No I'm not in love (Why would you think that?)

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by chantivera

Summary

Shane lets out a breathless laugh. “Can you imagine? Me and Ilya?”

Rose doesn’t say anything. There’s just a little smile on her face that makes Shane stop. “It’s really not as weird as you think. The only thing standing between you and him is the rivalry you made up.”

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Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov are elite athletes at their university. Shane can't stand Ilya. Ilya loves Shane.

Notes

Prompt:

Shane becomes a pilates girlie, while Ilya despises the torturous method of exercise. Maybe Shane even socializes and gossips with the girls.

This is certainly not what this prompt called for, but it *is* the prompt that made me write this. I was inspired by the pilates class that I joined at university this year. It's a little silly, but it's fun, I think! This is also kind of a new writing style for me, so I hope it works.

The hockey boys are in the gym again.

Shane moves to turn around and walk away, but Rose catches his arm. “Where do you think you’re going?”

Shane gestures vaguely at the gaggle of boisterous hockey boys hogging the weightlifting benches. “I can’t enjoy my workout when *they’re* around. I’ll come back in an hour.”

“I have class then,” Rose says, and Shane loves her, but he knows she’s about to convince him to stay and he resents her mildly for it. “I need my workout buddy. You can’t leave me alone.”

Shane knows damn well Rose would be fine working out on her own. But he had agreed to go with her, and he’d be an asshole for backing out. “Fine,” he relents. “Just know I’m mad at you.”

Rose smiles brightly. “You’re the best, Shane. Race you to the leg press.”

Shane groans– he hates leg day– but jogs after his best friend. They set up their weights, and then Shane’s attention is unwillingly drawn back to the hockey players when they all exclaim loudly.

He’s about ninety percent sure that’s one of the freshmen, Luca Haas, on the bench, looking sweaty and proud. Shane looks at the weight, and– *fuck.* Yeah, that’s heavy. He unmistakably hears a “Good job, Haasy!” amongst the cheers, and Shane doesn’t have to look to know who *that* is.

It’s Ilya Rozanov, Shane’s self-declared sworn enemy. They first met as freshmen, as the two winners of their university’s most prestigious scholarship for male athletes. Ilya got a full ride to play hockey; Shane got one to play volleyball. Ilya had been a cocky asshole then, and he’s still a cocky asshole now.

He’s *always* in the gym when Shane is*,* to the point where Shane had genuinely wondered if Rozanov was stalking him. And he’s always trying to one-up Shane. He’ll settle himself on the treadmill next to Shane’s and set the speed one notch higher, he’ll lift ten pounds more than Shane, he’ll hold his plank longer and do more pull-ups. It’s annoying, and Shane hates him.

Shane pointedly does *not* look in Ilya’s direction, because he can imagine the slow, crooked, teasing smile Ilya would throw his way if he noticed Shane’s presence. He always looks at Shane like that: smug.

“Stop ogling Rozanov and sit *down,* Shane,” Rose teases, and Shane blushes hotly. He quickly turns to face her. “I wasn’t even looking at him.”

“Right,” says Rose, turning her focus onto her legs. “Haas, then? Maybe Barrett? Barrett’s gay, you know. And there’s something about Haas that’s a little…”

“Oh my God, Rose. Stop trying to set me up with hockey players.”

“Why not? They’re hot.”

“Because they’re douchebags,” is Shane’s reply as he settles himself into the press next to Rose’s.

“Ouch,” says a voice from behind him. “That hurts, Hollander.”

Of *course* Ilya had come over to say hi. Shane blushes again, embarrassed. “Rozanov,” he grumbles.

“Hey, Ilya!” Rose greets him cheerily. Ilya smiles flirtily, and Shane adds that to his mental list of reasons he hates Ilya. “Hello, Rose.”

“I was trying to convince Shane to ask out Barrett.” Rose tells Ilya conversationally, and Shane sputters at her to shut up.

“Barrett? No. Barrett has a boyfriend.” Ilya hums, and looks over to where his teammates are chatting. “You could try Haas. I think he is a little…”

“Stop!” Shane interrupts. “I’m not asking anyone out, okay?”

Ilya just smiles. He looks pleased, and Shane doesn’t know how to feel about that. “I did not know you were gay, Shane.”

“Yeah, well,” Shane mumbles, wishing Ilya would go away. He doesn’t go away, just moves his attention onto Rose. “Me, though, I am single.”

“Charming,” Rose laughs.

Ilya grins. The problem is, he *is* charming. He’s– he’s *hot*. Shane can admit it, he’s not blind. Rozanov is infuriatingly good-looking, with his hard jawline and soft curls and sexy smile.

