Your Flight Has Been Delayed

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/89188201.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers | Heated Rivalry - All Media Types, Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationships:	Shane Hollander & Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander & Rose Landry
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Rose Landry, Svetlana Vetrova
Additional Tags:	Anxious Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov is Obsessed With Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander is Obsessed With Ilya Rozanov, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Gay Shane Hollander, Good Friend Rose Landry, Fluff and Smut, Post-Episode: s01e05 I'll Believe in Anything (Heated Rivalry), POV Shane Hollander, Humor, Smut, Shane Hollander & Rose Landry Friendship, Forced Proximity, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander Being an Asshole, Ilya Rozanov Being Ilya Rozanov, Good Friend Svetlana Vetrova, Ilya Rozanov & Svetlana Vetrova Friendship, POV Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-07-25 Completed: 2026-08-04 Words: 25,862 Chapters: 2/2

Your Flight Has Been Delayed

by americnxgirl

Summary

Ilya Rozanov is many things—a pain in Shane Hollander's ass, hockey's biggest playboy, a better chirper in his second language than most people are in their first, the only player who can challenge Shane for the title of "best of his generation." But when Shane and Ilya get stuck next to each other on a long-delayed flight to the MLH Awards, Shane realizes something else about him: Ilya Rozanov is hot.

***

Shane and Ilya never hooked up at the CCM shoot. Seven years later, they end up on the same flight from New York City to Las Vegas.

Notes

Turn on creator skins for some translation pop-ups.

Chapter 1: Shane

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shane Hollander lifts his travel bag into the overhead compartment, on the left side, closest to the front of the plane, before sliding into seat 3D, a window seat in first class. He completes his standard flight ritual: iPad loaded with an eBook and game footage in the seat pocket; mini travel bag with a sleep mask, reading glasses, two pairs of headphones, and a pair of ear plugs hooked onto the tray for easy access; charging cable for his phone plugged into the USB, backpack slotted under the seat in front of him.

Then he leans back in his seat and closes his eyes. He is exhausted.

Never one to miss a good business opportunity (or three), Yuna Hollander set up several sponsorship meetings for Shane in New York City during the week between the Stanley Cup Finals and the MLH Awards. He's spent the last five days smiling, shaking hands, chatting politely, being primped and made-up, and posing. On his one off evening, he took his parents to a nice dinner and a Broadway show, which was very loud and included actors coming into the audience and caused his normally-rational father to sing "Memory" the entire cab ride back to the hotel.

Needless to say, his social battery is at zero. He silently pleads with the airplane gods that his seatmate doesn't care about hockey.

Outside the plane window, steady rain falls onto the tarmac outside LaGuardia Airport.

As passengers filter onto the plane, Shane looks at his phone, smiling when he sees a few texts from Rose.

Rose: the CK test shots are 🔥🔥🔥
Rose: awoogah and all that
Shane: Down girl
Rose: not to pressure you but these would kill on a certain app
Rose: if ya know what i mean 👀
Rose: (ya know what i mean)

Shane looks around self-consciously, tilting his phone toward the window even though there's no one near him to see. Rose seems to be trying to get him more comfortable with his sexuality through exposure therapy. He can't complain. He feels beyond lucky that his last desperate attempt to date a woman was with someone as wonderful and understanding as Rose Landry.

Besides, her methods are working. He said the words "I'm gay" out loud for the first time in his hotel room earlier this week. Sure, it was to himself, but still. Baby steps.

Shane: I told you I'm not ready for Grinder
Rose: oh my hopeless baby gay
Rose: grindr*
Rose: a grinder is a sandwich
Shane: Duly noted
Rose: my best student

Shane: Homo school is really competitive
Rose: lmao shane

"Shane Hollander."

His own name rolls off an accented tongue, making Shane jump in his seat. He slams his phone against his lap and looks up toward the aisle.

He sees a black hat pulled down over unruly blond curls. Sunglasses perched on sharp cheekbones. A fitted Boston Raiders tank top and a pair of black joggers making him look even stronger and jockier than usual. Over-the-ear headphones draped around his neck. A shit-eating grin that Shane usually only sees on the ice.

Ilya Rozanov is standing there, looking dangerously like he's about to sit down.

"You're kidding," Shane deadpans.

"3C." Rozanov holds up his phone to show his ticket.

"3D," Shane replies with a sigh. Rozanov's face lights up with mischief, and he pulls off his sunglasses. "Pardon this insane question," Shane continues as Rozanov slings his suitcase into the overhead bin, "but… did you plan this somehow?"

Rozanov shakes his head. "I wish I planned this. This is too good."

"Weird coincidence, I guess," Shane mutters. He nestles into his seat and blindly clicks the lock button on his phone a few times out of an abundance of caution. His conversation with Rose is safe and away. Maybe he'll get lucky and pass out for the full flight.

"Seriously, what are the odds?" Rozanov slides into his seat and ignores Shane's leave-me-alone body language. "The number one and number two hockey players in the league, seated together on a flight to the MLH Awards, where they are both nominated for the Hart. Kismet, huh?"

"Let me guess," Shane drones. "You're number one."

"So generous of you to admit it, Hollander." Rozanov nudges Shane's elbow with his own. Shane shoves his elbow back.

"Fuck off."

"It's a fairytale!"

"So in your fairytale, we both lose MVP to Hunter?"

It's kind of a chirp at both of them, but it's true. Scott Hunter took a career-worst start of the season and turned it into a dominant Stanley Cup victory. He deserves it. And as for what he did after… Shane can't think about it too hard without getting either emotional or anxious. Or both.

"Hm, good point," Ilya agrees. "Maybe not a fairytale, then." He pretends to think hard. "Roger Crowell's wet dream?"

Shane snorts despite himself. "Gross."

“Rivalry brings the big bucks, after all.” Rozanov leans in conspiratorially. “Should we fist fight? Could be an exciting story.”

“I’m good.”

Shane’s week is catching up with him. His eyes feel suddenly heavy, and he fiddles through his bag for his sleep mask. Rozanov either doesn’t notice or doesn’t care, lounging as much as he can in the plane seat given his size and turning toward Shane. He *would* be the kind of person who chats up his seatmates on a flight.

“Why are you even in New York?” Rozanov asks.

“Sponsorship stuff.”

“Now ask me.”

“What?”

“Is how conversations work,” Rozanov teases. “I ask question, you ask question.” Rozanov looks at him, raising his eyebrows when Shane still doesn’t say anything else. Then he continues in a godawful Canadian accent, “‘Why are you in New York, Rozanov? Sorry.’” He flips back to his normal voice. “Thank you for asking, Hollander. I was visiting my old friend from Russia. She lives here. Very nice time.”

This is the most Rozanov has spoken to him since they filmed a commercial together right before their rookie season. His English is much better now, and his eyes glimmer like he knows he’s getting away with something. Not that Shane notices things like that.

“Rozanov, I’m exhausted,” Shane finally says.

Rozanov rolls his eyes but slots his headphones over his ears, a passive-aggressive surrender. “Fine. Boring. Get your beauty sleep, Hollander. Not that you need it.”

Shane hopes the dim lighting of the plane hides the immediate flush that comes to his cheeks. He makes sure his seat belt is buckled and visible and then puts on his sleep mask and ear plugs. The dark and the quiet soon overcomes his nervous energy, and he falls into an empty sleep against the plane window.

***

An hour later, Shane wakes up to stillness. Is it possible he got lucky enough to sleep through takeoff?

He pushes off his eye mask and pulls out his ear plugs, expecting to hear the loud hum of the engines. Instead he hears chatter. Murmuring. Nothing mechanical.

“You snore, Hollander.”

Shane’s eyes snap to Rozanov, still seated beside him. Right. His knees look crunched up underneath his tray table, but he seems relaxed, reading a detective novel and sipping on a glass of champagne. His headphones are propped half on his ears.

“No, I don’t,” Shane protests.

“Little baby snores. Like a puppy.”

If it's true, Shane is mortified. If Rozanov is fucking with him, he's successfully gotten a rise out of him, which is also mortifying. So Shane decides to deflect instead.

"Are we still in New York?" he asks, peering out the window.

Rozanov nods. "Our flight has been delayed."

"Weather?"

"Something with the plane."

"Until when?"

"I don't know."

"Did they say what's wrong?"

"So many questions," Rozanov says with a sigh. He pulls his headphones fully off. "Am I your secretary? It's not my fault you slept through all the announcements."

"Whatever," Shane mutters, embarrassed. "You don't need to be a dick about it."

Rozanov smirks. "But I'm so good at it."

"Something we agree on," Shane says, half-joking. He clicks through the screen on the back of the seat in front of him, scrolling through the terrible movie selections and pretending he doesn't feel when Rozanov leans closer.

"You're a little bit of a dick, too. I can tell," Rozanov says.

Shane frowns. "No, I'm not."

"Oh, I know so."

Don't take the bait, Shane. He immediately takes the bait.

"How could you know? We aren't friends like that." Rozanov just shrugs. Shane continues, "Is that some kind of inside joke in Boston? That I'm an asshole?"

"Tell me," Rozanov says, resting his chin in his hand. "What did you think about Florida's starting line this year?"

"It's a miracle they made the playoffs at all with Svenson dragging them down from the center," Shane says automatically. Rozanov breaks into a proper smile. "Okay, fine," Shane relents, "but I've earned the right to be a dick about hockey."

"I won't tell anyone," Rozanov says, hushed. "It's our little secret, Captain."

He gives Shane a little salute, pinky and ring finger curling into his large hand as his lips quirk up, and Shane's stomach flips.

Oh no.

The thing is, Shane may have only recently accepted that he is, to quote Rose, "full blown gay." But he's known he is attracted to men since he was a teenager. He did a lot of mental gymnastics back

then to excuse it. Sure, he got hard thinking about a guy on his school's varsity soccer team. But Britney Spears was also hot. Sure, he sometimes fantasized about sucking a dick when he jerked off. But he also managed to come when his first girlfriend gave him a blowjob. So he couldn't be gay. Not completely.

The first time he fucked a man while on vacation in Mexico, it was so much better than having sex with women that he had a low-grade panic attack for two days. In the years since, every attempted hook-up with women and every rare hook-up with men pushed him further into a dark corner he didn't want to be in, one where he might *only* want to hook up with men and may not be sexually attracted to women at all.

Thank god Rose Landry was there to turn the light on. The corner is less scary now.

All this to say, Shane knows his type and he knows how he feels when he's attracted to someone.

To his own horror, he is definitely attracted to Ilya Rozanov.

(Not that he was not aware that Rozanov was an attractive man. But when you're closeted in the world of male sports, you try to not spend a lot of time thinking about that stuff.)

To stop this spiral before it gets out of hand, Shane mentally lists some facts.

This is a flight from New York City to Las Vegas.

The flight is delayed.

Ilya Rozanov is a notorious playboy who chirps at and flirts with anything that moves.

Ilya Rozanov is straight.

Ilya Rozanov is waiting for him to say something.

"I still can't believe the Admirals won the Cup," Shane blurts out.

Rozanov straightens in his seat. "Yes, they started the year like shit. Did not expect it. But maybe Scott Hunter had one of those…" He snaps his fingers a few times. "You know in movies when someone dies and their ghost is suddenly young and hot again before they disappear to the great beyond?"

Shane snorts. "Hunter's not that old."

"He's president of AARP. In fact, he founded it."

"I think he's three years older than us," Shane says. Rozanov looks at Shane expectantly, raising an eyebrow, and Shane can't help himself. "But I am happy for him that he won before he retires next year."

Rozanov laughs, bright and generous. "You're funnier than I thought."

"Big compliment," Shane deadpans.

"Explain the sarcasm."

Shane tugs on his sweatshirt sleeve, forced nonchalance. “I know my reputation. As long as I’m funnier than a turtle, I’ll be funnier than people think.”

“Eh, I don’t know about that. Some turtles are very funny,” Ilya jokes. Then he takes his hat off and shoves it into the seat pocket in front of him, fluffing his hair out with his fingers. Shane pinches his thumb to focus on anything else. “But yes, Hollander, you are perfect and boring,” Rozanov continues. “Great, clean hockey. No mistakes. You don’t even fight, which is one of the big reasons hockey is better than other sports.”

“Someone in this league needs to keep all their real teeth,” Shane teases, enjoying the way Rozanov’s mouth drops open in genuine surprise.

“Really? All real?”

“Yes.”

Rozanov whistles. “Impressive.”

Suddenly Rozanov’s face becomes more serious, and his knee fidgets under the tray table.

“Scott Hunter may be the crypt keeper,” he says, “but it was very brave what he did after the game. It will change things for people.”

Shane gulps. “You think so?” he asks, working overtime to keep his voice as even as possible.

Rozanov nods. “I will tell him so in Las Vegas.”

“That’s very decent of you, Rozanov.”

“See? I can be nice guy.” Rozanov leans a little closer to Shane, lips curving back into an impish grin. “Not as nice as Rose Landry, maybe, but I’m okay if you give me a shot.”

All at once, Shane’s blood runs cold.

As grateful as he is to have Rose as a friend, their brief, very public relationship drew a lot of unwanted attention toward Shane, namely from other players in the MLH who were desperate to know why it ended. There was a giddiness to it all, like sharks preparing to feed. Everyone had been waiting for the great Shane Hollander to show some kind of character flaw, and he finally did. They couldn’t wait to chirp him for it, on and off the ice.

How boring, how unpleasant, how bad at sex, how gay do you gotta be to blow it so quickly with a hottie like Rose Landry?

Rozanov cutely raises an eyebrow, and Shane’s mood sinks further. He’s just like the rest of them.

“Fuck off,” Shane says quietly, retreating into his seat.

“What?”

“Don’t make fun of me.”

“Make fun?” Rozanov frowns. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing,” Shane snaps. He hurriedly retrieves his wireless headphones from his bag, hands trembling so badly that he almost drops an AirPod. “Whatever. I’m going to watch a movie.”

“Hollander—”

“Sorry. I’m just… I promised I’d watch this.”

“Promised who?”

Ignoring that last question, Shane shoves his headphones into his ears and clicks the first movie his finger finds on his seat-back screen. He stares intently as the production companies and film title pop up, forcing all of his focus onto the movie and away from his seatmate’s confused face.

Whatever *A Dog’s Purpose* is, it has to be better than continuing this conversation with Ilya Rozanov.

***

A Dog’s Purpose sucks.

In the hour Shane’s been watching this, the dog has died and been reincarnated three times. It’s the kind of maudlin movie that Shane’s paternal grandmother would make him watch when he stayed there for the weekend as a kid. He hated weekends with that grandmother.

Plus it includes one of Shane’s pet peeves: animals’ thoughts being expressed in human voiceover. He has a distinct memory of watching *Homeward Bound* with a babysitter and asking so many questions about the logic of it that the teenager finally groaned, “It’s just a movie, Shane.”

The plane still hasn’t moved.

Right as the dog is seemingly about to die again, his headphones make that ominous downward chime. The left AirPod dies just seconds before the right does. The ambient plane sounds are back.

Shane Hollander is nothing if not an experienced traveler. He opens his mini bag to grab his wire headphones, but the pocket where he normally keeps them is empty apart from a travel pack of Advil. Pulling his backpack out, he looks through all the compartments and pockets, but he doesn’t find them.

Suddenly, a horrifying flashback.

On the flight back from their last playoff game, a painful loss against Boston in the first round, Hayden asked to borrow his headphones and then… never gave them back.

Now Shane is headphone-less until his AirPods fully charge in a few hours, unless he can flag down a flight attendant and grab a cheap pair.

Risking a glance to his left, Shane sees Rozanov leaning back against the headrest, eyes closed and headphones slotted back over his ears. In sleep, he looks relaxed, mouth slack and lips barely parted. His profile is striking. His nose has been broken a few times—the way he runs his mouth on and off the ice, it’s not surprising—but it adds a ruggedness to his otherwise beautiful face, with his high cheekbones, sharp jaw, and strong chin. Shane’s never been this close to him for this long before…

Well, except the night of the draft all those years ago, in a hotel gym, when they sat on the floor, sweating, gasping for air, feet in lockstep, their hands clasping over a shared water bottle, a night of

what-if and possibilities that Shane fantasized about in the shower multiple times before ultimately breaking up with his high school girlfriend…

Jesus, Shane needs to get laid. If that night was even anything, which it wasn't, Rozanov probably fucked it out of his system by the first All Star Game. Maybe he'll be able to find someone discreet in Vegas, since his parents aren't coming this year.

"You plotting to murder me?" Rozanov says suddenly, one eye peeking open.

Shane exhales sharply. Chirping is safe. "Nah," Shane says. "If I kill you, history will remember me as the guy who murdered Ilya Rozanov, not as the best hockey player of our generation."

Rozanov smirks. "You've thought this through."

"I was trying to flag down a flight attendant."

"Shane Hollander. Driven to drink by my presence."

Shane rolls his eyes. "My headphones died, asshole."

"Spoiler alert." Rozanov taps his finger against the paused movie on Shane's screen. "The dog learns a life lesson."

"You've watched that horrible thing?" Shane asks, surprised.

"It's a dog movie!" Rozanov says defensively. "It's supposed to be fun, like the dog basketball movie, or the other dog basketball movie."

