

stay good under pressure

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stay good under pressure

by [jafffacakes](#)

Summary

Shane and Rozanov don't usually work together. In fact, they never do. They work on different client teams, since there's no need for more than one person at their level in the squad. They're simply too good. Quite frankly, they cost too much.

So when Scott says that he wants them both to drop whatever they're working on, because he has this client proposal that's due on Friday — literally five days from now, Shane's counted — it's unprecedented.

Shane has a million reasons why this is a bad idea, waiting on the tip of his tongue. First of all, he's not sure he actually can work with Rozanov.

He feels panicked at the thought, can feel his tie getting tighter around his neck, threatening to close off his supply of oxygen at any moment.

Scott glances between the two of them, at Rozanov sitting calmly and Shane feeling like he's about to have a heart attack, and asks, "I assume you two get along okay?"

Rozanov looks across at Shane, licks his lips slowly before he speaks. "We are very close."

OR, a Hollanov co-workers AU

Chapter 1: Monday.

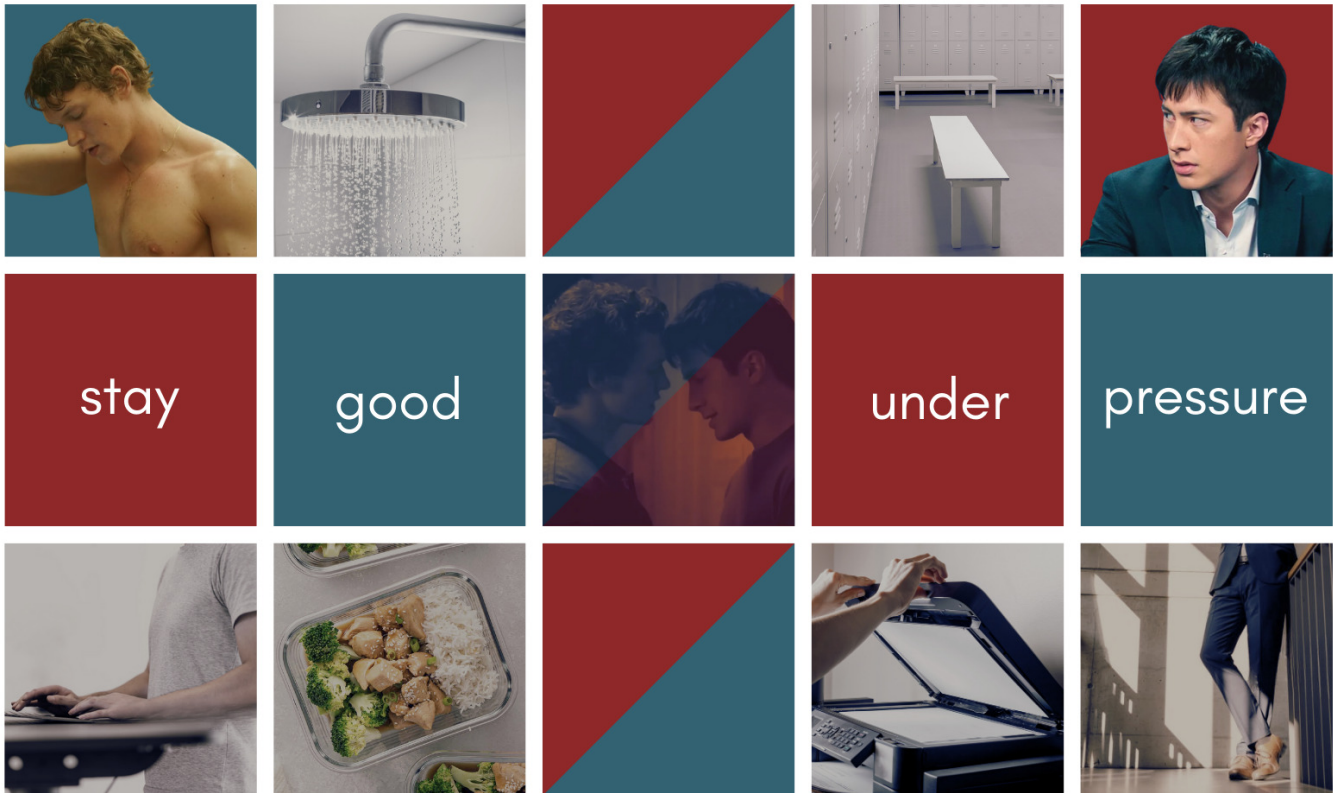
Chapter Notes

They say to write what you know, and I know co-workers. I've had this idea rattling around in my head for a while and I finally just had to write it down.

This is my first Hollanov fic. I am, um, a little obsessed, and haven't been able to get them out of my head since the first time I read Heated Rivalry.

5 chapters, fully written, posting one day at a time.

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



Monday.

Shane takes a deep breath as the elevator doors open onto his office floor. He swipes his access pass against the security screen, and rounds the corner to his desk.

It's just as he left it yesterday, except for one thing.

And it's the same thing, every day.

The exact position of his — *their* — shared drawers under the desk.

His eye twitches as he approaches, as, once again, it has ended up on Rozanov's side.

He could scream.

He won't, because that would be wildly unprofessional.

And Shane Hollander is a lot of things, but he's *not* unprofessional.

He's the epitome of professional. In his suit and tie, his hair neatly brushed, he's always at his desk and logged on by 8 o'clock each morning.

He's the poster child of being professional.

So he's not sure what sin he committed in a past life that has led him here: To a desk next to Ilya Rozanov's. He's forced to sit next to Rozanov each day. Forced to share one single under-desk drawer system with him. Forced to live and breathe the same air as him.

It's penance, surely. There's no other explanation.

Their office is state-of-the-art, with all the modern amenities you could wish for. Sit-stand desks for every employee, arranged in pairs as far as the eye can see across the sterile office floor. It's all white and grey, large windows that don't open, and air conditioning they have no control over. There's a communal shower on the ground floor for anyone who runs or bikes to work and needs to freshen up when they arrive. Each level has an office kitchen filled with snacks, and a fancy coffee machine and assorted teas.

And limited under-desk storage. It's all part of the company's green policy, a commitment to using less paper. The idea that desks should be free of clutter and paper at the end of each workday, because apparently having an organised desk calms the mind, or something. Which means, for some reason, there's less storage space for everything else.

Shane is always #1 on the leader board when the company shares their *Eco Warrior* rankings each month, a list of who in the company has used the least paper.

And his mind has never been calm so he's not sure how well that is actually working out.

In Shane's case that's just because the printer is too complicated to figure out.

They don't show the bottom rankings, though he's sure they exist somewhere.

And he's sure, if he found them, Rozanov's name would be right at the bottom.

Shane's never seen him read a document on his screen. He always prints them out, single-sided, and reads them at his desk.

It's annoying. The scratch of his pen as he marks corrections or the scrape of his highlighter when he's making notes, the constant sound of paper being turned over. The way Rozanov licks his thumb as he turns each page.

Shane puts his backpack down on the floor, on the side closest to the wall. There's a large stack of papers on Rozanov's desk, with what looks like potato chip crumbs scattered on top — Shane

makes a note to ask their office manager if the cleaners came the night before — and, of course, their under-desk drawers are underneath Rozanov's desk.

Not halfway in between them, like they agreed.

So every morning when Shane gets to the office he rolls their under-desk drawers back to the halfway point between their desks. It's not hard. There's a very slight gap in between their desks, a visible demarcation to show where the drawers should go.

And somehow, throughout the course of every single day, it ends up back on Rozanov's side.

Probably weighed down by all the cans of tuna he stores inside.

They clunk around from side to side as Shane rolls the drawers back, the noise echoing throughout the early morning quiet of the office.

Shane keeps his own snacks in little organiser trays he bought; his protein bars in one container, sachets of protein powders in another, his own set of cutlery for his lunches and some hydration tablets he usually adds to his water bottle in the afternoon.

He brings his lunch each day and places it in the office fridge, his name written in sharpie on a piece of tape stuck to the lid.

That's his weekend routine: plan out his meals, grocery shop and replace all his snacks and powders for the office, and then meal prep for the week. He also goes for a long run on Saturday mornings, and goes round to his parents' place to watch a hockey game if there's one on. Sometimes he meets his other colleague, Hayden, and his kids at the park.

So it's not like he doesn't have any fun.

It's nearly 9 o'clock when Rozanov arrives, the scent of stale cigarette smoke making his presence known long before his heavy bag drops to the floor.

As much as Shane hates the smoke, he appreciates the advance warning. Rozanov can't place his bag down gently like a normal person — he can't do anything like a normal person — and the shock of the thud always makes Shane jump out of his skin.

He's not sure why. He should be used to Rozanov by now.

He's not sure he'll ever be used to Rozanov.

They started together on the same grad rotation program. Shane was hired straight out of college, and Rozanov had initially been headhunted by the American firm and then transferred to the Canadian branch a few months later. The program is highly competitive, meant for the hottest and brightest future executives, and it almost guarantees you a career pathway in the company.

