

Measuring Up

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Measuring Up

by [ThePromptWasntThisLong \(shredded_potato\)](#)

Summary

Shane trembles harder, overwhelmed by the praise, the possession lacing Ilya's voice. Heat coils tight in his stomach, pressure winding. He clings to Ilya like he might float away. "Ilya," he gasps. "I—"

Ilya cards fingers through Shane's hair, pushing damp locks off his forehead. "That's right. You're perfect. So pretty for me."

Shane's face flames. The insecurity is still there, but it transforms into a desperate need for reassurance. Voice shaking, he stammers, "P-pretty... I'm—prettier?"

Ilya's thrust stutters for a heartbeat, then he groans, burying his face in Shane's neck. "The prettiest," he growls, words vibrating against Shane's skin. "All mine."

It's bad enough that Shane has to do warm-ups in a giant bunny suit. It's worse that Ilya's stunning ex-boyfriend picks that exact moment to visit. It's a catastrophe when said ex starts offering unsolicited advice about what Ilya likes done with his cock.

Shane's about two seconds from losing it.

Notes

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

Shane sat in the cramped equipment room and glared at the headless pastel-blue bunny suit sprawled across his lap like it had personally ruined his life. The bet had seemed worth it after morning skate three days ago when JJ dared him to land ten cross-crease one-timers in a row against Hayden. Hitting that many should've been easy. He'd hit nine, whiffed the tenth, and watched JJ smirk and say, "Mascot time, captain." Now, somewhere between the sagging foam belly and the short fluffy tail sewn to the ass, he was ready to kill his entire guilty conscience, because this was humiliating on a level he usually reserved for playoff losses.

He stripped down to compression shorts and yanked the plush suit up his legs. Static snapped over his calves. The fabric was thick enough that he already felt like he was sweating, and he wasn't even zipped up. He wriggled his arms into the sleeves and cursed when the zipper snagged on his base layer. The whole thing hung baggy from his shoulders like he'd borrowed the costume from someone taller, bulkier, more tragic. He looked like someone stuffed lanky limbs into a pillow.

"Fucking—I swear to God, JJ, you're buying me dinner for a month," Shane muttered to the empty room. The head of the bunny sat on the bench beside him, dead eyes wide, pink nose twitch-frozen. He wasn't supposed to put it on until warmups officially started so everyone could witness his humiliation in stages. Wonderful.

He fussed with the collar, messing with the little satin bowtie sewn there, when a warm weight pressed against his back. Shane squeaked, loud in the silent room, and tensed as strong arms circled his waist from behind. The hold was possessive and lazy, a familiar heat that made every nerve in Shane flare.

A low laugh breathed against his ear. "Privet, malenkij krolik," Ilya whisper-growled in Russian, syllables rolling like smoke. *Hi, little bunny.*

Shane jerked around, face burning. Ilya's smile flashed, wicked and slow, and his eyes devoured the sight of Shane in a fluffy pastel-blue mascot suit. "Fuck off—" Shane began, scowling.

Ilya didn't let him finish. One gloved finger slid up, rubbing the lobe of Shane's ear, a spot that's embarrassingly tender. Shane bit down hard on his lip, trying to choke the whimper, but it slipped out anyway, a breathy, needy sound that only pissed him off more. "*Nngh*—" he gasped, mortified.

Ilya's smirk deepened into something darker, more possessive. "So jumpy, *kotik*. Is suit too tight? Or you just happy to see me?"

Shane flushed an even deeper crimson, mortification warring with the traitorous thrill that pooled low in his gut. He shoved at Ilya's chest, but it was half-hearted. "Get lost, Rozanov. Don't you have your own locker room to vandalize?"

"Is boring there. More fun here. Watching my favorite bunny get dressed." Ilya's gaze swept over the costume, lingering on the way the white plush hugged Shane's thighs. "Montreal so

broke now they make captain be mascot? Should ask for raise. Or maybe trade. Boston has real mascot. Big bear. Less... fluffy.”

“We have a mascot, you asshole,” Shane grumbled, crossing his arms, which only made the bunny paws flop comically. “I lost a bet.”

“Ah. This explains pout.” Ilya leaned in again, his voice dropping. “Is cute pout. Makes me want to—”

The locker room door banged open. “Hey! Hands off the merchandise, Rozanov!”

JJ strutted in, already in his gear, his gaze flicking between them with theatrical disapproval. He pointed a finger at Ilya. “You. Scram. Our captain might have to wear that thing, but at least he’s cute enough to pull it off. You’d just look like a deranged forest animal.”

Ilya didn’t move his hands from Shane’s waist. He just turned his head slowly, his expression shifting from playful to icy in a heartbeat. His eyes narrowed at JJ, and he said in low, rapid-fire Russian, “Ty dumayesh, ya slepoy? Yobanyy debil.”

Do you think I’m blind? Fucking moron.

JJ blinked, his bravado faltering. He looked at Shane. “Did he just curse me out? What’d he say? You know Russian, right?”

Shane rolled his eyes. “I don’t know, JJ. And no, I don’t.”

JJ opened his mouth to retort, but the door to the hallway flew open again. This time it wasn’t a player or staffer walking in. A tall woman strode inside as if she owned the place—platinum-blond hair falling straight down her back, lips painted a fierce red. She wore a fitted winter coat over a black dress, and her boots clicked against the floor with the confidence of someone who had never once been told no.

“Ilyusha!” she called, Russian rolling off her tongue like music.

Behind her strolled a man nearly as tall as Ilya but leaner, with sharp cheekbones and a smug little half-smile. His hair was dark, styled artfully messy, and he carried himself with that languid boredom Shane would have punched on principle if the guy weren’t also stupidly gorgeous.