On the rare occasions where Shane lets himself consider that, Ilya only has to open his mouth for Shane to forget about it completely.

Shane tries to focus on his workout, on the strain in his legs, but he can feel Ilya’s gaze on him. Why is he still standing there? Shane feels an irrational flash of anger. He wants to snap, wants to tell Ilya to go back to his hockey posse, but doesn’t want to give Ilya the satisfaction of being the first one to break. So, he continues to mind his own business. Ilya, eventually, wanders off.

Shane is still annoyed when he’s gone.

He chats with Rose until they finish their workout. The hockey boys are gathered at the entrance putting their outdoor shoes back on when Rose and Shane emerge from the locker rooms. Something catches Rose’s eye and she nudges Shane as they walk by the reception desk.

“Hey. I saw in the most recent newsletter that there’s a free pilates class every Tuesday at five. I was thinking we could go together. The sign up sheet’s right there.”

“Pilates?” Shane repeats, and Rose nods. She pats Shane on the stomach. “Yeah. It’s good for your abs. I did it a bunch in high school, when I was a competitive dancer.”

Shane shrugs. “Can’t hurt. I’ll try it.”

As Shane signs his name, he looks over the list and only sees women. He has nothing against women, obviously, but he has a slight, uncomfortable feeling of being out of place.

He feels the presence of a body behind him, and turns to find Rozanov leaning over his shoulder. He looks at the sheet, and at Shane, and finally at Rose. “What the fuck is a pilate?” He asks.

Shane sighs, but Rose laughs. “It’s exercise. For your core.”

“Ah,” Rozanov says, looking too intrigued for Shane’s liking. Shane interjects without thinking. “Don’t you dare.”

Rozanov’s eyebrows raise. “What? Why not?” He looks at the paper again. “Tuesdays at five I am free.”

Shane has decided that Rozanov absolutely does not belong in a pilates class, and unfortunately he’s stubborn as hell. He has to say something, fast. “Well– I’m sure you’ll be too busy, bulking up so you can punch guys out on the ice, or something.”

Ilya flashes Shane one of his classic crooked smiles. “That is not what hockey is, Hollander.”

“I know what *hockey is,*” Shane defends, in vain. His stomach drops as he watches Ilya scribble his name underneath Shane’s.

Suddenly, his mouth goes dry as Ilya lifts his shirt up, because *what the fuck.* Ilya looks down at himself, unconcerned by the way both Shane and Rose are *staring* at him, and says, “they could use a little work, no?”

Not really, Shane thinks, jealous. Ilya’s abs are picture perfect, shirtless magazine cover perfect, tanned and hard with a little bit of hair peeking out of his waistband. Shane’s treacherous brain pictures himself dropping to his knees, grabbing Ilya’s waist, and licking the shit out of those perfect abs.

He turns quickly away. Rose is still looking when she slowly says, “I’ve gotta get to class. I’ll see you later, sweetie?” Then she peels her eyes off Rozanov and kisses Shane on the cheek. “Love you. Don’t bite Ilya’s head off.”

“Love you.” Shane mumbles. “No promises.”

“I have other head you could bite, if you’d like,” Ilya says dirtily, unashamedly running a hand slowly down his stomach. Shane gags, and moves to leave. “Gross.”

“Hollander, wait,” Ilya stops him, dropping his shirt and sounding serious, so Shane turns. “What?”

“Would you like to get a coffee at the Social Roast with me?”

“No,” Shane says immediately, only to see Rozanov’s face fall slightly. The tiny frown at the corner of Ilya’s mouth makes Shane feel guilty. Okay, maybe that was rude. Shane rocks back on his feet and says, truthfully, “I don’t drink coffee.”

He doesn’t wait for Ilya’s reply. He turns, grabs his shoes, and books it to the door.

*

Shane doesn’t see Ilya again until next Tuesday at five. When he does see him, he’s waiting outside the squash court where the class is taking place, a yoga mat balancing vertically between his legs, standing in a circle with three girls. He throws his head back and laughs at some unknown joke, and the girls are laughing too.

Shane is immediately annoyed. And weirdly jealous. But Rose exclaims, “oh, Maddy! Hey!” and suddenly he and Rose are a part of the circle that’s gathered around Ilya too.

Ilya nudges him. “Hello, Hollander.”

“Hi, Rozanov.”

“How were your classes today?”

For some reason, Shane is taken aback by this question. He and Rozanov don’t *small talk.* They gripe and make fun of each other– that’s it. “They were fine.” He pauses. “Thank you.”

“What is your major?” Ilya asks, and Shane wants to be offended, but he realizes that he actually doesn’t know what Ilya’s major is, either.

They’ve known each other for three *years*.

