

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned

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Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned

by [kat_writes_smut](#)

Summary

As he kept gazing at Ilya, he suddenly felt like his pants had gotten weirdly uncomfortable. Like they were suddenly too tight. He glanced down at himself and felt like his heart was about to jump out of his chest when he noticed the bulge on him. What on earth was that? He stared down at himself for a moment, in shock. Then, he decided he would try to push it down; maybe that would help. He startled even more when his own action made him let out an undignified, weird sound. Like a groan, but not really. Why had that felt so good? He just stared at himself for another moment, horrified. He tried it again. He had no idea what he was doing, but it felt wrong. Like, he shouldn't do something that made him react like that. He glanced up, realising he was still very inappropriately watching the naked priest, and exhaled when he hadn't been spotted yet.

★ °. ★9♡e★ °. ★

OR

Shane has led a sheltered life with his family, growing up deeply religious in a small village somewhere in medieval Europe. His quiet world is disturbed when a new priest takes over the town's church.

OR

Shane is really fucking gay, and he has no idea that it is even an option.

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Notes

It's week 1 without a new episode of Heated Rivalry, and I'm slowly going insane, so enjoy whatever the fuck this fic is

Important note: All mentions of religion and praise of God in this work are simply crucial for Shane's character development and to understand the way he views the world, and I do not wish to indoctrinate any of you with Catholicism – I'm an atheist myself, fyi!

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

Chapter 1: A new face

Chapter Notes

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

It was a day as gloomy and cold as any in the months when the nights tended to be longer than the days. A thick coat of snow lingered on every roof, on every surface, on every path that hadn't been treaded yet today. The grass was fighting the snow on patches where the sun was kissing the ground, which were sparse, as always. The sun rarely lasted more than a few hours, if that. But Shane had gotten used to it. In fact, he never knew anything else. How could he? He rarely wandered outside his village, and if he did, it was only to accompany his father whenever he had to travel to the nearest city to send one of his important letters.

He had heard about the lands east of here, where the sun was out for most of the day, and the people had to wear hats for a different reason than to warm their heads. But those lands were simply a fragment of his grandmother's stories. She had fled them decades ago, back when the war got so bad that she and Shane's grandfather had to find a safer place for themselves. Back then, his grandmother had just been pregnant with his mother. Shane sometimes imagined what it would have been like to grow up there. His grandmother had often told him of her own childhood, whenever Shane was lingering around the tavern past his bedtime as a child. He loved listening to her. About the warm waters and the soft sand in the summers, and the freezing cold she had to survive in winters.

Shane loved listening to her. Talking to her. She was a wonderful woman. And the best cook he could imagine. It was only natural that she and his grandfather opened the little tavern, in the middle of the village. Well, nowadays the tavern was not so little anymore. Despite the town having 500 inhabitants at most, also counting all the little ones running around everywhere, the tavern was always lively. Travellers from near and far would stay the nights there when they crossed the village on their journeys. That happened a lot. They were not far from a big river, which a lot of travellers used as a waypoint in their journey west. Shane usually had no idea where they were going. He often wondered if these lands were even real. The wanderers often didn't know themselves.

As a child, he absolutely loved staying at the tavern with his grandparents, chatting with the patrons and listening to heroic or adventurous tales. Now that he had almost fulfilled his 20th year on this earth, his interests had taken him elsewhere. He still enjoyed going to the tavern, helping his mother out, now that she had taken over most of the work, since her own parents were too old to work as much as they used to. But he most often spent his time in his own chambers, using quill and feather to bring his thoughts to papyrus. He was like his father in that sense. The older man was the scribe of the village. Where reading and writing was mostly a matter of the clergy and the aristocracy, having a scribe in your village made a lot of official things easier. Their town wasn't large by any measure, especially compared to other cities that were just a day's travel away, but sometimes there still came letters from the crown, often important information that was distributed throughout the kingdom.

Shane did not use his ability to write for anything remotely as important as his father did. Instead, he often used it as an escape. As a way to dream about far lands and magical stories that he would never experience. Not that he wanted to, anyway. He loved his town. Loved the people here. Loved his family. Compared with the lives his grandparents had led, Shane had a very sheltered upbringing. Yes, they may not be royalty by any stretch of the word, but they lived in a pretty sizeable house made of stone on the edge of the village, on top of a little hill that overlooked the town and the tavern. They usually had enough firewood to survive winters in relatively cozy warmth and were rarely short on food.

When he wasn't writing or helping in the tavern, Shane liked to spend his free time with the town's youth. Yes, he might be a bit old now to hang out with the children, but they loved it whenever he read to them. He even taught them sometimes, though the younger ones weren't really interested in it. Whenever Shane and his father travelled to the city for whatever diplomatic stuff his father had to deal with, Shane liked to browse markets for books he could bring back to the children. Of course, most books were about religion or the sciences or similar boring stuff, but he had found a few storybooks as well. Currently, he was reading them a book about a knight who rescued a princess from a tower. Shane had to internally roll his eyes a lot as he read it to them. The princess was really annoying. She was described as so beautiful, with long blonde hair and emerald-green eyes, and the knight was so head over heels for her that he was ready to betray his own king to save her. Or something like that. He wasn't exactly paying attention to any words he was reading.

Well, his point was that he didn't believe any woman could be so beautiful that he would ever go against the king, or whatever similar figure he found in his life. He often had to suppress a groan whenever his parents or grandparents talked about finding him a wife. He knew, some day, he had to get married, have children, all of that. In a few years, maybe. But right now, he could not care less about that. Thankfully, his parents did not press too much. His mother was still fairly young and loved running the tavern, while his father could keep his job as a scribe for at least another decade. There wasn't a family legacy Shane had to continue yet. He still had time. Maybe one day he would also find a woman so beautiful that he would do anything for her. He doubted it, though.

Lately, the silent peace of the town had been disturbed by a new face. Usually, the villagers were slow to accept new members into their community. Most people in the town had been there for generations, and newcomers were introduced only through births or by someone finding a spouse in another city. A stranger being accepted to live in their space was almost unheard of. But not totally.