Initially they alternated through different departments, learning all facets of the business, and rarely crossed paths.

They've been on different routes since then, different trajectories, and if Shane went home and cried when Rozanov was promoted before him, that's no one else's business.

But somehow they've both ended up here together, both Senior Managers in the same department, working at the same pair of desks.

Sharing the same under-desk drawer.

Shane stands for most of the day. It's better for his posture, better for his core, better for his heart rate.

Which he monitors on his watch all day long.

Better than having to sit next to Rozanov, who has never stood at his desk even once. Shane isn't even sure that Rozanov knows he *has* a sit-stand desk.

It also means Shane can look down at him, literally and figuratively, and that feels good. It feels right.

Shane gets a bird's eye view of him as he works, as he scribbles down notes on loose-leaf paper with no method or cohesion behind it.

As his long fingers flex and stretch over his keyboard, words flying onto the screen, into some client proposal that is probably flawless and going to earn a fortune for the company.

As he swipes through his phone, responds to his messages on both Tinder and then Grindr, and then scrolls through local restaurants to find something to order for lunch.

It's Monday, Shane's favourite day, when his workload is high and his prepped meals are still fresh. Rozanov was probably too busy hooking up with people all weekend to plan his weekday lunches.

Shane doesn't know how he stays so fit and well-built. He's never seen the man eat a vegetable.

Not that he watches him. Or what goes in his mouth.

He's just hard to avoid.

And Shane doesn't, like, check out how Rozanov looks in his suit, or anything. But it's obvious when a man is attractive and Rozanov is an attractive man.

He never wears his suit jacket, always leaves his top button undone and his tie loosened around his neck with the glint of his gold cross visible in the gap, and his sleeves rolled up to his forearms regardless of the temperature outside.

His hair is usually wet when he arrives, sometime between 8:55 and 9:15, as if work was the last thing he had to do that day and not his only reason for getting up in the morning.

He's just so effortlessly cool, all of the time. It's infuriating.

Shane will never understand how someone can care so little about what other people think of him.

How someone can put in such little effort, in every facet of his life, and still be on equal footing with Shane.

Shane cares *so much* about what other people think of him, it can be debilitating.

Shane has worked his whole entire life to be here, it's the only thing he's focused on throughout high school and college. Picked his subjects and his major and his extracurriculars to make him the most enticing prospect, only to be seated next to someone who doesn't even keep a to-do list.

Rozanov takes out his ear buds and walks over to the kitchen, then returns minutes later with a hot coffee in his hand. He stops next to his desk momentarily, pausing before he sits in his chair. Just for enough time to grab Shane's attention.

As though Shane isn't always aware of where Rozanov is and what he's doing. But Shane pretends to be busy, takes his time scrolling through his emails, typing replies and pressing send, before he acknowledges the man next to him.

Rozanov doesn't move the whole time, sitting in his desk chair and sipping his coffee, while he watches Shane work. It's a quiet thrill, having his full attention like this.

Finally, content that he's made Rozanov wait long enough, he glances to his left.

"Yes?" Shane asks.

"Scott asked to meet with us."

"When?"

"Five minutes ago."

"What?" Shane asks, as he spins around to glare at Rozanov. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"You look busy," Rozanov says flatly, gesturing to Shane's monitor and, *god*, he's such a dick.

Scott is their new boss, just transferred from the New York office and still barely even knows their names, so it's important that Shane makes a good impression. Ignoring a request to meet with him straight away is *not* a good impression.

"Did he say what for?"

"No, he said to see both of us in his office straight away."

"Straight away?" Shane is trying not to yell or freak out, but that would be unprofessional. And Shane is not unprofessional. "You should have told me, Rozanov."

"Relax, Hollander. Is okay."

Shane has never relaxed once in his life and he is not going to start now.

He collects his laptop, notebook and pen, and marches over to Scott's office. Rozanov, empty-handed, follows behind.

Scott's door is closed and two silhouettes are visible through the frosted glass window.

“Great, we missed him,” Shane says as he paces back and forth in the office hallway.

Rozanov leans back against the wall, arms crossed in front of him, completely unbothered.

“Why would he want to meet with both of us? No one ever needs to meet with both of us,” Shane mutters, almost to himself but too loud not to be heard.

Rozanov smirks, that lazy sardonic smile of his. It’s permanently etched into his face, without an ounce of sincerity behind it.

“Maybe he’s firing one of us.”

Shane panics, as Shane tends to do. His breath quickens, his pacing increases, his hand gestures grow increasingly erratic.

And there’s fucking Rozanov, grinning, sly and crooked.

“You’re fucking with me.”

“Yes.”

“For fuck’s sake, this is serious.”

“Is it?”

“God, you’ve never taken anything seriously in your life, how would you even know?” Shane’s almost yelling at this point. He could throttle Rozanov, just wrap his hands around his neck and not let go until the life has drained from his rich hazel eyes and his plump, full lips.

Scott’s door opens just in time, sparing Rozanov from an early death.

Scott’s assistant, Rose, smiles sweetly at Shane as she walks out the door, and Shane doesn’t miss the questioning eyebrow Rozanov raises in his direction.

Shane kissed Rose, once. Weeks ago, at a Thursday happy hour that turned into many hours after work. Rozanov had turned up with some random girl they’ve never seen again — he always brings a random girl they never see again — and snuck off with her to a bathroom halfway through the night then never returned.

Rose lured Shane into the same bathroom later that night. They kissed, and when she cupped him through his pants and implied she wanted to get down on her knees for him, he had to blame the alcohol for his lack of cooperation.

She didn’t know he rarely drinks, that he’d been sipping a ginger ale all night.

Scott motions them both inside and shuts the door behind him.

His office is pristine. A mahogany desk in the centre, an executive chair behind it, and nothing on his desk but his keyboard, mouse and monitor, and a smoothie cup from a franchise down the street sitting on a marble coaster in the corner.

This is Shane’s dream. Exactly what he wants, exactly like this.

Scott points to the two chairs opposite his desk, as he takes his seat in the executive chair.

“Shane, Ilya,” he says, eyes darting between them. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

“Hollander had to send very important emails,” Rozanov says, as Shane scowls at him.

“I’ve been told you’re two of the best,” Scott continues.

“Yes,” Rozanov says.

And it’s true, Shane won’t lie. As much as Rozanov is a thorn in his side, he’s incredible at his job.

He’s a thrill to watch, actually. He has a natural affinity for technical details and an innate ability to read the room; he’s somehow able to predict exactly what each client wants to hear. Shane can’t remember the last time Rozanov *didn’t* win a client pitch for the company.

And he does it so easily. So *effortlessly*.

He’s almost charming when he’s in front of clients. They love him, and Shane will never understand it.

Shane barely sleeps the night before a client presentation. Spends the whole day leading up the meeting sweating in his suit with an anxious stomach, planning and anticipating and hoping like hell he’s got it right.

Rozanov will casually stroll into the office five minutes before the client arrives, his tie neatly done and his sleeves rolled down, looking relaxed and ready like it’s just another work day.

It’s infuriating.

Scott angles his monitor towards them, and explains the client request on his screen.

Shane and Rozanov don’t usually work together. In fact, they never do. They work on different client teams, since there’s no need for more than one person at their level in the squad. They’re simply too good. Quite frankly, they cost too much.

So when Scott says that he wants them both to drop whatever they’re working on, because he has this client proposal that’s due on Friday — literally five days from now, Shane’s counted — it’s unprecedented.

Shane has a million reasons why this is a bad idea, waiting on the tip of his tongue. First of all, he’s not sure he actually *can* work with Rozanov. Troy and Bood seem to get along with him well enough, and Harris from the Communications team is always dropping by his desk to show him photos of his dog. But Hayden is Shane’s only real friend in the office and he spends most of his time complaining about how much he hates Rozanov.

Shane feels panicked at the thought, can feel his tie getting tighter around his neck, threatening to close off his supply of oxygen at any moment.

Scott glances between the two of them, at Rozanov sitting calmly and Shane feeling like he’s about to have a heart attack, and asks, “I assume you two get along okay?”

Rozanov looks across at Shane, licks his lips slowly before he speaks. “We are very close.”