"Air Bud and Air Bud 2?"

"Yes, the Golden Receiver." His accent wraps charmingly around that second word. "But who wants to watch a poor doggy die a billion times?"

"Not me."

Rozanov frowns, an indignant pout on his face. Then it fades, and he's just looking at Shane, like he's trying to puzzle something out.

"What?" Shane asks self-consciously.

"I think I offended you before, but I don't know why."

Shane chews on his lip. Rozanov is usually not subtle with his insults, and he seems genuinely confused. For the sake of a peaceful flight, Shane gives him the benefit of the doubt.

"It's a me thing," he says as a nonexplanation. "Sore subject. Can we drop it?"

Rozanov nods. "Okay."

The speakers crackle overhead and then the voice of the pilot comes through, low and annoyingly steady. "*Passengers, uh, this is your captain speaking. We are still working on the issue with the brakes. Currently we are delayed waiting for personnel to finish up with another job at the next terminal. We appreciate your patience, and we'll update you again when we can.*"

"Great," Shane mutters.

“Is hard to understand him. Still delayed?”

“Yep.”

His phone buzzes with a text from his mom, who still tracks his flights like he’s an unaccompanied minor.

“Hollander. Smile.”

“What?”

Shane looks up and sees Rozanov holding out his phone in selfie mode with a big smile on his face. Shane glares, which makes Rozanov smile even bigger. He snaps a picture.

“Is funny,” Rozanov explains. “Hockey’s biggest rivalry, defeated by a dumb plane.”

“Don’t post that until we’re in Vegas.”

“I know how to be a public figure, Hollander.”

“Right.”

Shane never does that well with casual conversation, usually because he has a hard time feigning interest in people and topics he doesn’t care about. But that’s not what’s happening here. He feels off-balance, like his coordination is being compromised by proximity to Rozanov’s bare shoulders. It’s, frankly, embarrassing and awkward.

Luckily Rozanov seems to be immune to awkwardness.

“Let’s play a game,” he says suddenly, clapping his hands together.

“A game?”

“Yes. Unless you want to watch the rest of your dog trauma porn with no sound.”

“I could put on subtitles.” It’s the flimsiest excuse, and Rozanov rolls his eyes at him accordingly. “Okay, fine,” Shane relents. “What game?”

“Truth or dare.”

“Absolutely not.”

“So boring.” Rozanov sighs dramatically, retrieving a can of Coke he’s stored in the seat pocket and cracks it open. “Okay, two truths and a lie, then.”

“What are these game ideas? Are we having a slumber party?”

“Maybe.” Rozanov waggles his eyebrows. “I have jammies in my carry-on.”

Shane shoves a really inconvenient mental image of Rozanov sleeping in nothing but a pair of boxer briefs out of his mind immediately.

“How do we know who wins?” Shane asks, folding his arms across his chest.

“So competitive, all the time.”

“Duh.”

Rozanov’s lips quirk to the side as he thinks. “First to trick the other person five times wins.” Shane looks at him, unsure, and Rozanov correctly takes his pause as an attempt to back out. “What are you more afraid of, Hollander, getting to know me a little or losing to me at another game?”

“Fuck you. I’m going first.”

They start out with surface level trivia.

Shane likes pontoons, likes kayaking, but doesn’t like cruises. (“It’s like being trapped in a nightclub for the elderly.”) Rozanov likes Vancouver, likes Toronto, but hates Winnipeg. (“*You* would be big party boy in Winnipeg.”) Shane knows how to surf and snowboard but has never skateboarded. (“I was always afraid to fall on cement.”) Rozanov enjoys burgers and pizza but doesn’t like cheesesteaks. (“What is Cheez Whiz? What is wrong with normal cheese?”)

Shane tricks Rozanov by revealing that his favorite hockey movie is *Goon*.

“It’s a little bloody, but it’s the most Canadian hockey movie. I keep it downloaded on my iPad in case I ever don’t have WiFi on a roadie.”

Rozanov tricks Shane back by revealing his only pet growing up was a fish.

“Papa said no pets, but I caught a little fish in a small river near my house. I kept it in a big glass vase by my bedroom window. Fed it little fishy flakes.”

Soon, they are tied 4–4.

“We don’t have all day, Hollander,” Rozanov says, tapping his fingers against his chin impatiently as Shane tries to think of a good last set of facts about himself.

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Only seventeen more hours until flight takes off.”

“Oh! I got it.” Shane smiles. “You’re fucking finished, Rozanov.”

“Bring it.”

Shane leans forward, already proud of himself. “I hold three Montreal Voyageurs records: most goals in a rookie season, most points in a regular season, and most assists by a player under 30.”

Ilya’s face drops. “That’s your big smoker’s gun?”

“Smoking gun? Yeah. Which one’s a lie?”

“You’re giving me hockey facts.” Shane nods. “Jesus, Hollander, you are like a Terminator who was created to make mediocre goalies cry.” Despite Rozanov’s exasperated tone, his eyes are sparkling and bright as he ponders his answer. “I think… you do not have most assists under 30.”

Shane frowns. “Fuck.”

“Ah ha!” Rozanov cheers, grinning brightly. “That’s advantage me. If I get you, I win.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Shane mumbles. “Give me your best shot, ‘Roz.’”

“Okay, ‘Hollzy.’”

Shane shudders at the nickname, which makes Rozanov chuckle. Then Rozanov thinks quietly for a minute. Something akin to nerves crosses his face, and he looks over Shane’s face so intently that it makes Shane averts his eyes. Shane realizes a second too late that instinct drew his gaze to Rozanov’s mouth instead, and in a panic, he ends up staring at the small brand logo on Rozanov’s chest.

“Okay,” Rozanov finally says quietly. Shane can barely hear him over the din of the plane cabin. “I like women. I like men. I eat a salad every day.”

The world flickers and resets.

Shane’s eyes snap back to Rozanov’s, looking for any sign that this is a joke, a trap, a long fakeout before the big laugh. He’s been in too many rooms where being gay *is* the punchline.

But he finds nothing but sincerity and perhaps a hint of anxiety looking back.

Shane gulps. “You don’t eat salads?”

Rozanov takes a sip of his Coke, his smile pressing against the metal lip.

“Tied again, Hollander.”

What the fuck. Shane has never been more grateful for a loose-fit sweatshirt and black joggers. His body is shorting out, unsure if it’s terrified, horny, relieved, panicked, or… well, even more horny. He feels flushed and cold, skin warm even though goosebumps are prickling over both his arms. He’s not hard, but he embarrassingly feels like he could be at a moment’s notice.

“You…?” Shane asks.

Rozanov raises an eyebrow. “You are surprised.”

“Kind of, yeah.”

“I think perhaps you too,” Rozanov says carefully.

Shane’s body isn’t confused anymore. This is anxiety and fear and panic. His pulse spikes so quickly, he feels lightheaded. His voice comes out very breathy.

“How…” He shakes his head. “Does everyone…?”

“Hollander, you are panicking,” Rozanov says with a small smile. “No one knows.”

“Then how?”

“Breathe first.” Shane audibly sucks in a breath. Rozanov rolls his eyes. “And out. Come on, Hollander, you know how to do this. Sleeping people do this.”

“Fuck you,” Shane says as he exhales.

Rozanov chuckles. “Very good. And to answer your question, I have a skill for this. My secret talent.” Then he leans closer to Shane, so close that Shane can smell the mint of his chapstick. “Plus you gave me a hard-on in a hotel gym on draft night.”

Heat creeps up Shane’s neck and cheeks.

“You remember that?”

“Is hard to forget.”

Shane must have hit his head getting into his taxi this morning. Or the dead dog movie was so bad it sent him into some kind of rage-induced coma. It’s the only explanation for the fact that Ilya Rozanov, man of a thousand “Woman’s Name (bar)” phone contacts, is so casually mentioning a night that Shane looks back on as his likely sexual awakening.

Or the fact that Rozanov is currently looking at him with such open curiosity.

The pilot’s droning voice snaps Shane out of his gay-panic trance.

“*Attention passengers. We have an update from the technical crew. Uhh, the brake issue is more complicated than originally anticipated.*”

“He has mush mouth,” Rozanov says, visibly struggling to follow the announcements. “Very xenophobic.” Shane holds up a finger, as polite as a shush can be, and listens for them both.

“*In order to ensure a safe flight, we will be asking you to collect your belongings and deplane the aircraft in just a few moments.*”

The entire plane seems to let out a collective groan.

“*A new aircraft should be arriving from Charlotte in about two hours, and we will do our best to get you all on that plane as quickly as possible. Thank you.*”

“Bad news?” Rozanov asks.

“We have to get off,” Shane replies, accidentally suggestive. “The plane,” he adds, making it worse.

This is the perfect opportunity to pop this weird, suddenly way-too-personal bubble that’s formed around them. Shane can get up, go read his book in the lounge by himself, and return to the new plane ready to sleep for six hours. Rozanov can do whatever he does to pass the time.

Instead, they just stare at each other. Shane lets his gaze move over a familiar face that suddenly looks a little different. He’s becoming a real person in front of Shane’s very eyes. Rozanov is doing the same to him. When he exhales, his mouth opens slightly and Shane can see a tiny scar on the inside of his lower lip.

Shane’s balancing on a dangerous ledge.

Turns out, it doesn’t take much of a push.

“I’m going to eat dinner,” Rozanov says.

“Okay.”

“You come with?”

“Yes.”

Four hours after Rozanov sat down next to Shane in seat 3C, they step back into the airport with instructions to keep an eye out for their new departure time. They’re as incognito as they can be,

Rozanov's hat sitting low over his eyes and Shane's hood flipped up as they roll their carry-ons away from the gate. They walk, side by side.

"Where are you taking me, Rozanov?"

The smile Rozanov tosses over his shoulder hits Shane like a brick.

"Call me Ilya."

***

"You look confused, Shane." Rozanov—*Ilya* says his name like it's a secret they share. "Do you need me to read to you?"

Shane stares hard at the menu, as if the suboptimal options can distract from this new state of constant, low-level horniness.

"This food is disgusting."

"It's Chili's."

"An *airport* Chili's."

Ilya snorts. "Who knew you were such a snob?"

"I'm not a snob," Shane protests.

"Shane." Ilya raises an eyebrow. "You model for Rolex."

Shane glares at him, though he's not sure how effective it is. They're seated at a table in the back corner with a hanging lamp. Both of them are sipping on water from red plastic cups. If you swap out the black-and-white Statue of Liberty artwork for a poster that said the word "RIBS" in ten different fonts, Shane went on this exact date with his girlfriend in ninth grade.

Not that this is a fucking date. *Jesus, Shane, get a grip.*

"So what?" Shane asks defensively. "Aren't you like a fancy car guy?"

Ilya grins wickedly. "Why, Shane Hollander, are you keeping tabs on me?" He leans a little closer. "Do you secret follow me on Instagram?"

"Fuck off," Shane says, fighting a smile. "I remember seeing some article about it."

"What's your burner account, RozanovFan69?

"You wish, dude."

"IlyaLover69?"

"HollanderRules." Shane grins. "69."

The waiter comes by. Shane manages to order a chicken sandwich. ("No bun, no sauce," Shane requests. "So just piece of chicken," Ilya adds unhelpfully.) Ilya, on the other hand, orders steak fajitas and two Coronas.

“Two beers?” Shane asks when the man leaves.

Ilya shrugs. “Extra in case you decide to live a little. Otherwise, I’m getting airport tipsy alone.”

Shane takes the beer.

And then they just… talk.

They talk hockey.

“What did you think about Colorado this year?”

“Embarrassing,” Ilya says. “They shouldn’t be allowed to come back to the mountains until they learn how to skate. What about LA?”

“Good team, but maybe a fluke they got to the Finals this year. Really weak third line. Toronto?”

“More talented at being assholes than at hockey.”

“They’re pretty great at hockey.”

“They’re prodigies at being assholes.”

They talk gossip.

“There’s no way,” Shane says, mouth agape.

“That’s what Carmy heard from old teammates in Carolina.”

“*During* the All Star game this year?”

“Peterson sleeps with Marakov’s wife. Marakov gets revenge with Peterson’s wife. Is like Wife Swap, but they’re both getting divorced now.”

“Where the hell was I?”

“You were probably too nervous, getting ready to play your first hockey game on the same team as the great Ilya Rozanov.”

“Yeah. I hear that guy’s a prick.”

They even talk about things Shane doesn’t usually like talking about.

“So Rose Landry…” Ilya asks, trailing off.

“What about her?” Ilya shrugs and takes a sip of beer. “She’s just a friend,” Shane clarifies. “A really great friend.”

“Sex was that bad, eh?”

“Fuck you.”

“Or maybe the sex was so good you had to end it, for the sake of her action movie career.”

Shane snorts. “Common problem?”

“Oh yeah. Back gets too blown out, you forget how to stage kick.”

“Sounds like you’re familiar with that dilemma.”

“Is why I had to stop sleeping with Chris Evans.”

As the minutes pass, Shane finds his shoulders lowering, his muscles feeling calm and loose as he relaxes into the booth. The beer helps. But the alcohol isn’t what’s unwinding the tension that generally courses through Shane’s body like a second skeleton. (Even a lightweight like Shane is still a 200 pound man who can handle a Corona.)

It’s the conversation. It’s Ilya.

Shane can’t remember the last time he sat across from someone and didn’t feel like he had to be on his best behavior. Maybe it’s because he’s closeted to everyone close to him, with the exception of Rose. Maybe it’s the pressure that comes with being exactly as good at hockey as everyone thinks he is. All of the authority figures in his life, from parents to coaches, have expectations of how he should act and speak and behave. Everyone wants something from Shane Hollander.

Ilya doesn’t want anything from him except his company.

Plus he’s fucking hot.

That might be the beer a little bit.

When the busser arrives with their food, Ilya is delighted by the sizzling fajita plate, and Shane is delighted by how many teeth he shows when the waiter warns him not to touch the pan.

“You eat like a dog,” Shane says after Ilya devours half his dish in about five minutes.

“I’d like to see a dog assemble a taco.” Then Ilya thinks for a moment. “Would they use their noses, you think? Pushing tomatoes around?”

He nudges his nose forward as he talks. It’s cute. Fuck this guy.

“Better than using their dirty paws,” Shane says lamely.

“How is your dry, bunless chicken?”

“Dry and bunless.”

Ilya grabs the guacamole container off his plate and drops it next to Shane’s barely-eaten French fries.

“Take it. It’s avocado, so it’s healthy.”

“Ilya—”

“You must take good sauce that is offered to you,” Ilya says, waving his hand in Shane’s direction. “Is important Russian custom.”

Shane smirks. “Oh, is it?”

“Yes. You will offend me greatly if you don’t eat it.”

Shane rolls his eyes but feels warm as he spreads the guacamole over his chicken. It's not bread, but it certainly tastes much better this way.

Suddenly Shane's phone starts vibrating on the table. *Yuna Hollander (Mom)* flashes on the screen. Shane gives Ilya an apologetic nod and steps away from the table toward the front of the restaurant.

"Hello."

"What is going on with this flight?" his mother asks, launching right in. "I've been tracking and other flights are taking off, so it can't be just the rain."

"No. It's some kind of mechanical issue. They're swapping out the plane."

"What a nightmare. I'm sorry, honey."

"Eh." He glances back toward the table in the back of Chili's, where Ilya is trying to scoop the last of his pico de gallo up with two of Shane's fries. "Could be worse."

He hears typing on the other end. "It looks like there is a flight to Vegas out of Newark in three hours that I could get you on, though you'd have to sit in coach."

"Mom—"

"Or you could catch a connecting flight to Charlotte, right there from LaGuardia in about an hour. Extra time in the air, but a more guaranteed departure."

"Okay, but—"

"I also gave a heads up to your travel agent, and she is more than willing to put together an alternate travel plan that will get you to Vegas faster. We're not looking to charter a jet or anything, but she may be able to piece something together—"

"Mom," Shane snaps. "I'm fine. I don't want to change my flight."

"Shane," she says in a voice that always makes him feel like he's somehow being unprofessional. "Realistically, best case scenario, you're taking off in four hours."

"And the awards aren't until tomorrow night," he pushes back. "I'll be fine."

After a long moment of silence, she says, "Are you sure? You'll miss the welcome party. You never know who you might meet at one of those." *Hockey players and overeager executives who think they count as hockey players*, he thinks. "It'd be a great opportunity to… I don't know. Put yourself back out there."

There it is. "Mom."

"Just saying, it's been a few months since Rose—"

"Mom, stop." A completely reckless part of him wants to tell her he's already sort-of-putting himself out there, sort-of-flirting with a hot guy that he definitely shouldn't be sort-of-flirting with. Instead he reiterates, "I'm fine hanging here. It's kind of nice, actually. I'm taking it easy today."

"You?" she asks skeptically. "Taking it easy?"

“Yes.”

“At the airport.”

“Yes.”

“Fine,” she says. “Oh, I also followed up with Reebok and Calvin Klein. They both said you were great this week, and Reebok had a really interesting pitch about their spring campaign for next season that I’d love to talk over with you.”

“Mom, please.” Shane hates how his voice sounds, whiny and frustrated. “Can this wait? I don’t want to do business stuff today.”