“Psychology,” Shane says earnestly, because it’s objectively weird they don’t know this about each other. “What’s yours?”

“Political Science and International Relations.”

“Oh,” Shane says, but he doesn’t know why he’s surprised. “Cool.”

Ilya shoots him a grin, and they are pulled back into conversation with the girls.

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Ilya won’t stop *groaning.* He planted his yoga mat right next to Shane’s, and Shane is finding it very difficult to concentrate with all the noise Rozanov is making. “Shut *up,*” he hisses quietly.

“Fucking hurts, Hollander,” Ilya tells him, voice strained.

“Don’t be a baby,” Shane mocks. They’re on their backs and making circles with their legs. It is, admittedly, a little hard on the thighs. But Shane can *feel* his muscles tightening as he squeezes his body together and breathes through the movement. It’s nice. Like if stretching was a bit more of a challenge.

Ilya groans again and drops his leg hard when the instructor allows them to relax. And he groans again when they are instructed into another pose. Shane continues to control his breathing so that those incessant noises don’t drive him up the wall.

The instructor is a very friendly lady called Kelly, and she’s very pleased by Ilya. “That means it’s working,” she teases, “if this room was quiet I’d be working you all much harder.”

Pilates, Shane learns, is weird. He feels a bit silly as he shapes himself into a ball and rolls back and forth on his spine. He feels really silly as he lays on his stomach and pumps his arms and legs in a swimming motion. He can feel that he’s blushing, and Rose giggles at him.

But he doesn’t mind it. He feels good after class.

Rozanov does not look so good. He’s sweaty and breathing hard when he walks up to Shane and Rose and says, “that was torture.”

“It was nice,” Shane argues. “Thank you for bringing me, Rose.”

“At least there was lots of pretty girls,” Ilya says with one of his flirty smiles that Shane hates. “*That* was nice. And since you are gay, Shane, for you, there was me.”

Shane rolls his eyes hard. He and Rose sign their names for next week; and Shane expects Ilya to keep walking. But instead he stands there, waits for the pen, and writes his name. “Really?” Shane judges.

Rozanov smiles at him. “Was nice to hang out with you, Hollander.”

“Right,” Shane scoffs. He’s sure it’s the pretty girls thing, in reality.

*

As the weeks go by, Shane finds himself looking forward to pilates class, despite the persistent presence of Ilya Rozanov. He makes friends with Rose’s friends, and feels good every time he can wave at one around campus. Sometimes he feels like he spends too much time on homework and volleyball and like he doesn’t have a social life, so he really appreciates them.

They all have a crush on Rozanov though, and that doesn’t make Shane feel so good. It makes him jealous, actually, which makes no sense because Shane isn’t attracted to any of the girls. He wants to tell them that in reality Ilya is terrible and exasperating, but it’s a hard point to make when he actually… isn’t.

He complains at every class, but in a way that's endearing. It's frustrating when Shane *wants* to be mad at him, and he just smiles and asks Shane about his day. It puts Shane on edge. He feels like there's some kind of joke he's not in on. Rozanov still teases him, but in a way that feels *friendly.*

Shane never imagined there'd be a day he considered any hockey boy, let alone *Ilya Rozanov*, a friend. He never imagined there'd be a day he actually kind of *liked* Ilya Rozanov.

One day, sitting with his best friend in the meal hall, Shane finds himself saying, "why don't you go out with Ilya Rozanov?"

Rose freezes, the muffin she decided to have for breakfast halfway to her mouth. Slowly, she sets it down on the table. She stares at Shane intensely. "You're kidding, right?"

"No. Why would I be? You like him. He likes you. He flirts with you all the time."

"Shane," Rose says in a way that makes Shane feel stupid. He shifts in his seat. "Ilya doesn't like *me.*"

"Sure he does," Shane defends. He prepares to give Rose a speech about how wonderful she is and how Ilya Rozanov would be fucking *lucky* if she even looked at him, but Rose interrupts.

"Sweetie, Ilya Rozanov likes *you,*" is what she says, and Shane can't stop the laugh that escapes him. "Okay, yeah, right, sure."

He's still laughing, but it dies down as Rose just keeps staring at him. She says, "I thought you knew."

He's quiet now. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Oh my God. *Shane.* Ilya is *obsessed* with you."

"What? Rose, Rozanov hates me. I hate him. That's like, our *thing.* Plus, he's– he's *straight.*" Shane sputters.

"Ilya's *bi,* " Rose says, matching Shane's tone. Her eyes are wide and panicked. "Shane, I thought you knew this. I thought– I thought you just weren't into him."

"Ilya's *bi?* " Shane repeats. "How do you know that?"