Chapter End Notes

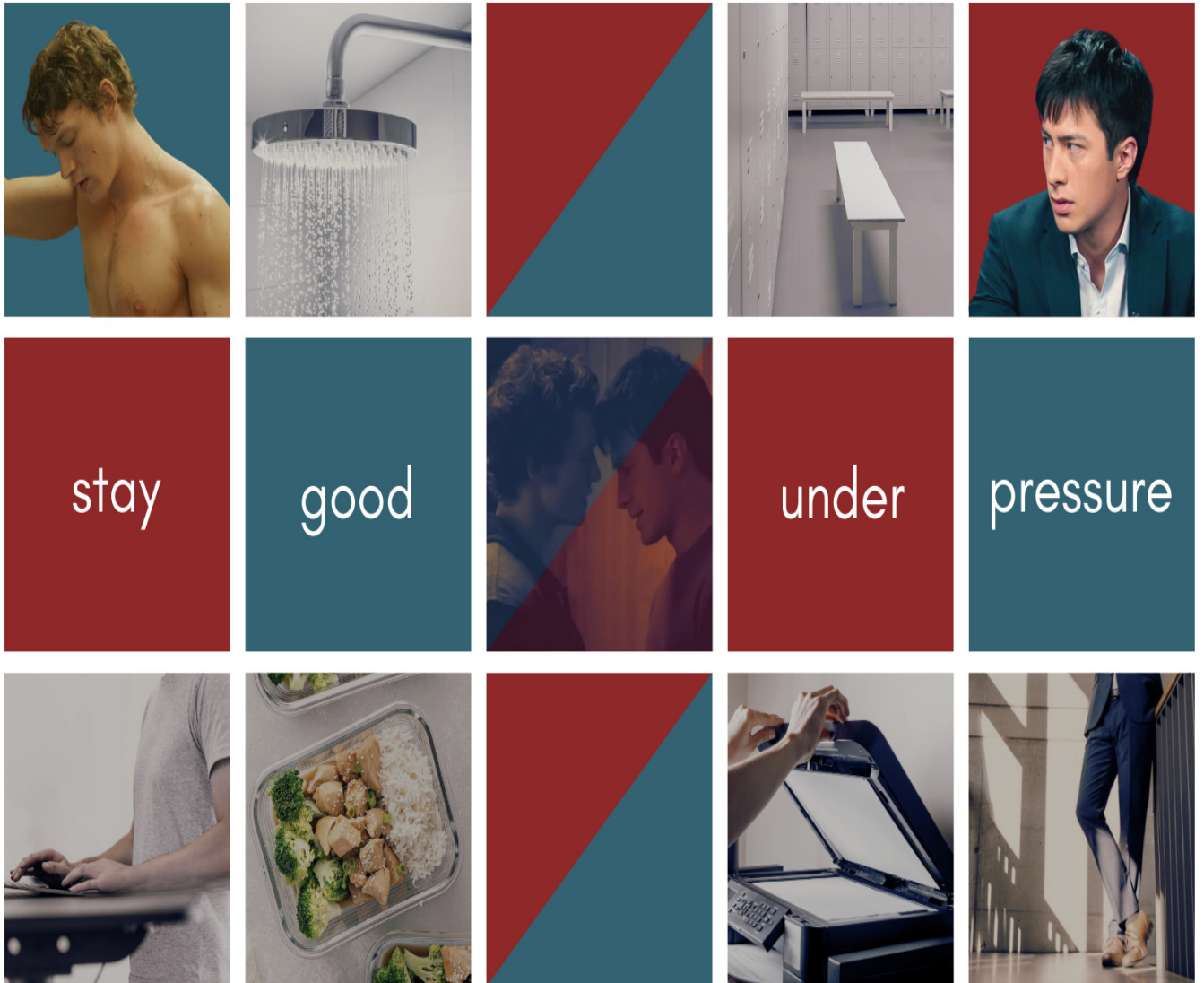
Next chapter tomorrow!

Title is from *Heel Turn 2* by The Mountain Goats

Massive thank you to [nina](#) for demanding/politely asking I write this, and to [Ariel](#) for, as always, being the best beta a girl could ask for.

Find me on [bsky](#) 

Chapter 2: Tuesday.



Tuesday.

Shane runs to work this morning, as he does most mornings. Barring wild weather events or an early morning meeting, he runs to the office and then showers in the communal change room on the ground floor. It's an easy way to get his miles in through the week, and means he doesn't have to catch up on the weekend if he has to stay back late unexpectedly. He gets his dry cleaning sent to the office, and stores a rotation of shirts and suits in a locker so he doesn't have to worry about ironing or forgetting a shirt when he gets dressed at work.

The end-of-trip facilities in the building are indulgent. There's multiple shower cubicles with all these fancy toiletries in pump bottles, a fresh towel service, and an assortment of grooming and hair tools that Shane has never used.

He might be the only one who knows about the space. It's always empty when Shane arrives, and it's still empty when he leaves. Despite the marble counters and warm towels, it has a high school locker room vibe, with its doorless showers and long wooden benches.

The four-minute timer on his waterproof fitness watch beeps, alerting Shane to shut the water off. He turns around one final time to lean his hair back under the warm water, and rinses off the last of the suds from the company-provided shampoo.

Shane keeps his eyes closed as he runs his hands over his hair, his back to the tiled wall.

The sound of hot water hitting the tiled floor echoes throughout the cavernous open space, the steam rising around him and disappearing into the ceiling.

He's not sure how he didn't hear someone else enter the change room.

Not just someone.

Rozanov.

Sitting across from Shane's shower stall, watching.

He has no idea how long he's been there — less than four minutes — wearing nothing but tight athletic pants and the gold cross around his neck, resting on that stupid bear tattoo across his sweaty, naked chest.

He has one ankle stretched across the other knee, as he removes his cycling cleats and places them on the bench next to his helmet. Shane didn't even know he cycles to work.

It's infuriating how *masculine* Rozanov is. Shane has always felt child-like in comparison. He's all boyish charm and innocent smiles, while Rozanov is rugged rebellion.

The thick dark hair on his chest curls all the way down to his torso, down to the elastic waist of his pants and beyond, and Shane thinks, for just a brief second, that he'd like to see exactly how far.

Shane waits for him to make some biting, mean remark.

It doesn't come.

Rozanov looks like he wants to bite Shane, and mean it. Like a lion stalking its prey.

But they don't do this.

Not *here*.

They've hooked up a few times when they've travelled for conference or training courses, but they've always kept it strictly to away games.

Never on home turf. Neither of them get the home town advantage.

It's been a few times a year since...

Well, Shane isn't going to think about how long it's been going on.

Since that first time away at a training course together in their grad rotation program, when he found Rozanov alone in the hotel gym late at night, and then suddenly found himself pressed against the wall being kissed like it was the only thing that made sense.

And again six months later, when they were booked at the same hotel for an industry conference, and Shane stumbled upon Rozanov by himself at the rooftop bar. He was on his knees five minutes later.

They don't cuddle, they don't stay the night, they don't fucking talk about it. They've never even exchanged phone numbers, just a hotel room number sent over Microsoft Teams messages late at night. That's why Shane has never turned his notifications off on his phone.

Just in case.

Nothing in Shane's life has made sense since that first time, so long ago.

Certainly not this shower, that's now edging towards five minutes long. Shane makes no move to turn the water off.

They watch each other in silence. Shane sees the way Rozanov's eyes linger down, feels himself getting hard under his piercing gaze, sees the way Rozanov's lips curl in appreciative response.

Shane slides a slow hand down his torso, the stare between them charged and unyielding. It's intoxicating, having Rozanov's attention like this.

And he's tried, okay. He's tried to be with other people and has had a handful of awkward sexual encounters as a result. It's nothing like it is with Rozanov.

This fucked up all-consuming thing that he allows himself a few times a year and occupies all of his thoughts the other 360 or so days.

And he's not here, naked, on the ground floor of his office building thinking about beckoning Rozanov over to the shower, of getting a hand around his dick and bringing him to the brink under the warm water.

He's *not*, because that...

That would be wildly unprofessional.

Shane runs his hand over the length of his fully-erect cock, strokes the head once, and then twice, eyes fixed on Rozanov across the room.

Rozanov uncrosses his leg, moves as if he's about to stand. As if he's about to let Shane pull him under the water, pull him into his orbit, as if Shane might feel like he has any control in this relationship.

It's not a *relationship*. It's not.

Shane has worked so fucking hard to get to where he is. He's not going to let this *thing* ruin his career. It's one thing to make out with your boss's assistant in the bathroom of a dirty bar — honestly, nobody would care — but it's another thing entirely to have a longstanding fucktuationship with your professional rival.

Ilya is on both feet, slowly making movements towards the shower, and there's the unmistakable sound of a security pass being swiped to gain access to the change room.

Some guy Shane has seen a few times in the elevator — he's nodded at him once or twice but doesn't know his name — is fucking *whistling*. There's no discernible tune, barely more than one long, flat note, but it sucks all the oxygen out of the spacious room and replaces it with bitterness and tension.

Shane can't fucking breathe.

He freezes, turns bright red, the sudden realisation of what he was about to do — what he still fucking wants to do — floods his senses. He turns abruptly to face the wall and reaches for his towel with one hand and shuts the water off with the other.

By the time he turns around, towel tucked around his waist while the whistler unpacks his bag on the bench to his left, Rozanov is undressed and in the shower down the far end.

Shane dresses quickly, dries his hair roughly with his towel and throws his belongings into his backpack.

Rozanov is still in the shower when he leaves.

They work right though until lunch. Side by side, unspeaking, un-even-looking at each other.