He hears her sigh. “Okay, honey.”

“I love you.”

“Love you, too. Text me when you have a flight update.”

Shane feels like a pouting teenager as he drags himself back into the depths of the airport Chili’s. He even lets out a dramatic sigh when his phone pings with a text from his father:

David Hollander (Dad): Remember to text your mom.

The booth squeaks when Shane plops back down.

“Fun call?” Ilya asks, looking amused.

“My mom,” he sighs. Then he shakes his phone in his hand. “And my dad. I think they forget I’m a fully grown adult sometimes.”

“I see.”

“I love them, but they can be so annoying. Just leave me alone for one day.”

Ilya chuckles, touching a chain around his neck absentmindedly, and a realization hits Shane like an ice cube down his back. Ilya missed a week of the season two months ago because his dad died. His dad is dead, and Shane’s whining about his parents being too involved in his life.

“Oh god,” Shane says, dropping his head into his hands. “Sorry. I’m sorry for complaining.”

Ilya cuts him off with a wave. “Is fine.”

“No, I’m an asshole.”

“Please be normal, Hollander,” Ilya says with an eyeroll. “My dad is dead. Your parents are bugging you. Unrelated things.” Ilya steals another fry off Shane’s plate. “That being said, I reserve the right to pull out the orphan card whenever I feel like it.”

“An orphan?” Both of his parents were dead? “Jesus, Ilya, I’m so sorry.”

“Uh uh.” Ilya blows a raspberry. “Is my orphan card. Give it back”

Shane’s lips quirk up. Then he flicks an imaginary card across the table. Ilya pretends to catch it and mimes putting it into his back pocket.

“Will you tell me why that phone call gave you,” Ilya reaches across the table until his thumb is centimeters from Shane’s forehead, gesturing between his brows, “little line right here?” Shane pinches his own thigh to stop himself from doing something stupid, like leaning forward, or putting Ilya’s thumb in his mouth.

“It’s been harder to talk to them lately,” he admits.

“They are mean?” Ilya asks, not judgmental, just curious.

“No, not at all. They’re great.” Shane mulls over how to phrase this without sounding like a spoiled only child. “My mom is also my manager. And sometimes what her son needs is different from what her client needs.”

“Sounds complicated.”

“I think I’m also making it more complicated by not telling them…”

“That you don’t like cruise ships?” Ilya teases.

Shane smirks. “Yeah. Cruise ships.” Then he sighs. “They were so excited when they met Rose. Which was literally one time, at a game, mind you. But they acted so… relieved, like finally their sad, single son was dating someone.”

Ilya snorts. “You’re 26, Shane, not a spinster.”

“‘Spinster?’ Where’d you learn that one?”

“*Grey Gardens*.” Shane shrugs, unfamiliar. “You don’t know? Come on, Hollander. Learn some gay culture.”

“Fuck you.” Ilya just smiles, so Shane continues, “You know how hockey is. Guys start their families super young. I mean, Hayden Pike just had his fourth.”

Ilya’s eyes bug. “Four children?”

“Yep.”

“And he is our age?”

“Basically, yeah.”

“Is he trying to make a *Sound of Music*?” Ilya asks, scrunching his nose. “Little child chorus they can tour around?”

Shane laughs. “They’re sweet kids. And his wife is one of my close friends.”

“Tell your close friend Mrs. Pike to shove her husband off every once in a while.”

Shane wants to argue, but… he also agrees. Both Shane and Ilya finish off their beers. Ilya stretches out his legs under the table, bumping his knee against Shane’s. Shane thinks it’s an accident until Ilya does it again. Silent encouragement to continue.

“My parents mean well. They just want me to settle down with a nice woman.”

“I don’t know the rules in Canada,” Ilya says in a loud whisper, “but two Stanley Cups should get you out of the wife and children conversation for at least a few more years.”

Shane swallows. “That’s the problem. I don’t think I am going to have a wife. Period.” He risks a glance up at Ilya. The man’s face softens with understanding.

“Ah.”

Shane smiles, small and embarrassed. “Recent realization.”

The restaurant noise around them gets distant and muffled, or maybe Shane’s focus just tightens. Ilya’s bone structure looks unfairly sharp and handsome in the crappy airport lighting, and he has one of his long arms stretched across the back of the booth seat. In a moment of courage, Shane shifts his leg under the table until the contact between them is constant. Ilya’s eyes flare, and his mouth curls up, just barely. Shane only notices because he’s staring.

“After the Cup,” Shane says, his voice huskier than usual. “I started an email to Hunter like six times. I couldn’t figure out what to say. But it meant something, to know I wasn’t alone.”

“Same. To me.”

“Have you ever,” Shane asks, “with…?” *A man* goes unsaid.

Ilya nods slowly. “A few times. You?”

“Yes, a few times.” When Ilya chuckles at this, looking a little too delighted, Shane frowns. “Are you that surprised?”

“Uh, no, Shane.”

“Why not?”

“You look like that.”

Then Ilya drags his eyes up and down Shane’s body, and Shane’s heart jumps into his throat, his skin feeling alight and fizzy like he’s actively being touched.

His experiences so far with men have been intentionally impersonal, fucking strangers while on vacation, exchanging blow jobs at a gay bar in Ohio, letting anonymous bodies make him feel good on the rare occasions he’s feeling brave (or so horny that he doesn’t care). But this is new. This is already the most he’s talked to a person he’s this attracted to, and it’s allowed him to settle, relax in a way he usually can’t. And Ilya’s looking at him like he did back in that hotel gym, but even more so, because the question is gone. It’s all making Shane feel a little crazy.

As if reading his mind, Ilya says, “I thought we might, after the draft.”

Shane’s pulse thuds. God, what would have happened if Ilya Rozanov had gotten to him first? Would he have ruined him for other men, just like that?

“Part of me hoped we would,” Shane admits, trying to ignore how hot his cheeks suddenly feel. “And then we started actually playing each other, and you were so fucking annoying.”

Ilya breaks into a brilliant smile. “You love playing against me, Hollander.”

“Not as much as you love playing against me.”

“That’s not fair.”

“How come?” Shane asks with a frown. Ilya props his elbow on the table, resting his chin in his hand as he stares at Shane.

“I love playing against you more than most things.”

Ilya grins again, slow and sexy. Shane is so dazed by his face that he forgets they are anything but Shane and Ilya, two men crowded into a booth at an airport, flirting pretty aggressively.

What if Shane slouched down now? What if he moved his knee until it pressed between Ilya’s legs, coaxing a hiss from his outrageous mouth? What if Shane just… let this happen?

Would his teeth snag against Shane’s bottom lip before he kissed him? Would he open his mouth right away or make Shane beg for it? Would he fall to his knees or would he command Shane to fall to his? How dark would his eyes get? What would his sweat smell like? Would he fuck Shane if he asked? Would his accent get thicker before he comes?

With a careful inhale, Shane slides his foot forward, seeking something, anything.

Then two cell phones vibrate in unison against the table, snapping Shane back into his surroundings and making him bang his leg against the table.

“Ow, fuck.”

“Careful,” Ilya says, catching an empty bottle before it falls over. Maybe it’s Shane’s horny brain talking, but Ilya’s voice sounds a little strained. Then Ilya wraps his long fingers (*stop it, Shane*) around his phone and reads out loud off the screen.

“Flight rebooked for tomorrow morning, 10 o’clock.”

“Oh.”

It’s not quite cold water, but it’s water all the same.

What the *fuck* has gotten into him?

Shane had been about to feel up Ilya Rozanov, infamously his rival in the world of professional hockey, under a table at an airport restaurant surrounded by dozens of potential witnesses. They’re both quite famous in a very specific circle. If someone had taken the wrong picture, Shane’s big gay secret would be public before he could even tell his parents.

Is this all it takes to turn Shane Hollander into a slut? A pretty face, some big muscles, and a light, flirtatious compliment on his hockey? Embarrassing. Rose will be equal parts delighted and scandalized when he tells her.

Ilya seems to notice the shift in Shane’s mood. He flags down the waiter and hands over his card, watching Shane carefully even as he signs the receipt.

“Hollander,” he says softly.

“Rozanov.”

“Shane.” Even softer.

“*Rozanov*.” It’s like he’s reminding himself who he’s talking to.

“You are thinking very loud right now.”

“What are we doing?” Shane asks with a gulp, gripping the edge of the table with his hands.

Ilya takes a sip of water. “Well,” he says casually, “we just finished eating a fun, delicious dinner at one of America’s finest chain restaurants. Or I did. You ate boring chicken. We had good conversation. Very informative.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane asks, voice still a little shaky. “What’d you learn?”

“You are an anxious little thing.”

“Fuck you. I’m not little.”

“And you make me curious.”

“Oh.”

Ilya raises an eyebrow. “Yes. Oh.” He licks his lips, probably on purpose given how much he smiles when he notices Shane noticing. “And now, I am going to book a room at…” He grabs his phone, clicking around quickly, looking up every few seconds to make sure Shane is still with him. “The Westin while I wait for rescheduled flight to Las Vegas. Premium suite. Private balcony. King bed. Very secretive.”

“And what am I going to do?”

“That is up to you.”

Ilya laces his fingers behind his head, pulling his elbows back and twisting to stretch out his back, flexing the thick muscles of his arms, properly peacocking. And then, the dagger: He winks at Shane. Shane’s mouth goes dry.

His libido is battling his brain. His libido’s winning.

“Is the hotel near the airport?”

Ilya just smirks, rising from the table and gathering his bags. For a moment, Shane is frozen in place. Ilya looks down at him. Amusement makes his eyes flicker.

“You coming, Hollander?”

“Hopefully.”

Shane braces for an innuendo, some fuck-me eyes, maybe a teasing remark about Shane’s lame joke. That isn’t what happens.

Ilya fucking *giggles*.

***

Shane is either in a porn or a horror movie.

He treads down a hotel hallway, decorated with a geometric carpet and uncanny valley overhead lighting, watching the numbers tick closer to his destination. His body is bracing for a jump scare that he orchestrated himself. His dick is the killer.

He and Ilya parted ways at the elevators half an hour ago, the second key card to Ilya's room hanging heavy in Shane's pocket. In record time, Shane dropped off his bags in his own room, showered, panicked, showered a second time, brushed his teeth, dressed in clean jeans and a T-shirt (resisting the urge to put on the somewhat formal outfit he brought for the MLH Awards welcome party), texted Rose, ignored Rose's follow-up call, shouted into a pillow, and did his usual pre-game five-minute meditation to settle his nerves.

And now, feeling properly insane, he is walking to Ilya Rozanov's hotel room. Presumably to have sex.

Either that or Shane has so thoroughly misread things he might have to retire from hockey; and using heavy machinery.

Then he reaches the end of the hallway, room 1826. He looks at the closed door and tries to find the strength to not knock, to turn around and go back to senses. Instead the door swings wide open to reveal Ilya. Shirtless Ilya, with wet hair and just a pair of joggers hanging low on his lips. A thin gold chain with a small variant of a cross hangs around his neck.

"How long have you been standing there like home invader?"

"How long were you waiting at the peep hole?"

"No waiting," Ilya lies. "I could hear your brain spinning from down the hall." He steps to the side to let Shane in. When Shane passes him, his shoulder dangerously close to brushing against Ilya's chest, he hears the soft sigh of a shaky exhale.

Ilya's nervous too. That loosens something in Shane's stomach.

Then the door clicks shut.

Shane works his way up to eye contact, which conveniently means basking in the beautiful sight of Ilya's torso, dusted in moles and hair and absolutely carved with muscle. His shoulders look strong and broad, grippable. Shane wants to dig his fingers in, press until he leaves marks on his pale skin that linger. He's a work of art, Roman marble with a jester's mouth.

A hand firmly grips Shane's chin. Ilya lifts his face, tilting it left and right, almost inspecting him. And then they're looking at each other. His breath hits Shane's nose, minty and clean. *He brushed his teeth*.

"," Ilya mutters.

"What does that mean?"

"Is Russian for 'smokeshow.'"

"Fuck off," Shane tries to sigh, though it comes out more like *fuck*, or even just a pathetic moan.

He's suddenly aware that his hands are hanging like limp noodles at his side. When Ilya takes a step forward, crowding Shane back against the wall, Shane takes the opportunity to grip his hips. He's so warm, and when he slides fingers beneath Ilya's waistband, he finds nothing but skin underneath.

“This is a bad idea,” Shane whispers half-heartedly, mostly because he thinks one of them should say it at least once.

“Probably,” Ilya smirks, his eyes flicking between Shane’s. “But you know what they say. What happens in Vegas...”

“We’re in Queens, Ilya.”

“Come on, Shane. Use your imagination.”

Shane expects him to kiss him then. He automatically parts his lips in expectation, his tongue prepping for contact. Instead, Ilya arches forward. His body presses Shane firmly against the door, and the layers of fabric between them do little to hide the fact that they’re both already half-hard. In a move Shane finds staggeringly hot, Ilya uses his grip on Shane’s chin to tip his head back, revealing his neck. Still his lips don’t touch Shane’s skin. Ilya drags his nose from Shane’s collar up to just below his ear. His pauses before saying, crystal clear:

“I should have fucked you after that stupid photoshoot.”

A shiver runs through Shane’s full body, and then thinking is out the window. His hands fly up to Ilya’s jaw, yanking his head up and then *finally*, Shane crashes his mouth against Ilya’s.

The kiss is instantly filthy. Shane nips at him, and Ilya responds by sucking hard on Shane’s bottom lip, tilting his head back, and pressing his tongue against Shane’s, hot and wet and skillful. While Ilya’s mouth sets about mapping every inch of Shane’s, his hands grip onto Shane’s ass through his jeans, pulling them flush together.

No one has ever kissed him like this. He feels fucking plundered.

When he starts to feel dizzy, Shane drops his head back against the wood.

“What the fuck?” he gasps.

“You mean where the fuck?” Ilya replies, shit-eating tone still there even though he’s also out of breath. “The bed? The floor? Right here against the door?”

“You’re unbelievable.”

“So…”

“Bed.”

Before Shane can make his feet move, he’s lifted off the ground. His brain tells him to smack Ilya’s arm, even as his legs tighten traitorously around Ilya’s waist. They stumble backward, and Ilya practically throws him onto the mattress. Shane uses the brief break in contact to yank his shirt off, and they kick off their shoes, and then Ilya is on him again.

He’s everywhere. Shane’s a big guy, a professional athlete who gets slammed into boards for a living, but for the first time with a partner, he feels properly manhandled. Ilya hooks his hands onto Shane’s biceps and pushes his arms up on the bed as he grinds his hips down, making Shane arch against him instinctively.

When he kisses and bites down the column of Shane’s neck, tonguing his sensitive skin, Shane moans —until he feels suction.

“Don’t give me a hickey, asshole,” he says, kicking his heel into Ilya’s calf.

“Would be hot. Bruise on your neck where everyone can see.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Very adventurous for good boy Shane Hollander.”

Embarrassingly, Shane whimpers at being called a *good boy*, which, okay, he knows he loves praise, loves to let go of control in the bedroom. Still, when Ilya chuckles, pressing another hot, open-mouthed kiss onto his collarbone, Shane hears the teasing for what it is. It’s a challenge.

And he’s never let Rozanov win before.

Using his core strength, painstakingly developed over years of hard work and discipline, Shane flips them over until he’s on top of Ilya, straddling his waist. Ilya’s eyes flare with delight and he wriggles beneath him as Shane ducks his head, kissing his way down Ilya’s chest. Shane glances up, watching the way Ilya’s lips part as Shane drags his tongue over his nipple, and then grins before biting and sucking at a spot on his pec, hard enough to leave a red mark.

Ilya’s hips jerk up. “Feisty predator,” he sighs, “like a kodkod.”

“What’s a kodkod?”

“Smallest wild cat in the Americas.” Ilya smirks and combs his fingers into Shane’s hair. “Is fluffy and grumpy, like you.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “Do you, like, spend hours learning random facts on Wikipedia so you can more specifically insult people?”

Ilya shrugs. “Sometimes.”

“You’re a menace.”

“Yes.”

Then Ilya rolls his hips, grinding their erections together, and Shane’s eyes flutter. Who cares if this guy is a menace? Who cares about anything? Shane mouths his way down Ilya’s body, hooking his fingers into Ilya’s waistband and chuckling when Ilya jerks his hips up to help Shane get his pants off. They shove the fabric down together, and Shane is momentarily speechless.

It’s perfect. Thick and heavy. The kind of cock men would go to war for.

“You will stare all day?” Ilya asks mockingly, but Shane sees right through him. A creeping blush has bloomed on Ilya’s neck and chest, and his eyes have gone glassy.

“Do you want me to suck your dick or not?”

Ilya, incredibly, shuts the hell up. And Shane gets to work.

Shane loves giving head. He loves the feel, the taste, the sounds. He loves how fuzzy and quiet his brain goes as he sucks and swallows, singularly focused on the task at hand.

Wrapping his palm around the base of Ilya's dick, Shane drags his tongue up the underside before taking Ilya into his mouth, a little further down with every bob of his head. With a grunt, Ilya sits up to give him more room on the bed and then grabs onto Shane, one hand smoothing over his back and the other scratching into his hair.