Forty years ago, the town had accepted Shane's grandparents. They had just fled a war from a land in the far east and were clearly starving. On top of that, Shane's grandmother was very pregnant and not in the condition to travel any further. So, the town elders made the decision to accept them into their society. Well, it wasn't quite that easy. While they could communicate with gross gestures and pointing, his grandparents had no ability to speak the local language. And their skin and hair colour clearly also exposed them as outsiders. But they tried. Hard. They took over the old tavern that had been empty since the last owner had died and brought it to new glory. Slowly but surely, the town's people accepted them as one of their own. And 18 years later, Shane's mother married the son of one of the elders –

Shane's dad. And since then, Shane's family has been a well-integrated and well-loved part of the community.

This time, it was a little different, though. It wasn't a young family or a pregnant woman seeking refuge. It was a man. A single man, with no family, or a wife or kids or any actual reason why he was here. He *did* speak their language, which Shane found interesting, albeit with a strong accent. Shane had never heard someone talk like him before. His words were all strong, almost edgy. Not that he had secretly eavesdropped on a conversation between the man and one of the town elders. He would never.

Shane had heard the words "Ruthenia" and "Rus" tossed around by some patrons in the tavern when they talked about this new guy. Shane had no idea where that was, but from their description, it was very cold and under the ruthless rule of the Vikings. Shane wasn't too sure what that entailed, but he also did not really care to find out.

What was mildly more interesting to Shane was that this new guy apparently was a priest. Which was surprising, considering every priest Shane had met in his life was old and – well, mostly very old. And maybe strict. And they never really showed their faces outside the church.

This man? He could hardly be older than Shane, maybe 20, but not at all above 25. He had blonde hair and blue eyes, which wasn't a surprising thing to see around the village. Honestly, in that regard, Shane's dark hair and eyes were the exception. Still, something about how the man looked was fascinating to Shane. He almost seemed like an angel when the light hit him at the right angle, making his curls look like they were made out of gold and his eyes shine like crystals. Not that Shane paid attention to that. He just crossed paths with the man once, when Shane was walking down the hill from their house to the tavern, and the priest was walking up, towards the church. The church was at the very top of the path, tucked behind a small forest. Shane loved to play in that forest when he was a child. It was just behind their house, and it had always been full of adventures for him.

Sometimes he had wandered a bit too far into the forest and found himself in the church garden. That had led to many reprimands from the priest who was at the church at the time. Shane wondered if this new priest would also yell at little kids for playing in the garden.

Shane had been surprised that the town so quickly accepted this man to join their community. He hadn't even really expected the elders to accept a random single man at all. Shane felt it raised more concerns about the village's safety than the benefits they saw in another man joining their community. On the other hand, there had been a bit of a scandal in the village a few weeks ago.

The priest who had been there ever since Shane could remember randomly vanished one day, without a trace. Well, Shane – and probably every other adult in the village – knew that it wasn't all that random. There had been rumours, for months now, that the priest wasn't exactly a good man. Especially not around children. And when a young girl had gone missing a few weeks ago, after she was sent to confession by her parents, one or two of the rowdier blokes in the town had gone for a chat with the priest. Weirdly enough, he never returned from that. Really weird. But nobody had spoken of it since.

Since then, their church had been without a priest, which was impossible to imagine. A village without a church was like a baker without flour or a tavern without ale. *Unacceptable.*

So, when this random man came along, and he coincidentally was a priest, the town was more than ready to welcome him. His first liturgy was attended by nearly everyone in town, filling the church and the surrounding area. The town was deeply religious. Shane was too. Obviously. Not like there could be any question about it. Christianity was the only way. Catholicism was the only thing Shane knew. And by now, he also knew better than to question it.

Back when he was a kid and met all kinds of people in the tavern, he had picked up on the fact that not everyone believed in God. Or at least, not in the same god he believed in. He tried asking his grandmother about it, but the immediate reprimand he received made it clear this wasn't a topic he should ever bring up. So, he didn't.

By now, he realised his grandparents probably had not grown up catholic. He had read enough books about religion, which often were boring as hell, to know that Catholicism wasn't practised as much in eastern lands. The books he read always portrayed it as a kind of outrage. That not being a good Christian was the biggest sin. Shane agreed, of course. He would go to church every week, he would pray every night before bed, and he would pay his indulgences. All with the intention to go to heaven, obviously. What else would he do in life, if not try to get to heaven? He had read the Bible many times by now, in Latin and other translations. He knew what God considered a sin and what he shouldn't do. Like steal, murder, lie. All of those things. Shane never really struggled with any of that. He was a good kid. Always had been.

"Shane, but what if the princess didn't want to leave her tower?" He had just finished reading another chapter of the book to a bunch of the children. "Hm, I don't know, why wouldn't she?"

"Maybe she wants to fight the dragon herself!" a young girl exclaimed. "Girls can't fight dragons!" a little boy replied. Shane chuckled a bit. It was still winter and cold, but it was a comparably nice day. The sun had shown her face for the past few hours, melting away the snow in the church's yard. Shane often came up here when he knew the children were finished with their schoolwork so that he could read to them. His little reading sessions were always well attended.

"I can fight a dragon!" The girl now picked up a stick, wagging it at the boy like a sword. The boy picked up a stick himself, and then they were swordfighting, cheered on by the surrounding children, who had now lost interest in Shane's reading. He chuckled to himself as he watched the children move around the garden, acting out the scenes he had just read to them.

"Careful, you'll get them to attempt fighting a real dragon next." Shane jolted when he suddenly heard that deep voice. The rough accent. He turned to glance at the now open door

at the side of the church, where the priest had stepped out into the yard.

“Oh, sorry, Father-“ It was weird to call a guy his age that word, but he was the priest after all. “I didn’t mean for them to mess up the garden-“

But the other man held up his hand. “No, stop.” His voice was rough, and Shane could already tell that he was very blunt. Shane wondered whether it was the language barrier or the other man's culture. “I don’t mind them playing here. Is nice. Gives some life to this... dead place.” Oh. That was new. The old priest would have thrown an absolute fit if he saw the children trample the grass and stumble over the snow-covered rose bushes.

Shane watched the children for a moment. He could feel the priest's eyes on him. “Call me Ilya.” Shane’s head snapped towards the other man. “Sorry?”