Shane stiffened, instinctively forgetting all about the bunny suit sticking to his skin. He glanced at Ilya and caught surprise flickering across his face before it melted into something softer, so gentle it made Shane’s throat close up. He had seen Ilya cocky, angry, smug, exhausted, even tender when it was just the two of them, but this—this softness, the kind that came from years and years of love and familiarity—had never been directed at Shane in public.

And fuck, Shane hated how badly he wanted it.

“Ilya,” the woman said again, her voice lilting with laughter. She held her arms out.

Ilya moved toward them without hesitation, arms out, the tension leaving his shoulders. Shane's stomach clenched at the sight. He knew Ilya had friends back home, obviously; the man had a life outside of their weird enemies-with-benefits situation. But this was different. This was Ilya lighting up in a way that wasn't about hockey or sex or winning, but something more intimate. Something Shane had never been allowed to see.

A smile spread across his lips—not a smirk, not a grin, but a true, gentle, unguarded smile that Shane had only seen in fragments, in the dark, after sex.

His heart gave a single, hard thump against his ribs, a dull ache of something he couldn't name.

Ilya met the woman halfway. They exchanged rapid Russian, Ilya's voice warmer, lighter than Shane had ever heard it. He kissed her on both cheeks, then pulled her into a brief, tight hug. Over her shoulder, his eyes met the other man's, and he gave a short, acknowledging nod. The man pushed off the doorframe and sauntered over, accepting a back-slapping hug from Ilya that spoke of deep, casual familiarity.

Shane stood frozen in his bunny suit, feeling abruptly and utterly ridiculous. He watched the three of them, a closed circle of shared history and language. Ilya laughed at something the woman said, a real, unrestrained laugh that made Shane's stomach twist. His focus was glued to Ilya, to the easy way he touched Sasha's arm to emphasize a point, to the fondness in his expression.

Until he felt a stare like a physical touch. He dragged his gaze away from Ilya and found Sasha looking directly at him. Not with curiosity, but with a slow, appraising assessment. His eyes, a startling shade of hazel-green, traveled from Shane's flushed face down the length of the silly costume and back up, his expression unreadable but intensely focused.

Shane shifts his weight, suddenly hyper-aware of how idiotic he looks. He's about to escape to the hallway when JJ grabs his arm.

"What the fuck—" Shane hisses, but JJ leans close, whispering, "Captain, please be a decent human for once and introduce me. I think I just fell in love."

Shane stares at him. "The fuck are you talking about? I don't know them."

JJ's eyes stay glued to the woman, shining like a puppy spotting a steak. "Come on, I'll do your laundry for a week. Two weeks! Look at her. She's an angel. I'd die happy if she just kicked me."

"You're disgusting," Shane mutters, tugging his arm. He reaches up with the giant paw, planning to drag JJ away by the ear, when JJ clears his throat loudly.

Shane mutters a prayer to every deity he never believed in, begging them to save JJ from himself. Then he remembers he's still wearing the idiotic bunny suit and nearly groans. He chooses instead to stare straight ahead and contemplate spontaneous combustion.

“Hi.” JJ’s voice pitches a little higher as he steps forward, lacing fingers behind his back as if rehearsed. “I’m JJ, right wing, Montreal. And you are a vision.”

The woman laughs, the sound soft and lilting. “JJ, is it? You are bold.” Her English holds only a whisper of Russian cadence, words polished.

Ilya eyes JJ with impatience. “Leave her alone. She has standards.”

JJ grins. “Oh please, I just want to know her name.”

The woman waves Ilya off. “Stop it, Ilyusha. I can speak for myself.” She extends a hand to JJ. “Svetlana. And this is Sasha. We’re Ilya’s friends.”

JJ’s face lights up as though she just agreed to marry him. “Svetlana,” he repeats, savoring the syllables. “That’s beautiful.”

“Thank you,” she says, amused. “And your bunny captain here looks jealous.”

“What? No.” Shane flaps his paws uselessly. Ilya snorts.

The quiet man steps forward at last, sliding his hands into the pockets of his coat. His eyes sweep over Shane again, this time more deliberate, curiosity cracking his stoic mask. His voice, when it arrives, is deep and thick with accent, matching Ilya’s.

“And who might this be?” he asks, chin dipping toward Shane.

Before Shane can speak, Ilya answers in Russian. Shane catches only one word—“kapitan.” Captain. The rest is a blur, but whatever Ilya says makes the man, Sasha, break into an unexpected giggle. The boredom vanishes. He sidles closer to Ilya, leaning into him with ease, taking up space that seems already molded for him. He edges into Ilya’s personal radius, forearm brushing Ilya’s ribcage, voice sliding back into Russian as he murmurs something with a teasing lilt. Ilya doesn’t move him away. He tilts his head, listening, indulging the closeness like this is nothing new.

Shane felt his jaw tighten. An ugly, cold sensation slithered up from his gut, coiling tight around his lungs. The bunny suit wasn’t just ridiculous now; it was a grotesque garb highlighting his status as an outsider. He looked down, fiddling with the fuzzy paw, his mind retreating into a buzzing static. He didn’t know why it bothered him so much. He only knew that the longer he watched, the more ridiculous the bunny suit felt. So he looked away, focusing on the floor tiles until his thoughts blurred. He tuned out their laughter, JJ’s continued attempts at flirtation, the solid wall of Russian that excluded him completely.

He only snapped back to reality at the sound of his name, spoken in that familiar, rough-edged tone.

“Shane.”

He blinked, looking up. “What—”

The locker room had emptied around them. JJ was now by the door to the rink with Svetlana, laughing at something she'd said. Sasha stood a few feet away, leaning against the wall of lockers, chewing gum slowly. His eyes, however, were not on his friends. They were fixed on Shane and Ilya, that same assessing look in them.

