Fuck you. It was so much easier before I met you. I didn't have to think so hard about it. I told myself that people distanced themselves from me because I was awkward, because I wasn't white, because I was boring, because I wasn't something that they could easily understand and categorize.

I know that you see through it all, though. I know that you can tell exactly what I am, and it fucking scares. Can the others tell or is it just you? Am I crazy for thinking that I was hiding it so well?

All I can think about is the way that you stared at me. I know that you know. I hope that I never see you again because I'm so embarrassed. At the same time, I want to see you again tomorrow. I want to see you right now.

The thing that scares me the most is that if you do know, you didn't seem disgusted by it.

Everything has moved over a few inches since that night in the hotel gym.

Things I knew and things I relied on are now new.

I had to make up an excuse to my parents that day I introduced myself to you. I don't remember what I said. Something that didn't give away that I knew you were right outside. I had known for a while that I wanted to meet you. I don't even remember being nervous. I just wanted to know you.

Later on, I told my mom you were an asshole, and maybe that was true, but I didn't mind it.

I shook your hand twice just to feel your palm against mine. Even then you were my rival, but your touch didn't feel like opposition. And your fingers touching mine in the hotel gym was nothing like violence. Both times, you held my gaze so steady, like you were trying to tell me something. I feel like I'm spiraling trying to decode a message that I'm scared I'm making up.

That fucking gaze has rearranged my life. I haven't decided if it was for better or for worse yet.

I don't know what I'm supposed to do about this.

Even though I wondered if you might be like me too, I knew that it was probably some sort of stupid, childish wish that I had. I never thought that you would seek me out. I never thought you would show up to my hotel room and touch me with those fucking hands that make me weak if I think about them now.

It seems so easy for you. I know that I am probably just another night for you. By tomorrow, you will likely forget about all of this. You don't have to be like me and fret over all the details. I'm so jealous of that. The way that you hold yourself, even when you're being a smug asshole, I'm so enamored. You don't ever seem uncomfortable.

Do you look at me and think I'm pathetic? You probably see the way I dress, or the way I stand, or the way that I so easily admitted to you that I have never even been with a guy, and you think that it is so embarrassing. You didn't make me feel that way, though. Fuck. No, you were actually kind and gentle in ways I would have never expected.

I know I don't know anything about you, but I want to know everything. I hope I can see you again. It sounds so clingy, practically obsessive. I'm no better than the creepy fans that probably stalk you on social media.

This is so bad. This is the last thing we should be doing. I already know that it will end badly. If I was smart, I would pretend like this never happened. I won't. I could never. I'm terrified at how easily you have unraveled this part of myself that I've tried so hard to keep hidden. What else will you do to me?

Before you leave my hotel room, I have to keep myself from falling at your knees and repeating thank you thank you thank you.

God, I love the way you take me apart. Can you tell how badly I need your touch? Nothing has ever come close to the way that it is with you.

When we get together, there is always a moment before we even touch. We make small talk or even just look at each other. Can you tell how badly I am aching for you to touch me? Is it obvious that I am nearly shaking with restraint, from having to force myself from not reaching out the second I see you?

I feel insane waiting for you to text me back. I don't even want to check my phone in front of other people anymore because I know that it must be written all over my face how infatuated I am. I can't think of another time in my life that I've had to keep myself from smiling so much. Some of the guys on the team think I have a girlfriend. They can't see me as someone with a casual relationship.

I wouldn't tell you, but this isn't casual for me. I know it is for you. You probably like playing with me like a cat with a mouse. But I'm so gone, so fucking deep. I almost want to apologize to you for accidentally becoming obsessed with the way your hair looks after you've showered, or that smirk you always give me when I try to chirp you, or the sound you make right before you come when you're fucking my face.

I'm miserable waiting for your touch again.

I keep thinking of last week, when you dug your nails into my hips while I rode you. I'm thinking about that burn in my thighs, like a good workout, your mouth parted and eyes glazed. When I leaned down to kiss up your neck and your jaw. When I tasted salt because we were sweating

During our time apart, I've thought of a thousand new things we have to do together. Maybe next time you can put me in handcuffs and fuck me, and you'll have to put your fingers in your mouth to keep me quiet. Maybe another time you can push me against the cool granite countertop in my kitchen and we'll be too frantic to even take off our clothes fully.