"I don't know. It's not a secret. You remember Scott Hunter? They used to, like, get it on."

"That's not true," Shane says immediately. "There's no way. Hunter couldn't stand Rozanov. It was a rumor." Hunter graduated last year, and Shane had known him briefly. They had a class together. He was the captain of the hockey team before Ilya, and he's playing for an AHL team now.

"*You* can't stand him," Rose says. "And yet you like him. You just thought he was straight."

“I don’t *like* him!”

“Are you sure? You like him enough to think he’d be good for me.”

“We’re kind of friends now. So what?”

“Shane, Ilya is a good guy and he’s hot as fuck and I’d be all over him in any other circumstance, but it’s kind of a turn off that he’s in love with my best friend.”

“Rose!” Shane hisses. “He’s not *in love* with me.”

“Okay, fine. But he has a crush on you, Shane. Everyone at pilates knows it.”

Shane slumps back into his chair. “You’re not making this up.”

“Of course I’m not. I wouldn’t lie about this.”

“It’s not possible. All he *does* is antagonize me.”

Rose leans forward, reaching her hands across the table, offering them to Shane. Shane takes them, reluctantly. “Everything he does, he does because he wants you to notice him. He’s like a little boy on the playground pulling your pigtails. It’s almost embarrassing. You should see the way he looks at you when you turn your back.”

Shane looks at the floor. Rose squeezes his hands. “He keeps asking you out, and you keep saying no. So I never bothered to ask you about him.”

“He hasn’t asked me out,” Shane mutters. He’s still not sure he believes Rose. He kind of likes the idea that Ilya likes him, and he doesn’t like that. He can’t be naive enough to completely change the way he feels about Rozanov because of this. Shane hadn’t been attracted to him before.

At least, he thought so.

“He wants to get coffee with you. He wants to walk you to class. He invites you to all the hockey games. He asks when your games are. He asks you if you want to work out with him. You always brush him off. He comes to pilates even though he hates it because it’s the only time you’ll hang out with him.”

Was nice to hang out with you, Hollander. Shane’s stomach flutters as he remembers Ilya saying that, thinking he actually meant it. If he did, Shane’s been an asshole.

“Oh,” it’s more of a puff of sound than a word, as Shane rolls back all his conversations with Ilya in his mind. If Rose is right, and everything Ilya has ever said and done was his twisted way of *flirting,* Shane’s been an asshole.

He remembers Ilya’s tiny, imperceptible frowns, and his heart pangs.

“Am I an idiot?”

Rose smiles softly. “No. You’re not, Shane. It’s not your fault. Ilya’s flirting with girls in front of you really sends the wrong message. But I swear he stops as soon as you’re gone. He just wants your reaction. *That’s* pretty stupid, honestly.”

Shane lets out a breathless laugh. “Can you imagine? Me and Ilya?”

Rose doesn’t say anything. There’s just a little smile on her face that makes Shane stop. “It’s really not as weird as you think. The only thing standing between you and him is the rivalry you made up.”

This hits Shane harder than he expects it to. His entire perspective of Ilya Rozanov has been flipped upside down in one conversation, and it’s a lot to take in.

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Shane doesn’t stop thinking about it.

He can’t decide if Rose is right. There’s a knot in his stomach the next time he walks into the gym and Ilya is there.

She could be wrong. Ilya could be straight and in love with Rose and maybe the Scott Hunter thing *is* just a rumor.

But she could be right. Ilya could be bisexual and could have a crush on Shane and *that’s* why he’s been so nice lately.

Shane isn’t sure he particularly likes either option, but he supposes there’s no harm in finding out for sure. Ilya flirts with Shane all the time and Shane just rolls his eyes, but maybe he should flirt back, for once. Just to see what happens. It would be easy to play it off as a joke.

Ilya is deep in concentration on the shoulder press as Shane walks towards him. His curls are long and falling on his forehead, he has white earbuds in, and he’s wearing a loose, sleeveless black shirt. There’s a thin layer of sweat covering his arms and neck, leaving him glistening.

He’s fucking hot.

When he sees Shane, he smiles brightly, though the smile is crooked as always. Shane’s heart starts beating a little faster.

Shit. He’s having *feelings* about Rozanov.

He pulls an earbud out and leans slightly forward. “Hollander!”

Shane smiles at him awkwardly. “Hey, Rozanov.”

“Am glad to see you. You will join me, yes? Was just thinking of switching to cardio, and you are much slower than me. I need a good break.”