Shane gets his lunch out of the fridge, and is startled by the unmistakable scent of tuna in the office kitchen.

The smell is *sickening*.

It should be illegal to have fish in a communal kitchen. A fireable offence, definitely.

He's requested, before, that it be included in Rozanov's annual performance review. There should be an automatic points reduction off the teamwork and collaboration metric for anyone who dares to eat tuna in an open plan office.

It lingers for hours afterwards, the warm fish and melted cheese inescapable to anyone who sits nearby.

In addition to a fridge full of drinks and a pantry full of snacks, they get a few lunchtime basics provided by the company: bread, butter, and an assortment of spreads and common fillings if you need to make a quick lunch on the go.

On the days he doesn't order some heart attack in a takeaway box from a local restaurant, when he actually looks and acts like he might be too busy to take a proper lunch break, Rozanov takes a can of tuna from the drawers under their desk and makes a tuna melt in the office kitchen.

Some days, when he's feeling particularly hedonistic, he'll get a packet of potato chips from the vending machine — jalapeno cheddar or spicy dill pickle flavoured ones — and crush them right on top of the melted cheese.

Every bite is an offensive combination of *squish* and *crunch* and a personal attack on Shane's ears.

Shane rotates through four meals he makes at home, and eats the same one for a week straight. That's the beauty of meal prep Sunday; it means all your days are perfectly predictable. And really, it might *sound* dull, but due to his simplified meal roster, he only has to eat each meal for 13 weeks out of the year, so he never gets tired of them.

It's a perfect system.

It's chicken and rice today, lightly seasoned with some steamed broccoli on the side.

Rozanov brings his tuna melt and a cold can of Coke over to his desk, the cheese still hot and bubbling on top of the bread. No chips today. He cracks the can open and takes a long, loud sip. Shane can practically hear the bubbles popping in his mouth, from the way he sighs in contentment like he's starring in a fucking Coke commercial.

Rozanov munches and crunches on his melt. Lets the gooey cheese fall over the sides and onto the plate, then swipes the remains of the bread through the melted mess to try again.

Shane eats his lunch out of the glass container he stores it in; there's no need to create extra work for the office cleaning staff. He stabs his fork at a piece of chicken, and takes a sip from his reusable water bottle. He eats his chicken and rice in seething silence, and watches as the condensation on Rozanov's Coke can drips water stains all over the desk.

The entire client request, some recent research papers they'll need to refer to, plus multiple client proposals for similar clients and industries are stacked in a pile on Rozanov's desk. Shane doesn't know where he got them from, or when, but he's happy to see Rozanov has put in some effort already.

He could ask him, could talk to him about the important proposal that they're technically working on together, but he doesn't.

That feels too much like giving in.

Instead, he opens the under-desk drawers and pulls out a paper coaster, and slides it across to Rozanov.

Rozanov reaches out to take it, lets his pinky finger linger behind a little too long as Shane passes it over, and grazes it ever so slightly across the sliver of bare skin at Shane's wrist.

Shane doesn't dare look over, but he can feel his cheeks darken at the touch.

That brief touch imprints itself onto his skin; he's sure if he looked down at his wrist he'd see a permanent outline of Rozanov's fingerprints, tattooed just under his shirt sleeve.

It calms him, somehow.

It shouldn't.

His heartbeat is pulsing against the spot, a rhythmic reminder of exactly what he's not supposed to be thinking about.

They don't *do* this. They don't touch each other in the office.

They don't nearly jerk each other off in the office showers.

They certainly don't spend the rest of the day wishing they had.

Shane has written a draft outline for their proposal, highlighted and commented on all the relevant sections that Rozanov needs to look at.

He's not used to working with someone at his own level.

He thought it was a joke, when they were told about this seating arrangement. Some cruel prank the whole office was in on, just to make each day a living hell for Shane.

Previously, he'd been seated with people working under him; junior staff that could learn from him, or that he could delegate to. And that's an important part of being a manager: leading by example.

But something happened when he sat next to Rozanov. It's like a spark ignited within him, a new passion for his work, and now he's working with some of the biggest clients they have.

He doesn't think it's anything Rozanov does directly. It's not like he's sharing intel with Shane, or helping him work on his pitches.

Maybe it's the challenge.

Shane's always been the best. Teacher's pet, top of his graduating class, always ranked in the highest band for annual bonuses at performance review time. He's already been told he's on track to make Partner in a few years.

Working so close alongside someone else, someone who is his equal — not that Shane would ever admit it — pushes him to work harder, and smarter. It just makes him *better*, and he can't explain it.

There really is no explanation, because Shane's yet to find any coherent system to Rozanov's work method. He's absolute chaos, a madman, and, unfortunately, infuriatingly talented.

He's over at the vending machine for the third time today. Like he doesn't already have a drawer full of snacks within arm's reach.

Harris stops Rozanov just before he gets back to the desk, and pulls out his phone to show him the newest photos of his dog. Rozanov is facing their desk, and Shane can see every smile and sigh as he swipes through the camera roll. It's just in his peripheral vision, he's not *watching*. It's alarming to see Rozanov be so sweet and affectionate towards another living thing and Shane can't look away.

“When are you bringing Chiron to the office?” Rozanov asks.

Harris laughs, “You know she’s not allowed in here.”

“I’ll keep her under my desk, will be fine.”

“Still not allowed.”

“On my lap, then.”

Harris smirks and takes his phone back. “What are you working on now, I hear you’ve been paired with Shane?”

“Who?” Rozanov asks and, god, he’s such a dick.

And then, this fucker, he looks over at Shane and he fucking *winks*. Just in front of the whole entire office.

No one else could have seen it, no one else was watching them, but still.

Shane’s cheeks are burning and bright red by the time Rozanov sits back down. He can’t believe how much he lets Rozanov get under his skin.

How much he wishes he’d let Rozanov get under ——

No. He’s not doing that.

“A Snickers, Rozanov? Really?” Shane asks.

Shane would fucking kill for a Snickers bar. But he’s got a container of greek yoghurt and berries in the fridge, and a protein bar in their drawer if he really needs a pick-me-up.

“Is part of my meal plan,” Rozanov says, as he unwraps the bar and takes a bite.

Chapter 3: Wednesday.

Chapter Notes

I don't know about anyone else but I am losing my mind a little bit waiting for the TV show to start on Friday. Hopefully this helps 🥰



Wednesday.

Shane doesn't set his shower timer this morning.

If he uses up a few extra minutes of company hot water, so be it. He's earned it.

If he happens to run into Rozanov in the showers again, so be it.

He's earned it.

He wishes he'd set a timer. He has no idea how long he's been under the water. It could be 5 minutes or 25, he can't tell.

He doesn't think they count water usage towards the company Eco Warrior rankings, but it's not worth the risk. Slowly, reluctantly, he turns the shower off.

Cheeks flushed from the steam, fingers wrinkled and pruny, he towels off and quickly dresses.

It's 8:20 by the time Shane makes it up to his floor, and Rozanov is already at his desk. There's a half-eaten bagel with cream cheese on a paper napkin in front of him, large coffee in hand, a million tabs open on his computer.

He looks stressed.

"You're early," Shane says.

"You're late."

Shane has never been late once in his life, and Rozanov fucking knows that.

Shane gets down on his knees to move their under-desk drawers back over to the middle point between their desks, made slightly more difficult when there's another person here. Rozanov puts his coffee down and watches Shane, on all fours under the table.

"While you're down there," he says, and gestures to the open gap between his legs.

Shane looks up at him, at Rozanov's soft hazel eyes, almost earnest.

They don't *do* this. They don't fucking talk about whatever this fucked up thing between them is.

If it was anyone else saying that, Shane would just write it off as a stupid joke. Just a bit of sexual harassment between colleagues, no big deal.

But the thing is, he knows exactly how much Rozanov enjoys it when Shane is on his knees for him.

The way he strokes Shane's cheek, a thumb lightly brushing across his freckles, as Rozanov thrusts his cock down Shane's throat.

Shane never thought he'd enjoy having a dick in his mouth, but it's always the first thing he wants. Usually the only thing he dreams about, weeks before each work trip: A Microsoft Teams message late at night, a gentle knock on Rozanov's hotel room door, the bristle of hotel carpeting as he steps inside and falls to his knees.

It's not all he enjoys. He loves it when Rozanov fucks him. The care and reverence when he uses his fingers to work Shane open, the way he gently caresses Shane's back as he slowly enters him from behind, the way his long fingers thread through Shane's hair when he kisses him.

The way he always knows exactly what Shane needs. Hard and fast when he needs to get out of his head. Slow and gentle when he needs to *feel* something.

It could so easily be a humiliating experience, but Rozanov treats it like an honour.

Shane's tried it a few times with other men, but it's never felt the same. No one he's ever wanted a repeat performance with. Maybe it's because Rozanov is the first man he ever kissed, that's why

he's been ruined for anyone else. Rozanov imprinted on him somehow, left an intangible mark, an invisible hex against all other men.