Shane swallowed, forcing his attention back to Ilya. "What did you say?"

Ilya raised a dark eyebrow. "Why are you so jumpy today? More than usual."

"I'm not—" Shane started, defensive.

But Ilya reached out, his fingers brushing through Shane's sweaty hair. He plucked out a small, invisible piece of lint or fuzz from the costume. "There," he murmured, his voice dropping. "Bunny captain looks prettier now."

The words, so casually delivered, sent a fresh wave of heat through Shane. He stammered, unable to form a coherent sentence, then turned on his heel. "I—we have warm-ups. JJ! Knock it off, we're going!" He stomped toward the rink entrance, the fluffy tail bouncing with each step.

He didn't look back, but he could feel it—Ilya's smirk burning into his back, and the steady, unnerving stare of Sasha following him out of the room. The fluster and nerves churned inside him, a confusing mix of Ilya's teasing, the unexpected visitors, and that unfamiliar, prickling feeling he couldn't yet name.

The Bell Centre roars like a living thing, layers of sound trembling through the concrete, rattling the stands, vibrating in Shane's sternum. Thank every patron saint of hockey that he's no longer imprisoned in synthetic fur. He skates through warm-up with energy leftover from annoyance, exchanging chirps with Rozanov whenever their paths cross. Ilya glides past the red line, mouth curved wickedly.

"Let's see if little bunny can keep up tonight," Ilya calls out.

Shane answers with a tight grin. "Only thing you're catching is my dust. Try not to cry."

The puck drops, the night churns, every shift a collision of bodies, shouts, grunts, sticks slashing air. Ilya keeps snaking close, murmuring nonsense whenever the referee isn't looking. Halfway through the first, they crash into the boards together, sticks locking. Ilya leans in, breath fogging.

"Pretty captain," he taunts, voice low enough that only Shane hears. "So pink, so flustered."

Shane mutters, "Eat shit," yet heat tinges his ears under the helmet. He skates harder, jaw clenched, determined not to give Ilya the satisfaction of a flustered stumble. Each chirp stokes him. JJ keeps tossing exaggerated hearts toward the stands where Svetlana sits, blowing kisses whenever he scores a decent shot on goal. Shane tries not to laugh, especially when Svetlana winks back.

But Boston grinds with relentless efficiency. Through the third period, they wear Montreal down. When the final horn blares, the scoreboard blinks a nasty truth. Boston 4, Montreal 2.

Shane lifts his head, chest heaving, sweat dripping down his neck guard. He watches Ilya celebrate, gloves tossed, teammates piling around him. Ilya's smile claims the whole rink—a wide, triumphant flash that turns every groan in Montreal's section into a grudging grin. Shane scoffs quietly, but a fond smile betrays him. Seeing Ilya radiant does something traitorous inside him, warm and aching. He tells himself to pay attention to the handshakes, going down the line.

“Good game,” he says, patting JJ's shoulder, nodding to rookies shell-shocked from the loss. When he lifts his eyes again, Svetlana has already stepped onto the ice, sliding carefully in rubber-soled boots. She throws her arms around Ilya, almost taking him down. He laughs, catches her waist, spins her once before setting her down. Her voice rings out in Russian, pure delight. Then Sasha hops over the board with a bit more braggadocio, nearly slipping. He launches himself at Ilya's back, legs wrapping around Ilya's waist like they're teenagers again. Ilya staggers, grabs Sasha by the thighs, laughing from deep in his chest. Sasha's face changes, eyes softening as he looks down, a look Shane has seen reflected in hotel mirrors after sex. The recognition twists.

A pat on the arm drags him back. “Hey, Hollander, good game,” Riley says. Shane nods, mumbling it back automatically, edges blurring. He forces his attention away from Ilya, returns focus to teammates, the losing routine. Skate off, nod to the fans, swallow the bitterness.

He's almost at the gate when a voice booms behind him. “Kapitan!”

Ilya skates swiftly, cutting across the blue line. Shane keeps his shoulders stiff, pretending he didn't hear. The boards are two strides away when Ilya's arm shoots out, blocking his path. He braces hands on either side of Shane, pinning him with a grin still gleaming from victory.

“Whoa, ignoring me now?” Ilya teases, breathless, eyes lit.

Shane rolls his eyes, yet the grin tugs at his own mouth. “Get off, Rozanov. I need a shower.”

Ilya chuckles, leaning in, crowding his space. He smells like sweat, expensive cologne, and adrenaline. “Fine, fine. But you're coming tonight, yes?”

Shane's heart stutters as if someone yanked the brake. “W-what? Where—”

“To the party,” Ilya cuts in, grin shifting smug. “Didn't that stupid winger tell you?”

Shane almost groans when a sharp pang of disappointment coils in his gut. Of course. A party. Not the invitation he imagined. He pushes lightly at Ilya's chest. “I'm not going. You know I don't do that stuff.”

Ilya doesn't budge. He just leans closer, palms sliding down the boards, voice easing. “Come on. It'll be fun. Party is fun. Svetlana and Sasha will be there too. They like you.”

Shane doubts that. From across the rink, Sasha's gaze burns, unwavering. Watching. The weight of his stare presses between Shane's shoulder blades. He shifts, uncomfortable. "People can see us. Let go."

"I know," Ilya says, unbothered. "So say yes already."

"Ilya—"

"I'll take you home after." Ilya's grin goes feral. "Free service. I give no charge."

Under the glare of rink lights, Shane can't miss the glint in Ilya's eyes. He exhales, shoulders slumping in surrender. "Okay, fine. I'm coming. Happy? Let me go now, for fuck's sake."