He’s looking up at Shane, eyes and smile bright like a puppy’s. He’s beautiful, and Shane *really* lets it sink in for the first time. Ilya might *like* him. Shane could lean in right now and

kiss him, just like that, and Ilya would let out a surprised noise but wouldn't pull away. He'd kiss Shane and sneak his fingers into Shane's hair and gently coax Shane down to his knees and– *oh, fuck.*

He wants to kiss *Rozanov*?

Shane bites his lip. He's *bad* at flirting. Suddenly he doesn't know why he thought this was a good idea. "Yeah, sure. I'll run with you."

Like he always does, Rozanov sets the pace of his treadmill just slightly faster than Shane. Shane knows because he caught Rozanov checking. Feeling petty, Shane raises his, too.

Because he's still a piece of shit, Rozanov only allows this for a minute before he increases his speed *again.* They go on like this until they're full-on sprinting, and it hurts, but Shane is determined to win. He's pretty certain Rozanov smokes, for fuck's sake, so if Shane's lungs are burning Rozanov's must be killing him.

Eventually Shane can't take it anymore, and he slams the emergency stop button and stumbles off the treadmill. Ilya immediately does the same. Shane sits on the floor, his breath heaving. "*Fuck.*"

Ilya doubles over, chuckling through his panting breaths. He retrieves his water bottle then sits down next to Shane, running a hand through his hair. Shane can't breathe, and he's staring at the movement of Ilya's arm, which definitely doesn't help.

He stares some more as Ilya wraps his lips around the nozzle of his water bottle. Shane watches his Adam's apple bob with each deep swallow. Rozanov's lips are wet and shiny when he smiles dumbly at Shane, and offers him his water.

Shane shakes his head. "I'm fine."

"No, you are not." He shakes the bottle at Shane. "I do not want to be responsible for the volleyball captain dying of dehydration."

"Fuck you," Shane laughs, and takes the water. He hesitates, for a moment, before deciding to take advantage of the situation. His eyes on Rozanov's, Shane presses his tongue on the mouthpiece deliberately before wrapping his lips around it and taking a meaningful sip.

He doesn't miss the way Rozanov's eyes darken slightly, and he feels a flash of excitement. Shane never imagined he'd ever be trying to get Ilya Rozanov hot for him on purpose, but here he was.

Ilya looks away and blinks, asking in a nonchalant tone, "When is your next game?"

"Tomorrow," Shane replies, remembering what Rose had said to him. *He asks you when your games are. You always brush him off.* So he adds, trying to match Rozanov's nonchalance, "You should come."

Ilya looks at him, his expression clear of the heat that was there a minute ago. His classic smirk is back. "You want me to?"

“Definitely. It’s at seven.” Shane nods his head in the general direction of the gymnasium. He licks his lip and asks, “When do you play?”

Ilya’s eyes light up. “Tonight. Against our rivals. We are going to kick ass. You should come watch me.”

“Just you?” Shane questions playfully and helps himself to another sip of water from Ilya’s green Gatorade bottle. There's a stripe of rainbow hockey tape on it, but Shane knows plenty of the hockey players have that on their bottles and bags.

Rozanov waves a hand in the air. “I am the most interesting.”

Shane taps his shoe innocently against Rozanov’s leg. “I’d only want to watch you, anyway.”

Ilya looks at him, his smug expression falling to something more genuine. “I will get you a good seat,” he says softly, like he can’t quite believe Shane is agreeing to go. “Or two? Would you bring Rose?”

“Yeah. Definitely. Please.”

The smile on Rozanov’s face now is almost *cute,* and Shane has to admit it to himself. He’d really fucking like it if Rozanov liked him, because now Shane likes him too.

“See you tonight, Hollander.”

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Rose smiles brightly at Ilya when he delivers two tickets to the hockey game before he heads off to practice. Shane thanks him more normally, because he knows, unlike Rose, that this is a normal situation. It is *not* the beginning of the greatest rivals to lovers story to have ever graced this campus, despite what she says.

The energy in the arena is palpable, even as early as Rose and Shane took their seats. The entirety of their small university’s student body might be in these seats right now.

Shane’s volleyball games don’t get this kind of turnout. He’s okay with that– he finds it intimidating, just being here, and he’s not even playing.

The team is on the ice, but the game hasn’t started. Rose explains some of the general rules of hockey while they wait, because Shane is a terrible Canadian and doesn’t really know all that much about the sport. He half-heartedly listens, watching Rozanov skate around instead.

He doesn’t like hockey. He’s not a fan of the aggressive nature of it, and he never really liked the type of boys that played it either.

Now that he’s actually friends with Ilya Rozanov, he feels that changing. He’s curious about the sport that made Ilya’s life. He’s curious about Ilya.

