he guided Shane's cock into his mouth, he didn't really have one.

Ilya moaned at the feeling of having Shane in his mouth and he couldn't believe he had never done this before with his best friend. The taste of Shane was always his favorite and this was definitely filling a desire he didn't know he had.

Ilya began bobbing his head, sucking Shane deeper and deeper, while his hand matched his pace.

Shane felt euphoric, and unable to do anything else besides squeeze his eyes closed as Ilya worked his mouth around him.

Hearing Shane's panting and moans motivated Ilya. To hear the wet sounds as he sucked Shane's cock, and to know that no one else could make Shane feel the way he was making him feel.

Sasha was a good time, and Ilya knew it would have been an even better time if they had kept going. But Ilya knew, more than he knew anything else that ever existed, that nothing could ever make him feel the way Shane did. Nothing made his mind go blank and make his body feel everything the way Shane could. Even being the one giving Shane pleasure was making Ilya feel incredible. He salivated on Shane's cock and felt it coat his hand completely, enough for Ilya to want to make Shane feel even better.

Ilya no longer needed his hand to make up for what his mouth couldn't cover, so he decidedly brought his fingers down to Shane's hole and rubbed at the area.

"Ilya—" Shane immediately moaned out his name once he felt Ilya's fingers teasing his entrance. He brought one hand down to grip at Ilya's hair and Ilya knew that was a green light.

He pushed one finger in and out, which was easy to do with how much saliva covered his fingers. Then, after a few seconds, he added another finger. His head movement slowed as he focused on Shane's reaction to his fingers inside of him.

It was when he pushed a third finger in that he felt Shane tug at his hair.

"Come here..." Shane said, panting in a way that made Ilya think he was close.

Ilya kept his fingers inside while pushing himself up to lay himself back over Shane.

He could see how blissed out Shane was from receiving a blowjob and getting his ass fingered at the same time and Ilya knew he was almost right there with him.

Shane kept his legs wrapped around Ilya's waist, to allow him to keep going.

While Shane pulled him back down to kiss him sloppily, Ilya pumped his fingers in and out.

He was obsessed with the feeling of being inside Shane like this. So much so that he pulled his fingers out and grabbed his dick to rub along Shane's entrance.

The feeling made Shane gasp, and his body tightened. Neither he nor Ilya knew if the reaction was a good one, just that they were playing with fire.

Ilya whispered, his swollen lips grazing Shane's. "Just the tip is okay?"

He badly wanted Shane to say 'yes'. Shane's perineum and hole were so slicked up that he almost couldn't handle how good it felt to move his foreskin and press the head of his cock against the rim.

Shane took three seconds to try to calm himself down enough to give Ilya a response. A single nod after entering a new state of trance upon feeling the head of Ilya's cock touch the sensitive skin of his entrance.

Ilya slowly released the air from his lungs the instant the head of his cock pushed into Shane's gaping hole and then pulled back out.

"Mmm..." Ilya growled, pressing his face into the crook of Shane's neck.

He held his cock in his hand while his hips moved and continued to guide it, rubbing it between Shane's cheeks, slipping it in, then pulling right back out before he went too far.

If someone tried to show Ilya a picture of heaven and a picture of this moment, then asked him to tell them the difference, he would argue that they're the same picture.

Shane, on the other hand, could be convinced that he was dead. This was simply too much, too fucking good and he must be deceased. He brought his hands down to grip Ilya's ass, as a way to ground himself back to the moment.

The thing about getting a small taste of Ilya, was that Shane's body always wanted more, even before he himself knew it.

It was shown through his actions, the tightening of his legs around Ilya's waist and his hands trying to pull Ilya in more to create more friction.

"*Solnyshko*," Ilya cried, failing to find the right English words, trying to fight against the pull and getting so close to being burned. "пожалуйста (*please*),"

Ilya opened his eyes to look into Shane's, pleading with Shane to stop pulling him closer if this wasn't what he wanted. But with just one look, Ilya knew he and Shane had crossed a different set of boundaries. One that neither of them meant to cross, but had no intention of walking back.

Not an ounce of Shane had a desire to uncross whatever line they just stepped over. Because he was sure that if Ilya looked this drunk with what they'd done so far, then he probably looked worse.

Something else stood out to both of them, though, as Ilya looked at Shane with the rawest expression and Shane looked at Ilya with no walls to hide how he felt.

They both wore the same look— lust and love, maybe.