Ilya laughs, a low rumble. "Good." He finally eases back, but as Shane pushes past, Ilya steps in again, hand shooting up. He hooks two fingers around a damp strand of Shane's hair, tucking it carefully behind his ear. The gesture is unexpectedly intimate, almost reverent. Shane's lungs stutter. Ilya's voice drops to a murmur reserved only for hotel rooms and whispered phone calls. "Dress pretty for me."

Shane huffs, "You're impossible," and escapes the boards, heart hammering against the ribs of his chest protector. He tells himself the flush on his cheeks is from the game. Not from the way Ilya's eyes darkened when he made that promise. Not from the knowledge that everyone might have seen.

He grabs the door handle, pulls hard, and refuses to look back until he's sure he can stand upright without trembling.

Shane steps into his apartment and realizes he agreed to something mortifying. He stands in his bedroom, closet doors flung wide, clothes scattered across the bed, chair, floor, the lampshade. Three ties dangle from the ceiling fan like limp casualties. It's the stupidest decision he's made in months, maybe all season.

"Dude," Hayden says from the doorway, arms folded, expression hovering between pity and scolding. "We're going to a bar, not a Met Gala."

Shane freezes mid-change, half inside a sleek black turtleneck that clings too tight at the throat. He hears the words but only feels the thud of his own pulse. "Is this... too much?" he asks, voice strangled.

"Too much? You look like a sexy assassin in a cologne commercial." Hayden sighs. "Which, okay, not the worst, but calm down. Honestly, just call Rose. She'll fix this."

He does. Rose answers on the second ring, laughing even before he explains. "Shane baby, breathe. Send me pictures. I'll tell you exactly what to wear."

Thirty minutes of wardrobe chaos later, Shane has tried on seven outfits, each more revealing than the last. Rose is relentless. No sweaters. No comfort. Only temptation. Eventually she lands on something even he can't deny looks incredible: a sheer black button-up, delicate

fabric whispering against his skin, tucked into high-waisted charcoal trousers tailored within an inch of their life. Underneath, a fitted charcoal tank clings to his torso, visible through the translucent fabric whenever he moves. A slim belt with a matte silver buckle cinches everything together. Rose insisted on the shirt, insisting the subtle transparency would make his freckles peek through like constellations. Shane protested, said it was too much, that people would stare. Rose snorted. “Shane, they won’t be able to help it. That’s the point.”

By the time he finishes fussing with cuffs, he’s an hour late. He texted Hayden to go ahead, promising he’ll catch up. He slicks back his hair with trembling fingers, leaving them glossy and deliberate. He checks his reflection for flaws, then texts Rose.

Shane: are you a hundred percent sure i don’t look ridiculous? people are staring at me already just walking through the lobby

Rose: babe, are you doubting me?

Rose: people are staring because they want to climb you like a jungle gym, not because you look ridiculous

He flushes, pockets his phone, adjusts the shirt again, and tells himself to breathe. The club thrums with pulsing bass that rattles his ribs the second he pushes through the door. Lights strobe in neon waves, laughter blends with synths, bodies swaying in shadows and shards of color. Shane hates bars. He hates how loud, how chaotic, how exposed they make him feel. But Ilya asked. Ilya said dress pretty. So here he is, swallowing panic.

Eyes snap to him immediately. He feels them like hands. The sheer shirt clings, highlighting the lines of his chest, the curve of his throat. He bites down on nerves, scanning the crowd for familiar faces. Near the far side, a banquette glows under golden light. Ilya lounges there with casual command, arm spread along the backrest, posture loose and magnetic. Svetlana sits to his left, laughter tinkling as she flirts with JJ, who looks like he might faint. Sasha leans to Ilya’s right, draped in a tailored emerald suit with a silky charcoal shirt unbuttoned just enough to show an expensive chain. His blond hair catches the lights, shimmering. He tilts his head, begins to say something to Ilya, and the sight of them together hits Shane like a punch.

He hesitates. His steps falter. Before he can commit to walking over, he pivots sharply, colliding with a solid chest. His heel skids, gravity pulling him backward. An arm lashes around his waist with quick reflexes, steadying him.

“Whoa, careful,” a male voice murmurs, lips brushing too close to his ear.

Shane stiffens, smelling heavy cologne and whiskey. The man releases him slowly, hands lingering on his waist a beat too long. “You here alone?” he asks, eyes appraising. He’s tall, hair styled into a glossy swoop, sleeves rolled to show inked forearms. He keeps looking at Shane like he’s something to unwrap.

“No. I’m with... friends,” Shane says, trying to peel away.

The man glances around, unimpressed. “So, can I join you? I’m here alone.” His tone turns coaxing. Shane fumbles, uncomfortable, brain clogging. He doesn’t see Hayden or any teammate nearby. He swallows, inching back. “I—I don’t really—”

“Come on, it’ll be fun.”

Shane recognizes the line from earlier, heat curling in his stomach. He opens his mouth to refuse, but before words form, an arm hooks around his waist. He’s yanked flush against a chest he knows too well, breath stolen. The cologne is citrus and cedar, a scent he could drown in.

“Sorry,” Ilya says smoothly, voice dipped in warning. “He’s taken for the night. No more applicants.”

The man looks Ilya up and down, eyes landing on the hand gripping Shane’s hip possessively. He scoffs. “You could’ve said you have a boyfriend,” he mutters to Shane, already stepping back.

“He’s not—” Shane starts, but Ilya cuts in, voice dripping disdain.

“Yeah, yeah, fuck off already. Fucking idiot. Your belt sucks anyway, that’s not how you style it, you look like a rich clown.”