It's certainly not because Shane is in ——

No.

They don't *do* that.

Shane, feeling bold, says quietly, "I thought I'd see you in the showers this morning."

"I drove today," Rozanov says, as he looks at Shane. His eyes are softer, somehow. Regretful, perhaps, like he's just realised what he missed out on.

Shane gets back on his feet, raises his desk up to standing height.

"That's probably for the best, anyway," Shane says softly, almost breathless.

Rozanov takes a long sip of his coffee and hums in agreement.

———

They've barely had time to breathe today.

Shane ate his chicken and rice standing at his desk while Rozanov ate a large bowl of creamy pasta from a local Italian place and told Shane how boring his meal plan is.

It's somehow dark outside again, and the office is empty, and Shane's stomach is rumbling.

He lost track of when he last ate; his afternoon protein bar disappeared hours ago.

The scent of melted cheese and warm fish wafts through the office, and Shane is so hungry it almost smells appealing.

Rozanov appears by his desk a minute later, holding a plate with two tuna melts in one hand, and two cans in the other.

Coke for himself, ginger ale for Shane.

He slides the can across the table to Shane, who places two paper coasters down on the desk. Shane wheels his chair over to Rozanov's desk, the two of them sitting side by side, eating dinner from the same plate.

"Thank you," Shane says appreciatively between bites.

"Sorry it's not a protein bar."

Shane is ready to disagree — he's always ready to disagree with Rozanov — but stops himself. He takes another bite of his melt.

It's unfortunate, but Rozanov is never fucking wrong. This is delicious, actually, and exactly what Shane needs. Warm and comforting, full of fat and flavour.

Everything Shane has convinced himself he can live without.

He's lost count of the number of times he's tried to stop this thing between them.

Tried.

Well, thought about trying.

He thought about ignoring Rozanov's message on their last trip together, and the time before, and the time before that.

Thought about going into his hotel room and saying, "No, not again." Only for it to happen again.

And again.

Shane takes a sip of his ginger ale — he's never even told Rozanov he likes ginger ale — and looks down at his dinner.

"No chips?" Shane asks. He doesn't need them, but he does love the crunch.

"You don't like them."

This is verging on something unfamiliar between them, something Shane can't think about. Or name.

"Do you have much left to do tonight?" Shane asks, desperate to steer the conversation back into neutral territory.

Rozanov sighs, and flips through a stack of papers on his desk. "A bit," he says. "You?"

"Yeah, I think I'll be here all night."

Rozanov leans back in his chair and folds his fingers behind his head, elbows pointed out.

"We could make it interesting?" he says, smirk and intention clear across his face.

Shane scoffs and pretends to be affronted. "Our work is incredibly interesting."

"For boring people."

The thing is, deep in his heart of hearts, Shane actually does believe that their corporate drudgery is interesting as hell.

Following this line of conversation is a dangerous idea. He really, really shouldn't.

"How would we make it interesting?"

Rozanov leans over and presses the button on his desk, to raise it up to standing level.

"I didn't know your desk could do that," Shane says.

“I keep it low so you feel tall.”

Shane rolls his eyes at the dig, then crosses his arms and feels all of three feet tall, so yes. Point taken.

Rozanov raises the desk to maximum height, then stands up next to it. He runs his palm up his hip, to where the edge of the desk hits just under his ribcage. He nods.

“When I finish first,” Rozanov says, his voice low and quiet even though there’s no one else around. “I want you underneath the table.”

Shane swallows and looks around nervously, eyes wide.

“Yes,” he whispers.

“And if you finish first?” Rozanov asks, a curious eyebrow pointed at Shane.

“Same,” Shane says, his breath short and raspy like he’s just run up a flight of stairs. Visions of Rozanov on his knees for him flood his mind and darken his cheeks. He’ll be begging Shane to come while he stands at his desk.

Shane might even put his suit jacket back on and re-do his tie.

“I want the same.”

They didn’t really set any official guidelines as to what constitutes *finished*. Or even if they were starting with an equal workload.

But he’s competitive by nature, always has been. That’s how he got here; initially accepted into the grad program, and then rapidly promoted, and now working long hours to pitch to their biggest client.

He’s not the type to sit back and let things happen to him. He wants to work his ass off to be the best, to beat the best, so that everyone else knows he’s the fucking best.

Because what is he, if he’s not the best?

It’s not something he’s ever had to think about. He’s not going to start now.

That competitive edge is what gets him up in the morning, keeps him moving throughout the day, keeps him fucking alive.

Shane should be exhausted, but he’s been razor-focused all night, on the slide deck in front of him and the man standing next to him.

Rozanov has kept the desk at standing height, as if to prove a point. He rolled their under-desk drawers over to the far end of the table, so there’s nothing between them. They’ve been working

side by side, elbow to elbow, for hours.

It's after midnight by the time Rozanov says he's finished.

Shane should protest when Rozanov claims victory, should accuse him of foul play. But what's the point when Shane gets rewarded, too? Every player wins a prize, like the participation trophies he was given in junior hockey.

Only this isn't a sympathy handout, or a meaningless token. This is the fucking Stanley Cup.

Having Rozanov's cock in his mouth is his very favourite thing; the weight of it on his tongue, the feeling of Rozanov towering above him, the moans Shane pulls out of him with every lick and suck.

Shane is upright and on his knees as he mouths over Rozanov's bulge through his boxers. Shane can't see anything above Rozanov's waist; he's kept his hands above the desk, except for a moment when he reaches down and unbuckles his belt. Shane watches his long, deft fingers, as they undo the clasp in one smooth motion.

It's been far too long since Shane's had those fingers inside him, and he's going to have to keep on waiting. That's not in the cards tonight.

He pulls the boxers down to the floor, nuzzles his mouth against Rozanov's thigh and inhales his musky scent. He can feel himself growing hard just from the proximity to Rozanov, and he should be embarrassed by how fucking easily this turns him on.

He's not.

The fucked up thing, the really fucked up thing that Shane will never admit to anyone — especially himself — is how much he wants this. How much he's always wanted this.

This beautiful, perfect, fucked up thing with Ilya Rozanov.

Shane licks a broad stroke up the length of his cock, feels Rozanov whimper above the desk. Shane puts his mouth around the tip and licks the precum that's formed there, the salty taste the best thing he's had in his mouth all day. He grips one hand around the base of Rozanov's dick and swallows down the full length.

Shane feels Rozanov's hand move under the desk, skims past his cheek and comes to rest at the back of his neck. Shane has wondered before what he likes about this so much. If it's the one time he doesn't feel in control, and he willingly cedes power to someone else.

But that's not entirely true, because he doesn't feel like he's not in control right now. He feels like a fucking god.

It makes him feel powerful, to know that he's the one Rozanov has chosen.

Repeatedly chosen.

That he's the only one who gets to see Rozanov like this, in stark contrast to his corporate persona. Across the company, he's known for being arrogant and conceited and too talented to be reprimanded for it. He's nothing like that now.

It's tiny, and indiscernible, and Shane isn't even sure he hears it when Rozanov whimpers "*Shane*."

Shane freezes, cock still heavy on his tongue, Rozanov's thumb still pressed against his freckles.

They don't *do* that.

But they don't do *this* either, and they haven't stopped yet.

Shane digs his fingers into Ilya's thigh when he hears it again, soft and delicate. "*Shane*."

Shane leans back and whispers, "*Ilya*."

Ilya freezes above him. Maybe he didn't even realise he said Shane's name, and it just slipped out by mistake. Then Shane feels Ilya's thumb slide against his cheek, gentle and tender, caressing a face he can't see.

Shane slides Ilya's cock out of his mouth and holds it gently in his hand. It really is a beautiful dick, hard and pink and leaking.

"I want to see you," Shane says.

Ilya peeks down under the desk, and Shane recognises that same feeling of longing in his eyes, the same one he can't seem to turn off. Ilya interprets that look, and gets down on his knees under the desk with Shane.

This is absurd. They're two grown men, in a completely empty office floor, with bathrooms a short step away. But Shane can't move, can't stop, can't think of anything but seeing Ilya's face as he comes.

Ilya leans back against his elbows on the carpet — and, god, Shane does not want to know when it was last vacuumed — and Shane takes Ilya's cock into his mouth again. *Again*, like it belongs there. Like it's home.

Ilya warns Shane before he comes, he knows Shane doesn't always want to swallow, but tonight Shane devours every drop. Honestly, it's part self-preservation; he's not sure he could work a single day at this desk if he knew Ilya's come was staining the carpet below them. It would be like The Tell-Tale Heart, Shane driven to insanity by memories of Ilya moaning his name.

Russian words tumble out of Ilya's mouth when he comes, a stream of foreign syllables that are incomprehensible to Shane. Then he wraps his hand around Shane's neck and drags him forward. The kiss starts out charged and heated, as if there's a million things they've left unsaid and this is the only language they know.