“Ilya. That’s my name. No need for Father. Is... strange. You are my age.”

Shane agreed. It was strange. But it was just as strange to be on a first-name basis with the priest. But now, the other man – Ilya, apparently – held out his hand for Shane to shake. So, he did. “Shane.” He figured if the priest introduced himself, Shane should too.

“Shane.” The name sounded weirdly nice coming out of Ilya’s mouth. “You can read. Well.” The statement was as blunt as everything was about him.

“Yeah, uhm, my father is the scribe, so-“

“Ah. Yes, I have met him. Very nice man.” Ilya nodded, his eyes drifting from Shane to where the children were currently hitting a tree stump with their sticks.

“You really don’t mind them playing here? The old priest would have already screamed at them.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow at that. “Scream at kids? For playing? No.”

Shane felt like that was a pretty sensible answer. They were just playing. Not harming anyone. Besides maybe a few rose bushes that would probably need some extra love in the spring.

“Your family owns the tavern, yes?”

Shane nodded. He would say he’s surprised that Ilya knew that, but on the other hand, as the priest, it was probably his job to know everyone in the town. Especially his mom and grandma, who went up to the church to pray every morning.

There was a moment of silence. Shane used it to glance at Ilya from the corner of his eye. He was in the usual priest attire, a simple black cassock. His hair was short but very curly, and blond. Shane had noticed it before, but never had the chance to look at the man this closely. He had high cheekbones and a few moles on his face. He looked strict, if Shane had only to guess from his resting face, but clearly that was not entirely the case. Shane suddenly wondered why his hair was so... normal. Usually, any priest he had seen had some weird,

half-shaved hair as a way to leave behind their ego and the material world symbolically and only live their life for God.

“Why is your hair like that?”, Shane suddenly asked and immediately cringed when he finished the sentence - way to be disrespectful to the bloody priest.

“Because I am not Catholic priest.”

Whoa, pause, what? But – he was the priest, here. In their very catholic village. Doing regular catholic service.

Shane’s confusion must have been plain on his face because Ilya continued: “I am orthodox. From Russia. Or Rus, as you call it here. It is Christian, but not like you do it. But here...” Ilya gestures at the church and the whole space around them. “I can be catholic. It is same God, after all.”

Shane frowned. He didn’t really know all that much about other religions or the bureaucracy around becoming a priest anywhere, but it still felt fishy to him. “And the elders, do they know that-“

“Yes. I have told them from the start. I am not catholic. But I can make Catholic service. Be Catholic priest here.”

“And that’s... like, allowed?”

Ilya considered it for a moment. “It is. The pope allows it. We have same... *how do you say...*” He fumbled for the word for a moment. “Ah, sacraments, I mean. Like, baptism and all of that. They are valid to Catholic church.”

Shane nodded. He had no clue if that was right. But he assumed a priest wouldn’t lie to him, right? “So, like... how are you a priest? I mean...” He really had a knack for disrespecting the church today, huh? “You are so young”, Shane quickly added to not sound like a total idiot.

“My father was a priest. It was... natural for me to become it too.” That was all Ilya said about it, and something told Shane he shouldn’t push for more answers than that. He had probably spoken more to Ilya in the past five minutes than he had spoken to the last priest in his whole life.

The sun was slowly setting in the distance, and Shane knew he should slowly start to make his way to the tavern, since most people were there around dinner time. “Well, I’ll... see you around, I guess, Fat- Ilya, I mean.”

Ilya simply gave him a nod. “Yes. Goodbye, Shane.”

The conversation left Shane feeling weird as he walked down the hill towards the tavern. Something about Ilya was off. He just didn’t fully know what, yet.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you prefer longer paragraphs like this or if I should add more spaces in between so it's easier to read :)

Chapter 2: Good luck, babe!

Chapter Notes

The number of religious words I had to translate for this chapter, because I didn't know them in English, was insane. But at least my Austrian catholic upbringing was good for something other than giving me trauma, I guess, lol

Also, I want to add that any mention of God in this fic is from Shane's specific perspective and not meant as a general statement! :)

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

That night, when Shane was serving the patrons in the tavern, he was secretly waiting to hear even the tiniest sliver of conversation revolving around the priest. Shane wasn't even sure why he suddenly felt so interested in knowing more about the man. The old priest was just... there. He never really cared to get to know him on a deeper level. Shane was very content to just visit him whenever he had a religious concern or for Sunday service and felt no need for any interaction with him outside a religious context.

But Ilya was different from the last priest. Very different. But Shane reasoned there were many explanations why he was so interested in learning more about him. For one, Shane had always been very curious about other people's stories. Listening to travellers tell him about his adventures as a child single-handedly had sparked Shane's interest in writing and reading stories himself. And the fact that Ilya also had come from another land, one that seemingly was very different to Shane's, intrigued him to no end.

He also figured that he obviously was more interested in talking to a guy his own age, who clearly did not care a lot about the usual respect rules surrounding the clergy, than that old, strict priest. He had felt almost a bit endeared when Ilya said he didn't mind the children playing in the garden, that it made the church feel livelier. Shane liked that way of thinking. He loved the village's many children, loved how curious and loud and playful they were. And to know that, after the whole spectacle with the former priest, Ilya didn't see a problem with them either, made Shane feel very warm inside.

Another thing Shane realised, while he was pouring the hundredth ale that night, was that he really enjoyed listening to Ilya. He had a very interesting accent and a very comforting voice. It was deep and a little rough, but also just... nice, for lack of a better word. It was just nice listening to him. And looking at him. Ilya had something ethereal about him. Angelic, even. Shane felt it suited him that he was a priest. He looked like God had sent him down from heaven himself. That thought also made Shane feel all warm inside.

Shane usually never really minded going to church. It was a chore, like any other, that he had done every week since he could remember. Sure, there were more interesting things to do

than listen to a priest read from the Bible and put God's blessing on you, but Shane didn't mind it if, in return, he got the prospect of going to heaven. It wasn't like he could just choose not to go, anyway. Well, he wouldn't want to stop going to church, either. He believed in God, and he thought that going to church brought him closer to the man in the sky. But if you didn't show up to church, without a good reason - like being on your deathbed - the village would go crazy. You would probably be shunned and excluded from any other communal activity forever. So, Shane definitely did not want to risk that.

