Irina's

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Irina's

by PeaceLilies

Summary

Ilya Rozanov has always wanted to open his own bar. When the opportunity presents itself, he manages to make his dreams come true, and opens up his own place. He meets fussy food writer Shane Hollander one night at the bar as Shane is assigned to do a write-up on the new hot spot. What starts out as a quippy, slightly antagonistic relationship, turns into a sweet romance...

Notes

I've been working on this fic since May 2024. It took me a million years to finally finish it but she's done and I'm so glad lol This story is meant to be low angst. Just a bunch of sweetness of two guys falling in love over a bar top.
Thank you, as always, to Cal for beta and editing and encouraging me to finish this fic. I owe you my eternal gratitude.
Enjoy! 💖💖

I don't have a posting schedule, at least once a week? On Thursdays? We'll see what speaks to me lol

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Svetlana decides to help a friend

February

Svetlana Vetrova liked men.

She liked them in the same way that she liked manicures and designer dresses and tropical vacations. They were nice to have on occasion but not required for everyday living.

She hadn't dated anyone since high school and she wasn't interested in that changing any time soon. She was perfectly content with living the single life and hooking up with attractive (albeit boring) men when the mood struck.

But there was something about this particular man that made her pause.

He didn't make her want to date or get married. They were friends, kind of, with benefits. He was handsome and charming and funny and he was *fantastic* in bed. He was Russian, too, which was a plus. Straight-off-the-boat Russian, which her mother would love, but she wasn't going to marry him, so that point was moot.

No, Svetlana wasn't interested in dating or marrying Ilya Rozanov, but the crazy part was that she was thinking about any kind of commitment at all.

A business deal, specifically.

Svetlana was very good at business. She had her MBA and had been working on the business and marketing team for the Montreal Voyageurs for the last few years. She was smart and savvy and the story Ilya was telling her had her mind whirring.

They were sitting in Ilya's small one bedroom apartment drinking the most incredible martinis Svetlana had ever had while Ilya made them blini, dressed in nothing but his black boxer briefs.

It was unfair how distracting he was, looking the way he did. Athletic, with broad shoulders and a trim waist and long fingers attached to big, competent hands. His left arm, from shoulder to wrist, was covered in tattoos, and he had one very dumb snarling bear tattoo on his left pec that Svetlana liked to tease him about.

She was sitting on a bar stool at his kitchen counter, wearing one of his t-shirts, watching and listening.

They had met three years ago at a trendy Montreal cocktail bar where Ilya had been the head bartender. He had been hard to miss, being over six feet tall, with a head of golden-brown curls. He was incredibly striking; sharp cheekbones, hazel eyes that always sparkled with playfulness, handsome stubble, and a cleft in his chin. His smile was crooked and sexy. His nose was slightly crooked, too, probably from being broken, but it only added to the rugged air about him.

He also made some of the best cocktails that Svetlana had ever tasted.

They had hit it off almost immediately and had hooked up that night at his place, right down the street from the bar. They saw one another fairly regularly now. Neither of them were attached or interested in pursuing a relationship but it was nice to be able to speak Russian together and bond over the lack of Russian cuisine in Montreal and hockey, though they liked different teams. A bit of friendly competitiveness never hurt anyone.

And there was the mind-blowing sex, of course.

They'd slowly gotten to know one another over the years of their hookups but this was the most intimate that Ilya had ever gotten with her. Maybe it was because it was almost three A.M. and they'd been drinking and were coming off of several hours of great sex. She had no idea… but the cat was out of the bag now.

"You want to open your own bar?" she repeated, speaking in Russian.

Ilya glanced over one muscular shoulder and nodded.

"Yeah," he replied, turning back to the blini. "I want to name it after my mother. Make it something that's… cozy. Welcoming. A place for people to come before a night out or for a nightcap. My mother liked hosting people. She didn't get to do it often because my father was an asshole. But you could tell how happy it made her when people came over."

Svetlana watched the strong lines of Ilya's back as he worked at the stove, considering all of this information.

She knew that Ilya's mother had taken her own life. That Ilya had found her. That he had been twelve years old. They didn't talk about how any of that made him feel but this admission felt like Ilya spilling his guts.

And fuck… she wanted to *help* him.

When the hell had she gotten so sentimental?

Ilya placed the plate of blini in front of her, topped with some powdered sugar and raspberries.

"It might not be very realistic or likely but," he shrugged. "A man can dream…"

Svetlana looked down at the plate and then up at Ilya. He smiled at her and she felt herself smile back.

“Tell me more,” she said, accepting the fork he handed her and cutting into the blini. She ate a piece and sighed. It was delicious.

“More of what?” Ilya asked, sitting on the other stool.

“About your dream bar.”

Ilya cut a piece of blini and ate it, thinking.

“I want it to be small. Maybe like, twenty seats. Curated cocktail menu, some wine, very select beers. Russian finger foods.”

Svetlana chuckled. “We do need more of that. Russian cuisine, I mean.”

“We do… and it would be different.”

She nodded, taking another bite of blini.

“Why a bar?”

Ilya shrugged. “Why not? I’m a good bartender. I think I’m okay at business, though I’d have to find backers. I like taking care of people.”

“And flirting.”

Ilya laughed. “And flirting, yes.”

Svetlana chuckled.

She ate another piece of blini and watched Ilya.

Yeah.

She was going to help him.

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April

Svetlana sat down at the end of the bar, brushing her hair over her shoulder, and slightly adjusted the single strap of her asymmetrical top. She was the only person seated, everyone else bustling about, getting ready before they opened for service. She’d sweet talked her way inside, chit-chatting with the general manager, who had let her in.

So now she waited.

She could hear Ilya. His laugh was loud. Infectious. He emerged from the back a few moments later, carrying a box of beer. He was dressed in a white shirt, the sleeves rolled up, revealing his tattoos, and muscular forearms.

He was laughing and chatting with one of the bar backs, his English heavily accented, before he turned to place the beer on the cooler behind the bar. His face shifted, confused, as he spotted Svetlana.

“What are you doing here?” he asked her, in Russian, moving closer to her end of the bar.

“Sit,” she said to him.

“I have to prep,” he replied gently, though he leaned over the bar, watching her.

“You can listen for a few minutes then,” she hummed and rested a small pile of paper on the bar, neatly stapled.

She had been working on this business proposal and plan over the course of the last few weeks. It had come easily and had made sense as she wrote it up. She’d looked into all of her financials and knew that she could afford to be the primary, possibly the *only* , backer for opening the bar.

She’d done the math about how long it would take for her to get money back on her investment in best case and worst case scenarios. She had outlined steps to take to build a business and the potential risks and things to optimize for.

Ilya blinked at the business proposal.

“I want to back your bar,” she continued. “You can pick the location, the design, the menu. But I’ll be co-owner and I’d like to take on a few bartending shifts. I get a cut of the profits, at least ten percent.”

Ilya’s eyes were huge. He was staring at her as if she had grown four heads and a tail. Svetlana smiled back. She loved this. It was fun, having the element of surprise. Ilya, always so calm, cool, and collected, looked a bit taken aback.

“You’re serious?”

Svetlana nodded and examined her impeccable nails. Charlotte’s work was always flawless.

“Like a heart attack.” She looked back at Ilya. “You can think about it. You don’t have to make any decisions right now, but I want to help. I drew up a whole business plan. Read it. Ask me any questions.”

Ilya turned the packet of pages toward himself, flipping through it, eyes scanning the pages.

Svetlana leaned in, resting her hand on top of one of Ilya’s on the bar, his eyes lifted to meet hers. “I really want to help, Ilya. Seriously. I love your idea… and I love that you’d do it for your mother.”

His eyes searched her face as they both looked at each other, assessing. After a moment, he nodded. He looked surprised, as if he couldn’t quite believe that anyone would do something like this for him, before he schooled his expression.

“I’ll take a look and let you know.”

Svetlana nodded and smiled. “Good.”

“You want a drink?” he asked, taking the papers from her. He rolled them up and slid the roll into the back pocket of his jeans.

“A double, if you would.”

Ilya laughed. “Of course.”

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About a week later, Svetlana was back in Ilya’s apartment, sitting by his open bedroom window, sharing a cigarette.

She was watching his profile as he looked out the window, appreciating the masculine lines of his face, and the way his curls fell just so. She reached out, tucking some of the unruly strands behind his ear.

In a different life, were her priorities different, she probably wouldn’t have minded settling down with Ilya. But as it stood, the idea of commitment to anyone other than herself, made her queasy.

Ilya turned to face her.

“I considered your offer,” he said, holding the cigarette out to Svetlana. She took it.

“And?” She took a drag off the cigarette, releasing the smoke out of the corner of her mouth toward the open window.

“I accept.”

Svetlana smiled knowingly, tapping ash into the plate they were using as a makeshift ashtray . “I knew you would.”

Ilya chuckled. “Of course you did.”

“We’ll have to sit down with a lawyer. Make it all official.”

“You’re seriously okay with just… paying?”

Svetlana chuckled. “I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t. And I get a percentage of the profits, so, it’s not like this is for free.”

Ilya nodded. “It’s still a lot of money.”

“And I have a trust fund.”

Ilya went quiet.

She offered him the cigarette back and he accepted it, taking a long drag. He was quiet for a long time, holding the smoke before releasing it, looking away from her.

“It’s a big risk.”

“I know, Ilya.”

He looked up at her. “This,” he said, motioning between the two of them. “Complicates things, too.”

“How so?”

“Don’t mix business and pleasure. Isn’t that the saying?”

Svetlana shrugged. “If you don’t think I can separate sex and business, then you don’t know me at all.”

Ilya huffed a laugh.

“Besides. I like you. As a friend.”

Ilya smiled at her. “You like me because I’m good in bed.”

“It helps. You can be a terrible friend most of the time.”

Ilya shook his head but he was smiling.

“You don’t think *you* can separate business and sex?”

Ilya shrugged. “I just want to be respectful of my new business partner.”

“Oh, what a gentleman.” Svetlana rolled her eyes and shoved him playfully. “I can handle myself.”

Ilya smiled at her. “I know. Thank you.”

“You can thank me once you actually sign the paperwork.”

He nodded. “Okay.”

Ilya finished the cigarette and put it out. He offered Svetlana his hand. Svetlana looked at it and smiled, taking it.

“Here’s to a new business venture?”

“To a new business venture.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Ilya opens his bar

A Year Later…

Ilya stood on the sidewalk in front of his storefront. He just stood there, taking it all in. He'd been in the space several times over the course of its renovations and even after the renovations had finished.

They were about a month and a half into opening and it still felt surreal.

This was real. And *his.*

The bar was in a gorgeous old brick building on the ground floor with apartments above. Ilya had moved into one of the apartments that had been for rent, seizing the opportunity when it had presented itself. It had been incredibly thrilling, a dream come true… to own a bar and live above it.

The facade was painted a soft pink and the name of the bar, written in elegant script, graced the glass window that looked into the bar.

Irina's.

Soft pink velvet curtains were pulled back to reveal the interior. Two elegant tables for two right at the window, then three tables for two against the right wall made up of exposed brick, across from the gorgeous granite bar that could seat eight, pink velvet and gold barstools all neatly lined up. In the back, a crushed pink velvet booth that could seat four.

Ilya loved seeing it. It was a bittersweet feeling, though he felt that the sweet outweighed the bitter.

This was a small gesture. A tiny tribute to his mother that he thought she would appreciate. He wished she could be here with him, to see it, experience it. She'd probably have a lot to say about the menu.

Ilya walked up to the door and unlocked it, stepping inside, turning on the lights. He was always the first to arrive and he liked it that way, getting to enjoy what he had made. He walked across the wood floor to get to the other side of the bar and headed into the kitchen to store his things, sliding his phone into the pocket of his jeans, before he started prepping for the evening.

Ilya was literally living his dream.

He and Svetlana made a surprisingly good team. She had been an important asset to Ilya as he worked through the process of starting a business. Getting things registered, getting a CPA, finding a building, hiring a crew for renovations, buying furniture.

It had been *a lot* but it had all paid off.

Irina's had gotten off to an incredible start, thanks to his and Svetlana's connections.

The menu had been small at first; four select cocktails, two wines, and a single beer, as well as three different finger foods. Ilya was slowly expanding the cocktails and adding a few more wines and beers.

They had needed something to start with, testing things out, and it had been helpful to see what people gravitated towards and what they were looking for.

Ilya had brought in people he knew from the Montreal food scene. People he knew had said they would like to work for him if he were to ever open his own place, people he knew who were trustworthy and talented. Former coworkers and managers.

Word of mouth had done a great deal of legwork, bringing in all kinds of people Ilya had met over the years as a bartender. Regulars from other bars he had worked at and other bartenders, even front and back of house staff at restaurants he'd once passed through as he'd gained more experience.

Svetlana had brought colleagues and contacts she had from the NHL and it had only been up from there.

Ilya was trying not to get his hopes up too much. It was possible that *Irina's* was just the next trendy thing and the popularity would die down as the novelty of the place wore off. There was a lot of reliance on Ilya's reputation as an incredible bartender. And he knew he was incredible. But people's interest was fickle.

Irina's had been mentioned on local social media as a new bar/restaurant to keep on your radar for that summer, which had been exciting, and had certainly helped boost interest.

Ilya was confident in his abilities. He was confident in his fellow bartenders. But managing a business and making that business a staple in a competitive culinary market was stressful. The pressure was real.

Ilya had more or less quit smoking cold turkey when he'd noticed how quickly he'd been going through cigarettes, relying heavily on them to cope. It didn't help that they were so expensive, either. He'd switched out the habit for going to the gym more often instead. It had made the stress feel more manageable.

He still had moments of weakness, but they were few and far between.

He just couldn't get too cocky about any of this. He wanted to succeed… and he had employees to take care of now, too.

He had to trust himself and his team.

“Yo! What’s up, Captain?!”

Ilya looked up from where he was prepping his garnishes and smiled at Cliff Marlow and Wyatt Hayes. Hazy had worked with Ilya at *Bar Cloakroom* , the last job Ilya had had, and the one he’d held the longest. Ilya had been there for close to a decade, acting as beverage manager, helping to train staff, curating a menu, and managing the bar stock. Hazy had been one of his bartenders. Cliff was a chef and had worked at Ilya’s job before *Cloakroom* , a restaurant called *beba.*

Ilya greeted them both, letting them know what they needed, and what they were out of. He’d need to be sure that they put in another order before Friday. Harris Drover, their host, was the next person to arrive. He acted like Ilya’s second in command, helping with placing orders, scheduling staff, and managing the bar’s social media account.

Harris’s boyfriend, Troy Barrett, was one of Ilya’s other full-time bartenders besides Wyatt. Harris and Troy had met at a service industry party that Ilya had put on one year with some of the other staff from *Cloakroom.*

Ilya accepted all credit for getting Harris and Troy together, since he was the one who had told them both that they had feelings for each other. They were a very cute couple and Ilya was very happy for them. They were also very good at their jobs.

Slowly, the rest of the staff started to trickle in.

Svetlana would be joining them for the later half of the night.

Ilya asked Wyatt about his sister and her wife and their son. He talked to Harris about his and Troy’s dog, Chiron, who Ilya loved, and who made him want a dog of his own. Cliff and Zane Boodram were in the kitchen, prepping, and Ilya went back to check on them, particularly Bood, who had just welcomed his first baby, Milo, with his wife Cassie.

Leah Campbell, their only server, who would assist the guests seated at the tables, had recently returned from her honeymoon. Her husband, Max, promised to stop by for a drink that evening.

About a half hour before the bar opened, Ilya gathered up the staff to thank them, prep them for the evening, so there were no surprises in things they might be low on, and give them a little pep talk. A line had already formed outside. The entire space, due to its size, was first come, first serve. Excited anticipation filled Ilya.

He loved this.

He loved having a full house, talking with guests, making them feel at home, entertaining them, giving them great drinks, and great service.

Every night was exciting and it all felt too good to be true, in a way.

At night, after closing the bar, Ilya would sometimes find himself wide awake, wondering when the other shoe would drop. When would this all come crashing down on him?

He had worked hard to get here. He had fled his home country for the safety of Canada. With no living family besides an estranged brother, there had been no reason for him to stay in Russia, particularly if he couldn't be his whole self there.

Ilya missed it, sometimes. The familiarities of his native language and culture… but it felt better being in Canada as an out bisexual man. He had built a life here. He had the bar, he had friends. It was a lot safer.

But he couldn't always help the remnants of his past creeping up on him. The old worry about when things would go wrong.

They hadn't so far.

He just had to keep moving.

It was game time.

The lights were dimmed, candles were lit, music was turned on, and everyone was in their place.

The doors opened and the first few guests stepped inside. Harris greeted them with his usual cheerful demeanor, directing people to the bar or tables, depending. The place was full within ten minutes of opening and Harris was taking down names and numbers for their wait list.

Ilya smiled at the people sitting in front of him, giving them menus, introducing himself. He enjoyed people knowing him, being excited to try his drinks. He liked seeing repeat customers.

He shook hands and charmed and flirted a bit.

He loved his work.

Ilya worked the bar with Wyatt, the two of them bantering back and forth, before Svetlana joined them for the second half of the evening. The bar opened at four P.M. and last call was at twelve forty-five, with the bar closing at one A.M.

There was always a short lull between the pre and post dinner rush. It was just enough time to settle and breathe and restock before things picked up again as people finished dinner and were in search of an end-of-the-night spot or an in-between before heading out to a club.

Working always left Ilya in a flow state. Time passed quickly and he wasn't thinking about anything else except what he was doing at that moment. He knew the menu back to front and mixing drinks was second nature. He didn't have to think hard about making them.

"For you," Ilya said as he placed a very pink cocktail, the current signature drink of the bar, in front of a woman sitting by herself. She was very pretty, with olive skin and light eyes,

dressed in a blue top with long nails painted a shimmery silver. He gave her a wink and she smiled at him, her eyes sliding away.

It was a great night.

They had been busy, having to turn people away. Ilya was sure that potential patrons would want a larger space but he liked the intimacy (and exclusivity) of a small bar. It allowed everyone to feel taken care of and for drinks and snacks to be quality.

At the end of the night, as had become tradition, Ilya made mini-cocktails for everyone, and Bood brought out potato and cheese pierogi and an array of pickles.

Ilya was the last to leave, loading the dishwasher and letting it run. He made sure the bar was sufficiently cleaned, then went back to grab his keys. He turned off the lights and locked up, heading upstairs to his apartment.

Ilya opened the door, flicked on the lights, and then closed the door behind him, locking it.

The apartment wasn't very large. It was a one bedroom, with a decently sized kitchen, a small-ish living space, the bedroom, and en suite bathroom. It was slightly larger than his last place, which made him hopeful about getting a dog.

Windows that lined the back wall of the living room space looked out onto the street, though it was relatively quiet, given that they were a little removed from the main thoroughfare.

Ilya kicked off his shoes, unbuttoned his shirt the rest of the way, peeling it off as he made his way to his bedroom. He stripped, dumped his clothes in his hamper, and showered. His mind was surprisingly empty, relaxed.

It had been a good night tonight. Fun. Profitable. It had been good to see regulars he hadn't seen in a while and to see familiar faces of people who might become regulars. He liked knowing people enjoyed his work and his space so much that they wanted to keep coming back.

Finished with his shower and dried off, he crawled into bed, flopping onto his belly, and dragged a pillow over to hold. He was exhausted and for the first time since the restaurant had opened, he fell asleep, not once thinking about things going horribly wrong.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Shane mostly loves his job

Chapter Notes

Posting Schedule: 3 chapters every Thursday (7 weeks of posting!)

May

Shane Hollander mostly loved his job.

Like, ninety percent of the time, he loved it.

He was a staff writer for *Cult Montreal* , a mainstay magazine in the city that covered everything from the arts, to food, to news, to music, to local events. He'd always enjoyed writing, particularly about food, and landing a job at *Cult* had been a dream come true.

He got to go to amazing restaurants and meet incredibly creative people in the food industry scene. He had loved being able to do write ups about Asian cuisine in Montreal, a city that was so heavily influenced by Europe, and it had gotten him the full-time gig he had now.

Shane had been working at *Cult* for about six years and he had no intention of leaving, though his eyes were set on the position of editor, hopefully in the very near future.

He got to work with some pretty amazing people, too. Rose Landry and Jean-Jacques Boiziau were two of his fellow writers and closest friends at the magazine. Rose wrote for the Film & TV portion of the magazine, while J.J. worked directly with Shane for Food & Drink.

Moving into the summer was one of the more exciting times in Food & Drink, with several new restaurants and bars opening their doors for the summer rush. Shane had been keeping his ear to the ground and had set his eyes on a new izakaya that was slated to open in late May.

But when he had arrived at his desk and checked on his assignments, he was very disappointed to find that he had been assigned to write up a review of a new cocktail bar instead.

This was the ten percent of his job that he didn't like. He couldn't turn down an assignment from his boss, whether he wanted to write about the subject or not. He had enough seniority that he usually managed to have some sway, but sometimes the volume of articles needed outweighed your interest as an individual contributor.

Shane wasn't usually a complainer. He would do his job and do it well because that was what was expected of him but he was annoyed at having been given an assignment for something he was completely ambivalent about.

He didn't like cocktails, first of all, and he had absolutely no interest in or knowledge of Russian cuisine. And maybe that was a bit small minded of him, but he knew what he liked and what interested him… and this was most certainly not it.

"What's with the long face?"

Shane looked up from his desktop to see Rose standing at his desk. She was dressed so fashionably in a tank top blouse, high-waisted shorts, and high top sneakers. Her dark hair was down, the elegant waves falling around her face and down to her shoulders.

Shane let out a long suffering sigh.

"Theriault didn't assign me *Omori* ."

"He didn't?! Really?! But you'd said that you really wanted to write for them!"

"I know! That's what I don't get. We had a whole conversation about it. I thought I had it in the bag. He put me on Irina's instead. Which like, I don't know fuck all about that place."

Rose's brows were furrowed but Shane saw her dark eyes sparkle with recognition.

"Irina's? The new cocktail bar?"

"Yeah. You know about it?"

"Hell yeah. Everyone does."

She came around Shane's desk and waved her hands at him to move his chair. He did. She bent over, opening up a new browser window and typed something in. A few search results popped up and Rose clicked on the top result.

It was a write up for *Bar Cloakroom* . The picture accompanying the article was of a very striking man with curly, golden-brown hair and a crooked, sexy smile. He was standing, leaning against the bar, arms crossed over his broad chest. He looked like a model but apparently he was the (now former) beverage director.

"Ilya Rozanov," Rose said. "He's the co-owner and cocktail connoisseur of Irina's. There was a little blurb written up in *Eater* about the place. You should check it out. It's supposed to be pretty great but difficult to get into. They only seat twenty-two people. No standing room."

"What? Seriously? That's a bit much, don't you think?"

Rose shrugged. “I don’t know. Ilya has a great reputation in the bar scene. I can see why he’d be popular. You could always find out why the limited seating when you go. I’m surprised you haven’t heard of him.”

“I don’t like cocktails.”

Rose laughed. “Oh my god. I don’t understand how you can be a food writer and not like cocktails.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “I’ll drink them if I have to but they’re not my favorite. Just give me a basic ass beer, or like, a beaujolais.”

“You’re so weird.”

“No. I’m totally normal. I just know what I like!”

Rose smiled knowingly at him. “You like what’s safe.”

“Yes,” Shane replied stiffly. “I do. But I can be brave sometimes.”

“Occasionally,” Rose said with a knowing smile, making Shane roll his eyes. “Well, this could be fun for you regardless. Even if the cocktails don’t live up to the hype, which I doubt, Ilya is *very nice* to look at.”

She wasn’t wrong about that.

“I’m surprised you haven’t been,” Shane noted, changing the subject. Rose, fashionable and popular, was always going to some of the best places for after parties or gallery openings and she knew a lot of people in the art and film industry. J.J. was much the same, only his connections were directly within the food industry.

“Not yet. It’s been too hard to get in! You’ll have to give me all the deets.”

Shane smiled at her. “Sure.”

Rose laughed softly. “Good. Check out that article, I think it’ll help give you a good idea of what you’re getting yourself into.”

“I will. Thanks, Rose.”

“Anytime. We still on for lunch?”

“Of course.”

“Excellent! I’ll come get you when I’m done. I’ll be running around a bit today.”

Shane chuckled. “Okay. No problem.”

Rose smiled brightly at him and blew him a kiss before she left to head to her own desk.

Shane shook his head, smiling, and turned back to his screen, once again greeted with Ilya Rozanov's handsome face.

He typed in *irina bar eater* into his search bar and clicked on the link to the article.

It was short, a brief blurb about the bar.

Irina's

This intimate gem found in Old Montreal is the brainchild of cocktail genius Ilya Rozanov. A menu as small as the space contains curated cocktails and small bites to satisfy both the adventurous patron and anyone looking for creature comforts. Stay for a pre-dinner drink or post-dinner cocktail, this itty-bitty spot has a little something for everyone.

The verbiage seemed a bit hyperbolic but otherwise… promising.

Shane clicked on the social media links, looking at perfectly posed pictures of refreshing, artful looking cocktails and food, as well as candids of what must be the staff.

Shane paused over a picture of Rozanov. He was making a cocktail, curls tucked behind one ear, a wide smile on his face, his shirt unbuttoned, giving a glimpse of golden skin, and a gold chain. Shane's stomach fluttered a little and he scrolled away to look at another picture.

He couldn't let some good-looking bartender distract him from his work. He had a job to do. And he didn't need further reminding of his very single status… or the fact that he hadn't been laid in almost a year.

He closed out of the socials for the bar and sighed. He supposed he should try and give the bar a call and see if he could get a reservation. They didn't open until four, so he had a few hours.

Shane worked on some of his other tasks, following up about a few articles that had come back for general editing.

He stopped to talk with J.J. about *Irina's* and found that J.J. hadn't been but knew friends who had and said that they had loved it. This Rozanov guy was apparently the second coming in the world of mixed drinks and Shane had to admit, his curiosity was piqued.

If anything, he was maybe the best person to write about the place, given that he didn't like cocktails. If he ended up liking what he had at *Irina's* , then the place *had* to be good, right?

Right.

Rose came to his desk and they went to lunch. They got poke, Rose catching Shane up on her dating life, which was pretty active, but relatively bleak in regards to interesting suitors. She'd been seeing a surfer, apparently, but he had turned out to be far too much for her, constantly asking deep, existential questions. She lamented the lack of good men to date and that she'd be happy to meet a baker who was just a regular guy.

This certainly didn't help her case as she tried to tell Shane about her friend's very attractive single brother. Shane politely declined. He knew he should probably take her up on the offer… but after hearing her horror stories, he didn't think he could stomach a date at the moment.

Shane had been out for about three years, having figured out he was gay relatively late compared to most, spending many of his formative years in hockey, where things were less than open and accepting.

He and Rose had attempted to date their first year at *Cult* and it had been Rose who had helped Shane realize that he actually wasn't straight.

He still felt like he was trying to figure himself out. He had slept with various men over the years and he had had one sort of long-ish term relationship. But he wouldn't say he was experienced.

He just hadn't met *the one* and he wasn't sure if he ever would.

But he supposed that was on him, too. He needed to put himself out there. Saying yes to getting set up, going out to clubs, taking J.J. up on him being his wingman. Nothing would change if he didn't do something about it. He couldn't just expect the right guy to simply walk into his life with no effort at all.

Maybe when he was done with the article on *Irina's* . That was a good deadline. Something he could plan for. He liked having a plan.

After lunch, it was back to the office. He called *Irina's* and inquired about a reservation and was told by the very kind man on the other end of the line that the restaurant was first come, first serve. He recommended that Shane show up about a half hour before opening to be one of the first in line or he could add his name to their day of wait list.

Shane thought that that was a bit much but he figured he'd get there forty minutes early to be sure he got a spot. He'd never queued that early for a bar or restaurant… ever. And he was kind of miffed about it.

This place better have the best canapes and cocktails he'd ever fucking had, that was for sure.

He supposed that Rose was right though. Even if it wasn't as great as all the hype, at least he'd have a very attractive bartender to look at.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Shane goes to Irina's

Shane arrived at *Irina's* forty-five minutes before it opened. He wasn't the first person there, a few other people had arrived around the same time he did, but he was the first in line. It felt ridiculous to have to come so early to guarantee a spot in the place, but hopefully this would be the first and only time he would have to do this.

He waited, as patiently as possible, peeking in the window to see the staff prepping for the evening.

He spotted Ilya Rozanov, who was hard to miss. He was… tall. And broad.

Shane watched him through the window as he talked to a beautiful woman with blonde hair so light it was almost white. She laughed at something he said and it was very hard to look away from his responding smile, wide and bright, making his eyes crinkle.

Shane's heart did a weird stutter step in his chest. He looked away from the window and back to his phone. Thirty-seven minutes until opening.

Fuck.

He texted his closest friend, Hayden, about his situation. Lamenting the wait and how he was sweating through his shirt and how much he just wanted to get this whole thing over with.

Hayden and Shane had known one another since Juniors, both of them pursuing other careers outside of hockey. Hayden was a physical education teacher and a dad to four kids. Hayden's eldest children, twin girls Jade and Ruby, were Shane's goddaughters.

Hayden was currently at a soccer game and sent several pictures of the twins on the pitch, then another picture of his son, Arthur, wearing oversized sunglasses and smiling hugely, and then the last picture was of Amber, his youngest, sleeping on his wife Jackie's shoulder.

Shane smiled. He loved the Pikes. Hayden had been the second person Shane had come out to after he and Rose had had the revelatory conversation about his sexuality. He had been very accepting and open, though it had taken him a little while to wrap his mind around the idea.

Jackie and the kids hadn't even blinked and they had all come with Shane to the last few Pride parades in the city. It was nice, having so much support. Shane felt lucky.

He spent most of his time waiting texting Hayden, when the door to the bar finally opened. A stocky, rugged man with glasses, combed back blond hair, and a neat beard peeked out.

“Hey folks! Welcome! Come on in!”

He propped the door open and Shane followed after him, walking up to the host stand. It was blessedly cool inside.

“Table or bar?” the man asked.

“Bar, please,” Shane replied.

The man blinked pretty green eyes at him from behind his glasses. “Oh. You’re the food writer who called, right?”

Shane felt his cheeks heat. “Yes.”

“Remind me of your name?”

“Shane,” Shane replied. “Hollander.”

“Yes! Right! So glad you made it! Make yourself at home.”

“Thank you.”

Shane stepped into the restaurant and went to the bar, picking a seat at the end. He looked around, taking everything in.

The place smelled… good. Like lavender and something else inexplicable. He liked the ambiance. Not super fancy but not super casual either. Sophisticated. Lots of pink but all very tasteful pastel and blush colors. He liked the chairs. They were comfortable and the velvet was soft.

He looked up as a menu was placed in front of him and a water glass appeared. Behind the bar, right in front of Shane, was Ilya Rozanov. The man was a lot more imposing in person than Shane would have expected.

He was wearing a maroon colored button down, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, revealing muscular forearms, one of which was covered in tattoos. Two of the buttons of his shirt were undone and Shane could see a gold chain and a peek of plush pecs dusted in dark hair… and a tattoo of some kind?

Rozanov lifted his eyes after he’d finished pouring Shane’s water and met Shane’s. His eyes looked gold in the low light and Shane swallowed involuntarily.

“Welcome to Irina’s,” he said, his voice deep, and heavily accented. It was… sexy. And so was his smile. “Let me know if you have any questions.”

“Will do,” Shane managed to reply. “Thanks.”

He looked down at the menu in front of him, all of a sudden very nervous, his hands clammy. He felt ridiculous. It wasn't the first time he'd ever met an attractive man and it certainly wouldn't be the last.

Get it together, Hollander. Jesus.

Shane sighed, sliding on his glasses from where he'd had them hooked on the front of his shirt and perused the menu. It was long and thin, on good quality cardstock that had a kind of sparkle to it. It was a nice touch. The menu itself was small, which made sense. There were about eight cocktails on the menu now, four wines (red, white, rose, and bubbles), and two beers. Shane was tempted to get one of the beers, but that wasn't why he was here.

Given that he wasn't entirely sure which cocktail to try first, he figured he could ask the man himself for a suggestion.

Shane flipped the menu to look at his food options. They were all bite sized foods, things you could snack on, as opposed to meals.

There were: cheese and potato pierogi, assorted pickles, smoked salmon canape, *grenki*, which was described as a fried black bread crouton with garlic, and *syrniki*, noted as being fried fluffy pancakes with Russian cottage cheese.

Intriguing.

"So," came the sexy accented voice and Shane looked up again. Rozanov was leaning against the bar, looking at Shane with a little smile. His attention was solely on Shane, as if he was the only patron at the bar. Shane's eyes darted down to his exposed chest, then back up to his plush lips pulled into a playful smile, and hazel eyes sparkling with mirth. "You are the fancy writer guy. Cannot read a website."

Shane blanched.

"Excuse me?"

The smile on Rozanov's face widened, going lopsided.

"Harris told me you had called to make a reservation. Shane Hollander, yes?"

Shane nodded. "Yeah. I have a deadline. I wanted to be sure I could get a spot."

Rozanov chuckled. "Of course."

He was very obviously teasing Shane and it was kind of rude and… also kind of hot. All of his attention, frustrating as it was, was completely on Shane…

He offered his hand and Shane shook it. It was warm and calloused and *large* .

"Nice to meet you, Shane Hollander."

Shane smiled back at him. "Nice to meet you, too, Ilya Rozanov."

“Ilya.”

Shane chuckled. “Ilya, then.”

“May I call you Shane?”

“Of course.”

Ilya’s smile turned warm. “Any questions? Do you know what you would like?”

Shane blinked at him and then he managed to get a hold of himself. “I’m not the biggest fan of cocktails… what would you suggest?”

Ilya considered him for a moment, his expression going serious, and thoughtful.

“What do you usually drink?” he asked, standing up to his full height, hands on the bar. He had nice hands; long fingers attached to broad palms with roads of veins on the back.

“Wine. I like reds. Beaujolais especially. And beer. The more basic the better.”

Ilya gave him a funny look, tilting his head to the side in consideration.

“You want something from the menu or something I can make you?”

“From the menu,” Shane clarified and then smiled, maybe a little wickedly. He was feeling slightly outmatched and it felt good to take some of the power back. “I’m doing a write up on your place, after all.”

Ilya nodded slowly, he was smiling, but Shane could tell that he was picking up what Shane was putting down.

“Well, I am not sure if there will be much you like, except *Summer Vibes* , the sangria. It is red wine.”

Shane grinned. “I’ll have that and one of each of the bites.”

“Okay,” Ilya replied. “Coming up.”

“Thank you.”

Ilya gave him a nod and a wink, which had Shane blushing despite himself, as he watched Ilya punch in his order, and then pour his drink.

The sangria was batched, which didn’t surprise Shane, so he didn’t get to see Ilya’s mixing skills in action, which was a bit disappointing.

He set the glass down in front of Shane, a hibiscus and strawberry garnishing the drink.

“Thanks.”

“Try it. I want to know what you think.”

Shane chuckled softly and took a sip. The drink was very good. Simple, sweet, a little dry, fruity, and definitely boozy. It was… perfect.

“It’s delicious.”

Ilya grinned. “I will tell Sveta you said that. It is her recipe.”

“I heard my name,” the beautiful blonde woman who Shane had glimpsed before said, sidling up to Ilya’s side. She had a slight accent as well, possibly also Russian. She was the other bartender working.

“Shane Hollander, this is Svetlana Vetrova. She is the co-owner of Irina’s. And part-time bartender.”

“Hello, Shane Hollander,” Svetlana said, her voice sultry. She had very blue eyes and, were Shane straight, he was sure he’d have been completely taken with her. She offered her hand and Shane shook it. Her nails were painted black and gold.

“Nice to meet you, Svetlana. Your sangria is amazing.”

Svetlana preened and smiled brightly. “Thank you! That’s so kind. I’m glad you like it.”

She looked at Ilya who looked back, his expression fond. Svetlana fluttered her lashes at him. “I told you it would be a hit.”

Ilya chuckled. “You did, yes.”

Svetlana made a soft, self-satisfied “hmm” noise, shrugging her shoulder, before turning her gaze back to Shane. “Lovely meeting you, Shane. We hope you enjoy your time with us tonight.”

“It was nice meeting you, too. Thank you.”

Svetlana gave him a flirty smile and then flitted away to tend to patrons at the other end of the bar. Ilya was watching after her, laughing softly. Shane wondered if there was something going on between them and he felt himself get disappointed at that. Which was very dumb.

“I’ll have to try one of yours next,” Shane said, calling Ilya’s attention back. Ilya’s eyes slid to him and he smiled at Shane.

“Oh yes? You will go out on a limb?”

“Whichever of your cocktails is the most popular. I’ll try it.”

“Okay,” Ilya chuckled. “It is a deal.”

Shane smiled and picked up his sangria, watching as Ilya grabbed a plate and utensils rolled in a napkin, setting them down in front of Shane, before moving away to greet new guests that were now sitting on his side of the bar.

Shane watched him and Svetlana as they interacted with other people at the bar and one another. Ilya was very charming. He laughed and smiled easily and he knew his shit. He mixed cocktails with the efficiency of someone who had been doing it for many years.

Shane watched the way his hands looked as he stirred drinks, the way his muscular forearms worked as he shook cocktails. He did everything with care and attention and the competency of it all was… kind of a turn on.