Shane is rock hard, has been since Ilya said he'd won — probably since this whole competition started, if he's really honest — and he knows it won't take long for him to come. Ilya kisses his way down Shane's neck and strokes him over the top of his suit pants. "Yes, Ilya," Shane moans and releases in his boxers just moments later, his face pressed against Ilya's neck, Ilya's fingers threaded through his hair.

Usually, if they were in a hotel room on some interstate training conference, this is where they'd part. One of them would get a damp cloth from the bathroom and wipe them down, they'd say

goodbye and Shane would go back to his hotel room alone. They'd see each other again the next morning. They would never mention what happened the night before.

Tonight, Ilya tilts Shane's head up and leans down for a gentle kiss. It's soft, and delicate, and Shane is grateful for Ilya's lips pressed against his.

They're the only thing holding back the words he wants to say.

Chapter 4: Thursday.

Chapter Notes

Happy *Heated Rivalry TV Eve* to all who celebrate ❤️

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



Thursday.

Shane slams the paper tray on the printer shut with his foot. It might work this time. It didn't the first time, or the fifth, but this time for sure.

He's *exhausted*.

He got home somewhere around 2am, but his heart kept doing this stupid flippy thing in his chest that he couldn't control which made it impossible to fall asleep.

It was just excitement, he's sure of it. From doing something so out of character, so wildly unprofessional. The adrenaline in his body had nowhere to go.

It had nothing to do with how long they spent kissing underneath the desk, or how Ilya had offered to *drive Shane home*.

Shane had refused, of course. He has no idea where Ilya lives or how out of the way it would be, and it seemed far easier to say goodbye from the office than inside a car.

What would he do, lean across the centre console and kiss him good night? Have Ilya walk him to his door? Invite him inside and then ask him to stay the night and maybe never leave?

He couldn't do any of that, so he did none of it. Called himself an Uber and went home alone.

Only to be back in the office by 8, and waging a war with the printer by 9.

Shane didn't even shave this morning, can't remember whether he wet his hair in the shower. He might even be wearing yesterday's tie.

He's not sure he has the energy to sit and stare at his screen all day. He thought printing out their proposal to make notes by hand might be a better use of his time.

But he's survived this long without ever using the printer. What's one more day?

"Did you try kicking it?" Ilya says behind him, his voice low and lush, loud enough so only Shane can hear.

"I did, actually," Shane says. Because he did.

Shane turns around, sees Ilya standing behind him leaning against the entry way of the printer room. It's a little alcove in the middle of the office floor, hidden and tucked away amongst the all-white walls. It's practically invisible to the naked eye, only revealed to those who go searching for it.

Ilya looks so fucking good. Hair slightly damp and curled at the edges, shirt sleeves unbuttoned and rolled to his elbows, sipping from a coffee cup that Shane knows is hiding a smirk behind it.

"How do you look so good?" Shane asks softly, the words out of his mouth before he's had a chance to stop them.

Ilya smiles, his mouth crooked and sincere, and points his coffee cup in Shane's direction.

"You need coffee," Ilya says.

Shane grabs the cup, raises it to his mouth and takes a tentative sip. He grimaces, and Ilya grins.

"I need the damn printer to work."

"I'll show you."

Ilya steps behind Shane and wordlessly traps him in place, locked in between his arms and the machine.

“Here,” Ilya whispers, his voice curling around Shane's ear. “You get your swipe.”

Ilya reaches his hand around to Shane's front, slowly slides his palm along Shane's thigh, up to where the access swipe is attached to his belt loop.

Shane wills himself not to get hard. Thinks about things like spreadsheets and attractive women and dirty office floors and what they did last night and —

“Already?” Ilya laughs.

Shane swallows, despite the desert now located in his throat.

“Yeah, well,” Shane says. “It doesn't take much.”

Not when it's you.

Ilya pulls the swipe on its little elastic cord, and stretches it up to the printer. His mouth is pressed up behind Shane's neck, and Shane can hear, can feel, every breath.

“You log in like this.” Ilya presses a button on the screen. “You find your document like this;” he presses another button. “You print like this;” he drags his fingers across Shane's hand as he reaches across to touch the big flashing *Start* button on the machine.

“Thanks,” Shane says, not sure how he's capable of speech or thought or remaining upright.

Nothing happens.

“See?” Shane says, annoyed. “I’ve tried like twenty times.”

Ilya shoos him out of the way, swipes his own pass and presses some buttons and then, like magic, a printed document appears.

Shane tries again. Swipes his pass, presses some buttons, and nothing happens.

Kicks the printer again, just in case.

“What are you printing?”

“Nothing, obviously.” Shane opens and closes the paper tray, lifts and shuts the lid, swipes his pass and tries again.

Shane takes a deep breath, and turns to face Ilya. “I’m trying to print our presentation to mark it up by hand, I don’t think I can handle looking at a screen all day.”

Ilya swipes his own pass again, presses some buttons and starts the printer.

Papers start collecting in the tray, printed in colour and single-sided, like the company’s Eco Warrior rankings mean *nothing*.

It’s a lot of pages. Tangible evidence of their week spent working together, alongside each other. On top of each other.

The printer stops, and Ilya takes out two identical documents, both stapled in the top-left corner.

Shane didn't even know the printer could *do* that.

Ilya hands one of them to Shane. "You use the paper, and I get blamed for it. Pretty sweet deal for you."

As hard as he's tried, Shane can not get any work done today. He's so tired he's been sitting down the entire day.

The office is too loud, and too bright, and Ilya is *right there* next to him and he can't concentrate on anything else.

He starts to pack up his belongings and says, "I'm going home."

"Okay," Ilya says.

And that's another thing Shane can't concentrate on. If Ilya told Shane he was going home, Shane would yell at him. Tell him he's not taking this seriously and they need to finetune their presentation and stay all hours until they are happy with it.

But Ilya being relaxed about Shane going home means that *Ilya* isn't taking it seriously and Shane wants to yell at him anyway.

Shane is waiting for his laptop to power down, but it's performing some system update that's taking forever to finish and he's about to lose his fucking mind.

JJ and Boob are on the other side of the office yelling about something and someone is on a video call with their headset not plugged in correctly so the whole office can hear the entire conversation and Shane's leg is bouncing under the desk and there's not a thing he can do to stop it.

It's the chastest thing, a barely there touch, when Ilya taps his shoe against Shane's.

Shane looks over at Ilya, who has his head down and a pen in his mouth. Again, he rubs the tip of his shoe against the side of Shane's foot.

It's almost instant, the way that barely-there touch calms him down, slows his movements and his thoughts.

Not his heart rate, though. That's pulsing out of his chest, fills his ears and drowns out the sounds of the Teams call and the obnoxious colleagues until the only thing he's aware of, the only thing in this room, is the fact that Ilya is touching him right now.

Here, in the office, with other people around.

Shane almost forgets to breathe.

Ilya is still focused on the page in front of him with the pen hanging out of his mouth, and Shane swears, for just a moment, Ilya moves his hand closer. The tiniest slide of his palm over to Shane's

desk, his pinky finger stretched out.

If he didn't know any better, Shane would think he's just flexing his hands, like those work safety exercises they get reminders about every few months. Stand and stretch your legs once every hour, rotate your neck from side to side at regular intervals, and don't forget to slide your hand across the desk towards your casual-but-only-on-work-trips-and-now-sometimes-also-at-work fuckbuddy.

Shane stares down at Ilya's fingers, and begins the slow torturous slide of his own palm across the desk.

"Hey, Shane," Hayden's voice booms over their desk, and Shane freezes. Ilya drops the pen out of his mouth, and picks it back up. Ilya clicks the pen a few times.

"Hey," Shane says, as Hayden gets closer.

His laptop has finished updating now, and Shane unplugs it from the docking station and puts it into his backpack.

"I have a question about that Jones file I'm working on, was I supposed to call the client before I filed the document?"

"Yes."

"Shit."

Ilya laughs.

Hayden straightens his back and folds his arms, but doesn't say a word to Ilya.

"Okay, I need you to call them because they're... not happy."

Shane sighs and rubs his fingers against his temples. This is the last fucking thing he needs right now.

Ilya looks over at him, almost concerned.

"I don't have time, Hayden. We've got this presentation tomorrow, and —"

"It's okay," Hayden interrupts. "It can wait until after that, or I can get Scott to call them, or —"

"No!" Shane near-yells. He's not getting the fucking boss involved with his client because Hayden didn't understand basic instructions. "I'll call them tomorrow, it's fine."

"Thanks, Shane. I owe you one," Hayden says, quiet and remorseful.

Shane smiles, just barely. He knows Hayden didn't fuck up intentionally.

"Oh!" Hayden says, clicking his fingers in excitement. Ilya has stopped pretending that he's working, now openly watching the conversation. "Jackie's mom is babysitting for us tomorrow night, you should come out with us."

Shane shakes his head.

“Jackie’s friend Rachel is coming. I think you’d really like her.”