The game starts and Shane finds himself sucked in. He gets lost a few times, trying to follow where the puck is and who has it and who’s allowed to do what with it, but he’s invested. He

cheers when their team gets the first goal. Later, when he notices he's genuinely sitting on the edge of his seat, he makes a point of putting his back against the chair again, because that's embarrassing.

During the third period, Ilya and a player from the other team are shoved up against the boards fighting for the puck, a mere few meters from Shane's face.

Shane *watches.* Ilya looks serious, concentrated. His eyebrows are furrowed and the corners of his mouth are turned down as he grapples with his stick and the guy behind him. Shane's never seen that expression on Rozanov's face before. Unfortunately, it's hot. Rozanov is hot and hockey is hot and according to Shane's dick, so is the way Rozanov steals the puck and shoves the guy behind him so hard he nearly falls over.

Shane blinks and looks away from the ice because he refuses to think about rough sex with his athletic rival while he's at a hockey game with his entire school.

Rose jumps out of her seat when Ilya scores. Shane missed it, everything happens so *fast* in this sport– but he claps and smiles as Ilya celebrates, his teammates gathering around him.

That goal breaks a tie and eventually wins them the game. As they're filing out of the arena, Rose takes notice of a group of hockey girlfriends outside the dressing rooms. "We should wait for him."

Shane replies, "Why? So you can flirt with him?"

"No. So you can." Rose smirks and forcibly takes his arm to pull him with her. Shane rolls his eyes, but secretly doesn't mind. It was strange to think only a few weeks ago he'd have done anything to avoid being in Rozanov's presence, and now he was purposely searching it out.

When Ilya comes out, finally, he has his huge hockey bag slung over his shoulder, his hair's wet, and he's laughing with Troy Barrett. Troy breaks away, and Shane's stomach does a weird flip when he saunters up to Harris, a boy Shane recognizes because he's a part of the Student Union and he's everywhere on campus, and kisses him right on the mouth.

Ilya spots Rose and Shane and his eyes light up. Shane feels stupid for picturing kissing him the same way Troy and Harris just did. He feels like he's not allowed to want that. He's never had a real boyfriend before.

"Great game," Rose immediately says. "That was a cool goal."

"Thank you," Rozanov answers earnestly, but he's looking at Shane. Shane almost doesn't notice because he's busy looking at how good Rozanov's chest and shoulders look in his university hockey branded windbreaker.

"Oh, um, yeah, I had fun. Watching you. It was a good game." Shane stumbles, but it seems like Ilya appreciates it anyway.

"I am happy you guys came."

Ilya drops his bag and the three of them chat for a while, Rose unsubtly nudging Shane closer to Ilya. It's silly, and Shane feels like stepping on her foot.

"I am looking forward to your game tomorrow, Shane," Ilya says.

"Really?" falls out of Shane's mouth, involuntarily.

"You are not very tall for a volleyball player," Ilya replies, patting Shane on the head twice. "Will be interesting."

"Fuck you," Shane says, because that's what he always says when Rozanov teases him. He wishes he had quicker wit like Ilya's all the time.

"What? Is not an insult. Is cute."

Shane blushes. Hard. He hates it when he blushes because it's so obvious, the way his face gets all red.

"I have to go," Rose says quickly. "I, uh, forgot I left my laundry in the machine. Bye!"

It's a lie. Shane knows his best friend better than that. He's both grateful and annoyed that she's giving him an excuse to stay with Rozanov alone for a while.

He focuses on Shane immediately when she's gone. "You are cute when you blush, too."

Oh, Shane can't handle this. He avoids Ilya's gorgeous eyes. He finds it in himself to admit, "You– looked good out there. On the ice."

Ilya's slow, seductive smile that Shane used to hate appears. He doesn't hate it so much anymore. Especially when Ilya says, "I was showing off for you."

"Yeah?" Shane is breathless, but he forces his gaze back onto Rozanov's face. He can't let Rozanov know he's so nervous. "I liked it."

Ilya just stares at him, for a second, like he's waiting for Shane to take it back or something. His smile falters, and then he asks, "I know it is late, but do you want to come back to my dorm with me?"

It could be innocent. It could not be. Shane's stomach twists. He thinks Ilya has probably used this line a thousand times on plenty of girls. Maybe on some guys too. It certainly works. "Yeah. Sure."

Rozanov blinks. "Okay."

Shane learns that Ilya lives in Vaughn Hall, which is one of the nicer dorms on campus. He has his own bathroom that he shares with a roommate. His roommate is Luca Haas– Ilya tells him they assigned rookies to rooms with older players for a mentoring thing. "He is quiet," Ilya gestures at Luca's door as they pass it. "Good kid, though."