When he went home that night, already past midnight, he struggled to fall asleep. Every time he closed his eyes, he had Ilya's face in mind. The way he looked so content to let the children mess up the rose bushes in the garden. How he was so blunt and did not try to hide his background. How he was just honest with him when Shane asked. Straight to the point.

Shane figured it was a sign from God, in a way. He definitely had been lacking with his prayers recently, especially when he got home late from the tavern. *God must be showing him the priest in his sleep so that he would go to church more often again!* Maybe he should also put some more thought into his nightly prayers. He should also go to confession again soon, given it was almost Christmas. Shane wondered if Ilya would do a special service for Christmas. Sure, Christmas service always was a little more special than regular Sunday service, but maybe Ilya would give it an extra kick. Did orthodox Christians even celebrate Christmas like Catholics they did? Shane wasn't sure. He'd have to find a book about orthodox Christianity the next time he's in the city with his father.

He found himself in an eerily good mood the following Sunday. Often, he had to drag himself out of bed, not particularly motivated to leave the warmth of his house to sit in the cold church for an hour. But today, he didn't particularly mind.

"Someone is eager to go to church", his mother had said during breakfast. Shane just shrugged. "I like the new priest, you know? I talked to him the other day, when I read to the kids behind the church. He was really nice."

His father smiled. "Isn't that great? Maybe he can motivate you to take your Bible readings more seriously again."

"Oh, maybe he even has time to read with you!" Shane's mother added. Shane just smiled a bit. He could imagine worse things than listening to Ilya's voice when he read him the Bible.

Shane decided then that, yeah, *God surely had sent Ilya to his village on purpose to draw Shane back to religion.* He would have to thank him for the motivation in his prayers tonight.

Shane was listening to Ilya's service more closely than he probably had ever listened to any service in his life before. It was strange. So different to what they had been used to from their former priest. Usually, the service was a whole lot of dry reading from the Bible, then the choir would sing the same few songs, and everyone would receive either wine or bread to partake of the body of Christ in communion. Then the service concluded with a few more Bible verses.

But Ilya – he performed, in a way. It felt like watching a play instead of going to church. Yes, he still read from the Bible, and there was still the usual communion and all that. But he also

did parts of the service without reading them from the Bible. Told some tales from his homeland and his own journeys. He spoke of meeting the pope for the first time and how it changed his life. It was strange.

It wasn't wildly different from the usual service. It was definitely not different enough to outrage the village. Because that would have been bad. Sure, some of the very old and conservative folk thought he did too much and should just stick to the Bible. But most of the town was enamoured with him. He wasn't exactly bubbly or warm or anything of the sort. But he had a very refreshing bluntness about him. Usually, priests or other clerical folk liked to almost speak in riddles, just like the Bible did. But Ilya was straight to the point. Very big on the "love thy neighbour" thing. Very big on telling the elderly people of the town that children are our future, and we should treat them with the same respect we expect from them. Very big on the fact that he did not want to accept any money from the regular working families when the aristocrats had more than enough to give.

At the end of the service, Shane felt as if he were in a trance. *He felt like the holy spirit had taken control of him.* Ilya was absolutely amazing. His service had been mesmerising. Even the children, who were usually bored out of their minds and tended to get restless towards the end of the service, were quiet and listened until the very end. And Shane could tell that the rest of the village felt similarly. Maybe Ilya was the best thing that could have happened to their town.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Fathe-" He'd never get used to this first-name thing. Shane cleared his throat. "-Uh, *Ilya*. I just wanted to say that your service was like, really great." Wow, why did his hands suddenly get so sweaty? He felt a little tremble in them. Ilya glanced up from where he was currently cleaning up the altar. He nodded. Shane realised he had yet to see the man smile.

"Did you like it?"

Shane loved it. "Yeah, it was very interesting. I can't remember the last time I was this excited about church." He smiled at Ilya and felt a bit embarrassed about it. But why? He just told the priest he loved his service. Nothing was embarrassing about that. But he still felt the heat rise in his cheeks when Ilya looked at him, the sun filtering through the colourful glass of the windows, which lit the room up in red and orange hues and reflected off Ilya's golden hair.

"I am happy to hear that." Ilya didn't smile, but Shane could hear the softness in his voice. Maybe that was the closest to a smile he would get from him. Shane wasn't sure if he ever saw their old priest smile. Or any priest, for that matter. Maybe they weren't allowed to smile.

"Do you, uh, need any help cleaning up here?" Shane didn't know why he asked that. The words came out without permission. But offering your help to a priest couldn't be that bad. God probably appreciated it. He was sure he must have had some stupid expression on his face because the side of Ilya's mouth twitched a little.

“Sure, you can carry Bible into sacristy.” Ilya nodded his head at the book still on the altar. Shane nodded too, immediately going to grab it.

“Ah,” Ilya said, a hand coming out to press against Shane’s chest to stop him from grabbing it. “You didn’t cross yourself.”

Oh, yeah. The thing every kid learns to do before touching anything on the altar when they become an altar boy. And Shane forgot about it. Now his face really got red. “Oh- oh yeah, I’m sorry, I totally-“ *Ilya’s hand was on his chest.* He should not feel this flustered about that fact.

“Is okay. Just do it now.” Ilya took a step back, and Shane felt like he could breathe again. He nodded and did the gesture – forehead, chest, left shoulder, right shoulder... or wait, was it right shoulder first? He was so embarrassed, he couldn’t even remember. But Ilya didn’t comment on it, so it was probably alright. Hopefully. He took another breath before reaching for the book again, and this time, Ilya didn’t interject. The priest gave him a nod before he led the way back into the sacristy.

“Just put it on that shelf”, Ilya commented as they reached the room in the back of the church. Shane did, and as he turned around, he watched as Ilya took off his chasuble. He still had his full cassock on underneath, so it was not like he was stripping naked right there, but Shane still felt like it was an inappropriate thing to watch a priest undress like that. He turned to look away, the heat rising in his cheeks again. He really had to get his embarrassment under control; he couldn’t keep being embarrassed about everything he did around Ilya. But the respect for the clergy that had been drilled into him since he was a little boy was still deep-seated inside him.