“I don’t think so, I’m going to be exhausted after the meeting tomorrow, and...” Shane trails off, too distracted by Ilya to continue. He’s not really doing anything, just listening intently, but Shane doesn’t want to have this conversation in front of him.

“You’ll need to celebrate after the presentation,” Hayden says.

“Then I am invited too, yes?” Ilya interrupts.

Shane laughs. Hayden doesn’t.

“No,” Hayden says instantly.

“Rude,” Ilya says.

Hayden ignores him, and looks expectantly at Shane.

“Thanks, but I don’t need you to set me up with Jackie’s friends.”

“It’s not good for you to be alone all the time.”

“I’m not —” Shane stops, and huffs out a breath. “I’m not alone, okay. I’m fine.”

He can feel the heat of Ilya’s gaze staring, can’t bear to look back at him in case Shane says something stupid like *I don’t want anyone else* or *You’re the only person I think about* or *It’s been you, this whole entire time*.

Shane picks up his backpack and leaves.

Shane had a nap when he got home from work in the early afternoon, which is somehow only the second-most unprofessional thing he’s done this week.

He spent the rest of the day working in his home office. It’s his second bedroom, and he rearranged the space so there’s a blank white wall behind him when he takes video calls from home. It’s perfect.

His mom dropped off a week’s worth of frozen dinners for him on Monday night, when Shane told her how busy he’d be this week. He’s in his kitchen heating up his dinner when he hears the Teams call come through.

The ringing has stopped by the time Shane gets back to his office with his dinner. He sets up his bowl and cutlery in front of him and unlocks his computer — because he always locks his computer when he steps away from it, even at home — and checks his notifications.

Missed call from Ilya Rozanov

Shane scrolls up through their message history.

Their entire Teams chat history is messages sent late at night, weeks or months apart. All containing nothing but a hotel room number.

Ilya Rozanov: 1410

Ilya Rozanov: 1822

Ilya Rozanov: 1126

Shane has never even replied, just knocked on the room door a few minutes later.

It was easy to compartmentalise them when it was something that only happened away, easy to separate the Shane and Ilya in the office from the Shane and Ilya in a hotel room in another city. Easy to think of it as some kind of alternate reality, with no chance of it slipping into this one. There was absolutely no risk to the spacetime continuum.

But *this* Shane and Ilya — the ones that get each other off under the desk at work, and get flustered in front of the printer, and call each other late at night — they're in danger of disrupting something critical to maintaining order in the universe.

Or Shane's heart.

Ilya answers the video call almost straight away.

"Holy shit, Hollander! Do you wear glasses?"

Oh, shit. Shane forgot about those.

"Only late at night." He takes them off, embarrassed, waiting for Ilya to tease him and call him a nerd.

"I like them," Ilya says, grinning.

He looks *soft*. Wearing a faded grey t-shirt, a sweet smile, and his curls slightly wild at the end of a long day. It's hard to tell through the screen but it looks like he's sitting on a couch, with his head leaned back against a cushion and low light highlighting his cheekbones.

"You do?" Shane asks, not sure if he believes it.

"You are very beautiful, Hollander."

Shane has never heard those words before, except from maybe his mother. Though she probably said handsome, or gorgeous. Not beautiful.

He didn't know anyone could think he was *beautiful*.

It does something to him, to hear that word from Ilya Rozanov. His heart beats rapidly, its rhythm wild and out of control, and there's suddenly no air in the room. It's probably the spacetime continuum ripping apart.

Shane is sure he has a dopey grin on his face, judging by the way Ilya is looking at him.

He's spent so many years ignoring this thing between them, pretending it's nothing. It's a mindfuck to suddenly realise that it's *something*.

Something Ilya feels, too.

"What's that behind you?" Ilya asks.

Shane turns around. There's nothing behind him, it's a blank wall.

"Nothing."

"In the corner, there's a book or something."

Shane looks at his camera view on the screen, and tucked in the far corner is the edge of a book, on the bookshelf that's just out of frame from the camera. He reaches over and grabs it.

"It's just this book I've been reading, about the Canadian economy in 1972."

Ilya laughs. "Do you read books that aren't boring?"

"Not usually, no."

They take a few moments to just look at each other, smiling. Ilya watches Shane eat his dinner, and Shane watches Ilya watch him.

It's a nice, comfortable silence.

"Did you call me for a reason, or?" Shane asks.

"Yes. And no."

Shane moves his now-empty bowl out of the way and takes a long sip from his water bottle. Ilya is still in the same spot, head resting against a cushion.

"We need to talk about the presentation," Ilya says. "And I want to check you are okay."

Oh.

"I'm okay," Shane smiles, insanely fond. "I was just really tired after last night, you know?"

Shane *meant* the late hour that he got home. He did. Not the reason that he got home so late.

Ilya grins. "Yes, last night was..." He trails off.

"Yeah, it was."

They're just two dopey idiots grinning at each other over a late night Teams call and Shane can't remember the last time he felt this happy.

Shane brings up the slide deck on his screen and they rehearse their slides. Figure out who will open and close the presentation, and try to come up with answers to any possible questions the client might have.

Ilya speaks with such confidence when he's presenting to a client. When it's material he's prepared, and he knows the subject matter inside and out, he's formidable. Absolutely no one can speak to it better than he can.

"Is hard sometimes, with questions," Ilya says.

And Shane's never really thought about it before, how much Ilya's English has improved over the years. Of how difficult it must have been for Ilya to move to a foreign country and adapt to a new language and make it all look so fucking easy.

"I will need help if they ask a lot of questions."

That's the first time he's heard that word from Ilya. *Help*. It's vulnerable. Admitting a weakness. Of course it's one thing when it's a rehearsed presentation on a subject he's studied extensively, but it's another thing entirely when he has to think fast in such a technical environment. Shane even struggles to respond sometimes, and he's spoken English all his life.

"Of course," Shane says, and he means it.

"You should go to sleep," Ilya says, as Shane rubs his eyes.

"I'm not tired," he yawns.

"Good night, Shane," Ilya says, his voice warm and soft, laced with honey.

"Good night, Ilya." Shane stops himself from adding, *I wish you were here*.

Instead, he does a dumb little wave to the camera.

Ilya waves back.

Chapter End Notes

See you tomorrow for the final chapter!

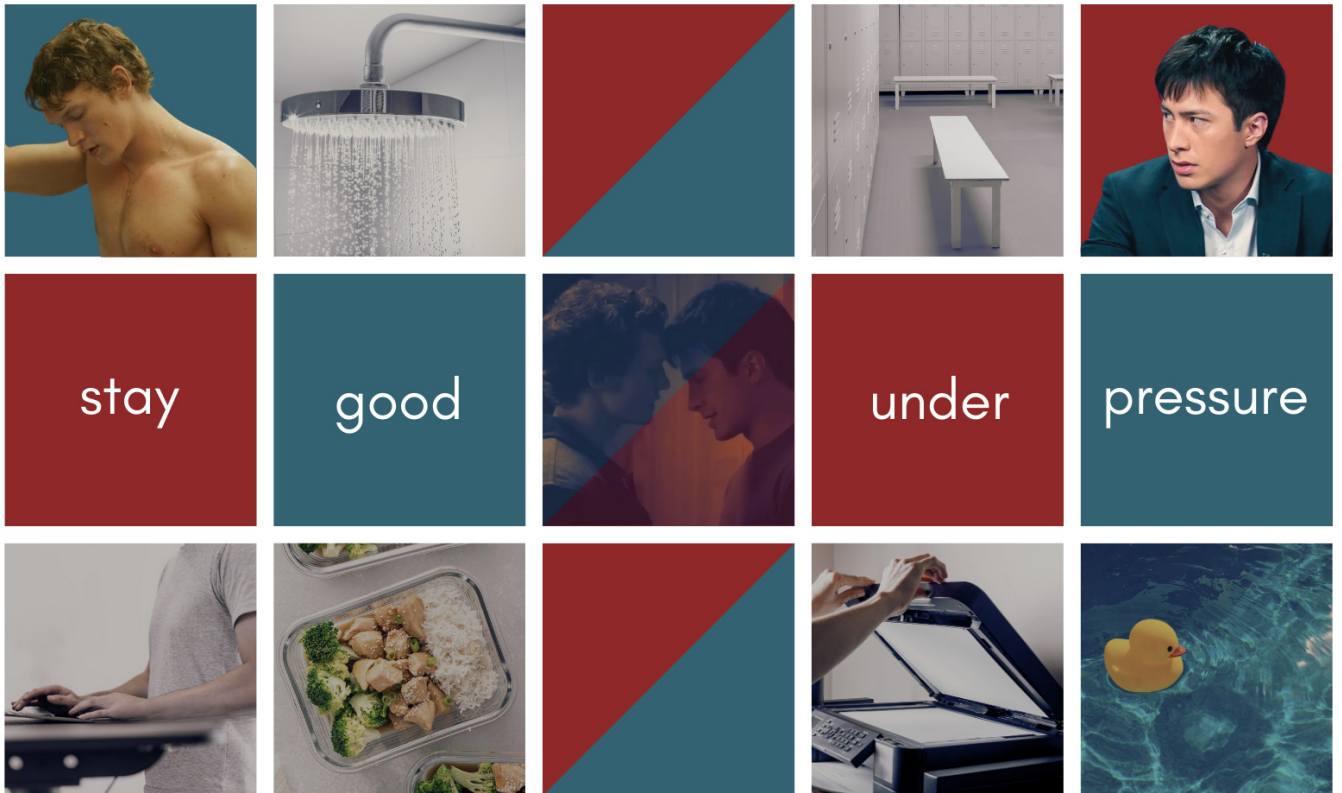
Chapter 5: Friday.

