

flyng jewels

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flying jewels

by [galehautstomb](#)

Summary

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The ladies whispered amongst themselves, scrambling for their iPhones stuffed inside their pockets. Shane, meanwhile, had gone to stand behind the cover of a leafy green plant, positioned perfectly so as not to spook the bird, with a perfect window for a gorgeous photograph.

"That's a good camera," the guide commented, watching Shane with the admiring eye of a fellow birder.

Ilya was preening. A preening fucking peacock. He didn't care if the metaphor was cheesy; he felt like one. He felt like one of those crazy-looking birds from the documentaries Shane liked to watch, birds-of-paradise, with ruffled rumps, faces like parade masks, prostrating themselves in the treetops for love.

(Or, Ilya takes his birding husband on a birding honeymoon.)

Notes

waves what is up my fellow birders?

I loved writing this AU. I loved everyone's responses to it, and so I wrote this completely self-indulgent sequel to fantasize about my dream vacation. The resort Ilya and Shane visit is [Isla Palanque](#), a stunning, EYE-WATERINGLY expensive eco-resort off the western coast of Panama. They have LOTS of birding tours. I'd kill to go there someday.

A few factoids in the endnotes. This is un-betaed. Enjoy!

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

It was a quarter to six, and Anya stuck her cold nose into Ilya's open palm. Outside, an early morning thunderstorm rolled over Ottawa. On any other occasion, Ilya would have taken shameless advantage of such a dreary day and cuddled up against Shane under the blankets, angling for a quickie.

Not today, they had a flight to catch.

"Shh, pretty girl. Don't wake him up," Ilya whispered, running a hand over Anya's furry head. They'd adopted her two years ago, at the end of a particularly bad depressive spell for Ilya. Worn out, but healing, and set reluctantly upon new antidepressants by his therapist, Anya had been just the shining star he needed after a months-long harrowing ordeal. Ilya had instantly fallen for Anya's big brown eyes and her contagious, eager energy. (It seemed Ilya had a type.) He'd worried in the beginning that Shane would be bothered by her, that he was only on board with adopting because he'd seen just how far and how deep Ilya could fall into his mental health, but Shane loved her almost as dearly. He insisted on only the freshest, veterinarian-approved dog food and took the lead on all of her training classes. They would both miss her. Already, Ilya dreaded dropping Anya off with his in-laws.

Quietly, Ilya pulled himself out of bed, smoothing a hand over Shane's exposed flank when he grumbled at all the shifting. Shane had been working hard lately. Earlier this year, the local board of education partnered with the Ottawa Birding Troop to pilot after-school birding programs in three elementary schools. They were a rousing success. Most of Shane's afternoons from March to May were spent leading little legions of excited nine-year-olds through Ottawa's historic parks, on the watch for southern migrants. Ilya knew that when they returned from their trip, Shane had a week's worth of meetings lined up; half a dozen more schools were eager to implement programs of their own.

As for Ilya, last night he locked his work phone in the safe in their closet with no intention of removing it. It was June, for Christ's sake, Pittsburgh had just won the Cup, hockey was *over*. Any GM moronic enough to try any bullshit with Ilya's players in the off-season wasn't worth picking up the call from.

And besides, Ilya was going on his honeymoon.

Ilya turned the TV on low in their living room and mashed down Anya's wet food in her bowl with a fork. She danced her happy-breakfast dance at his feet, the clink of her paws on the floor like falling marbles. On the TV, the meteorologist predicted a swift, if chaotic departure of this morning's storms. The skies would be clear by the afternoon.

Ilya checked his personal email. A notification from the airline. Their flight to Newark was delayed an hour. He took a deep breath. They had a four-hour layover in New Jersey. It was plenty of time, and they wouldn't miss their flight.

A world away, paradise awaited to usher in a pair of newlyweds.

“Are you guys American?” a sun-kissed woman in a straw sunhat asked on the drive to the marina. She was middle-aged, with curly brown hair and laugh lines etched along her elegant face. Her husband, or at least Ilya, assumed he was, sat with Shane near the front of the van. Their heads craned out the window like dogs, watching a flock of cormorants take off from the water. To their left, the Pacific Ocean lapped at the coastline, a blue ribbon snaking between mangrove trees.