“Your mother talked to me earlier”, Ilya commented as he carefully folded up his chasuble to store it away properly. Shane raised an eyebrow. What did they talk about? Did she say something about him? Oh no, did she say something embarrassing?

“She asked me if I have time to do some... studying Bible with you.”

Oh. Okay. They had discussed that during breakfast this morning. That wasn’t that bad. Not embarrassing at all. Well, unless Ilya was really busy, which he probably was, like why should a priest have time for something stupid like that-

“Do you have time today, in afternoon?”

Shane’s eyes snapped up to meet Ilya’s. His face was neutral, as always. But he seemed sincere. Like he was actually free to have a Bible study session with Shane, and it wasn’t a bother for him at all. “Uh, yeah, I mean- I usually read to the kids on Sunday afternoons, but-“

“We can do after that, then?” Ilya seemed very set on the fact that he wanted to do this. Shane would have almost felt endeared if he hadn’t felt so unexplainably embarrassed about the whole situation.

“Yeah, after works well. I read to them in the church garden anyways-“

“*I know*”, Ilya commented while Shane was still talking.

“-so I can just... come in, after I’m done?”

“Yes”, Ilya said, dragging out the s-sound a little as he clapped his hands together. “Very well, I will see you then.” Without any more farewells or courtesies, he vanished down one hall of the church.

Shane stood there for a moment. He had to take a breath. None of this was weird. Or embarrassing. Just a priest being kind enough to take the time to read the Bible with Shane and, hopefully, teach him a thing or two. So why did that feel so awkward to Shane?

Shane felt antsy all afternoon. During lunch, he had just poked at his food, making his mother worry that he might be sick. But he was just really nervous about his Bible study later. What if he said something embarrassing? What if he did something equally as stupid as forgetting to cross himself before touching the altar?

That day, he barely remembered a word of the chapter he read to the children. It was something about the princess being obnoxious and feeling butterflies in her stomach whenever she saw the knight from her window. He really should have picked another book; this was boring as fuck.

He didn’t actually have time to dwell on his dislike for the fictional princess before his thoughts got interrupted by a, at this point, quite familiar voice. “All done?” He tried his best to keep his nerves down. “Yes”, he nodded as he got up from the bench he was sitting on.

“Stay”, Ilya then suddenly said. “It’s still nice out, no?” It was still nice out. It was mid-afternoon, the sun had yet to set, and despite the season, it was pretty warm out here, where the sun was hitting the side of the church where the bench was. Shane realised then that the sun had been out every day since Ilya arrived at the village, which was a very uncommon occurrence for their usually gloomy town. What a weird coincidence.

“Yeah, sure”, Shane nodded and then swallowed when Ilya sat down on the bench next to him, a Bible in hand. Okay, so they would do their Bible study out here. What about it? That was like so totally normal. *No need to get all weird about it, Shane.*

“Anything specific you want to talk about today?” *Yeah, maybe why I feel so fucking awkward around you.*

Shane shook his head. “Not really, no.”

“Alright.” Ilya then opened the Bible, as if he already knew which part he wanted to talk about: Romans 15. When Ilya started reading, Shane couldn’t help but be entranced by it. His accent wrapping around the words was just... something. Shane couldn’t even describe it. He leaned over, to also get a glimpse of the written words. Ilya noticed, and he scooted over on the bench until he was right next to Shane, placing the Bible on his lap slightly to the left so Shane could read too.

“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” That verse somehow stuck out to Shane, in a way.

“What does that mean, exactly?” He pointed at the seventh verse, re-reading it in his head.

“What do you think?” Ilya glanced at him, his head not as far away as Shane would have liked. His stupid cheeks reddened again.

“Well... I don’t know... I suppose it’s like... something about accepting each other, like Jesus did?”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. The Bible wants us to...” He looked out into the garden, and Shane assumed he was searching for the correct words. “To accept. Everyone. As they are. Like Jesus did. He accepted every person, no matter how... you know. How they look, poor, rich, old, young... what they like to do...”

Shane nodded. That made sense. He always liked the idea of Jesus, and God, accepting everyone the way they are. Why else would God have made them this way, if he didn’t accept them like that?

He suddenly felt Ilyas knees against his. Shane pulled back a little. Touching a priest was probably where one should draw the line, right? It had felt inappropriate enough to watch him take his chasuble off. He felt the priest’s eyes on him. He couldn’t bring himself to meet them at that moment.

“Do you want to keep reading?” Ilya then asked. Shane didn’t. He really didn’t. He wasn’t even sure if the words on the page would make any sense right now, when he was still feeling this flustered for some reason.

“Sure, yeah.” He wasn’t about to refuse a priest, though.

He felt Ilya’s eyes linger on him more than they did on the book. He knew the other man was listening closely. “You read well”, he commented at one point, and it made Shane feel stupidly warm inside. Not every day did someone with a formal education tell him he read well. So *that* was definitely why he felt so special about it.

“Maybe I should make you read more often for me. Helps my accent.” Shane’s brain came to a screeching halt. Did Ilya just – he wanted Shane to read to him, so he could better his accent? Shane felt so honoured about that, he was actually feeling a bit dizzy.

“Sure, yeah, why not?” Shane tried a smile, but he wasn’t sure if his face cooperated right now.

“We should do this, uh-“ Ilya made a hand gesture, like he was willing the words to fall into his brain “- weekly?”

“What, Bible study?”

“Yes. Every Sunday. Your mother will like it.” Ilya nodded at him like that was a totally normal suggestion. Hell, it was. And Shane’s mother surely would love to know he was

having weekly Bible study sessions with the priest. But if his body kept reacting this way, for absolutely no reason at all, Shane wasn't sure he would make it more than a week.

But again, Shane was not about to refuse a priest. "Yes, of course, if you want to."