Shane shifted uncomfortably in his seat and tucked his hair behind his ear. If he was getting all worked up about a hot bartender flirting with him and doing his job well, then Shane knew he was in trouble. He really needed to get laid.

He sighed and tried to turn his attention back towards work, adjusting his glasses.

The tiny bar had filled up very quickly. The noise was surprisingly subdued but also lively. And comfortable. There was one server working the tables, two bartenders, and the host pulled double duty as part-server, part-host.

Shane took a few notes in the small notepad he had brought with him and sipped his sangria. His snacks arrived, brought over by the host, Harris, and Ilya.

“The pierogi are my mother’s recipe,” Ilya said softly, intimately, only for Shane to hear. “Bon appétit.”

Shane smiled and blushed. He went for the pierogi first. They were warm and fresh and… absolutely delicious. Super simple, just cheese and potato, but who would ever have a problem with dairy, starch, and carbs?

The information about the pierogi was something worth noting. Shane wasn’t sure if that was common knowledge but it was sweet and he jotted it down in his tiny notebook.

He sipped his water before trying the smoked salmon. It was good if smoked salmon, dill, and cucumber were your thing. The assortment of house-made pickles were expertly made, a nice crisp freshness for summer. Shane had never had *grenki* or *syrniki* before, given that he had never really had any interest in eating Russian cuisine.

The *grenki* looked like french fries if they were croutons and made of black bread. They were very crunchy and very heavy on the garlic. Shane liked them a lot but he could see them as being overwhelming for anyone with an allium sensitivity. He was glad he’d remembered to pack some gum.

Shane had some more sangria and then some more water before he tried the *syrniki* . They were tiny little fluffy pancakes topped in some kind of blueberry compote and a kind of whipped cream.

They were sweet, but not overly so. The blueberries added some extra sweetness but not anything overwhelming. Quite nice for something sweet-ish without washing out any of the sweeter cocktails on the menu.

Overall, Shane liked the menu. It could use a bit of evolving the longer the bar was open but it was a good place to start. Nothing that was completely out of this world, but definitely delicious. Comforting.

Ilya came back around, leaning over the bar again, and Shane could not stop staring at his pecs. They were *right there* . Had he opened another button on his shirt?

Shane forced his eyes back to Ilya's face and Ilya was looking at him as if he knew exactly what Shane had been looking at, and what he was thinking.

Shane felt his face go very warm.

"So," Ilya drawled. "How was the food?"

Shane coughed into his fist. "Um, good. Great. Everything was delicious."

Ilya smiled warmly at him. "I am happy to hear that. What was your favorite?"

"The pierogi were incredible. Simple, but absolutely delicious. The pancakes, too."

"Good. I'm glad." He stood up straight, still smiling at Shane. "Would you like the other drink?"

Shane smiled and nodded. "Yeah. Surprise me."

Ilya beamed.

"How do you feel about egg white?"

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Ilya intends to expand Shane's palate

"How do you feel about egg white?"

Shane Hollander blinked at him from behind his glasses and smiled. "I don't mind it."

"Perfect," Ilya replied and turned his attention momentarily away from Shane to grab a shaker and start making the most popular cocktail on his current menu.

Making the drink was like second nature and it gave Ilya time to reflect on the bespectacled man that was sitting behind him.

When Harris had told Ilya about food writer Shane Hollander calling to ask about a reservation, Ilya had been annoyed and somewhat amused. He had no idea who this Hollander guy was and it felt rather presumptuous of him to think he'd get a reservation just because he was a food writer.

At least he'd had the decency to be honest. There were plenty of critics and writers who weren't, lying about who they were, or sometimes trying to use their status to skip lines or have their drinks and/or meals comped.

It was gross and Ilya hated it.

He had been pretty set on being hospitable but coolly indifferent to the man when he came in for the pre-dinner service. Ilya assumed that he would be an obnoxious, bland looking white guy… only to find that Shane Hollander was anything but.

He was first, *very* attractive, and second, not white. He had hair that just brushed his shoulders, dark and glossy, with big dark eyes and a smattering of dark freckles that covered his cheeks and the bridge of his nose, which was unreasonably adorable. He had a sharp jawline and pretty pink lips and Ilya cursed himself for *pausing* .

Shane Hollander was very cute. A little nerdy maybe… but cute nonetheless.

Ilya liked the way he talked, with a hint of a Canadian accent. He wore glasses, which Ilya hadn't been expecting, and he looked even better with them on.

Ilya was pretty confident when it came to meeting attractive people. He usually sought them out. He loved flirting and being sexy and sexual when it was appropriate. He was always charming when he was working.

But he'd never met anyone who had thrown him for a loop like this. It had just been unexpected. He might have felt differently if Shane had just sat at the bar like any normal patron. But Ilya had gone in with an expectation and that expectation had been completely demolished.

To add insult to injury, the guy said he didn't like cocktails! Ilya was intent on remedying that.

On the plus side, Shane was definitely into Ilya and Ilya was very good at keeping his cards close to the vest. He could flirt and maybe annoy Shane a bit, but he knew that Shane was into him. Shane didn't need to know that Ilya knew this… or that maybe Ilya was into him, too.

His eyes kept lingering on Ilya's chest and mouth, which was flattering, and also useful. Ilya had unbuttoned an additional button on his shirt, just to see what would happen, and Shane hadn't let him down. His eyes had lingered and he'd blushed, which was so endearing. Ilya imagined that he was going to have a lot of fun playing with Shane Hollander.

Ilya had added all his ingredients to his shaker with ice. He popped the cap on, making sure it was secure, before shaking the mixture. He loved egg white cocktails, the only downside with them being that you needed to shake them for a long time in order to make the egg white foam properly.

He'd probably have to adjust the menu and limit how often they did the cocktails, simply because they were so labor intensive.

But he knew he made it look effortless… and sexy.

He finished his shaking and popped the shaker open with the heel of his hand. He had an elegant coupe glass waiting, placed a strainer over his mixer with a flourish as he poured the mix through the strainer, into the glass. He scooped out the foam with a spoon and topped the cocktail with a thin slice of strawberry.

Ilya whisked away Shane's empty glass, replacing it with the foamy pink cocktail. Shane's eyes were wide behind the frames of his glasses. He looked at the drink, then at Ilya.

"Which one is this?"

"Pink Drink," Ilya replied. "Gin, St. Germain, yuzu, fresh strawberry juice, and egg white."

Shane was looking at Ilya as he listened, then turned his eyes down, sniffing curiously at the drink. He reminded Ilya of a kitten, unsure of a treat it was being offered.

Adorable.

Shane picked up the glass and took a tentative sip. Ilya watched him, surprised to find himself eager to hear what Shane thought about his most popular cocktail.

Ilya watched him lick foam off his top lip and was even more surprised to feel heat trickle down his spine at the gesture. Shane's dark eyes lifted to meet his and *fuck* , that was

unexpectedly sexy. What the hell?

“It’s very good,” he said. “Not as sweet as I thought it would be. Refreshing. Bright. I like it.”

Ilya grinned. “See? And you thought you did not like cocktails. You just haven’t had anyone make them good enough.”

Ilya watched in fascination as Shane’s cheeks pinked and he glanced away.

“Well… maybe that’s the case.”

Ilya softened his smile to something sexier, resting his forearms on the bar, hands on his elbows. He was close enough to Shane that it was like they were the only two in the bar, sharing a secret.

“There is more where that came from,” he said and winked, before standing up, and walking away.

Svetlana caught his eye, raising a brow, her blue eyes darting to Shane, and then back at Ilya.

What’s going on there? was what her expression said.

Ilya shrugged and smiled at her. *Just having fun,* was his reply.

Shane didn’t stay long after he finished his last cocktail. He asked for the check and Ilya brought it over after comping his last drink.

“So,” Ilya said, sliding the small wooden clipboard with the receipt on it over to Shane. “Do you need a quote from me? For your article?”

Shane smiled at him, accepting the bill. “Not unless you want to give one.”

Ilya shrugged. “Not necessary. I hope you liked everything… and that you had a good time.”

“I did,” Shane replied, sounding genuine. “Thank you.”

Ilya nodded his head. “Have a good night, Shane Hollander.”

“Thank you. You, too, Ilya Rozanov.”

They shook hands and Ilya turned to greet his newest guests.

After Ilya had closed up and returned to his apartment, he got into bed and Googled *Shane Hollander* . He had never heard of him before and after seeing him… his interest was piqued.

He found a few of his articles, all of which were fairly well-written. The only picture Shane had of himself was apparently his headshot, which must have been from a few years ago

because his hair was short. He still looked cute, but Ilya definitely preferred the longer hair he had now.

Ilya checked out his Instagram, which was listed on his bio page from the magazine he worked for, but Ilya was disappointed to find that it was only pictures of food and drinks. There was the occasional picture of what must have been friends but literally no pictures of Shane at all.

Ilya scoured the internet to see if there was anything else out there about Shane Hollander, but could only find a few articles written up about him when he played hockey for the Junior league in Canada. Ilya found that interesting. He had also played in Juniors, back in Russia, and the similarity made him weirdly excited.

Besides that though, it didn't even look like he had a secret Instagram account for like, nude pics or anything. Very disappointing.

Eventually, Ilya put his phone away to try and sleep. He was just going to have to see if Shane kept coming to the bar and learn more about him that way.

***

June

"Your man is back," Svetlana purred over Ilya's shoulder as he prepped his garnishes for the evening.

"Hm?" he replied, glancing at her.

"The cute food writer guy. Dark hair, glasses, *freckles*. "

Ilya blinked and turned to look out the window. There was a line of people, as there always was, and at the front of the line, almost out of view, was Shane Hollander. Ilya was surprised to see him… but also… excited? His stomach fluttered weirdly. He wasn't sure how he felt about that.

"His name is Shane."

He looked at Svetlana, who was watching him knowingly.

"What?" he asked.

"Don't think I didn't miss you flirting with him. With your tits hanging out."

Ilya furrowed his brows at her, narrowing his eyes. "I did no such thing."

Svetlana arched a perfect brow at him. "You like him."

"I don't," Ilya replied. "He's a food snob and a nerd who doesn't like cocktails. He's *harshing the vibe.*"

“He seemed to enjoy the drinks you made him. He seemed to enjoy *you.* I feel like that's *exactly* your vibe.”

Ilya felt his cheeks heat uncomfortably and he frowned. Svetlana grinned at him wolfishly.

“Ilya!” she exclaimed, pushing her hand against his shoulder.

He rolled his eyes at her. “So he’s… attractive. That doesn’t make him any less annoying. Or boring.”

“Mm,” Svetlana hummed. “Then you won’t mind if I take care of him tonight?”

“I don’t care,” Ilya replied flippantly, though his chest constricted a little at the thought. Not that he didn’t trust Svetlana, she was very good at her job, she was good at almost everything, but there was a part of Ilya that wanted to take care of Shane…

Which was an absolutely ridiculous thought to have.

Svetlana giggled and turned on her heel, triumphant. Ilya just shook his head. He *didn’t* care.

He finished his task before gathering the crew around for their little “chat” before doors opened and then Harris let everyone in. Shane was one of the first people, sitting in the spot he’d occupied the last time he had been at the bar.

He caught Ilya’s eye and smiled, offering a small wave. Ilya smiled back before Svetlana swooped in.

Ilya wasn’t sure if he imagined it, but Shane seemed surprised, maybe even a bit disappointed, at having Svetlana make his drinks. He was perfectly nice to her, smiling and even laughing, but Ilya noticed the way his shoulders sagged a bit and he kept shooting furtive glances at Ilya when Svetlana was busy elsewhere.

Ilya tried to ignore him, taking care of his other patrons on his side of the bar.

This lasted a short while before Svetlana caught him.

“He’s asking for you,” she said, sounding surprised. “Like, he *asked* for you, specifically.”

Ilya looked at her, confused. “What?”

“He was nice about it. He’s sweet. But he asked if you could talk.”

Ilya poured the drink he’d been mixing. “Okay…”

He slid the glass to Svetlana. “This is for the man in the blue shirt.”

“Got it.” She smiled at Ilya. “Go get your man!”

“Shut up.”

She giggled and Ilya ignored her as he went to greet Shane.

“Mr. Hollander,” he drawled, coming to stand in front of Shane. “Back for more?”

Shane looked at him. He wasn’t wearing his glasses and Ilya didn’t miss the way his dark eyes traveled up Ilya’s torso to his face. He blinked and smiled. His hair was tucked adorably behind one ear and he was wearing a very nice outfit.

A white linen shirt, rolled up at the sleeves, and slate blue shorts with a woven belt. Ilya couldn’t see his shoes. He looked good. Stylish. And Ilya didn’t miss how nice his arms looked.

“I suppose so,” Shane replied, bringing Ilya back to reality.

“Need more information for your article?” he asked.

Shane smiled and shook his head. “No. Not quite. It’s almost done. Should be published sometime this week.”

Ilya bowed his head a little. “Congratulations.”

Shane’s cheeks flushed pink. It was cute… how easily he blushed, how pretty he looked like that. Ilya leaned on the bar.

“Was Sveta not doing a good job?”

Shane’s flush deepened and he looked alarmed. “No! No. She was fine. Great. Her drinks are wonderful, I just…”

Ilya smiled at him. “Ah, so you just want all of my attention then. I understand.”

Shane’s expression morphed into annoyance but his cheeks went even pinker if that was possible, traveling down his neck. “I wouldn’t go that far.”

Ilya laughed. “Have I finally won you over then? Expanded your palate enough? You have such boring taste.”

Shane huffed. “Are you this mean to all of your patrons?”

Ilya smiled lazily at him. “Only the ones I like,” he purred.

Shane’s entire face was now beet red and Ilya reveled in it.

God, he’s cute.

“Can I get you anything else? Are you hungry?” he asked, taking pity.

“I’m fine for now,” Shane replied, his expression easing a bit. “I just wanted to say hi.”

Ilya found himself softening, too. “Hi, then.”

They looked at one another for a moment and the unmistakable spark of interest flashed between them. Ilya felt it tickle the back of his neck, sliding down his spine.

“Hi,” Shane replied.

“Let me know if you need anything else.”

Shane nodded. “Okay.”

Ilya tapped his knuckle against the bar and offered Shane one more smile, before he got back to work.

Admittedly, he was distracted. It didn’t take away from his work, of course, but he found himself glancing in Shane’s direction, their eyes occasionally meeting. They would talk in lulls between patrons as Ilya teased and flirted with him, mostly making fun of Shane’s “terrible” taste in alcoholic beverages.

He liked that Shane gave as good as he got.

Shane finished his third cocktail and asked for the check. Ilya wished he could have spent a little more time talking with him but they were busier than usual that night since there had been a party of four ladies who were sitting at their booth and, according to Leah, one of the girls was navigating a bad breakup… so lots of alcohol was required.

“I will make you a drink next time. One that you cannot refuse,” Ilya said, leaning on the bar as he spoke to Shane after resting his check on the granite.

Shane laughed. He was maybe a little tipsy. “Is that so?”

“Mm. It is a promise.”

Shane leaned against the bar, too, getting close to Ilya. Ilya could smell him. Citrus… and mint. “I’ll hold you to that.”

Ilya bowed his head a little, conceding.

Now he was going to have to come up with something good. Like… *really good.*

When Ilya went to collect Shane’s check, he was already gone, and Ilya found himself disappointed.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya become more familiar

Montreal Restaurant Guide: Irina's

By: Shane Hollander

Irina's can be found off the beaten path in Old Montreal, taking up the first floor commercial space of a small brick apartment building. Tastefully appointed pink velvet seats with wood and brick accents create a warm, welcoming, and delicately feminine atmosphere that gives the bar her own personality. Irina's is the perfect spot to grab a drink before a night on the town, at the end of a long night at a club, or to find some respite from the summer heat. With carefully curated cocktails and a small, albeit delicious, menu of Russian finger foods, this petite bar offers a friendly, comforting atmosphere that would satisfy even the most fussy of patrons.

Ilya chuckled to himself as he read the article. It had been published the other day and he hadn't been sure what to expect. It was nice. Complimentary.

He printed it out and took it up front to keep by the register behind the bar.

Ilya had had plenty of write ups done about him at other restaurants and bars he had worked at, but nothing for his own place. He was immeasurably proud, though he felt a bit embarrassed to admit it.

He knew that he was good at what he did, but he had never run a business before. It was nice, knowing that people enjoyed his work, even better knowing that his employees liked working for him, that they felt that they were treated well, and were paid decently.

It felt silly, getting a bit emotional about Shane's words, but they meant a lot to him, and what he had been trying to create.

He hadn't seen Shane in a while and Ilya wondered if he would come back tonight. If he would get the chance to thank him for his kind words and then tease him some more.

Ilya hadn't come up with a cocktail for Shane yet, though he was working on it. He was pleased that Shane did seem to like their current cocktail offerings… but Ilya wanted to make him something special.

He'd have to think more about it later; he had to finish gearing up for tonight.

Svetlana was the first one in, pausing to read the article where it was taped by the register.

“Aww! So sweet!” she cooed, nudging Ilya playfully.

“Stop,” he grumbled.

She laughed. “Come on. This is the most fun I’ve had in ages. I’m not even mad that we’re not having sex right now because you have a crush on the cute food writer.”

Ilya leveled Svetlana with a look and she looked back, smiling.

“I don’t have a *crush* on him. And we can have sex if you want to have sex. Just ask.”

Svetlana tilted her head to the side, considering. “Mm, this is more fun. I like watching you squirm.”

“Thank you,” he deadpanned at her. She kissed his cheek and hummed happily as she swept away into the kitchen. Ilya sighed loudly and exasperatedly into the bar.

At least Svetlana was the only one who could read him so well. That was a bit annoying; he preferred being mysterious and difficult to read, but he supposed that that was what he got for allowing someone to get to know him over the years.

He was curious about her comment about their lack of sleeping together. Ilya wasn’t against it. They’d been hooking up consistently since the bar opened but things had tapered off after Shane had showed up.

That didn’t necessarily mean anything though. They were busy. Svetlana worked one and a half jobs. They weren’t in a relationship.

And yes, okay, Ilya thought that Shane was cute. And he probably *would* sleep with him… eventually, because that was just how Ilya operated. He saw a hot person and would flirt with them and sometimes seduce them if those were the vibes they were putting out.

Ilya was under the impression that Shane would fold like a house of cards if Ilya made the slightest hint at wanting to sleep with him. More than once he’d felt Shane’s eyes on him, casting surreptitious glances in his direction.

Not to mention how Shane checked him out. Though Ilya wasn’t trying very hard to be modest.

He took a breath and let it out slowly. He had other things to focus on than Shane Stupid Hollander right now.

Ilya got back to work.

Shane didn’t show up when they opened that evening. Ilya had expected him to be there bright and early, one of the first people in line, but no such luck. Ilya was a little disappointed.

But he was swept up in taking care of his other patrons that Shane's absence quickly disappeared from his mind.

Ilya mixed drinks and brought over food and chatted with people at the bar. He checked in with the kitchen and Harris and Leah.

He was wiping down a now free spot at the bar and looked up as someone pulled out the chair to sit.

Shane Hollander stood there and smiled at him, looking… beautiful.

In all of Ilya's years of hooking up with very attractive people, he had honestly never felt this thrown off by anyone before. Svetlana, for example. She was beautiful, very sexy, and incredibly fun but Ilya had never felt unsteady with her.

Every time he looked at Shane, he felt almost out of his depth. Nervous. He was good at hiding it, but the fact still remained that Shane was different, and not because he was a man.

"Hi," Shane said, sweet and shy. He sat down at the bar, tucking his hair behind one ear in a self-conscious gesture. Even in the low light of the bar, Ilya could tell that his cheeks were pink, and Ilya couldn't stop staring at his freckles.

Fucking adorable.

"Hi," Ilya replied. "I did not think you were coming tonight."

He slid a menu in front of Shane and leaned against the bar.

"I'm sorry. I got caught up at work. Figured I'd come by for a drink before I head home."

Ilya smiled at him, the sentiment sweet. He liked this little giveaway. Shane felt bad for not having been here earlier. "No need to be sorry."

Shane blinked at him and his cheeks flushed deeper. "Um… right. Yeah."

Ilya chuckled. "I have a drink for you."

"You do?" Shane asked, blinking at Ilya, surprised.

"Yes," Ilya replied. "I told you I would make something that you could not refuse."

He had been thinking quite a bit about what to make Shane. And he was pretty sure he'd come up with something suitable. Citrus and mint.

"Oh yeah? I'm so curious now."

Ilya chuckled and his stomach fluttered in a way he wasn't accustomed to. This was fun. He liked how interested and engaged Shane was.

"You will see," Ilya assured, offering Shane a wink, before he turned to grab his ingredients.

Simple syrup, mint leaves, fresh lime and lemon juice, gin, and champagne.

He set a cooled coupe glass on the bar top and started making his drink.

Ilya took some fresh mint, muddling it in the bottom of his shaker. He added the simple syrup, fresh squeezes of lime and lemon juice, measured out the gin, and capped the shaker. He shook the mix, then strained it into the coupe glass.

He took out a bottle of champagne, popping it open, and topped the cocktail with bubbles.

He placed the drink in front of Shane, on top of a pink coaster.

“What’s this called?” Shane asked.

“The Hollander,” Ilya replied cheekily. He watched Shane’s entire face go red and he spluttered. Ilya chuckled.

Shane gave Ilya *a look*, shaking his head a little, and picked up the glass.

“What’s in it?” he asked, shyly meeting Ilya’s eyes.

“Muddled mint, simple syrup, gin, lemon and lime juice, topped with champagne.”

Shane seemed to consider this, looking interested, and took a sip.

“Oh. Wow.”

“Good, no?”

“It’s delicious. Very refreshing. Not too sweet. The citrus and mint go well together.”

Ilya smiled. “Yes. I’m glad you like it.”

Shane took another sip. “It’s… really good.” He set down the drink.

“I wanted to thank you,” Ilya said. “For the article. It was very… nice.”

Shane averted his eyes, smiling small, before he looked back at Ilya. “It was a pleasure. I’m glad you liked it. You guys are doing really great work. It wasn’t at all like I expected.”

“We have something to satisfy even the most fussy of patrons.”

“You do,” Shane laughed, rolling his eyes.

They looked at each other for a moment, just smiling, and it was like they were the only two people in the bar. Ilya, remembering himself, broke the silence.

“Can I get you anything else? Are you hungry?”

“No, I’m okay. Just this.”

Ilya nodded and stepped away to help other guests, but not before putting in an order for some pierogis for Shane. On the house.

***

August

"Hi," Ilya said, placing a menu and a water glass down in front of Shane.

"Hi," Shane replied as Ilya poured water into his glass.

"How are you?" Ilya inquired, setting down the water, and meeting Shane's eyes. Shane smiled at him, bright and beautiful, and Ilya smiled back.

"I'm okay," Shane replied. "How are you?"

"Wonderful," Ilya chuckled. "Would you like a drink?"

"Love one."

"We updated the menu. Take a look."

Shane looked down at the menu and made a noise of intrigue. "Tell me about it."

Ilya hummed, leaning over the bar, explaining the menu to Shane. They were leaned close together and Ilya could smell Shane, the familiar mint and citrus. Shane looked up from the menu after Ilya had finished walking him through each drink.

Their eyes met, and not for the first time, a spark flashed between them. They held one another's gaze and Ilya was tempted to lean in and kiss Shane. He knew if he did, Shane would kiss him back.

Ilya watched Shane swallow and he smiled in response.

Shane had been coming to the bar almost every week for the past two months. He was basically a regular now. Everyone recognized him and Svetlana hadn't stopped teasing Ilya about him.

Ilya had been doing his best to seduce Shane.

He knew that Shane was into him, it was terribly obvious, but the part that was confusing to Ilya was his resistance. It was possible that he was anxious, or inexperienced, maybe both. But Ilya was making it pretty clear that he was interested in Shane. He hoped that maybe tonight he'd finally break through.

"What do you think?" Ilya asked, tempted to reach out and run his thumb over Shane's perfectly pink bottom lip. But he refrained. He was still at work after all.

"The paloma, I think," Shane managed to reply, though he sounded a little breathy. Ilya smiled crookedly at him and watched Shane's cheeks turn pink in the way that Ilya had come

to know (and love) so well.

“Good choice,” Ilya replied and went about mixing his drink.

They talked a bit as he worked, setting the drink down in front of Shane, and placed an order of zucchini fritters for him.

Ilya checked in intermittently with Shane, too busy to really talk with him, but swooped back around during a lull.

“Another drink?” he asked, taking Shane’s empty glass. “How were the fritters?”

“I’ll do one more,” Shane replied. “Something else though, I have to decide. And the fritters were awesome.”

Ilya nodded and smiled, watching as Shane perused the drink menu again.

“Are you busy tonight?” Ilya asked him. “When you leave here?”

Shane looked up at him, surprised. Ilya waited for an answer, not having given himself enough time to worry about Shane’s response.

“No. I… no. I’m wide open.”

“Can you stay? Until closing?”

Shane blinked at him. His eyes were huge and dark and… hopeful.

“Yeah. I think so.”

Ilya smiled at him, reaching across the bar to rest his fingers on top of Shane’s hand. His skin was warm and electricity traveled all the way down Ilya’s arm at that simple touch. Shane’s lips parted as he looked at Ilya.

“Thank you.”

Shane smiled, though he looked a bit awestruck. “You’re welcome.”

Ilya removed his hand. “Now. What can I make you?”

The rest of the night seemed to go by far too slowly. Shane only had two drinks and the fritters. He closed out his tab and told Ilya he was going to get something more substantial to eat but promised to be back.

“It’s okay if you can’t hold my seat. I’ll figure out something to do until you close. I’ll leave you my number.”

Ilya hadn’t been expecting that but Shane scribbled his number down on the back of a napkin. Ilya immediately put it in his phone and texted him. He got a smiley face emoji in response.

He was distracted enough by working that he wasn't worrying too much about whether or not Shane would come back… but he did, finding a place at the opposite end of the bar.

At the end of the night, Ilya had Shane tucked away in the booth while he helped close up for the night, and then sent everyone home. He pointedly avoided all of the looks his employees were shooting him while they cleaned up.

Finally, it was just the two of them left.

Ilya stood behind the bar, mixing a drink, and Shane came to stand on the other side of it.

"So," he said. "Why did you want me to stay?"

Ilya looked at him. "You cannot guess?"

Shane watched him, then looked away. "I don't know. Feels like it would be testing fate."

Ilya poured the drink into two small glasses, sliding one to Shane.

"My apartment is above the bar," he said casually. "You're welcome to come upstairs with me."

Shane picked up the small glass, looking at it, before finally lifting his eyes to look at Ilya.

"You're serious."

"Yes. Is an open invitation."

Shane's whole face went red. "Fuck. You're serious?"

"Yes," Ilya laughed. "I have been trying to seduce you for two months!"

Shane burst out laughing, shaking his head, his free hand covering his eyes. "Oh my god."

Ilya sipped the cocktail he'd made, a very simple vodka martini, smiling small.

Shane finally calmed down and looked at Ilya. "You're *really* serious?"

"Very," Ilya replied, looking at Shane through his lashes.

Shane's face softened a bit, as if realization was dawning that Ilya wasn't pulling his leg.

"I'd like that."

Ilya smiled softly at him. "Me, too."

Shane smiled, soft and shy, and looked away.

"What did you make?"

"Vodka martini. Simple."

Shane nodded and took a sip. He made a face, as if he didn't like it, and Ilya chuckled.

"You do not have to drink it."

"No. It's okay. Just not what I'm used to."

"Mm. You like sweet drinks. Fresh and floral."

"I do. You pay attention."

"Of course."

"What do you like?"

"Anything. Everything. I like vodka, though I cannot get the good Russian vodka here. Rum is good. Gin."

"When did you start bartending?" Shane asked, leaning on the bar.

"I was young. It was a small job at first, so I could buy hockey gear. Clearing tables at the local bar."

Ilya wasn't going to spill his guts about how he had gotten into bartending, not when he was hoping to get Shane into his bed.

Shane smiled. "You played hockey?"

"Yes. Almost professional."

"Me, too."

"I know. I saw when I Googled you."

"Oh god…"

Ilya chuckled fondly, finishing his martini. He sat the glass down, spinning it between his thumb and index finger on the granite, before turning his eyes back up to look at Shane.

"You are very beautiful," he said, matter-of-fact.

Shane looked at him, unsure. He placed his half-finished martini on the bar, and for a moment, Ilya thought he was going to leave.

"You're very handsome," Shane replied, face red once more. Ilya loved how easily he blushed. It was so fucking sweet. He wanted to follow that blush and see where it went…

"I, um, I think you're totally out of my league."

Ilya huffed a laugh, appreciating the compliment, but ultimately disagreeing with it.

"Yes. Probably," he teased.

Shane laughed and Ilya smiled.

“Would you like to come upstairs?” he asked again, to be sure.

Shane met his eyes. “Yeah. I would.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Ilya finally gets Shane upstairs

Ilya cleaned up the martinis and came around the bar. He stood in front of Shane, looking at him, and Shane looked back. He seemed nervous, not quite meeting Ilya's eyes, fidgeting a little.

Ilya found this incredibly endearing. He reached up, carefully brushing silky strands of dark hair behind Shane's ear, smoothing his thumb over a pink, freckled cheek. Shane's eyes shifted to his and he glanced away again.

Ilya tucked a gentle finger under Shane's chin, tilting his head up. Their eyes met and Ilya brushed his thumb just under Shane's bottom lip. Shane's lips parted, his tongue darting out to lick his bottom lip.

Heat had pooled in Ilya's belly, knowing that Shane was here. Just looking at him and how lovely he was was a turn on. The anticipation of touching him, kissing him, *being* with him.

"Can I kiss you?" Ilya asked quietly, because he very much wanted to know if those pretty pink lips were as soft as they looked. He wanted to know what Shane tasted like.

"Yes," Shane replied immediately, just as quietly. Ilya smiled, bringing his mouth down against Shane's. His lips *were* as soft as Ilya had thought… maybe even softer. And warm. Shane's hand came up, resting on Ilya's chest, their mouths simply pressed together, and even that initial chaste touch was electric.

They parted and Shane let out a soft sigh, his hand sliding into Ilya's open shirt, skin touching skin. They looked at each other, understanding and desire passing between them, before they kissed again, Ilya tracing his tongue against Shane's lips, seeking entry, and Shane opened for him easily, eagerly.

Ilya slid his hands into Shane's soft hair, his tongue sliding against Shane's. He tasted like the martini Ilya had made him. Shane made another soft noise into Ilya's mouth as they kissed, his other hand joining his first, palms brushing over Ilya's nipples, making him moan softly.

They kissed deeply, Ilya moving his hands to Shane's waist, pulling him closer, wedging his thigh between Shane's legs, and Shane moaned, rubbing against Ilya shamelessly.

Ilya liked this. He liked that Shane was into this, and that with some gentle coaxing, there was some fire underneath all of that stuffiness. It was like he'd just needed to be given permission… and he could let go.

“Come upstairs,” Ilya asked as they both came up for air. Shane nodded, biting his kiss-swollen lip.

“Yeah. Okay.”

Ilya smiled at him, chuckling softly at how quickly Shane acquiesced. Ilya took his hand. It was smaller than his, warm, and Shane squeezed his hand as Ilya led him upstairs to his apartment, flicking off the lights on their way out of the bar.

They kissed at the top of the stairs, before heading down the hall to Ilya’s apartment. He let them in, pulling Shane inside, and closed the door behind him. Ilya turned on the apartment lights. He and Shane looked at one another for a moment, before Ilya pushed Shane back against the wall.

He worked on tugging Shane’s shirt off and Shane, in a very bold move, reached down to cup Ilya through his jeans, making Ilya huff out a breath, smiling at the boldness. They went right back to kissing, Ilya’s hands greedily stroking over the warm, firm, smooth skin of Shane’s chest.

Shane was working on undoing the fly of Ilya’s jeans, sliding his hand into Ilya’s briefs, wrapping his hand around Ilya’s cock. Ilya inhaled sharply at the sensation and stopped kissing Shane, tilting his head down to watch Shane stroke him, the head of his cock poking out from the waistband of his briefs. He’d had plenty of people touch his dick like this… but fuck it felt so good to have *Shane’s* hands on him.

He’d wanted this for ages.

Shane lifted his gaze and Ilya met his eyes. He shifted his shirt the rest of the way off, cradling Shane’s face in his hand, stroking his thumb over his cheek, then his lips, humming as Shane’s tongue darted out to lick the pad of his thumb.

Ilya smiled softly, sliding his thumb into Shane’s mouth, and his breath caught as Shane sucked on the digit, closing his eyes, making a low noise of pleasure. God, he was fucking gorgeous; his long, dark lashes laying against his flushed, freckled cheeks, his hair mussed from Ilya’s fingers.

Ilya was usually pretty controlled with people he was sleeping with. But there was something about Shane that made him restless, like he needed more of him, even though he was right here in his arms.

He wanted to see Shane naked. He wanted to kiss every inch of him and fuck him and make him feel incredible. Ilya could only imagine what it would be like to be inside him, if Shane let him. He hoped he would…

Shane released his thumb, opening his eyes, and leaned forward to kiss Ilya again before sliding to his knees.

“Fuck,” Ilya murmured, watching as this beautiful man knelt in front of him, tugging his pants and briefs down, and pressed his tongue to the head of Ilya’s cock. Ilya held Shane’s

face in one hand, watching him as he licked and kissed at Ilya's dick before taking it into his mouth.

He lifted his eyes to look at Ilya as his lips slid down on him and Ilya let out a soft laugh, smiling in amazement. It was ridiculously hot to see the way his cock disappeared into Shane's warm, wet mouth.

Shane hummed around him, the vibration sending sparks of pleasure shooting down Ilya's spine, straight to his balls. Shane's eyes slid closed in what appeared to be bliss.

"Look at you," Ilya breathed, in Russian. "So beautiful."

Shane sighed, the sound dreamy, his eyes sliding closed as he sucked Ilya with what was obvious enjoyment. That was a nice ego boost. Ilya stroked his cheek, his hair, completely enamored. They hadn't talked about anything, simply going on instinct, and maybe that was okay.

Ilya felt like they were maybe more on the same page than would have been expected.

He let Shane blow him for a few more blissful moments before he gently tugged his hair.

"Stop, stop," he said.

Shane pulled off quickly, looking up at Ilya with his big dark eyes and his wet mouth. "Sorry, was that—?"

"Was good," Ilya assured, stroking his hand through Shane's hair, watching the way Shane leaned into the touch like a cat. "Too good, maybe..."

"Oh," Shane replied, his voice breathy, face flushed, eyes full of wanting. He got to his feet. "Okay."

Ilya smiled at him, cupping his face in his hands. "I don't want to finish too soon."

Shane huffed a laugh and they kissed some more, getting lost in deep, hungry kisses, as Ilya worked on getting Shane's pants open.

They pulled apart to kick off shoes and pants and underwear, leaving everything in Ilya's entryway, laughing about it as they came back together.

Ilya moved them toward his bedroom, pausing every so often to press Shane up against a wall. Shane's hands dug into Ilya's biceps, his foot wrapping around Ilya's ankle. Ilya took the opportunity to hoist Shane up against the wall.

Shane gasped, wrapping his legs around Ilya's waist, kissing Ilya even more wildly than before. Ilya was getting the impression that Shane was very eager. Maybe he hadn't been with anyone in a while. After two months of flirting, Ilya was pretty much dying, so he was wondering how Shane was feeling.

Ilya was a sexual creature by nature. He loved sex and getting off, and he could not imagine going more than maybe a day without an orgasm of some kind, so all these weeks of tension between them had whittled down his control substantially.

He hoped he would be able to give Shane what he needed and that he enjoyed himself. He deserved that and it seemed to be going well so far.

Ilya pulled Shane away from the wall, walking them to his bedroom, carefully placing Shane down on his bed, pulling away to just look at him for a moment.

Shane lay there, looking like something out of a dream. His long hair spilled out against the gray of Ilya's comforter, his muscular arms raised above his head, arching his torso. He smiled flirtatiously at Ilya and Ilya smiled right back.

"Look at you," he said again, in English. He ran his hands over Shane's hips and thighs in an appreciative caress. "You are beautiful."

And he was. His skin was tan, absolutely flawless, and smooth. He was extremely fit, which Ilya was very into; strong and firm under his hands.

Shane preened under the attention and Ilya wanted to ravage him.

"One second," he murmured, moving away to turn on one of the bedside lamps for some mood lighting. He could feel Shane's eyes on him and saw him sit up on his elbows, watching Ilya right back.

"Jesus… wow…"

"What?" Ilya asked, chuckling.

"Hang on," Shane said before Ilya could join him on the bed. "Let me just… look at you…"

Ilya smiled and stood there for a moment, more than comfortable in being admired, before doing a few poses, flexing his biceps, and making Shane laugh.

"Oh my god," he snorted.

Ilya laughed, too, crawling into bed, and on top of Shane. They grinned at each other, chuckling, and went back to kissing.

Ilya was surprised by how comfortable this was. Almost familiar. For someone who was as uptight as Shane could be sometimes (from what Ilya had observed), he was surprisingly relaxed now.

Shane slid his hands into Ilya's curls, scrunching them in his fingers. Ilya liked the way Shane's body felt against his; the press of his skin, the firmness of him.

"So soft," Shane murmured about Ilya's hair as Ilya kissed down his jaw, his neck, to his collarbones. Ilya chuckled, smiling to himself against Shane's skin.