It was felt in their hearts, even if neither of them were saying it. Shane *felt* like Ilya loved him in that moment. And he was certain Ilya tried to show him by moving his hand to cradle his cheek and run his thumb where his freckles were. He looked as if he was realizing some truths of his own. And against this, Shane couldn't pretend.

Pretend all of this didn't mean something to him.

Ilya *felt* like Shane loved him in that moment too. And he was certain Shane tried to show him, by pulling him in slowly and kissing him twice, gently despite how frantic they had just been a moment ago. It was easy to get lost in all of the questions he carried around, easy to keep up a facade built on excuses and weak reasons. But when stripped down to what it really was that they wanted, it was this. To openly allow their hearts to feel loved and to love the person that feels like home.

It slowed them down enough to calm their panting, rub their noses together, and embrace it.

"I missed you today." Ilya admitted quietly, and Shane was hit with a sudden rush of emotions.

Shane lifted Ilya's chin and met his eyes before pulling him down again and kissing his jaw. The place that always belonged to them. "I want you, Ilya, please."

With their blown eyes locked, Ilya released his restraint, and pushed in deeper and deeper, until he was completely inside Shane.

Ilya's eyes fluttered closed, and he dropped his forehead against Shane's to savor the feeling.

Shane savored a similar feeling, but he felt breathless at how full he felt with Ilya inside him. This was nothing like anything he'd ever felt, and his mind had reached places it had never gone.

"You're okay?" Ilya asked it after he was finally able to come back to himself.

Shane nodded. "Yeah." His response was barely audible.

Ilya had done this before with women. Granted, it never felt this good, but he had enough experience to know that saliva was only good temporarily.

It wasn't until he reached down to grab his pants, pulled out his wallet and clumsily sought out a packet of lube, that he pulled out of Shane to coat his dick.

Shane quietly whined at the loss, and at the friction. It didn't take Ilya long before he was pushing back in, and trying to gauge Shane's reaction and readiness.

"Please, fuck me." Shane couldn't take it anymore. He needed Ilya to move, and he needed to fucking come before he exploded.

That was all Ilya needed to start rolling his hips and begin fucking Shane.

He started off slow, still needing to make sure Shane was okay.

He adjusted himself so he could push Shane's knees back towards his face, and thrust into him hard enough to fill the room with their skin slapping together.

They did this for the next several minutes, muttering words like *'fuck, fuck, Ilya, like that.'* and *'Solnyshko, you look so fucking good like this. блять (fuck)'*

"Mmm, Shane—" Ilya said when he looked down at where his cock moved within Shane. He had seen Shane in a lot of different ways but this definitely had to be one of Ilya's favorite sights.

"You feel so good," Shane muttered, hands tightening into Ilya's hair.

Wanting to feel their lips together again, Ilya leaned forward and kissed him. Shane gladly and eagerly kissed him back, and when he felt the angle change and felt Ilya hit what he assumed was his prostate, Shane struggled to keep up. Every thrust pulled a moan from him.

Shane felt his orgasm right there, at the point where he would have usually pushed Ilya away and finished himself off. But he couldn't, and badly didn't want to. So he didn't.

Instead, he let Ilya fuck into him until Shane felt hot spurts of his come coat his and Ilya's abdomen.

And *fuck*— Ilya thought that was so fucking hot, and exactly what drove him to his own orgasm before he could even pull out on time.

Ilya's abdomen tightened as he filled Shane up with his come, and fell on top of him when he was done.

They both worked to catch their breath. There was a thin film of sweat on their skin but neither cared. There was a bubble that surrounded them, that kept them in a haze. Ilya didn't bother to remove his dick, and there was no rush to. He couldn't bother, not when Shane was rubbing his nose gently against him.

"That was so fucking good," Shane said lowly, running his hands through Ilya's curls. Ilya smiled, sucking a quick kiss onto Shane's lips.

If this was what Sasha meant by Ilya being wrapped around Shane's finger, then fuck it. He was exactly where he wanted to be.

They lay like this for another ten minutes before Ilya finally found his voice.

"Should we go to my room?" he asked.

"Fuck," Shane said, only seemingly realizing where they had fucked. "We probably made a mess."

Ilya lifted his head to take in their position. "Yes, probably."

"We can go to your room. But I'm bringing the couch covers with us," Shane said, pushing Ilya off of him. They both winced slightly when Ilya removed his dick.

"Why? Nobody's home. We can just wash them tomorrow." Ilya suggested, holding his and Shane's clothes in one arm.

"Ew, no Ilya. What if they do come home and decide they want to watch TV or something?" Shane said as he removed the covers on both the couch seats. "Grab the blanket and pillow."