Chapter End Notes

Shane: *absolutely in love*

Also Shane: huh weird must be the holy spirit

P.s: I need someone to comment on their every thought about every word in this fic, because I don't think I have ever put this much thought and care into anything I've written before and I yearn for detailed feedback (on the plot, not necessarily on my writing lol)

Chapter 3: Friends

Chapter Notes

I find it important to note that all the mentions of religion and praise of God in this chapter/the whole fic are simply crucial for Shane's character development and to understand the way he views the world, and I do not wish to indoctrinate any of you with Catholicism – I'm an atheist myself, fyi! Enjoy chapter 3 :)

“Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins.” They were currently on chapter 4 of the first book of Peter when Ilya read that verse out loud. It had been their second Bible study session, the following Sunday. Unfortunately, the weather had realised it was, in fact, not spring yet, and the night had brought about a foot of snow. So, instead of sitting in the sun outside of the church, like last week, Ilya had invited Shane inside his house for their session.

Despite Shane having lived his whole life in this village, he had never been inside the priest's designated chambers, which were directly attached to the church building. It was small and definitely humble, but it was enough for a single man living there. Plus, the limited space made it easier to heat, which Shane appreciated right now. He had been freezing during his merely 5-minute walk from his own house to the church.

Now they were sitting around Ilya's small wooden dining table, a mug of warm water with herbs in front of Shane, which Ilya had insisted on making.

“Love covers a multitude of sins?” Shane asked with a raised brow.

“Yes. Do you not understand?” Ilya looked at him. His question wasn't belittling, just a genuine wonder if Shane didn't get it.

“I suppose, I'm just not too sure what covers means, in this case.”

“Well...” Ilya started, looking down at the pages while he thought about an answer. He leaned back on the bench and against the wall behind him. “When people... do bad things, like sin... whatever sin... then... God wants us to... still love them, and forgive each other.”

Shane nodded. That made more sense than his own interpretation. “So, it doesn't mean love cancels out your sins?”

Ilya huffed something close to a laugh at that. Shane felt stupidly warm from the sound. Or maybe that was his hot herb brew. Definitely. “No, it does not. But... love should always be there, even if someone sins, you know? Because sins are... between a person and God. And we should not judge for God, you understand?”

“Unless it’s like... murder, right?” At that, Ilya actually huffed a proper laugh. And Shane was caught off guard by that. The priest had laughed. *Laughed*. Because of something Shane said.

“Yes, Shane, if someone does very bad sin, they need to also get punishment from king.”

Shane chuckled at that. “Just wanted to make sure.”

“Идиот”, Ilya mumbled, a slight grin still on his face.

“What in the world does that mean?” Shane already assumed it was probably a word from whatever language they spoke in Ilya’s homeland. And he wanted to hear Ilya speak more of it.

“Means you are... stupid. Idiot.”

“Hey!”, Shane exclaimed, with much less actual outrage than he tried to convey, and the grin on his face didn’t really help him to seem more serious.

Ilya returned his grin. “Ok, back to reading Bible, yes?”

Over the next few weeks, Shane felt like he was floating through everything. He had let God back into his life, and he felt rewarded. He was in such a good mood all the time, very disciplined with his nightly prayers, which he was now also doing in the morning, and every Sunday, he looked even more forward to service because of the Bible study sessions with Ilya. He was so overjoyed that God had brought Ilya into his life to set him back on the right path. It had worked so well already.

“You are very happy today”, Ilya had noted one day, about a month into their sessions. It was the middle of December by now, and with the Christmas festival approaching, Shane felt more connected to God than ever.

“I am always happy to learn about the Bible”, Shane had retorted. That got a smile from Ilya. He had achieved that a lot, recently. Smiles from the priest. He felt just a little special about it. Considering how he still didn’t smile during service, Shane wasn’t sure if anyone else ever really got the honour to see Ilya smile. Secretly, Shane kind of hoped they didn’t. He didn’t want to be selfish, but there was something very satisfying about the thought that only he brought out that side of Ilya. Or maybe he was just in over his head.

“Did you do your homework?” Ilya raised an eyebrow at him. Shane rolled his eyes. “Of course I did.” As of recent, Ilya had given Shane passages of the Bible to read at home and asked Shane to make notes that they could discuss during their sessions.

“Did you do yours, too?” Another smile from Ilya.

Shane had given him some homework in return. He had lent Ilya that book he always read to the children behind the church and asked him to read a chapter every week, to help Ilya learn the language. Even though he was pretty fluent already, Ilya still often messed up the grammar or confused words, not to mention his strong accent. The book was meant for

children, so the language was relatively easy. Shane felt like Ilya would benefit from reading it out loud to himself, just a little bit every week.

“I did, yes. I don’t like princess, though, she is annoying.” Ilya commented.

“Right?!”, Shane retorted with a little too much enthusiasm, but gosh, he also found that princess obnoxious. Always so stupidly heart-eyed about the stupid knight, always so giddy whenever she saw him again, always babbling about butterflies in her stomach. Shane thought it was ridiculous. It wasn’t even that special to feel like that about someone. He felt giddy, as if butterflies were in his stomach, whenever he saw Ilya. That didn’t mean he had to write an entire book about it. Like, it was normal to feel like that over a friend. Very normal.

“Are you excited over Christmastide?” Ilya asked as he prepared a hot mug of water for Shane, using fennel and chamomile, since he had learned Shane liked that the most.

“Yes, obviously.” Shane said as he watched Ilya crush up the dried chamomile with a mortar and pestle. “Are you going to do anything special for service on the 25th?”

“Would you like me to?”

Shane was a little taken aback by that question. He didn’t like that his opinion mattered here. “You are the priest”, he retorted.

“And you’re part of community”, Ilya replied. “So, what do you think community would like?”

“I don’t know what options there are.” Shane, for all his piety and knowledge of Catholicism, had no idea how much creative freedom a priest had when making his service. “I mean, you will do a three-part mass, right?”

“Obviously. It’s Christmas.” Obviously. Stupid question to ask, Shane figured.

“Well, that is already special.” Shane watched with a certain reverence as Ilya poured the ground herbs into the mug, topping it off with boiling water from the pot simmering on the fire. “I don’t think you should do anything differently”, Shane commented then.

“No?” Ilya glanced up to meet his eyes, and the low candlelight of the room cast long shadows on one side of Ilya’s face, while the other was illuminated in a golden hue. Shane swallowed. Why did he suddenly feel this flustered? He thought he had rid himself of the initial awkwardness around Ilya.