Shane’s eyes widen. “Ilya! Oh my god.”

He grabs Ilya by the wrist, dragging him toward a dim corner near a curtained hallway. “Are you insane? What if—”

The rest dissolves into a muffled gasp when Ilya crowds him against the wall and kisses him, hot and hard. The kiss is messy, needy, tongues sliding, teeth grazing. Ilya wedges a knee between Shane’s thighs, urging them apart, hand gripping his jaw. Shane melts instantly, fingers curling into the lapels of Ilya’s tailored jacket, nails pressing through the fabric. His heart jackhammers. The music fades to a distant throb.

When Ilya finally breaks away, Shane is panting, eyelashes fluttering. Ilya’s thumb strokes his cheekbone, eyes dark. “You show up looking like this,” he murmurs, voice roughened. “No wonder people can’t breathe. So pretty for me.”

Shane feels dizzy. His chest heaves. He nods like an idiot. Ilya kisses him again, softer, then pulls back enough that their noses brush.

Shane can’t stop the tiny, breathless laugh. His chest flutters like something caged. “I—”

“Hmm?” Ilya hums, eyes lowered, lashes dark against skin.

Shane swallows, nerves fraying. “Are you…” He hesitates, voice shrinking. “Are you coming tonight?” He licks his lips. “I—I cleaned.”

Ilya’s mouth curves. He kisses Shane again, softer, then murmurs against his lips, “I’m coming anyway. You don’t have to ask.”

Shane smiles despite himself, a foolish warmth spilling into his bones. Ilya winks, squeezes his waist, and slides out of the alcove, disappearing back into the noise. Shane watches him go, fingertips brushing his own mouth, pulse racing.

Shane finds Hayden and JJ near the bar, both already holding drinks, both staring unabashedly at the corner booth. Shane grabs a beer and pretends not to notice how many glances he's stealing. The room pulses with color, but his eyes keep tracking back to Ilya, Svetlana, and Sasha. Their laughs intertwine, bodies leaning in. Svetlana rests a hand casually on Ilya's knee. Sasha lounges against him, shoulder pressed to shoulder. The familiarity between them is obvious, baked in, something Shane can't replicate. Whenever Ilya cracks a joke, Sasha smirks immediately, rolling his eyes fondly, like they share secret translations.

"You've been staring long enough," Hayden says, nudging him. "Drop it."

"I'm not," Shane mutters, taking a gulp of beer that does nothing to settle his stomach.

"Come on," Hayden scoffs. "You're not even being subtle. You're giving the guy laser beams."

Shane drags his gaze away, but as soon as Sasha shifts—throwing his head back in a laugh, touching Ilya's forearm—Shane finds himself drawn again.

Shane keeps telling himself to stop looking. He nurses his beer, stares determinedly at the condensation slipping down the glass, then raises his gaze and catches it again: Sasha leaning into Ilya's side, whispering something that draws a low laugh from deep in Ilya's chest. Svetlana swats at Ilya's shoulder for a cheeky comment, and he hooks an arm around her waist, pulling her close while Sasha smirks like he's seen this routine a hundred times. The three of them move in sync, an old constellation Shane's never mapped.

He tries to focus on Hayden's story about a disastrous power play from two seasons ago, but the words blur. His attention keeps snagging on details that shouldn't matter. The way Sasha's fingers curl around the stem of his glass, knuckles brushing Ilya's thigh casually with every shift. The way Ilya never flinches, never fidgets, simply accepts the contact as natural. The way Svetlana rests her chin on Ilya's shoulder when she speaks quietly, lips close enough to brush his ear. Each small familiarity digs nails into Shane's calm.

"You're staring again," Hayden mutters, elbowing him. "Seriously. Drop it."

Shane flinches, forcing his eyes back to the table. "I'm not," he insists, even though he knows it's useless. His chest feels tight. He takes another gulp of beer, almost draining it, hoping the burn numbs him.

Hayden sighs. "You think I haven't noticed? Your eyes have been glued to Rozanov and his entourage since we got here. JJ's equally hopeless, but at least he's flirting. You're just torturing yourself."

"Whatever," Shane mutters, grabbing another napkin just to shred it.

He peeks again. Sasha is laughing now, head tipped back, exposing the long line of his throat. The emerald suit catches the lights, gleaming. He lifts his glass, and Ilya clinks his in return, their knuckles brushing. Sasha leans over, murmuring in Russian, lips close to Ilya's ear. Ilya nods slowly, eyes half-lidded, a fond expression settling there—soft, indulgent, something he rarely shows in public. Shane's stomach dips.

He tries to remind himself of Ilya's earlier words, the way he pressed him against the wall and promised to come over later. But the scene unfolding makes him feel like an outsider peeking through frosted glass. There's history between those three, a gravity built over years he didn't exist, and it wraps around them like an invisible lasso.

Sasha shifts suddenly, sliding out of the booth. He straightens his jacket, drains the last of his drink, and glances across the bar. His gaze lands on Shane instantly, like he knew exactly where to look. The corner of his mouth lifts, amused. Shane jerks his eyes away, heart lurching.

"Someone's coming," Hayden warns under his breath. "Brace yourself."

Sasha approaches with the ease of someone who knows every head will turn. He stops at the bar beside Shane, nodding politely to Hayden, then signals the bartender with two fingers. "Hi, Captain," he says, accent thick, voice smooth.

Shane clears his throat, trying to play it cool. "Hey."

"Vodka tonic," Sasha orders, then swivels to lean an elbow on the bar, studying Shane openly. "Enjoying the party?"

"Sure."

Sasha chuckles. "You stare a lot for someone who is enjoying himself."