Ilya obeyed, following Shane to the stairs.

"They've experienced worse. Remember when—" Ilya paused midway when he heard keys jangling at the front door, where both he and Shane currently were.

They were frozen to the spot, completely aware that they were both naked, and had very little time to do anything about it.

In a hasty decision, Ilya used their clothes to cover his dick while Shane used the soiled couch covers to hide his dick just in time, as the door flung open.

"Welcome to my humble abo—" Wyatt began to say, but as he spoke, he caught the sight of his two roommates just a foot away, naked and tussled up. His voice transitioned from calm, to a loud scream, that Ilya would have assumed belonged to Lisa who was walking in after Wyatt. "—OH SHIT!"

In what was an obvious fright, Wyatt stumbled back and tripped on his footing right on top of Lisa, causing them both to fall on the ground.

"Oof—" Ilya reacted to the sight, but didn't move since he was still very much naked.

"Fuck, I'm sorry, Hayes." Shane immediately apologized.

Wyatt immediately stood to help Lisa up.

"Are you okay?" Wyatt asked her.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm fine. What are the odds this happens to me twice tonight?" Lisa laughed.

"Why the FUCK were you two just standing there? NAKED?" Wyatt exclaimed as he checked over the girl he had brought home and then looked at his roommates.

"I swear we were on our way up!" Shane answered.

"We were having sexual intercourse," Ilya said at the same time to answer Wyatt's second question. He felt proud of himself for finally saying the truth of what he and Shane were up to.

"Ilya!" Shane turned to him, horrified, with wide eyes.

"What? He asked," Ilya responded as if he was surprised by Shane's reaction.

"That doesn't mean—"

Wyatt rubbed at his face, annoyed, before interrupting them, "You know what?"

He turned to Lisa.

"I think I'd much rather go to my dorm room tonight, if that's okay with you." Wyatt said.

Ilya scrunched his eyebrows. "Dorm room?! Since when do you— Why did you never tell us you had a dorm room?"

"Ilya, what are you talking about?" Shane asked. "That was legit part of the reason he moved in with us, remember?"

Ilya whipped his head back around, mouth agape. "THAT'S what I was missing from your tarantulas story!"

"Tarantulas... plural?" Lisa asked Wyatt.

"Yeah, so basically it was me and my other roommate Marly at this—" Wyatt reached for the doorknob and closed the front door, obviously changing his mind about coming home tonight.

With the door shut, Shane slowly turned to look at Ilya and scoffed before he walked up the stairs.

Ilya trailed right behind him. "How the fuck else was I supposed to explain why we were naked?"

Shane didn't respond, since he also wouldn't have known what to say.

Once in Ilya's room, and after they cleaned up with one of Ilya's towels, they found themselves under his duvet, leaving some space between them.

They couldn't see each other, and unfortunately had no Himalayan salt lamp to gently illuminate the room.

But neither of them minded.

There was something about the darkness that made what they did, and where they found themselves now, feel even more vulnerable.

"Hey, Ilya?" Shane broke the silence carefully.

"Yes?"

"I don't think I'm gay... I— I mean... I don't know. I never thought about that stuff before..." Shane admitted.

"Okay." Ilya responded simply. He didn't want to make anything harder for Shane, knowing that he himself had had a hard time with his own sexual identity.

"But," Shane continued, his heart pounding. He was grateful for the darkness. As much as he loved looking at Ilya, not seeing him made this easier. "I wasn't being fully truthful when I said this was just 'fun' for me."

Ilya looked at the space he knew Shane occupied as he let the words settle in his chest. It sounded like a simple admittance, but for Ilya, it held weight and meant everything. Whatever had been making him go crazy these past few days, could be hushed by this.

With a deep sigh, Ilya moved closer to Shane to close the gap. Shane didn't hesitate to tangle their legs together, and interlace their fingers when Ilya held it between them.

"I know." Ilya rubbed the tip of his nose to Shane's. "Me either."

That was the last verbal conversation they had. The rest of the night, they stopped needing words. After Ilya's response, they fucked again, with Shane on all fours and Ilya fucking him

right into the mattress.

Then again after they'd fallen asleep wrapped in each other's arms, with Ilya rocking into him from behind in a slow yet delicious rhythm.

At around 4 AM, Ilya woke up to find Shane on top of him, kissing each mole Shane had memorized over the years, before riding him, and getting off the moment Ilya wrapped his hand around his cock.

The last fuck of the night had happened at around 6 AM, with Ilya in between Shane's thighs and the sun beginning to rise. They weren't even sure if they could count it as fucking since Ilya was barely moving as they made out lazily, but they did technically come.