Maybe at some point we can go to my cottage and I'll wake up with your dick hard against my ass and I'll jerk you off while you wake up to the soft morning light pouring in through the windows.

I have to keep telling myself that it's not obvious. People can't tell. My feelings aren't written all over my face.

My mom keeps bringing you up, practically snarling at your quotes, and I want to burst out laughing and have to hide a smirk behind my hands.

After games, the locker room erupts in groans at the mere mention of your name, but I'm still grinning from whatever chirp you said to me that night.

Reporters love to talk to me about you, holding out the microphone in hopes that I'll give them some vicious quote about how much I hate you, and all I want to do is fall apart because I can't believe that anyone actually believes that I wouldn't like you. That I'm not soft and gooey at the thought of your face. That I don't have some schoolgirl crush on you.

Someone must be able to tell that I hang on every word you say, that I'm just waiting for you to turn your gaze towards me again, waiting for the warmth to return.

No one ever calls me on all of this, though. Even when I spend all day with your name on the tip of my tongue, to them, I am a man who has never known your touch outside of the ice. I'm terrified of what people would think if they knew about us, but some days, when I'm almost asleep with the memory of the tender way you stroke your hand against my cheek between kisses, I think that someone else should know. I want to brag about our fleeting slices of heaven because it feels wrong that I should keep something like that to myself.

Went to a wedding today.

I haven't been to many. I usually avoid them, but this one was important. Instead of coming up with some excuse that everyone would know is a lie, I put on a suit and showed up without a plus one. I watched the bride walk down the aisle and listened to the vows told between chokes and nervous laughs. I refused to think about anyone else. I refused to think about what it would feel like to listen to my friends and family cheer as I kissed the person I loved after publicly declaring our love.

I remember a girlfriend in high school asking me about what type of wedding I wanted one day. At the time, I had laughed, suddenly panicking at the thought that my wedding wasn't an if but a when. Because it always felt inevitable if I wanted to keep up whatever illusion I had created for the Shane Hollander that was normal, that was straight, that was just like his other teammates. I was seventeen years old overcome with fear knowing that I had to get married, had to have kids, had to buy a house and maybe get a dog.

And, fuck, I could hardly pay attention to the first kiss and the speeches and the cake cutting because I'm suddenly so worried about one day having to corner some distant father and ask for permission, and then get down on one knee, and then stand in front of everyone and hope that I really do love her. Because it has to be a her. There is no room for anything else.

Maybe this is bad, but sometimes I hope I get past this all like a bad phase. Like being with you is like biting my nails, and one day I won't even think about bringing my hand up to my mouth.

At the end of the night, when everyone was dancing and I was sitting in the back watching longingly, I told myself that eventually a wedding won't feel like a threat.

(I refuse to think about you, I really do. Because I know one day you will find a girl you will want to marry, and you won't hesitate or settle, and you'll slow dance at the end of the night and everything we had together will feel so far away. Maybe you won't even remember this by then.)

I wish I knew what I did wrong. Please tell me. I need you back in my life. I'm sorry if you could tell that I've crossed the line from casual to something more. I can hide it better, I promise. I can pretend if that's what I need to do to have you back in my life.

Maybe this would all be easier if things weren't so different with you.

I tried. I tried to find someone else. I thought if I slept with another man, I could keep myself from making things with you into something it isn't. I thought once it was someone else pressing me down, making me come, that I wouldn't need you so bad. I didn't want to replace you, but I wanted to make sure I could if I needed to.

It was different. Painfully different. He still took off my shirt. He still pressed his hand to my neck when he kissed me, could probably feel my pulse racing under his hand. He still fucked me just like you do.

It still wasn't the same.

It wasn't you.

I wonder if you can feel this absence too. Is there a missing piece when you're with someone else too? Do you hold his chin and think of me?

Before all of this, back when I didn't know you and I didn't let myself linger on anything other than women, I thought maybe things would work out eventually. I figured I needed to meet the right girl. I had to get out of my head while having sex and I would enjoy it more. I thought I could carve the future I wanted if I tried hard enough, but now I'm not so sure.

