he’ll be the best you ever had (if you let him)

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by vissers

Summary

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"Give it back," Ilya instructs, his voice steady and low. "Tell me I am nothing to you, and I let you go."

It's self-sabotage. Textbook fucking definition. Maybe it's what he needs to give up on this. He just needs to hear Shane say it, that's all.

——

Shane freaks out. Ilya doesn't want him to leave without figuring out exactly how Shane feels about him.

(aka a post tuna melt scene rewrite where communication isn’t a foreign concept to them)

Notes

title is from waiting room by phoebe bridgers but with switched pronouns (*rodrick heffley voice* sorry women)

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya doesn't know how to do this. But he's trying, okay? He really, honestly is.

Now, if only Shane could see that. If only he could acknowledge the cards Ilya is so obviously putting down in front of him, neatly laid out waiting for him to take them or leave them.

Waiting for Shane to take *him* or leave him.

The thing is, Ilya is a lot more strategic than people give him credit for. The league, the fans, his own damn team — they see him as a hurricane on skates, all brashness and wisecracks and unpredictability. He doesn't read the ice, he *takes control* of it and bends any given situation to be his and his alone. He's a bulldozer, flatting everything in his path so that he can reset the foundations himself.

And while, sure, there's some truth in that, his real strength comes with his ability to pretend as though he's not thinking five steps ahead of everyone else.

It comes in his casualness, his nonchalance, his reckless confidence that makes his opponent underestimate how smart he actually is. Other people's ignorance to the fact that he's *Ilya fucking Rozanov*. Because if they don't think he's strategising — that he isn't figuring out exactly what buttons to press at any given time, instead just running on adrenaline and pure impulse — then it'll be a lot easier to pull the rug out from under them when his plan falls into place.

He doesn't want to say that's what he's doing with Shane, but it kind of is.

Because Ilya has thought this through a hundred times before. He's agonised over every detail in a way that surprised even him; inviting Shane to stay without making it into a *thing*, buying his objectively boring ginger ale because that's what his cute boring self likes to drink, taking care of him in a way that's so subtle that it won't come as a gigantic, roaring warning siren to his overthinking mind.

Shane is just—

He's so high strung. Ridiculously so. To the point where Ilya is honestly kind of concerned for his blood pressure.

Ilya just... doesn't know how to toe this line with him without completely freaking the guy out. Without sending him running in the opposite direction. Because what is Shane to him if not a flight risk waiting to happen?

This thing between them, it could mean something. It could *be* something. Something complicated, even more so than whatever it is now, but maybe something worth the complications anyway. Ilya can see that much.

And if he could just make Shane see that potential — that *Ilya* sees the potential there — then maybe it doesn't have to be reason for concern. This thing between them can just develop without it having to be the end of the world, of normality as they know it.

So, he grills him a tuna melt.

A simple, uncomplicated gesture that he hopes doesn't torpedo the whole thing. *We can do this*, it says. *We can give each other things beyond frantic, mind-blowing sex. That isn't all this has to be.*

When that isn't enough to drive Shane away, Ilya starts a dialogue. He presses him about girls, about relationships, about where his preferences lie. And when Shane squirms and utters out half-baked fibs, Ilya tells him where his own do.

I like girls. But I also like you.

And when he dilutes that statement with a joke — softening the blow, trying not to back him into a corner — it still isn't quite enough to take away the sentiment. *I like you, Shane. Haven't I done enough to make that perfectly obvious?*

They settle into each other again, magnets inevitably crashing back against each other, and Ilya is stupid enough to think that maybe he has gotten through to Shane somehow. That he has picked up what he has put down, craving this sort of intimacy as desperately as Ilya does.

Not because they're each other's only option on days like this, but because they're each other's choice whenever they can manage it.

And, look, he doesn't mean to move so fast. In fact, what he does next is a complete fucking misstep on his part. It's not like he *means* to moan Shane's name — *Shane* instead of his usual sarcasm-laced *Hollander* — as he reaches climax, he just feels so close to him that—

It was too perfect, he shouldn't have trusted it. He shouldn't have deluded himself into thinking that maybe Shane could see him as anything more than a hookup. Anything more than that bastard Rozanov who he fucks sometimes, sure, but who makes his life harder the other ninety percent of the time.

And while the whispered moan of *Ilya* fills his ear for one glorious, unspoiled second, the way Shane scrambles off his lap shatters the illusion before he can even fully process that it happened.

Had Ilya imagined the whole thing? Had he just heard what he so desperately wanted to hear without it even leaving Shane's mouth?

Ilya.

No, he— He definitely heard it. Shane had *said* it. *Ilya.* It echoes in his mind, reverberating again and again and again. *Ilya, Ilya, Ilya.*

Shane had called him *Ilya*.