He worked his way down Shane's body, going slowly, pressing appreciative kisses to the hollow of his throat, his sternum, his muscular pecs. He bit a nipple gently, listening to Shane gasp and hiss, before running his tongue over it to soothe the bite.

He continued down Shane's abs, over his hips, to the inside of his right thigh. Ilya sucked on the delicate skin, leaving a mark, and Shane whined, the hand still in Ilya's hair tightening.

"I've been thinking about this," Ilya murmured, kissing the mark he'd left. "Thinking about you…"

He lifted his head to look at Shane and Shane licked his lips, looking down at Ilya with eyes dark with desire.

"Me, too," he replied softly.

"What do you want?" Ilya asked.

"Whatever you'll give me…" Shane replied, his eyes never leaving Ilya's.

Ilya cooed at him, teasing his tongue over the head of Shane's cock, refusing to break eye contact. He loved this. The tension, the unwillingness to look away. He loved the way Shane's mouth fell open, and a soft, punched out noise puffed past his lips.

Pleasure *made* him.

"Whatever you want," Ilya hummed.

"Fuck me," Shane panted. "Please."

Ilya practically growled at that, wrapping his lips around the head of Shane's cock, sucking, listening to the helpless moan he made. He slid his lips down Shane's dick, putting his considerable blow job skills to good use.

Shane had a nice cock. It was neat and smooth, nestled in a patch of dark hair. Ilya took him all the way down, swallowing around the head, and loving the noise Shane made in response.

"Holy fucking shit," he breathed as Ilya used a hand to play with his balls and tease a finger against Shane's rim.

He panted and whined, hand fisted in Ilya's curls, though he wasn't tugging or pulling, just holding on. Ilya pulled off of him slowly, kissing the underside of his cock, giving Shane a moment to settle as he leaned over to grab lube and a condom from his bedside table.

"How do you like it?" he asked, smoothing his palms up Shane's impressive thighs. Shane looked at him, eyes glazed, lips red, dick hard and leaking against his stomach, still wet from Ilya's mouth.

"Anyway. Every way. As long as I'm bottoming."

“Reasonable,” Ilya replied with a smile. “I prefer to top.”

“Thank god,” Shane replied and they both laughed.

Ilya leaned back, uncapping the lube, and hummed as Shane opened his legs wider. He was eager and Ilya liked that.

Ilya settled between Shane’s legs, lifting one up onto his shoulder, rubbing a slick finger against Shane’s rim. Shane’s lips parted slightly, his eyes half-lidded. Ilya ran soothing circles against the warm, puckered skin of Shane’s entrance. He seemed tight and Ilya wasn’t going to rush.

He watched Shane’s face, wanting to take in every pretty detail of how Shane looked like this, and to be sure that he wasn’t in any discomfort. Carefully, he slid a finger into him. Shane’s eyes closed and he made a soft noise.

“Been a while?” Ilya asked, voice soothing.

“A bit,” Shane replied, relaxing as Ilya slowly penetrated him, sliding his finger in and out, giving Shane the time to adjust.

“When was the last time you were with someone?”

“A year ago, a little more than that, maybe,” Shane replied, eyes open again. He looked self-conscious.

Ilya smiled softly, turning his head to kiss Shane’s ankle. “I will take good care of you. Don’t worry.”

Shane smiled at him, soft and sweet, his cheeks extremely pink. “Thank you.”

Ilya continued his careful fingering, adding a second finger, then a third. He was enjoying watching Shane like this. He was very expressive and Ilya liked the way he had pleasure written so clearly on his face.

Ilya ran the tip of his index finger of his free hand down Shane’s leg, from ankle to knee, and then down again, just touching. He rubbed up against Shane’s prostate, loving the way Shane arched and moaned, his hands curling into the comforter on either side of his head, body splayed out.

Ilya kind of loved that Shane’s cock leaked like a fountain, too.

“Fuck, Ilya,” Shane breathed. “I’m ready. Come on.”

Ilya smiled, tempted to keep going, to tease Shane. He liked watching him like this but that could be something he could save for another time… *if* there was another time.

He removed his fingers and carefully set Shane’s leg down.

“Turn over,” he said and Shane obeyed, turning onto his hands and knees. Ilya watched him fold his arms under his head, his knees under him so his ass was up in offering as Ilya slid on the condom, and added some extra lube. He swore in Russian, palming Shane’s perfect ass.

It really was a very nice ass. Muscular and round. Ilya wanted to bite it though it was maybe a little too soon for that. He curled his hands around Shane’s hips, holding him steady as he pressed into him. Shane gasped and moaned as Ilya’s hips pressed up against his ass.

Ilya had to bite his lip against the overwhelming sensation of being inside Shane. He was hot and tight, his body clutching to Ilya so perfectly. Ilya smoothed his thumbs over Shane’s lower back, giving him some time to adjust, and allowing himself the time to appreciate how good he felt.

Shane looked good like this, too. Ilya ran a hand up his spine and then back down to his waist.

“There,” he hummed. “Okay?”

“Yeah,” Shane sighed. “Perfect.”

Ilya started to move, pulling out and pressing back in, listening as Shane cried out. He found a solid rhythm, letting Shane get used to the feeling, though going by his noises alone, it sounded like he was enjoying himself. Ilya adjusted his angle slightly and smiled at the response he got.

“Oh fuck. Holy shit, Ilya. Right there. Just like that. Don’t stop.”

“Don’t worry,” Ilya purred. “I won’t.”

He kept that angle, thrusting in and out of Shane, watching the way his dick disappeared into Shane’s ass, loving Shane’s moaning and gasping, that he begged for more.

Ilya was more than happy to give him as much as he wanted. He hauled Shane back against him by the hips, pounding into him, his own orgasm creeping up. He watched as Shane reached a hand down, jerking himself off, whining, and bucking back against Ilya.

“Going to come for me?” Ilya ground out.

“Yeah. Yes. Holy shit. I’m coming. Ilya, I’m, ah—!”

Shane cried out as he came, his body spasming and clenching around Ilya in the most delicious way. Ilya thrust into Shane faster, chasing his own orgasm. He loved the exhilaration of this, of chasing his pleasure. It felt so fucking good. So perfect. Ilya grunted and stilled, coming inside Shane, hard and long.

Fuck. He’d been thinking about this since he’d first laid eyes on Shane in the bar, and it was better than he’d expected. Better than the fantasy, which was crazy. That was a rare experience.

Ilya carefully pulled out of Shane and lay on his back beside them, enjoying the pleasant buzz of post-coital bliss, catching his breath. Shane lay beside him and Ilya turned his head to look at him.

“ *Wow* ,” Shane breathed and they both laughed.

“I know,” Ilya replied, because he did. He knew he was very good in bed but the sex really had been amazing. Shane snorted again and reached over to smack his knuckles against Ilya’s shoulder.

“Was good,” he chuckled.

“It was. I needed that,” Shane sighed softly.

“I know that, too.”

Shane hummed, looking up at Ilya’s ceiling. Ilya just looked at him and his face in profile. The elegant slope of his nose, the sharp line of his jaw. He was smiling. He turned his head to look at Ilya again.

“Where’s your bathroom?”

Ilya laughed and sat up. “I will show you.”

He brought Shane to the en suite bathroom and Shane thanked him, stepping inside, and closing the door to clean up. Ilya disposed of the condom in the wastepaper basket he had in his bedroom and waited for Shane before taking his turn in the bathroom.

When he came out, Shane was standing in the middle of the room, still naked, but looking uncertain.

Ilya came up behind him and pressed a kiss to his shoulder, brushing the back of his finger along Shane’s side. “Do you want a tour?”

Shane looked at him over his shoulder, chuckling. “Sure.”

Ilya took Shane around his apartment, naked, and showed him where everything was. The apartment wasn’t very large but at least now Shane knew the layout.

Living room, small dining area, kitchen.

“Can I get you anything?” Ilya asked as they stood in the kitchen.

“Water would be great, actually.”

Ilya provided him with a glass of water and one for himself. He watched Shane look around the apartment, appreciating how good he looked in Ilya’s space, and how lovely he was naked.

“You are welcome to stay,” Ilya told him, leaning back against his counter.

“That’s okay?” Shane replied.

Ilya nodded and Shane smiled.

“I’d like that.”

Ilya took their water glasses, leaving them in the sink, before taking Shane’s hand and leading him back to bed. They kissed and cuddled, not really escalating anything, interrupting their make out session with yawns, and laughing about it.

This felt… nice. Ilya felt differently about Shane than he’d ever felt about his other hookups. He wasn’t sure what it was exactly. Something about Shane’s demeanor, maybe, his personality. Something about him that called to Ilya.

Shane fell asleep first as Ilya ran his fingers through his hair. He listened to the sound of Shane’s breathing, feeling surprisingly peaceful.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Shane marvels at his night spent with Ilya

It had been a long time since Shane had woken up next to someone. He was a little confused at first, waking up in someone else's bed, a strong arm wrapped around him, before he remembered that he had slept with Ilya the night before.

He was sore, understandably so, but it was pleasant in a way, a physical reminder of what they'd done last night.

Shane lay there, wide awake, thinking about how good it had been to be with Ilya. Shane knew he'd been a bit desperate but he hadn't been expecting to be fucked *that* good.

Ilya had been so kind and gentle with him, too, wanting Shane to have enjoyed himself.

And Ilya was hot. Like, *I-can't-believe-I-get-to-kiss-you* hot. And Shane had kissed him and sucked his cock and let him fuck him. It was actually mind boggling.

He was surprised how cool he'd managed to be last night, only having a mini freak out in the bathroom while he cleaned up about coming all over Ilya's comforter. He reminded himself that Ilya probably would have done something else if he cared about getting come on his comforter.

He'd even walked around Ilya's apartment naked (NAKED!) with him while he gave Shane a tour.

Now Shane was waking up next to him. His heart and stomach fluttered with anxious-excited butterflies. He shifted, rolling over to see Ilya sleeping. He was laying on his stomach, lips parted, curly hair falling in his face.

He looked so beautiful that Shane's breath caught.

He just looked at the handsome lines of Ilya's face, taking in all of his features, wondering how on earth he had gotten here. Ilya really was stunning. And Shane took in all the little details he didn't get to experience from far away, like how Ilya had very long eyelashes, and bronze strands in his golden-brown hair, and a slightly crooked nose.

Shane was tempted to kiss the cleft in his chin, just because, and rub his cheek against Ilya's, appreciating the catch of stubble. His chest was dusted in dark hair, which Shane found stupidly sexy, and he had a neat trail of hair under his perfect belly button that Shane was fascinated by, a bit sad that he didn't have the opportunity to check Ilya out further.

Ilya had pretty insane back muscles though and a very nice ass.

He was so *masculine* . He was strong and fit and sure of himself and charming and funny as hell. Shane liked *all* of that in a man.

He wondered if maybe they were both coming on too strong. Or maybe it was just him. Ilya seemed so perfect. Shane knew that no one was perfect but he just checked all of Shane's boxes.

Anxiety flooded through him. He was getting way too ahead of himself. Yes, Ilya was very attractive and yes, he was very good in bed, but good looks and awesome sex skills did not a relationship make.

Ilya might not even want a relationship. He might just want to sleep with Shane. Which, Shane wouldn't be against, though he would be the first to say that he was more of the commitment type.

He took a few deep breaths, trying to calm himself down from spiraling, when Ilya started waking up. Shane's anxiety was momentarily forgotten as he watched Ilya's eyes flutter. He blinked them open, rolling over onto his back, and stretched out, his muscles pulling taut, and then relaxing in a way that was so interesting to Shane.

And Shane got a chance to ogle his torso for a bit.

Ilya's eyes blinked open. They were a beautiful hazel, a fascinating mix of green and brown that made them look almost gold in certain lights. He smiled, shy and sweet, and Shane's heart fluttered.

"Good morning," Ilya murmured, his voice all frayed and throaty from sleepiness. Shane shifted closer to him, unable to help himself, like he was a magnet caught in Ilya's pull.

"Good morning," Shane replied. Ilya hummed, pulling Shane close, nuzzling his nose against Shane's cheek. Shane smiled and closed his eyes, sliding his hand over Ilya's chest, his fingers bumping the crucifix he wore on a chain around his neck.

He let himself indulge… enjoying whatever it was that Ilya was willing to give him. He was really sweet. More affectionate and physical than Shane had been expecting. And hospitable, too.

Shane turned his face, his nose bumping against Ilya's. They both chuckled and Ilya leaned in, kissing Shane. Shane resisted at first. He didn't like being kissed before brushing his teeth, but he let it go. It wasn't every day that the hot Russian bartender you'd been crushing on for two months fucked you so good that you could have cried and then let you stay over to maybe do it all again the next morning.

So Shane let Ilya kiss him, and he kissed Ilya back, because fuck, it felt nice to be kissed… and so well, too.

Ilya rolled onto his back, pulling Shane with him. Shane straddled Ilya, running his hands over his plush pecs, appreciating the firm muscle and chest hair, smoothing his thumbs over Ilya's already stiff nipples. He liked the touch apparently, hissing softly.

Shane was intrigued by all of his tattoos, particularly the snarling bear on his left pec, but he could ask about that at another time.

Ilya ran his big hands down Shane's back, to his waist, then back up to his shoulders. Shane leaned back, looking down at Ilya. He was so big, like, everywhere. Shane liked that. *A lot.*

He was fit and athletic and not small by any means… but Shane was very into the fact that Ilya basically swallowed him up.

As if to prove Shane's point, Ilya's big hands curved around Shane's hips, and Shane smiled at him, kneading his pecs, which made him chuckle.

Shane was very aware of straddling this very handsome man's very naked body and Ilya was grinning up at him, his eyes still hooded from sleep.

"You on top?" Ilya asked, his palms sliding over Shane's quads.

"If that works for you," Shane hummed.

"Of course."

Shane smiled, leaning back down to kiss Ilya, enjoying the pleasant scratch of his stubble, the soft, ticklish wisps of his curls, the pleasant way he smelled, musky and sweet.

Shane dug around for the lube from last night, finding it in the folds of the comforter, and grabbed a condom from the bedside table drawer that Ilya had gone into the night before.

Shane rested his hand on Ilya's chest as they fucked, surprised when Ilya covered his hand with his own. He was watching Shane's face, his eyes glazed, mouth hanging open. He looked like he was really into this, getting to look at Shane, and Shane rode him harder.

"Fuck, Shane," Ilya grunted and Shane bit his lip. Ilya's hands squeezed his ass and then smacked one cheek, making Shane gasp, before Ilya flipped them, so Shane was on his back. Shane gasped, then moaned at the change in position.

Ilya held his legs as he fucked into him and holy shit, Shane was going to come untouched. His orgasm hit him, hard and sudden. His release splashed up to his chest and the base of his throat, the euphoria of it overwhelming him, his hands gripping Ilya's triceps.

Ilya purred something in Russian, still fucking Shane, sending aftershocks rocketing through him before he stilled and came, crying out into the room. Shane watched, enraptured, because he had never seen anyone's face look that gorgeous as they came.

Ilya dropped his elbows to the bed, kissing him. Shane wrapped his arms around him, kissing him back. He didn't care that he was covered in come and he was getting it all over Ilya. That had been fucking incredible.

“Okay?” Ilya asked, still getting his breath back. He carefully brushed Shane’s hair back from his face and Shane smiled at him, feeling his cheeks heat under the tender touch. He nodded.

“Yeah. I’m great.”

Ilya smiled and kissed his cheek, nuzzling in close, his face pressed to Shane’s neck. Shane sighed dreamily, arms wrapped around Ilya, enjoying the closeness. He’d never been with anyone so affectionate, wanting to be close like this. It was sweet.

They lay there until Ilya’s softened dick slipped out of him, Ilya pressing a kiss to Shane’s shoulder, before getting out of bed.

He went to the bathroom and then peeked back out, looking at Shane.

“Want to join me?” he asked.

Shane smiled and nodded.

They showered together, rinsing off and making out, but not going any further. Ilya wrapped Shane in a towel, ruffling his hair, then kissed him, before he grabbed a towel for himself, drying off.

“Do you like espresso?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “I do.”

Ilya beamed. “Stay in bed. I’ll be back.”

Shane laughed, shaking his head a little. He had not been expecting Ilya to be so cheerful. He was mysterious and sexy at the bar and he still kind of was, but Shane hadn’t been expecting this sunnier side of him.

He liked it.

He followed Ilya back into his bedroom, watching as Ilya divested himself of his towel, and went looking through his drawers. Shane could not resist checking out his perfect ass and ridiculous back muscles. Like… how did someone just *look like that?*

Ilya pulled on a clean pair of black briefs and Shane put his own underwear back on, sliding back into bed.

Ilya smiled and winked at him as he left the room and Shane watched after him from the doorway, Ilya disappearing into the kitchen. Shane couldn’t see him completely but he was amused and warmed.

He slid out of bed to find his phone. He had a pretty low battery and checked his notifications just in case, but there was nothing pressing.

Ilya was bustling around in the kitchen and Shane heard the unmistakable sound of an espresso machine. He smiled, curling his knees to his chest, and rested his head on top of

them.

Shane had only had one serious boyfriend since he'd come out and that relationship hadn't been particularly good or long. It felt strange, sleeping with a literal stranger, and feeling like he treated Shane better than his former boyfriend ever had.

Ilya made Shane curious.

He wanted to know more about him, as a person, just as much as he wanted to know more about his body. He chewed on his bottom lip.

Don't get too ahead of yourself, Hollander.

Ilya came back into the bedroom, two mugs in hand.

"Did you make lattes?" Shane asked, accepting the mug as Ilya handed it to him. He had tucked his curls behind his ears, a few strands hanging in his face, making him look incredibly endearing.

"Maybe," Ilya replied teasingly, sitting on the edge of the bed, by Shane's legs. He had one leg tucked up, the other on the floor, looking like something out of an advertisement for Calvin Klein underwear.

Shane took a sip of his latte. "Oh… this is good…"

"I put maple in it."

"Like, maple syrup?"

"Mm."

Shane really wasn't a sweets guy normally. He liked sweet things on occasion, particularly Ilya's cocktails, but he would never have thought about making a maple syrup latte.

"It's really good."

"I know," Ilya said with a smile.

Shane shook his head, chuckling.

They talked over coffee, Ilya laying perpendicular to Shane on the bed, propped up on one arm. He plugged Shane's phone in for him so it could charge and they talked about Ilya's tattoos, and how much he liked Shane's freckles. He called them *breathtaking* .

Shane hated his freckles, so having someone say that they liked them so much was weird… but also nice.

He enjoyed learning about Ilya's ink. His arm was covered in various things; flowers, animals, geometric shapes, and one tiny, hidden tattoo of a bottle of small-batch Russian vodka.

They finished their coffee and got off again together, before Shane took a real, actual shower, because he had to get home.

He didn't want to leave but he also didn't want to overstay his welcome. He didn't know if this was it; sleeping with Ilya this one time and then that was that. He didn't want it to be, but he also didn't want to push his luck.

Ilya had put on a pair of sweats that hung low on his hips and an old band t-shirt. He smiled at Shane, his own phone in hand.

"Thank you," Shane said. "For last night… and this morning."

"My pleasure," Ilya replied, standing up, and coming to Shane. He took Shane's hand, loosely holding his fingers, brushing his thumb gently over Shane's knuckles. It was a sweet gesture, such a tender, soft touch, and Shane looked down at their hands, before looking up into Ilya's eyes.

"I would like to see you again," Ilya murmured. Shane blinked at him, feeling himself blush.

"Yeah?"

"Yes," Ilya chuckled. "I like you, Shane Hollander."

Shane was blushing in earnest now, smiling, having to look away from Ilya's sweet face, or else his heart might explode.

"I like you, too," he replied, looking back up into those playful hazel eyes, all crinkled up as Ilya smiled. "You have my number."

"I do," Ilya replied with a wink.

They exchanged some more kisses, before Ilya walked Shane to the door.

They kissed some more and then Shane really did have to leave. He laughed as he waved goodbye, giddy as he headed down to the stairs that would lead out of the building.

He called Rose almost as soon as he was on the sidewalk.

"Hey!" she said on the second ring. "What's up, buttercup?"

"I slept with Ilya last night. And this morning. Twice."

There was a pause.

"You did WHAT?!"

Shane laughed, holding the phone from his ear.

"SHANE HOLLANDER YOU SLUTTY SLUT! TELL ME EVERYTHINGGGGGGG!!!!"

Shane told her everything.

“I can’t believe you did it,” Rose said. “Damn. Good for you, Shane. He’s a fucking smokeshow.”

“I know! I can’t believe it either. I mean… he’s way out of my league… but he wants to see me again and we have each other’s numbers so…”

“Hey! Take that back! He is NOT out of your league! You are just as hot as he is! Actually, it’s kind of unfair, if I’m honest, but whatever. The point IS, that *you* are a hot dude who is now banging another equally hot dude, and that should be celebrated.”

Shane chuckled. Leave it to Rose to pump his tires like that. She was an incredible friend and Shane was so grateful for her. “Yeah. You’re right. Thanks, Rose.”

“Anytime, my friend.”

They talked a little more and made plans to get dinner. Shane felt like he was walking on air the entire way back to his own apartment. It was a forty-five minute walk but worth it. It was a beautiful day and he’d been all wrapped up in the arms of a beautiful man, with the intention of doing that again… hopefully soon.

Today felt like it was going to be a good day.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Ilya gets protective

September

Ilya smiled at his phone, re-reading the last few texts that he had exchanged with Shane. They were texting almost all the time, whenever they could, since they'd hooked up over a week ago.

They'd seen each other a few times since and had only been able to hook up once more. Ilya was hoping to make that a regular thing though. He definitely wanted more of Shane Hollander.

Ilya was very comfortable with hooking up with people. He and Svetlana had been hooking up regularly for years and Ilya had had sex with various other women and a few men over the years in much the same capacity.

He hadn't really dated anyone. Ever. He had a very limited experience with relationships and the examples of relationships in his life had never been good.

His parents' marriage had been disastrous and the last thing Ilya wanted was for the cycle to repeat itself.

He had more or less resigned himself to bachelorhood; having sex with lots of people, and never really settling down. The idea of having a family felt very pie in the sky for him. He liked kids, he thought he would like to be a dad, but finding the right partner seemed like the more difficult thing.

Ilya felt different about Shane though. He couldn't quite put his finger on what it was exactly that made him feel this way… or even exactly what that feeling was.

He liked Shane. A lot. He was beautiful, smart, funny, and kind of nerdy. They had a lot of things in common, almost like they'd lived sort of parallel lives. Ilya enjoyed his company and the sexual chemistry between them was off the charts.

It felt a little like it was too good to be true, if Ilya was honest. He was afraid of asking for or doing more. Things were fine as they were. They'd only hooked up twice and they could keep doing that; spending time in Ilya's bar, having amazing sex at the end of the night, then some incredible morning sex, too… and more espresso.

And that was fine.

He didn’t need to want more than that. If it wasn’t broken and all that.

Ilya smiled to himself. He sent Shane one more text, a winking kissy face, and then pocketed his phone in order to get ready for that evening’s shift.

Ilya was excited for tonight. He was working with Wyatt and Svetlana on the bar, which was always a blast, and he’d been looking forward to working this shift with them.

But before he could get his hands dirty, he needed to do some business.

He and Svetlana sat down with Harris about hiring some more people. Though *Irina’s* was small and Ilya did enjoy having a tight-knit, intimate staff, he knew that they needed more hands on deck so people could take time off.

Harris and Svetlana had given him a pointed look at the mention of time off, which Ilya chose to ignore. He didn’t need to take time off. Not now. Maybe one day, eventually, he would.

More importantly, he wanted to be sure that his employees could.

They talked about putting up a listing and Ilya would ask around within his restaurant network and see if there was anyone who was looking for a job. They could interview as options came in.

That settled, they did some inventory and stock, then placed some orders, and then it was time to prep.

He wasn’t going to see Shane tonight because he had other plans, which was fine. Ilya liked that he had his own friends and did his own thing. Their hookups were convenient and that was all Ilya could ask for.

He checked his phone once more before they opened and smiled at Shane’s response.

Shane: ❤️ have a good shift!

“Is that your boy toy?” Svetlana asked, in Russian, trying to peek over his shoulder.

“Maybe,” Ilya replied, turning off the screen, and placing his phone back in its usual spot on the shelf by the register.

Svetlana smiled at him, her blue eyes dancing.

“You slept with him, didn’t you?”

Ilya didn’t respond, simply going about prepping his garnishes.

“Ilyaaaaaaa,” Svetlana sang.

He looked up at her, shaking his head as she grinned at him.

“He’s very cute.”

“Mm.”

Svetlana leaned against the bar, smiling wide. “Are you gonna spill?”

“No.”

Svetlana looked at him in faux shock. “How dare you! Not even a crumb?”

“I don’t kiss and tell.”

She pouted. “You’re no fun.”

Ilya huffed a laugh. “Don’t be jealous.”

Svetlana rested a hand on her sternum, tossing her head back dramatically. “Oh, woe is me! I cannot possibly survive without your dick. How will I go on?”

They both laughed.

“Is it serious?” Svetlana asked once they’d both calmed down.

Ilya shook his head. “I don’t think so. He’s fun and cute. We’ll see how things go, y’know?”

“Fair enough,” Svetlana agreed. Ilya could feel her eyes lingering on him and he looked up, their eyes meeting.

“What?” he asked.

She shook her head and smiled mysteriously. “Nothing…”

She pushed off the bar and went about checking their wine and beer stock. Ilya watched her curiously before he shrugged and went back to his own task.

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Half-way through their night, Wyatt showed up for his shift. It was the lull before the later evening wave of people and the bar was always busier after dinner and the extra set of hands was welcome.

Wyatt was tall, with blond curly hair, and a bright smile. He was personable and easy to talk to. Ilya always had a good time when it was the three of them working the bar, laughing and joking around while also keeping a steady stream of customers happy.

Tonight felt busier than usual. There was a summer concert series and tonight was one of the concerts, so that explained the increased rush of people.

Ilya felt like he was being put through his paces, making drink after drink after drink. A few people had needed to be turned away because they were already fairly intoxicated but better to keep things peaceful and relaxed.

In a rare breather before the next cocktail order came in from the floor, Ilya surveyed the bar, and paused over one particular patron.

Shane was sitting in his usual spot at the end of the bar. He caught Ilya's eye and waved, smiling. Ilya brightened at seeing him, pleasantly surprised. He hadn't thought he would be coming tonight.

Ilya made his way over, leaning over the bar before he could stop himself, and kissed Shane's cheek.

"Hi."

"Hi," Shane laughed, his cheeks pink under his freckles. Ilya really, *really* loved how easily he blushed. It was so adorable.

God, he's cute.

"I thought you were not coming."

Shane shrugged. "Figured I would grab a nightcap…"

Ilya smiled at him, unreasonably pleased to have him here. "What would you like?"

"Just a beer tonight."

Ilya rolled his eyes and scoffed. "Fine. So *boring* ."

Shane just laughed.

Ilya put in the order and grabbed the beer, popping the tab, and placed the can on a coaster in front of Shane. No glass.

"Thank you," Shane said.

Ilya winked at him before tapping his knuckles on the bar and getting back to work.

He would have liked to have talked to Shane some more, ask him about his night with his friends, curious as to what he had gotten up to, if he had had fun. He would have liked to have flirted with him a bit, take him upstairs again at the end of the night, fuck him into the wee morning hours.

But he was at work and work was busy, so they would both have to make do with the occasional glance and smile.

Shane had maybe been at the bar for less than twenty-minutes when Ilya glanced up and noticed the man sitting next to him.

It wasn't someone Ilya recognized. He was young-ish, with slicked back brown hair cut into an aggressive fade. He looked like a low-rent Peaky Blinder… or mafia. He was wearing a

button down with an open collar, the sleeves rolled up. He was talking to Shane, though Shane looked like he wasn't interested in talking.

He slid a menu over to the man, so Ilya assumed that was all he had been asking for. Ilya went back to making his drink, before moving on to the next few drinks that had come through.

"Hey," Wyatt said, coming up to Ilya's side maybe five minutes later.

"Yes?" Ilya replied, adding a garnish to a drink.

"Heads up on the weird guy talking to Shane," Wyatt continued. "Somethings up. Figured you would want to handle it."

Ilya stilled, eyes glancing to Shane's end of the bar. Shane looked extremely uncomfortable, sitting rigidly in his seat. The man sitting next to him looked drunk, his hand on the back of Shane's chair, boxing him in. Shane gave him a tight smile, shifting slightly. He gestured about getting up from his seat and the guy moved his arm, touching Shane in a familiar kind of way. Ilya narrowed his eyes.

Shane twitched out of his touch, his body language screaming his discomfort, before he moved out from his seat, and made a beeline to the bathroom.

"Take this," Ilya said to Wyatt. "Woman in the red shirt with her husband."

"Got it."

Ilya made his way to the end of the bar. He went slowly, measuring his steps. He was not unfamiliar with untoward bar patrons. People got drunk, they felt entitled, they talked to women (and sometimes men) in a way that made the other person feel trapped.

It was one of the downsides of working in the service industry in general. Some people didn't do well with alcohol and some people were assholes. Sometimes they were both.

Ilya grabbed a full bottle of water and brought it with him as he made his way down to stand in front of the man. He refilled the man's water glass. The guy looked at him. He had a beer open in front of him but he definitely looked like he had had more to drink, probably from wherever he'd been before *Irina's* .

"Having a good night?" Ilya asked the man. He blinked at Ilya, then smiled, his cheeks ruddy.

"Yeah, man," the guy replied. "Fucking baller. Was at the concert before this. Hopped around to a few places. This spot is cool as hell!"

Ilya forced a smile. "Good. I am happy to hear it. I'm glad you like my place."

"Oh yeah? You the owner?"

Ilya nodded his head once.

“Right on!”

Ilya glanced to the side as Shane slid back into his seat. Ilya made eye contact with him. Shane looked relieved but also uncertain. Ilya didn’t like that. Shane (and really any of his patrons) should never feel unsafe, especially at his bar.

The drunk man reached over, slapping the back of his hand against Shane’s arm. “Yo! Did you know this guy owns the bar?”

“Um, yeah,” Shane replied.

“We are friends,” Ilya said, a casual warning, though the guy didn’t seem to register it.

“Hey! That’s cool!”

“Was there anything else you needed?” Ilya asked the man, keeping calm.

“Just another beer, dude. We’re having a nice conversation,” the guy replied, looking at Shane meaningfully.

“I cannot do that,” Ilya said evenly. “You’ve had enough for tonight, but you are welcome back anytime. I will get your check.”

The guy looked at Ilya as if he couldn’t believe he was being refused service. “What the fuck, man? I’m not *that* drunk.”

“But you *are* intoxicated,” Ilya reasoned. “And I believe my other guest would like to enjoy his evening alone.”

Ilya plucked the mostly empty beer bottle from in front of the man.

“Hey! What the hell? You the alcohol police or something?”

Ilya tossed the can into the garbage. “Yes, sort of. I would prefer to be a responsible bar owner. Everyone here deserves to have a peaceful time and it is important for your safety.”

The guy looked at Ilya like he had ten heads. “Fuck this. I ain’t paying for that beer.”

Ilya blinked placidly at the man. He was fine with letting a single beer go unpaid for if it meant getting a drunken idiot out of his bar without disturbing the other guests or anyone getting injured.

“I would be happy to have our host call you a cab,” Ilya continued.

“Pfft,” the guy replied, flinging his hands at Ilya. “Fuck you. I’m out of here.”

Then, ridiculously, he turned to Shane, placing a hand on his arm. “C’mon, sweetheart. We can go to a better spot and continue our conversation.”

“I really don’t—” Shane started to say.

“Do not touch him,” Ilya cut in, his voice firm, a bit sharper than he would have liked.

The man and Shane both looked at him.

“You have been asked to leave. He is not interested in leaving with you. Please go.”

At that moment, Wyatt appeared behind the man. He met Ilya’s eyes and Ilya nodded at him.

“C’mon, fella. You’re coming with me. We’d be happy to have you another time, but you’re done for the night.”

Perhaps realizing that he was outmatched, surprising given his level of drunkenness, the man let go of Shane’s arm, and slid out of his seat. Wyatt steadied him and escorted him out. Ilya watched him go, before he turned his entire attention to Shane.

“Are you alright?” he asked, resting a hand on top of Shane’s. His hand was trembling slightly. “I did not mean to speak for you.”

“I’m okay, yeah,” Shane replied, looking shaken, and pale. “It’s fine. Thank you, actually.”

“I’m so sorry,” Ilya replied, meaning it with every fiber of his being. “That is not usual…”

Shane shook his head. “No. I know. It’s okay. Just… so bizarre. Thank you for stepping in.”

“Of course.” Ilya’s eyes searched Shane’s face. He didn’t like the anxiety there or knowing that Shane had been uncomfortable at all. “That should not have happened…”

“It’s okay, Ilya,” Shane assured, offering Ilya a smile. “Not your fault.”

Ilya felt like he should have done more. Shane was being unreasonably gracious.

“Do you want to go home? The beer is on me.”

Shane huffed a laugh and shook his head. “Do you mind if I stick around…?”

“Not at all…”

Ilya wasn’t sure why Shane would want to, after that whole thing, but he wouldn’t look a gift horse in the mouth. He gently squeezed Shane’s fingers before he poured him some more water.

“I’ll be back.”

“Take your time. You’re working.”

Ilya waved his hand dismissively and turned to help Svetlana. Wyatt had returned, getting right back to work.

“Thank you,” Ilya said to him.

“Just part of the gig, Roz. No worries. Shane okay?”

“A little shaken, I think, but okay.”

“Good. Some people are just fucking dicks.”

Ilya huffed a laugh and nodded in agreement.

***

At the end of the night, Ilya locked the front door and sighed. Shane was standing by the bar and Ilya went to him, wrapping his arms around him.

“I’m sorry about tonight,” Ilya murmured to him. “It was a pleasant surprise, having you here.”

“It’s okay,” Shane murmured back, his body tucked against Ilya’s, hugging him back.

Ilya rested his chin on top of Shane’s head and just held him for a bit. He felt terrible for how the evening had gone. Shane had surprised him, which should have been fun, and a bit sexy, knowing that they would head up to Ilya’s apartment together afterward.

But Ilya didn’t want to assume anything now. He didn’t want Shane to feel pressured, especially after being hit on and touched by that weird guy. The whole thing made Ilya’s stomach knot and he felt himself getting angry.

No one had the right to touch Shane like that or make him feel uncomfortable. Ilya was upset with himself for allowing it to happen, which was a ridiculous thought, but he couldn’t help it.

“Is it okay if I stay?” Shane asked.

“Of course.” Ilya was surprised to hear it, but pleasantly so.

They looked at each other before completely pulling away and Ilya leaned down to kiss Shane. It was a soft kiss, as gentle as he could make it. Shane was smiling when they parted and Ilya took that as a good sign.

They went upstairs and right to bed. They cuddled up together, Ilya spooning against Shane’s back, holding him protectively. Shane curled against him, finding Ilya’s hand, and holding it in his.

Ilya closed his eyes and kissed the back of Shane’s head. He tried not to let his mind latch onto the events of that evening, thinking of all the ways he could have done things differently, while Shane slept in his arms.

It was over now. There was nothing he could do and it didn’t seem that Shane was upset. Ilya would make it up to him, of that he was sure.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The morning after and checking in with friends

Shane woke up the next morning to soft light spilling into Ilya's bedroom, and Ilya still spooned up against his back, one strong arm around Shane's waist.

Shane smiled a little to himself, snuggling back against him, listening to the sound of Ilya's soft snoring. He was hard and he could tell that Ilya was, too, but he was in no rush to escalate anything, or wake Ilya up.

It had been a weird night last night but Shane appreciated how kind Ilya had been about the whole thing and, if Shane was honest, how sexy it had been to have someone step in for him like that.

Ilya had been so calm and cool, defusing the situation, which had given Wyatt plenty of time to step in and remove the guy from the bar. It had been excellent and impressive work. It was the competency that really did it for Shane.

He never felt like he really needed rescuing or that he couldn't handle himself. He knew he would have found a way out of that situation but it was nice to not have had to do that. Shane knew that part of Ilya stepping in was his job but the fact that he had comforted Shane after felt… different.

He didn't want to question it. He didn't want his anxiety to continue to seep in when he was enjoying himself. He could have this and be appreciative of someone coming to his aid and comforting him.

So he placed his worry to the side and let himself doze some more, enjoying the comfort of being in Ilya's arms.

Shane was woken some time later by soft, ticklish kisses being pressed to his shoulder. He smiled, his stomach swooping pleasantly at the way Ilya trailed his lips against Shane's skin.

"Good morning," he murmured, rolling over to look up at Ilya.

He looked rumpled and sleepy and impossibly gorgeous, smiling down at Shane with his curls wild, his hazel eyes half-lidded.

"Good morning," he murmured back, voice all frayed and throaty from sleep. "Sleep okay?"

"Yeah. Great."

“Good.”

They smiled at one another and Ilya surprised him as he reached out to gently brush some of Shane’s hair out of his face.

“I am sorry,” he said, his face serious. “About last night.”

Shane furrowed his brows, leaning up on his elbow, and shaking his head. “No. It’s okay. It wasn’t your fault. Thank you for stepping in.”

“Of course. No one should feel unsafe at my bar,” Ilya replied, looking at Shane intensely, as if to say, *especially you.*

Shane blushed under the attention, glancing away. “I appreciate it. Really.”

He looked back at Ilya feeling surprisingly bold and, admittedly, pretty turned on. “It was, um, very sexy.”