And yeah, it felt like love.

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Shane's alarm went off at 10 AM, and for two people who barely had any sleep, it was the worst thing possible.

"SHANEEE!" Ilya groaned from beside him, smacking him with his pillow before covering his ears.

"Don't hit me, asshole." Shane, through his squinted eyes, reached for his phone on Ilya's desk.

Once he silenced it, he threw himself back down to where he was resting and went to lift the duvet to cover his entire body.

"Why the fuck do you have an alarm? It's Sunday morning." Ilya tucked the pillow back underneath his head.

Shane was halfway to going back to sleep when he heard Ilya's question and thought about it.

Shit.

With a loud sigh, Shane tossed the duvet off of his face.

"I have to drive Jess to the bus stop in about an hour." He fully opened his eyes, to turn to look at Ilya.

Ilya didn't react, barely awake to really process last night's events. Instead, he just raised his eyebrows.

"Shit." Ilya rubbed at the corner of his lips, trying to read Shane's mood. "You okay?"

Shane stared back up at the ceiling, feeling completely exhausted and spent. But also nervous, relieved, and maybe sad that Jess was leaving like this.

"Sucks that this was how her trip went and that we'll probably never talk again but," Shane shrugged. "I'm okay."

Ilya felt for him, understanding that it probably wasn't easy.

Ilya brought his hand up to rest on Shane's cheek, and gave him light caresses.

"Do you want me to go with you?"

It was a rhetorical question, Shane knew, and he appreciated the sentiment.

"Don't think that'll help, but thank you," Shane said before getting up.

As Shane sought out his clothes from yesterday, Ilya sat up on his bed.

"You should probably take one of my hoodies." Ilya suggested.

Shane's eyebrows lowered. "Huh? Why?"

Ilya tilted his head to the side and pointed at his own neck. "You have a really big purple bruise, right here."

"What?" Shane said, slightly mortified, and rushed to look at the small mirror that sat on Ilya's desk. " Oh my god, Ilya! When did you leave a hickey on my neck?!"

"Mmm..." Ilya moved his eyes around the room, pretending he was in deep thought. "Probably while I was fucking you. Maybe. I don't remember."

Shane sucked his teeth. "You're unbelievable."

After shrugging on one of Ilya's black McGill hoodies and adjusting the hood to hide the mark, he went right back over to Ilya and spent the next five minutes straddling his lap and resting his head on Ilya's shoulder while Ilya hugged him close and left tiny kisses all over his neck and face.

Waking Jess up was awkward, to say the least.

Shane had walked into his room smelling the stale throw-up in the air. Before waking her up, he made sure to throw the trash bag out and air out the room. There was no reason to have her feel more embarrassed than she already was going to feel when she had to gather her things and get in his car.

The next forty minutes went exactly as he expected— him struggling to wake her up, instantly receiving the cold shoulder from a hungover and heartbroken Jess, waiting for her to finish showering and getting ready, awkwardly helping her pack while she refused to talk to him, and then loading her luggage into the car.

He could count on one hand how many sentences she had said to him since waking up and he knew trying to bring up what happened would be the worst option.

They were broken up. If Shane had any lingering doubt that perhaps she would wake up and not remember that, it quickly went away when she said ' *We're not together. You want to be useful? Fine. Grab my shit from the bathroom and get the fuck away from me.*'

The other thing she had said to him was 'No.' when he had asked her if she wanted breakfast on the way.

He didn't listen to the last one, making sure to drive to the nearest McDonald's before breakfast ended and ordering her a few things he thought she might eat.

Surprisingly, she didn't fight him on it.

By the time he had gotten to the bus stop, she had another twenty minutes before she had to board. He made sure not to rush her as she ate the last of her sausage, egg and cheese McGriddles.

He was parked off to the side, anticipating whatever was to come. And it did, but not in the way he was expecting or hoping for.

"I'm so mad at you..." Jess said with no real anger in her voice, both of them watching people walk around the car, rushing to catch their bus or say 'goodbye' to their loved ones. "But I feel mad at myself too, for tolerating it for years when it bothered me the whole time."

She sounded defeated and it did break Shane's heart a little bit. It hadn't been his intention to hurt her.

"And I'm mad at myself for arguing with Svetlana and Rose and being mean to Wyatt. I guess I'll have to text them later and apologize but Shane," when he heard Jess turn her head, he did too.