Maybe you didn't kiss me because you can tell how far I've taken this. Maybe this is your way of telling me that this isn't anything serious. I need to take some steps back. This feels like too much. When you touch me, all the panic I feel melts away. And, fuck, you telling me what to do…I hate myself for how much I love it. When you grab my face, force me to look you in the eyes, I know that there is no going back. Whatever you want, I'll do it. I can pretend to put up a fight, but it's not real.

There are bruises on my hips from your fingers. They make me upset because you probably don't even realize what your touch will do to me, but it'll be on my skin for weeks now, a reminder of how easy I forgive you. Maybe for how desperate I am.

I hate that you can see right through me. No one else can, though. And I do hate it, I do, but sometimes it also feels like a relief, like a balm. Someone can see me. You can see me. That's all that I need.

I would never tell you this because it's so embarrassing, but sometimes when I'm hanging out with Hayden and Jackie and their kids, I think about you. I watch the way that Hayden cuts up his daughter's food, and I listen to the way that they bicker half-heartedly over who has to do the dishes. I try to watch TV, but I feel like I've walked in on something that I should have never seen when Jackie walks up behind Hayden on the couch and rubs his shoulders absentmindedly.

(I can't wrap my brain around how their touches seem so thoughtful and romantic, but at the same time so automatic and intuitive and maybe even thoughtless. I can barely look at you in public without feeling like everyone knows about us. I can't imagine reaching out and feeling your skin without a closed door behind us.)

But I get to see them live their life together as a family and I think about you because I'm so weak. What if things were different? Could we kiss each other on the lips before work and come home and make dinner together? I try not to, but I can't help but to imagine you sending me a text in the middle of the day of a recipe you found that you want to try to make tonight. We could go to the store together and bicker about what type of cheese we should get. And, god, I feel stupid even typing this out to no one but sometimes I even wonder what it would be like if we had a family together. I know you didn't always have a good home life, but I think you would be a good dad.

I know how fucked I am when I go to the bathroom at their house and look at their vanity with two sinks and think about what it be like to get ready for bed with you every night. Someone else will get that. It won't be me. But in another universe, maybe I do.

I'm so used to you finding a way to tell me to leave without actually telling me to leave. I'm used to feeling frantic with the way that I'm counting down all the seconds we have left after fucking before you decide you have to go. You didn't ask me to leave today, though. I had everything I've been wanting for months – jesus christ, probably years at this point, and I just threw it away.

You made me food. We watched TV on the couch together like a married couple after a hard day at work. You touched me with no sexual intention behind it, and somehow that felt just as good as when you press into me during sex. We were normal for a few hours and it fucking scared me. I can't tell if you were trying to apologize for something by giving me exactly what I've been craving. It scares me even more at the mere thought of you wanting all of this too. The thought of the two of us both wanting each other like that…it almost makes me sad because I know we can't. I know it's impossible.

I wish I would've stayed even if I know I would've admitted everything to you. Do you know how badly I wish you could've run your fingers through my hair and pressed kisses to my head before I fell asleep in your arms? Does it make me a selfish person for wanting to wake up with you in the morning, every morning, for however long you'll have me?

I know it's crazy I walked out on you. I feel like I am choking on the truth about how I feel about you. If I stay too long with you, I know I will tell you. I will ruin things. I can't let that happen.

This is dumb, so fucking dumb, but I am not poetic or artistic enough to ever put into words the way that I feel when you say my name. I could listen to it all day. You could say it over and over and over and

The other day I went to lunch with my parents and I imagined you there next to me.

I just know you would completely derail Mom's business talk with some topic that you find more interesting. I tell myself it's because you know how much I hate that I spend all my time with my parents talking about my career. I imagine us discussing how you hate how American airports make you take your shoes off at security and how the TSA agents always throw away your fancy cologne because you never check the liquid limits. I imagine you debating some trivial hockey fact with Mom only for me to Google it and find out that you're both wrong and we all laugh about it. At the end of the meal, you'd be the only one to order dessert, but you'd force me to try it, holding your fork out to me.

I know you would fit in so well. You would make things easier. I dream of a world where things are easy for us.