“Canadian. Sorry,” Ilya said, not feeling very sorry; the happy-glowy feeling of receiving his citizenship papers had not yet worn off. He doubted they ever would. He was rid of Russia, and the ambivalent US he puttered around in for years, and finally in a country, with a man, he would happily call home. Still, better not to piss off any potential island cabin-neighbors this early on the trip. Best to save that for later, when Ilya fucked Shane so good and so loud they scared all the birds out of the trees.

“No apologies necessary. I’m getting my Euro passport soon, then that country will have seen the last of me,” the woman said, holding out her hand to shake. “I’m Stella. My fiancé, Adam, is Danish. He’s a wildlife photographer, so you can imagine this place is like a goldmine to him.”

Ilya grinned. A kinship sprang between them, two strangers, stupidly in love, and even stupidly excited to gush about being so. “Mine is the same. He loves birds. Now, I love them too.”

Stella giggled behind her hand, sporting a perfect gel manicure. An engagement ring, with a diamond the size of a quail’s egg, glittered on her finger. “Adam likes fish. A coral reef is his happy place. I met him at an Irish pub in Manhattan. How could I have known?”

Ilya shook his head, chuckling. Shane was back in his seat, hunched over and talking to the driver in accented, if serviceable Spanish. Shane may not be able to ask about the local cuisine, but he could quiz him about the best local birding spots. Priorities, and the like.

“The things you do, when you’re in love, huh?” Stella said, with a bemused but long-suffering air, like it was a challenge she liked to suffer every day.

Falling in love with Shane and the things he loved to do was the easiest challenge Ilya ever faced.

He told her so. “These things, I am happy to do them.”

Ilya reserved the beachfront house closest to the forest. He would have happily paid top-dollar for the ones closer to the cape, by the pristine blue water and its inevitable picture-perfect sunset, but that’s not what Shane wanted. Shane wanted trees, shade, and *privacy*. Screw the ocean, he wanted leafy palms filled with paint-colored parrots right outside his window.

Barring the extra occasional creepy-crawly insect, Ilya was satisfied with his choice. The house was nestled into a small clearing under the shade of a few old, dark rubber trees, their trunks slick with moisture and the occasional lizard. The house was larger than the Hollander

family lake cottage, with sweeping glass walls and high ceilings, but not big enough to get lost in.

They'd arrived at the resort just past dinnertime, and their guide had led them along a stone path with only a small lantern. No streetlights, no torches, nothing to disturb the animals. One of Panama's national marine parks was just a kayak ride away. They took their conservation seriously, the guide had explained, and Shane had hummed, satisfied, and asked about the nesting precautions made for red-legged honeycreepers.

"It's stunning," Shane breathed after the guide left, staring out through the glass, the dark smudge of the beach just visible beyond the treeline. His perfect pink mouth was softened into an "O" of wonder.

There were photographs of humpback whales, tropical fish, and jungle butterflies along the walls. Their bed, sectioned off into the corner, beckoned dreamily with a sheer linen curtain. A spread of fruit was laid out on the small countertop, and beneath two large plate covers, Ilya knew there would be Spanish rice, ceviche, and the local fish of the day. He'd ordered it in advance from the airport while Shane was in the bathroom.

Ilya let the food be for now. He went to his new husband, and rocked him in his arms, nosing at his temple where he smelled fresh and sweet, even despite the plane ride. Ilya was addicted. He wanted to spend hours pinning Shane to the mattress, just smelling him, rubbing his face on his skin like a cat.

Shane kissed him over the breastbone through his t-shirt, then looked up with those lovely dark cow-eyes. "Ilya, this is too much. How much did you pay for this?"

Ilya stopped that line of thinking right in its tracks and gave Shane a firm kiss. "One billion dollars," he breathed against Shane's mouth. "We are now bankrupt. Surprise, we are fleeing the country."

"You think you're so hilarious," Shane grumbled.

"I am. You married me because I make you laugh. This, and the orgasms."

Shane grinned, then hid it in the curve of Ilya's shoulder. He was weird about money sometimes. He wasn't lacking by any means. His business was booming, and his parents were solidly middle-class, but Shane never spent much as far as "treating himself" went. Not like Ilya, with his sports car, his designer clothes, the extravagant vacations he took great joy in cajoling Shane into. He would drape Shane in silk robes and twenty-four carat fucking gold dust if Shane wanted it, but that wasn't his style. That didn't mean Ilya wasn't intent on teaching his husband to indulge every now and then. Starting with a pricey but world-renowned eco-resort for the honeymoon seemed a good compromise.