Shane has a single room in Harrison House, across the quad. All the volleyball players were placed there. He doesn't have a roommate, but he doesn't have a bathroom either. He has to share with the rest of the floor.

Once he's in Ilya's room, he doesn't know what to do. Are they just here to talk? Are they here to make out? He looks around the room, instead. Rozanov has hockey posters, music posters of bands Shane doesn't recognize, some plaques and medals, some political science textbooks, some novels. His hockey bag takes up half the space on the floor. It's clean. Nice. Tasteful.

And Shane is pretending he gives a shit about decorations because otherwise he'd have to think about Rozanov and the way he is standing so close to him.

"Hollander," Ilya says softly. Shane looks up at him, but Ilya is looking at his mouth. That fact makes Shane's heart go crazy. "Since when do you like me?"

Oh. Shane huffs out a laugh. His face feels hot. He doesn't know why, but he deflects. "I've always liked you, Roz."

"No." The corner of Ilya's mouth quirks. It does that sometimes. It's another one of those things that used to be annoying that now is just *cute.* "You said I was a douchebag. A dumb hockey boy. You hated me."

"I didn't– *hate* you."

"Yes, you did."

"Maybe a little." Shane relents. "But you hated me too."

"I did not," Rozanov says, the honesty in his voice dangerous. "I've always liked you."

Fuck. Shane closes his eyes. "Come on," he mutters, disbelievingly.

Ilya is standing very close to him. Shane can feel the heat of him, his warm breath on his face. Shane tries to meet Ilya's eyes, but Ilya's gaze is committedly elsewhere– on Shane's lips, on his cheeks, on his neck. Shane likes it. He likes it so much.

"Is true," Rozanov's nearly purring. "I thought, this boy is so stubborn, so smart, so talented, and so fucking gorgeous. And when I look at him his nose scrunches and his cheeks turn pink and it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

Shane cannot breathe. His heart's beating so fast he wonders if he might genuinely pass out. "Ilya…"

"But he would not look at me. Until now. I thought maybe it was a joke. I thought maybe I was crazy. Shane Hollander does not like me."

"I didn't *know,*" Shane says, suddenly, desperately. "I didn't know. Ilya, it's not a joke. I thought you were messing with *me.* I thought you liked *Rose.* But now I know, and I like you so fucking much, Ilya."

“I know,” Ilya replies. He grabs Shane’s jaw, bumps their noses together, and kisses him. Shane’s world collapses.

How could he have been so stupid? He was always meant to be here. He could have been here two years ago.

He runs his hands over Ilya’s damp curls, trying to find a hold. He settles on wrapping his hands around the back of Ilya’s neck. Ilya pushes him against the door with a thud and Shane nearly jumps on him. Instead he just grips harder, kisses harder.

He’s kissing Rozanov. It’s crazy, but Shane just thinks, *finally.*

*

He doesn’t go back to Harrison. Being wrapped up in Rozanov’s arms, kissing him breathless, is just too good. All six foot three of Ilya and all five foot nine-and-a-half of Shane don’t really fit on Rozanov’s single mattress, but neither really minds. Ilya pulls Shane’s back against his chest, presses his lips against the back of his neck.

It’s innocent, despite what Rose will think when Shane tells her he spent the night in Rozanov’s dorm. They’d been hard and panting and sex had come up, but this was already a lot for Shane. Ilya had said, “If you ask the question, then it is always yes,” but Shane replied, “not yet.” Rozanov said, “when you are ready,” and Shane fell into his arms, grateful. He’s glad that even though they crossed a line in their relationship, they still work. It’s still comfortable.

Rozanov’s sleepy now, which makes his muttering of sweet words Russian instead of English. Shane’s so fucking endeared. He vows to download Duolingo in the morning.

*

unread messages from: rose (soulmate) 🌹

Rose: Shane where are you

Rose: Why aren’t you in your room

Rose: SHANE

Rose: Wait holy shit

Rose: ARE YOU WITH ILYA

Rose: SHANE DAVID HOLLANDER

Rose: I TRACKED YOUR PHONE

Rose: WHY ARE YOU IN VAUGHN

Rose: ITS THE HOCKEY DORM I JUST ASKED !!

Rose: Oh my God

Rose: Shane text me in the morning you slut

*

Ilya's in the gymnasium bleachers way earlier than he needs to be. The volleyball game starts in two hours, but he's propped his feet up against the seat in front of him and placed his laptop on his thighs so he can work on his econ paper. If anyone asked, he'd say that the gym was a comforting study space for him, and it wouldn't be a lie. He likes the squeak of running shoes on the wooden floor and the laughs of pretty girls in skirts playing badminton as background noise.