Chapter Notes

How is everyone feeling after seeing the first two episodes?

I, personally, am insane. They're so good I can't cope.

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



Friday.

“Did you book a whole meeting room just for us?” Ilya asks, impressed, leaning against the door with his arms folded.

Shane is impressed, too. Ilya is dressed and in the office by 8:30 which is something of a miracle. He's wearing a suit jacket and tie, his top button done up, and it looks like he may have run a comb through his hair this morning.

And he smells good. Rugged but sweet. Like leather and cookies, or something.

The client presentation is after lunch, and Shane booked a private meeting room on another floor so they can be alone.

To prepare for the meeting, of course.

Absolutely no other reason.

Shane didn't run to the office this morning. He's not sure his resting heart rate has been in a normal range even once this week, and he's probably pushed his heart to its limits a few too many times already.

So he drove to the office, and stopped along the way to get himself a coffee. He doesn't like coffee, very rarely drinks it, but it felt necessary today.

Shane's still reeling from their video call last night. The sweet words and softness and honesty and vulnerability. It felt like too much but also not nearly enough.

He wants more. He wants it all.

Ilya walks in and sets up his laptop on the table next to Shane, then crawls around on the floor to find somewhere to plug in his charger.

Shane doesn't say anything, because he is completely professional, dammit.

When Ilya is back on two legs, Shane places a takeaway coffee cup on the table in front of him.

A cappuccino, he's pretty sure that's his coffee order. And a bagel with cream cheese in a brown paper bag. It looks like it's more cream cheese than bagel, but that sounds about right for Ilya.

Ilya peeks into the paper bag, "Did you buy me breakfast, Hollander?"

Shane blushes.

"Yeah, I, uh. I thought this might save time, if you don't have to go out to get coffee."

Ilya takes the lid off the coffee cup and examines its contents. He takes a tentative sip, and then a bigger one. The relief on his face is instant as the calming warmth slides down his throat. Shane's gaze follows it, charts the journey through the bob of his Adam's apple, and then continues further south.

Shane had booked this meeting room on Monday, straight after Scott told them about the presentation. He knew they'd need somewhere private to prepare, away from the distraction and noise of the rest of the office.

He hadn't known, then, what else he'd want this room for.

But they're *not* doing that here.

They are, above all else, professional.

Well, Shane is.

Ilya is too, surprisingly.

Shane loads their slide deck onto the large screen in the meeting room.

They practise their sections, offer advice and criticism. If it were anyone else, Shane would be annoyed to have his presentation style critiqued, to be offered advice he didn't ask for.

But it's not just criticism. Ilya is effusive with his praise, pointing out all the things he likes about Shane's technique, and how well his structure and cohesion plays off of Ilya's slightly more chaotic approach.

And it's not anyone else. It's Ilya.

Shane's never seen it up close before, but it's fascinating to see how much Ilya cares. It's so well-hidden behind his everyday facade.

And Shane's seen glimpses of it, in other contexts. How hard he works to make sure it's good for Shane, that they're both getting exactly what they want out of every brief encounter.

How hard he works to make it look like he doesn't care at all.

Shane forgot to bring his lunch today. He's never forgotten to bring his lunch. He worries it's a premonition of how the client meeting will go. As if any deviation from his standard routine will bring about disaster.

It might. How would he know? He's never tried it before.

But he's never said good night to Ilya over a video call before, and that seems to be working out okay.

Ilya insists on buying them lunch. He lets Shane choose the restaurant, and he picks this deli a few blocks away that he's been to once before. Shane orders a protein power bowl. Ilya orders a turkey club with sweet potato fries.

Ilya sneaks outside for a cigarette while they wait for it to be delivered. When he comes back up to the meeting room a little while later, he's got a delivery bag in one hand and cans of Coke and ginger ale in the other.

He puts the cans down on the table, unboxes their food, and pulls two paper coasters out of his pocket. The same ones Shane keeps in his — *their* — under-desk drawer.

They eat their lunches in comfortable silence. Ilya offers his sweet potato fries, and Shane refuses at first.

But maybe forgetting his lunch today does mean something significant.

Like maybe things can change, if Shane wants them to.

He puts a few of the fries in his bowl, and doesn't miss the way Ilya smiles at him. Like he's proud.

They're in the final few minutes now before the clients arrive, and that nervous gnawing feeling in his stomach is growing, only it's different this time. They're completely prepared, there is nothing for them to worry about.

He's nervous about something else, and he knows if he doesn't do this now he might never.

Shane's voice feels squeaky, like he has no control over it. He's trying to stay calm, trying to feel like he's in control of his feelings.

He feels like a rubber duck in the ocean. Completely at the mercy of the tide.

He takes a deep breath, and ——

“Are you going to the management training course in Toronto next month?”

There, he said it. He is brave and courageous and has finally acknowledged the one thing they've been avoiding this entire time. A true hero.

Ilya grins at him.

He has so many grins, Shane's found. The crooked smirk and sharp jawline when he's being a dick. The soft one that Shane saw last night, when his eyes crinkle a little bit in the corner and his vowels get a little bit softer. And the sincere one, that's big and wide. It looks like Ilya has no control over that one, the way it dominates all of his features.

That's the one he's got now.

And it's good that they're on equal footing. Both completely adrift.

“Yes,” Ilya says. “Is for a whole week.”

“Yeah. It is.”

Shane takes a sip of his coffee. He hates coffee.

“We could?” Shane asks, silently begging Ilya to finish the sentence.

“We could what?”

Okay, there's the crooked smirk and sharp jawline.

Unfortunately Shane likes that one just as much as all the others. Maybe more.

Shane stammers, takes another sip of his awful coffee before he finally places the cup down on the table.

“Late at night, you and me...”

“Oh, do you like it when we do that?”

Crooked and sharp.

“I like it too much, probably.”

Soft now, eyes crinkled.

“Me too, Hollander.”

Ilya presses his leg against Shane’s under the table.

“Are you going out with Hayden tonight?”

“No,” Shane replies instantly.

“Must be hard to find a babysitter for twenty kids.”

“He doesn’t have twenty kids.”

Ilya shrugs.

“You with Jackie’s friend?”

“I don’t want to meet Jackie’s friend,” Shane says. Firm. No room for debate.

“Okay.”

The tide is coming in and the rubber duck is bobbing wildly, spinning as it struggles to get to shore.

Shane wipes his sweaty palms on his trouser leg, still pressed against Ilya’s.

They’re two grown men, arguably the best in their field, about to lead a client pitch for a contract worth millions of dollars, and they’re delicately dancing around their feelings.

But, well. Shane’s never been a dancer. Anyone who’s seen him at happy hour on a Thursday night can attest to that.

And this unspoken thing between them, it *does* feel delicate. Not that it’s made of lace, or glass, or some other fragile material.

But that he wants to protect it, to look after it.

To watch it grow.

Shane can’t bear to make eye contact. Keeps his head pointed down in his lap.

“I could do something else tonight, instead,” he says, his squeaky voice betraying the calmness he’s trying to show. Trying and failing.

Shane has presented off the cuff at all-staff meetings, and he did karaoke in front of the whole office at the last company Christmas party. Once, he made a stranger on the bus get out of their seat for a pregnant woman who was standing.

But *that*, saying that one sentence out loud, is the bravest thing he’s ever done.

Ilya runs his palm up Shane’s thigh, and reaches across to lace their fingers together.

Shane is suddenly very aware that they’ve never held hands before.

Blowjobs under the desk are one thing, but hand holding? He's never felt more exposed. Ripped open, his heart on display.

Ilya's hands are big and strong, slightly calloused like he lifts weights or chops wood in his spare time. It's hot.

Shane lifts their linked hands up to his mouth, and softly kisses Ilya's smallest finger. A gentle whisper falls from Ilya's lips, warm and wanting.

Finally confident that this is something he can have, something he deserves, Shane turns his head to look at Ilya.

"You want this?" Ilya says.

"Yeah, I really do."

Ilya's smile is big and wide.

"If I send you a Teams message tonight, maybe around nine?"

"I might reply."

"I might send a message."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who has read along this week! It's been really fun ❤️

Beta-ed by [ExitAriel](#)

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