", Shane," he groans as Shane takes him almost all the way down, his cock bruising the back of Shane's throat. Ilya makes a choked out sound and pulls Shane off of him.

"Stop, stop."

"What's wrong?" Shane asks, wiping the drool off his chin.

Instead of answering, Ilya smashes his lips against Shane's, making out with him like a man possessed. Before Shane knows it, he's on his back again, and Ilya is unbuttoning his jeans while Shane sucks on his tongue. Shane feels out of control. He hasn't had sex with a man in a while, and he hasn't had sex with someone this attractive ever. Pushing his hands into Ilya's curls, he tightens his fingers and tugs, drawing a low moan from Ilya's throat.

"I want to fuck you," Ilya says directly into Shane's mouth. "Can I fuck you?"

"God. Yes."

While Shane pushes his jeans down his legs, folding them quickly and tossing them toward a chair near the bed, Ilya reaches for the nightstand, where he's already stocked lube and condoms. They meet back in the middle, another insanely hot kiss that ends with Shane laying flat while Ilya tongues his way down Shane's abs.

Then—to Shane's wild frustration—Ilya slows down.

He squeezes his pec, rolling his thumb across Shane's nipple. He drags his hot mouth over Shane's stomach and then blows cool air until Shane is whimpering and squirming toward his hand. Then he slides down the bed, finally face-to-face with Shane's dick, but then keeps going, grazing his teeth down Shane's leg before, inexplicably, biting the side of his knee.

"I thought you were going to fuck me," Shane whines.

Ilya chuckles. "So eager."

"Give me the lube, I'll… prep."

Shane sits up to reach for the bottle, but he's stopped by Ilya's hand. He sits up and pushes Shane back against the mattress, his face just inches from Shane's the whole way so they're chest to chest. He kisses Shane tongue first, until Shane's is boneless and distracted, and then slides back down Shane's body.

"Are you always in such a hurry?" Ilya asks.

"Kinda, yeah." Such is the way with anxious, anonymous hook-ups.

"Your men don't open you up for you," Ilya says against Shane's hip bone, running his hands underneath Shane's ass, "stretch you out on their fingers until you're begging for it?"

"They can," Shane says breathily. "I'm just more efficient at it."

Ilya glares up at him. “You have not been fucking the right men, Hollander.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “Let me guess. You have.”

“No, sweetheart,” Ilya presses his mouth against the inside of Shane’s thigh, which falls open automatically at the contact. “I am the right man.”

Then he nuzzles at Shane’s dick through his underwear, grabs the waistband with his teeth, and tugs them down. Within seconds, he takes Shane’s cock into his mouth, deep-throating him on the first go. Shane arches off the bed. He may be levitating.

“*Hnnnng*, Jesus Christ, Rozanov, fucking… what?”

Ilya chuckles and kisses beneath the head of Shane’s dick. “You’re a poet.”

Shane would write poems about this. He would write a fucking sonnet, learn whatever the hell iambic pentameter is if it got Ilya to keep sucking his dick like this. His mouth is perfect. Soon Shane hears a faint pop and feels a warm, slick finger press against his hole.

“Is okay?” Ilya asks.

Shane aims for, “yes,” and lands somewhere around, “*yuhhh please*.”

And then Ilya pushes in one finger, then two, then curls them up while sucking Shane’s dick like a champ. Shane’s being attacked with pleasure from two points.

“Holy shit,” Shane moans.

“Yes, I’m very gifted.”

Shane’s had great sex. He thinks. Before today, he was really certain he’d had great sex. Or at least really good sex. But this is something different entirely, surprising, all-consuming, hot as hell, and it’s recalibrating something deep inside him. The fact that Ilya Rozanov is the one doing it is breaking his brain a little. He sees new colors. He might speak Spanish now.

After inserting a third finger, stretching Shane out with perverse patience, touching him until he’s sweating and writhing and practically whimpering for it, Ilya finally sits back from Shane to roll a condom on.

The physical space gives Shane enough room to set a necessary personal goal.

Experience be damned, Shane is not going to let Ilya beat him at sex. If Ilya’s going to rock Shane’s world, Shane is going to rock it right back, more, better.

He’s Shane fucking Hollander, after all. Every coach he’s ever had has called him a fast learner.

Ilya grabs Shane’s hips to flip him over onto his stomach, but Shane shakes his head. He forces himself to hold eye contact with Ilya as he shoves both hands against Ilya’s chest until he’s on his back, confused head nearly hanging off the foot of the bed.

“You want to wrestle?” Ilya asks.

“You’re so annoying.”

Then Shane straddles Ilya's hips, raises up on his knees, and watches the naked wonder on Ilya's face as Shane sinks down onto his cock, inch by inch. It would be a better power play if Shane wasn't panting like a dog. But a win's a win.

"*Ungh*, Shane. Tight. So good."

"Fuck."

He's only ridden a guy once before, an equally closeted soccer player he met last year while in London for Wimbledon. The experience had been a bit awkward as Shane struggled to figure out the motions. And there's a little of that here, but Ilya's such a mess underneath him, mumbling bilingually in both Russian and sex noises, that it spurs Shane on. He tries out a few angles until he finds one that grinds against his prostate, and the shock of pleasure nearly knocks him over.

"Look at you," Ilya groans. His hands roam over Shane's hips and thighs, up to Shane's chest, over his shoulders, and back to his waist, like he's trying to feel up everything at the same time.

It takes all of Shane's concentration, but he manages to chirp back. "Hottest player in the MLH."

"The cowboy's a narcissist," Ilya grunts out with a smile. "So fucking hot."

Shane holds on Ilya's shoulders for leverage as he finds a good rhythm, rocking and grinding on Ilya until they're both breathing heavy and covered in sweat. Looking down at his chest, Shane is hypnotized by the flex of his muscles, his skin. Without thinking, he ducks his head and licks the sweat off Ilya's collarbone.

"Jesus, Hollander."

Then Ilya grips his ass hard and fucks up into Shane with intensity, punching out noises Shane didn't know he could make. Ilya's cock is so big that Shane feels him in his stomach. He's exploring his guts, staking claim, and rearranging things to his liking, and there's nothing Shane can or wants to do about it. Ilya has squatter's rights to his asshole.

"Fuck me," Shane moans as the heat builds in his body.

"Okay,"

Suddenly Ilya wraps an arm around Shane's waist and rolls them over, only pulling out for a moment before thrusting back in, harder, faster, deeper. He locks his hands on the back of Shane's thighs, pushing his knees up, and the new angle makes Shane see spots. Shane thought he was doing yoga for better mobility and less injury risk, but clearly it was for this, so he could fold himself like a pretzel and get fucked like he deserves.

"Fuck I'm close," Shane chokes out, half-desperate to come and half-devastated it's almost over.

"Touch yourself," Ilya grunts.

"What?"

"Touch your dick. Now"

Yes, sir, Shane thinks, though even in his blissed out haze he'd rather die than give Ilya that leverage. He uses his own precum as lube—god, there's so much of it—and grips his very sensitive dick. He

only has to pull once, twice, and then he's coming harder than he's ever come in his life, an electric shock of pleasure hitting every cell of his body.

Angels weep. The heavens part. Little cartoon birds float around his head.

This might be the meaning of life, getting split in two by Ilya Rozanov's perfect dick.

Ilya's thrusts speed up, and Shane can tell he's about to come. The only coherent thought that gets through Shane's fucked-out brain is that he needs to see it. He needs to see Ilya come.

"Come on me," he hears himself say. "On my chest."

Ilya visibly shudders at the order. Then he drops Shane's legs, which flop uselessly down to the mattress, and pulls out. He rips the condom off, and in a move out of Shane's wildest fantasies, gathers some of Shane's cum and uses it to jerk himself off. Shane is left cockdumb, eyes locked on Ilya as he loses rhythm and then stills, moaning loudly as he spurts ropes onto Shane's already messy stomach and chest.

Then he collapses his full weight forward, knocking an "oof" out of Shane as he nestles his face into Shane's chest. Shane mindlessly wraps an arm around Ilya's back. His brain is slowly flickering back on again, but not yet. He will enjoy the cuddling until he remembers why he shouldn't be doing this.

"You killed me," Ilya says happily, still panting. "You are murderer after all."

Shane snorts. "Then it was a murder-suicide. I'm dead too."

"Like Romeo and Juliet. Very romantic."

"Romeo and Juliet doesn't end with a murder suicide. He drank poison, and she stabbed herself because their letters got mixed up in the mail."

"This is very strange pillow talk, Shane Hollander."

Ilya tilts his head up, propping his chin on Shane's shoulder. He's looking at Shane with something close to fondness, a small smile resting on his kissed-swollen lips. And if Shane leans forward and kisses him once, twice, nipping at his mouth until he laughs, that's his own business. He'll leave for his own room soon. In a little bit.

After Ilya cleans them both up with a warm wash-cloth, he settles back, flopping half on top of Shane.

"That was so hot," Shane says, lightly scratching his nails against Ilya's ribs. Ilya hums in agreement. "I guess we both won."

"Won what? Sex? I didn't realize we were competing at sex."

"Get a grip," Shane says, shoving Ilya's shoulder even as he can feel a blush warming his cheeks. "We're always competing."

Ilya shakes his head, like he can't believe what he's hearing, and then lays a big one on Shane, his tongue doing things that should violate at least some local laws. "Then I definitely won," Ilya says when they separate to breathe. "I got to fuck the best hockey player in the league, according to some metrics."

"So did I."

“Yeah, but mine is really flexible,” Ilya says, pulling Shane’s leg over his own hip to demonstrate. His fingers trace warm circles into Shane’s skin.

“I do yoga,” Shane explains.

“At lakeside cottage, yes?”

For a moment, Shane is confused at how Ilya could know that. There’s no way that Ilya fucked him so good that he developed mindreading powers, right? That’s not possible. Then, a realization. Shane has only publicly talked about his cottage one time, a few years ago.

“You saw that ESPN video?”

Ilya shrugs. “I jerked off to it.”

And somehow, of all the impossible things that have happened today since Ilya Rozanov sat down next to him on a broken airplane, this is the one that breaks Shane.

He laughs until he has tears in his eyes. Then Ilya’s laughing too. Then they’re making out again and any thoughts of sneaking away back to his own hotel room go right out the window.

***

“Shane!”

“I know.”

“*Shane*!”

“I’m as surprised as you.”

He sees himself in the corner of his Facetime call with Rose, looking embarrassed but happy. Rose meanwhile looks like he just gave her a really expensive, really shocking present. If they were together, she’d probably be shaking him.

“How was it?”

Shane rubs his hands over his eyes. He can’t look at her while he says this. “We fucked for like an hour. And then we took a break, watched a movie together, and fucked again.”

“So… good, then.”

“Good is an understatement.”

They’d watched *Goon* together on Ilya’s laptop, Ilya cackling with delight every time blood splattered across the ice. Then Ilya rimmed him and fucked him so hard in the shower that he almost cried. Shane has bruises on both elbows from when his hands gave out against the ceramic tile, stupid and clumsy with desire. It was one of the hottest, most fun nights of Shane’s life.

“I can’t believe you hooked up with a random guy you met on a plane! That’s so slutty of you.”

“I want to protest, but my ass is literally sore today.”

Shane feels a little guilty about not telling her the full truth. But if he’s being honest, he hasn’t fully processed it himself. He left Ilya’s room around sunrise, too tired to do much beyond taking another

shower and packing up his carry-on. They shared an Uber to the airport, dozed quietly near each other in the first-class lounge, and both looked a little disappointed when they realized they had been shuffled into separate rows on the new plane.

He didn't ask Ilya directly, but Shane sensed they both understood this was a one-time unbelievable thing that would turn back into a rivalry when they arrived at the MLH Awards. It didn't stop Shane from being bummed when he walked into his Vegas hotel room by himself.

"You don't even need Grindr," Rose says. "You're picking up guys all by yourself." Then she mockingly sighs. "They grow up so fast."

"Rose, I'm an adult man."

"A brand new baby, born two days ago."

"You remember that we had sex, right? A few times."

She snorts. "Shane, I love you so much that I'm really trying to forget that."

"Hurtful," he jokes.

"Hey. If it weren't for me, you'd still be moping away as my boyfriend, pretending you weren't gay, and then you wouldn't have gotten your brains screwed out by your airplane man." She curls a piece of hair around her finger, seemingly very pleased with herself. "So in many ways, I did you a favor."

"A big favor. Like shockingly big."

He holds his hands out to demonstrate, and Rose laughs loudly. Then Shane's phone pings. Uber.

"I gotta go," he says, sliding on his jacket. "My car is almost here."

Rose blows him a kiss. "Tell Scott Hunter congratulations for me."

"Ha ha," Shane deadpans. "Love you."

"Love you too, slut."

***

The awards go as expected.

The players are loose and quickly tipsy. The non-players are both complimentary and happy to tell Shane exactly what they think, in their expert and executive opinions, went wrong with Montreal this year. Everyone seems very amused that Hollander and Rozanov ended up on the same badly delayed flight.

Surprisingly Ilya himself is harder to pin down. Shane sees him only briefly as everyone's taking their seats, looking unbelievably handsome in his tux. It's hard to believe this was the man Shane watched house a tray of fajitas yesterday.

Scott Hunter's MVP speech is so touching and terrifying that Shane has to go collect himself in the bathroom afterwards. He might not be brave enough to talk to Hunter tonight. He hopes he will be soon.

And now it's the after party.

Shane is nursing his one glass of champagne while he fields questions from a terrified twenty year old who just lost Rookie of the Year.

"It's just, Mr. Hollander—"

"Seriously, call me Shane."

"Shane, Shane Hollander, sir, how do you get past that voice in your head that's like, 'Whoa. I'm playing hockey. Fuck.'"

Shane has never had a voice say that in his head ever, but he doesn't think that's very comforting.

"Um, it can be tough."

"And dexterity. You gotta get that going. But what's the line between dexterity and strength, and also, how do you know?"

"You had a great season," Shane interrupts, pretending to wave to someone over the kid's shoulder. "Just work hard, keep your head down, and remember: hockey is fun."

"That's amazing. Thank you, Mr. Shane. Hollander. Shit. Can I get a picture?"

Shane poses for the most awkward selfie of all time, and then excuses himself. Thankfully he finds Matheson from Colorado holding court with a group of Canadian players and joins them, happy to stand on the outskirts while they talk at each other.

He keeps thinking about Ilya.

He can't stop thinking about Ilya.

He thinks about the sex, obviously. It was incredible sex. But it's the rest of it that's making him feel so out of sorts. Conversation where he doesn't have to worry about being too intense or too boring or too focused on hockey. Easy laughter and easier banter. Having a person's focused attention on him and giving it back it spades.

The entire evening felt like an alternate reality where Shane was just a man with a crush on a really hot guy who seemed to like him back.

Who is Shane kidding? He definitely liked him back. He ate his ass in the shower.

Shane drains the rest of his champagne and flags down a waiter to grab a second glass.

He needs to get a grip. If Shane is feeling this stupid about Ilya already, maybe it's good they only got to do it once. A one-time thing is exciting and romantic and fucking hot. A one-time thing means no broken hearts or hard feelings, just a lot of laughs and a few incredible orgasms. A one-time thing is just what Shane needed.

Shane's phone vibrates a few times in his hand in quick succession.

Rose: shane hollander
Rose: if there's even the tiniest chance this means what I think it means…….
Rose: [A screenshot of an Instagram story posted by @ilyarozanov. It's a selfie where Ilya is smiling

brightly while Shane glares at the camera with the caption “Two losers headed to the MLH Awards.”]
Rose: ……..

Before he can respond to Rose, he receives another text.

+1 (617) 555-8561: let’s play a game

He frowns, glancing around.

Shane: Who is this?
+1 (617) 555-8561: a gifted, sexy, charismatic man who charmed ur number out of carter vaughn
+1 (617) 555-8561: he’s very drunk btw

Shane’s heart flutters. He looks around the room again, seeing hockey player after hockey player (including Vaughn, who is indeed very drunkenly dancing near the bar next to his embarrassed girlfriend). And then he finds him. Lounging back against the wall across the room, his tie off and a few buttons undone on his collar, a small smirk on his face, is Ilya Rozanov. He’s holding his phone. And he’s staring right at Shane.

Shane: You’re an asshole
Shane: Why did you post that picture?
+1 (617) 555-8561: is funny no?
+1 (617) 555-8561: only we know we’re both winners ;)

Another text pops up from Rose but he swipes it away.

Shane: What game do you want to play?
+1 (617) 555-8561: two truths and a lie
Shane: You go first
+1 (617) 555-8561: i had a really great time last night
+1 (617) 555-8561: i want to do it again tonight
+1 (617) 555-8561: i eat a salad every day

Shane looks up at Ilya and smiles.

Ilya smiles back.

Okay, maybe a two-time thing would be fine too.

Chapter End Notes

And then they fell wildly in love and lived happily ever after just faster this time the end.

This is a kodkod. I imagine Ilya was watching Animal Planet and saw this cat and it reminded him of Shane. I mean, look at its serious little face.