In truth, though, he's just excited that after three years, Shane Hollander actually *wants* him to be here. He'd *asked* Ilya to be here. So he was so fucking here.

Shane was all too aware of it. Before last night, he thinks it wouldn't have bothered him this much. But he can feel Ilya's eyes on him as he tosses a ball around with his teammates before the game. He remembers having Ilya's hands on his waist, Ilya groping his ass, and having Ilya's lips on his neck. It's distracting.

So distracting that he doesn't play very well during the first set. They then lose the set, as if Shane wasn't already embarrassed enough. For the next one, he shakes it off and focuses. He's never been nervous to play in front of Ilya before. He'd always wanted to show off, to prove that he was good. And he *is* good. Kissing Ilya Rozanov doesn't change that.

Ilya likes watching volleyball. He's not going to pretend he's any sort of expert on the sport– he was terrible at it when he tried it– but he finds it so fascinating to watch people who *are* good at it. It's much more interesting when the players can actually keep the ball in the air.

He likes watching Shane, specifically. Shane's incredible, his skill evident in everything down to the practiced way he stands. His measured steps, the way he volleys like it's nothing when Ilya had ended up with bruised wrists. He's smooth, graceful– Ilya had always thought he was most beautiful like this.

He jumps down from the bleachers before the players disappear when the game is over, hoping to catch Shane. Shane blushes. "Hi," he says.

"Hi," Ilya replies, "Good game."

"We lost."

Ilya shrugs. "Was close."

Shane's sweaty, and his hair sticks to his forehead. He's so cute in his green and gold jersey. Ilya wants to eat him. Shane laughs once. "Yeah. Maybe you're bad luck, Roz."

Ilya smirks. "I am too hot. Your whole team was busy looking at me."

“I don’t think that’s it.” Shane smiles. It’s stupid how much he likes Ilya. “Maybe I was, though.”

He looks around, just to check if anyone is watching them, then reaches for Ilya’s face and pulls him down for a kiss. “Use your sabotaging powers of hotness on the other team, next time, please,” he whispers.

Ilya’s gaze is full of admiration Shane doesn’t know what to do with. “Okay. I will.”

“I have to go change,” Shane tells him. “But I can meet you at the Social Roast.”

The way Ilya’s eyes light up tells Shane a lot about how long Ilya had wanted this for. “You don’t drink coffee,” he says. Not that it matters, because it’s almost nine o’clock at night.

“I like their chocolate pudding.”

“I will get you five,” says Ilya.

“I don’t need five,” Shane laughs, but he might be in love.

*

That night, Shane brings Ilya into Harrison and they make out aggressively against Shane’s closet for a good twenty minutes. Shane hooks his legs around Rozanov’s waist, because he can, because he wants to, and Rozanov holds him. Shane hates when he loses, but right now, he feels feral, like he can do anything, like he owns the world.

He has Ilya fucking Rozanov half-naked in his dorm, and he *wants.*

“Suck me off,” Shane asks, suddenly, breathlessly. He’s so hard. “Please.”

Ilya doesn’t think he’s ever moved so quickly, shoving his hand down Shane’s pants as soon as the words come out of Shane’s mouth. Shane gasps and bucks his hips and Ilya gets on his knees.

“Anything,” Ilya whispers hotly as he grabs the waistband of Shane’s underwear with his teeth and pulls them down. “Anything.”

Shane buries his fingers into Ilya’s hair, pulling him closer, closer. “I’m so sorry it took me this long.”

Rozanov looks up at him, and Shane knows he’ll remember this exact picture for a long, long time. “Is okay. You have me now.”

And then Shane forgets how to think.

*

“*Privet, moy lapochka,*”

Shane flushes as Ilya wraps his arms around Shane's shoulders and presses a kiss under his jaw. He was standing outside the squash court with Rose and Rose's friends, waiting for their pilates class. "Hi," he mutters, looking away from the girls' faces. They whisper and giggle conspiratorially. According to Rose, they all saw this coming.

"*I* didn't even see this coming," Shane argued.

"We could see how much he loves you. And you already acted like an exasperated husband." She said.

Shane answered, "I did *not.*"

"Denial is a river in Egypt," Rose sing-songed, and Shane rolled his eyes.

"You know you don't have to come to this anymore," Shane was saying to Ilya now, "if you hate it."

"I do not hate it," Ilya replies. "It is fun."

"Bullshit," Shane calls. "You cry about it every single time."

"When I like something, I am a little annoying about it," Ilya teases, kissing Shane's cheek. "Is how I am."

Shane can't really hold back his smile. "And how did that work out for you?"

"Pretty good, I think," Ilya says. "Now I have a hot, flexible boyfriend that I get to watch do pilates."

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