Ilya is never again going to hear his own fucking name, never going to hear *Ilya*, without the faint echo of Shane's voice accompanying it. How's that for being completely fucking ruined?

But he's still leaving. He's grabbing his shirt — no, sorry, he's grabbing *Ilya's* shirt — and making all sorts of bullshit excuses why he should go, and Ilya is *reeling*.

This isn't what he wanted at all. He wanted to draw Shane closer to him, not scare him away entirely. Because that's what it feels like — finality, the last nail in the coffin, the inevitable fall from grace after *eight years* of teetering on the edge of oblivion.

"Thank you for the tuna melt," Shane mumbles at him in that infuriatingly polite Canadian manner of his. Crushing Ilya's heart and *thanking* him in the same breath. *God, it's maddening.*

His eyes are blank and so dissociated that he might as well be on another planet, aimlessly scrunching up the shirt as though he's trying to pull it over his body but can't remember how to.

"Um.. Uh..." he continues like a buffering stream, meeting Ilya's gaze without really looking at him. "I'm sorry. This... I can't."

Ilya shakes his head ever so slightly, extending his hand out in Shane's general direction. "Hollander," he says, trying to hit the reset button.

Take it, he wants to say but can't quite find the strength to. *Take my hand, sit the fuck down, and we can pretend nothing happened. We can go back.*

"I just... I can't, uh..." Shane breathes back, still panicking, still unravelling before his very eyes, still ignoring Ilya's silent pleas. "I can't do this."

Or won't. You won't*, Shane.*

"*Hollander*," he tries again, more desperate this time, willing to repeat it until he's blue in the face if that means undoing that one *Shane*.

I take it back. God, I take it back. Why won't you just fucking let me take it back?

But it's too late.

Shane has already made up his mind, scurrying out of the room with one final apology. "I'm sorry," he says, and *god*, Ilya feels the regret in his voice.

The regret of everything — of humouring Ilya and his pointless advances, of letting this go on for so long, of the past eight years of almost having something that they could never fully let themselves grasp.

Ilya's muscles seize, rendering him completely immobilised on the couch as he recoils from whatever the hell just happened. It had been so fast, such a blur that his body hadn't been able to process it.

But he can still hear Shane down the hall, the slap of soles hitting his hardwood floors as he struggles to pull on those fucking Reeboks of his, and Ilya knows this is his last chance.

Shane is *still here.*

If he wanted to, he could still catch him. If he wanted to run the risk of making an even bigger ass of himself, of decimating this even further, he could still—

He can't wait around another few months.

He can't let Shane slip away from him now when they aren't guaranteed to be alone together for god knows how long.

He can't let another fucking second pass him by without at least trying to salvage this.

Ilya is moving before he even knows that he's doing it, before he has the chance to talk himself out of it.

Shane is lacing up his shoes by the front door when he reaches him, hands shaking and legs wobbling as he crouches over himself. While Ilya's shirt is now slumped over his body, he hasn't grabbed his jacket, so distraught he probably doesn't even remember it exists.

Look at what you do to people, Ilya.

He takes a deep breath before he speaks. "You are wearing my shirt."

Doesn't that mean something to you?

Shane's head whips around, a jittery movement as though the sound of Ilya's voice is enough to make him jump out of his skin. His cheeks are flushed around those damn freckles that drive Ilya crazy, water collecting in his lower lash line.

A fractured man who Ilya could very well reduce to a shattered one.

"Who cares whose fucking shirt it is, Rozanov?" he bites back, undeniable power there despite the still-present quiver in his voice. "You're on a NHL salary. Buy another one. Jesus."

Rozanov.

The back of Ilya's throat stings, swallowing down the lump there proving difficult. "You say you don’t want this. You say you can't. And still the shirt."

Shane is quick to protest, not giving himself a second to even consider any alternative. "Look, I don't know what you're trying to prove here but—"

"Give it back," Ilya instructs, his voice steady and low. "Tell me I am nothing to you, and I let you go."

It's self-sabotage. Textbook fucking definition. Maybe it's what he needs to give up on this. He just needs to *hear* Shane say it, that's all.

"You *let* me go?" Shane repeats, a harsh scoff accompanying it. "Sorry, I didn't realise you were holding me here against my will."

"Shane," Ilya tries, emphasising the syllable, trying to break through his carefully constructed walls. "Tell me I am nothing to you. That this," he gestures vaguely in the bleak, empty space between them, "means nothing to you."

You mean nothing to me, that's all he needs to hear to make peace with this. Why won't he just fucking say it?