He could tell the food had helped, as some color was returning to her face, but he couldn't ignore the shimmer on her lids, as they began to water with tears. Shane felt his eyes, do the same.

"Please know that I don't think I could ever hate you. I just..." She took a steady breath to calm herself. "I just wish you hadn't gotten me to fall in love with you. Not when we both knew you were in love with him."

Shane wiped at his teary eye. "I didn't know, Jess. I swear."

Jess shook her head. "No. You knew. Maybe not that you were in love with him, but you *knew* it was something. In the same way you knew that you viewed men and women differently."

"Huh?" Shane sniffed, sitting up straighter in his seat. "What do you mean I *knew*? Knew what?"

"You never noticed that I was never jealous of other girls? Not Rose, your girl bestie or Svetlana your girl roommate?"

"Yeah, because they're into each other? And I figured you just trusted me..."

Jess scoffed. "No, it was because I never worried about you getting with other girls. I don't even think I've caught you checking them out. And at first I thought it was a good thing—that you only had eyes for me. But then this weekend, it brought me back to high school. Of having to watch you and *him* have your special bond. But also..."

Jess paused, seemingly considering her next words. And Shane hated the feeling that he was about to hear something he didn't like.

"Do you remember that tutor Hayden had gotten?"

Shane had to sort through his memories to remember who she was talking about. Eventually, a face came to mind.

"Scott... Hunter?" Shane said, unsure if the name was correct.

"Yeah, him. That uni student that came to our study groups every week for about a month and helped us with our midterms."

"What about him?" Shane said impatiently, wanting her to finish her story before it was time for her to board the bus.

"I used to think you had such a crush on him. Not a big one. Not anything like how you got when Ilya was in the room but I was so convinced that you felt *something*. You used to blush like crazy whenever he pointed out how smart you were. I was convinced that he was trying to steal you away or something."

"Maybe I just liked the compliment." Shane defended.

"I thought that too. But—I don't know. It was the only time that I was nervous about leaving you in a room with someone, other than Ilya obviously."

Shane shook his head. "That's crazy."

"At the time, it probably was crazy for me to be jealous since he was way older than us. But it wasn't that crazy to think that maybe you would do something with a guy."

Shane felt Jess's eyes drop down to his neck, where his hickey was most likely barely being covered.

"Jess, I'm really *really* sorry... I did want to be better for you," Shane said genuinely.

"It was never going to work." Jess turned to look away from him, shook her head and shrugged. "You can't spend a lifetime lying to yourself, and hiding from the truth."

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The goodbye was bittersweet for him in more ways than he thought it would be.

A part of him wished that Jess had blown up on him, cursed him out and then stormed out of his car, where he would most likely never see her again unless he was visiting Hayden and J.J., or at their graduation. He would have felt the emptiness that had been filled with the space she took up in his life, and missed her like any person does when ending a relationship.

But she didn't do that. Instead she took whatever he had been trying to push down, and forced his mind to think about every single thing.

This was hard for him to do as he had been so set on the life he was picturing with her in it. The easier route— where they would have gotten married and had kids, been easily accepted by the hockey world as a happy straight couple, and made his parents proud. And then after he spent the whole day making everyone else happy, he would go back to the person that always felt like his home and made his heart truly fill with happiness.

That was the "easier" route because Shane hadn't allowed himself to be honest with himself.

Now driving on this road that was just another detour to get back home, he realized that it wasn't "easier" at all. It was exhausting to keep up with every part of a plan, except for the last part, that repulsed him completely.

It was exhausting getting gut-punched by all of these truths about himself that he had suppressed.

By the time Shane made it back to the house, it was obvious that Wyatt, Marleau and Svetlana were also here. The air smelled like bacon and he heard all three of their voices in the kitchen, but he wasn't ready to interact with them so he made his way up the stairs.

He took a deep breath before entering Ilya's room, where the other man had been walking around in his track pants.

"Hey," Ilya said when he caught the sight of Shane. "Wyatt made French toast. I will die if I do not get some—"

Ilya began on his dramatics, but only stopped when he realized Shane was smiling at him fondly.

"What?" Ilya laughed, confused.

"Can we sit?" Shane pointed to the bed and walked over.

Ilya hesitated. "Okay..."

They both sat next to each other, but kept their hands to themselves.

"Did the drop-off with Jess go okay?" Ilya asked nervously.

Shane nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, it went okay. Uh— actually..."

Shane had a habit of pulling at his eyelashes when he was nervous, and watching him do it now only made Ilya assume he was going to say the worst thing.

That maybe they had talked it out and gotten back together. That they were going to try to make it work.