"Does not matter what it costs. I have the money. I want to spend money on you. On us," Ilya said.

"You don't want to spend a week birding for honeycreepers," Shane pointed out.

“No, I want to watch *you* do it,” Ilya corrected, and led his grinning husband to the dinner table.

There was a special joy in watching Shane sneak bites of honey-drizzled French toast from Ilya’s plate and babble about nature.

Ilya couldn’t help but preen a bit. Shane was meticulous about the food he put in his body, but his dedication to his own health bordered on an unhealthy neurosis. Over the years, Ilya’s worked on convincing Shane to indulge more and relax that trademark Hollander strictness. Shane’s gotten better at doing so, indulging in a treat every now and then, especially when he was feeling relaxed and happy. Ilya couldn’t retrain his pleased smile when Shane speared a fatty piece of chorizo off a side plate. He’d almost gone through a whole sausage.

Shane covered his mouth as he chewed, but continued praising the expertise of the resort staff, particularly the local botanist he’d met this morning at the breakfast bar, who studied indigenous farming methods. They could take a foraging tour later if they wanted, and glean their lunch out of the rainforest. Shane kept a small herb garden in the windowsill of their apartment — rosemary, thyme, leafy basil, and stalks of green onions — Ilya wouldn’t be surprised if Shane snuck a tropical seed or two home to grow himself. Then again, there were rules and things about bringing produce on a plane. If Shane really wanted it, Ilya was willing to risk international agricultural law in the name of love.

After they finished breakfast, they met their birding guide at the trailhead by the welcome center. It was a smaller tour, a product of the early morning start time, but the smaller the better. The only other attendees were three middle-aged women in expensive yoga gear chattering off to the side. One of them only wore leggings and an athletic bra. Ilya would bet an untold amount of money that she’d be bug-bitten and begging for some of Shane’s natural lemon-scented spray half an hour in.

While Ilya made nice with these expensive-looking ladies, Shane walked right up to the guide, introduced himself, and asked her about the migration patterns of warblers in the region. Surprised, the guide shot Ilya a look over Shane’s shoulder. He raised his brows. He’d offer her no help. Shane meant business and would grill her until he was satisfied with her answers.

Luckily, the guide recovered quickly, and after realizing that Shane was passionate but about as threatening as a fruit fly, happily fired back answers to his continuous stream of questions. Shane took point at the front of the trail with her, offering his hand to their fellow attendees when climbing over a gnarly rock or protruding tree root. As usual, Shane was completely oblivious to the ladies’ blushing and giggling on his behalf.

Shane hung back when Ilya rested a gentle hand in the small of his back. Oh, the joy in feeling Shane fall into his palm, turning that pretty face over his shoulder, and peering at Ilya with those lovely questioning eyes.

“I’m being helpful!” Shane pouted when Ilya nodded at the giggling ladies up ahead. One of them waved, her hip cocked out and her shapely calf positioned eye-catchingly on a log. Ilya was sure she’d pulled her tank top down further to show off her cleavage.

Ilya kissed Shane quickly, and as expected, Shane chased him for more. They shared another, lush and clinging, the kinds of kisses that made Ilya feel drugged; the ladies, the guide, and the birdsong fell away.

“You are the most helpful, and the most pretty,” Ilya said, running a thumb over Shane’s freckles, more pronounced with the summer sun.

“It’s not my fault they flirt with me,” Shane grumbled.

“Of course not. They are harmless, and if they are not, I will punch them in the face. Get arrested. You will have to bail me out of horrible jungle prison.”

Laughing, Shane pushed him away and continued up the trail. “You’re so annoying.”

As predicted, the mosquitoes worsened the further they hiked inland. Shane happily shared his bug spray with the ladies, who’d cut back on their ogling after Ilya’s shameless display of husbandly affection. It wasn’t long before they reached the apex of the trail. The path curled tightly into a copse of overgrown brush, and beyond it, a small, burbling stream that led back out to sea. The water was shallow, but almost completely clear. Even from this distance, Ilya could see the coiled silver swarms wiggling beneath the surface. Small fish, and subsequently, birds to feast upon them.

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Like these birds Ilya had managed to romance his chosen partner, with great effort and even greater reward. His partner, once he was finished with his picture-taking, practically skipped back to Ilya, the pictures already queued up on his camera screen, his joy as plain as day on his face.