"Don't." Shane's voice breaks, a dull little squeak at the edges of it. Ilya can *hear* the strain there. "I swear to god, Rozanov, just *don't*."

But he doesn't give in, too stubborn and finding the right buttons to push in typical Rozanov fashion, repeating himself. "Shane."

"I *told* you not to—"

Shane grits his teeth, his breath hitching in his chest. Almost there. He's so close to—

One more time, more grounded this time. "*Shane*."

"What you *mean* to me doesn't mean shit! It doesn't change anything! Don't you see that?"

But it could. It could if you'd just let me—

"What are you so afraid of, Shane?" Ilya demands in a sudden burst, hot blood coursing through his veins as the heat rises in his cheeks. He just— He can't take this any longer. He'd rather watch this burn before his very eyes than be stuck in limbo a second longer. "We have good thing here, no? I like you. I *care*. Did you even hear me? Did I not show you this?"

Shane shakes his head, chewing at his lip in a way that suggests that he's either going to break down or tear Ilya a new one — honestly, Ilya will take either as long as he says *something*. "*What am I so afraid of?* How about fucking everything, huh? Is that a good place to start? My whole life is a goddamn fever dream!"

"Is scary," Ilya acknowledges, taken aback by the intensity in his eyes. "But here, just us, it does not have to be. Not as much."

"I just don't get what you want from me. This isn't real, *Ilya*." He spits out the name like it leaves a bad taste in his mouth, a vein bulging out of his forehead. "It can't be, alright? Everything that went down today; staying over, holding each other the way we did, making each other fucking tuna melts. Don't you know that's a fantasy? We don't get that, Rozanov! That's not for us! And there's no use in deluding ourselves otherwise!"

Something squeezes in Ilya's chest. "Who says it is not for us? And why do we listen?"

This is ours. Don't let them take this away from us before we even know what it is.

"Because—" Shane pauses, pupils darting back and forth frantically. It takes him a second of heaved breaths and scrunched up, thoughtful nose wrinkles to come up with a good enough reason. Or maybe he just has to work up the courage to vocalise it. "Because I'm scared of what it would mean. For me. For the rest of my life. It's easier to just... listen, you know?"

A glimpse of vulnerability shines through the cracks in Shane's front as he blinks away a stray tear. Ilya has seen him in some exposed, compromising positions, but he has never once seen him like this — so prone to breaking, so *raw*.

"What *about* you?" Ilya's voice softens, studying him with careful eyes, but he knows well enough what he means.

You know I won't judge you for that. How many times have I been right there beside you, pressed against you, even inside you?

"You asked me about girls, *Hayden* asked me about girls, my fucking *parents* asked me—" He trails off, chewing at his lips as his eyes grow unfocused. It takes him a moment before he can speak again. "And I'm not sure I even... And that's terrifying because if I let myself have this — god, even entertaining the idea — it's like kissing the chances of that normal, uncomplicated life goodbye."

"You kissing me kisses girls goodbye?" Ilya questions, brows furrowed, just wanting to understand. The English language continues to baffle him. "You like them less when you kiss me?"

"No, kissing you — *being with you* — makes me think that I... didn't even like them in the first place."

And there it is, the root cause of the issue here.

It's not that Ilya is his rival, someone who the entire fucking world thinks he can't stand, it's that Ilya is a *man*. A man who makes Shane question everything he once thought to be true about himself.

A man who he would have to *come out for* if they ever wanted any sort of life together, ultimately complicating everything they know, everything they had won and gained and damn right earned, everything they had *fought* each other for.

"You don't want that?" Ilya asks, but he's terrified of the answer. Because why would he?

I'd do it for you. Maybe not now, but I could get there. I can feel *myself getting there, Shane. I could grow to do a lot of idiotic, self destructive things for you if you let me.*

Russia would never want me back, my family would never look at me again, a somehow even larger margin of hockey fans would hate my guts, but I would get you out of it. Don't you think that could be enough?

Shane gulps, eyes bleary. "What kind of hockey player would want to be gay, Ilya? Riddle me that."

Riddle him what? What does that even mean?

"You would be gay anyway," he replies, because it's not like he can wish himself out of this. It's not like *either* of them can. "I would still be bisexual. And I would still like you. The question is if you want to be a happy gay or lonely gay."

His words seem to strike a nerve with Shane, his gaze faltering as he mulls that over. Does Shane even think he deserves that happiness — real, pure, unfiltered validation? Hadn't he already gotten into a habit of making himself miserable? Hadn't Ilya?

"You think you could make me happy, Rozanov?" Shane tests with wide eyes, arching a brow pointedly, but there's a genuineness there still.

The question isn't rhetorical, no matter how much he wants to make it seem like it is. It's as close to an ultimatum as he can brave right now.