Thank you for reading! Hope you enjoyed my first proper foray into Heated Rivalry smut. Comments are super appreciated. I'm also on Twitter @rachwasagymnast and I have no hrtwt friends so hi :)

ETA: Chapter count upped to 2. Stay tuned.

Chapter 2: Ilya

Chapter Summary

> How to speed run a nine-year situationship in three weeks.

Chapter Notes

> Logistical note: For our purposes, Svetlana lives in NYC like in the books but they are childhood friends like in the show (because that is just a better world imo).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took some begging, a promise of a Madison Avenue afternoon on Ilya's credit card, and a table for two at No. 9 Park, but Ilya gets Svetlana to come to Boston the weekend after the MLH Awards. They sit at a beautiful table in a private back corner of the restaurant. Ilya orders the four most expensive appetizers and a $400 bottle of wine while Svetlana drums her fingers against her cheek impatiently.

"The crudo looks good, yes?" Ilya asks in Russian.

"Sure," Svetlana drolls as Ilya scoops a serving onto her plate. "Though I'm sure the appetizers that come *with* the prix fixe menu would have sufficed."

"Nothing is too much for my oldest friend. You look beautiful, by the way."

"Ilya," Svetlana interjects. "Cut the shit."

Ilya takes a deep breath and looks at Svetlana gravely. She has been there for him through grief, family drama, hockey annoyances, teenage growing pains, and everything in between, basically his right hand woman since he was old enough to fight. But somehow, despite the length of their friendship, they've never had to chat about this.

"I need your help with something," Ilya admits.

"What? No way," Svetlana says, rolling her eyes.

"Also remember that I love you very much, and I wouldn't be bothering you with this if I didn't think it was critically important. Life or death. Top secret."

Her face softens from annoyance to concern. "Okay I'm getting worried now, Ilyusha." Sveta reaches across the table and squeezes Ilya's fingers. "Did you get someone's wife pregnant? Did you run over Tom Brady with your stupid orange Porsche? If so, you need to get the fuck out of Boston—"

"I'm in love."

Sveta blinks several times. "What?"

“And I might need you to marry me so I can never get deported to a life of sorrow and misery away from my lover.” Sveta is gaping at him, so he takes a swig of wine and adds, “Also fuck you, my Porsche is beautiful. *You* sold it to me.”

The baffled look on Svetlana’s face is almost a relief, concrete proof of the fact that Ilya sat next to Shane Hollander on an airplane on Thursday and proceeded to completely lose his mind over the course of sixteen hours. Seventy-two if you count the two days they spent together after.

It was a surprise to him too. He passed the flight back to Boston trying to map out how he went from chirping Hollander for being a poor conversationalist on an airplane to extending his stay in Las Vegas so they could fuck on every surface of his suite. But he kept getting distracted thinking about the crackly sound of Shane’s laugh, so the details remain fuzzy. It’s a great mystery of life, right up there with Stonehenge and Scott Hunter’s longevity.

“I’m calling the Bears medical staff,” Sveta finally says. “They clearly missed a major concussion when Jalo knocked you out of the playoffs.”

“I’m serious, Sveta,” he says, shaking his head. “I’m head over heels. Locked down. Off the market. Congratulations to me.”

Ilya raises his glass, waiting for a toast. Svetlana leaves him hanging.

“The last time I saw you, you were wasted, shouting out an Escalade window that you were gonna fuck the Chrysler Building.”

“That was then.”

“That was six days ago.”

“Sveta. I mean it.” Ilya thinks about Shane’s pretty face, the hundred different ways he’s been told to fuck off by Shane’s pretty lips, and he automatically smiles. “I’ve never felt like this about anyone before. It’s like I finally understand what Rihanna is singing about.”

She frowns. “Which song?”

“Rude Boy.”

Svetlana sighs wearily. Then she takes a sip of wine, folds her hands in front of her on the table, and gives Ilya a very fake smile. She’s humoring him. He doesn’t care.

“So you’re in love,” she says flatly. “How’d you meet her?”

“Him,” Ilya clarifies. Sveta raises an eyebrow but gestures for him to keep talking. “We met years ago. Longtime acquaintances, first time soulmates. It’s old but mostly very new.”

“When did this happen?”

“Last weekend, at a Chili’s at the airport. He said I eat like a dog.”

“Jesus Christ,” she says, dropping her face into her hands.

He grins dopily. “He absolutely cooked me! How could I not fall in love?”

Svetlana presses her thumbs under her brow bone, something she does when she's getting a stress headache. Ilya frowns. She's not getting it. Then he catches his reflection in an ornate chrome art piece next to their table, and he can't blame her. His hair is sticking up everywhere from his nervous fingers, and his pupils are flared with excitement. He looks insane.

Taking a deep breath, Ilya drops his shoulders and tries to settle back into the posture of regular old Ilya Rozanov. "I realize how this must sound. You probably think I've lost it."

"No shit." Sveta huffs out a laugh. "You proposed a green card marriage to me because you're in love with some guy you met at Chili's."

"We didn't meet at—" Ilya shakes his head, cutting himself off.

He looks at Sveta. A part of him hoped she would be so thrilled for him that he could avoid getting into specifics, but he perhaps overestimated Sveta's affinity for big sweeping romance.

"Listen, one of his close friends figured out what happened between us, so he said I could tell one person that I really trust." She lifts an eyebrow, intrigued. "You know I trust you. If I tell you this, you cannot repeat it to anyone."

"I won't."

"I'm not kidding. Not a soul."

Sveta mimes zipping her lips, locking it, and tossing the key at his head. Then she flutters her eyes at him sarcastically, playing the perfect listener.

"It's Shane Hollander."

If Sveta was shocked before, she's gobsmacked now, sitting completely still and staring at him with wide, unblinking eyes. Ilya leans forward and pretends to hand back the imaginary key she threw at him.

"Unzip, Sveta."

Her mouth falls open instantly. "Shane Hollander?" Ilya nods. "Like the hockey player Shane Hollander?" Ilya nods harder. "Are you serious?"

"Deadly," Ilya confirms. "Everyone thinks he's a polite golden boy, but really, he's a mean little freak, and I'm in love with him."

Despite her clear bafflement, Ilya sees her lips turn up at the corner, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. Ilya relaxes into his chair. Sveta can't stay frustrated when there's good gossip on the table.

"Did you fuck him?" she asks.

"Yes."

"Was it hot?"

"Obviously it was hot. I was there."

Svetlana rolls her eyes. Then she shakes her head out, like she can physically rattle this into making more sense.

“Literally how did this happen?”

“It’s simple,” Ilya explains, swirling around his wine by the stem. “I have suffered a lot in my life, so God rewarded me by sitting me next to beautiful, gay Shane Hollander on a broken airplane. We talk. We laugh. We have a lot in common.” He tips his glass toward her. “Turns out, we both love crushing everyone at hockey and sucking cock.”

Sveta finally laughs at that. “God, I’m so jealous. He’s gorgeous.” Then, just as quickly, her face tumbles back to panic. “Wait, you didn’t *tell him* you loved him, did you? Please tell me you didn’t tell him that.”

Ilya scoffs. “Fuck no. What am I, a crazy person?”

“Thank god.” Svetlana audibly sighs in relief, pressing her hand to her chest.

They both take a moment to pick at the, frankly, overkill spread of food in front of them. Ilya wonders if any of this would fit with Shane’s weird diet, which Ilya was exposed to a few times last weekend as he watched Shane take apart and reassemble his room service meals. He wonders what Shane is doing, what he’s wearing. Maybe he should text him and ask.

He doesn’t even get his phone out before Sveta swats him with a napkin. “Don’t text your boyfriend during our friend dinner.”

“He’s not my boyfriend. He’s a boy that I am in love with. There’s a difference.”

“Ilyusha,” Svetlana says carefully, interrupting Ilya’s down-bad spiral. “I am going to say something with all the warmth in my heart.”

“Low bar,” he mutters. She glares at him. “Fine. What?”

“You are not in love with Shane Hollander.”

“Yes, I am!” Ilya huffs, stabbing into a disc of pâté.

“It honestly sounds like you’re dickmatized. Or holematized, if I remember correctly.”

“It’s not that, Sveta,” Ilya protests. Then he pauses for a moment and corrects, “It’s not *just* that. I mean, yes, his dick is gorgeous, and his asshole is the most perfect thing I’ve ever seen. Plato’s hole.”

“Ilya, for the love of God—“

“But it’s more than that. He’s so…” How to describe Shane Hollander, a man Ilya mostly thought of as an uptight, hot, possibly-closeted hockey robot before last week? That feels like a lifetime ago. “He’s so boring and funny and honest and strange, and he’s so competitive about everything, maybe even more than me. And he’s got these freckles on his cheeks and shoulders, and he sleeps on his back like a dead person—”

“Wow. A love bomb so strong its reverberations can be felt all the way up in Canada.”

Ilya frowns, his cheeks warming and his stomach twisting a little. He so infrequently gets embarrassed that it takes him a moment to identify the feeling. “You’re making fun of me.”

“I’m sorry,” Sveta says, almost sounding sincere. “It’s very cute, Ilya.”

“Gee, thanks.”

Sveta grabs his hand again, holding on even when he tries to pull back like a pouting child. “This feels like an insane thing I have to say to my adult friend who has fucked most of the eastern seaboard,” she says, “but it sounds like you really hit it off with someone, not just sexually, and now you have a big fat crush, maybe for the first time ever.” She shrugs. “It happens to the best of us. Usually when we’re 15, but still.”

“Okay. I hate you, but I hear what you’re saying,” Ilya relents. He scratches his fingers through his hair. “I don’t even know how this would work, or even if it could work, with us both playing hockey. I’m just… excited. About him.”

Svetlana smirks. “Never thought I’d see the day.”

“Everyone in my life is mean to me.”

“Okay.” Svetlana quickly drains $80 of wine and grabs the bottle from the stand to refill her glass. “As hilarious as it would be for me to watch you bellyflop trying to land the man of your dreams, I do, regrettably, love you and want you to be happy.”

“What an honor,” Ilya deadpans.

“I’m here until tomorrow night. That’s plenty of time for me to *My Fair Lady* you back into a human man who knows how to behave.” She places her hands on the table and stares at him. “First of all, no I will not randomly marry you so you can fuck a Canadian with no consequences.”

“So you’re a cop now.”

“Fuck you,” she snaps. “Do you want my advice or not?”

“Yes. I love you. Sorry.”

“Second of all,” she continues, “how about instead of jumping straight into love and soulmates and all that gross crap, you just… try to date the man?”

“What do you mean?” Ilya asks, frowning.

“You know. Text him good morning and good night. Call sometimes. Get to know him. Find chances to meet up when you can. Be cool. Figure out how much you actually like this guy before you embarrass yourself by trying to adopt a dog with him week 2.”

Ilya lets out a pained groan and drops his face into his hands.

“What’s wrong now?”

“I’m picturing him with a dog.”

Sveta grabs Ilya’s wrist, feeling his pulse. Then she exhales dramatically and drops his hand. “We lost him. Here lies fuckboy Ilya Rozanov. Time of death, 9:02pm.”

He peeks up at her. “Ha ha.”

“Chill the fuck out, Ilyusha.” With a grin, Sveta leans forward and ruffles her hand through Ilya’s hair while he tries to swat her away. “You’re a catch. You’re a flirt. You’re going to be fine.”

“Okay, I can do that.” Ilya sits up straight and adjusts the collar of his shirt. “I can be chill and date Shane Hollander like a reasonable man.”

“Good boy.”

The waiter brings out their entrees, quail and wagyu that keeps them both mercifully quiet for a few minutes. Over the last few years, his relationship with Svetlana has shifted into something warm and almost familial. They fuck less often. They call just to catch up. Without realizing it, he has recategorized her in his mind from a party friend to a true confidant. He is beyond grateful that they seem to be growing up together instead of apart.

She’s his best friend. Despite their teasing, they’ll support each other through anything.

“Thank god you live in different countries,” Sveta finally says, cutting a piece of quail and setting it on Ilya’s plate. “It’ll make it harder for you to do something crazy.”

Well, almost anything.

“Yes.” Ilya hesitates before adding, “Though I am going to be starting this whole cool and chill plan in Canada...”

Sveta clanks down her fork. “Why?” He busies himself cutting his extremely tender steak instead of answering her. “Why, Ilya?”

“No reason.”

“Oh god,” she says, “you’re going to do something stalkery like ‘accidentally’ bump into him outside of his house in Montreal, aren’t you?”

Ilya snorts. “Come on, Sveta. I have way more game than that. Have a little faith.” He takes a bite, lets it melt on his tongue, and tries to be extremely casual when he continues. “Shane invited me up to his summer cottage. I’m going next week.” Svetlana’s eyes could set him on fire. “But I’m going to play it super chill while I’m there.”

“I’m going to kill you.”

***

The day before Ilya flies to Ottawa, he goes for a long run along the Emerald Necklace in Boston, burning off his nervous energy through sheer force.

His suitcase is packed. He’s cleaned out his fridge and done his laundry. He’s muted his text thread with Sveta, who keeps alternating between sending him cheesy relationship advice articles and clips from the movie *Swimfan* (typing “you” alongside every video link). There’s nothing left to do but wait. Wait and run and probably jerk off later.

He is determined to have a nice, chill, casual time in Canada with Shane Hollander. Sveta’s advice may have been harsh, but it wasn’t completely wrong. It’s only been two weeks since he first hooked up with Shane. This doesn’t need to be a big deal.

As he rounds Jamaica Pond, his phone pings in his pocket.

He smiles when he looks at the screen, partially because he’s changed his background to a goofy press picture of Shane—after he won the Cup the second time, a reporter asked Shane if he’d be going to

Disney World and his disgusted reaction was captured in two incredible photos—but mainly because Shane has texted him.

“How the hell would you explain that?” Sveta asked when she saw his phone.

“Making fun of my famous rival,” Ilya explained, pinching her cheek.

Jane: Do you drink IPAs?

Ilya snorts, slowing down his stride so he can text back.

Ilya: looking to bro out with me dude?
Jane: Fuck off
Ilya: i’ll bring my frisbee
Jane: I’m at Costco asshole
Jane: Buying you food

A teenager dribbling a soccer ball calls out his name, and Ilya tosses him a smile and a peace sign as he runs past. He likes the nice Boston sports fans. He likes the ones that yell at him about missed plays even more.

Ilya: any beer is fine
Jane: 👍
Ilya: can u also get peanut m&ms?
Ilya: and popsicles
Ilya: and 500 condoms
Jane: I’m getting you ten pounds of flour and nothing else
Jane: You can make yourself bread
Ilya laughed at Jane’s message

Then he’s off again. The city is charming in July. The college students are mostly gone, so the streets have more room to breathe, and the humidity clings to everything like a second skin. He enjoys running when the sweat comes easy, a visual representation of his effort.

This is the first summer in Ilya’s life that he hasn’t spent in Russia, the first summer since his father died. He keeps waiting for the guilt of routine to hit him. Instead it’s been nice. Relaxed.

Since the Bears got knocked out of the playoffs a month ago, he’s taken in the gaudy fireworks and colonial outfits on Independence Day. (Boston’s obsession with history cracks him up as a man who grew up in a nearly thousand-year-old city.) He went to a Red Sox game with some teammates who stay local year round and ate hot dogs until he felt sick. He’s barbecued. He’s beached. He had plans to take a crash course in American summer, three full months of being a tourist in the city he’s lived in since he was 19.

Then Shane Hollander grabbed his face in a New York hotel room.

Is Lanaudière charming like Boston? Will he even notice if it is? Or will he be too busy staring at the magnificent curve of Shane’s ample ass?

Another text comes through.

Jane: Are you packed?
Ilya: eh i’ll pack in the morning

He sends the lie and only has to wait five seconds for the predictable panic.

Jane: ??
Jane: Your flight is at like 9am
Ilya: counting down the hours eh ;)
Ilya: (eh because canada)
Jane: Please pack before bed
Ilya: is fine
Ilya: maybe i'll buy clothes at airport
Jane: No
Ilya: harvard crop top?
Ilya: boston tea party speedo?

Shane's next text makes him laugh out loud.

Jane: [Photo of Shane's hand holding up two really ugly men's swim trunks at a Costco. One of them is covered in sleepy cartoon fish, and the other has a big palm tree wearing sunglasses and holding a beer on the thigh.]
Jane: Drunk fish or single dad palm tree?
Ilya: shane
Ilya: it's important to me you can answer this
Jane: This feels like a trick
Jane: Single dad palm tree?
Ilya: he works so hard! he deserves a vacation!!

As Ilya begins the loop back, he cranks up his music, shoves his phone back in his pocket, and picks up the pace. He loves to sprint like this. He tears down the path, pushing his lungs and legs to the limit. Finally he sees the Museum of Fine Arts up ahead and slows to a walk. He's parked a mile up the road, and he doesn't want to get into his Mercedes all sweaty.

He's staring at his phone, smiling like a moron at the crinkle of horror on Shane's face at the prospect of sitting through It's a Small World, when it starts vibrating in his hand.

Shane is *calling* him.

"How many hours left?" Ilya answers, his attempt to sound cool completely undercut by the fact that he's still out of breath. "Give me update."

"Am I insane for inviting you here?" Shane blurts out.