“No. Like, everyone already loves your service. Wouldn’t want to outrage the elders by messing with Christmas tradition.” There was a slight tremble in Shane’s voice. He prayed to God that Ilya wouldn’t notice it.

The priest nodded as he carried Shane’s mug over to the table. “You are right. Don’t want to make anyone angry on Christmas.”

Christmastide was Shane’s favourite part of the year, for obvious reasons. It was basically a two-week-long festival, where the whole village goes all out on celebrating, dancing,

feasting, you name it. Shane especially loved seeing all the decorations around the town, especially how his grandmother and mom always did up the tavern. Everything was always filled with candles, holly and mistletoe.

Shane had just gotten the order from his mom to hang up one of the mistletoe branches in the entryway of the tavern when a familiar voice almost knocked him off the ladder he was on.

“Do you have someone to kiss underneath that?” Shane was so startled, he had to grab onto the doorframe not to fall over. He glanced down from his ladder to see Ilya, looking infuriatingly casual and neutral as ever, standing there and glancing up at him.

“Well, considering I am not married, no.” Shane decided that was the smartest reply. There was no reason for his heart to beat as fast as it did. His brain conjured a very strange, silly image of him kissing Ilya. How very weird. *As if two men could ever kiss*. Shane shook his head as if to physically get rid of the thought.

“Oh, so you are really that devout, yeah? Not even a kiss before marriage?” He knew when Ilya was teasing him, by now. And it still didn’t change that his heart threatened to beat out of Shane’s chest whenever he heard that tone from the man.

“Of course not”, Shane replied. “Wouldn’t dream of it.” He really wouldn’t. He could count the number of times he found a girl pretty enough to kiss on one hand. Well, on no hand, actually. It hadn’t happened before.

“Very good, Shane.” He should not blush that badly over a simple statement like that. But he just couldn’t help it. Ilya might not have been a lot older than Shane was – he had figured out it was just a few months – but he was still a role model for Shane. So, it was only natural that Shane reacted this strongly to praise from the man. Because he was a role model. Yeah. That made sense.

Shane tried to keep his brain busy by finally hanging that mistletoe, but it was harder to concentrate now. “Try not falling from ladder”, Ilya commented, stepping closer to hold the bottom of said ladder to make it more secure. Shane felt warm again. That happened a lot around Ilya lately. Eventually, he managed to put it up, and he could finally descend the ladder again, before any further comment from Ilya threatened his safety once more.

“Ah, sir, good to see you!” Shane’s mother exclaimed as she just then carried a small barrel of ale towards the tavern. “Oh, please, let me help you”, Ilya immediately offered as he took it from Shane’s mother. She smiled at him, then launched into a long monologue about how happy she was that Ilya still held regular Bible study sessions with Shane, and how they helped him find his way back to God. Shane was embarrassed. He knew there was no reason to. Everything his mom said was true. But somehow, her saying that to Ilya was still flustering Shane.

From the corner of his eye, Shane saw Ilya glance at him, a mildly amused expression on his face. Shane’s cheeks were burning up by now.

She ended her speech by commenting something about Shane also joining the clergy. At that, Shane perked up a little. He had thought about it before himself. But he never felt it possible.

Usually, becoming a priest meant basically studying from a very young age, becoming fluent in Latin, working for a priest and getting approved by a bishop. All of that kind of felt impossible to Shane. But that was before he befriended their local priest.

Ilya considered her for a moment. “Yes, I think he would have bright future.” He met Shane’s eyes for a moment. “Maybe too late to become priest but... still possible to become sacristan or deacon, I think.” Shane’s mother beamed with pride at that. Getting into the clergy was probably the best thing Shane could wish for in his life. “Well, you better get that into his head, then! We could use a cleric in the family.”

Ilya gave her a friendly nod before he finally carried the ale inside. Shane kept standing in the doorway, his mind racing a bit. Sacristan or deacon. Devoting his life to God and spending his time around Ilya while he was at it. That kind of felt like the perfect outlook for his life. Especially the thought that then, he might not need to get married. He would just devote himself to God, take a vow for eternal celibacy or something, and never be bothered about finding a wife or having kids again.

“Did you actually mean it?” Shane asked on Sunday, as he watched Ilya make his brew of herbs, which had become some kind of ritual for them by now.

“What? Did I mean what?” Ilya glanced at him.

“What you said to my mother. About becoming a sacristan or a deacon.” He clarified.

“Yes, why not?” Ilya shrugged. “Sacristan better, I think. Easier. Only need bishop to approve, no education.”

“Seriously? Like – I would only need a bishop to agree, and then that’s it?” He felt like that was a little too easy.

But Ilya nodded. “Yes. Well, you would not really be part of clergy, but close enough. Could just... help me out in church and get money for doing it.”

Shane didn’t exactly care if he was part of the clergy or not. That felt like too much responsibility anyway. Just becoming a sacristan and helping Ilya out in the church, basically like a secretary or something, sounded way more up his alley.

“You can think about it. If you decide, I send a letter to bishop.”

Shane was in awe for a moment. “You would do that for me?” He couldn’t really believe it. Why would Ilya ever do that for him? He owed Shane nothing.

“Of course. We are friends, no?”

That was the first time that word had ever come up. Sure, secretly, Shane did consider Ilya his friend. At this point, maybe even his best friend. But Shane had felt like the fact that he was a priest, and therefore definitely above Shane, meant that friendship would never be realistic for them. “Yeah”, Shane said hoarsely, although his mind was swimming. Friends.

Ilya considered him a friend. The town's priest considered him a friend. Somehow, that was crazy to him.

The Christmas Mass was as beautiful as Shane had expected. The first one of the three, midnight Mass, was probably his favourite. Not at last because Ilya was fascinating to look at, only illuminated by candles and the moon shining through the church's windows.

Ilya took the traditional route, making the three services very similar to the old priest, which Shane found fitting. As much as he liked it when Ilya made his liturgies more interesting, he felt like Christmas (and probably Easter) was the one time when sticking to tradition was for the best. And Shane wasn't the only one who felt that way. Later that day, on the 25th, when many of the town's people came to the tavern to start the 12 days of Christmastide celebrations, all the talk was about how beautiful and amazing Mass was. Shane couldn't help but feel a little bit of pride. He didn't actually have anything to do with the service whatsoever, but hearing the other villagers gush over Ilya did fill him with happiness.