Ilya takes a step towards him, breath caught in his throat as he reaches out. "I already do, Hollander. Open your eyes and you will see."

There it is, that confidence of his. It's enough to fool everyone else. Can Shane see through it? For the first time ever, Ilya hopes that somebody can.

His fingers latch onto Shane's own, hanging from them so loosely that he has every choice to pull away if he wants to cut Ilya loose. But he doesn't shift, curling his around Ilya's until he can feel the press of his nails in his skin.

"What if I don't want to?" Shane's voice croaks, heavy with apprehension, yet he still doesn't pull away. "Open my eyes, I mean. Maybe it's... easier to keep them closed."

Shane wants this, Ilya knows that for certain now. Like, actually, consciously wants this. Before it had been a probability — something that had blossomed out of blind hope — but now he knows it to be true.

He's just too scared to ask for it.

He just doesn't know how to convince himself that he deserves it.

And, well, Ilya is happy to take on that role — to coax it out of him again and again, to reassure him that Ilya *knows* that he is someone worth fighting for. Maybe then he would see worth in fighting for himself, too.

"You will," Ilya assures him, pulling their bundled together hands into his own chest and pressing them close to his heart. *It's yours if you want it.* "But you have to trust. Will you trust me?"

Again, it takes Shane a moment to speak. Not quite as long as before, though. If that isn't progress, Ilya doesn't know what is. His mouth flails ever so slightly, trying to find the words.

"I can't promise I'm not gonna, like, freak out again," Shane breathes out, half as light as before. His hands still tremble in Ilya's grasp, so he squeezes them tighter. "There's a lot on the line here, for both of us. It's gonna be an adjustment, seeing this for what it is. Because, you're right, I do like you. More than I'd like to admit. I've just been scared of what it would mean for so long."

And now Ilya is the one who thinks he might cry, heaving out the fraught exhale he'd been holding for longer than he can say, inhaling sweet relief with his next breath.

Shane wants this. He wants to try, even if it terrifies him.

"Is okay, Shane. I can be patient," he says, the muscles in his cheeks aching from the grin he attempts to stifle. "One day at a time, yes?"

Shane nods, untangling his hands from Ilya's and cupping his cheeks instead. "Say it again."

To say that Ilya melts into his touch would be an understatement, feeling every tensed muscle in his body go slack all at once.

"What, *Shane*?" Ilya asks, his vowels squished by the weight of Shane's hands on either side of his face.

"Mm hm."

"Shane." Ilya's hands find his hips, pulling him closer with a satisfied grin at the same time he pulls out the syllable. "Your turn."

"Ilya."

He snorts a little. "Pronunciation needs work."

That comment earns him a shove, but Shane is smiling when he does it. "Oh, fuck off. That was perfect and you know it."

"Canadian tongues — always lazy, overconfident mess."

"Hey, you like this Canadian tongue."

The press of Shane's chest melds against his, steady and warm, and there's a smirk gracing his lips that makes every second until Shane lips meet his next feel like blissful agony.

"In certain places, yes." Ilya offers him a shit-eating grin, tilting his face ever so slightly down so that his lips hover over Shane's. "Might have to try it out in a few more. To be sure."

"You're an asshole," Shane tells him, keeping himself close. "Like, a *total* asshole."

"But you *like* me."

"For some fucking reason," Shane shoots back, rolling his eyes ever so slightly. He's so close now that Ilya can feel the warm flush of his breath tingling against his lips. "This is what you wanted then? That was your plan all along — lure me to your house, stuff me full of tuna, and what, make an honest man out of me?"

And, well, Ilya can't exactly deny that, can he?

He bridges the gap between them, pressing his lips to Shane's to shut him up for one heavenly moment, relishing in the way Shane's fingers dig into the contours of his hips as he does so. His own hands tangle in Shane's shirt — *his* shirt, still on Shane, not given back to him along with every seed of potential they had almost wasted.

"I stuffed you full of more than just—" he starts as he pulls back, taking great delight in watching Shane squirm.

He gets nothing but a glare in return. "Answer the question, Ilya."

"Why else would I buy fucking ginger ale if not to win you over?"

End Notes

let the record show that i am not (!!) immune to hockey yaoi propaganda

hollanov have bewitched me body and soul yall it isn't even funny anymore so here's a little something to tide you over until the next ep

ilya loverboy rozanov you're so fascinating and internal i love you and i hope i did you justice

(anything that isn't dialogue is spiritually written in russian btw i don't make the rules we're all in his head now sorry)

and yeah thanks for reading if you've gotten this far! any feedback is v appreciated so let me know what you think :')

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!