Heat crawls up Shane's neck. "It's loud. Hard to focus." He takes another sip from an empty glass just so he has something to do.

"You're very pretty tonight," Sasha says casually, as if remarking on the weather. "Ilya didn't warn us."

Shane's heart stumbles. "He didn't... what?"

Sasha accepts his drink, takes a slow sip, eyes flicking toward the booth where Ilya sits watching them. "He just said you would come. No mention you'd look like... this." His gaze drops over Shane's outfit, appreciation glinting openly. "No wonder his eyes keep wandering."

Shane tenses. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means he keeps checking on you. Protective as always." Sasha smiles languidly. "He's like that with people he cares about."

The words clang around in Shane's skull. He doesn't respond. Sasha leans closer, shoulder brushing Shane's upper arm, voice lowering.

"I've known him a long time," Sasha continues, conversational as he swirls the ice in his glass. "We grew up together. He took care of me for years when my family needed help, you know." He glances sideways. "He has a soft heart under all that swagger."

Shane swallows. "Yeah. I know," he says quietly.

Sasha hums. "You must, if you've kept up with him this long. It is not easy being around Ilya." He chuckles softly. "He's relentless."

Shane nods, unsure where this is heading. He feels dread coiling in his gut. Sasha sets his glass down gently, fingers tapping the rim.

"But tell me," Sasha said, voice turning almost conspiratorial. He leaned in closer still, the mirth in his eyes sharpening into something more intimate, more knowing. His gaze dropped to Shane's mouth for a fraction of a second before lifting again, as if picturing the scene he was about to paint. "Does he still like it when his partner chokes on his cock?" He giggles softly when Shane nearly inhales his beer. "It drives him crazy. You should see him when they can barely breathe, tears in their eyes. He gets so rough." Sasha's smile widens, eyes sparkling with mischief. "He's got that knack for finding exactly how far to push. You must have fun."

Shane's brain short circuits. He feels blood rush to his face, pulses pounding everywhere. "We don't... I mean..."

Sasha shrugs, a slow roll of shoulders. "He tends to like it rough. You know, when his partner scratches down his back, bites his shoulder, takes him deep until they're gasping." He swirls his drink again, eyes distant with nostalgia. "He loves it when someone rides his thigh hard enough to bruise. Or when they let him hold their throat. He's bad at being gentle unless you beg." Sasha smirks. "You should try it. He goes wild."

Shane wants to sink through the floor. His heart slams, mouth dry, thoughts racing through every hotel room moment he's shared with Ilya. The tender nights, the slow kisses, the controlled pace. He realizes with a cold jolt that he's never done any of the things Sasha just described. He didn't even know Ilya liked some of them. He's always been careful, quiet, worried about crossing lines. And now he's being told there's an entire side of Ilya he hasn't touched.

Sasha lifts his glass in a tiny toast. "Anyway, I'll let you get back to your friends. Pleasure meeting you, Captain." He slinks away, leaving the words hanging like smoke.

Shane stands rooted, gripping his empty glass until his fingers ache. Hayden murmurs something about getting another round, but it doesn't register. Shane's mind loops Sasha's voice over and over. He tries to shake it, but the insecurity digs in. Maybe he's boring. Maybe he's holding Ilya back. Maybe Ilya only tolerates their softer rhythm out of courtesy.

When he finally finds a breath, Ilya is crossing the room, eyes fixed on him. Shane straightens automatically. Ilya reaches him, tilting his head. "You okay?" he asks, voice low, concern threading through.

"Yeah. Fine," Shane lies, forcing a smile. "Just needed air."

Ilya studies him a moment longer, then nods. "Ready to go soon? I want you."

The words should soothe. Instead, they twist. Shane nods anyway. "Yeah. Let me tell Hayden." He forces himself to step away, heart pounding, mind already racing ahead, planning. If Ilya likes it rough, he can do rough. He just... needs to figure out how.

The rest of the night blurs. Ilya keeps a hand on the small of Shane's back as they leave the bar, protective, possessive. Shane leans into the touch, trying to quiet the panic spiraling inside him. He tells himself he can prove he's enough. He'll show Ilya he can be whatever he needs. Even if it terrifies him.

Ilya ushers him outside into cool night air. The street is nearly empty, the city humming low. Ilya's hand finds the small of Shane's back, guiding him to a waiting SUV. The driver nods, opens the door. Inside, leather seats cradle Shane's exhausted body. Silence swells between them, different from their usual comfortable quiet. Ilya reaches over, resting a hand on Shane's thigh. "You were quiet tonight," he observes.

"Just tired," Shane lies.

Ilya hums, unconvinced, yet he doesn't push. They ride in silence to Shane's apartment. In the elevator, Ilya pins him gently against the mirrored wall, kissing him in slow, unhurried drags. Shane kisses back, but his mind flickers with Sasha's voice, those sharp words echoing.

In the apartment, they barely make it past the threshold before shoes are kicked off, jackets shrugged away. Ilya backs Shane into the bedroom, hands already tugging at buttons. "Been thinking about you in that shirt all night," he murmurs, lips along Shane's jaw. "Need to taste you."

Shane swallows. He wants to sink into the familiar rhythm, but an urgency builds, a need to prove something, to match the intensity Sasha described. Maybe Ilya is waiting for him to step up. Maybe he's tired of Shane playing it safe. The insecurity gnaws.

When Ilya drops to his knees with a smirk, hands sliding over Shane's hips, Shane stops him, fingers trembling. "Let me," he says, voice strained.

Ilya's brows lift in surprise. "You sure?"

Shane nods. "Yeah. I want to."

Ilya leans back on his heels, expression softening. "Come on then, lapushka. Show me."