Ilya nearly trips over a dip in the sidewalk. It's hard to recover gracefully when you take up as much space as Ilya does, but he tries his best. At least he didn't run anyone ever.

"Wow," Ilya says. "A twist. Jane is panicking."

"Rose thinks I am."

"Panicking?"

"Insane, asshole."

"Are you calling me from Costco line?" Ilya asks, stepping off the path and finding a more secluded spot under some trees.

“I’m in my car,” Shane replies. His voice is a little muffled like he’s trying to hide his face in the steering wheel. “I was feeling good, and then I talked to Rose this morning, and she gave me that look that you give your friend when they tell you they want to go sky-diving.”

Ilya perks up. “Ooh, let’s go sky-diving.”

“Focus, Rozanov.” Despite Shane’s attempts to sound stern, Ilya can hear his voice softening, like he’s fighting off a grin. “Maybe I should have sky-dived the first time. Avoided all this stress.”

“Yes, big daredevil jump fifteen feet off a busted plane to tarmac.”

Shane chuckles. Ilya thinks that butterflies isn’t the right word for this feeling buzzing through his chest and arms, warm and scary. He has a hornets nest rooted in his ribs.

“I know we decided to do this while perhaps… a bit mentally compromised.”

“Is that fancy talk for fucked dumb?”

Shane snorts. “Sure.” Then he sighs. Ilya wishes he could see his face, his downturned mouth and overly expressive eyes. “I’m just saying, I won’t be mad if this is too much and you change your mind,” Shane adds quietly. “No big deal.”

Something loosens in Ilya’s chest. Shane says *no big deal* the same way Ilya’s been saying it to himself, like it may, in fact, be a very big deal hiding under the thinnest level of self-protection. Any doubt or hesitation he’s felt since Sveta’s visit evaporates with his sweat.

“Shane.”

“Yeah, Ilya?”

“I am excited to see you.”

“Me too."

“I think we do not need to think so hard,” Ilya says, speaking to both of them. “Maybe it’s insane, but maybe it’s also good?”

Through the phone, Ilya hears a little, punched-out exhale. “Wow,” Shane says after a moment. His smile is audible. “No punchline? No sneaky dig at my hockey?”

Ilya looks up at the sun peeking through the leaves and smiles back. “I’ll try to think of one.”

When he hangs up, he’s feeling in such good spirits that he checks in on his muted thread with Sveta.

Света: “Swimfan (2002) - I'm Trying to Drop You Scene (3/5) | Movieclips” [link]
Света:

He mutes her again.

***

Shane Hollander drives like a teenager who’s terrified of failing his test. He keeps his hands solidly at the 4 and 8 position and looks at all three mirrors with cyclical regularity. He puts his turn signal on so early that they hear the clicking for up to ten seconds before each turn.

Ilya focuses hard on this from the passenger seat so he doesn't start thinking about how hot Shane looks in his sunglasses.

"Flight was okay?" Shane asks as he pulls onto Autoroute 50.

"Was not too bad." Ilya stretches out his legs the best he can. "I got seated next to third best hockey player in the league. He wasn't attractive."

"Must have been disappointing," Shane says, lips turning up at the corner.

"Very."

Shane's eyes flick toward Ilya. "Are you thirsty? I brought an extra water bottle."

"Maybe later."

The road stretches out long ahead of them, with flat, green fields on either side. Ilya's long morning begins to creep up on him. He chugged a huge, sugary coffee at Logan Airport before his flight, and as the caffeine fades, good, old-fashioned nerves take its place in his system.

Shane doesn't seem to mind the quiet. As they drive, Shane occasionally tells Ilya a piece of Canadian information he deems very important to share. (These include, "A&Ws have this whole Burger Family, Papa Burger, Baby Burger, like ten different burger family members," and "The A-50 used to be two separate roads but it's one big one now.")

After about an hour, a weird, shrill horn sound breaks through Ilya's mental fog. His eyes flick toward the radio, which seems to be quietly playing some kind of modern jazz station.

"What is this music?"

"I don't know," Shane says. "I picked a random station before you got in. I figured you might like music in the car."

"What were you listening to on the drive down?" Ilya asks.

"A podcast for a bit. Then nothing."

Ilya's jaw drops open. "*Nothing*? Please tell me that's the name of a weird Canadian band."

Shane shrugs. "I like to think while I drive."

"That is bone-chilling," Ilya says, giving his shoulders an exaggerated shudder.

"Shut up."

"You must sleep like wife in *Paranormal Activity*," Ilya continues, "just standing in the dark, staring at nothing."

"You fucking know I don't sleep like that."

Ilya smiles brightly. "I do. You sleep like a mummy."

A warm blush rushes onto Shane's cheeks. "Yeah, well," he mutters accusatorially, "you sleep like a koala. Clingy as hell."

“Was checking your pulse to make sure the Scorpion King hadn’t called you back to hell. Very helpful, if you ask me.”

Shane glares at Ilya briefly. Then he flicks on the turn signal. The hornets are back in Ilya’s stomach, threatening to sting as Shane pulls the car onto a turnoff on the side of the highway. He slows the car to a stop, throws it in park, and turns on the hazards.

He looks at Ilya. And he scowls.

“Uh oh,” Ilya says nervously. “You making me hitchhike back to Boston already?”

Shane dives across the seat instead.

He lips slam against Ilya’s, his fingers winding into his hair and knocking his baseball hat off. The noise that comes out of Ilya’s mouth is embarrassing, but he recovers smoothly enough. Center console be damned, Ilya grips Shane’s waist with one hand and neck with the other. He wants to eat him. He wants to kiss him until Ilya passes out, and then have Shane give him mouth to mouth (with tongue) to revive him. He wants to make Shane lay on top of him, creating one Vitruvian man between them. He wants he wants he wants.

Shane drags his tongue against Ilya’s and bites at his upper lip. Then, right as Ilya’s trying to figure out the best way to give a blowjob in a cramped car, Shane pulls back. Somehow three buttons of his shirt are undone, and he has spit on his chin. When he smiles, Ilya gets the strangest urge to high five him.

“Okay,” Shane says, his voice way too steady for how much he’s gasping for air. “One hour to go.”

Then he puts the car back in drive.

Ilya fears Sveta might be an idiot. If this isn’t love, then he’s almost afraid of what love will do to him, if a mere crush makes him feel like he would run headfirst into a wall if it got in Shane’s way. The wall wouldn’t stand a chance.

Still, her point about not doing too much too soon is well taken. He will be chill about this.

Shane drives the rest of the way with his left hand at 12 and his right hand on Ilya’s thigh, while Ilya tries to memorize every crease on his knuckles with his fingertips. Chill-ly, of course.

***

Ilya is quick to call out English for being a stupid, confusing language. But he thinks the misnomer of “cottage” may be a purely Canadian thing. “Cottage” invokes images of sweet little houses with flowers in the window and perhaps a wolf pretending to be a elderly woman inside. “Cottage” is pastoral and cute, rocking chairs and fireplaces and brightly painted doors.

“Cottage” does not adequately describe the big, beautiful property that Shane’s had built on a lakefront in the Quebec wilderness. Ilya doesn’t remember Little Red Riding Hood visiting her grandmother’s private indoor synthetic ice rink.

It’s gorgeous. Plus the sheer volume of things to look at is a welcome distraction from the fact that Ilya wants to carry Shane around like a backpack.

Ilya whistles as they walk through the front door. “Fancy man.”

“Fuck off,” Shane says, though a proud smile pulls at his lips.

“I can never show you my home,” Ilya says, looking up at the exposed beam ceilings. “You will think I am some meager back-up center on a one-year contract.”

Shane chuckles. “I highly doubt that.”

“Is true,” Ilya says, following Shane into the house. “Shane Hollander summers in a mansion while Ilya Rozanov suffers away in his studio apartment.”

“Your salary is public, Rozanov.”

“Internet is full of lies. It says you have more Cups than me.”

When they get to the main space, an impeccably designed open-plan area that includes the kitchen, dining table, and living room, Shane stops. He turns and lounges back against a granite island, hooking his thumbs into his pockets. Ilya steps slowly into his space, watching the way Shane’s chest moves as his breathing quickens. They look at each other.

“Where can I put my bags?” Ilya asks, leaning forward to nudge his nose against Shane’s shoulder. “Because I want to suck your dick right now.”

Shane gulps. “You can put them right there.”

Then they’re kissing. And then Ilya’s bags get shoved off and kicked away, so Shane can grab his shoulders without backpack straps in the way. And then, when he can feel Shane hard against his thigh, Ilya drops to his knees and gets Shane’s shorts and boxer briefs down just enough to release his cock, his beautiful cock that has two freckles on the underside, a pair of north stars guiding Ilya right where he wants to be.

Right against the island, Ilya gives Shane a blowjob to remember, some of his finest work, loving the way Shane’s shirt grazes his forehead every time he bobs his head toward Shane’s stomach. After just a few minutes, Shane is shaking and coming down Ilya’s throat with a groan that could rattle glassware. He’s still basically fully dressed.

Ilya breathes heavily against Shane’s knee as Shane comes back to earth.

“So like a guest room, or…”

Shane laughs loudly. “I can’t stand you.”

He can jerk Ilya off like a maestro though. They get to the bags later.

***

By the afternoon, after a quick nap where Ilya wakes up to Shane having grilled ten hot dogs for two people, Ilya demands a tour of the lake. A dock extends out over a large, dark body of water with thick trees on every side, and a rack standing nearby displays 2 large wooden canoes. Wide, flat stones form a walkway between the dock and a large shed thirty feet from the water’s edge. Like everything in Shane’s life, it’s perfectly planned and executed.

Ilya lays flat on his stomach at the dock’s edge and drags his fingers through the cold water.

“You like the water?” Shane asks, standing back a few feet.

“Oh yes. I am like a fish.”

“I didn’t know if you did a lot of swimming growing up. Since, you know.”

Shane waves his hand around, and it takes Ilya a moment to realize what he’s implying.

“We have water in Russia, Shane,” Ilya replies with a smirk. Shane’s face scrunches up in a way that Ilya is learning is very Shane, like his brain can’t process being wrong and is trying to reject it through his crinkled nose. “We even have outdoor pools. I learned to swim in one.”

“Of course,” Shane says. “Duh.”

Ilya stands up and walks to Shane. He clicks his teeth. “Knows every Conn Smythe winner since Beliveau but doesn’t know geography. How cold do you think Moscow is?”

Shane rolls his eyes. “I’ve only been to Russia the one time, and it was fucking cold, okay?”

“Yes, at the *Winter* Olympics.”

Ilya reaches a hand out to boop Shane’s nose, but Shane swats it away first. He pivots and starts walking toward the shed. His ass lures Ilya to follow closely behind him.

He’s not sure what he expects to find in Shane Hollander’s lake shed. Perhaps a toolbox or some extra deck chairs. And he does find those things, but mostly he finds:

“So many goodies!” Ilya excitedly jumps into the shed, scanning through all the shelves. It’s a lake party dream, carefully organized into labeled bins. In addition to the canoes stacked closer to the dock, there are kayaks, balls, inflatables, water guns, stand-up paddle boards, different sizes of life vests and water shoes, beach chairs, and even a floating cooler. “You're hosting ragers up here, Hollander?”

Shane scratches his hair. “Hayden brought his family up last summer. I didn’t know what kids like to do for fun, so I just bought a bunch of stuff.”

“How old were these kids?” Ilya asks. He holds up two unopened boxes, one that shows an adult woman in a bikini sitting on a unicorn floatie and one that seems to contain a floating basketball hoop.

“Three, three, and one,” Shane admits, looking embarrassed.

“You should get beer pong for next year, when they’re in kindergarten.”

“Fuck you.” The words are normal enough for him, but the way Shane says it, and the way his face is suddenly bright red makes Ilya light up. With a pained sigh, Shane points to a box on the bottom shelf and then hides behind his hands.

“Shane, no!”

“I didn’t read the label!”

This is how Ilya finds himself bobbing on a unicorn in the lake while Shane straddles an inflatable slice of pizza. Between them, a floating beer pong table is filled with cups of lake water. His new single dad palm tree swim trunks barely fit, but there is no way Ilya wasn’t wearing them at least once.

The sun is shining, Shane's wet hair is slicked back, and Ilya feels relaxed and happy in a way he didn't know was possible outside of the bedroom.

Shane narrows one eye and then launches a ping pong ball right into the back corner cup. He makes one more, then misses. Ilya misses his first shot. Shane hits a third.

"Why are you so good at this?" Ilya asks as he dumps yet another cup back into the lake.

"It's hand-eye coordination. You should try it sometime." Shane cocks an eyebrow, and Ilya's mouth goes dry. He's so hot like this. Ilya might die the next time they face off against each other on the ice.

"Eh." Ilya shrugs. "I'll just goad the ping pong ball into hitting me first." He waves his hand over his side of the table, blocking the cups. "Hey, ball. Tell your sister I like her new haircut."

With a grin, Shane pelts the ball and smacks Ilya right in the back of the hand. "That's a two minute minor for instigating," Shane jokes.

Ilya taps a finger against his chin. "What could we do for two minutes?"

Shane snorts. "Two minutes? Do you think I'm sixteen?"

"No," Ilya says, blowing him a kiss. "I'm just ambitious."

The soft attempt at distraction doesn't work. Shane easily disposes of Ilya in two more rounds. Then he beats him again, landing six balls before Ilya can even get two. It would be embarrassing if confident, competitive Shane wasn't such a turn on.

"Who knew?" Ilya says, emptying his final cup again. "All this time, clean-cut Shane Hollander has been a college frat boy."

Shane rolls his eyes. "I didn't go to college."

"Obviously," Ilya says. "You think Moscow is full of penguins." Shane drags his hand across the lake and splashes cold water at Ilya's head. Ilya curses at him but finds himself smiling back at Shane's pleased face. "Do you ever wish you did? Go to college?"

"Not really," Shane says. "All I've ever wanted to do is play hockey. You?"

Ilya shakes his head no. "I might go to school after I retire. Be the weird old man in Russian literature classes. Correcting everyone else's pronunciation for a change."

Shane grins. "Sounds perfect for you."

Ilya dips his head back into the water, fully wetting his hair. When he sits up, he catches Shane staring at his chest and neck. If Shane notices him taking extra time to straighten out his necklace, running his hands along his collarbone to adjust the chain, he doesn't say anything. But he does watch.

"I do wonder sometimes," Shane says, his voice softer, "if I had gone to college, would I have realized I was gay sooner?" He seems to be processing his thoughts in real time, and Ilya just waits, lets him. "Basically everyone I interact with is a hockey player or hockey player adjacent." Shane runs a hand through his hair. "Maybe interacting with different types of people when I was younger would have helped."

"Hockey is not the most encouraging space to explore."

“No,” Shane agrees. “It’s not.” He flops back thoughtfully on his floatie, and Ilya feels something tighten in his chest. He’s a surrealist painting, a sunkissed Olympian draped lazily over a cartoon pepperoni slice.

“The Voyageurs…?” Ilya asks carefully.

Shane waves his hand in a so-so gesture. “They’re not Toronto, but they are…”

“Hockey players,” Ilya finishes. Shane nods in agreement. “Same with Boston. Not the worst. A few guys are very good. But overall, I don’t know.”

Ilya hooks his foot onto the beer pong table so it doesn’t drift away. Putting his hands in the water, he paddles lightly, rotating so his head is closer to Shane’s.

“I got lucky,” Ilya says. “The first boy I slept with was hockey adjacent, so I didn’t have to look far.” Shane’s eyebrows raise, so Ilya clarifies, “Not a player. My coach’s son, in Russia.” The last he heard, Sasha was having the time of his gay life in Paris. He’s happy they both got out. “But if it wasn’t him, it would have been someone else. Lots of night clubs back then. Many hot men and women.”

“How old were you?”

“Fifteen, maybe?”

“*Fifteen*?” Shane actually gasps. Ilya shrugs. He doesn’t really feel one way or another about his sexual history. It’s been mostly fun, mostly healthy. Still, when Shane frowns, it makes him a little nervous that maybe this will be the thing that finally turns Shane off. Slutty Ilya Rozanov, too run through to be taken seriously. Instead, Shane says, “I’m jealous. I wasn’t even brave enough to kiss a guy until I was 22.”

Ilya grins. “Must be why you’re so desperate for it.”

Shane’s eyes flare for just a second. Then he reaches over and shoves down on the side of Ilya’s unicorn floatie, knocking him off his perch and fully into the water.

The shock of cold makes Ilya shriek. Shane tries to paddle away, but the shape of the pizza gets in the way, and Ilya easily grabs his ankle. Soon they’re both in the lake, wrestling and splashing and laughing. Then Shane grabs his thigh, and Ilya wraps his legs around Shane’s waist. He feels a little silly, since he is bigger than Shane, but then Shane looks up at him. His eyes do that thing where they drift to Ilya’s mouth, his lips twitching up almost subconsciously, and the lake water makes the sun dance over his freckles.

Ilya can’t help it. His tongue needs to be touching Shane’s. It’s like his lungs no longer work on their own. He needs Shane’s spit to breathe.

“You’re desperate too,” Shane pants into his mouth. “What’s your excuse?”