Ilya blinked at him and then smiled, chuckling, the sound low, a deep, delicious rumble.

“Do you like being taken care of, Shane Hollander?” Ilya asked.

“I like competence,” Shane replied and god did he ever. He loved a man who was in control. Shane wasn’t into shaming or punishment, but he didn’t mind being told what to do by a man who knew what he was about.

And Ilya hit all those buttons.

Ilya hummed, smiling his sexy, crooked smile. He took one of Shane’s hands, maintaining eye contact, and kissed the knuckles, before licking teasingly between them. Shane swallowed. Ilya turned Shane’s hand to kiss his palms and Shane’s lips parted on a sigh, those simple gestures making his whole body tingle.

Ilya seemed to take Shane’s measure, eyes taking in what he could see that wasn’t hidden under the comforter. He set Shane’s hand down, curving his hand around Shane’s jaw to hold him in place as he leaned in and kissed him.

It was easy for Shane to surrender to the kiss, expecting something hard and hungry, but getting something tender and adoring instead. Carefully, Ilya pressed him onto his back, and Shane wrapped his arms around his muscular shoulders.

Ilya pressed their bodies together as they made out, Shane’s hands finding their way into Ilya’s curls, scrunching them in his fingers, one hand trailing down to cup Ilya’s scruffy cheek in his hand.

Ilya hummed, kissing Shane’s cheek, down his jaw, to his neck. Shane tilted his head to give Ilya better access as he kissed a slow, ticklish trail of warm kisses down Shane’s body.

Shane opened his eyes to watch as this big, beautiful man kissed down his abs, pausing to lick just below his belly button, before raising his eyes to look at Shane as he tugged down

Shane's briefs.

"Okay?" he asked and Shane nodded.

"Yeah."

Ilya smiled, pressing a teasing kiss to the tip of Shane's rigid cock, turning his head to kiss a path down Shane's groin, to the inside of his thigh. He did the same to the otherside, then turned his attention back to Shane's dick.

Shane bit his bottom lip, smoothing his hands into Ilya's hair as Ilya teasingly kissed and licked at Shane's erection, making Shane whine and pant until he finally wrapped his plush lips around him and took him into his mouth.

"Oh god, Ilya," Shane moaned, pressing one hand against the headboard, fingers fisting in Ilya's curls.

Shane didn't know all of Ilya's sexual history but boy howdy was the guy good at blowjobs.

He sucked Shane leisurely, taking his time, swallowing around him, humming, which just brought Shane closer and closer to the edge. He didn't know what Ilya's plan was and he didn't care. He was fine with being in such knowledgeable hands.

Ilya pulled off of Shane, letting him slide from his mouth, and there was no reason for that to be as sexy as it was.

"Do you want me to fuck you?" Ilya asked, voice still a bit gravelly.

"Yes. Hell yes."

Ilya smiled and laughed warmly, dipping his head to suck one of Shane's balls into his mouth. Shane keened.

Ilya released him, grabbing the lube and a condom. He took his time, opening Shane up with steady confidence. And it wasn't a hardship for Shane to open for Ilya. He knew exactly how to touch him, fingers sinking into him with confidence, gently curling and stretching.

When Ilya finally entered him, it was surprisingly tender. He peppered Shane's face with tender kisses, almost apologetic, moving with slow, deliberate strokes. Shane wrapped his arms and legs around him, urging him deeper.

"You are beautiful," Ilya murmured, his breath coming in ragged puffs that brushed against Shane's face.

"So are you," Shane breathed. "Fuck. Just like that…"

Ilya sped up a little and Shane reached down, wrapping a hand around his cock. Ilya's eyes trailed down, watching.

"Yes," he breathed, tilting his head back as he started chasing his pleasure.

Shane came first, body spasming and clenching around Ilya as he spurted all over his hand and belly. Ilya swore in Russian before he came, pulsing inside of Shane, his head falling forward, looking too gorgeous to be real.

Shane had never been so fascinated by anyone's 'O' face before, but Ilya's was perfect.

Carefully, Ilya pulled out, rolling to his side to lay next to Shane. Shane hummed happily, stretching out, his body loose and at ease.

Ilya chuckled.

"What?" Shane asked.

Ilya leaned up on his side, perching his head in his hand. "Nothing. Just… this is nice. And I am sorry about last night."

Shane turned to look at him. "This is nice and it's okay. Nothing for you to be sorry for."

Ilya smiled and nodded his head. "I will make you breakfast?"

Shane smiled back. "Sure. I'm in no rush."

"Good."

Ilya leaned in and kissed him gently, before getting out of bed. He went to the bathroom and came out a few moments later with a cloth for Shane. He gave it to him and kissed the top of his head, before grabbing his underwear and slid into them.

"Stay," Ilya soothed and Shane watched him disappear to his kitchen.

Shane got up anyway, slipping back into his briefs, and boldly, grabbing the t-shirt that Ilya had tossed over his desk chair. It was baggy on him and smelled like Ilya.

He left the bedroom and went to the kitchen, wrapping his arms around Ilya from behind as he stood at the stove. Ilya was warm and Shane pressed up against him, his hands resting on Ilya's chest.

"Hello," he said.

"Hi," Shane sighed.

Ilya made breakfast and lattes and they sat together at his kitchen island. Ilya really was very sweet and it was obvious how badly he felt about last night. Shane reassured him and expressed his appreciation.

After breakfast they showered together, getting off again, before Shane headed home, feeling warmed by all of Ilya's care and attention.

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Two days later…

Shane was sitting at brunch with Rose, J.J., Hayden, and Hayden's wife, Jackie. The Pike children were being watched by Jackie's parents, so she and Hayden had been able to escape for some adult bonding time.

Shane loved his friends. He was so grateful for them and their support and spending time with them always made him feel more grounded.

But sometimes he felt like they could be a little nosy… especially about his love life.

"Tell us everything," Rose said as soon as they had ordered cocktails.

"Tell us everything… about what?" J.J. asked, raising a brow at Shane.

"Shane is seeing someone," Rose clarified. "Hooking up."

"And you didn't tell me?!" J.J. asked, in French, which was what he was being serious and/or outraged about something.

Shane offered him a small, apologetic smile, his cheeks burning. He didn't really enjoy being the center of this kind of attention, but he had four pairs of eyes on him, all very expectant for him to spill the beans.

"Who is he?" Jackie asked.

"Yeah," Hayden added, eyes narrowed. "Who?"

Shane sighed. He started at the beginning, telling everyone about being assigned to do a write up on *Irina's* , meeting Ilya, and their subsequent hookups. He told them about the night at the bar with the handsy guy, both Jackie and Rose listening with concern and interest.

"Oh my god, Shane!" Rose exclaimed. "He rescued you!"

"He sounds dreamy," Jackie piped in.

"Hey," Hayden huffed and his wife elbowed him playfully.

J.J. seemed dubious. "It sounds like he was just doing his job, taking care of the bar. The sex could have just been a way for him to placate you."

"Whoa. Harsh," Rose replied and Shane had to agree.

"He was sweet about it," Shane replied. "Very apologetic and kind. And I wanted to go home with him, so I did, not because I felt like he owed me. It didn't feel like he was just trying to like, manipulate me."

J.J. shrugged. "Rozanov has a reputation. He sleeps around. He's kind of a dick. Who knows with that guy."

Shane wasn't sure if he was buying J.J.'s perspective. Ilya had been kind of a dick when Shane had met him but in getting to know him better, he was seeing different sides to Ilya, ones that were sweet and kind and soft.

He didn't like the seed of doubt that J.J. had tossed into the mix. Shane didn't think that Ilya was using him or anything.

"We're not serious anyway," Shane said. "So if he ends up being an asshole, then I stop seeing him."

J.J. nodded. "All I'm saying is that you can find someone better. Even just for hookups."

"I agree with J.J.," Hayden added. "You should be with someone who respects you."

"He does," Shane replied, surprised at the vitriol he was getting from his friends. "And I'm an adult. I can make my own decisions. I'll leave if he starts really being awful. But he hasn't and I'm having fun."

Hayden didn't seem convinced, which annoyed Shane. Yes, his friends liked to tease him for being wound so tight he was on the edge of combustion and that he needed to get laid. Now he was getting laid, quite spectacularly he might add, on a regular basis, and his two best guy friends were being weird about it.

"We trust you," J.J. finally said, patting Shane on the back. "If you're happy, that's all that matters."

"Thank you," Shane replied and gave Hayden a pointed look.

Hayden shrugged. "As long as you're happy."

They finished up brunch and everyone said their goodbyes. Rose was the last to leave, lingering, and giving Shane a tight hug.

"Listen. Don't listen to them. If you're having fun, then good! You deserve this and I'm happy you're happy."

"Thanks, Rose."

By the time Shane got home, Jackie had sent him a one-on-one text with a similar sentiment, and Shane did feel better.

He knew that Hayden and J.J. were just looking out for him and wanted the best for him. Maybe they didn't quite understand the experience of being a gay man but Shane knew that they were just coming from a place of care.

Shane's experience of Ilya wasn't at all as J.J. had described and until he proved himself otherwise, Shane was going to see where things went.

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That evening at Irina's…

Ilya was thinking about Shane.

He was sort of always thinking about Shane these days, which was surprising to him. He normally didn't think about his hookups outside of hooking up with them and reaching out to hookup if that was what he was in the mood for.

They had been talking still, like nothing had changed, and Ilya had realized he had been nervous that Shane might stop contacting him after the incident in the bar with the weird drunk guy.

The whole situation had really been bothering Ilya, even though he knew he had handled it as professionally as he was able, and he'd been able to comfort Shane.

He wasn't sure what it was about Shane that was so… different. It wasn't anything bad. Quite the opposite in fact.

Ilya was enjoying Shane's company. He was beautiful, the sex was incredible, but Shane was also very smart, interested in the food and drink scene on an intellectual level that Ilya found stimulating. He was funny and willing to give as good as he got, though he was easy to tease, which Ilya enjoyed.

He was just hitting all the right buttons for Ilya. Even buttons he hadn't known existed.

Ilya wasn't going to push anything and he wasn't sure what else to expect, really. The hooking up was good and he had fun flirting with and teasing Shane. So he didn't think he needed to make anything weird.

No need to examine his feelings too closely.

But he should maybe invite Shane over for dinner. Cook something nice for him. He just wanted him to be comfortable.

"Hey, boss!" Wyatt greeted as he came into the bar, drawing Ilya from his thoughts.

"Hazy," Ilya greeted back.

Wyatt was one of the first people here, along with Ilya and Zane, the bar quiet, except for the music Ilya had playing while he prepped garnishes.

"You listening to the new Kendrick album?"

"Of course," Ilya replied with a smile.

"Nice!" Wyatt hummed happily as he went into the back to divest himself of his jacket and bag.

He came back out, washed his hands, and got to work helping Ilya prep.

“So how’s your man doing after the other night? He okay?”

Ilya glanced at his fellow bartender, one brow raised.

“My man?”

“Yeah. Shane Hollander. Y’all are seeing each other, right?”

Ilya narrowed his eyes and looked at Wyatt. The man was incredibly observant. It was something that made him an excellent bartender, able to notice when people had had too much or were being a problem.

“We are hooking up,” Ilya replied. “Not dating.”

“Oh. Okay! Nice.”

Ilya huffed a soft laugh. “Did Svetlana tell you?”

“Oh, no. She hasn’t said anything. I was just watching you guys during our shift and the way you were acting when that guy was getting all handsy. Seemed like things were higher stakes for you.”

Ilya made a face. Wyatt wasn’t wrong.

“Maybe,” Ilya replied.

“You like him, Roz?”

Ilya glanced at his friend and smiled. “Yes. I think so. He is a nice guy. Smart. Very funny.”

“Hey! Well that’s good! So it's like... just sex? Nothing serious?”

Ilya eyed Wyatt with some suspicion. “Just sex.” He appreciated how nonchalant Wyatt was about all of this. He was a fairly open-minded guy and not at all shy about discussing sex. But it felt like he was trying to get more information from Ilya.

“He seems pretty cool. Glad it’s working out for you!” Wyatt replied, dimples out in full force as he smiled.

“Yes. Thank you. Me, too.”

They went back to their prep in companionable silence.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Ilya cooks for Shane and then some...

Ilya: What are you doing right now?

Shane smiled at his phone as he read the text, unsurprised to be hearing from Ilya, but still feeling all warm and fluttery at receiving the text.

It was a Monday, one of the two days that *Irina's* was closed. Shane was at work currently, trying to finish his write up for a new barbecue spot that had opened. He was curious as to what Ilya was getting up to.

What did Ilya Rozanov do on his days off?

Shane: Procrastinating at work. You?

Ilya: You do not seem like a slacker, Hollander 😜

Ilya: I am home after food shopping

Ilya: Are you busy tonight?

It was a work night, so no, Shane didn't have any plans. He intended to go home, binge watch the episodes of the latest reality TV dating show Rose had recommended that he had missed, and then promptly go to bed.

But his interest was piqued.

Shane: The only plans I have are with my couch lol Why?

Ilya: Come over?

Shane blinked, very surprised at that text. It wasn't that he didn't like it. He liked it *immensely* in fact. He was very much into the idea of Ilya inviting him over. And Shane was an adult. He could go out on a work night if he wanted. He didn't usually but it wasn't like he'd ever had any hot Russians that were interested in him in a carnal sense in the past.

But it felt weird, too.

It was new.

Shane wasn't used to this kind of attention. He wasn't used to talking to someone every day, flirting with them, sending suggestive pictures back and forth. It wasn't something he really did. There was just something about Ilya that made him want to step outside his comfort zone.

They'd only hooked up three times. Twice that first time Shane had stayed over three weeks ago and once again the morning after that weird drunk guy had tried hitting on him.

He had really been enjoying whatever this was between himself and Ilya. He didn't want to hope for too much, but it was… nice. Good. Shane looked back at his phone and Ilya's waiting text.

Ilya: I won't keep you late. I wanted to make you dinner.

Shane bit his lips against another smile, his heart fluttering in his chest. Ilya's sweetness continued to surprise him. He was a very mysterious character, enjoying teasing and flirting and bantering. Shane liked the teasing, if he was honest, the playful ribbing, but he was getting the distinct impression that Ilya was kind of just a big softie.

Shane: Oh… really?

Ilya: Yes

Shane: 🥺 Okay! I finish up around 5! I can head to you once I'm done!

Ilya: Perfect

Ilya: Do you have any allergies?

Shane: nope!

Ilya: 👌

Shane laughed softly to himself, wiggling a little in his seat, before setting his phone aside, and taking a few deep breaths. There was no need for him to get ahead of himself. He liked Ilya, yes. He was attractive and talented and the sex was fucking amazing. But they weren't in a relationship.

They were kind of friends, maybe? Friends with benefits?

That wasn't usually Shane's style but it had been a long time since he'd been with anyone, so he would enjoy this while it lasted. He wouldn't expect anything more.

It was nice that Ilya wanted to make him dinner. He would have to bring something… a nice bottle of wine, maybe? Some dessert? Both? He could do both.

Shane managed to get through his work, though he was consistently distracted thinking about his impromptu plans for tonight, and making sure he didn't show up to Ilya's empty handed.

He left the office at five sharp, texting Ilya he was on his way, and made a pit stop to pick up a nice bottle of wine, and a half-dozen donuts.

He took the metro, getting off at the closest stop to Ilya's, which was about a seven minute walk.

Shane was nervous… but also excited. The walk helped to calm his nerves a little. It was a warm summer evening with clear skies. Everything you could want for this time of year.

He texted Ilya that he had arrived at his building and waited a few minutes before Ilya came downstairs, opening up a different door on the other side of the bar's entrance.

Shane felt himself flutter just seeing Ilya. His curls were pulled back and up in a small, partial ponytail, secured by a maroon colored scrunchie. He was wearing a tank top that showed off his muscular arms and the entire expanse of his tattooed left arm, as well as a pair of gray shorts and black slip-on sneakers.

"Hi," Ilya greeted, smiling brightly at Shane.

"Hi," Shane replied. "I brought wine. And dessert."

"That was not necessary," Ilya chuckled, looking down at Shane as he came to stand in front of Ilya. He smelled so fucking good. Shane had no idea what cologne he wore but he really liked it.

Shane shrugged and blushed. "I didn't want to come empty handed."

Ilya just smiled wider at him, before leaning in to kiss Shane hello. It was a very nice kiss; commanding and thorough but also sweet and… adoring, almost. It made Shane's toes curl. They parted and Shane just barely held back a smitten sigh.

"Come in," Ilya said, holding the door open for Shane. Shane stepped inside and he and Ilya went up to Ilya's apartment.

They chatted a little about Shane's commute, before stepping into Ilya's apartment.

Ilya took the wine and donuts, setting them on one of the counters. Shane surveyed the food items laid out, curious as to what Ilya had in mind for dinner.

"Do you want anything to drink?"

"Water is fine for now," Shane replied.

Ilya smiled lopsidedly at him. "We can open the wine later. Or I can make cocktails."

Shane laughed. "Whatever you like."

"You're my guest. Whatever *you* like."

Shane watched Ilya pour him a glass of water, intrigued by the way the muscles in his arm and back moved. He couldn't get over the scrunchie and how it didn't take away from how attractive Ilya was at all. It was cute.

He handed Shane the glass and he thanked him, suddenly extremely thirsty.

"Do you want to help?" Ilya asked, gesturing to his ingredients. "Or watch?"

"What are you making?"

" *Chebureki* . Is a savory turnover."

"That sounds delicious."

"They are very good. My mother's recipe."

Shane smiled softly. "Do you mind if I help?"

"I would not have asked if I minded," Ilya chuckled.

Shane washed his hands and joined Ilya at the counter, helping to chop cilantro, parsley, and green onion. They talked, mostly about Shane's work, and what Ilya had gotten up to on his day off. It was small talk, nothing too in-depth, but it felt nice, especially as they stood side by side, working together.

The whole scene was surprisingly calm and domestic. Shane did his best to not overthink it, to just enjoy the moment as it unfolded. He tried not to think about what it meant or could mean, or beating himself up for saying something dumb that made Ilya tease him.

But they laughed… a lot. Which Shane really liked. It felt good to laugh with Ilya, to have fun with him.

Ilya had made the filling out of a mix of ground pork and beef. He added the greens that Shane had chopped, as well as some salt and pepper, and three tablespoons of milk.

He helped Ilya make the chebureki, adding the filling to the dough Ilya laid out, and then Ilya sealed it.

Shane put together a small salad, then opened the bottle of wine while Ilya fried the chebureki, pouring two glasses after Ilya showed him where the wine glasses were.

"Smells delicious," Shane hummed, setting a wine glass where Ilya could reach for it but not knock it over.

"Yes," Ilya replied with a playful smile.

Shane watched him, his anxiety getting the better of him now that he was still, no longer distracted by helping prepare a meal. He took a sip of the wine from his glass.

“Is this to make up for the other night?” Shane asked, because it did seem unusual for Ilya to do all of this. Shane would have continued to flatter himself to think that Ilya liked him enough to invite him over simply for that reason alone but he wasn’t sure that was all this was.

Ilya shrugged, placing a finished turnover onto the plate covered in paper towels. Shane reached out, feeling bold, and poked one of Ilya’s (impressive) biceps.

Ilya looked at him, arching one of his dark brows at him.

“Is it?”

“Maybe,” Ilya replied, adding another cheburek to the plate. “I feel bad for what happened. Like I could have done more. I think we are friends, yes? This is a small thing I can do.”

Shane looked at Ilya, processing what he’d said. He could understand Ilya doing this because he felt bad, though talking about them as friends was… interesting.

“We’re friends?”

“You do not think so?”

“I mean, we’ve hooked up. Do you do that with all your friends?”

Ilya smiled a little. “Some, yes.”

“Do you want to be friends?”

“I think so.” He added yet another pastry to the plate. “I like you.”

Shane’s face and ears went warm, his heart rate speeding up. It wasn’t the first time Ilya had told him so, but it hit different this time. “Oh.”

Ilya chuckled. “Friends can also have sex. If you want to.”

“I mean, yeah.”

Ilya laughed out loud and Shane only blushed further. He felt ridiculous. What was he even doing?

Ilya had moved all the chebureki from the pan and turned off the burner. He turned to face Shane. Shane swallowed and looked back at him.

“I like you, too,” he finally said. “I’d like to be friends… who hook up.”

“That was not so hard.”

Shane scowled at him. Ilya chuckled again, reaching out to tuck Shane’s hair behind his ear, one long finger buffing Shane’s cheek, and he could have melted on the spot. Ilya’s expression was fond.

“You think too much.”

Shane nodded, averting his eyes. “Yeah. I’ve heard that before.”

“Relax a little. This is fun, yeah?”

When Shane wasn’t getting all in his head, yeah, it was fun.

“It is.”

“Okay,” Ilya replied, shrugging. “Then we keep having fun. Deal?”

Shane smiled small, turning his eyes back to Ilya. “Deal.”

Ilya nodded once. “Good. Let’s eat.”

They sat at the kitchen counter to eat, their knees brushing with how close they were given the limited space.

Shane took a cheburek and some salad, letting the turnover sit on his plate to cool a bit more.

“Here,” Ilya said, handing him a few pieces of paper towel. “They can be messy.”

“Thanks,” Shane murmured, offering a smile.

The food was delicious. The turnovers came out really flavorful and delicious, even Shane’s salad wasn’t half-bad.

“These are really amazing,” he said, taking another cheburek.

“I know,” Ilya smiled.

Shane chewed his food thoughtfully, looking at Ilya.

“Was your mother a good cook?” Shane asked.

“She was,” Ilya replied, lifting his eyes to meet Shane’s.

“Do you use all her recipes when you’re trying to woo people?”

Ilya laughed. He had a nice laugh. Deep and warm. Unguarded.

“No,” he managed to reply. “I don’t.”

“I feel so special.”

Ilya hummed, winking at Shane, and finished the wine in his glass.

“The food is a bonus. I am charming enough.”

Shane raised his brows at Ilya, scoffing. “You have a huge ego.”

Ilya grinned. “I am very sure of myself.”

“Oh my god.”

Ilya chuckled, a teasing *hehehe* . He knocked his knee playfully against Shane’s.

“You like it.”

Shane felt himself blush. “Maybe.”

They finished dinner and Shane made an attempt to clean up, since Ilya had done much of the cooking, but Ilya pushed him gently back down onto his stool.

“You are my guest. You have done enough.”

Shane refilled their wine glasses, watching Ilya load his tiny dishwasher in a way that suggested he had found a system that worked in getting all his dirty dishes into it in one shot. Ilya closed the dishwasher and turned it on. He washed his hands, dried them, and turned back toward Shane, moving closer to stand in front of him.

Shane looked back, his heart thumping in his chest. Ilya cupped Shane’s face in his big, warm hands, tilting Shane’s face up, and kissed him.

This was a deeper kiss than before, hungrier, and Shane surrendered to it easily. Eagerly.

He wrapped his arms around Ilya, one hand finding its way into his curls, holding onto the thick, soft strands.

Shane wasn’t sure that he had ever been kissed so well before. Ilya was really fucking good at it. He wondered how many people Ilya had kissed… but the thought left his mind as soon as it arrived.

Ilya broke the kiss, pulling away only enough so he could speak, his lips brushing Shane’s.

“How about dessert?” he asked.

Shane huffed a laugh. “Yeah.”

Ilya released Shane’s face, getting his hands underneath him, and lifting him from the stool. Shane wrapped his arms and legs around him, holding on as Ilya carried him effortlessly to his bedroom as they made out some more.

Normally, Shane would have been outraged at this, but Ilya’s strength was a huge fucking turn on.

He lay Shane out on his bed carefully, leaning over him, his fingers tugging Shane’s polo out of his pants, finding their way up his shirt to touch skin, palms sliding over his abs, to his chest, pushing the polo up.

Shane sat up a little to take the shirt off, Ilya leaning in to kiss him again as Shane's own hands reached to take Ilya's tank top off.

They kissed hungrily, greedily, pulling off clothing as best they could while trying not to break apart. When they'd managed to get naked, Ilya kissed his way down Shane's neck, to the hollow of his throat, down his sternum to his abs. He paused there, pressing gentle, ticklish kisses to Shane's belly, before making his way further down to Shane's hips and pelvis.

Shane opened his eyes and bit his lip, watching how fluidly Ilya moved, mesmerized by how stunning he was, brushing his lips against the inside of Shane's thigh. His stubble tickled the sensitive skin, his lips soft, breath warm.

Shane reached up, tugging the scrunchie from Ilya's hair. Ilya looked up, letting out a soft, surprised laugh, his curls falling around his face. Shane slid his hand into his hair and Ilya smiled up at him, ducking his head to kiss his way up Shane's cock.

He stopped at the head and Shane couldn't look away as Ilya wrapped his tongue around it, before sucking it into his mouth. Shane gasped, falling back onto the mattress, closing his eyes as he got wrapped up in the pleasure of it all.

Ilya was fucking incredible at blowjobs. His mouth was warm and wet and tight. He used his tongue and a little bit of teeth, one hand reaching up to play with Shane's balls, rolling them carefully in his palm.

"Oh god," Shane gasped. "Fuck…"

He wasn't even embarrassed. He loved being touched like this and Ilya did it so well.

Ilya hummed and the reverberation shot through Shane, making him moan.

Ilya pulled off of him slowly, letting Shane slide from his lips. He looked up at him and Shane reached for him, pulling him close to kiss him again, before pushing Ilya onto his back. He slid down Ilya's body, appreciating the catch of his chest hair under his palms, and the ridges of his abdominals.

He took Ilya into his mouth, sighing in relief at the sensation. Ilya was a big man and his dick was proportional to the rest of him. Shane wanted to know what it would feel like to feel him get hard in his mouth but this was just as good. He was warm and weighty against Shane's tongue and the sensation of having Ilya in his mouth only turned Shane on more.

He was a little rusty but he took Ilya down as far as he could. Not all the way, but enough. Ilya made a shuddery sound and breathed something in Russian, one big hand sliding into Shane's hair.

His fingers traced Shane's face gently as Shane sucked him, following the line of his jaw, his cheekbone, his freckles. Shane lifted his eyes, finding Ilya watching him. His eyes were dark with desire, his lips kiss-swollen and wet and parted.

“You are doing so well,” Ilya murmured, his thumbs brushing under Shane’s eye. Shane hummed, making Ilya moan, letting his eyes slide closed. Shane loved praise. He didn’t like when it was excessive… but he did like knowing he was doing a good job, that he was being good.

He sucked Ilya for a few more moments, before releasing him, and crawled back up his body. They kissed some more, pressed together, rubbing against each other.

“You on top?” Ilya asked, cupping his hand around Shane’s left ass cheek, squeezing.

“Okay,” Shane breathed.

He leaned away from Ilya so he could grab the lube and a condom, before he sprawled back out next to Shane, on his side. Ilya tugged Shane’s leg over his hip and opened him up that way, which was different for Shane, but sexy.

He went slowly, rubbing a slick finger against Shane’s rim, before carefully sinking it inside. He penetrated Shane almost lazily, waiting until Shane was more loose before adding a second finger, curling, twisting, gently stretching apart.

Shane wasn’t sure if Ilya just liked taking his time or if he enjoyed teasing Shane. Based on his sexy little smirk, it was the latter.

“You into ah—! Torture?” Shane asked, breathless, as Ilya nudged up against his prostate, making him moan as pleasure swept through him.

“No,” Ilya chuckled, breathing against Shane’s ear, nipping at his earlobe.

Shane panted, overwhelmed by how expertly and deliciously Ilya opened him.

“Stop,” he managed to get out. “I’m ready.”

Ilya looked like he could have kept going until Shane came but he withdrew his fingers, rolling onto his back, and pulling Shane with him. Shane kissed him as Ilya slid on a condom, reaching out and searching blindly for the lube.

He found it, pouring some into his palm, and reached back to wrap his slick palm around Ilya. Ilya hissed, his hands wrapping around Shane’s hips, as Shane stroked him slowly.

Shane smiled down at him, feeling like he had a little bit of the upper hand, pleased to be wringing pleasure from Ilya.

“You like this?” he asked.

“Thought you wanted me to fuck you,” Ilya retorted. Shane smiled. That was true enough.

Shane didn’t tease him for long, carefully sitting back onto Ilya’s cock. He loved this feeling, being filled. Ilya felt so good inside of him and he wanted to bask in the sensation, one hand planted on Ilya’s chest.

Shane tilted his head back, biting his bottom lip.

“Okay?” Ilya asked and Shane let his head fall forward, eyes open.

“Yeah,” Shane huffed, smiling. “Great.”

He started moving slowly at first, adjusting the angle, finding a good pace. Ilya slid a hand up Shane’s abs, to his chest, his dark eyes half-lidded, watching Shane’s face. The touch was a firm caress, his thumb teasing Shane’s nipple, making him gasp.

“You feel so good,” he panted.

“Yes,” Ilya practically growled. “Keep going.”

Ilya’s hands dragged over Shane’s thighs, back to his hips, before he covered Shane’s hand with his own, and Shane rode him harder.

He bounced on Ilya’s dick, hips trapped between his thighs, loving the way this felt.

“Fuck,” Ilya swore and flipped them, which caught Shane a little by surprise, but he wasn’t mad about this turn of events.

Ilya leaned over Shane, his crucifix hanging in the space between them, his hands holding Shane’s legs up as he fucked into him.

Ilya pushed forward a bit, bending Shane’s legs back further, pushing in deeper. Shane’s mouth fell open at the sensation. It was overwhelming and fucking incredible.

“Don’t stop. Fucking hell,” he breathed.

“I won’t,” Ilya purred, continuing to thrust into Shane with long, confident strokes.

Shane hadn’t known that it was possible to have sex this good. To be fucked so well that it left you feeling like putty. He wasn’t self-conscious or embarrassed, allowing himself to be as loud as he wanted. And Ilya encouraged him.

“Yes, Shane. Let me hear it.”

Shane whined and panted and moaned. He told Ilya how good this was, begging for more, until he could feel his release creeping up on him.

“Oh shit. Fuck—!” Shane gasped, his orgasm hitting him hard and sudden. He came all over his chest, up to his throat, feeling like it would go on forever.

“Yes,” Ilya panted. “Gorgeous.”

Aftershocks rocked Shane’s body as Ilya kept fucking into him, chasing his own release. He stilled as he came, letting out a broken off gasp. When it was over, he released Shane’s legs, collapsing to his elbows, and kissing Shane messily.

They parted and Ilya rolled onto his back next to Shane. Shane sighed, closing his eyes, wanting to hold onto how good he felt. He felt Ilya move next to him, shifting off the bed, bare feet padding to the bathroom, probably.

Shane opened his eyes when Ilya came back out a few moments later and Shane went in next. After cleaning up, Shane went back out to the bedroom, finding Ilya in bed, still naked.

“You are welcome to stay,” Ilya said. Shane joined him in bed.

“I have work tomorrow.”

“Me, too.”

Shane chuckled. “I have to be up by seven.”

Ilya shrugged. “I don’t mind.”

“I don’t have a change of clothes…”

“I can do laundry. Would anyone notice?”

Rose and J.J. would definitely notice and then he would have some explaining to do. But would that matter really? Ilya had lifted his hand, kissing the back of it, then his palm.

“I have to go…” he murmured, watching Ilya, longing for him even though he was right there.

“Do you?”

Ilya lifted his eyes to meet Shane’s and any possible argument for why he should leave disappeared.

It was rare that he let himself have anything like this, that he allowed himself to give in to his desires. Why shouldn’t he enjoy Ilya’s company for the night? It was being freely offered.

“You don’t mind doing laundry?”

Ilya laughed, smiling brilliantly at Shane. “Not at all.”

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Shane visits his parents

October

Shane pulled up into his parents' driveway, parking behind his mom's sedan. He cut the engine of his Jeep Cherokee, gathering his wallet and phone, before he stepped out of the car.

He grabbed the wine and cheesecake he'd brought for his parents from the backseat. He'd made the cheesecake himself, from an older recipe his paternal grandmother had used.

As an only child, he tried to visit and spend time with his parents as often as he could, usually coming by on Sundays for dinner. His parents lived in Ottawa, about two hours drive from Shane, still living in the house that he had grown up in.

They were wonderful people who had given Shane everything. They had sacrificed a lot for him to play competitive hockey and had been so supportive of him when he had decided to return to school and pursue a career in food journalism.

Shane made his way up the walkway to the house, full of comfort and nostalgia. He'd made this drive and walked this walkway hundreds of times in his life. He could do it all with his eyes closed. He opened the front door to the house and stepped inside. He didn't bother to knock. He never did, with them.

"Hello! It's me! Shane!" he called into the house, slipping his shoes off at the door.

"Hi, honey!" Mom called. She appeared a moment later from the kitchen, smiling happily at seeing him, her arms open.

"What did you bring?" she asked as she hugged him, kissing his cheek.

"Wine and cheesecake."

Mom gave him a conspiratorial look, taking the cake and wine. "My favorite."

"I know," Shane laughed. "Where's Dad?"

"Where do you think?"

"Grilling, I'm guessing."

“Of course.”

They both laughed and headed into the kitchen. Mom took the wine outside, leaving the cheesecake in the fridge. Outside on the back deck, Dad was making burgers.

It was October, the days cooling down, but still warm enough to cook and sit outside.

“Hey kiddo!” he greeted upon seeing Shane. They hugged and Shane let Dad go so he could get back to grilling.

“What do you want to drink, Shane?” Mom asked, opening the wine.

“A beer is fine. Whatever you got. You want another one Dad?”

“That’d be great!”

Shane went to the cooler his parents had next to the door that led into the house and pulled out two Sleeman beer cans. He opened them both, leaving his on the table, and bringing the other to his dad. He took the empty and tossed it.

“Need help?” Shane asked.

“Nope! I’m good. Almost done.”

“Take a load off. Come sit with me,” Mom said.

Shane sat with his mom and let her ask questions about how the drive had been and how Montreal was and what he was getting up to. She asked after Rose and J.J, and Hayden and his family.

Shane loved and liked his parents. He felt very lucky for that, being able to talk to them, and knowing how loved he was.

Dad finished the burgers and Mom opened the package of buns. They chatted a bit more about general life things; his parents’ friends, hockey, their jobs working in government.

“So,” Mom drawled in the way that she did when she was going to start prying into Shane’s love life.

Shane eyed his mother wearily. She smiled blithely back at him.

“Are you seeing anyone?” she asked, inevitably.

Shane chewed his burger, stalling. It wasn’t that he had any issues with talking about his love life with his parents. They weren’t judgmental or anything. It was just kinda weird to tell your parents that you were having incredible sex with a very hot European man with no strings attached.

“Sort of,” he replied slowly, wiping a bit of mustard off his finger.

“Sort of?” Dad prompted.

“Yeah. We’re seeing each other but we’re not like, dating.”

Shane knew that his parents didn’t care what he did in his personal life, so long as he was happy. Neither of them had ever pressured him to “settle down” or give them grandkids, but Shane knew that they worried about him being alone.

Shane didn’t mind his independence. He loved it, in fact. But he could admit that it was nice to have someone to share his time with… and to have sex with.

“Oh?” Mom replied, immediately intrigued. “Is he nice?”

Shane laughed. “Yeah. In his way.”

Mom gave him a funny look.

“He’s nice, Mom. Don’t worry. Uh, his name is Ilya. He’s from Russia but is a Canadian citizen. He owns a bar in Montreal.”

“That how you met?” Dad asked.

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “I did a write up for the place.”

“How nice! I bet he must have loved that,” Mom said.

Shane chuckled and shrugged. “I think so.”

“And you two just want to… hook up?” she asked.

Shane shrugged again, looking at his burger, his cheeks heating. “I guess. I mean, I like him. He’s funny and confident and good at his job. We have a lot in common, too, like, weirdly so. I just don’t know how he feels about me, I guess.”

“You could always ask him,” Dad suggested.

“Yeah,” Shane sighed. “I know.”

And he did know. It seemed like such an easy, simple thing. Ask and ye shall receive and all that. But Shane was nervous. He didn’t want to rock the boat or spook Ilya. It felt like things were so delicate and he didn’t want to ask for more than he could have.

Ilya was so affectionate and sweet, that sometimes Shane forgot that they weren’t, like, a couple, which was sort of confusing for him. He didn’t think Ilya meant to be confusing exactly but he hadn’t said anything. Shane wasn’t sure if Ilya felt more than just lust and passive enjoyment of Shane’s company.

The way he acted suggested he liked Shane and being with him… but he had never really provided much feedback beyond liking Shane. No indication of looking for something more serious or anything like that.

Ilya had said that they should have fun. Which it was when they were together. But when they were apart, Shane wondered if maybe he had gotten in over his head… if he was on the road to heartbreak…

"Honey," Mom said, touching his hand. "Stop spiraling."

Shane looked at his mom and huffed a laugh. "Yeah. Sorry."

"Your father's right," Mom continued gently. "You could just ask him and see what he says. If he's as nice as you say, then he'll be truthful. Maybe he feels the way you do, but he's not sure how to ask or he's nervous about disturbing what you already have going."

Shane couldn't imagine Ilya being insecure or unsure. He seemed like the kind of man who knew what he wanted and went after it. But Shane supposed that his mom had a point. It wasn't out of the realm of possibility.

Even confident people felt insecure or unsure at times.

"I'll think about it," he said.

"We just want you to be happy, Shane. That's all."

"I know," Shane replied.

"Do you have a picture of this guy?" Dad asked.

Shane looked at his dad and chuckled. "Yeah."