Shane sinks down, pushing Ilya gently onto the bed. He works Ilya's belt open, hands shaking, the metal buckle clinking. Ilya props himself on his elbows, watching with heavy-

lidded eyes. "Take your time," he murmurs. "We have all night."

But patience isn't what Shane wants. He wants to prove he can give more, match the intensity that someone else might have given freely. He palms Ilya's cock through his briefs, feeling it harden fast. When he pulls the fabric down, Ilya's breath hitches. Shane swallows hard, leans in, presses wet kisses along the length, then wraps his lips around the head. Ilya groans, fingers threading into Shane's hair.

Shane takes him deeper than usual, ignoring the panic that flutters when the tip brushes the back of his throat. He forces himself to keep going, humiliation burning when he gags softly. Ilya's hand clenches at his scalp, instantly easing pressure. "Easy," he says, voice tight. "Don't hurt yourself."

Shane shakes his head, tries again, jaw aching as he pushes down, determined. He wants to feel Ilya lose control, wants to elicit the kind of reaction Sasha described. But his throat rebels, gag reflex sparking tears. He chokes, pulls off abruptly, coughing, eyes watering.

"Shane," Ilya says, sitting up. He reaches to cup Shane's face, thumb swiping at the wetness under his eyes. "What are you doing?"

"Sorry," Shane mutters, embarrassed, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "I'm fine. Just... I can do it."

Ilya frowns softly. "I never asked you to—"

"You don't have to ask," Shane snaps without meaning to. He drags Ilya's hand away, leans in again, but Ilya catches his wrist.

"Stop." The word is firm. "You're shaking."

Shane freezes. His entire body trembles, adrenaline spiking in ugly waves. He sits back on his heels, shoulders caving. Ilya watches him quietly, eyes searching. "What happened?" he asks, voice calmer.

"Nothing," Shane mutters, turning away. "Can we just—"

Ilya moves behind him, arms wrapping around his torso, chin resting on Shane's shoulder. Lips brush his ear. "It's okay, baby. You can tell me."

Shane's throat tightens. The endearment hits like a balm and a blade. He exhales shakily, fingers twisting in the sheets. "S-Sasha—," he whispers, the words tumbling out before he can stop them. "He said you like it when... when people choke on your cock, when they fight you, when they... set the pace. We don't do that. I thought maybe you..." He swallows, shame burning. "I thought maybe you were bored."

Silence stretches. Ilya's grip tightens just slightly, then softens. He presses a kiss behind Shane's ear. "Sasha talks too much," he murmurs, voice holding a thread of irritation. "I never said I wanted that with you."

Shane twists, facing him. "But you've done it before."

“With people who get off on pushing lines,” Ilya says. “Not with people I love.”

Shane stares. The word hangs between them. Love. Ilya doesn't flinch. He cups Shane's cheek with one big hand, thumb tracing the curve of his jaw. “You don't have to do anything you hate to keep me. I'm not going anywhere.”

Emotion cracks down Shane's spine. His shoulders slump in relief and frustration. “I just... I don't want you to think I can't keep up.”

Ilya's gaze darkens, not with lust but something fiercer. “You keep up better than anyone,” he says, voice low. “You make me crazy just by breathing.” He kisses Shane slow, lingering. “You want me to show you what I like? I'll show you.”

Shane nods shakily, letting Ilya guide him. Ilya eases him onto the bed, climbing over him, pressing kisses down his throat. The urgency shifts; Ilya takes control without roughness, mouth trailing heat across Shane's collarbones. He unbuttons the sheer shirt with careful fingers, peeling it open to reveal the fitted tank beneath. He slides his palms up Shane's sides, reveling in the feel of warm skin under thin fabric.

“You're so pretty,” Ilya murmurs, voice husky. His knee slides between Shane's thighs, pressing snug. Shane gasps, hips twitching. Ilya grinds gently, coaxing breathy sounds from him. He drags his mouth down to Shane's chest, teeth grazing through the tank, catching a nipple, nibbling until Shane arches. “There it is,” Ilya croons. “That's what I want.”

Shane shivers. Embarrassment morphs into need. He threads fingers into Ilya's hair, tugging lightly. “Please,” he whispers.

“Patience,” Ilya chides, but his eyes glow. He tugs the tank upward, exposing skin. He kisses every inch he reveals, lingering at freckles, worshiping with tongue and teeth. Shane trembles, breath hitching with each deliberate pass. Ilya slips a hand inside the waistband of Shane's trousers, knuckles brushing his hardness through the black boxer-briefs. Shane inhales sharply, hips canting up.

“You wanted to please me?” Ilya asks softly, stroking him through the fabric. “You do. Just like this. Let me hear you.”

Shane whines, hands fisting in the sheets. Ilya finally shoves trousers and briefs down, freeing his cock. He doesn't rush. Instead, he straddles Shane's thigh, grinding slowly while his hand strokes Shane in slick, steady pulls. Shane's head falls back, lips parting on a broken moan. Ilya licks along his throat, sucking a mark beneath his jaw. “That's it,” he murmurs. “Everything about you ruins me.”

Shane gasps, thighs trembling. He watches Ilya through half-lidded eyes, marveling at how focused he looks, how intent on wringing pleasure out of Shane's body. Ilya slicks his fingers with spit, slides one down between Shane's cheeks, circling his rim. Shane writhes, whining. “Ilya—”

“Relax,” Ilya soothes. “Breathe.” He presses a finger inside slowly, followed by a second, scissoring gently, stretching with practiced care. Shane grips Ilya's shoulders, toes curling.

He whimpers, overwhelmed by sensation and the tender way Ilya mutters praise against his skin.