"She said a few things that made me realize a few things about myself. And it led me to think about *us*." Shane noticed the nervous glance Ilya shot his way and quickly grabbed his hand. "N-nothing bad, Ilya. I promise we're okay."

"Okay." Ilya hesitantly accepted the reassurance.

"These past few days have been a lot, I think for the both of us, though. And now with Jess gone, it's given me the opportunity to sort out my thoughts, maybe."

There was a long pause as Shane tried to figure out what he wanted to say.

"You want space?" Ilya asked calmly, reading between the lines.

"I'm not trying to push you away again, Ilya. I just—"

"Stop." Ilya shook his head, and gently caressed Shane's cheek with his other hand. "Is okay. If you need time to yourself, to think or whatever. Is okay. I will be here."

Shane looked deeply into his eyes, at this man he has loved since probably the beginning, and leaned in to kiss him.

After a long press of their lips, they both pulled back.

"You should probably hurry up and go downstairs before Marly uses up all the syrup again." Shane joked.

Ilya gave a closed-mouth smile. "I will fucking murder him."

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The rest of Sunday was spent apart.

Shane busied himself at the library, while Ilya remained in the house finishing up all of his assignments.

Monday was similar, in that they kept to themselves, but when they did catch sight of the other person, there were only looks of fondness being exchanged.

Ilya thought that maybe he would have a hard time with the space, but in little ways Shane reassured him they were okay— by using his toothbrush, squeezing his arm a couple of times throughout their game against Carleton, and washing his work uniform when he went to wash the couch cushion covers.

Something that surprised Ilya, though, was how much he also needed this time to himself.

Ilya wasn't this huge planner. Beyond hockey, he wasn't sure what was going to happen the next day. He had been content with the stupid title his fellow freshman classmates had

granted him, had loved living with his roommates and Shane.

He didn't feel like he needed anything else in his life, currently.

But feeling like he was losing Shane three nights ago, and spending half of the next day apart from him was enough to shake Ilya up.

They were best friends. But at any point in their lives, Shane could get into another relationship or Ilya could decide to give a girl in his phone a chance and that was all it would take to put their friendship in the backseat. It was the only logical way for things to go, but Ilya hated that idea.

In what world would anyone be more important than Shane?

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Shane: Hey

Ilya: hi

Shane: You're not home

Ilya: No

Ilya: alexei picked me up on his way to Ottawa. mama wanted to have dinner tonight with both of us

Shane: How are you getting back home?

Ilya: idk. maybe pay alexei to drive me back

Shane: im on my way

Ilya: to where?

Ilya: why is your location getting closer to mine??

Ilya: don't you have work tonight?

Shane: Boods covering my shift

Shane: Meet me at the lake when you're done with dinner?

Ilya: ...

Shane: It's Tuesday

Ilya had parked Alexei's car kind of like shit, but it didn't matter. It was freezing tonight so Ilya hugged his jacket tighter against his body as he walked down to the benches. It didn't take him long to spot Shane sitting on the same bench they always sat at when they would tighten the laces of their skates.

It wasn't cold enough for the lake to be frozen over, so Ilya watched the calm waves even when he sat down next to Shane.

"You never thanked me." was the first thing Shane said long after Ilya sat down.

Ilya's eyebrows scrunched. "For what?"

"For being the reason you became such a good skater, basically one of the best in our school. If we hadn't come here every week after we met, who knows if you would have gotten in to hockey."

"Ehhhh, no. Fuck you. You don't get credit for that. I played hockey back in Russia wayyy before I had ever met you." Ilya responded, voice slightly raised and waving a hand through the air. "And what do you mean by 'one of the best'? I am *the* best at McGill."

"Oh yeah? Who was the one that scored a hat-trick yesterday? And who was the one who broke his blade during the game and had to crawl back to the benches?" Shane teased.

Ilya laughed, mostly surprised by Shane's audacity to bring that up so soon. "You know. A lot of people don't notice how much of an asshole *you* actually are. I will make flyers. Big bold letters. 'Shane Hollander is an Asshole'. Post them all around campus."

Shane smiled, and playfully shoved him. "Don't. I know you're joking but I don't put it past you to wake up tomorrow and actually do it. The same way you posted flyers everywhere with Hayden's face on them when he was coming to visit a couple months ago."

"Ah, yes. 'BEWARE OF CANADA'S WORST HOCKEY PLAYER'. He was very mad at me for that one."

"Obviously. Everyone kept looking at him everywhere we went."