“You kidding?” Ilya asks. Shane shakes his head. A million things he absolutely should not say fly through his brain, so he settles for an indisputable fact. “You’re so hot, Hollander.”

“Oh,” Shane says. “Good.”

It takes a while to get from the lake to the shower to the bed. But then Shane practically leaps onto his hands and knees on the mattress, his hole already fingered open in Shane’s enormous master

bathroom, his ass presented to Ilya like the Ark of the fucking Covenant. It's the most beautiful thing Ilya's ever seen. If his face melted off right now, it'd be totally worth it.

Thankfully it doesn't. Otherwise he wouldn't get to hear the incredible whine of Shane's voice when he begs him to go harder, or see the blissful shape of Shane's profile when he comes untouched ten minutes later.

"I should get a trophy for that." Ilya kisses Shane's shoulder, his body pressing Shane down into the comforter. "I'd put it on my shelf right between my Hart and my Stanley Cup ring."

"Then I deserve one too," Shane replies, almost slurring his words. "It's a team sport."

***

Ilya knew that Shane was nervous about this trip, just like he was. But it takes Ilya a few days at the cottage to figure out the exact way that Shane's anxiety manifested itself.

Namely: Shane has planned approximately one hundred different potential activities for them to do during Ilya's seven days here.

And Ilya doesn't mean he loosely brainstormed some things they could do, like go swimming, watch a movie, or make dinner. There's a list, with categories, rankings, and a color-coded system to indicate how easy it would be to have a conversation during each activity. Ilya finds it by accident, when he sneaks up behind Shane to kiss his neck and instead sees him typing "Look into quadski rental and/or purchase" into a complex Google Doc on his phone.

"When were we even going to do all of this?" Ilya asks, once he's eased Shane back from the brink of mortification. They're sitting in an arm chair, Shane on Ilya's lap and Ilya's chin on Shane's shoulder as he scrolls through the list.

"I wanted options. What if you didn't like s'mores?"

"Who doesn't like s'mores?"

Shane blinks a few times. "Well, I don't, really. But if you did, I wanted to be prepared."

That night, Shane does in fact sit next to Ilya while he makes s'mores over Shane's firepit, staring judgmentally as Ilya layers graham crackers with Jersey Milk bars and sticky melted marshmallows. His nose has been half-scrunched since Ilya started loading up his skewer.

"Want me to get you an apple to roast?" Ilya teases. "Or celery stick? Diet friendly."

"Fuck off," Shane says, shoving his shoulder. "It's not the sugar. It's the marshmallows."

"You don't like marshmallows? Why do you hate fun, nice things, Hollander?"

"I don't! They're slimy goop," he says, physically recoiling as Ilya swings his skewer toward him. "And yours is literally a cancer hazard." He points to Ilya's marshmallows, which are so well roasted that they look like three stacked pieces of coal.

"Guess this is a bad time to tell you I smoke cigarettes sometimes," Ilya replies, sucking the top marshmallow off his stick.

Shane's jaw drops. "Are you serious?"

“I’m working on quitting! I haven’t had one in like a month.” Then Ilya thinks. “Well, that’s a lie. I had one before I left Boston. But I am quitting.”

Shane drops his face into his hands. “You’re a professional athlete who is almost as good as me,” he mutters miserably.

“What did you think this was?” Ilya asks, amused, lifting his arm and displaying the nicotine patch he’s stuck to his tricep.

“Bandaid?” Shane answers sheepishly.

That night, Ilya lies in the dark bedroom and watches Shane sleep, flat on his back, mouth slightly open. The moonlight cuts through the windows and casts dramatic shadows over Shane’s pretty face, making him look, well, undead. If he wasn’t worried it would wake Shane up, he would try crossing his arms over his chest to get the full effect.

He doesn’t have to be cool about Shane when he’s asleep.

Ilya is so charmed by this strange, cocky, soft, sweetheart, asshole of a man. A man that will make a color-coded Google Doc—with tabs—to soothe his busy brain and guarantee that Ilya has a nice time here. Who seems to split his life neatly into things he cares obsessively about and things he doesn’t (which has made him exceptional at hockey and a blank slate when it comes to things like popular music or famous people’s names).

The truth is, Ilya is starting to suspect that it doesn’t matter what he does with Shane. It’s all going to be fun because Shane is there. It’s all going to be attractive and infuriating and sexy because it’s Shane, and he is somehow even more of all those things when he’s being weird and boring.

He wants to watch Shane put a deck of cards in order.

He wants to order a seven-day pill organizer from Amazon just to see Shane fill each compartment with vitamins.

He daydreams about Shane holding up a pair of black socks and a pair of navy socks and asking, “Which one?”

In one particular moment of mental humiliation, he fantasizes about ordering a hoodie big enough that he and Shane can wear it at the same time.

A corner of his sleepy mind wonders if he’s been cursed in some way. Every time he made fun of a teammate for being obsessed with their girlfriend, every time he stuck his tongue out because a friend wanted to spend time with his wife and kids, every time he quietly celebrated when a buddy went through a break-up because he wanted more single friends, it’s all been bundled up and thrown back at him tenfold. He’s Funhouse Ilya, ready to crawl on his mirror-warped knees to make Shane Hollander smile.

He can never tell Sveta about any of this. She might laugh so hard that she actually dies, and he cannot be haunted by a smug ghost.

The next morning, Ilya wakes up and sees Shane already fully dressed in a hoodie, layered joggers, and a toque. Ilya rubs his eyes and reaches for a coffee mug.

“Did I accidentally sleep until autumn?”

Shane smiles excitedly. “Let’s go to the rink.”

“Aw, but I was hoping we could…” Ilya pulls out his phone and reads a random row off the document he forced Shane to share with him. “Go catch-and-release fishing, parentheses, an opportunity to talk about indigenous species, end parentheses.”

“Come on, asshole.” Shane rolls his eyes, though his cheeks are a little red. Ilya wants to lick him. “I have extra skates. I wanna score on you.”

“Do not threaten me with a good time.”

Being on a rink with Shane again is unreal. He got a taste of it at the All Star Game this year, when Crowell finally took the stick out of his ass long enough to let them play on the same team for once, but now when Shane skates around him, he knows what those strong, talented legs look like naked. It makes a bigger difference than he expected.

They pass around the puck for a while, playing King of the Hill, chasing each other around the ice, and messing around with trick shots. Ilya is wearing a borrowed Voyageurs sweatshirt and toque—the ice may be synthetic, but Shane keeps the air conditioning in here nearly as cold as a real rink—which creates a fun opportunity for Ilya to declare, “Montreal loses again,” whenever Shane bests him at a game.

After a while, they’re just skating, alternating between hockey sprints and more casual laps.

“Were ice skating nights a thing in Russia?” Shane asks.

“Like night practice?”

Shane shakes his head. “When I was in middle school, the kids would all go to the local rink on Friday nights, and they’d play this awful pop music and flash these disco lights while a bunch of thirteen-year-olds skated around in circles. Sort of like a teen club but on ice.”

Ilya grins. “God, you must have hated that.”

Shane nods grimly. “My parents always wanted me to go to socialize with my classmates. I think I went twice and then begged them to stop making me.”

“Did you spend the whole time correcting everyone’s technique?”

“I barely talked to any of them,” Shane says with a shrug. “I just skated faster than everyone else, which apparently was ‘rude’ and ‘not in the spirit of the event,’ according to my mom.”

“I need to see a picture of teenage Shane Hollander. I bet he was so fed up.”

“The worst was when they did this ‘couples’ skate’ thing,” Shane adds. “They’d play some sappy love song, and I’d have to hold hands with some girl from my class, and we’d skate so slow.” He drags out the last two words, like it agonizes him to even remember. Ilya can imagine a young, skinny Shane Hollander, face completely despondent as some poor tween girl drags him around the rink to a K-Ci & JoJo song.

Ilya pivots and starts skating backwards, keeping pace with Shane as they circle the rink face to face. “I hate to reveal the secrets of heterosexual dating to Mr. Hockey Gay, but the point of a couples’ skate is the hand-holding part not the skating part.”

“Well, to Teenage Hockey Gay, it was boring as hell.”

Ilya laughs loudly. He’s laughing so much this week. There must be something in the air in Canada, like fairydust or nitrous oxide. Shane is looking at him with a half-annoyed, half-hungry expression that makes Ilya’s hornets buzz awake. He doesn’t mind them so much anymore. After all, bees are very important to the planet’s health.

Suddenly, inspiration strikes.

“Wait, hold on,” Ilya says, skating over to the bench area where he left his phone. He quickly finds the video he’s looking for and heads toward a speaker system Shane has installed along one wall. “Does aux cord connect to room speakers?”

“Uh yeah. Why?”

Once everything is hooked up, Ilya presses play and rushes back to Shane, hockey stopping in front of him right as commentary starts blasting over the speakers.

“*Polenka wins the face-off. Boiziau with the steal, he passes to Shane Hollander, who breaks wide open! They can’t catch him! He shoots. Scores! Montreal is on the board in the first 30 seconds of game one.*”

Shane barks out a laugh. “What the hell is that?”

“Is YouTube video with Shane Hollander Stanley Cup highlights,” Ilya says. “I figure that is sappy love song for you.”

“You’re such an idiot,” Shane says, but his smile is so big, and when Ilya reaches for his hand, he gives it willingly.

“Skate with me, Hollander,” he says, starting to move. Shane drifts along with him. “You can feel what it’s like to be the slow one in a couple skate.”

“You fucking wish, Rozanov.”

Then Shane plants his skates and absolutely takes off, yanking Ilya behind him. And then they’re ripping across the ice, hand in hand. Shane’s rink is smaller than a regular MLH one, so the turns are tighter, sharper. Occasionally one of them gets ahead, but because their fingers are locked together, they end up sort of slingshotting around, stumbling and recovering more than once. On one bad turn, Ilya accidentally slams Shane into the boards and uses the opportunity to lick his neck.

As the compilation video reaches Shane’s second Stanley Cup run, Shane shifts his grip on Ilya’s hand so he’s ahead, his arm and Ilya stretching out behind him. He locks his elbow so whenever Ilya picks up speed, he just pushes Shane further ahead.

“You are cheater!” Ilya gasps.

“You are losing,” Shane replies.

He glances over his shoulder and grins cockily at Ilya. When he looks back, the curve of the rink is closer than he expects, and Shane has to cut hard to make the turn. The adjustment throws Ilya off-balance. He trips over nothing and lets go of Shane’s hand as he slides across the synthetic ice, coming to a neat stop inside the net of the goal.

“Ow,” Ilya whines, rubbing the heel of his hand against his hip bone where he’s definitely going to have a nasty bruise. But he also can’t stop laughing, and Shane is literally doubled over, his elbows resting on his knees as he struggles to catch his breath. When Shane glances back up again, his cheeks are flushed. *Pretty*, Ilya thinks for the thousandth time.

“Who gets credit for that?” Shane runs a hand through his sweat-damp hair. He looks like a slutty jock angel. “Technically, I scored *with* you.”

“But I am puck,” Ilya says, grabbing at the net from inside the goal.

Shane skates over until he’s standing above Ilya. “You get the goal, I get the assist?” he asks, reaching out both hands to help Ilya back up to his feet.

“Deal.”

When Ilya’s upright again, Shane grips the front of Ilya’s sweatshirt in his fist to keep him from skating away. His brow furrows and his eyes flick around Ilya’s face like he’s trying to figure something out.

“Why is it so easy to hang out with you?”

Ilya smoothes a hand over Shane’s hair as he ponders the question. It’s a good one.

“I think maybe we were always meant to be friends.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” Ilya says, hoping his memory will do Shane’s soft little smile justice when he thinks back on this later. “But unfortunately we are also horny monsters controlled by our dicks, so we are cursed to have really hot sex in addition to the nice friendship times.”

Shane snorts. “Yeah, that part is horrible.”

Ilya leans in to kiss him, pushes his tongue past his sweat-salted lips, but before he can really get into it, a horn blares on the speakers.

“*They’ve done it! The Montreal Voyageurs are your Stanley Cup Champions for the second year in a row.*.”

Ilya pulls back with a frown. “Okay, we can turn this off. This song sucks.”

Shane tosses his head back and laughs again, big and bright.

“Don’t be fucking jealous.”

Today, Ilya likes Shane, and Shane likes Ilya.

In two days, Ilya will be back in Boston, and Shane’s laughs and smiles and mouth and chirps and ass and dick and weird little lists will be in Canada, completely out of reach.

***

The cottage in the evening gets a magical feel to it. The living room, with its massive windows, overlooks the sun setting over the lake, casting the space in a warm, orange glow. When the fireplace

is going, the crackling sounds and picturesque views makes Ilya feel like he's in a fairytale assembled by a really high-end interior decorator.

But right now, there's no time for magic.

They are sitting on the plush rug that covers most of the room, the coffee table shoved closer to the couch. Each of them has the appropriate stacks of playing cards in front of them, and they each hold one hand behind their back.

Shane stares at Ilya.

Ilya stares at Shane.

"Spit," Shane says.

They both flip their top cards and begin to play.

Playing games with Shane is like playing two games at the same time for Ilya.

First, the game itself. No surprise for a professional athlete: Ilya is a competitive man who likes to win in everything he does. This includes everything from hockey games to card games like Spit. The Bears once banned him from Mario Kart for two months after Ilya got too heated and broke a beer bottle in his hand by squeezing it too hard. (He still claims there was something wrong with the bottle, but Marly called him a witch, and the label stuck.)

The second game is more interesting. When Shane realizes he is engaged in a competition of any kind, something switches in his brain, and he goes from being a thoughtful, slightly awkward guy to a monster who will stop at nothing to achieve victory.

He's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jackass. It delights Ilya to no end. He's obsessed with fucking with him.

"You are luckiest in the world," Ilya pouts as Shane stacks card after card while Ilya keeps getting stuck. Shane tosses him a terrifying grin. No wonder several rookies in the league cried the first time they played against him.

"It's not luck," Shane says. "It's skill."

"Skill of getting lucky cards."

While he waits for Shane to get stuck again, he uses his non-playing hand to scratch at a spot on his leg. Shane doesn't even look up.

"Hand behind your back, Rozanov."

"I'm not using this hand to play," he says. "I'm scratching mosquito bite."

"Yeah, right."

When Shane is nearly through all of his cards, Ilya stops looking at his piles altogether. He watches Shane, sees him lick his lips, notes how his eyes light up as he sees a path forward to winning this hand. His right hand places one card, two cards, his last card—

And then Ilya slaps the smaller pile a fraction of a section before Shane does.

“Fuck you!” Shane shouts.

Ilya cackles, recollecting his now slightly smaller hand. “My grand strategy is paying off. Let you do all the work, and then swoop in with my talented fingers.”

“Talented fingers my ass,” Shane grumbles.

“Yes, you love my talented fingers in your ass.”

Shane’s lips twitch, just barely. One point, Rozanov.

They continue playing. Shane is winning the card game, but Ilya’s winning too. He “accidentally” bumps his foot against Shane’s while he’s dealing. He plucks an eyelash off Shane’s cheek while he’s trying to quickly place a 2-3-2 stack, making Shane scowl. By the time they’re down to one Spit pile, Shane is on edge, glaring at the cards like they’ve done something to him.

“Spit,” Ilya says.

Shane goes to work. So does Ilya.

As Shane quickly smacks down three cards, Ilya sets his free hand on Shane’s leg, which is now stretched out beside him. He mindlessly rubs circles into his ankle, placing cards only when Shane needs him to to keep going.

“You’re not trying,” Shane complains.

“Yes, I am.” Ilya lazily drops a 6 to prove his point.

“I don’t want to win because you gave up. Spit.”

Ilya flips a new card onto the pile.

“Who’s giving up?” Keeping his eyes on Shane, Ilya lifts up Shane’s foot toward his mouth, pressing a kiss against his ankle bone. “I’m very determined.”

Shane lets out a little whimper at the contact. But he doesn’t look at Ilya. And he doesn’t stop playing until the cards make him.

“Spit.”

He flips a card.

As Shane thins out his hands, Ilya kisses up Shane’s leg, opened-mouth kisses that leave wet little marks along his skin. Shane’s breathing more heavily. When Ilya reaches his knee, he tongues over a scar on his kneecap that Ilya now knows Shane got when a high school teammate clipped him with a skate while attempting to jump over a stick.

Shane moans something resembling a word.

“What was that?” Ilya asks innocently.

“Spit, dickhead.”

Finally Shane has one last card in his hand, ready to drop. He hovers the 8 of clubs over the spit pile, trying to pick the right moment so he can slap the empty pile and win.

As he's choosing his moment, Ilya sets down Shane's leg and shifts so he's on his hands and knees. He crawls forward until his face is right in front of Shane's, until he can feel Shane's shaky breath on his lips, the heat of his stare on Ilya's mouth.

"," Ilya whispers.

Shane leans closer to him, an unconscious drift. "Wha…"

Then Ilya pushes Shane's hand with the card down onto the pile, smacks his own hand onto the empty pile, and grins. Two points, Rozanov.

"Hand goes to me."

"Oh fuck this," Shane spits out.