He took out his phone, bypassing all the pictures that Ilya had sent him that he could *never* show his parents, and found the professional headshot of Ilya from the bar's Instagram page.

"Oh Shane," Mom said, looking at the picture, Dad peering over her shoulder to see, too. "He is very handsome."

Shane felt himself blush again. "Yeah. He is."

"I like his curly hair," she continued.

Shane chuckled. "Me, too."

"Well," Mom said, handing him his phone back. "I hope we get to meet him."

Shane smiled and nodded. "Yeah. Me, too."

Shane spent the whole day with his parents and drove back to Montreal in the evening. He could have stayed over but it was nice being in his own space, especially on a Sunday. Back at home, he texted Rose, flopping down on his couch.

Shane: should I talk to Ilya about how he feels about me?

Rose: I mean… if you feel like you need to? Did something happen?

Shane: No

Shane: I was with my parents today and I told them about him. My mom said I should talk to him about our situation

Rose: Do you want to?

Shane: I don't know. I like him. A lot. Maybe too much.

Rose: You don't think he feels the same?

Shane: Idk

Rose: Well, from how you've described him, he seems like a super affectionate guy. Like, he makes you feel as if you're already dating

Shane: Yeah. That's the confusing part

Rose: So, maybe you should clarify

Shane: Logically, yes

Shane: But I'm afraid that that would end things between us

Rose: that's understandable. It's scary to be vulnerable like that… but maybe he'll surprise you. He has so far

Shane: that's true

Shane: we haven't even talked about like, our sexualities…

Rose: 😂

Rose: maybe talking will be good, about all the things

Shane: yeah, you're probably right

Rose: Are you seeing him any time soon?

Shane: not officially but I'll probably stop by the bar this week

Rose: good! Maybe see if you can chat when you're together

Shane: I'll try

Rose: you got this, buddy! I believe in you!

Shane:😂 thanks, friend ♥

Shane rested his phone on his chest and closed his eyes, visualizing having a conversation with Ilya. What he would say, how he would say it, how Ilya might respond. Shane's anxiety

made him think Ilya would be outraged or at least annoyed, but knowing Ilya's character, Shane imagined it was more likely he would be receptive, or at least gentle in letting Shane down.

He wouldn't really know the answer until he actually had that conversation, which was scary, but it was highly likely that things would work out in the end, even if he ended up being disappointed.

He allowed himself a small bit of indulgence, thinking about Ilya saying that he felt the same. That he liked Shane and wanted to be with him, as his boyfriend. He imagined going on dates and spending time together outside *Irina's* and Ilya's apartment.

He tried not to get too ahead of himself but it was a nice, comforting thing to imagine.

Shane's phone vibrated, startling him from his thoughts. He looked at his phone and laughed out loud at seeing Ilya having sent him a text.

It was a picture of a basic beer in a can sitting on a bar that Shane didn't recognize. A moment later, another text came in.

Ilya: thinking of you

Shane's heart flipped.

Shane: awww! Sweet! 😂

Ilya: this beer is not good

Ilya: I need to expand your palate

Shane chuckled.

Shane: I think you've done that reasonably well

Shane: I like cocktails now

Ilya: that is true

Shane: having a good night?

Ilya: is okay. Playing pool

Shane: sounds fun!

Ilya: yes. But I think I would rather be with you

Shane chewed on his bottom lip, his stomach fluttering, a mix of pleasure and anxiety.

Shane: I wouldn't mind that at all

Ilya: When can I see you?

Shane: Tomorrow?

Ilya: yes

Shane tapped his finger against his phone, thinking.

“Fuck it,” he murmured.

Shane: I have a random question

Ilya: ??

Shane: Are you… queer?

Ilya didn’t respond right away and Shane’s stomach dropped. He got up from the couch and paced, unable to look at his phone. He should have waited. He should have had this conversation in person. God, what an idiot he was.

Eventually, his phone vibrated, and Shane grabbed it, nearly dropping it in the process.

Ilya: yes

Ilya: I am bisexual

Shane breathed out a sigh of relief though the anxiety didn’t dissipate. That was an interesting thing to learn about Ilya. He had suspected that was the case but getting the confirmation was kind of nice.

Shane: okay. Cool. I’m gay

Ilya: 😂 😂

Ilya: You are very cute

Shane: thanks, I guess?

Ilya: 😉 you are!

Shane: 😒

Ilya: 😏😘

Shane chewed on his lip. He could maybe bring stuff up now that he’d opened up this line of conversation… but Ilya was out, drinking, probably with friends, and Shane didn’t think it would be a good look for him to bombard him with big questions like, “are you in love with me?”

Shane: Have a good time

Ilya: Thank you

Ilya: I am looking forward to seeing you

Shane: So am I

Ilya: Good

Shane: Goodnight, Ilya

Ilya: Goodnight, Shane

Shane smiled to himself. Okay. That wasn't so bad. At least there was one mystery solved. Maybe he'd be able to get to the next one.

He lay on the couch a little while longer, mulling over how he might broach the "feelings" conversation, before finally getting up, and making moves to get ready for bed.

He could prepare all he wanted but at the end of the day, things would play out however they would play out and there was no way he could prepare for that.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Ilya thinks about, talks about, and sees Shane

Chapter Notes

One of my favorite chapters 💖
I love Ilya and Svetlana's dynamic

That same night, at a dive bar…

Ilya chuckled, resting his phone face down on the bar, and took a pull from his beer, warmed by the thought of being able to see Shane tomorrow. He was out with Svetlana, Troy, Harris, and Wyatt, playing pool at one of their favorite dive bars.

Monks was a staple in the industry and most of the clientele were service industry professionals, coming in for a drink after their shifts.

It was always a lot of fun, a good way to just hang out, blow off steam, but Ilya had been missing Shane in particular tonight.

It wasn't very like him to crave in this way. He hadn't ever been someone where he was considering any kind of commitment. Not because he didn't want commitment, but that he didn't necessarily want to saddle someone with any of his baggage.

He liked having a good time, without causing any unnecessary stress, so hooking up with a regular or a one-night stand worked well enough for him.

But Shane was… different.

Ilya thought about him all the time and not just about his body. He daydreamed, thinking about a future, even if it only consisted of holding hands, and waking up together in the mornings every day, and drinking espresso in bed.

It was possible that Ilya might be… in love.

It was a weird thought to consider, truly, but Shane made him feel things he hadn't felt with other people. He wanted to fuck him, yes, but he also wanted to cuddle with him and protect

him and make him laugh and make sure he felt comfortable.

He had no idea what he had been reduced to, really. It was disgusting.

And yet…

Ilya was shaken from his thoughts as an elegant arm slid over his chest and a beautifully manicured hand rested on his arm.

“Sveta,” he hummed, her bergamot and vanilla perfume filling his nose, her hair tickling his cheek.

“Who were you texting?” she purred in Russian, the tone of her voice suggesting that she knew the answer.

“No one,” Ilya replied, also in Russian, finishing his beer, and setting it back on the bar.

“Your lover boy?” she persisted, sliding her fingers across his back as she leaned back against the bar next to him.

Ilya turned to her, raising a brow at her in question.

“Can I help you with something?”

“Can’t a girl be curious about her friend and his love life?”

Ilya huffed a laugh. The bartender, Todd, came over and Ilya ordered a shot and a beer combo. Svetlana ordered a Manhattan.

“What do you want to know?” Ilya asked her after he finished his shot.

Svetlana sipped her Manhattan delicately, settling the glass down.

“I just want to know how things are going,” she said. “You’ve been seeing one another for a bit. Are things getting, you know, serious?”

Ilya sighed and shrugged, leaning his arms on the bar.

“I don’t know,” he replied honestly.

Svetlana nudged him.

Ilya took a deep breath and let it out slow, feeling heat creep into his cheeks despite himself.

He could see Svetlana out of the corner of his eye, resting her chin on her hand, elbow propped on the bar.

“You’re blushing,” she sang.

Ilya looked at her.

“I think I love him,” he said, the words coming out in a rush.

Svetlana looked at him, smiling in a “I knew it” kind of way, but her blue eyes were warm.

“That’s new for you,” she noted.

“Yeah. Fucking terrifying,” he huffed.

Svetlana laughed, taking another sip of her drink.

“Love does tend to be that way.”

“That’s not even the worst part,” Ilya grumbled, running a hand through his hair. “The worst part is that I’m probably going to fuck it up. Somehow. I’m not exactly boyfriend material. And he’s… he’s too good for me.”

Ilya stared at the wood of the bar now that the words were out of his mouth, everything quiet.

It was the truth.

He was in love with Shane and he was afraid of fucking it up. He had no track record when it came to committed relationships. His one example of a relationship was his parents and that had been fucked up from the start.

“I don’t know how to do this. How to have a relationship with someone and not hurt them.”

Svetlana reached out, her hand resting on Ilya’s shoulder.

“Hey,” she said, shifting slightly closer to him. “Look at me.”

Ilya turned his head and looked at her.

“Don’t talk about my friend like that,” she said.

Ilya blinked at her, grimacing a bit under Svetlana’s piercing gaze.

“You are a wonderful person, Ilya. You’re not perfect. No one is. But if you love him, then you should go for it. This is pretty significant for you.”

“Don’t be so generous.”

Svetlana narrowed her eyes at him and smacked him in the arm with the back of her hand.

“Ow!”

“Stop with the self-deprecating bullshit.”

Ilya didn’t reply, his mouth simply pressed into a hard line. Svetlana’s expression softened.

“Talk to him. The worst that could happen is that he says he doesn’t feel the same but from what I can tell, he’s just as into you as you’re into him. I’m very confident about that.”

Ilya knew that Svetlana was right, of course. Not so much about knowing that Shane felt the same, but that Ilya should talk to him. That was always the hardest thing to do. Being vulnerable, facing rejection. Ilya had spent most of his life being rejected by people purported to love him so why take that risk?

Behind his confident and charming exterior, was a surprisingly delicate heart.

He felt things deeply and intensely. It was why he didn’t dabble with love. Sex was easy. Navigable. Love was most decidedly not.

A part of him wanted to take that leap for Shane because Shane was worth it. He just wasn’t sure if Shane would feel the same… that Ilya was worth that kind of risk. He didn’t want to face the embarrassment of being told that he wasn’t worth the time or investment or energy of a relationship.

In the end, the only way to find out was to have that conversation.

Svetlana rested her head on his shoulder.

“I’m glad that love finally found you,” she murmured.

Ilya barked a laugh. “Sadist.”

“Only a tiny bit.”

Ilya huffed a laugh and turned his head to press a brief kiss into Svetlana’s hair.

“I’ll try.”

She hummed. “That’s all you can do. But I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised.”

“We’ll see…”

***

The next day…

Shane texted Ilya the following day and they made plans to meet up. They decided to go to a restaurant not far from Ilya’s house and they could head back to his place after.

Ilya didn’t say anything about wanting to talk. He didn’t want to make Shane panic, since he knew those words often held some negative connotations. He just had no idea how he was going to bring up his feelings.

He never really talked about how he felt.

He didn’t know how.

Ilya spent an inordinate amount of time Googling things like “how to tell the person you’re having sex with that you love them” and “good communication in relationships” and the like.

Some of it was helpful but he didn’t necessarily feel any more reassured. He also felt like a fucking idiot for even Googling any of that in the first place.

Despite his anxiety, he *was* excited to see Shane and hoped that maybe things would make sense once they were together in the same place.

Until then, he couldn’t worry about anything. It was outside of his control.

It felt like the day went on forever.

Ilya tried preoccupying himself by running errands, working out, cleaning his entire apartment, and working on a few new cocktail ideas he had.

He got ready for dinner, tearing through his closet for something sexy but appropriate to wear. He opted for a black sweater that was both comfortable and fit him like a glove, dark wash jeans, and a pair of black slip-on sneakers.

He left his curls alone; they were windswept, a bit darker than they were in the summer, since he wasn’t in the sun as much.

Not too bad.

Had he put deodorant on?

Yes. Yes. He had.

He put on some cologne and was on his way.

Ilya texted Shane that he was on his way and got a confirmation text back.

He tried not to rush. It was the middle of fall but he was sweating from nerves and didn’t need to make it worse by running around. Not that Shane seemed to care about that but… they were going to dinner.

Ilya spotted Shane in front of the restaurant, dressed casually as well, and looking adorable. He was wearing a blue sweater, a pair of slacks, and fashionable white sneakers.

He turned his head, seeing Ilya, and his face broke out into a thousand-watt smile.

Ilya’s heart leapt in his chest.

He jogged across the street and Shane laughed as they met in a hug. Impulsively, Ilya picked Shane up off the ground. So much for being cool. Shane laughed, strong arms wrapped tight around Ilya’s neck.

“Hi,” Shane sighed, leaning back a bit to look at Ilya.

“Hi,” Ilya replied, smiling brightly at him.

They kissed, sweet and soft, and Ilya set Shane back on his feet.

“You hungry?” Shane asked.

“Always.”

Shane just kept smiling and he took Ilya’s hand, which he’d never done before, gently tugging him toward the restaurant.

Ilya didn’t know what was happening. It wasn’t like them to be so… open like this. To hug or kiss like that, to hold hands like this. It was certainly nice and he wasn’t complaining. It was just so different.

It was like both of them were relieved to just be together again.

They were seated outside in the back in a space that was more like a garden. There were tables set up for large groups or couples, plants of all kinds lined the space or hung from shelves attached to the building, and there were heating lamps set up to keep the place warm.

They both ordered beers and negotiated appetizers, then talked about entrées before setting down their menus to catch up.

It felt like it had been weeks since the last time they had seen one another, though it had really only been four days. Shane had been busy with work deadlines and hadn’t been as available as usual. They’d talked all the time though, texting back and forth, discussing food and drinks, hockey, they’d flirted and sexted.

In this moment, Ilya felt like he lived in a world where Shane might actually love him back.

They ate their food and had a few beers, laughing and quipping at each other.

Everything with Shane felt so easy.

Maybe Ilya was deluding himself. They only really spent the “fun” parts of a relationship together. Flirting, semi-dating, having sex. They had never experienced anything difficult, they didn’t live together so they had no idea what annoying habits the other had, they hadn’t fought.

It almost made Ilya want to keep that going. Why ruin things by telling Shane how he felt?

But then he wouldn’t get to have those mornings together, with espresso in bed. He wouldn’t get to make meals with Shane or cuddle with him on the couch while they watched hockey together.

He wouldn’t get to come up behind him, wrapping his arms around him to hold him against his chest, chin perched on top of his head, pressing kisses into his hair whenever he wanted.

Ilya hadn’t wanted to be with anyone else but Shane for months.

“You okay?” Shane asked, shaking Ilya from his thoughts, one warm hand resting on Ilya’s arm, concern in his dark eyes.

“Yes. Fine. Sorry,” he replied, offering Shane a smile.

Shane smiled back. “It’s okay. Sure you’re good?”

Shane tilted his head to the side, his expression so earnest, and Ilya’s heart constricted. He was just so… he didn’t even know the words. He didn’t think there were any to describe everything about Shane.

And it was more obvious to Ilya than ever that he was completely and totally in love with him.

“Yes,” Ilya replied softly, though his stomach roiled a bit with nerves.

“Okay,” Shane chuckled, though he didn’t seem like he completely believed Ilya. He stroked his thumb over Ilya’s forearm and smiled gently. “Wanna get out of here?”

Ilya chuckled. “Sure. Okay.”

They got the bill and split it, making their way back to Ilya’s apartment.

Shane slid his hand surreptitiously into Ilya’s and Ilya tangled their fingers, chatting idly. There was a bit of heaviness between them that hadn’t been there before, a sort of anticipation.

They went up to Ilya’s apartment, stepping in the door.

Ilya wrapped an arm around Shane’s waist, tugging him close, kissing him. He wanted to kiss him. He’d missed kissing him in the way he wanted to; deep and commanding and tender. And maybe he was trying to avoid the inevitable.

Shane allowed the kiss, running his hands up Ilya’s chest, sighing into it. They made out in his entryway for a bit, pressed together, before Shane pushed Ilya away slightly, breathing hard.

“Ilya,” he said, lifting his eyes.

They looked at each other for a moment.

“Can we talk?”

Ilya blinked at him, anxiety slicing through him like a blade, making his blood immediately run cold. He swallowed.

“Sure.”

Shane smiled, looking like he was trying to be reassuring, and squeezed Ilya’s upper arms. They parted completely and Shane moved toward the living room. He sat on the couch and

Ilya followed, sitting next to him.

It was easy to see Shane's anxiety creep in. He seemed uncertain and Ilya's heart fell a bit.

Well… this was it, he supposed.

"Shane?"

Shane twisted his fingers together, raising his eyes to look at Ilya. His face was surprisingly pale and his eyes were wide and fearful. Instinctively, Ilya reached out and took one of his hands. Shane squeezed it.

"I like you," Shane blurted. "Like, really like you."

His cheeks bloomed pink and he looked away, chewing on his bottom lip. Ilya guessed that this was the part where Shane told him that he really liked him, but he wasn't interested in pursuing anything further. Or that things had been fun, but they could just stay friends, or that he had found someone else.

"I would, um, I think I'd like to be more than just… this," Shane continued, much more softly. His hand trembled in Ilya's. "I don't know if you feel the same or if you'd even be interested in being in a relationship with me but… I've felt this way for a while now and I didn't think it would be fair for either of us to keep it from you."

He took a steadying breath.

"I understand if that's not what you want. But I wanted to be honest with you."

He turned his gaze back to Ilya's, his eyes a little glassy, his fear so plain on his face. Ilya's anxiety completely evaporated in the face of Shane's words. He was surprised, not having expected this turn of events, but he was glad for it.

Shane *did* feel the same. He wanted more. What an incredible thing.

Ilya squeezed his hand and smiled.

"I feel the same," Ilya replied.

Shane looked shocked. "You, what? You do?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes. I would like to be more than just hooking up."

Ilya felt his cheeks heat uncomfortably… but Shane was being honest with him, so it was only fair that Ilya was honest back. He glanced away, trying to collect himself, and then looked back at Shane.

"I would like a relationship."

Shane nodded. "Me, too."

Ilya smiled at him and Shane smiled back, before gently extricating his hand from Ilya's. He reached up, cradling Ilya's face in his hands, and kissed him. Ilya wrapped his arms around him and held Shane close.

This kiss felt different. Truer somehow. As if coming clean about how they felt meant no more barriers.

When they parted, Shane folded into Ilya's arms. Ilya smiled, burying his face in Shane's hair, breathing him in, and held him close.

"You wanna do this?" Shane asked softly, his index finger circling in the material of Ilya's sweater, over his pec.

"Yes," Ilya replied.

"Me, too."

Shane lifted his head to look at Ilya, brushing his hair back, eyes searching Ilya's face.

"You're sure."

"Yes."

"So… boyfriends?"

Ilya smiled at him, the word was so ridiculous but so wonderful at the same time.

"Boyfriends."

Ilya saw Shane smile and then he had his arms full of Shane again, Shane's mouth against his, Shane's hands in his hair. He laughed into the kiss, full of such joy and relief and wonder.

Shane pushed Ilya back onto the couch and Ilya went willingly. Shane straddled him as they kissed wildly, as if they hadn't been together in months. Ilya jerked his hips up, seeking friction, and delighted in finding that Shane was just as hard as he was.

Ilya pulled off Shane's sweater, tossing it to the side, kissing him again, letting his hands slide down Shane's smooth skin to the fly of his pants, working them open.

Shane made a helpless moaning noise, his hands hiking Ilya's sweater up to his armpits, hips grinding down against Ilya's as he continued his desperate, filthy kisses.

"Fuck," Shane breathed against Ilya's mouth and Ilya laughed softly.

"Yes."

Shane laughed, too, sliding down Ilya's body, and hauled his jeans down. Ilya watched as Shane moved his hair out of the way before taking Ilya into his mouth, moaning around him, which made Ilya hiss.

He couldn't get enough of how desperate Shane was for his cock. He loved knowing that Shane loved having Ilya's dick inside of him however he could get it.

He slid his hands into Shane's silky hair, watching Shane blow him in the determined way he always did. Ilya had missed his mouth, had missed him, and fuck he felt so good.

"You are so beautiful," Ilya said, in Russian, and Shane sighed dreamily in response. Ilya didn't think he knew what he had said but he supposed Shane liked it when Ilya spoke in Russian.

It didn't take long for Ilya to come, which would have been embarrassing in other circumstances, but not so much now. He had the endurance of a stallion with other partners but there was just something about Shane that made it so much more difficult to restrain himself.

Shane hummed and pulled off of him, pressing a kiss to the tip of his cock and Ilya reached for him, flipping their positions, and returning the favor.

He loved sucking Shane. He was so noisy and eager and Ilya loved getting that kind of positive feedback. He liked knowing he was doing a good job.

It was a bit relieving to find that Shane didn't last long either, coming quickly into Ilya's mouth, and being apologetic about it, which was silly.

Ilya kissed the inside of his thigh and his hip, before wedging himself between Shane and the couch, pulling Shane into his arms. They were both boneless and relaxed, all snuggled together.

Ilya stroked Shane's hair and Shane nuzzled against his neck, and made a contented noise.

Ilya smiled.

"Boyfriend…"

Shane snuggled closer. "Boyfriend…"

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Ilya goes to Shane's place

January

Ilya lay on his couch, re-reading the texts that he and Shane had exchanged that morning. He couldn't stop smiling like an absolute idiot, all excited about the plans they'd made.

Shane: hey

Shane: I have a question for you…

Ilya: oh yes? 👀

Shane: um, would you want to come over to my place tonight instead?

Shane: I know it's easier for us to go from the bar to your place but if you don't mind traveling a little further you could come by me…

Shane: But I totally get if you don't want to! I know it's out of the way for you

Ilya: Yes! Of course!

Ilya: I have not seen your place! I want to see it!

Ilya: I want to fuck you in your bed

Shane: Ilya!!!!

Ilya: What? It is true!

Shane: 🫣

Shane: you want to though? That's okay?

Ilya: of course!

Shane: Okay ☺

Shane: I'd really like you to be here. I want you here.

Ilya: yes. I would like that too

Shane: 💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖

Since he and Shane had started hooking up, Ilya hadn't ever been to Shane's place. They had always gone to Ilya's, mostly because it was convenient and easily accessible. Ilya hadn't wanted to push or demand that they go to Shane's place but he had to admit that he was curious about it.

And, well, it felt like another layer of intimacy.

Going back to someone's home was being able to see all the bits and bobs of who they were when they were alone. What they liked, how neat they were (or messy), their preferences in style.

Ilya had imagined Shane's apartment plenty of times. Something neutral, well put together, tasteful and aesthetic, with small hints of Shane's personality here and there. Not that Shane didn't have personality, he did, but Ilya wasn't under the impression that style wasn't his strong suit.

He liked what he liked and stuck to that.

But even beyond getting to see and be in Shane's space, Ilya really wanted to fuck Shane in his own bed. He wanted to leave that memory for Shane, the knowledge of Ilya having been there.

The possessiveness was kind of unnecessary. Shane was his boyfriend. They were dating, they had been together for the past three months, but it was still so new to Ilya. To both of them. Three months wasn't really that much time at all…

It had been a wonderful few months though.

Ilya had met Shane's friends and had enjoyed getting to see what Shane was like with them. It had just been nice being able to meet them at all. He liked Rose the most. She reminded Ilya a lot of Svetlana. Jean-Jacques, who went by J.J., seemed a bit wary of Ilya, which was understandable. He was protective of Shane, in a friendly way, and wanted to be sure that Ilya had Shane's best interest in mind.

Then… there was Hayden.

Ilya would say that he had been outwardly hostile to Ilya.

Ilya was pretty sure that somewhere in there, Hayden had, at one point or another, had a crush on Shane. He was purportedly straight, but was anyone really truly straight? Ilya didn't think so.

Regardless, he seemed to not think that Ilya was going to take care of or look after Shane, that he wasn't good enough; maybe he even thought that Ilya would steal Shane away from him and his friends, though Hayden hadn't said as much.

Ilya didn't particularly care for his character being questioned. He had been as cordial as he could, but Shane had seemed pretty annoyed by how things had played out between them.

They had talked about it, after they'd gotten home.

Shane wanted Ilya to get along with his friends and vice versa. He would talk to Hayden but he made it clear that he didn't appreciate Ilya dishing it back. No one had any reason to be defensive.

Hayden is my best friend. I don't want to feel like I have to pick between you two. And I'm pissed that you both think that I can't make my own decisions!

Ilya had taken Shane's feedback to heart. It wasn't fair for Shane to feel that he had to choose between Ilya and Hayden and he certainly never meant for Shane to feel that he couldn't think for himself. Ilya would be nice and maybe he and Hayden could strike a truce.

Ilya knew he wasn't everyone's cup of tea, but he would do his best. For Shane.

Shane meeting Ilya's friends had been much smoother.

Shane was a bit of an introvert, enjoying time on his own to recharge his batteries, but he did really well with other people. He would often prefer to listen than engage in a conversation but was happy to chat with anyone who came to talk with him. Once he'd warmed up, though, he was very engaging. He played darts with Svetlana and listened to Wyatt talk about his comics and chatted with Troy about hockey and with Harris about dogs.

It had been nice, seeing how seamlessly Shane fit into his life. Ilya hadn't realized how much that would mean to him, being able to see the person he loved getting along so well with his friends.

They had talked about meeting Shane's parents, which seemed like a big step, but it wasn't anything concrete. Just theoretical.

It had been nice to talk a little about his own mother, telling Shane about how wonderful she had been and how much she had loved him. He missed her every day and he wished that she could meet Shane.

Shane saying that he wished he could meet her, too, had meant a lot to Ilya. More than he could have ever thought.

Shane had spent Christmas with his family and Ilya had been with Svetlana's.

It had been sweet, Shane texting him how much he wished he had been with him.

Overall, things were going really well.

Ilya was trying not to overthink it. He was just enjoying this new adventure. Learning all he could about Shane, getting to love him openly, exclusively.

Ilya had kind of gotten over the fact that he had turned into a sappy, romantic mess. He kind of liked it, if he was honest. Expressing his affection openly, sharing soft, domestic moments with Shane. Sometimes it felt too good to be true.

Ilya knew they were in the honeymoon phase. Things would begin to relax and settle and they'd have to navigate things together afterwards. But Ilya felt oddly hopeful about that. He didn't mind the idea of settling into familiar comfort with Shane, no longer feeling like they had to be "the best" versions of themselves and more that they could just *be* .

But one thing at a time.

He was excited to see Shane and his apartment and fuck him in his bed, and maybe his couch. Ilya chuckled to himself. He had so many ideas.

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Ilya looked down at his phone, following the directions on his map app. He looked up at the building in front of him and double checked the number of the place, to be sure he was at the right spot.

He texted Shane, letting him know he had arrived.

A few minutes later, Shane appeared at the door, opening it for him.

"Hi," he said warmly, laughing as Ilya kissed him in greeting. "How was the trip?"

"Fine," Ilya replied. "Easy."

"I'm glad."

Shane took his hand and led him into the building. They took the stairs to Shane's floor and walked down the hall to his apartment.

They stepped inside, the whole place smelling like Shane, and almost exactly as Ilya had predicted. Simple, relatively aesthetically pleasing. He couldn't see anything right away that spoke to Shane's personality but he was sure there would be some things.

"This is my place," Shane said, letting go of Ilya's hand, and walking into the apartment.

He seemed a little nervous; fidgety and talking just to talk.

Ilya smiled, sliding out of his shoes at the door. He placed his bag down quietly and just watched as Shane gestured to the living room, the small dining room/kitchen area, without even so much as glancing back at Ilya.

Ilya casually tugged off his shirt, letting it fall on top of his bag, waiting to see if he could get completely naked before Shane even noticed.

He undid the fly of his pants, sliding out of his jeans, he slid off his socks, and then his briefs. Shane was still going, talking about how the bathroom had been recently redone.

Finally, he turned, freezing, his eyes going wide.

Ilya just smiled at him brightly.

“Okayyyy,” Shane said, his face turning red, like a tomato. So cute!

Ilya watched his eyes travel down his body and he chuckled. He made his way toward Shane with purposeful, intentional steps. Shane shifted his stance slightly, his head tilted back as Ilya stood in front of him.

“Hi,” Ilya drawled.

“Hi,” Shane sighed.

Ilya chuckled, reaching up to hold Shane’s chin in his hand carefully, holding him in place as he kissed him, hard and possessive.

Shane moaned softly into the kiss, his hands running up Ilya’s abs, to his chest, fingers splayed against Ilya’s pecs.

Ilya kissed Shane for a few indulgent moments. He loved kissing him and it was nice to just do that for a bit. But he broke the kiss, running his thumb over Shane’s bottom lip.

“Take off your clothes,” he said.

“Oh shit,” Shane murmured, swallowing, and then dutifully taking off his clothes.

They had been experimenting, a little, exploring some discipline. Shane liked being good, whether that was competency or obedience. He liked following through with a challenge or a request and being praised for it.

Neither of them were into shame or punishment or anything like that. Shane had a praise kink a mile wide and Ilya was happy to indulge it. He liked praising him, seeing the way he responded so well to it.

He wasn’t always a fan of being called a ‘good boy’ and he wasn’t afraid to bite back. He could be bratty at times but Ilya enjoyed that kind of fire. Shane was no push over. He liked seeing all of these parts of Shane, getting to know his preferences, his likes and dislikes.

There was still a lot to explore and it was fun.

“Good boy,” Ilya praised, watching the way Shane’s cheeks turned a deeper shade of red, and he bit his bottom lip once he was naked.

Ilya just looked at him appreciatively. Shane really was so beautiful. From his long, soft hair to his broad shoulders, to his plush pecs and strong abs and trim waist. He had incredible thighs and a perfect ass.

One day, hopefully soon, Ilya would spend hours worshiping him. But he had other plans for today.

“So much for showing you my apartment,” Shane murmured, lips tilting up in a bit of a smirk.

“You only invited me here for that?” Ilya replied, stepping close enough that their chests brushed together, forcing Shane to have to look up at him.

“No,” Shane breathed.

“No,” Ilya repeated in agreement. In a neat little move, he got Shane’s back against the wall, gripping his face, Ilya’s thumb pressing into the hinge of his jaw, as he came down hard on Shane’s mouth, kissing him deeply.

Shane’s fingers sank into Ilya’s biceps, pulling him closer. He wrapped his foot around Ilya’s ankle, and Ilya growled. He grabbed Shane’s thighs and hoisted him up the wall so that Shane had no choice but to wrap his legs around Ilya’s waist.

Shane made a helpless little noise and Ilya smiled, breaking the kiss to move to Shane’s neck, sucking a mark into the skin.

“Fuck, Ilya,” Shane gasped, his head thunking back against the wall, offering Ilya more access.

“Mm, yes,” Ilya purred.

He pulled away from the wall, getting his hands around Shane as he clung to him. They kissed again as Ilya walked them toward Shane’s couch, placing Shane down on his feet carefully.

“Do you have plans for me?” Shane asked, looking at Ilya with his big dark eyes and kiss-swollen lips. Ilya could see a bruise forming on his neck from the mark he’d left.

Ilya smiled impishly at him.

“Turn around.”

Shane turned so he was facing the arm of the couch. Ilya stepped behind him, carefully moving Shane’s hair out of the way, brushing it over his shoulder and pressed a few soft, slow kisses to the back of his neck, over the adorable grouping of freckles there that Ilya loved.

He moved slightly, resting a hand between Shane’s shoulder blades, pushing him forward. Shane seemed to get the hint, bending over, hands on the arm of the couch.

“Oh,” he breathed, his chest rising and falling quicker than before.

Ilya moved back behind him, sliding his hands appreciatively down Shane’s sides, to his hips, leaning his weight on Shane’s back, feeling the warmth of him.

“Stay there,” he breathed against Shane’s ear, nipping it, and felt Shane shudder under him.

“Where are you going?” Shane asked, with a bit of an edge in his voice.

“To get lube,” Ilya replied casually, standing up, letting his hands slide over Shane’s skin, before turning back to the pile of clothes he’d left by Shane’s door. He opened his bag and pulled out the bottle of lube he’d packed and a condom.

Shane was still where Ilya had left him, arms stretched as far as they could go. He looked exquisite like that. Like something out of a painting. He was all pretty masculine lines. He looked absolutely perfect and he was destroying Ilya with his obedience.

Ilya sauntered his way back to Shane, sliding his free hand up Shane’s back, watching the way he responded, head bowed, a sigh escaping him. He reminded Ilya of a cat being stroked, seeking out more touch.

He leaned over Shane, pressing soft kisses to the middle of his back, down to his waist, before shifting to the floor, kneeling behind Shane. He placed the lube and condom within easy reach and slid a hand around Shane to brush teasing fingers over his cock.

“Fuck,” Shane hissed as Ilya traced a prominent vein, rubbing his thumb over the head.

He smiled to himself.

“You are so beautiful like this,” he said. “Being so good for me.”

Shane sighed again. “Want to be.”

Ilya smiled at that, cupping Shane’s perfect balls in his hand, rolling them in his palm, and listening to Shane’s low moan.

“Are you okay on the floor?” Shane asked after a moment once Ilya released him, his voice breathy.

Shane had hardwood floors and while it wasn’t the most comfortable thing in the world, Ilya could tolerate it for what he had in mind.

“Yes,” he replied fondly, appreciating the concern, and pressed a kiss to one perfect ass cheek, before spreading Shane’s cheeks apart with his hands.

He hadn’t done this for Shane before but he had been thinking about it. A lot.

He leaned in, brushing his tongue tentatively over Shane’s rim in slow, exploratory laps, waiting for his response. It was immediate, a soft gasp, a little moan.

“Oh, god. *Ilya.* ”

Ilya smiled to himself, continuing for a few more moments before he paused to ask, “good?”

“Fucking *great.* ”

Ilya chuckled and continued his lapping, softly fluttering his tongue over Shane’s hole, waiting for him to relax a bit. Shane groaned.

Ilya took his time, shifting a little closer to get deeper, and then pressed his tongue past the ring of muscle once Shane was relaxed enough.

“Fuck. *Fuck.* Ilya...holy god. That’s amazing. Thank you. Fuck.”

Ilya laughed softly at the thank you. It wasn’t necessary, but very cute. He kept fucking Shane with his tongue, listening to the noises he made, almost desperate.

Ilya’s main objective was to fuck Shane, but he enjoyed doing this, loving how responsive Shane was. He fucked him just a bit longer with his tongue, going back to longer, soothing strokes with his tongue, before reaching for the lube.

“Gorgeous,” he sighed, lifting his eyes to look at Shane.

He was breathing hard, his body loose. He peeked over his shoulder at Ilya, his face flushed, eyes half-lidded, and full of desire.

Ilya smiled at him, leaning in, and bit his right ass cheek.

Shane yelped and then moaned. Ilya smoothed his tongue over the bite, kissing it, before getting to his feet. He slicked his fingers with the lube, standing just slightly to the side of Shane.

He dipped a finger between his cheeks, stroking the tip carefully over Shane’s rim, before slipping inside. Shane gasped, his head tilted back, eyes closed, lips parted.

“You are so stunning,” Ilya murmured, leaning over Shane, pressing kisses to his shoulders and upper back as he fingered him.

“You, too,” Shane replied, his words a little slurred. “So beautiful, Ilya…”

Shane looked over his shoulder, straining a bit, and Ilya met him in a messy, open-mouthed kiss.

“You gonna fuck me?” Shane asked when they parted.

“I want you to beg for it,” Ilya replied.

Shane whimpered and Ilya added a second finger, going slow, seeking out Shane’s prostate to rub up against it. Shane moaned, shameless, and pushed back against Ilya’s fingers.

Ilya knew that Shane was going to hold out. He could start begging now, Ilya knew he was dancing along a fine line, overwhelmed by sensation, and everything Ilya had given him so far. But Shane would show restraint. He’d be good. And Ilya would reward him well for it.

By the time Ilya had three fingers inside Shane, he was pushing back against him, making eager noises. Ilya knew that Shane was focusing on the pleasurable torture Ilya was putting him through but Ilya was dying for it just as much. Shane’s responsiveness and discipline made it difficult for him to maintain control.

But finally, Shane broke.

“Fucking hell, Ilya. Holy shit. Want your cock. Want you to fuck me. Please.”

Shane sounded so desperate, panting and whining, his voice breathless. Ilya hummed in acknowledgment, pressing his fingers into Shane as far as they could go, making him gasp.

“Please. *Want.* ”

“You will get it,” Ilya replied, removing his fingers. He grabbed the condom, sliding it on, and slicking himself.

Shane whined, raising his ass, and Ilya palmed one cheek appreciatively.

“Mine,” he growled, brushing the head of his cock against Shane’s hole, and Shane pressed back a little in encouragement. They both let out loud moans of relief when Ilya began to slowly sink inside.

“Fuck yes,” Shane panted. “Finally.”

Shane was so tight, so perfect and hot. Ilya loved being inside him. He still couldn’t quite believe that Shane allowed him this. He loved being able to fill him up and give him everything he needed.

Ilya gave himself a second to settle once he was fully inside. Shane made an impatient noise and Ilya laughed, giving him a few slow thrusts.

“Is this what you wanted?” he cooed.

“Yes. Give it to me. Harder.”

Ilya didn’t need to be told twice. He had his hands wrapped around Shane’s hips, snapping his hips, fucking Shane harder, listening to his perfect noises.

Ilya leaned away to watch the way his dick disappeared into Shane, sinking into the exquisite heat of him. Shane took him so well, so perfectly.