I just know that my parents would love you. I know it's cheesy. It's pathetic for me to even be writing this. All I can think about now is where you would fit into my life if you were allowed in.

I imagine coming home to you after a game night, tired and exhausted, but we sit at the kitchen island together and eat dinner. We go back to the bedroom and I let you go down on me while I grip the bedsheets. I let you do all the work. It's easy. There's no rush because we can do it all again the next night.

I imagine you trailing behind me at the grocery store. You keep adding junk food to the cart, but I let you even if I tease you about it. You make stupid jokes as you watch me stare at every cut of meat before making my choice. You don't mind waiting. When we check out, you gently push me aside and loudly announce that you got it.

I imagine you there when I'm falling apart. Maybe I refuse to talk. Maybe I'm talking too much, spiraling over the smallest thing. You let me work through it. You don't force anything. You keep me company. I'm not alone, and I don't have to hide it.

I can easily slot you into every minute of my life.

Yet, at the end of the night, I have to push it all aside because I know that it's not like that.

I tried so fucking hard. I thought it worked. She is so pretty and funny and lights up the room in the same way you do. Things weren't perfect, sure, but they were fine until I saw you again tonight. I want to scream at you for ruining things. I know it's not your fault. But I want to be angry at you because I was better before tonight. I was forgetting about the press of your lips on my neck until you forced yourself back into my life.

How is it fair that I have to think about you so that I can fuck my girlfriend? I know you are probably sleeping around without even a thought about me. I have to think of your hands, and your mouth, and your stupid fucking accent telling me what to do so that I can feel anything. It's not fair. I wanted to feel normal and you ruined it.

Fuck you fuck you fuck you fuck

I'm not angry at you.

I wish we could talk. Maybe not as honest as I am here, but I want so badly to just have a few minutes where we are allowed to be honest and open and there is no future or reputation or fragile relationship to worry about.

I used to think it was your fault that I never talked to you like I do here. I thought you didn't want me to open up because then things would be serious and real. It must have been me the whole time. I'm not good at this in real life. I can only write to no one about my feelings so that I don't have to deal with them. Maybe I need help.

She might not be you, but it was nice to actually talk about myself and have someone listen. It makes me wonder if you would listen like that. I don't know if it matters either way. I have to say something. Need to.

I hate that we're always apart. Are we forever doomed to be a time zone away at all times?

I'm going to learn Russian. I keep telling you that I'm going to, but I really mean it. I'll find the time. I hate that you have to work so hard to tell me things. I want to be able to make things easier for you. One day, when I've memorized all the words I'll ever need, I'll do all the work. I'll listen to you spit in anger in Russian about your

family, the team you've played against that night, the world. I'll listen to you praise me in Russian while I take your cock to the back of my throat and then swallow all your come. I'll let you say it all in Russian as long as I get to be there to hear every word.

I know it's so fucking stupid for me to think about this future where we haven't forced ourselves away from each other because we think that's what's best for us.

I'm so scared at how fast time is slipping away. For so long, I've been thinking about how it'll all need to end eventually, that we'll both walk away and move on without each other. Lately, though, our kisses taste like maybe we could have something more. I desperately want to ask you if you feel it, too.

I refuse to look back at what I've written, but I know that it's the same shit over and over. We've been playing this game for so long. I keep tripping on the same trap again and again.

Oh fuck oh fuck I hope I didn't tell you.

The way you make me feel!!! So fucking crazy!!!

I love you so so so much. I am in love with you, Ilya. Oh god. I want to tell you so bad. I want you to say it back.

You visited me!!!! You care about me!!!! Please come to my cottage. Please please please please please. I want you there so bad. Please fuck me and then help me make dinner. Please play pretend if only for a few days.

Do you remember the first time you skated on the ice?

I don't. I was so young. My parents put me in lessons. Apparently, I impressed everyone with how good I was. I was so good that my future was forged for me then and there. I don't remember my first time on the ice, and I don't remember learning the rules to hockey, or even the names of anyone on my first team. If someone asked me tomorrow to stop and forget everything that I know about hockey, I would laugh in their face. I would tell them it's all I know. I would tell them that everything is muscle memory. Everything is natural. I love it. I can't forget it. I can't stop.

Do you think you could?