Shane starts to stand up, but Ilya tackles him first, pressing his body down into the soft carpet. When Ilya tries to kiss him, Shane turns his head and purses his lips, humming a no sound. He looks fucking pissed and fucking aroused, his cheeks red with anger and his shorts straining against his hard-on as he shoots daggers at Ilya with those incredible brown eyes.

Ilya thinks that Shane in this exact moment might be his favorite person he's ever met.

Then he ducks his head into Shane's neck before his face says something he's not ready to yet.

"Shaaane," Ilya sings into Shane's skin, dragging out the one syllable into a jingle. "Please let me make out with you. I'll do a really good job."

Shane shakes his head. "You fucking cheated."

"Yes, but you should forgive me."

"Oh yeah?" Shane scoffs. "Why?"

"Because I want to fuck you," Ilya says simply.

"Tough shit."

Ilya pushes up Shane's shirt, kissing his stomach, his chest. "I am very sorry." When he rolls one of Shane's nipples between his fingers and tugs, Shane's hips jerk up, his mouth falling open in quiet arousal. His hand automatically moves to Ilya's hair until he remembers he's mad at him. If an arm could pout, Shane's does as he drops it back against the carpet.

"You're not sorry," Shane protests weakly. "You're just horny."

"Let me prove how sorry I am."

Shane says nothing further, his face still cute and grumpy, but he does lift his arms over his head. Ilya stays skin-to-skin, sliding his hands up Shane's chest and biceps as he pushes his t-shirt off. Three points, Rozanov. We have a winner.

Ilya removes Shane's shorts in similar fashion, until Shane's laying on the carpet in nothing but black boxer briefs. His own clothes come off with much less fanfare. He grabs a bottle of lube and a condom he stashed in one of Shane's decorative baskets for an emergency such as this.

When Ilya returns with supplies, Shane rolls his eyes. “I haven’t forgiven you yet.”

“But you will,” Ilya says confidently.

“Pride comes before the fall, or whatever.”

Ilya winks at him. “As long as you come before me, I’m good.”

Laying down next to Shane, Ilya drags a finger from Shane’s waistband up his torso, gliding over his collarbone and all the way up to his shoulder, before pulling both of Shane’s arms back over his head. He gently takes one of Shane’s hands and sets it on top of the other.

“Grab your wrist, yes? Arms stay up.”

Shane does as he’s told, his eyes hooding as Ilya moves back down his body.

He settles halfway down Shane’s body and grips his erection through his underwear, mouthing at the shape and savoring the little gasps and grunts coming out of Shane’s lips.

When he does finally strip Shane fully naked, he blows him like he’s conducting an experiment. He changes up the pace, fast and then slower, clocking the moments when Shane’s moans seem to be escalating. He presses his finger against Shane’s perineum, making his hips rise off the floor, but stops before he gets too incoherent.

Every hypothesis is tested to just before its limit. He wants to write a thesis about taking Shane Hollander apart. He’d pass with flying colors. Be awarded the first ever doctorate in dick.

“Shit, shit,” Shane hisses as Ilya swallows around him. Hypothesis: He’ll like that. Conclusion: Yes. “I’m gonna come.”

The magic words. “Not yet,” Ilya says.

Then he pulls away and sits on his heels, no longer touching Shane at all. Shane gawks at him. He crunches and props himself up his elbows.

“*What*?”

“Arms back up.”

Shane immediately complies. He’s squirming on the rug, cheeks red. A fucking dreamboat.

“Fuck, Ilya, please. Finish.”

Ilya leans over so he can look Shane in the eye. “Do you trust me?” Shane nods his head immediately. Ilya taps his hand against Shane’s side. “On your stomach.”

“This apology sucks,” Shane whines as he rolls over. God help him, he keeps his hand on his wrist the entire time, adjusting until he’s lying face down, his left cheek against the carpet so he can look back at Ilya.

“But you like it,” Ilya says.

“Fuck you. Yeah, I do.”

Before Shane can grind against the floor, Ilya grabs his hips and lifts them until Shane's on his knees, his chest pressed against the ground and his ass in the air. Ilya runs a hand along Shane's arched back and reaches for the lube.

"Mr. Yoga."

"Shut the fuck up."

"What is this pose called?" Ilya asks.

Shane groans. "I don't want to say."

"Say it," Ilya says, biting Shane's asscheck, making him groan for a different reason. Finally Shane sighs and mutters in an embarrassed voice.

"Puppy pose."

Ilya smiles widely. "That's so cute. I'm going to finger you stupid now."

"Jesus Christ," Shane says. But he also rocks his ass toward Ilya, almost wriggling for contact.

They've fucked several times at this point, but Ilya still can't believe how openly Shane chases his pleasure when he gets like this. The careful captain whose post-game interviews are measured to the point of being boring, the superstar whose biggest hot mic scandal was accidentally calling a player by the wrong name, those versions of Shane fade into the background. He wants. He takes. He says exactly how he's feeling.

"Get the fuck on with it, Rozanov."

"Aye, aye, captain."

Slicking his fingers, he circles Shane's hole, pressing against the sensitive skin until Shane whimpers. He inserts one finger, then two, thrusting them in and out but avoiding his prostate the best he can. Ever the determined athlete, Shane shifts around, trying to put himself in a better position to score, but Ilya grabs his hip to keep him still.

"Touch me right," Shane whines.

"Oh," Ilya says passively, "like this?" Then Ilya curls his fingers sharply, driving them exactly into position and picking up speed. Shane knocks his forehead to the floor at the shock of pleasure, moaning loudly. He lets go of his wrist but keeps his hands above his head, gripping onto the rug for leverage.

"Holy shit."

Ilya watches Shane intently, looking for all the cues his body gives that he's getting close to an orgasm. He scissors his fingers, adding in a third and keeping consistent pressure against the spot that makes Shane squirm and drool. Then Shane's breathing picks up, his arms flex—

And Ilya removes his fingers entirely.

"Come the fuck on," Shane groans loudly. He's trembling with desire, and when he rolls over onto his back to look at Ilya, he has a red mark on his forehead from the rug. He's perfect.

Ilya crawls forward and finally presses his lips to Shane's, grabbing Shane's neck to hold him close. It's hot and messy. Shane is so horny that he's almost fucking Ilya's mouth with his tongue. Ilya is so horny that he almost tells Shane he loves him. Instead, he mutters a lot of really embarrassing shit in Russian and tries to slow things down, guiding Shane back from the brink as he kisses his lips swollen.

"Do you forgive me?" Ilya asks against his mouth.

"Make me come, and we'll talk," Shane pants, tugging on Ilya's hair. He bends his leg and presses his knee against Ilya's cock. Ilya moans and pushes Shane back onto his stomach. He guides Shane until he's laying flat and nudges Shane's legs apart so there's room for him.

"Very generous of you," he bites into Shane's shoulder.

He makes quick work of the condom, adding more lube. Then he presses his dick against Shane's hole, makes a few exploratory thrusts before he bottoms out, and any thoughts of edging Shane further go out the window.

Shane is absolutely everywhere. His back under Ilya's chest. His legs sliding against Ilya's legs. His body taking everything as Ilya pounds into him, tight and warm and wanting. Shane's making these little noises that might be English. It's hard to say. Ilya forgets how to speak it.

As heat builds in Ilya's stomach, he reaches around to grip Shane's head, turning his chin so he can see his face. His eyes are glassy. When Ilya touches Shane's lips, Shane, like the absolute sex demon he is, opens his mouth wider. Ilya pushes two fingers inside, pressing his tongue and hooking onto Shane's bottom teeth.

Ilya's so close. Too close. If he comes before Shane after all that, Shane will never let him hear the end of it. He changes the angle of his hips, and that does it.

Shane cries out, "Oh fuck!" the words muffled by Ilya's fingers. His whole body seems to snap into tension, and then he's coming hard, drooling onto Ilya's hand. Ilya follows maybe five seconds later, collapsing onto Shane's back with a groan.

"Forgiven?" Ilya asks, the word heavy on his accented tongue.

Shane chuckles breathlessly. "Who cares?"

Fuck. Ilya loves him.

He almost says it when Shane puckers his lips at Ilya as he comes back from tossing the condom, too fucked out to get up but wanting a kiss anyway.

He almost says it again later when Shane pulls out a handheld wet vac and cleans his own cum off the rug like he's removing a red wine stain, his eyes sparkling brightly when the job is complete.

***

On Ilya's last night at Shane's cottage, they sit, crunched together on the chaise part of Shane's huge sectional couch. Ilya drapes a leg over Shane's, and their heads are tilted back against the top cushion, facing each other.

Ilya feels clingy and mopey. Shane has very quickly become his favorite toy, and the world is trying to take him away from him.

“What time do we have to leave in the morning?” Ilya asks.

“Your flight’s at 2pm. Say three hours at the airport for an international flight with a foreign visa. Plus three hours for the drive. We should get on the road by 8.”

It’s a depressing ending to a one-week sex vacation. They should be racking up a few final orgasms. They should be doing something so hot and so nasty that they actually need space from each other to be privately embarrassed once they’re done.

Instead, Ilya decides to embarrass himself in a different way: emotional honesty.

“I’m going to miss you,” he says, tracing a finger over the lettering on Shane’s shirt.

Shane scoots a little closer. “Me too,” he admits. “I’ve gotten used to how fucking loud you are. It’s going to sound like a museum in here.”

Ilya’s eyebrows shoot up. “*I’m* loud?”

“Yeah, you clomp around everywhere.”

“I seem to remember one of us having to drink tea with honey after the kitchen table, and it wasn’t me.” Shane reddens and tries to hide his face into the couch cushion, but Ilya catches his cheek in his palm, gently turning him until he can see his eyes again. “Is okay. I like your loud.”

“You better,” Shane says, bumping his forehead against Ilya’s. “You work really hard for it.”

Ilya feels a little bit like a puppy testing boundaries. He performed one vulnerable trick for Shane and got a treat in return. Now it’s time to push, roll over and see if Shane likes his belly.

“What happens now?” Ilya asks quietly.

“Well…”

Shane slides his hand between Ilya’s legs, cupping Ilya’s bulge, which almost jumps up to greet him. *Down boy*. It takes a feat of will Ilya didn’t know he was capable of to stop Shane from tugging down his shorts—especially since he’s still sort of thinking about Shane, bent over the kitchen table and almost shouting with pleasure as Ilya railed into him—but he somehow does it. He’s Popeye the Horny Man, using all his strength to grab Shane’s wrist, pulling his hand off his dick and pressing a kiss to his pulse point.

“Shane. With you and me.”

“Oh,” Shane says, his face softening as he fully hears the question. He glances at Ilya’s shoulder like he does when he’s nervous. “Um. Montreal and Boston play each other a lot. Maybe we have a standing date when we’re in each other’s towns to see each other?”

It’s not a declaration of endless love, but it’s not, “thanks for the dick and get the hell out of my house” either.

“Okay,” Ilya says.

“I don’t want to overthink this, I…” Shane’s eyes drift again to Ilya’s mouth. He reaches up and carefully presses his thumb to Ilya’s lower lip, tugging it slightly, touching his teeth. “I just want to see you again. Even if it’s casual, when we can make it work, I would like that.”

It's an appealing offer. Ilya has spent all week trying not to overthink this. And Shane's thumb in his mouth is making him think of other things he can put in his mouth (tongue, dick, and asshole, order may vary). Getting to do that a few times a year is more than he ever imagined.

But then Shane's eyes move back up to his, and the breath is punched out of Ilya's body.

Shane Hollander is an impossible catch. Someone is going to catch him.

And right now, he is looking at Ilya like he's desperate to be caught.

Actually, he is looking at Ilya like he's trying really hard to not appear desperate to be caught. Despite his dark, shimmering eyes and shaky breath, he's offering Ilya something very easy to say yes to instead of asking for the wild, impossible thing he really wants. He's cool. He's chill.

The realization bonks Ilya on the head like a cartoon mallet.

Shane feels the same way.

"This is a bad plan," Ilya blurts out.

"Oh." Shane's face falls so drastically that any doubts still hanging onto Ilya are shaken off like water droplets. "I mean, we don't have to."

"No, Shane. Listen." He grabs Shane's face, rubbing his thumbs over his freckled cheekbones. "I don't want to pretend I feel casual. I don't. I am not casual or chill or cool about you. I'm world's biggest nerd for Shane Hollander."

A laugh rips out of Shane. He's blushing maybe harder than Ilya's ever seen, and Ilya feels a little bit stunned and a lotta bit stupid for the perfectly straight plane of Shane's nose. He's a siren without singing a fucking note.

"Ilya…"

"And I do overthink. It's all I think about." Ilya tilts Shane's face up. "I like you so much that I kind of can't believe we didn't talk more before all of this."

Shane smiles. "It pisses me off, honestly."

Suddenly Shane pushes against Ilya's shoulders so he's seated back against the couch. He straddles Ilya's lap, pushing Ilya's curls out of his face as he smiles down at him.

"I want to date you," Ilya continues, "and talk to you every day and brag to my friend Svetlana about my hot, funny boyfriend so much that she starts ignoring my texts."

Shane snorts. "She sounds like a hater. I should introduce her to Rose."

"I want to be your boyfriend," Ilya repeats, because like any dog being trained, he's taken the positive feedback and now can't stop begging for more. Any minute now, Shane is gonna swat him in the nose with a newspaper. Ilya's such a freak for him, he would probably like it.

"I want to be your boyfriend too," Shane says. "I have no idea how this will work. Jesus, how the fuck will this work? We play on rival MLH teams."

“Add a tab to your Ilya spreadsheet. Let the numbers speak to you, like meme with all the floating equations.”

“You joke, but I am going to kick the shit out of a Google Doc later,” Shane says.

Ilya grabs Shane’s ass and pulls him forward. Is it possible to get hard from feelings? “I want to be with you.” He lazily rocks himself against Shane, enjoying the flutter of his eyelids. “I want to fuck you all the time, and I also want to kick your ass every time we play hockey until you’re so mad at me.”

“Good fucking luck,” Shane says.

Ilya can only blame horniness for the words that fall out of him next. Shane rolls his hips and all sense of reason and self-preservation fly out of Ilya's brain.

“I want to say words to you that I’ve never said to anyone,” Ilya says. “And I want to hear them back, even though that’s absolutely deranged, because we’ve been seeing each other for three weeks.”

“What the fuck?” Shane laughs. Before Ilya can feel the full horror of rejection—-and even scarier, of Svetlana being right—Shane ducks his face into Ilya’s shoulder. He bites at his trap before dragging his tongue up his neck to his jawline. “How has it only been three weeks? I feel insane.”

Shane pulls back just enough to unleash some kind of witchcraft onto Ilya, with his face, his stupid real perfect teeth. The force of Shane Hollander’s affection is hypnotic. Ilya gets how cults happen.

“I really want to say the words,” Ilya admits.

“So do I,” Shane impossibly admits back. A warm smile takes over his whole face even as he shakes his head in disbelief. “This is the worst fucking rivalry in sports history. One long conversation and we both turn into infatuated morons.”

“My hero, Roger Crowell, would be so disappointed in us.”

Shane snorts and dips his head again. He kisses just next to Ilya’s mouth, his cheek, tugs his earlobe between his teeth.

“Beating my boyfriend to a third cup is gonna feel so good.”

Ilya pushes him flat on his back, swallowing his surprised yelp and crushing their open mouths together. He takes a second to thank god for big couches and big hockey players who fuck like they invented the practice. Shane arches his back, giving room for Ilya to slide an arm under, and digs his heel into Ilya’s ass. They couldn’t be closer. Ilya’s going to try anyway.

“Wait, Ilya.” Shane gasps suddenly, pulling away from Ilya’s mouth. “I think your phone is buzzing.”

“Who the fuck cares?”

“No, I got it. Let me look.” Shane reaches over his shoulder, grabbing both Ilya’s phone and his black frames off the coffee table. He looks at the screen and pretends to see something. He really is a terrible actor, hamming it up in his fuck-me reading glasses. “Wow. Bad news,” Shane says, very seriously. “Your flight got delayed.”

Ilya smirks. “Oh really?”

“They say it’ll be delayed like three more days.”

“Sounds serious,” Ilya says, sucking at Shane’s neck while he resumes grinding their erections together. He hears his phone clatter to the floor.

“Something with the wings,” Shane says dreamily, “or the arms or something.”

“If it’s the arms, it could take a week.”

Ilya pushes Shane’s shorts and underwear down in one go. He grips Shane’s cock, his boyfriend’s cock, his beautiful boyfriend’s beautiful cock, and starts to kiss down his muscular chest. What a body. What a man. Ilya may be losing it a little bit. He’s about five minutes away from getting Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov hockey cards and making them kiss.

Then Shane says, “So do you need me to recommend a hotel?”

Ilya gapes up at Shane, resting his chin on Shane’s hip bone. “Just for that, I’m gonna fuck you so good you’ll be begging me to stay here.”

Shane grins at him, cocky as hell and ready for the face-off.

“Game on, Rozanov.”

Chapter End Notes

The response to this fic has truly been overwhelming. I'm so grateful for all of your comments and love and recommendations. It's been a while since I've written this much prose, and the support has meant the world. Thank you thank you thank you.

I'm on Twitter @rachwasagymnast and Threads (sort of) @americnxgirl.

Long live Kodkod Shane and Loverboy Ilya <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!