When Ilya finally slides inside him, he does it with excruciating slowness, letting Shane feel every inch. Shane gasps, fingers digging into Ilya's biceps. Ilya's eyes flutter shut briefly, then snap open, pinning Shane with molten focus. He starts to move—a deep, deliberate rhythm, hips rolling, breath catching. Shane arches, mouth spilling moans. Pleasure builds fast, hot. Every thrust hits the spot, dragging soft cries from his throat. Ilya kisses them away, whispering in Russian, each word a caress.

Shane trembles harder, overwhelmed by the praise, the possession lacing Ilya's voice. Heat coils tight in his stomach, pressure winding. He clings to Ilya like he might float away. "Ilya," he gasps. "I—"

Ilya cards fingers through Shane's hair, pushing damp locks off his forehead. "That's right. You're perfect. So pretty for me."

Shane's face flames. The insecurity is still there, but it transforms into a desperate need for reassurance. Voice shaking, he stammers, "P-pretty... I'm—prettier?"

Ilya's thrust stutters for a heartbeat, then he groans, burying his face in Shane's neck. "The prettiest," he growls, words vibrating against Shane's skin. "All mine."

Shane sobs out a moan, eyes squeezing shut. The affirmation shatters something open inside him. He claws at Ilya's back, hips pushing up to meet every thrust. Ilya keeps praising him—sweet, filthy, reverent words that turn Shane's bones to glass. He whispers Russian endearments, calls him beautiful, perfect, the only one who makes him feel alive. The combination of praise and intense, steady strokes overwhelms Shane until he's trembling uncontrollably, orgasm crashing through him. He arches, cries out Ilya's name, spilling between their bodies.

Ilya follows, groaning, hips faltering. He thrusts deep, burying himself as he comes, chanting Shane's name like a prayer. When the tremors subside, he collapses gently on top, bracing his weight on his forearms. He peppers kisses along Shane's jaw, tasting sweat.

"My pretty captain," he murmurs quietly, breath hot against Shane's ear. "No one compares."

Shane clings to him, tears pricking his eyes for a different reason now. He nods, not trusting his voice. Ilya rolls them onto their sides, still inside, hugging Shane against his chest. They lie there listening to each other breathe, the room dim, the world outside irrelevant.

Minutes later, Ilya strokes Shane's hair and says, "Next time Sasha tries to talk to you, just come find me. I'll shut him up, *da*?"

Shane chuckles weakly. "You already do."

"Good." Ilya squeezes him, forehead pressed to Shane's temple. "Sleep, *lapushka*. Pretty boys need their rest."

Shane chuckles shyly at that but nuzzles against Ilya's neck, breathing in the scent of sweat and cedar and sex. He drifts slowly, the tension of the night dissolving under the weight of exhaustion and warmth. His breathing evens out, body going slack against Ilya's side.

Ilya waits until he's certain Shane is asleep—until the fingers curled loosely against his chest stop twitching and the soft sighs become rhythmic. Then, with careful precision, he extracts himself from the tangle of limbs, sliding out from under the sheets. He pads naked across the dark room, picking up his discarded trousers from the floor and fishing his phone from the pocket.

He steps into the living room, the city lights painting faint stripes across the hardwood through the blinds. He finds Sasha's contact—a number saved under a simple Cyrillic initial—and taps it. The line rings twice before connecting.

“*Ilyusha*,” Sasha's voice comes through, amused, slightly slurred. Music thumps faintly in the background. “Miss me already?”

Ilya doesn't smile. His voice is low, flat, a blade wrapped in velvet. “Trogay ego yeshche raz, i my perestanem byt' druz'yami. Ne perekhodi chertu.”

Bother him again and we stop being friends. Don't cross the line.

Silence stretches on the other end. Sasha's breath hitches, the amusement evaporating. “Ilya, I was only—”

Ilya ends the call. He doesn't wait for excuses, or apologies. He tosses the phone onto the sofa, where it lands soundlessly on a cushion. He stands there for a moment, staring out at the sleeping city, jaw tight. Then he turns and walks back to the bedroom.

Shane has shifted in his sleep, curling onto his side, one hand tucked under his cheek. The sheets pool around his waist, exposing the elegant line of his spine, the scatter of freckles across his shoulders. Ilya slides back into bed, the mattress dipping gently. As soon as the warmth returns, Shane instinctively shifts closer, nuzzling his face into the hollow of Ilya's neck with a soft, contented sigh. His breath ghosts over Ilya's skin.

Ilya stares up at the ceiling, one arm curling around Shane's back, holding him close. A disbelieving chuckle escapes him, quiet and rough in the dark.

“Ty i ponyatiya ne imeyesh', na skol'ko ty svodish' menya s uma,” he murmurs to the sleeping man in his arms. *You have no idea how much you drive me insane.*

He presses a kiss to Shane's temple, closes his eyes, and lets the steady rhythm of Shane's heartbeat against his own lull him into a peace he never thought he'd earn.

End Notes

So... I've been dealing with some pretty bad anxiety lately. That's why this fic has been sitting untouched for about a week now...

If you've got anxiety, you know how bad it can get—you write something, read it back, and feel absolutely nothing 🤖

It sucks, and it completely kills the joy of writing...

I updated another fic yesterday thinking I was past it... but woke up this morning feeling the same flat feeling 😞

Honestly, I don't even know how I managed to finish this fic today (if I messed it up, im so sorry...). And I'm not totally sure if what I'm typing now even makes sense 😂

So yeah... that's why I haven't been updating much lately...

No worries though! This isn't new for me. I've dealt with it many times before, and it comes and goes. Just wanted to give a little heads-up for anyone waiting on updates for unfinished works hehe 😊

Love you all! Please always choose to be kind ❤️

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!