"Well, he should have appreciated it then. That's the most attention he'll ever get for being a mediocre athlete."

For the next minute they sat in a comfortable silence, and watch a pair of loons floating in the water.

Shane worked himself up to what it was he wanted to say, reminding himself that the person he was talking to was the one he trusted the most. He had a whole speech planned and he just had to start with the first word. 'The...'

He took a deep sigh and just went right out with it.

"I'm gay."

Fuck. That wasn't even close to how he meant to start.

Ilya blinked at him, taken aback by the sudden confession. "Oh?"

"Um... yeah. That's not really how I meant to say it but, yeah. I— I'm gay." Shane's voice quavered. "I didn't realize it before when I was with Jess. But then she told me about the time she thought I had a crush on Scott Hunter, and I realized that..."

"The dinosaur?" Ilya interrupted.

"...even though I didn't, the idea of crushing on him didn't make me feel weird. Not as weird as it made me feel when Hayden had suggested I go talk to Jessica at his parents' BBQ." Shane continued.

"Fucking Hayden." Ilya shook his head.

"I was never attracted to her, Ilya. Or any girls, really. " Shane confessed.

Ilya could make a joke right now, where he told Shane he could have pointed that out to him a long time ago, but he doesn't. It wasn't what Shane needed right now.

"And..." Shane swallowed, turning his body to face Ilya even more, causing Ilya to do the same. "...another thing that made me realize that I was gay is that..."

Ilya's eyes locked with Shane's, feeling frozen in his spot at the open expression his best friend was giving him.

"I'm so fucking in love with you, Ilya." Shane's voice wavered with the abundance of emotion he was currently feeling.

Ilya blinked, unsure if he trusted his ears with what he thought he heard. But he must have, because his eyes watered and his heart pounded against his chest.

"And it was killing me, pretending I'm not."

Shane smiled fondly when he saw Ilya's face slightly crumble at his admission.

"Fuck, Shane." Ilya whispered, and pulled Shane in for a deep kiss, followed with two more kisses because *fuck*.

When they pulled away, Ilya rested his forehead against Shane's.

"I'm in love with you too. So very much." Ilya kissed him again.

They hugged each other, keeping the other person warm while also wanting to be as close as possible.

Ilya savored the moment of Shane in his arms, and the feeling of grazing his lips against his soft skin.

"I was jealous... of Sasha," Shane said, muffled in the crook of Ilya's neck.

Ilya chuckled before responding. "Yes, I know."

Shane pulled back, eyeing Ilya suspiciously. "I wasn't *watching* though, if that's what you're thinking."

"Let's just agree to disagree," Ilya suggested, smiling at his Shane, before letting the smile slip from his mouth. "I—I guess it was mutual. It was breaking my heart seeing you with Jess."

Shane felt his heart drop. "Shit, Ilya. I'm so sorry that I kissed her on her jaw. That was *our* thing, and I just... wanted to figure out how to love her in the same easy way it was to love you. So I treated her like you, but that wasn't fair... to either of you."

Ilya shook his head, grabbing either side of Shane's face in his hands and kissing just the tip of his nose. "Stop. Is okay. I know you weren't trying to hurt me."

"It's not okay— And it's not okay that I made you think you were secondary in my life." Shane said regretfully but then he remembered a small part of his speech, something that he had been certain about. "But I do plan to make it up to you. To love you every day, and stop making excuses to the rest of the world."

"Shane," Ilya smiled sadly, letting logic inside their bubble. "You just got out of a relationship a few days ago. It's okay to take more time if you need, to be alone. There's no reason to rush into this before either of us think about what it would be like to be together."

"I get that." Shane nodded, looking around and then looking at Ilya. "But to be honest, Ilya. I think we've *been* together."

And to Ilya, that was just as true as his love for Shane.

Shane had always been his, and he had always belonged to Shane.

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Ilya pushed the door to the house wide open, causing it to slam against the wall.

It was late into the night, but he and Shane found the rest of the roommates splayed out on the couch and floor, watching a movie. A movie Ilya wasn't the least bit interested in watching.

Shane stepped in right behind him, awkwardly, and noticed all three pairs of eyes turning to look at them after Ilya's loud entrance.

"We are in love," Ilya said, turning on the living room lights, and causing everyone to squint and hide from the light.

"Fuck, Ilya. You asshole." Marleau said, covering his eyes from the bright light.

"I'm blind!" Wyatt cried, at the same time.

"Wait, what?" Svetlana said with her eyes closed.

"Me and my Shane are lovers," Ilya stated, closing the door and lacing his fingers with Shane's.