The past four mornings, they’d been up early, indulging in the resort’s seemingly endless offerings of nature and wildlife tours. Whale watching in the bay, foraging in the forest, snorkeling in the coral reefs. The reef had been Ilya’s favorite. His body, oh so buoyant and listless in the salty water, floating over colorful fans of coral, striped fish darting between his

fingers. A sea turtle, its shell caked in algae, picking greenery off a sunken tree branch. An octopus, rippling in orange, gliding over the seafloor.

Ilya was beyond satisfied with his choice of honeymoon destination; the food was superb, and the accommodations luxurious, the activities wide and varied. He'd been soaking in Shane's glee like a lizard basking on a rock.

After every excursion, they returned to their bungalow, thrumming with adrenaline, and almost every time afterward, Ilya bullied a bright-eyed, babbling Shane into the shower to wash them clean and swallow his cock down. Or some other kind of desperate newlywed fucking.

Thank you, thank you, Shane had mumbled once while licking Ilya's come off his own hand in the sitting room, dazed and flushed, the most biteable thing on all the island. Earlier that morning, their tour into a birdy grotto revealed several pairs of rare tanagers Shane had never seen before. The photos he'd gotten were simply magnificent. Ilya insisted they go up on the Troop's website. Shane stuck a hand in Ilya's pants immediately after he suggested so.

Wonderful as their athletic afternoon romps have been, Ilya wanted one morning, one day really, in this paradise with Shane all to himself. When he woke up today to find Shane sound asleep, he made his case swiftly with his eager tongue and warm hands, rough on Shane's morning wood. It wasn't long before thoughts of their ten AM cooking class disappeared from thought. Ilya would gladly pay the no-show fee.

From the open window, a bird called from the forest. Ilya was no expert, but he guessed it was a flycatcher. Too bad. The expert was busy. Ilya currently had the expert hard and leaking in his mouth, begging for release.

"Ilya, *God*, please," Shane cried, with his hands tangled in Ilya's curls. Ilya had kept him like this for half an hour.

Ilya pulled away to lay his teeth against the soft skin of Shane's thighs. He licked down and sucked, meanwhile rubbing his cock against the sheets for friction. He was so hard he could explode. If he wasn't inside Shane in the next minute, he was going to lose his mind.

"Gorgeous," Ilya rumbled in Russian and pulled off, smoothing his thumb over the bite he'd left behind. It beckoned, a bright purple-red on Shane's creamy skin that promised to blossom even further. Shane liked being marked up, he liked when Ilya returned to his earlier handiwork and nipped around the sensitive skin. He didn't always have the courage to ask for the marks, especially in such a sensitive place, but when did, Oh he was so good at begging for it.

"Feels good. Thank you. I love you," Shane slurred, his eyes glazed, his face tipped up at the ceiling.

Ilya caged Shane in, holding himself up with his arms bracketed alongside Shane's head. He wanted his husband's eyes on him, cocooned under his body, focused on nothing but the slow roll of Ilya's cock splitting him open.

“So polite,” Ilya whispered into his mouth. “Are you ready now for your reward? For being so good?”

Shane nodded frantically and stretched upward to sloppily mouth at Ilya’s jaw. “I’m good. I was so good, Ilya. *Please.*”

Ilya would, and has, made Shane beg to come for hours, but they both knew that about half the time, Ilya caved early. Shane was so earnest, mouthing off one second and pleading with Ilya the next, completely unabashed in both. No one else on Earth had ever turned Ilya on so much.

He couldn’t restrain himself any longer. Shane was already stretched from Ilya’s talented fingers, and it only took a second for Ilya to slick himself up and slide home, tight and warm as Shane had been the first time.

Ilya kept it slow; he was feeling sappy. He fucked himself in firm rolling strokes, the kind that rubbed his cock along Shane’s prostate in a constant teasing pressure. It never took long for Shane to come like this, especially when he was worked up. He didn’t hide his noises, instead, he kept his mouth open, squeaking little *ah, ah, ah*’s with each thrust.

“Sweetheart,” Ilya groaned, pushing one of Shane’s legs back against his chest for a better angle. With more room between Shane’s hips and fucked his cock there in circles. Then he pulled out almost all the way just to watch his cockhead sink back inside. Shane gasped when he slammed home, throat bared in a long, elegant stripe. There was no better sight in the world.

“Inside. I need it inside,” Shane begged, fumbling for his own weeping cock. It only took a few strokes before he was coming, hot and wet between them, dirtying Ilya’s stomach.