He bent over Shane, sliding a hand into his hair to pull his head back, making Shane gasp and swear.

“You want more?” Ilya asked, biting his ear.

“Yes. Fucking hell, Ilya.”

Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane’s chest, under his arms, hauling him up so his back was pressed to Ilya’s chest. He fucked into him, Shane’s arms coming up to hold onto Ilya’s forearms, his head falling back onto Ilya’s shoulder.

“Don’t stop. Holy shit. Ilya. So fucking good. Love having you inside me.”

“Love being inside you,” Ilya replied in Russian. “So fucking perfect, Shane.”

Shane whimpered and whined and Ilya wondered if he would come without being touched.

“Are you going to come for me?” he asked in English.

“Yes. Fuck yes. Oh god. I’m so close. I’m gonna—”

Shane let out a helpless noise, clenching hard around Ilya’s cock as his body spasmed as he came. Ilya fucked Shane through his orgasm, stilling as he came hard inside Shane, holding him tight against him.

Ilya folded them forward, his forehead pressed to Shane’s back as they both caught their breath. He smoothed his hands over Shane’s ribs, pressing a kiss to his damp skin.

“Okay?” Ilya murmured, giving Shane a few more kisses, before carefully pulling out.

“Yes,” Shane sighed. “That was amazing.”

Ilya smiled, watching Shane stand up and stretch, allowing his eyes to take in the way his back and ass and arms flexed, before Shane turned. Ilya stepped closer, kissing him, humming as Shane ran a hand up Ilya’s chest, his palm resting over Ilya’s heart.

“Let’s clean up,” Shane murmured, rubbing their noses. The gesture was sweet and made Ilya’s heart wobble helplessly in his chest.

“Okay,” he replied, smiling as Shane took his hand.

“I’ll give you a proper tour after.”

Ilya laughed. “Whatever you like.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane enjoy the rest of their cozy winter evening

After a warm, indulgent shower, where they mostly just held each other and kissed, Shane gave Ilya a proper tour of his apartment once they'd gotten dressed.

It was a very nice apartment; well-appointed with framed pictures of some of Shane's articles on the wall, hockey memorabilia, and very pretty black and white photos scattered about that Ilya had learned were taken by Shane.

He was an amateur photographer in his (limited) spare time and Ilya had delighted in knowing this information. Shane had blushed adorably when he promised to show Ilya some of his albums after dinner.

"I'm going to make you one of my favorite dishes from when I was a kid," Shane said as they stood in his kitchen, looking at the ingredients he'd laid out.

"What is it?" Ilya asked curiously, looking at the pork loin and rice amongst the other ingredients.

"Have you ever heard of katsudon?"

Ilya shook his head. He wasn't super familiar with Japanese food. He mostly just knew sushi and teriyaki and bento boxes but not much else beyond that.

"It's basically just fried pork cutlet with rice and scrambled egg."

"That sounds delicious," Ilya replied because it sounded fucking delicious.

"It is," Shane said with a bright smile. "My mom used to make it pretty often during the winter. It's Japanese comfort food. This is my grandmother's recipe."

Ilya followed Shane's lead, washing his hands along with him as Shane talked about his experience with food.

His father, a mix of French, Dutch, and Scottish heritage, hadn't had much to offer in the food department. But his mother had a wealth of Japanese recipes from her parents that she had shared with her own family.

"I never knew my maternal grandparents," Shane said as he deftly cut the pork loin in several places. "They passed when I was a baby. But it was really because of them and my mom that

I got into cooking and food when hockey didn't pan out."

Ilya was paying more attention to Shane than his task of cutting onions. He had a soft smile on his face, his hair pulled up into a messy bun, with the shorter strands tucked adorably behind his ears.

He was impossibly beautiful and sweet and Ilya felt like his heart was in his throat.

He loved Shane. He knew he did. It was just a fact like any other. He wanted to blurt it out but he had no idea how well Shane would take it. They hadn't been together very long and Ilya was afraid of coming on too strong.

But it was impossible not to feel this way; to not look at Shane like this, being with him like this, soft and domestic and cozy on a cold winter's day, and not wanting to wrap him up and hold him close and confess everything he held in his heart.

Ilya was almost sure that Shane would say he was ridiculous for feeling so strongly when they were so new to all this together. Or he'd just think that Ilya was simply pathetic. It wasn't a charitable thought, he knew. Shane wasn't like that at all but Ilya couldn't help the insecurity.

Shane looked up at him, smiling, and his concerns dissipated. Ilya smiled back.

"Have you been to Japan?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded. "Yeah. I've been a few times. I went with my parents when I was sixteen. And I've been two other times since. I love it there. It's such a different environment and vibe. Really hospitable and, like, *cozy*. Have you ever been?"

Ilya shook his head. "No. I have not done much traveling."

"Do you like to travel?"

"Sometimes," Ilya replied. He had never really felt at home anywhere and so feeling that he could put down roots somewhere had felt more important to him. He had been to a few places in Canada and to some US cities, but he preferred his little apartment above his bar.

"We should go sometime," Shane said.

"Hm?"

"To Japan. I'd love to show you the best spots."

Ilya smiled and chuckled softly. "I would like that."

They finished prepping the ingredients together and then Ilya watched Shane as he fried the pork. He had Ilya do the rice, which was easy, because they just popped the appropriate amount of rice and water into a rice cooker.

Shane went about preparing and plating the katsudon, leaving Ilya just to observe. Shane was competent and relaxed, cracking eggs one handed, which made Ilya chuckle fondly.

He came up behind Shane as he finished sliding the pork on top of the egg and rice, sprinkling some green onion on top. Ilya wrapped his arms around him, kissing his neck, pressing their cheeks together.

Shane hummed, rubbing his cheek against Ilya's, and they both laughed softly.

"Smells delicious."

"I hope it is."

"I'm sure it will be."

Shane had some sake and they opened that, sitting at Shane's kitchen island to eat.

Ilya had never had anything like this before. This soft domestic scene. Making a meal with the person he loved, being able to share it with them.

Ilya hadn't ever allowed himself to think of a future with a partner. He had always dreamed of owning his own place and running a bar that he could be proud of. But he hadn't really considered his life outside of work.

He knew that that wasn't the healthiest, but it wasn't like he had been set up for success in the romance department.

His parents' relationship had been terrible and his mother had struggled for so many years, before she had taken her own life.

That had traumatized Ilya and even if it hadn't been conscious, he had sworn off love, even though, deep down, it was something he so desperately wanted.

He wanted to love and be loved.

He wanted to find a *home* …

It was scary in a lot of ways to think that maybe he had found that in Shane.

"Are you okay?" Shane asked gently, resting his hand over Ilya's.

Ilya looked at him. "Fine. Why?"

"You seem… distracted."

"Sorry."

Shane shook his head. "Don't be. It's okay. We can talk about it… if it would help."

Ilya blinked at Shane, considering his offer. He wasn't really one to talk about his feelings. Sometimes they felt too big and burdensome and the last thing he wanted was to lay them at

Shane's feet.

He never wanted to be a burden. To be too much for someone to handle.

But Shane was looking at him with such kindness, like he would be happy to listen to whatever it was that Ilya had to say.

"This is nice," Ilya finally said. "I have not had this before. With someone."

Shane's cheeks pinked.

"It is nice. I haven't either. I like it."

Ilya turned his hand under Shane's to wrap his fingers around Shane's hand, squeezing.

"Me, too."

They looked at one another for a long moment, before Ilya looked down at his food.

"This is delicious."

Shane chuckled. "I'm glad you like it."

After they finished eating they packed away leftovers and washed dishes together.

Dishes put away, they retreated to Shane's couch, intending to watch a movie, but making out instead.

Shane was in Ilya's lap, straddling his hips, hands cupping Ilya's face as Ilya squeezed Shane's perfect ass in his hands. They kissed hungrily, hard as hell, but in no rush to escalate things.

Ilya really liked kissing Shane.

He slid one hand up Shane's back, sitting up a bit more to press closer, and just held Shane against him.

They parted for air and Ilya nuzzled against Shane's neck, kissing his jaw, and just below his ear.

Shane sighed happily, smoothing his hands into Ilya's curls. Ilya looked up at him, smiling. Shane smiled back, brushing the backs of his fingers over Ilya's cheek, smoothing his thumb over Ilya's bottom lip.

Ilya closed his eyes and kissed the pad of Shane's thumb.

"Ilya…"

Ilya hummed in reply, eyes closed, waiting. When Shane didn't reply right away, he opened his eyes and looked at his boyfriend. Shane's expression was one of awe, looking at Ilya with

such an earnest expression, full of affection and adoration. His brows furrowed a bit and Ilya tilted his head curiously.

“What’s wrong?” he asked softly.

Shane shook his head. “Nothing, I just—” He bit his bottom lip and swallowed, his dark eyes searching Ilya’s face. “I love you…”

The words were so soft, barely above a whisper, Shane’s fingers delicately brushing along Ilya’s hairline.

It took Ilya maybe longer than it should have to process. He just stared at Shane, his heart hammering in his chest. He hadn’t been expecting that. He hadn’t been prepared to hear those words, to hear that Shane felt the same.

He thought he would have to hold his feelings close. To keep them locked within himself.

But this was an incredible surprise.

It seemed that Shane would just continue to surprise him.

He had no idea how long he was quiet for but it must have been too long because Shane started to look afraid.

“Shane,” Ilya murmured, reaching one hand up to cup Shane’s cheek. “I love you, too.”

Shane laughed shakily, smiling. “Oh. Good.”

Ilya laughed, too, unable to help it. He felt like his smile was going to split his face. He was overwhelmingly happy. Shane was beaming down at him, eyes bright and freckles crinkled, and Ilya loved him. And Shane loved *him.*

Holy fucking shit.

Ilya wanted to kiss him but he didn’t want to stop looking at him. Shane’s thumbs smoothed over his cheeks and Ilya leaned into one of his palms.

“This is real, yes?” Ilya asked. He just had to make sure.

“It’s real,” Shane said, his voice low and warm, making Ilya’s heart clench.

“I feel like... I am dreaming?”

“You’re not. I love you.”

They kissed again and Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, holding him tight. When they parted, Shane rested their foreheads together, brushing his nose against Ilya’s.

“I love you,” Ilya murmured, in Russian.

The words, in both languages, were a bit strange on his tongue, but not unpleasant. He liked saying it, though he felt a bit rusty.

Shane smiled. “Is that ‘I love you’?”

Ilya nodded.

“Say it again.”

“Ya lyublyu tebya.”

Shane said it slowly back and Ilya grinned, his heart flipping. He liked hearing Shane speaking his native language.

They kissed some more and Ilya got his hands under Shane to hold him as he stood up. Shane gasped softly, wrapping around Ilya as Ilya carried him to his bedroom. He closed the door with his foot, laying Shane down carefully on the mattress.

Shane sat up, meeting Ilya half way as he kneeled on the bed, pulling him in for more kisses. He tugged Ilya on top of him and Ilya went, kissing Shane back, grinding his hips down on Shane’s, making him gasp.

Ilya sucked Shane’s bottom lip into his mouth before pulling away, tugging off his own shirt, and tossed it aside. Shane sat up, doing the same, undoing the fly of his jeans. Ilya followed suit until they were both naked and pressed together.

Carefully, Ilya pressed Shane onto his back. He slid their hands together, fingers tangled, and raised Shane’s hands up so they rested beside his head.

He looked up at Ilya with his big, dark eyes, the skin under his freckles flushed, his lips swollen and red.

“Stay,” Ilya murmured, releasing Shane’s hands, running his middle fingers down Shane’s palms, to the pulse points in his wrists, and shifted his hands away. “Relax…”

Shane took a breath and let it out slowly, relaxing. Ilya leaned in very gently pressing his mouth to Shane’s forehead. He kissed over the warm skin, Shane’s hair lightly tickling his nose. He kissed down between Shane’s eyes, to the tip of his adorable little nose.

He paused, just to look at Shane; his eyes closed, body still, but at ease, lips slightly parted.

Ilya continued his kisses, following the trail of freckles to Shane’s cheeks, down to his chin, then the corner of his mouth.

He kissed down Shane’s neck, to his collarbone, down his sternum. He took a detour to Shane’s pecs, pressing very careful kisses all over the muscle, over Shane’s nipples, before returning to his sternum, and continuing his journey south.

He curled his hands around Shane’s ribs, kissing his abs, to his belly button, his hips, and along his pelvis.

Shane's cock was unsurprisingly hard and Ilya bypassed it in favor of kissing along his groin on either side, to the inside of his thighs.

Ilya worked his way all the way down to Shane's ankles, before making him turn around to work himself all the way up Shane's back.

Ilya loved that he got to do this. He loved that he got to worship Shane from literal head to toe, to express how loved and adored he was.

And every part of Shane was kissable and perfect. Ilya spent a little extra time on his ass, parting his cheeks to tease him just a bit with his tongue, which had Shane making the most delicious little noises.

Ilya loved learning what parts of him were sensitive; his chest, the insides of his thighs, his back.

Ilya kissed every notch of Shane's spine, feeling him shiver.

"Okay?"

"Yeah," Shane breathed, glancing over his shoulder.

Ilya kissed his mouth, as tender and gentle as he could. Shane whined as they parted and Ilya smiled, brushing a kiss along his cheekbone. He moved to the side, laying on his side next to Shane, stroking his fingers up and down his back.

"You gonna fuck me?" Shane asked, his head pillowed on his arms.

"If you want," Ilya replied, smirking.

"Yes. I want to be in your lap. I want to be as close as possible," Shane said, his cheeks stained pink.

"Yes?"

Shane nodded, biting his bottom lip.

Ilya hummed, his heart feeling so full. "I want that, too. I love you."

They moved quickly. Ilya sat with his back against the headboard and Shane straddled his lap. They kissed for a long time like that, and Ilya wrapped his hand around their cocks, stroking.

"God, Ilya," Shane breathed. "You have to stop. I need you inside me."

Ilya chuckled, brushing his thumb over the heads of their cocks, more focused on Shane's reaction than how it felt for himself. Watching Shane was more heady than anything else.

He reached into the bedside table that held lube and condoms, pulling both out. He slicked his fingers, reaching around to open Shane up.

“Stroke yourself for me,” he hummed once he was two fingers deep in Shane.

“Can’t,” Shane stammered. “I’ll come.”

“I think you can do it and not come.”

“Ilya…”

“If you love me…” Ilya replied obnoxiously.

Shane huffed but he wrapped his hand around his cock, barely touching, stroking himself slowly. Ilya made an approving noise, loving Shane’s obedience.

Ilya watched Shane, loving everything about this moment; the way he felt around Ilya’s fingers, how beautiful his face looked, all flushed, lips parted, his fingers moving over his cock, which was dripping precome. Fuck, Ilya loved how wet Shane got.

He wasn’t going to last long and Ilya wasn’t sure he would either if he kept things up. Shane huffed, letting his head fall back for a moment, then forward again so he could look at Ilya.

“If you loved *me* , then you’d fuck me *now*.”

Ilya was surprised at first, but he grinned back, leaning in to bite Shane’s pec.

“Brat.”

But he removed his fingers, grabbing the condom and lube, and getting himself ready. Shane shifted slightly, sinking down slowly on Ilya’s cock, and oh god, it was the most incredible thing Ilya had ever felt.

He rocked up into Shane’s body, unable to help it, and Shane let out a breathy moan, cupping Ilya’s face in his hands, and kissing him. He felt Shane *everywhere* . He wrapped his arms around Shane, holding him as he moved.

Shane pressed their foreheads together, lips brushing. They were both breathing unsteadily, Shane’s hands planted on Ilya’s shoulders for leverage.

“So good, Ilya. Holy shit. Fuck.”

“Are you close?” Ilya breathed.

“So fucking close.”

Ilya bit his lip and impulsively flipped Shane onto his back. Shane moaned and gasped at the change in angle, before wrapping his arms and legs around Ilya, urging him deeper.

“Oh god. Yes.”

Ilya fucked into Shane slow and deep. It wasn’t going to take much, even at this measured pace, but he wanted to drag things out as long as possible.

“You are so beautiful,” Ilya praised. “So perfect. I love you.”

“I love you,” Shane panted. “Fuck, Ilya. Love you so much. I’m so close.”

“We can come together?”

Shane nodded, biting his lip, and Ilya sped up a bit. He could tell that Shane was close and he was right there, too, just at the edge.

“Yeah. Yes,” he gasped. “Come on.”

Ilya’s orgasm swept over him just as Shane’s mouth fell open, his body clenching around Ilya’s cock as he came. It was overwhelming, their eyes locked on one another, unable to move or speak for a few long moments.

Ilya caught himself on his forearms so he didn’t completely collapse on Shane, kissing him messily, Shane’s fingers tangling in Ilya’s curls.

“Oh my god,” Shane wheezed. “That was perfect.”

“Yes. Perfect.” Ilya managed to wiggle his hands under Shane and held him tight.

They stayed like that for a long time, eventually peeling themselves apart, and going to clean up.

Now they just lay together, tangled up in Shane’s bed, sleepy and deliriously happy.

“I love you,” Shane murmured, brushing Ilya’s curls back, touching his cheek, his lips.

Ilya smiled, lightly kissing Shane’s fingers. “I love you, too.”

Shane yawned and snuggled against Ilya’s chest.

“Sorry. I’m zonked.”

“Is okay. Me, too.”

They both chuckled and Shane sighed.

“Good night, Shane,” Ilya murmured, kissing into his silky hair.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Shane goes out to a club with Ilya and his friends

March

"You should come out with us," Svetlana said, leaning over the bar, her chin perched on her hands, her blue eyes looking almost otherworldly thanks to her eye makeup; so pale they were almost like ice.

Shane liked Svetlana. She reminded him a bit of Rose, though much more Russian, and overtly sexual. Flirty. Regardless of who you were.

Ilya had talked about Svetlana a lot, mostly because they had had such a long history of hooking up and he had felt it was important for Shane to know that. There was also that they were business partners, and friends.

Shane couldn't imagine juggling the complexities of that kind of relationship but Ilya and Svetlana seemed to be pulling it off. Their relationship was, as far as Shane could tell, purely professional. She seemed to like Shane and Shane and Ilya together… so that was good.

"Come out where?" Shane asked, sipping the cocktail Ilya had made for him.

"To Ultraviolet."

"The club?"

Svetlana laughed. She had a nice laugh. Musical and amused, her face transforming into one of delight, which made her look even more lovely than she already was.

"I don't think there is any other place called Ultraviolet," she replied, bemused.

Shane smiled small. "True…"

Svetlana tilted her head, observing, and Shane felt like she was looking into his soul, and knew all of his deepest, darkest secrets. It was incredibly disconcerting.

"You do not like clubs," she said, matter-of-fact.

Shane shook his head, smiling ruefully. "What gave it away?"

Svetlana's smile turned secretive. She stood up, hands planted on the bar.

“Think about it,” she said. “Ilya will be there, of course. He works there when they’re short-staffed.”

Shane chuckled, shaking his head a little. “I’ll think about it.”

Svetlana smiled brightly at him. “Good! It will be fun!”

She moved away after that, helping to mix drinks, and Shane watched after her curiously. She spoke to Ilya briefly and Ilya’s eyes flicked over to Shane. He arched a dark brow at him and Shane shrugged. They would talk when there was a lull.

It took a bit before Ilya could come over and talk. Shane wasn’t in a rush and he enjoyed watching his boyfriend work.

“Was she trying to get you to come to the club?” Ilya asked when he had a moment.

“Yeah,” Shane replied.

Ilya refilled his water glass and Shane watched him. It wasn’t interesting by any means, but he liked the way Ilya’s arms looked as he moved. He was wearing a v-neck t-shirt that was almost see-through in the right light, despite being black. Shane kept catching hints of Ilya’s bear tattoo and the gold chain and crucifix he wore.

He really had no right to be so hot.

“You can come if you want,” Ilya said, placing the filled glass back in front of Shane. “I would like if you were there.”

Shane smiled, his cheeks heating. “Yeah?”

Ilya nodded.

Shane didn’t really like clubs and Ilya knew that. He wasn’t a fan of the crowds or the heat. But maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if he was with Ilya, watching him work, maybe dancing with him after he clocked out, though Shane wasn’t much of a dancer…

“Okay,” Shane said.

Ilya perked up. “You’ll come?”

“Yeah,” Shane replied.

Ilya grinned at him and Shane’s heart skipped at seeing Ilya so happy and excited. It didn’t seem like a big deal, really, but Ilya’s reaction was sweet.

“You will like it,” Ilya assured.

Shane laughed. “I don’t know…”

“You will be with me,” Ilya replied smoothly.

Shane shook his head but he was smiling, his cheeks and ears warm.

***

2 Days Later…

"Who even are you?" Rose said over the video call Shane was having with her as he tried on various outfits.

He had called her in need of an objective opinion about his wardrobe and what he could possibly wear to a club, since he never went out, and had no idea how to dress. He wanted to look and feel good. And he also maybe wanted to impress Ilya and his friends.

"I don't know," Shane asked as he tried on a different shirt. "What about this?"

"Ilya is *such* a good influence on you, honestly," Rose giggled, before looking at the shirt Shane was wearing. "Oh! Is that the silk one I got you?"

Shane blushed deeply at the statement about Ilya being good for him. Rose was right. Ilya was good for him. They were both very different people but Shane had needed someone like that in his life. Someone to make him try new things, to show him how enjoyable life could be. Someone who made him laugh and held him and showed him how good sex could be.

"Yeah," Shane sighed. "And yes. It is."

Rose smiled knowingly. "Wear it with the dark slacks. Oh! And the leather jacket!"

Shane laughed. "Okay. I will."

Shane changed into the suggested outfit and showed it to his friend.

"Thoughts?"

"It's perfect! Look at that *ass!* And with the jacket? You look like trouble."

She was smiling widely and Shane shook his head, huffing a laugh. "If you say so."

"I do! Ilya is gonna love it! How do *you* feel?"

Shane looked at himself in the mirror from different angles. He liked how he looked in the shirt and the pants. The shirt was sexy, almost see-through, and light enough for a club, dark slacks that hugged his thighs and ass in just the right ways, and a reddish-brown leather cropped bomber jacket. He'd paired the clothes with a black and white sneaker that was comfortable.

He felt and looked *really good.*

Ilya and his friends were so fashionable and as someone who spent most of his time at a desk or in restaurants and bars trying to blend in, Shane rarely wore anything that made him stand out.

But he could imagine the way Ilya would look him up and down, how he'd look at Shane in approval and appreciation, his eyes twinkling with an easy joy and desire.

"I feel great," Shane replied honestly.

"That's what I like to hear, buddy. Have fun! I can't wait to hear all about it!"

***

A few hours later…

It seemed that almost everyone that worked at *Irina's* was at the club.

Svetlana, Harris, Troy, Bood, Wyatt, and Shane were ushered into the club without waiting in line thanks to Harris knowing the promoter and Ilya letting them know ahead of time that his group would be there that night.

They all sat at the bar while Ilya worked behind it.

Ilya had noticed Shane, giving him that appreciative, adoring once over that Shane sometimes dreamt about, making Shane blush. He'd come over to say hi, kissing Shane over the bar.

"You look hot," he'd rumbled into Shane's ear, pressing a kiss to Shane's cheek, before he'd pulled away, leaving Shane hot under the collar.

Bood and Wyatt's wives met them at the club and Shane was introduced as Ilya's boyfriend, which was still incredibly thrilling. He had heard a lot about Cassie and Lisa from their husbands, so it was nice to meet them in person. He had to admit he'd been a bit shocked to find out that they'd heard about him, too.

It seemed silly, in retrospect, but Shane was still adjusting to being with Ilya. It warmed him to know that Ilya talked about him. Raved about him, apparently. It was so sweet and overwhelming.

Svetlana had designated herself his "date", since they were currently the only two in the group sans partners. But it was nice. Shane liked being able to be with Ilya's friends and not have to worry about relying on Ilya to make him feel comfortable.

This group was so open and more than happy to include Shane in conversation, even if all he did was listen as they spoke, and laugh every time someone made a joke.

And he got to see Ilya in his element; the consummate host, life of the party. The humidity had Ilya's curls tightening, his skin glistening. He looked stupidly attractive. Any time the strobe lights swung past him, Shane could see the outline of Ilya's pecs, his tattoo, his chain.

He laughed with the patrons who came up to the bar and made drinks and doled out shots. The club was a lot less glamorous than Irina's, but Ilya somehow managed to make things feel intimate, even for the brief moment someone ordered a drink.

Shane would have felt more jealous if it wasn't for Ilya stealing glances at him whenever he could.

"Come on," Lisa said, taking hold of Wyatt's hand.

"Okay," Wyatt laughed, leaving his beer on the table as Lisa tugged him to his feet and toward the dance floor.

"We're coming, too!" called Harris.

Troy gave Shane a slightly distressed look and Shane laughed, trying to offer him an encouraging smile.

"Us, too!" Cassie interjected.

"Want to join?" Svetlana asked Shane.

Shane smiled at her. "Would you be terribly disappointed if I stayed to watch my boyfriend work, instead?"

Svetlana laughed. "Only a little." She leaned in and kissed Shane's cheek. "Have fun!"

"You, too!" Shane called back.

He laughed to himself and turned around to face the bar, tapping his fingers idly against the bottom of his empty cocktail glass. The club was getting very busy. They were in the VIP bar, so it wasn't as crowded as the bars below on the main dance floor, but enough that Ilya was very much working.

Shane could be patient and it was enough to just be in Ilya's general vicinity.

It didn't take more than a few minutes of sitting alone for Shane to feel eyes on him. He turned his head to find a handsome man looking at him, smiling.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," Shane replied politely, offering a small smile, before looking away.

Contrary to popular belief, Shane was very aware of when he was being flirted with. He maybe wasn't so good at flirting back but he wasn't a complete idiot. He wasn't super in the mood to have to tell someone to mind their business, but he would if he had to.

"You here alone?" the guy asked and Shane only just managed to not roll his eyes.

"No," Shane replied. "With friends."

"Oh yeah? Where they at? They leave you all alone?"

Shane was about to turn the full force of his annoyance on this guy when he saw the guy look over his shoulder, surprised, and a large palm rested against the small of Shane's back.

Shane turned, smiling as he looked up at his boyfriend. Ilya's response was to cup Shane's face in his hand and kiss him. It was a deep kiss, the kind of kiss that Shane always thought about when he thought about Ilya.

Commanding and tender all at once, just on the edge of filthy, but still making Shane feel adored and precious.

They parted, leaving Shane a bit breathless, his cheeks hot from more than just the warmth of the club. Ilya was looking at him intensely. He brushed his thumb over Shane's bottom lip.

"Hi," Shane managed to say.

Ilya smiled then. "Hi."

He removed his hand from Shane's face, resting it on his shoulder, before he looked over Shane, presumably to the guy sitting next to him.

"He is gone," Ilya said.

Shane laughed and let his head flop onto Ilya's chest. Ilya chuckled, which Shane felt more than heard, Ilya's hand resting at the back of his head, stroking his hair. Shane lifted his head to look at Ilya again.

"Thanks for the rescue. Again."

Ilya shrugged and Shane lifted his head. "I am finished for the night. Was good timing." He smiled and winked. "You can handle yourself."

Shane smiled back and nodded. "Yeah."

"Do you want to dance?"

"Fuck it. Why not?"

They made their way out to the dance floor, holding hands, finding the *Irina's* crowd. They all cheered at seeing them.

Shane wasn't much of a dancer and he wasn't the biggest fan of dancing, but he knew that Ilya liked to.

He took Shane's hand, holding it securely in his, resting his hands on Shane's hips, pulling him close. Shane plopped his hands on Ilya's shoulders, feeling awkward. He didn't have great rhythm and the bass thumped so loudly he could feel it in his chest.

Ilya leaned close, talking right into Shane's ear once more. "Relax. Move with me."

Shane took a breath and looked up at his boyfriend. Ilya smiled at him, winking, and Shane smiled back, sliding his arms around his neck, allowing Ilya to lead. He trusted him.

They danced together for a bit, enough for Shane to get comfortable, before Svetlana stole him, Ilya dancing on his own.

“You are a good dancer,” Svetlana purred at him, making Shane laugh.

“Thank you,” he chuckled. “But you don’t have to be kind, it’s okay.”

“It’s true! You’re not half bad!”

Shane smiled, appreciating her compliments, and let her and Ilya dance together after a while.

Then they all kind of danced together in a group, before Ilya tugged Shane close again so they could dance, just the two of them.

The whole club oozed sex and Shane wasn’t unaware of the way the people around them were grinding up against each other and making out.

Shane was mostly just paying attention to Ilya, watching him sing along to the music. He would involve Shane, too, serenading him, making Shane laugh as Ilya rested their foreheads together.

Ilya looked like he was enjoying himself, having fun dancing with Shane, and it *was* fun.

Shane met Ilya’s eyes, seeing the sparkling joy in them, and he allowed himself to just let go. He leaned in, kissing Ilya deeply, and sighed as Ilya kissed him back. They openly made out on the dance floor, Ilya’s big, warm hands sliding over Shane’s waist, pulling him close.

Shane had never done this with a partner before. The very few times he’d been to clubs when he was younger had been with friends. He would often just dance with Rose or sit things out. He’d only met one guy at a club that he hooked up with. But he had never had anything like this.

It still surprised him; how good it felt to do this with someone he cared for. Someone he loved.

When they broke apart, Shane turned, his back to Ilya’s chest. He reached up with one hand to rest his fingers into Ilya’s damp curls, and one of Ilya’s hands slid under his shirt, pushing it up to run his hand over Shane’s abs, making Shane bite his bottom lip.

Ilya dipped his head, kissing Shane’s neck, and it sent a pleasurable zing of electricity through Shane. He sucked in a breath and tilted his head back, giving Ilya more access.

“You are so beautiful,” Ilya purred and Shane hummed, grinding his ass back against Ilya’s crotch. He could tell that Ilya was hard and fuck if this wasn’t heady stuff.

Ilya was warm and solid and he smelled so fucking good. Shane had spent a lot of time in his younger years with smelly men in locker rooms, but Ilya always smelled incredible. Shane had no idea how he did it…

They kissed over Shane's shoulder and Shane wasn't sure he'd ever been so horny in his life. He didn't think it would have been possible for him to feel this way in a club, but he was with Ilya, and there were so many things that Ilya made so fun and enjoyable for him.

"I love you," Shane breathed and Ilya hummed, the sound almost a growl.

"I love you, too."

Shane turned around to face Ilya again, sighing as they wrapped their arms around each other.

"Should we take this back to my place?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded vigorously before pulling Ilya in for another heated kiss, Ilya's hands sliding into the pockets of Shane's jeans and squeezing his ass.

They pulled apart, Shane's hands wrapped around Ilya's biceps.

They turned to say their goodnights to everyone, getting wolf-whistles and cheers, which was embarrassing, but also funny. Ilya completely ate it up.

They grabbed their coats from the coat room and left, stepping out onto the shockingly cold sidewalk.

Ilya called a car and Shane leaned into him.

"Did you have fun?" Ilya asked, his voice a bit hoarse, wrapping his arms around Shane, and kissing the top of his head.

"I did," Shane replied, his voice equally as rough. "I'm not really a club person but… that was nice."

"I'm glad. Was good to have you. To see you with my friends."

"They're great."

"Yes."

Shane smiled, snuggling against his boyfriend, enjoying his warmth, and solidness.

"It was fun watching you work, too."

"You like watching me."

"I do."

Shane looked up, perching his chin on Ilya's chest, smiling at him.

"You look really fucking good," Ilya said.

Shane grinned. "Yeah?"

Ilya nodded, leaning down to kiss Shane. They made out on the sidewalk a bit before their car arrived and they slid into the backseat.

They managed to keep it together, leaving the car, and making their way up to Ilya's apartment.

They tumbled through the door, kissing, and hands running into hair, holding faces. Ilya pinned Shane up against the wall, one hand on Shane's thigh, Shane's leg wrapped around Ilya's ass.

They clung to one another, still dressed in their outdoor clothes, though neither of them were willing to stop as they rubbed up against each other, touching, getting hard.

"Wait," Shane panted. "Let me…"

Shane fumbled with the zipper of his jacket and Ilya let him go, laughing, unzipping his own jackets. They dumped their jackets on the floor, kicked their shoes off, and went back to kissing, making a slow journey to Ilya's bedroom, stopping against a wall to make out. Shane tried to climb Ilya like a tree.

Ilya scooped him up and carried him the rest of the way, both of them laughing. He set Shane on his feet at the end of the bed, where they just kept kissing. Shane loved kissing Ilya and he enjoyed the long minutes of it; Ilya's tongue in his mouth, hands on his skin, scent in his nose.

Everything familiar and warm and perfect.

Eventually, Ilya began to slowly undress Shane, pressing soft kisses and gentle bites to each piece of exposed skin. Shane shivered under the touches, sighing as Ilya sank to his knees in front of Shane, looking up at him with his golden eyes. He was so gorgeous, the light accentuating the sharp lines of his face, and Shane smoothed his hand into Ilya's curls, stroking his thumb over his cheek.

Ilya leaned in, peppering light kisses to Shane's abs, his stubble tickling Shane's skin. He looked up at Shane again, undoing his pants, tugging them down, allowing Shane to kick them off.

"You're so handsome," Shane breathed, unable to help it, the words tumbling out of his mouth. Ilya smiled at him, huffing a laugh, before he pressed his mouth to the bulge in Shane's briefs.

Shane bit his lip, watching his boyfriend take his time, tracing the outline of Shane's cock with his tongue, before dipping his head to mouth at his balls. There was something so sensual and captivating about watching Ilya do that. He was so good at it and was enjoying it and that just served to turn Shane on more.

Shane whimpered, the sensation of Ilya's mouth on him intense, but not even close to enough. Shane tightened his fingers in Ilya's curls, just holding on. They knew who was still in control here.

Ilya spent a ridiculous amount of time on Shane's cock, through his underwear, teasing him until the cotton was damp, clinging to his skin.

Ilya slid his long, strong fingers into Shane's underwear, pulling them down. Shane was so fucking hard and his cock bobbed eagerly in Ilya's face, only for Ilya to ignore it, and go straight for Shane's balls.

"Holy fuck," Shane gasped. "So good."

It boggled Shane's mind how good Ilya was at sex. It really didn't matter what they did together, all of it was incredible. Shane had no idea how Ilya even thought to do certain things, like flicking his tongue between Shane's knuckles or sucking on the pulse point in his neck. Ilya could just read Shane's body like a book.

And Shane loved when Ilya played with his balls. He was an expert at it and it was nice to know that Ilya liked doing it.

But he wasn't the kind of man to do things he didn't enjoy.

Ilya sucked gently at Shane's sac and Shane moaned softly.

"Fuck, Ilya. You could make me come just from that."

Ilya released him, leaning back to waggle his eyebrows at Shane, making Shane chuckle.

"I could," he hummed. "Do you want to try…?"

Shane chewed on his bottom lip as he considered the offer, his cheeks going warm, but he nodded. The idea was ridiculously hot and he wanted to see if he actually *could* come like that.

"Yeah."

Ilya smiled his sexy crooked smile at Shane and Shane knew he was totally done for.

He crawled into bed, taking off his socks as Ilya finished undressing. Shane sprawled out on his back and Ilya stretched out over him, naked and perfect, and kissed Shane into the mattress.

Shane wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, letting his hands roam over his muscular back, to his perfect ass, squeezing it in his hands. Ilya chuckled, kissing Shane's cheek, down his neck, working his way down his body.

He left a mark on the inside of Shane's thigh, kissing and licking over it, before leaning back.

Ilya looked at him, head tilted to the side, curls flopping a bit, as he regarded Shane with a fond smile. He reached his hand down, cupping Shane's balls in his hand, rolling them gently.

Shane bit his lip, pleasure sliding through him at the touch. It was different, having so much attention on just one particular area. Ilya was completely ignoring Shane's dick and it was strange but also sexy.

"Okay?" Ilya asked, one brow arched in question.

"Yeah," Shane replied, swallowing. "It's just different."

"Good or bad?"

"Good. Definitely good."

Ilya laughed. He released Shane carefully, casually rearranging himself into a more comfortable position. Shane watched, anticipating, lips parted, as Ilya leaned in, running his tongue along the seam of Shane's sac.

He teased Shane, licking and kissing him, before sucking one of Shane's balls into his mouth.

"Oh fuck," Shane gasped.

Ilya was careful, using less suction than he might on Shane's cock. The concentrated attention was… insane.

Shane had always enjoyed having his balls played with but this was a whole other level.

It was something he couldn't even properly describe, just such concentrated pressure in one spot.

"Ilya, holy shit," Shane breathed as Ilya let one orb fall carefully from his mouth, before he moved on to the other.

Shane watched Ilya's eyes slip closed and he made a soft noise of pleasure, which only turned Shane on more, because it meant that Ilya was enjoying this.

Shane slid his hand back into Ilya's curls, his other hand wrapped in the comforter.

"Oh god," he whimpered.

Ilya kept going, pausing his sucking to lick and kiss Shane's sac, lifting his eyes to meet Shane's.

"You are close," he noted, his voice husky from having to yell over the music at the club, and probably desire. "So tight."

Shane whined at the words and Ilya sucked again, gently. Shane's eyes rolled to the ceiling, lost to sensation, and the slow build of his orgasm.

"I'm so close," he panted.

Ilya hummed in acknowledgment, the sensation only adding to the pleasure of it all. Shane moaned, unable to help himself as Ilya kept things up. There was nothing complicated about this at all but Shane was going to come so fucking hard. He could feel it.