"Ew, Ilya. No we aren't." Shane said disgusted.

"Okay, fine. But still." Ilya waved his hand in the air as if to say 'whatever'. "I am spoken for."

"What the fuck? Like actually?" Marleau asked, once he was able to open his eyes.

"What do you mean?" Wyatt asked afterward. "How does that work between two straight guys?"

The entire room turned to him.

Svetlana grabbed Wyatt's hand and spoke to him gently. "Honey. You take however much time you need to process this."

Shane shook his head, to bring himself back to the moment. "Uh, anyway. I kind of wanted to apologize for everything you guys have had to see over the years. It only hit me yesterday that that might have been traumatizing."

Shane gestured to Wyatt as an example.

Svetlana shrugged. "I thought it was hot."

"*Oh, you did? You never told me that.*" Ilya said in Russian, eyebrows raised suspiciously.

"*Why would I? I didn't know you were in love with him. Figured if you and Shane were going to be naked in front of me, I could use that opportunity to admire how sexy he looked, especially jerking both of you off.*" Svetlana said with a smug smile.

Ilya deadpanned. His Russian stare would have intimidated anyone else, but to Svetlana, it didn't bother her even a little bit.

"I honestly just couldn't give two shits." Marleau admitted.

"Oh, fuck. You guys are..." Wyatt finally came to the same conclusion everyone else was at.

Svetlana stood from the couch and went to the bookshelf to pick up the infamous jar.

"What are we going to do with this now?" She placed the heavy jar on the table and they all stared at it.

Ilya brought Shane to the single sofa by the window and pulled him to sit down on his lap.

"Maybe we could buy something for the house with it?" Shane suggested, as he threw one arm around Ilya's shoulder.

"Or we can all go out to a very nice restaurant?" Marleau said.

"Oh, I'm down for that." Ilya agreed. "But how much money is even in there?"

Svetlana twisted the lid open and poured all the bills and coins onto the coffee table. The amount spread out on the table like that definitely made both Shane and Ilya cringe a little bit. All their lies, right there.

"Guess we better start counting." Svetlana said, twisting the lid back on and putting the jar somewhere on the floor.

Shane was just about to slide down on the floor to get closer to the table when he noticed Wyatt stood up quickly to make his way over to him.

Ilya caught on that Shane was focused on Wyatt making his way over, so he too looked at the other man.

Wyatt crouched right in front of them.

"Shane," Wyatt started, placing a hand on Shane's knee.

"Um, yeah?" Shane adjusted his position on Ilya's lap to sit more upright. He felt Ilya's arms tighten around his torso.

"I want to apologize for trying to kiss Ilya the other day. I was just trying to do what was best for the house." he said sincerely but all Shane could do was widen his eyes and whip his head to look at Ilya.

"What?!" Shane said loudly, hearing Marleau in the background react with a 'You did what?' and a 'Best for the house?' from Svetlana.

"Fuck, wait, no!" Wyatt panicked.

Wyatt looked around the room until his eyes landed on a frozen Ilya who was too stunned to speak before looking back at Shane.

"I'm not interested in him! N-not because he's not attractive. I'm just not attracted to men. But if I was attracted to men— Ilya, you're definitely a catch... Not that I would try to steal him away from you, Shane!" Wyatt started speaking fast, looking between Shane, who he was trying to apologize to, and Ilya, who he was trying to explain himself to. "That's not the point! I—I'm just trying to say that it wasn't like that— wait... FUCK!" Wyatt facepalmed, and groaned in frustration.

The room finally quieted after that, everyone watching Wyatt curse again under his breath before standing up, stomping to the console table, and grabbing his wallet to pull out a blue five dollar bill.

"Honey, I don't think you need to—" Svetlana started but shut her mouth when Wyatt threw the money onto the pile on the coffee table.

Once the room settled, and Ilya promised to tell Shane the story later about him and Wyatt and their almost kiss, they all went about counting the money.

\$141.00

After another hour of discussing what they could do with the money, they all called it a night. Everyone dispersed to their own bedrooms except for Shane. He went to Ilya's room and they found their way back into their little bubble—where Ilya rocked into Shane for hours, while they whispered sweet I love yous into the dark, and meant it completely.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading 🥺

My goal for this fic was to start it off silly and slowly transition it into something deeper.

I hope I was able to do that.

I love these boys so much.

Comments make me smile :)

End Notes

Twt/ X : @lovely_hollan0v

Works inspired by this one

[Cover Art for Drawing a Line](#) by [Lizluvsbooks](#)

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