“I’ll give it to you. Take it. Take my cock,” Ilya growled, falling forward so they were flush, stomach to stomach, and hammered in hard, with little rhythm. Ilya was lost, flushed in the face, his lovely new husband cooing in his ear, murmuring filth and encouragement.

Shane reached a dry finger around to Ilya’s ass and threatened the barest pressure against his hole. Ilya came, grunting, like he was gut-punched. Shane clenched down, like he could keep Ilya pumping him full and warm forever.

They didn’t speak. Ilya knew he only had a little bit of time before Shane demanded a shower, or if he was lucky, a wipe-down with some washcloths. A price worth paying for sure. In the meantime, Ilya flipped on his back and tucked his husband close, so Shane could rest his head on his favorite spot over Ilya’s pec. Just when Ilya thought he’d drift off, a long, hazy afternoon of napping stretched before them. Shane stilled, every muscle frozen in focus. A long whistling high note sounded from outside.

“That’s a flycatcher,” he said, giddy as a kid at Christmas. He probably knew the specific species, too.

Ilya couldn’t stop the giggles bubbling up in his chest. He laughed and laughed, while Shane fumbled at the nightstand, searching for his binoculars.

There were hummingbirds by the front door.

Ilya was surprised it took Shane this long to notice the spindly tendrils of vines stretching along the front of the house. Their flowers were long, purple, and shaped like the bell of a trumpet, perfectly sized for itty-bitty hummingbirds with pencil-like bills. When Ilya stepped outside this morning to smoke (he was trying to quit, and yes, he smoked on the beach a respectable distance away from all that flammable foliage), he caught sight of a quick-flying bird the size of his thumb by the flowers and immediately went back inside to get Shane.

“They’re alright, *solynshko*. They can’t see us,” Ilya murmured. He felt like he was soothing a spooked horse.

Shane's eyes were like liquid in the sunlight. He wasn't crying, but he was touched in some deep way, and more nervous than Ilya liked.

Shane turned to him again and whispered fiercely, “We made out on that wall last night! You lifted me up! I’m sure we crushed some flowers. God, what was I thinking...”

Ilya knew Shane would sooner cut off his hand than harm an animal. One day, about a year ago, while leading a bird tour, Shane and his group stumbled across a pair of mated screech-owls and their fledglings. Shane had corralled his excited tour-goers a safe distance away from the nest, only for a snooty teenager, more glued to their phone than interested in birding, to stride right up to the tree and take loud, obnoxious photos with the sound on. A fledgling, startled, had fallen from the nest. A trip to the local wildlife rehabilitation center patched its broken wing right up — but the bird would never fly again, and was transferred to a local nature center for their education program. A bittersweet ending. The night Shane found out where the owl was going, he wept in Ilya’s arms, furious with himself, his sobs rickety and restrained like they were when he was most upset.

“Shh. Easy, Hollander. Do you see flowers on the ground? No, just dirt. These birds are very strong. Small but mighty. You see the resemblance?”

Shane slapped him on the arm, but let Ilya tuck him against his shoulder for some much-needed comfort. They watched the hummingbirds, there were three of them now, hovering amongst the flowers. One of them perched, just briefly, on a stretching stem and flashed its glittery purple neck, like it had glued jewels to its feathers. It lolled its tongue, black and alien-like, before flying away for more nectar.

“Thank you for bringing me here,” Shane said, after a long while. The birds had flitted away higher up the vine, just blurs of movement in the green leaves.

Ilya stuck his nose behind Shane’s ear, where his baby hair curled up, small and soft. It was a simple secret fact Ilya could only have learned after years of loving one singular man, his body, his skin, his hummingbird heart.

“I love you. You deserve good things.”

“You are my good thing,” Shane declared fiercely, and gingerly, with care for the vines and the hidden fauna of the garden, let them back inside.

End Notes

I completely stole the title of this work from ["Joyas Voladoras"](#) by Brian Doyle. A stunning piece of creative nonfiction, I encourage you all to read. In Spanish, "joyas voladoras" means "flying jewels". This was the name the Spaniards had for hummingbirds when they invaded the continent.

The three birds at the resort I mentioned or described are the red-legged honeycreeper, the bare-throated tiger heron, and the long-billed starthroat. All have been documented in David, Chiriqui, Panama - the closest city to the resort on eBird.

Comments and kudos make my day!

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