Everything was just focused on one spot and the build of his orgasm was less of a building swell and more of just an intensity that didn't lessen.

"Fuck, Ilya, shit. I'm gonna come, I'm—" Shane made a weird whining noise that sounded more like a squeak before he came, his whole body tight as he pulsed hard and long, coming all over his stomach.

It was one of the longest, most intense orgasms Shane had ever had in his life. Bordering on painful.

When it was over, he lay flat on his back, breathing hard, feeling completely spent and empty.

Ilya came to lay next to him, propped up on his arm.

"Okay?" he asked and Shane turned his head, looking at Ilya.

His eyes stung, a sweep of strong emotion rolling over him. He didn't know where it came from, but it was *a lot* all at once. Ilya was blurry through Shane's tears.

"Shane?"

Shane rolled onto his side and Ilya wrapped an arm around him, pulling him close, and Shane cried against his chest.

"Sweetheart…" Ilya soothed gently, stroking Shane's hair, and kissing his forehead.

Shane took a few deep breaths, pulling away slightly to wipe at his eyes.

"Sorry," he sniffed. "I don't know what…"

"Is okay," Ilya assured. "Are you hurt?"

Shane shook his head and looked at his boyfriend, a little embarrassed, but wanting to reassure Ilya that he was okay.

"No. I'm fine. That was so fucking good. I just… I think it was just so overwhelming."

Ilya nodded in understanding, though he still looked a bit concerned. "Yes. Okay."

"I really am fine," Shane reiterated, reaching out to gently rest his palm on Ilya's chest. He reached up, resting his hand over Shane's.

"Okay."

He carefully took Shane's hand, kissing his palm, and Shane melted.

“Do you want…?”

“Is okay,” Ilya replied gently, kissing Shane’s cheek. “One second.”

Ilya slid out of bed and went to the bathroom, coming back with a wet washcloth. He cleaned Shane off gently, kissing him with a tender softness that made Shane shiver.

“You sure?” Shane asked when Ilya came back after dropping the cloth into the hamper.

Ilya nodded as he slid into bed with him.

Shane felt bad. He hadn’t meant to get all emotional and turn Ilya off. But Ilya didn’t seem bothered, rolling Shane onto his side, and spooning him from behind like he always did when they slept together.

He kissed the back of Shane’s neck and nuzzled him.

“Relax,” he murmured. “We are okay.”

Shane took a few deep breaths, holding Ilya’s hand where it lay on the mattress by his belly.

“Okay,” he sighed.

Ilya hummed, kissing his shoulder and nuzzling his hair. “Sleep. I love you.”

Shane closed his eyes, relaxing his shoulders. “I love you, too.”

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

The morning after the club

3AM

Ilya woke up to the feeling of a warm hand sliding across his chest and Shane's whispering in his ear.

"Ilya… are you awake?"

"I am now," Ilya replied, voice rough from sleep. Shane snuggled closer, his leg sliding over Ilya's thigh, warm, naked skin resting against his, Shane's erection pressed against his hip.

Ilya was a bit more awake just from that and the fact that Shane was nuzzling and kissing his neck, his hand sliding down Ilya's torso, fingers brushing against his half-hard cock.

"May I?" Shane murmured, his warm breath ghosting over Ilya's ear, making him shiver.

"Yes," Ilya replied, turning his head to kiss Shane messily in the dark, Shane's fingers wrapping around Ilya's dick, stroking.

Ilya sighed into Shane's mouth, feeling a bit off-kilter thanks to the abrupt waking, and the pleasure of having his boyfriend touch him like this. He felt a bit sluggish but the enjoyment of Shane's touch was immediate.

It was a simple thing but stupidly sexy to Ilya in that moment, just feeling Shane's hand on him, kissing Shane's soft, perfect mouth.

Neither of them really spoke, too busy kissing, Shane working his hand over Ilya. He broke the kiss and Ilya moaned, before Shane released him. He shifted around, making himself comfortable between Ilya's legs, kitten-licking and kissing at Ilya's cock.

"Is this okay?" he asked and Ilya ran one hand through his curls, before pressing it to the headboard.

"Yes," he breathed and groaned as Shane sucked gently under the head of his dick. "Fuck, Shane."

This felt like a lot for what was probably an ungodly hour but Ilya couldn't complain. It was rare, even in the short time they'd been together, for Shane to be impulsive like this; to wake

Ilya up for sex in the middle of the night. It was sexy as hell, maybe even more so because it wasn't something typical.

Shane just sighed, sliding his tongue into Ilya's slit, sucking the head into his mouth, worshiping Ilya's cock, and then finally taking it into his mouth, lips sliding all the way down the shaft.

Ilya swore in Russian, his free hand sliding into Shane's hair, just holding him as he blew Ilya with all the skill he possessed.

Ilya knew that Shane hadn't had any recent partners and while he might have been single for a little while, he knew how to deep throat. Even if he was rusty, Ilya couldn't tell. His mouth was perfect; warm and wet and tight. He swallowed around the head of Ilya's cock and Ilya let out a noise he might have been otherwise embarrassed by.

But not tonight.

"So good, Shane. Your mouth… made for this."

Shane hummed and the sensation went right to Ilya's balls, just as Shane reached up to roll Ilya's balls in his palm.

Ilya swore in Russian again, babbling absolute nonsense about how good Shane felt and how incredible he was, even if Shane couldn't understand him.

Shane moaned softly before pulling off of Ilya.

"Will you fuck me?" Shane asked, voice rough from the blowjob and sleep and the club.

"Yes," Ilya replied, already looking for the lube under one of their pillows, Shane reaching over to grab a condom. Finding it, he pulled Shane up to him.

Shane straddled his hips and they kissed, Shane's hands sliding into Ilya's curls as he uncapped the lube, slicking his fingers, and getting to work.

He wasn't as thorough as he usually was but Shane seemed just as restless and needy as Ilya felt, tolerating only a few moments of Ilya using three fingers, pressing as deeply into him as he could, before saying he was ready.

Ilya slid the condom on and slicked himself, the head of his cock tapping against Shane's rim, and Shane simply shifting his weight to sink down on Ilya.

They both groaned and Shane gave himself a moment to adjust before he started riding the hell out of Ilya's dick, trapping Ilya's hips between his thighs.

Ilya grabbed Shane's ass, helpless noises pulled from him as his gorgeous boyfriend slammed his perfect ass down on Ilya's lap again and again and again.

Ilya wished they'd turned a light on, he could see Shane fairly well, his eyes adjusted to the dark, but there was nothing like being able to watch the way his cheeks flushed, his perfect

pink lips parted, his eyes half-lidded.

He always looked gorgeous but sex made him. One day, Ilya was going to fuck Shane in front of a mirror and make him watch to see how beautiful he was when he let go completely.

“Holy shit. Ilya. Fuck. I’m so close. Gonna come.”

“Yes, sweetheart. Give it to me.”

Shane swore and moaned and came, body spasming around Ilya’s cock, which was all it took for him to empty himself inside Shane.

Shane more or less collapsed on top of him, both of them breathing hard, a bit sweaty, and covered in come.

Ilya chuckled, wrapping his arms around Shane, and Shane made a soft noise, his face tucked against Ilya’s neck. They just breathed together for a bit, pressed close.

“Good?” Ilya murmured.

“Amazing,” Shane sighed, sounding relaxed and sated.

He shifted, peeling himself from Ilya, both of them laughing. They exchanged a few tender kisses before Shane slid out of bed. He grabbed someone’s briefs and used it to clean come off of them both.

Ilya removed the condom, tying it off, and managed to find the small waste paper basket he had by his desk.

They both fell back into bed and Ilya pulled the covers over both of them. Shane pressed up against Ilya’s side once more, tossing his leg over Ilya’s thigh, his hand resting on his chest, fingers running through Ilya’s chest hair, which he seemed to enjoy and appreciate. It made Ilya smile.

He wrapped an arm around Shane, resting the other on Shane’s forearm, and turned his head to kiss into his hair.

“Goodnight,” Shane murmured. “I love you.”

Ilya closed his eyes, feeling as light as air. “Goodnight. I love you, too.”

***

11AM

Ilya woke up, properly, very late in the morning.

It wasn’t unusual for him, given that the service industry was known for its late working hours.

He didn't mind it but he was usually up earlier when Shane was over.

But apparently it didn't matter this morning because Shane was still sound asleep.

They had shifted during the night, after their quick fuck at three in the morning, before going almost immediately back to sleep. Shane was pressed up against Ilya, face more or less buried in Ilya's chest.

Ilya smiled fondly, nuzzling into Shane's hair, breathing him in. He enjoyed the quiet moment; of the comforting weight of Shane in his arms, the warmth of him pressed close.

Ilya had had many lovers over the years but no one that he had ever shared such intimacy with.

Being in love was new for him.

He was an expert at sex, at knowing when people were attracted to one another, and wanted to kiss, or fuck. But love? Relationships? That was all new territory for him.

Sometimes the depth of feeling he felt for Shane was enough to make him winded. It seemed impossible to love and be loved like this… and yet here it was.

Ilya was infatuated. Completely and totally.

He had no idea how Shane had managed to sneak behind his defenses and capture his heart the way he had.

It was terrifying, sometimes, thinking about how much power he held.

He could ask for anything and Ilya would give it freely.

Especially if it meant Shane staying.

Shane made a quiet, adorable noise in his sleep, snuggling closer, and Ilya held him protectively, his insides melting.

Cute…

Shane wasn't a small man. He was tall-ish and very fit, but Ilya loved that Shane seemed small in his arms.

Shane liked it, too, more than once telling Ilya how much he loved how tall he was, how big. Ilya liked hearing it, knowing it.

The only positives he'd gotten from his father were his height and broad shoulders.

Everything else had been his mother's first.

Ilya leaned away, just so he could watch Shane sleep. He'd woken up to find Shane watching him, so it only seemed fair to do the same, and he liked being able to appreciate Shane up

close.

Ilya loved the sharp line of his jaw, the elegant slope of his adorable nose, the smattering of dark freckles that spanned his cheeks, and over the bridge of his nose. He had such pretty pink lips and long, dark eyelashes.

Ilya wanted to kiss him awake and then snuggle him, but he refrained, wanting to allow Shane to sleep. He would make them coffee and blini and they would have a cozy, relaxing morning together.

So Ilya dipped his head to press a kiss to Shane's shoulder, carefully extracting himself from bed. He used the bathroom, changed into a clean pair of briefs, and made his way quietly to the kitchen.

He picked up their abandoned jackets, still on the floor, hanging them up, and went about making coffee, pulling two mugs from the cabinet and setting them aside.

While coffee brewed he made his mother's blini mix, pulling out some raspberry jam and honey, placing them on the counter.

Ilya set his skillet on his preferred burner, smiling as he heard the familiar patter of bare feet on hardwood floors. He loved that noise; the intimacy of hearing Shane in his home. A moment later, strong arms wrapped around him, Shane pressed to his back, pressing kisses between his shoulder blades.

"Good morning," Shane murmured, sounding adorably sleepy.

Ilya's whole chest went warm, reaching up to rest his hands over Shane's. It felt like he had put on one of Ilya's sweatshirts, which made his heart flip.

"Good morning," Ilya replied.

"You're not cold?" Shane asked, his head resting against Ilya's back, squeezing him.

"No," Ilya chuckled.

"I'm freezing…"

Ilya turned in Shane's arms, wrapping him up and holding him close. "Better?"

"Yes," Shane sighed, pressing as close to Ilya as he could as they stood in his kitchen.

Ilya rested his cheek on top of Shane's head and Shane hummed. It seemed that he had gone into Ilya's drawers for a sweatshirt but had opted for only that, his legs bare.

The coffee machine beeped and Ilya gave Shane a parting kiss to the top of his head before he went to the counter to pour coffee.

"Milk and sugar?" Shane asked.

“Yes, please,” Ilya replied, plopping butter onto his skillet and turning the burner on.

“What’re you making?” Shane asked as he set Ilya’s mug within reach of him on the counter.

“My mother’s blini,” Ilya replied.

Shane hummed, standing at Ilya’s side, watching him.

“What’s the difference between blini and crepes?”

“Yeast,” Ilya replied, picking up his mug, and sipping his own coffee. “If you make them right. Crepes do not use it. American pancakes do not use it, they use baking soda, or powder. Proper blini are made with yeast.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Today you learned.”

Shane smiled over the lip of his coffee mug and he was so adorable Ilya wanted to bite him. The cute aggression was *immense.*

“Cute,” Ilya murmured in Russian, leaning in to kiss Shane, just because he could.

“What does that mean?” he asked when they parted, the skin under his freckles still flushed.

“Cute,” Ilya replied, kissing the tip of Shane’s nose.

Shane whined softly, resting his forehead on Ilya’s arm, and Ilya laughed.

Shane stood there for a bit, sipping his coffee, as Ilya plated the finished blini. When the batter was finished, all the blini plated, Shane took them, placing them on the island with the honey and jam.

“I’ll have to make you crepes next time you come over,” Shane said, adding jam to his blini.

“Sure,” Ilya replied, taking some blini for himself. “How do you make them?”

“Traditionally,” Shane replied with a smile. “I’ll fill them sometimes.”

“Sweet or savory?”

“Savory.”

“Sweet is better.”

“Definitely not.”

Ilya snorted. “There is no accounting for taste.”

“Hey,” Shane protested, kicking at Ilya playfully. Ilya smirked at him, eating a blin.

“It is how interesting there are all these similar foods across cultures. Different but still very similar.”

Ilya nodded in agreement. “Humans are going to be humans.”

Shane smiled. “Exactly.”

Ilya looked at him. His hair was a little mussed, tucked adorably behind his ears on one side. The sweatshirt he was wearing was baggy on him and he looked very cozy in it.

“Why did you go into food journalism?” Ilya asked him. They had talked about their jobs here and there but Ilya had never asked how Shane had gotten into the field.

Shane looked thoughtful, considering the question. “I wanted to play professional hockey, originally. And for a bit it looked like I could make it, but I got pretty badly injured and that was kind of it for me on that front. So I decided to go back to school and pursue a degree in journalism. I’ve always liked cooking and food in general. I had a weird relationship with it for a while, after my injury, trying to control things that I felt were out of my control. I worked with a therapist who helped me a lot and my whole view on food shifted. It can be such a cool thing. Not just for physically fueling our bodies, but as something to be savored and enjoyed. As a way to bring people closer together, to share experiences, to show love, and appreciation. It’s such a wonderful part of being a human. I just love it.”

Ilya hadn’t been expecting that answer but he appreciated Shane’s honesty and vulnerability.

“It is wonderful,” Ilya agreed.

Shane had gone all pink again and Ilya’s heart melted. “What about you?”

“My mother, mostly,” Ilya replied, just as honest. “And because I had to. Was not many options for a Russian immigrant who did not speak good English. I learned a lot.”

“When did you come to Canada?”

“I was nineteen. I came to Canada with a backpack and whatever money I had. Not a lot. I had been working in bars back in Russia to make money as soon as I could work. My mother she…” Ilya paused. He hadn’t thought he would be sharing this over blini, in his underwear, but he guessed he was now.

He didn’t often talk about his mother and her passing. It wasn’t a pleasant topic for him and while the grief was worn after so many years, it still pulled uncomfortably, like a faded scar.

“She took her own life, when I was twelve. I found her. Was very hard for the next few years. My father was not kind. My older brother was very much like him. I left as soon as I was able to afford it.”

Shane’s expression was open and almost pained, but Ilya didn’t need pity or sympathy. It was a long time ago now. He reached out to touch Shane’s hand briefly, wanting to assure him.

“Oh Ilya…”

“Was okay. Hard. But I did what I had to. I could not stay in Russia any more and Canada was much better.”

Shane turned his hand, holding Ilya’s in his own. “That’s very brave.”

Ilya shrugged. He wasn’t sure about that. “I only did what I needed to survive. To be myself. To make my mother proud.”

“I think she would be incredibly proud of you. Look at how successful you are! You’re a star!”

Ilya felt his own cheeks heat, a rare and disconcerting sensation. He shook his head a little. Shane squeezed his hand, before releasing him, and slid out of his seat. He came around the island, wrapping his arms around Ilya, and hugged him, one hand resting at the back of Ilya’s head.

“I know she would be. And I am, too.”

Ilya closed his eyes, hooking his chin over Shane’s shoulder, and held him back. “Thank you…”

Shane held him for a long time, smoothing his hand over Ilya’s curls, and then down his back. He kissed Ilya’s temple and leaned away to look at him.

“I love you,” Shane said gently, brushing careful fingers against his temple, smoothing his curls behind his ear.

“I love you, too,” Ilya murmured.

Shane smiled, cupping Ilya’s face in his palm, and kissed him, warm and soft. Ilya wanted to get lost in him, if only just for the comfort and safety of being held by Shane.

It was rare for Ilya to feel safe with people. It took a long time for him to get to that place but it felt easy with Shane. Maybe that was because Shane seemed to trust *him* so completely.

They parted and Shane hugged Ilya again, before going back to his seat.

“Thank you for telling me about your mom.”

Ilya smiled softly at him. “Thank you for listening.”

“I wish I could have met her.”

“She would have loved you.”

Shane blushed. “I think I’d have loved her, too.”

They went back to eating their blini and Shane turned the topic of conversation back to hockey, though he held Ilya’s hand on top of the island.

It felt like a dangerous thought… but Ilya could get used to quiet, domestic mornings with the man he loved.

He smiled at Shane and Shane smiled back. Ilya lifted Shane's hand and kissed the back of it.

Fuck, he was in so deep. But there was no turning back for him now. Shane had his heart, completely.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane go on a date to a hockey game

Chapter Notes

Is this the cutest thing I've ever written? Quite possibly! 😂💕

April

“What are you wearing?” Shane asked incredulously after Ilya finished kissing him hello.

He stepped away slightly, though Ilya still had his arms around him. He was looking at Ilya’s Boston Bears jersey with a look of abject horror on his face that made Ilya cackle.

“No!” Shane said, trying to squirm out of Ilya’s arms as Ilya attempted to pull him close again, kissing at his face. “Ew! Gross! No! Don’t kiss me! Why are you wearing a Boston jersey?!”

“Because I am a Boston fan?” Ilya replied, grinning cheekily at his boyfriend.

“Seriously? Are you kidding me, Rozanov?”

Ilya laughed, nuzzling against Shane’s cheek as Shane made a retching sound. They parted slightly and Shane had a look on his face like he’d bit into a lemon, but he had stopped fighting Ilya’s embrace.

“I can’t believe I’ve been fucking a Bears fan this whole time! Gross!”

Ilya laughed, pressing teasing kisses to Shane’s cheek, following the line of his freckles. “But you love it.”

Shane chuckled and sighed, wrapping his arms around Ilya’s neck, looking at Ilya through his long, dark lashes.

“Yeah,” he breathed. “I do.”

Ilya smiled, eyes crinkling as he looked down at Shane and Shane smiled dreamily back at him, dragging his hands down Ilya’s arms to his hands. He leaned in, stealing another kiss.

He looked absolutely adorable, dressed in a Voyageurs jersey, with a hoodie underneath, his hair pulled up in a half ponytail. He was wearing a pair of comfortable looking jeans that made his ass look amazing, and plain gray sneakers.

“You look cute,” Ilya said. “I like your hair.”

Shane smiled, his cheeks turning the beautiful pink that Ilya loved so much. “Yeah?”

“Mm, yes,” Ilya replied, pressing a lingering kiss to one of Shane’s warm cheeks.

“Thank you,” Shane hummed. They smiled at each other again and Shane reached up to touch Ilya’s cheek and the beard he’d kept because Shane had said he liked it.

“Thanks for keeping the beard.”

Ilya winked at him. “Anything for you.”

Shane blushed some more and Ilya grinned.

“Are we ready to go?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah. We should probably head out now if we want to beat the rush.”

“Okay. I will follow you.”

They left the apartment and headed to the Metro, catching up. It was nice to just talk, teasing one another about their choice in hockey teams.

Ilya had thought this would be a fun date for them, something different than they normally did. They both loved hockey, so it seemed reasonable to get tickets to a game. Ilya had pulled some strings with connections he had and was able to get some decent tickets for a good price.

A plus that it was a Voyageurs/Bears game.

They got off at their stop and Shane took Ilya’s hand, walking down the street, amongst the spring crowds. It was still cold, but Montreal was beginning to thaw.

“I am excited for this game,” Ilya mused, glancing at his boyfriend.

“You are, eh?” Shane chuckled, looking up at Ilya, smiling slyly. “You think the Bears are gonna win?”

“Of course,” Ilya replied. “They are the best.”

Objectively, the Voyageurs and Bears were in similar standings and both were looking to make the playoffs.

Shane snorted. “As if. We’re gonna kick your ass.”

“We? What is we? You are playing now?”

They playfully went back and forth and Ilya was so in love it was disgusting.

He loved going on dates with Shane. He loved kissing him hello and holding his hand, and arguing back and forth about which team was better.

They stopped into a small pub that Shane was familiar with not far from the arena, grabbing seats at the bar, ordering some beers, and food.

Ilya was, unsurprisingly, chirped and quipped, given that the bar was full of Montreal fans. It didn't bother him. If anything, it just made him enjoy the experience more. He loved riling people up and ruffling feathers.

"You're enjoying yourself," Shane said over his beer glass.

Ilya shrugged and winked at him again. Shane smiled flirtatiously back.

They paid for their drinks and meal and headed toward the arena. Shane led them to a more quiet side entrance and they were the first people in the doors.

"My dad has season tickets to the Centaurs," Shane explained as they climbed the stairs to their seats.

"I'm sorry," Ilya replied and Shane laughed.

"They're his team," Shane said. "He was born and raised in Ottawa. My parents are there now, but they met in Montreal, in school. My mom's a Voyageurs fan."

"That must be hard."

Shane laughed. "They make it work. But I would have loved to have played for the Voyageurs when I thought I'd go pro, so." Shane shrugged. "They're my team now, too."

They got to their seats, which were behind the Voyageurs' goal, with a pretty decent view. Shane turned to Ilya, surprised.

"These are great seats," he said.

Ilya grinned. "I know."

After orienting themselves and knowing where their seats were, they went back to the concourse to grab some beers.

It was interesting, seeing Shane in this environment. They had spent so much time at one another's apartments and at the bar or out at nice restaurants, that a sporting event felt like a complete one-eighty, but Ilya was digging it.

They had talked about how they both loved hockey and had watched some games together, though they had usually ended up not finishing them, since they would end up having sex instead, which Ilya couldn't be mad about.

They sat in their seats and shared a pretzel, idly chatting with one another and the people around them. There were two other Bears fans in their section and Ilya talked with them for a bit.

The game started and they were already off to the races. The arena was buzzing and everything seemed heightened and intense, which made sense for a rivalry game so late in the season. Ilya loved how Shane was laser focused on the action on the ice, eyes tracking plays, wearing his glasses.

So fucking cute.

Ilya loved how intense he was about it and it was easy for Ilya to get right into it, too, to not feel that they had to have a conversation when the game was in play.

It was great.

Boston scored early and Ilya was out of his seat, roaring, though he was one of only a handful of Boston fans in the arena. Shane scoffed next to him, sipping his beer.

“Don’t get too comfortable, Rozanov,” he warned.

Ilya had learned, early on, that Shane Hollander was a competitive little shit.

Ilya was attracted to Shane. Very much so. He had been from the moment he saw him. But seeing him now, chirping, cheering with the crowd when his team scored, unafraid to rub it in Ilya’s face. It was frustrating and also incredibly sexy all at once.

Shane, who was relatively reserved in a lot of ways, was being so open. He was in his element and he felt comfortable. Ilya had started to see a sillier side to Shane in their quiet moments together, where Shane was relaxed and safe, but this was a whole other experience of him. It was great.

Ilya needed to consider investing in more hockey games.

“Not so confident now, huh?” Shane said as they sat down during the second intermission. Ilya narrowed his eyes.

“Teams have come back from worse.”

Shane laughed.

There was a t-shirt toss during intermission that Ilya only half paid attention to and then the Jumbotron was turned on, the camera sweeping the crowd. Ilya wasn’t really paying that any mind, briefly checking his phone before he heard the people around them cheering.

He lifted his head to see himself and Shane on the screen in the middle of the arena, surrounded by a heart frame, with script in the right corner that indicated that this was the kiss cam.

He blinked and turned to Shane. They looked at each other for a moment before Shane leaned in, one hand cupped to Ilya's cheek, and kissed him. The arena erupted in cheers.

They broke the kiss and Ilya blinked at Shane some more, surprised and delighted, laughing. Shane smiled, his entire face beet red and adorable.

The camera moved away from them and Ilya sat in his seat, amazed.

"Okay?" he asked Shane, reaching out and resting a hand on his thigh, rubbing soothingly.

"Yeah," Shane replied, laughing, shaking his head in what was maybe disbelief. "I didn't even think, I just did it."

Ilya grinned. "Was very hot."

"Yeah?" Shane asked, looking at him out of the corner of his eyes, so shy and sweet.

"Very."

"Hey," someone called.

Both Shane and Ilya turned to look at a group of youngish bro-types sitting behind them.

"Are you guys, like, actually together?" one of them in a white snapback asked.

"Yes," Ilya replied, shifting slightly, not afraid to become very menacing very quickly.

But the bros all smiled. "Right on, man! Love is rad! Good for you!"

Shane and Ilya glanced at one another and then the bros.

"Thanks," Shane said, before they turned back around, sharing another look.

Weird, right?

So weird!

They both chuckled and Shane leaned into Ilya's side, resting his head on Ilya's shoulder for a second. Ilya's heart clenched.

In the end, the Voyageurs won, 3-2. Ilya couldn't be that upset because he knew for a fact that winning turned Shane on.

But the game had been fun and they took their time getting home, waiting until the crowds had dissipated.

They walked hand in hand, Shane leaning his head on Ilya's shoulder as they went, surrounded by the merriment of Montreal's victorious fans.

"Let's go home," Shane said, kissing Ilya's cheek.

Ilya certainly didn't need to be told twice.

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They got through the door to Ilya's apartment, laughing softly and smiling at each other. Ilya unlocked the door and let Shane step in first.

"Did you have fun?" Ilya asked as he turned on the light, closing and locking the door behind him.

"I did," Shane replied, slipping off his shoes, his hand resting against the wall for balance. "Did you?"

"Yes," Ilya chuckled, taking off his own shoes. "A lot."

He stood up and Shane moved closer, resting his hands on Ilya's chest, looking up at him. Ilya looked back, sliding his arms around Shane to hold him.

"We should do that again," Shane said.

"We should," Ilya agreed, leaning down to brush a kiss over Shane's mouth.

Shane smiled and hummed happily, pulling away and heading to the kitchen.

"You want anything?" Shane asked and Ilya followed after him, leaning against the counter.

"Water is fine."

"Comin' up," Shane hummed, pulling out glasses, and pouring water into them, handing one to Ilya.

Ilya thanked him and watched as Shane hopped up to sit on one of the counters, swinging his legs, drinking from his glass.

He was so beautiful. His hair was tucked behind his ears on one side and he was smiling as he looked back at Ilya, glass held in both hands. He looked so casually comfortable in his kitchen and though Ilya had seen him like this before, it felt more significant somehow.

"I've never done a hockey date before," Shane chuckled and shook his head. "I can't *believe* you're a Bears fan. How did we go six months without me finding out?"

Ilya shrugged and pushed off the counter, coming to stand between Shane's legs.

"We never watched a Bears game," he replied simply.

He put down his glass, and slid his hands under Shane's clothes to touch skin, resting his fingers on Shane's hips.

Shane smiled up at him and Ilya leaned down to press soft kisses to Shane's face, just because he could, reaching his hands up to cup Shane's cheeks.

Shane sighed, eyes sliding closed, face tilted up as if toward the sun. Ilya's heart constricted. He loved this man so much it was almost scary.

Shane pressed his hands to Ilya's, sliding his fingers down Ilya's arms, over his sides, down to his hips. Ilya smiled softly, kissing the tip of Shane's adorable little nose, and then kissed his mouth.

It was a slow, patient kiss, adoring and warm, with the promise of more. Shane hummed, opening easily under Ilya's attention. He kept things tender and soft, not in any rush.

When they parted, Shane whined softly, eyes still closed, making Ilya chuckle. He stroked his thumbs over Shane's cheeks and Shane leaned into one palm, nuzzling in, making Ilya's heart wobble.

He opened his eyes, looking up at Ilya in that irresistible way he had, eyes bright, pink lips kiss-swollen, cheeks flushed.

He wrapped his legs around Ilya's thighs, pulling him in, and reached up to slide his arms around Ilya's neck.

"Take me to bed…"

Ilya huffed a laugh, releasing Shane's face to get his hands under him, lifting him from the counter. Shane bit his lip, wrapping around Ilya, obviously enjoying this. Ilya liked knowing that Shane liked how strong he was.

He squeezed his ass and Shane smiled, leaning down to kiss Ilya as he made his way to Shane's bedroom.

Ilya set Shane down on his feet next to the bed, reaching down to start pulling off his layers. Shane lifted his arms, both of them laughing as Ilya tugged off his jersey as carefully as he could, setting it aside.

He tugged off Shane's hoodie next and then his t-shirt, dropping those unceremoniously on the floor. Ilya reached for Shane's jeans but Shane batted his hands away, going to help Ilya take off his jersey, but the height difference made it more difficult.

They both laughed as they got Ilya undressed, pausing to kiss, and laugh some more. Ilya loved laughing with Shane, loved the ease with which they could be together.

Once Ilya was shirtless, Shane stepped in close, running his warm hands over Ilya's chest, down his abs, to the fly of his jeans.

Ilya slid his hands into the back pockets of Shane's jeans because he could and hummed as Shane kissed him.

"I had a lot of fun today," Shane murmured when they broke the kiss, rubbing his cheek against Ilya's beard. "I always have fun with you but… I liked that it was something that wasn't restaurant or bar related…"

“Yes,” Ilya replied. “Me, too.”

It was true. It was nice to have done something that was outside their shared work, like their relationship was somehow more real, which seemed silly, but that was just how it felt.

“We should do more things like that…”

“We should skate, sometime,” Ilya murmured and Shane looked at him, smiling as he slid his hands inside Ilya’s open jeans. “Together. At a rink… or along the canal in winter…”

“I would love that.”

Ilya grinned and Shane kissed him again, before tugging Ilya’s jeans and underwear down. Ilya kicked them off, working on getting Shane naked, carefully tugging off his jersey, his hoodie, his t-shirt. Once he was finally divested of his clothes, Ilya watched Shane go to his knees.

Ilya loved this view, seeing Shane like this. Ilya cupped his face in his palm, stroking his thumb over Shane’s cheek, he was already turned on but another wave of heat washed over him as he watched Shane lean into him, his eyes sliding closed, lips parting as he let out a little sigh.

“So beautiful,” Ilya murmured, skin tingling as Shane turned his head to kiss his palm before Shane leaned in, worshiping Ilya’s cock with kitten-licks and kisses, gently sucking under the head.

“Look at you…”

Shane moaned softly and Ilya traced light fingers over Shane’s cheeks, into his silky hair, soaking up the attention, and just how beautiful Shane was.

Shane lifted his eyes, meeting Ilya’s gaze, sliding his lips down Ilya’s dick, taking him deep, swallowing around him.

“Yes,” Ilya breathed, lost in the sensation of it.

Shane slid his hands around to Ilya’s ass, pulling him closer, and Ilya closed his eyes, letting his head tilt back as he got lost in the sensation of Shane’s perfect mouth around him. Shane was so fucking good at this and it was almost overwhelming.

“That fucking mouth, Shane,” Ilya growled. “Made for this.”

Shane hummed, eyes slipping closed, the sensation going straight to Ilya’s balls. Ilya wouldn’t have minded if Shane kept going but he smoothed his hand into Shane’s hair, gently tugging.

“Enough,” he said softly and Shane sighed, slowly sliding off of him, giving his cock a parting kiss. He looked back up at Ilya and Ilya helped him to his feet, kissing him, and maneuvering them toward the bed.

They fell into it together, laughing and kissing. Shane leaned back against the pillows at the head of the bed and Ilya kissed down his body, settling between his thighs.

He wrapped his arms around them, turning his head to kiss the inside of them, rubbing his beard against the sensitive skin, which made Shane shiver and laugh.

“God,” Shane breathed softly and Ilya chuckled, sucking gently under the head of Shane’s cock, teasing him just a little.

“You gonna fuck me?” Shane asked, lifting his head, his cheeks flushed.

“Is that what you want?” Ilya asked, sucking on one of Shane’s balls.

Shane gasped and moaned. “Yes.”

“Okay,” Ilya replied with a smile.

As much as he enjoyed Shane blowing him, he very much liked returning the favor. He took his time, sucking on the head of Shane’s cock, before taking him down, listening to Shane’s whining and panting. He was so noisy, it was very sexy.

Ilya kept going for a bit, before pulling off of Shane.

“Turn over,” he said, patting Shane’s hip. Shane moved to his hands and knees and Ilya leaned over to open the bedside table drawer, pulling out the lube and a condom.

Shane sighed, his head resting on his folded arms, ass up. He painted such a pretty picture like that and Ilya couldn’t help but reach out to touch him, running his hands over Shane’s sides, pressing kisses along his lower back.

“Gorgeous,” Ilya purred and Shane hummed happily.

Sex had only ever really been sex to Ilya. He hadn’t been interested in commitment or relationships. He had never experienced any sort of strong desire to be with one person and only focus on them.

He had had favorites, people he liked to see regularly, but mostly because they were very compatible in bed, not because he wanted to date them.

He hadn’t been sure what it was about Shane in the beginning, that was different. All Ilya thought about was him. When they had been apart, all Ilya wanted was to be with him.

That was still true, even now that they were together. Ilya thought about him constantly, wanted to be with him more often than not. He enjoyed his own space as much as Shane did… but the time they had together was always fun.

Dating Shane was new and a little scary but exhilarating. Ilya had never really been in love before and it was magical and wondrous and terrifying all at once. He loved every moment he and Shane were together but he worried constantly about fucking things up.

At least he knew he couldn't fuck *this* up.

He grasped Shane's ass cheeks in his hands, pulling them apart, and leaned in to run his tongue over Shane's rim.

"Oh fuck yes," Shane whimpered, making Ilya smile.

If someone had told him a year ago that he would be happily in a relationship with someone, Ilya would have laughed in their face, but now he couldn't imagine doing anything different.

He loved Shane. He loved being with him.

He wouldn't trade this for anything.

Ilya took his time, eating Shane out, switching between long, confident strokes of his tongue and soft flutters, which he knew Shane loved.

He chuckled as Shane pressed back against him and Ilya grabbed the lube, slicking his fingers. He pulled away, pressing a kiss to Shane's right ass cheek, before rubbing a finger against him, sliding inside.

Shane always opened so beautifully for him, sighing and leaning into the sensations. Ilya loved making him feel good, loved that they could share this.

He praised Shane, telling him how good and perfect and beautiful he was. He knew how much Shane loved being praised, enjoying Shane's reactivity as he stroked over his prostate, fingers curling and stretching.

"Ilya," Shane sighed, glancing over his shoulder. "I'm ready…"

Ilya hummed, just watching as he lazily slid his fingers in and out of his boyfriend, before sliding his gaze up to meet Shane's, removing his fingers.

Shane turned over, shifting up onto his legs, and Ilya opened his arms for him.

"Wanna be in your lap," Shane murmured against Ilya's mouth.

Ilya pulled Shane closer, sliding his hands over Shane's back as he straddled Ilya's thighs.

They had to find the condom and the lube, laughing together, finding them amongst the disturbed comforter. Ilya slid the condom on and sighed, eyes sliding closed for a moment as Shane slicked him, hand wrapped around his cock, before he sat back on it.

Ilya would never get tired of this. He would never tire of watching Shane's face at having Ilya inside him or how incredible it felt to feel Shane everywhere. Shane shifted his legs to rest on either side of Ilya's hips, Ilya's legs folded like a pretzel.

"Okay?" Shane asked, arms wrapped around Ilya's neck.

"Yes."

Shane smiled and kissed him and Ilya melted into it, running his hands up and then back down Shane's back, sliding around him to hold him close. Shane rocked against him, a very different vibe from what they usually went for; hard and frantic.

But Ilya liked this. Going slower. He liked being able to kiss more of Shane, to feel and touch him as they sort of just rocked together. Shane slid one arm across Ilya's shoulders, cupping his face in his hand, kissing him.

"Love having you inside me…"

Ilya smiled, turning his head to kiss Shane's palm, before pressing his cheek into his hand. "Yes. Me, too."

Shane sighed, stroking his thumb over Ilya's cheek, before dropping his hand, and letting his head tilt back. Ilya leaned in, kissing his neck and down to his chest, rocking up into Shane's body, making him moan.

They could go like this for hours, probably, but Ilya didn't think that was the plan. He slid his arm around Shane, palm pressed to his lower back, his other hand curled around his ass. Shane reached between them, wrapping his hand around his dick.

"Yes," Ilya breathed. "So beautiful, Shane. Want to see you come for me."

Shane whined and panted and Ilya couldn't take his eyes off of him. He was so stunning like this, lost in pleasure. Ilya loved seeing him let go.

"Fuck, Ilya. I'm coming, I'm—" Shane gasped and moaned, spilling all over his hand, spasming around Ilya in the most exquisite way.

That was enough to send Ilya over the edge, emptying himself into Shane.

They were both breathing hard, Shane's forehead dropped against Ilya's, and Ilya wrapped his arms around him, holding him.

"We're so fucking good at sex," Shane sighed and Ilya laughed, pressing soft little kisses to Shane's flushed skin.

"We are."

Shane cooed and Ilya nuzzled his jaw. Shane chuckled, tilting his head so that he could kiss Ilya's forehead.

They lingered like this for a while, exchanging soft kisses and just being close, before finally pulling apart, and cleaning up in the bathroom.

"I have a question…" Shane murmured when they were back in bed, fingers sliding back and forth across Ilya's chest.

Ilya hummed in reply, playing with Shane's hair, and dropping a kiss to his scalp.

“Um,” Shane started and then stopped, shifting away so that he could look at Ilya. His cheeks were red. Ilya tilted his head.

“What is it?” he asked fondly, folding his hands together, and resting them on his stomach.

“Uh,” Shane continued, clearing his throat, looking adorably self-conscious. “How do you feel about meeting my parents?”

Ilya looked at Shane, his heart rate picking up. He was surprised by the question, not having expected it. He thought that Shane was going to ask about a sex thing because he always got nervous and self-conscious about asking for sex things.

In truth, he was honored. Ilya knew that Shane was close to his parents and it meant a lot that Shane wanted to introduce Ilya to them.

Shane looked down, his cheeks and ears were red, and he fidgeted nervously.

“You don’t have to, of course. It was just— I’d been thinking about it and they know about you and had asked when they could meet you so I thought—”

“Shane.”

Ilya reached out and rested a reassuring hand over Shane’s. Shane glanced up at him. He smiled softly, his expression warm. “Is fine. I would love to meet your parents.”

“Oh. Yeah?”

“Yes. I was not sure what you wanted to ask.” He chuckled. “I thought it was a sex thing.”

“Oh god, no,” Shane laughed.

“You can ask for sex things, too.”

“I know, but,” Shane waved his hand. “It’s not that. I am serious though. Would you want to meet them? They want to meet you…”

“Do you want me to?” Ilya asked, feeling a little uncertain. He definitely wanted to meet the people who had raised Shane and who he loved so much, but he was nervous, too… that they might not approve of a tattooed Russian bartender for their son.

“Of course.” Shane turned his hand under Ilya’s so that he could thread their fingers. “I’d love you to, actually.”

Ilya smiled shyly back at Shane, pleased to hear that, that Shane was sure about him. About them.

“Okay,” Ilya replied. “I would like that. I have not met a partner’s parents before.”

“I haven’t either,” Shane confessed and they both laughed softly. “We’re in the same boat.”

“Is there more I should know about your parents?” Ilya asked.

“Mm, I don’t think so,” Shane sighed. “I know I talk about them all the time…”

“That is true.”

“Sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry for. Is cute. Is nice that you are close to them.”

“They’re the best,” Shane said softly, leaning back into Ilya, snuggling close to him. “I want you to like them.”

“I am sure I will,” Ilya murmured, pressing a kiss into Shane’s hair, enjoying the familiar scent of him, the familiar weight and warmth of him against him.

This felt like a big step. Terrifying… but exciting, too. It meant a lot that Shane wanted Ilya to meet his parents, that he had been thinking about it, that his parents wanted to meet him.

And Ilya wanted to meet them as well. He wanted to know who Shane took after and what their dynamic was like.

He smiled to himself, squeezing Shane close. He couldn’t wait.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Ilya meets Shane's parents

Shane had been thinking about this moment for a while. Probably since he and Ilya had confessed their feelings for one another. Maybe it was kind of stupid, but he couldn't help it. He'd never felt this way about anyone before and so his mind simply supplied him with all manner of sappy musings.

Shane loved Ilya. They were boyfriends. They had met one another's friends. Things were *real.* And so Shane had started to fantasize about his parents meeting Ilya.

He had daydreamed about how they would meet and what his parents would say about Ilya. It was mostly positive things, his parents gushing about how handsome and charming Ilya was and Shane being able to say how happy Ilya made him.

He loved him and he wanted his parents to love him, too.

And the day had finally arrived and Shane was so nervous he thought he might puke.

His parents were coming in to Montreal and they were going to go out to a nice lunch. Normally Shane would have his parents stay with him if they wanted to have a more leisurely time in the city. They'd take his room and he'd use his pull-out in the living room but Mom had insisted they get a hotel room, which was very nice, and a little embarrassing.

He was thinking that his mom was probably assuming that Ilya was staying over. Which wasn't wrong, but was also kind of strange.

Mom: Leaving the hotel! See you in 10!

Shane: Okay! 👍

He looked at himself in the mirror, fixing his hair, and adjusting his sweater. He'd spent an unreasonable amount of time going through his closet and trying on different outfits only to land on something very basic.

Which was fine. It was just Ilya meeting his parents. No need to overdo it. Keep it simple.

Breathe, Hollander. Jesus.

Shane loved his parents. They were the best. They had supported him through all of his endeavors in life, all the ups and downs. He was so grateful to have them and to be able to

have such a good relationship with them.

He felt bad, in some respects, that Ilya didn't have that.

He talked about his mother sparingly and almost never mentioned his brother or his father. Shane wasn't an expert, but he could see the grief that Ilya still carried.

Shane hoped that, if all went well, Ilya might feel welcomed by Shane's parents, and maybe, over time, he might see them as his own.

But Shane couldn't get too ahead of himself. They hadn't even been dating a year yet. Ilya was only just meeting his parents today! There was no use putting the cart before the horse.

He looked at his phone again, smiling at a text from Ilya.

Ilya: on my way

Shane: ❤️ 💗 💖❤️ 💗 💖❤️ 💗 💖❤️ 💗 💖

Shane slid his phone into his back pocket and went out into his kitchen, double checking the contents of his fridge, then to his living room to straighten the throw pillows, then needlessly pacing as he waited for his parents to arrive.

He was *so* nervous.

His phone started to ring and he answered it, telling his parents he would come down and let them in.

As soon as Shane saw his parents, he felt a little better, finding himself smiling as he opened the door to let them in.

"Hi!" Mom said, wrapping her arms around him right away.

"Hi, Mom," he chuckled, hugging her back, letting her kiss his cheek.

"Aww, look at your hair," she sighed, toying with the strands. "It's too long."

Shane laughed, rolling his eyes. "Gee, thanks."

"Do you like it?" she asked him, looking into his face.

"Yeah," Shane laughed. "That's why I kept it."

"Well, alright. As long as you like it."

Shane shook his head again and hugged his Dad. They shared a look, smiling.

"How's it going, kiddo?"

"Good. I'm good. How was the drive?"

“Oh not too bad!” Dad replied cheerfully.

They went upstairs, talking and catching up. Shane spoke to his parents every week but it was nice being together with them in person.

“When is Ilya coming?” Mom asked, perched on the arm of Shane’s couch, glass of seltzer in hand.

“He should be here soon,” Shane replied, sliding his hands in and out of his pockets nervously.

“We’re very excited to meet him,” Dad said, offering a reassuring smile.

“I’m excited for you guys to meet him, too.”

Both his parents were looking at him warmly, smiling, and Shane felt his cheeks heat.

“You really like him,” Mom stated.

“I do. Yeah.”

“Then we’re going to really like him, too.”

Shane bit his bottom lip and nodded.

A few minutes later his phone vibrated in his pocket.

Ilya: I’m here

“He’s here,” Shane said, sliding his phone back into his pocket, his stomach rolling uncomfortably with anxiety. “I’m gonna go and get him.”

He felt so jittery and nervous, almost forgetting his keys, before finally heading down to let Ilya in.

Ilya was waiting in the entry, wearing a black sweater, jeans, and boots. His usually wild curls looked a bit more styled and tamed and he had a bouquet of flowers in the crook of his arm. He looked exceptionally handsome, the thick beard on his face all neatly trimmed. Shane’s heart stutter stepped.

“Hi,” Shane said, knowing that he sounded dreamy and ridiculous and not caring at all.

“Hi,” Ilya replied, stepping into the apartment building. He kissed Shane hello like he always did, one arm wrapped around him, the kiss deep and adoring, making Shane’s toes curl.

Shane sighed deeply, smiling at his boyfriend, smoothing his hand over Ilya’s cheek.

“You look really good.”

“Yes?” Ilya replied, looking down at himself. “Is okay? The outfit?”

Shane smiled, laughing. “Yeah! You look great.”

“Okay. Good,” Ilya replied, smiling back at Shane, all shy and sweet. “I wanted to look, um, respectable for your parents.”

Shane’s heart warmed at how impossibly sweet Ilya was, how thoughtful.

“They’re gonna love you. Come on. They’re upstairs.”

Shane took Ilya’s hand and they made their way down the hall to the stairs.

“Who’re the flowers for?” Shane asked.

“Your mother,” Ilya replied, his cheeks looking pink, which was a rare sight. Shane almost never saw Ilya blush. “I thought it would be nice to do.”

Shane paused them at the end of the hall on his floor. He looked at this ridiculous, thoughtful man, and wrapped him up in a hug.

“You’re so sweet,” he murmured, kissing Ilya’s cheek. “Thank you. She’s going to love them.”

Shane held Ilya for a few moments longer, squeezing him, before they continued down to Shane’s apartment.

“Ready?” he asked Ilya softly.

Ilya nodded and Shane opened the door.

“We’re back,” he said as they stepped into the apartment. “Mom, Dad. This is Ilya. Ilya, these are my parents, Yuna and David.”

“Hello,” Ilya said.

“Oh hi!” Mom exclaimed. “It’s so good to finally meet you, Ilya! Do you hug?”

Shane watched as Ilya relaxed a bit and nodded. “Yes. Of course.”

Shane let his Mom direct the proceedings. It was her thing anyway, just to see everyone happy and comfortable.

Ilya shook hands with Dad and gave Mom the flowers, which she gushed over, and hugged him some more. Shane felt so pleased and excited to see the three people he loved most in the world in one place, talking, and laughing.

Shane sidled up next to Ilya, taking his hand, just to hold him while he talked to Shane’s parents. He laced their fingers and smiled as Ilya squeezed.

They hung out at the apartment for a bit before they left to make their way to lunch.

Shane hadn't taken his parents here before. It was a new spot, a cute little bistro that he thought would be approachable for everyone.

Conversation was easy and relaxed as they were seated at their table.

Shane's parents asked about Ilya's experience in bartending, fascinated in learning about his journey through the ranks, and how he came to owning and running his own bar.

"That is very impressive," Mom said. "Truly. You should be so proud of what you've accomplished."

"We should stop by for a drink sometime!" Dad chimed in.

Ilya smiled warmly at them both. "Thank you. I am very proud of my work and I would be happy to have you. Come by whenever you like."

Shane had no idea what he'd been nervous about really. His parents were great and Ilya was great and everything was going great.

There were some embarrassing parent questions, because weren't there always? But nothing that couldn't be laughed off. Ilya took everything in stride, affable and relaxed and charming as always.

Ilya and Dad seemed to hit it off great, talking about hockey and just generally vibing, which Shane thought was cute.

Dad was always a bit more relaxed. Mom tended to dominate conversations, always energetic and excited, which seemed to work well for his parents' dynamic. Shane had certainly inherited his mother's anxiety, but it was nice to see that Dad and Ilya had made a connection.

Mom touched Shane's arm and he turned to her. They smiled at each other and chuckled softly.

After lunch they walked around for a bit, stopping into a café for coffee and because Mom wanted a cinnamon roll.

Inevitably, Shane and Ilya had to recap how they had met to Shane's parents. Though Shane had told them before, it seemed that his parents wanted Ilya's side of the story.

Listening to Ilya talk about meeting Shane and the instant attraction they'd had, despite being somewhat adversarial, made Shane's heart flip, and stomach pool with warmth.

He watched Ilya as he spoke, unable to look away, knowing he was smiling like a doofus but unable to help it. He was sure his parents could see how in love he was. But that was the point, wasn't it? For his parents to see how much he loved Ilya and how much Ilya loved him.

They went back to Shane's apartment and hung out there for a bit. Ilya got to hear the whole story about how Shane's parents had met. His dad had been a hockey player at McGill and

his mom had worked as a server at a local restaurant.

They'd met at said restaurant and the rest was history.

They had plans for dinner, going to the new spot that used to be the restaurant they had first met at.

"It's not very good," Yuna said with a laugh. "But it's more for nostalgia than anything else."

They hugged Shane and Ilya goodbye, telling Ilya how nice it was to have met him, how excited they were to see him again.

By the time they left, Shane was exhausted, but happy.

"So?" he asked Ilya, leaning against his door.

"I like your parents," Ilya replied, chuckling. "They are very nice people."

"They are," Shane agreed with a smile, pushing off the door. He came to Ilya, wrapping his arms around him, and looked up into his face. "They loved you."

"Did they?" Ilya asked, curling his arms around Shane, too, leaning down to touch their noses.

"Yeah," Shane sighed and tilted his head up a bit more, looking for a kiss.

Ilya obliged him, brushing a tender kiss over his mouth.

"I'm glad."

"Me, too."

They kissed some more, all wrapped up in one another.

One of Ilya's hands slid down Shane's back, squeezing his ass, and Shane pressed against him, smiling.

"Bedroom?" Ilya murmured and Shane laughed.

"Yeah."

***

They cooked dinner together that evening, eating in Shane's kitchen, then washed dishes together, standing side by side at the sink, then cuddled up on the couch.

Shane was sitting cross legged on the couch, Ilya's legs in his lap. He wasn't really paying attention to the west coast hockey game they had on, instead texting his parents.

Mom: Oh Shane! He is so handsome! And charming!

Mom: We love him!

Shane: 😊

Shane: I'm glad! He liked you guys, too!

Mom: ☺

Mom: we're so happy that you two have each other ♥

Shane: thanks ♥

He smiled, set his phone down, and rested his hands on his boyfriend's shins.

"Your parents?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah," Shane replied, looking at him, smiling.

"Was okay? Today?"

"It was perfect. Thank you."

Ilya smiled at him, shy and sweet, and Shane felt like his heart would burst.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you, too."

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane take the next step in their relationship

Chapter Notes

Decided to just finish publishing. Appreciate everyone, as always, who read this and enjoyed it. It means so much to me, always 💖

2 Years Later

"Was that the last box?" Ilya asked as he came out of the bedroom, standing in the living room as Shane put down what was probably the last of the boxes that he needed to move.

Shane looked at him, brushing off his hands, and smiled at Ilya.

He was a little sweaty, his face crinkling as he smiled, bunching up his freckles in the adorable way that Ilya loved.

"Yeah," Shane replied and chuckled as Ilya moved closer to him, resting his hands on Shane's hips. He smiled down at his boyfriend, bonking their foreheads together, which made Shane laugh.

He ran his hands up Ilya's arms, wrapping his arms around his neck.

"What?" he asked warmly.

Ilya didn't reply. He just reached up to cup Shane's face in his hands, stroking his thumbs over his freckles, and looking at his long black lashes and cute little nose, and perfect mouth, before kissing him. Shane laughed into it and kissed him back, sliding his hands down Ilya's back, pressing him close.

They made out for a bit, standing in what would be their living room, surrounded by moving boxes.

Shane sighed as they parted, rubbing his nose against Ilya's, his cheeks flushed, eyes sparkling.

"I put our bed together," Ilya murmured, kissing Shane's cheek, and the corner of his mouth.

“You did, did you?” Shane replied, smiling, tilting his head to give Ilya better access to his neck as he kissed a trail down the tendon there.

“Mm.”

“Well, I guess we gotta break it in, right?”

“Obviously.”

They both grinned at each other and Ilya got his hands under Shane’s ass. Shane laughed, hopping into his arms, wrapping himself around Ilya like a koala. Ilya kissed him, smiling into it as he walked them to their new bedroom.

They fell, literally, into bed together, laughing.

“You made the bed and everything,” Shane chuckled, straddling Ilya’s hips.

“Of course,” Ilya replied, running his hands up Shane’s sides, taking his t-shirt with him as he went, pulling it off of Shane and tossing it aside.

Shane leaned down, sliding his hands into Ilya’s curls as they kissed some more, before Ilya sat up a bit to pull his own t-shirt off.

They kissed intermittently as they peeled off clothing until they were both naked, Shane still on top, his hands splayed out over Ilya’s pecs.

“You’re so handsome,” he sighed, running his teeth over his bottom lip, his eyes dark with desire.

Ilya reached a hand up, resting his palm against Shane’s cheek, and brushing his thumb over his cheekbone.

“And you,” he hummed. “So beautiful.”

Shane’s eyes fluttered closed, his hand coming to rest over Ilya’s, face pressing into Ilya’s palm. He really was so beautiful and Ilya was awestruck. He couldn’t believe how lucky he was.

He hadn’t ever imagined he would be able to have something like this. A long term, stable relationship, full of love. Someone who cared about him deeply, who wanted to build a life with him.

He and Shane had been together for two years. They were moving in together. Ilya would never have imagined this for himself. He wouldn’t trade it for anything. Shane was everything to him.

“How do you want it?” Ilya asked softly.

Shane opened his eyes. “Like this.” He smiled. “Just lay there and look pretty.”

Ilya chuckled and rested his hands behind his head. “Easy.”

Shane huffed a laugh. “I’m gonna have to do all the work, huh?”

Ilya shrugged. “You just said that I am only eye candy.”

Shane shook his head, smiling, and bent forward to press a kiss to the bear tattoo on Ilya’s chest, and then bit his nipple gently. Ilya hissed at the sensation, shivering as Shane ran his tongue over it.

“You don’t even want to open me up?” Shane hummed, brushing his mouth over Ilya’s.

“If you ask nice. Maybe.”

Shane nipped Ilya’s bottom lip.

“Please,” Shane breathed. “Will you open me up, please?”

Ilya growled, fisting a hand into the hair at the back of Shane’s head to crash their mouths together. Shane made a soft noise, kissing Ilya back. Ilya reached between them with his free hand, teasing his fingers over Shane’s erection, before taking both their cocks in hand.

Shane shivered and moaned, breaking the kiss to let his head fall back. His lips parted, his eyes closed, cheeks pink.

“Where’s the lube?” Shane asked, breathless, managing to open his eyes to look at Ilya.

“Bedside table,” he replied and Shane leaned forward, opening the drawer. Ilya took advantage, pressing kisses to Shane’s chest, before Shane leaned back with the lube.

“Condom?” Ilya asked, raising a brow at his boyfriend.

They used them only sparingly now, mostly when Shane didn’t want to deal with cleanup, but the occasions when he said he didn’t want to use them never ceased to thrill Ilya.

“Not tonight,” Shane replied.

“You’re sure?”

“Absolutely.”

Ilya had never had sex without protection before Shane and it was exhilarating to enter him with nothing between them. The thought of it now only turned him on more.

He took the lube from Shane, slicking his fingers, and got to work opening him up.

Ilya loved opening Shane up like this, where he could watch his face, see how much he was enjoying it.

He slowly penetrated Shane with two fingers, stroking his finger against Shane’s prostate, watching the way his face morphed into pleasure, listening to the way he panted and whined.

Ilya reached his free hand up to caress Shane's cheek with the backs of his fingers.

"You're so beautiful, my beloved," he said, in Russian. "Look at you."

Shane hummed softly, letting Ilya know he understood. They had been practicing Shane's Russian together, which filled Ilya with an incandescent joy. He loved hearing Shane attempt to speak in Ilya's native tongue and he loved even more that Shane was trying at all.

Contrary to what people often saw, Ilya was all mushy inside. He loved being sweet and soft with the people he loved, especially Shane, and it was an enormous sign of trust that he could be this way and for Shane to receive it.

He never made Ilya feel bad about it. If anything, he enjoyed and appreciated it.

"I like this," Ilya sighed, in English. "I could make you come…"

Shane bit his lip, opening his eyes. "No. I want you to come in me."

Well, Ilya couldn't refuse him that.

He kept going for a bit longer, feeling the way Shane clenched around him. He teased him a bit more before finally relenting. Shane grabbed the lube, slicking his own hand, and reached back to wrap his hand around Ilya's dick.

"Fuck," Ilya ground out as Shane stroked him, before holding him in place as he leaned his weight back to sit down on his cock.

They both groaned as Ilya slid inside, the sensation overwhelming. Shane always felt so perfect, so hot and tight around him, and Ilya pushed up into him, making Shane gasp. He adjusted a bit, making Ilya sigh as he lifted a bit and then slid back down.

"Hold onto something," Shane said after a moment, gripping the back of Ilya's left thigh, one hand on Ilya's chest.

Ilya curled his hands around Shane's hips, sprawled helplessly beneath him as Shane started riding him in earnest.

It felt impossible to not be so completely turned on by this display and the way that it felt to have Shane's perfect ass taking him like this.

Shane was strong and athletic and it was honestly so impressive to see him like this. Ilya wasn't going to last long at all, not when Shane felt so incredible.

"Love your cock," Shane panted. "Love having you inside me, like this."

"You are perfect," Ilya breathed in reply, struggling to keep his eyes open.

Shane bit his lip and whimpered, adjusting his angle, and then riding Ilya harder. Ilya started spewing Russian nonsense, completely lost in Shane, and how incredible he felt. He could

feel the thrilling build of release, unable to even be embarrassed about how quickly he was going to come.

“God, Ilya. So fucking good.”

“Are you going to come for me?” Ilya managed to say, in English.

“Yes. So close.”

“Stroke yourself.”

Shane wrapped a hand around his cock, jerking himself ruthlessly as he bounced on Ilya’s dick, making the most incredible sounds.

“Oh, shit,” Shane whined before he came spectacularly all over his hand and Ilya’s chest, clenching and spasming around Ilya.

That was all Ilya needed to empty himself inside his boyfriend, groaning long and loud as he came.

Shane collapsed forward, his neck tucked against Ilya’s as he breathed hard against his sweaty skin.

Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, kissing his hair, holding him as they breathed together, basking in the bliss of it all.

They stayed like that until Ilya’s softened cock slipped out of Shane. Shane pressed soft kisses to Ilya’s neck and sat up, looking down at Ilya with an almost dopey smile. Cute.

“Good?” Ilya asked, rubbing his hand up and down Shane’s thigh.

“Fucking great,” Shane replied with a happy sigh.

Ilya smiled. “That is what I like to hear.”

Shane chuckled. “Maybe we should break in the shower, too.”

“I think we should.”

Ilya laughed softly and hummed as Shane kissed him.

A few months ago, one of the apartments in Ilya’s building had gone up for sale. On a whim, they had decided to go to the open house, mostly just for shits and giggles. They’d talked about moving in together but nothing super concrete.

They’d seen the apartment and afterward had looked at one another in the hallway, agreeing that they had to buy the place.

It was a two bedroom, two bath, with a bigger kitchen and living space. Ilya’s commute wouldn’t change and Shane’s would be shorter.

They could get a dog…

The whole process had been stressful and nerve-wracking but in the end, the apartment was theirs, and Ilya thought it had actually made their relationship stronger. If they could survive buying an apartment, they could survive anything.

All the stress was in the past and they got to enjoy building a home together, which Ilya was very much looking forward to.

They eventually peeled themselves out of bed, showered in their new bathroom, and changed back into their clothes to begin the unpacking process.

“Thank you for doing all of that,” Shane said, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s shoulder as he walked past him their kitchen.

“No problem,” Ilya replied, watching after Shane, smiling warmly.

They started opening up boxes labeled “kitchen”, pulling out items, and finding homes for them. Ilya put on some music that Shane had no clue about. Ilya had been scandalized to learn that Shane knew next to nothing about music and so had begun to educate him.

They unpacked and Ilya serenaded his boyfriend and they danced in their new, partially put-together kitchen, laughing. It was domestic and sweet and Ilya had the realization that this was what he wanted for the rest of his life.

He wanted Shane smiling and laughing in his arms just like this. He wanted soft domesticity and the security of being able to love and be loved so thoroughly. Having fun together. Creating something wonderful.

“I love you,” Shane said, brushing his hand over Ilya’s cheek.

“I love you, too.”

“I didn’t know that you could sing so well.”

Ilya chuckled. “I have many talents.”

Shane looked at him for a moment, his expression soft, as if he just realized something.

“I’m excited that I get to learn you better,” he said.

The sentiment caught Ilya a little off-guard. It was so sweet and so Shane and it was true. Ilya felt the same. He wanted to know everything about Shane and he would consider himself the luckiest person to know him so completely.

“Me, too,” Ilya replied.

Shane smiled at Ilya, wrapping his arms around him, and resting his head against his chest. Ilya hugged him back, resting his cheek on top of Shane’s head.

He was excited for what the future held.

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya get a happily ever after

February

"See you tomorrow, Roz!" Troy called, the last one out of the bar. Harris was already on the sidewalk and waved through the window, bundled up in his winter coat.

Ilya raised a hand to offer a small wave to them both, before going back to cleaning the last of his glasses. It had been a pretty good night. Not overly busy but enough to keep everyone moving.

He was tired, in a good way, and was enjoying the wind down that cleaning up after a busy night offered him.

Ilya lifted his head when the door opened again. He wasn't expecting anyone else, given that the bar was closed.

Shane stepped in from the cold, covered in snow, and dressed in a puffy blue winter jacket, a toque, and scarf. He looked adorable like that and Ilya couldn't help but laugh.

"Where have you been?" he asked his boyfriend as he moved to the bar, peeling off his layers.

Normally Shane popped in just to say hi but Ilya hadn't seen or heard from him all night.

"Working," Shane said quickly, sliding his jacket onto one of the hooks under the bar, unwinding the scarf from around his neck, taking off his hat.

Ilya arched a curious brow at him as he slid into his usual seat at the bar.

"I thought you were done editing," Ilya replied.

Shane had started working on a book about the history of the culinary scene in Montreal while still working his day job. He would sometimes work out of the office to avoid distractions and had been working on some edits for a section of the book that he already had completed.

He'd told Ilya he was taking a bit of a break from the book until March since they had had such a busy holiday season and there were some things he needed to fix before he moved on to the next sections.

Shane shrugged and Ilya's brows furrowed.

"Do you want a drink?"

"Yes," Shane said, then paused. "Uh, no, actually." He paused again. "Maybe?"

Ilya chuckled, leaning his forearms on top of the bar, one hand cupping his fist.

"What is it?"

Shane met his eyes, his cheeks all pink. He looked nervous. Ilya felt that he knew Shane pretty well. Since living together, he felt like he knew him even better than before. Something was on his mind that he was uncomfortable talking about.

"I have a question for you…"

"Okay…?"

Shane fidgeted in his seat, looking away from Ilya, then back again, before he fiddled with something under the bar, unzipping what must have been his jacket pocket, and sat back up.

He placed a black box on the granite top of the bar and Ilya's heart sped up in his chest.

He looked at the box, then at Shane, then back at the box.

"What is this?" he asked, lifting his eyes once more.

"Open it," Shane replied softly.

Ilya hesitated for a moment, before reaching out and picking up the box. He opened it.

Inside was a ring.

Ilya blinked at it.

He suddenly felt winded. And dizzy. And maybe a little queasy.

He looked at Shane again.

Shane looked back. He smiled softly at Ilya, so nervous and so sweet, and Ilya felt like his heart was going to burst.

"Shane…"

"There's nothing in my life that matters more to me than you, Ilya. Being with you has been the best thing that's ever happened to me. You bring so much joy into my life and I know that I want to spend the rest of it with you…"

He reached out, resting his hand against one of Ilya's, where it was still holding the ring box.

"Ilya Grigoryevich Rozanov, will you marry me?"

Ilya just stared at Shane. He was never really short for words but they completely escaped him at the moment. He had not a single thought in his head besides Shane's words bouncing around the inside of his skull. He was having a hard time processing all of this. It wasn't that he hadn't been expecting a proposal, he just hadn't anticipated it at this very moment.

He had no idea how much time passed where he just stared at Shane but it must have been a long time because Shane was starting to look scared.

"You know my middle name," Ilya blurted, his voice trembling and soft.

"I fell down a rabbit hole about the Russian tradition of using the father's name as a middle name for his children and I knew your father's name was Grigori so I just looked at—"

Ilya reached across the bar with his other hand, fisting his fingers in Shane's sweater, and yanked him forward. Ilya leaned across the bar, kissing Shane as best he could.

"Yes," Ilya said when they parted. "Of course."

Shane looked at him, dark eyes searching Ilya's face. "Oh yeah?"

"Yes, Shane."

Shane beamed at him, leaning in to kiss Ilya again. "I love you."

They kissed some more, messy and sloppy and salty. They both laughed at each other and Ilya rubbed his tear streaked face against Shane's tear streaked face.

"I'm sorry this wasn't more romantic," Shane breathed. "I just couldn't wait any more…"

"Is okay," Ilya replied, sniffling. "Is perfect."

Ilya huffed a laugh, swiping his thumb over a tear track on Shane's cheek. He leaned in, kissing Shane again, before finally coming around the other side of the bar.

Shane slid out of his seat and they wrapped around one another, kissing again, laughing and crying at the same time.

"I love you so much, Ilya," Shane said, burying his face in Ilya's neck. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Yes, me, too. I love you."

Ilya tucked his face into Shane's hair, breathing him in, wishing he could hold him closer than this; melding them together.

Eventually, Shane leaned back and Ilya gently wiped his face, chuckling as Shane did the same for him.

"So, um, the ring…?"

Ilya retrieved the ring from the bar. He took it out of the box and examined it. It was black with a gold interior, very classy, and Ilya made an attempt to slip it onto his finger.

“Shit,” Shane sighed. “I wasn’t sure what your ring size was.”

“Is fine,” Ilya replied, working the ring back off his finger with some effort. “Should I wear it now? Or is this for after we are married?”

“Whatever you want to do,” Shane replied. “I can get it resized.”

Ilya chuckled, handing the ring back to Shane, and undoing the chain he always wore with his mother’s crucifix on it. Shane gave him the ring back and Ilya slid it onto the chain so it nudged up against the pendant.

“Did you buy one for yourself?” he asked. “Or is that my job?”

Shane huffed a soft laugh, taking the chain, and stepped behind Ilya to help fasten it, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s shoulder when he was done.

“I was going to buy the matching one. I just...wanted to make sure I needed it first.”

Ilya turned, raising his brows at his *fiancé* . “You thought I would say no?”

“I don’t know. I just didn’t want to be cocky about it,” Shane replied, looking embarrassed.

Ilya shook his head and cupped his face in his hands. “Buy the ring.”

They kissed again, adoring and sweet.

“Are you finished down here?” Shane asked, rubbing their noses together.

“Yes,” Ilya chuckled, even though he wasn’t quite done, but it was sort of irrelevant at the moment.

He was very happy. Too full of wonder and awe.

Ilya looked around quickly. The curtains were drawn, the lights were dimmed, the door wasn’t locked but the ‘closed’ sign was in place…

“One second,” Ilya said, kissing Shane briefly before going to the door and locking it. Then he went back behind the bar and switched off the security cameras.

“What’re you doing?” Shane asked, smiling as Ilya strode back over to him.

“This,” Ilya replied, lifting Shane into his arms. Shane laughed, wrapping his arms and legs around Ilya as he walked them toward the back of the bar.

“What is *this?* ” Shane asked but the way his dark eyes twinkled made Ilya believe he knew exactly what Ilya was thinking.

He sat his fiancé down on top of the large table for the back booth they had. Shane licked his lips and Ilya crashed their mouths together, kissing Shane hungrily as he reached down to unbuckle his belt.

Shane's hands hastily reached to do the same, one leg wrapping around Ilya's thigh to pull him closer.

They both laughed into each other's mouths as hands slid over skin. Ilya tugged Shane's underwear down so his cock popped out and Ilya wrapped his hand around it, teasing the head with his thumb.

Shane sighed, tugging Ilya's brief's down, too.

"Lube?" Shane asked.

Ilya shook his head. "Not down here."

"What? But you're always so prepared!"

This was a true statement. Ilya *was* always prepared, but he hadn't expected them to fuck in the bar tonight.

"I did not think you would propose to me here, Hollander," Ilya replied. "Is a good thing you get so wet…"

Shane huffed and moaned softly as Ilya teased the head of his cock some more, running his thumb over the bead of liquid that spurted out.

It had been a long time since Ilya hadn't used lubrication to do this. He lifted his hand, spitting into his palm, smiling as Shane's head fell back with a groan.

"Fuck, Ilya," he said, but it sounded more aroused than annoyed.

Ilya smiled and wrapped his hand around them both, stroking them off together.

Shane whimpered, arms wrapped around Ilya's shoulders, his other leg joining the first around Ilya's other thigh.

They both looked down, watching as Ilya jerked them, entranced, before meeting one another's eyes, unable to look away.

Their lips were parted as they both huffed and shuddered into the inches between them.

"Is this okay?" Shane whispered.

"Yes. Perfect," Ilya assured him.

Shane's eyes fluttered closed for a moment, his head tipping back on a gasp. He opened them again and smiled shyly.

“So good, Ilya.”

“I know.” Ilya kissed his throat, his jaw, and then his mouth again.

Ilya didn’t want this moment to end. Simple and explosive, he had never felt closer to Shane. He was caught between quickening his pace and continuing just like this, prolonging things until they both came.

He was overwhelmed by the idea of more of this. Of Shane. For a lifetime. Sharing everything with him.

“Mine,” Shane sighed, voice breathy, one hand cupping Ilya’s cheek. He was leaking all over Ilya’s hand, which was both sexy and useful.

“Yours,” Ilya hummed, turning his head to kiss Shane’s palm.

“Can we come together?” Shane asked and Ilya nodded, speeding up, listening to the way Shane’s breathing changed, to the soft noises he made as he got closer and closer to release.

“Yes,” Ilya breathed.

Shane panted, pulling him close for more messy, open-mouthed kisses, and Ilya increased the pace. He was close and he could tell that Shane was, too.

“Oh fuck, Ilya. Now.”

Ilya swore in Russian, watching Shane’s face as he came. It wasn’t quite simultaneous, but pretty fucking close, and Ilya rode the wave of pleasure fully, making a mess all over his hand and Shane’s belly.

They kissed sloppily and laughed about it. Shane nuzzled his face against Ilya’s, kissing his cheek and neck, hugging him close, arms and legs squeezing around him.

They breathed together, taking their time, until Shane relaxed his legs, and arms.

Ilya took off his shirt and used it to clean them both up, tucking Shane back into his briefs and jeans, kissing him, before taking care of himself.

Shane sat on the table and Ilya stepped between his legs, tilting his chin up to kiss him adoringly once more. He couldn't help it. He would be more than happy to keep kissing Shane just like this.

Shane sighed, his fingers sliding through the belt loops of Ilya’s pants, closing his eyes.

“We’ve never done that before,” Shane hummed as Ilya kissed along his freckles.

“Christening the bar,” Ilya chuckled.

“After three years?”

“Better late than never.”

“Should we go upstairs?” Shane asked with a soft laugh.

“Probably,” Ilya replied.

Shane slid off the table and Ilya went to turn the cameras back on. He turned off the lights and Shane tangled their fingers as they made their way upstairs together.

“I was thinking this summer,” Shane said as he stood in their bedroom, getting undressed.

“For what?” Ilya asked, lounging on their bed, waiting for Shane.

“Getting married.”

Ilya tilted his head to the side, looking at Shane in pleasant surprise.

“So soon?” he asked, heart flipping. He narrowed his eyes at Shane, a playful smirk on his lips. “Are you pregnant?”

“Stop!” Shane huffed, throwing a dirty sock at Ilya that he dodged, only to get hit in the face with the other one. “I’m being serious.”

Ilya chuckled, gathering up Shane’s socks, and tossing them in the hamper from the bed.

“I know.”

“Do you want that?” Shane asked, sounding anxious.

Ilya turned back to Shane, reaching his arms out for him. Shane left his own clothes on the floor and went to Ilya. He crawled into bed and Ilya wrapped his arms around him.

“Yes,” he replied truthfully.

Shane smiled up at him, resting his head on Ilya’s chest, reaching up to brush his fingers over the ring hanging on the chain around his neck.

“I feel like we kind of are already married… this is just making it official, you know?”

Ilya smiled, pressing tiny kisses to Shane’s forehead, nuzzling into his hair. “I do.”

“I’d marry you tomorrow…”

“We could do that, too.”

Shane laughed softly, curling into Ilya’s space, and Ilya bundled him close. Shane slid his hand down to rest on Ilya’s pec, smoothing his fingers through his chest hair.

Ilya was still buzzing with the reality of everything that had happened over the last hour.

He and Shane were *engaged* .

Getting married *this summer* .

“I love you so much,” Shane murmured, pressing kisses to Ilya’s neck. “I can’t wait to marry you.”

“Me, too. I love you so much.”

Shane lifted his head, cupping Ilya’s cheek in his hand. He smoothed his thumb over Ilya’s cheekbone and leaned up to kiss him warmly.

He settled his head back on Ilya’s chest and Ilya kissed the top of his head, playing with his hair. He was smiling like a fool, crackling with excitement. He wasn’t going to sleep tonight, that was for sure.

“You have off tomorrow, yes?” he asked.

“Mm.”

“I’m not going into work tomorrow.”

“Are you sure? You never take time off,” Shane yawned, snuggling close.

“I’m the boss. I think I can take time off for getting engaged.”

“You know everyone is going to want to celebrate with us, right?”

“Yes. But no working.”

Shane hummed and pressed a kiss to Ilya’s neck. “Sleep.”

“Okay,” Ilya sighed fondly.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

FIN

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!
You can follow me on Tumblr or Bluesky to get updates on what I'm working on!
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