"One ale, please." Shane turned towards the counter when he heard the familiar voice and was met with a softly smiling Ilya. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't have stopped the grin breaking out on his face. "Oh, that's on the house, of course, Father", Shane's grandmother commented in passing as Shane handed the cup to Ilya. "I could never accept that, my lady." Shane had to suppress a little smile at Ilya's use of titles. It was still somewhat surreal to him that someone of his status, a priest, was this unbothered by the actual honorifics and usual respect systems that surrounded them. Of course, Shane's grandmother was enamoured by the fact that Ilya addressed her like that. She shook her head again. "If you give me any money for it, I will just give it to Shane. The tavern can not accept money from our priest."

Ilya met Shane's eyes for a moment before he nodded. "Is okay", he said, before still putting the coins on the counter. Shane stared at them for a moment. He could not be accepting money from the priest, could he? Not to mention, whatever Ilya had put there was way too much for a simple ale. "Oh, this is--"

"Take it." Shane looked up from the money to Ilya's face. The conviction in the man's expression told Shane not to argue with him about this. Shane swallowed. With a nod, he took the coins and slipped them into his pocket.

"Do you mind if he joins me for an ale?", Ilya now turned to ask Shane's grandmother again, who looked delighted about the fact that the priest wanted to share an ale with her grandson. The fact that Shane spent so much time with Ilya had become a prominent topic of conversation in their household. It wasn't common for someone from the peasantry or lower merchant class – those who usually held little wealth or status – to build such close ties with the clergy, and it certainly boosted his family's reputation in the village. Plus, everyone in his family could tell that it clearly helped Shane find his way back to God, which was the highest goal in everyone's life after all.

So, Shane poured himself some ale, albeit just half a cup, before he followed Ilya into the back of the tavern, to a small table with just two chairs, and a candle lighting up the space between them. They sat a little bit further away from the main happenings of the night, and

Shane suspected that was because Ilya didn't want basically every guest to come up and talk to him. Because obviously, if you saw the priest, you had to at least go say hello to him.

It was a bit strange, Shane thought to himself. Despite Ilya having said he considered Shane a friend, they had never really talked outside a religious context. Shane wondered if there were a lot of things in Ilya's life that happened outside of religion. He thought there probably weren't many, considering that he had devoted his life to God after all. "Did you like the Christmas mass?" Ilya looked at him over his ale. Shane nodded. "I liked it a lot. It was very nice." He was met with a smile. "Good."

He couldn't really understand why he found Ilya this fascinating. Not just as a priest or even as a person, but also simply to listen to and look at. Something about him was just so... unique. Not in the bad way, like when you call someone unique to subtly say they were ugly. Quite the opposite, actually. Ilya was probably the most handsome man he had ever seen. Though, handsome wasn't really the word Shane would use. Even though Ilya was very manly – or at least as far as Shane could tell, since he always wore that long-sleeved cassock – he thought Ilya was rather... pretty? He usually rolled his eyes whenever women were described as the most beautiful creatures on this earth, authors always going into weird specifics about their hair or their eyes or their beautiful red lips. Shane had read poetry before, and he had never been able wrap his head around the fact that someone would want to write that much about a woman. About anyone, really. He much preferred to describe the beauty of nature.

Whenever he read someone profess their undying love to another person like that, Shane always thought it was somehow a lie. Sure, he did believe in love and all, but *obviously*, nobody actually felt this strongly about women. Marriage wasn't exactly done because of love, and he couldn't quite fathom the fact that a man could really find his woman beautiful enough to write silly stories with weird rhymes and stupid comparisons or overdone hyperboles.

What Shane *did* understand was authors writing this way about nature. Describing flowers and rivers and everything God had put on this earth in all its glory. For him, looking at Ilya was kind of like gazing at a beautiful field of flowers. There was so much to look at, so much to see, and it just filled him with the urge to write about it. To write about how his eyes had the colour of the sky on a sunny day, or like the wings of a silver-studded Blue. How his curls looked like strands of gold that God had woven himself. How his moles looked like angels had kissed him. How his hands seemed like they had been made for hard labour, but he instead used them to spread the gospel to his people. There was so much Shane could write about him. Maybe he would, when he found the time. Maybe, when it was summertime again, he would sit in the field, south of the village, and look at the flowers and butterflies and the blue sky and find all the similarities between them and Ilya's face. Maybe Ilya would like to join him there. Maybe Shane would pick up a paintbrush again and attempt to paint him. He hadn't done that in years, never felt like he had the talent or a lot of motivation to draw. But he felt like Ilya might change that.

He really had to thank God in his prayers tonight for putting such a great friend and inspiration like Ilya in his life.

Chapter 4: Desires

Chapter Notes

Kind of developing the plot as I write, and I'm really obsessed with clueless Shane + incredibly amused by that fact Ilya

Slowly but surely, Winter had been giving way for spring to fall upon the land. The snow was melting away, leaving behind wet patches of grass and mud, and making room for the first early bloomers. Snowdrops and primroses were the first to appear, creating colourful little patches against the fresh green.

It had been three months now, since Christmastide, and Ilya had continued their Bible study sessions every Sunday. To Shane's delight, a lot of their sessions had started to become less about the Bible and God, although he still liked those parts as well, and more about Ilya telling him about his home. It felt strange, in a way, that Shane had a priest open up to him like that, about his past. Often, Shane felt like whenever someone entered the clergy, they left their past lives behind and never spoke of them again. But not Ilya. Ilya was different in that way, overall. Shane already knew about his lack of care for the standard respect rules governing the address of a priest and similar matters, but he also came to realise that Ilya did not really care about any of the usual rules set in place for priests.

He wasn't thinking he was better than the peasantry, just because of his occupation, but Shane already knew that much. He also didn't care one bit when Shane asked about his home, or his life before he became a priest, or even when Shane asked about other religions. Shane had learned early on in his life that the people around him didn't want him to question Catholicism or the church and especially not God himself. But Ilya was different. He almost seemed proud when Shane did not immediately comply with every verse he read and instead encouraged Shane's critical thinking. Whenever Shane had a question, he would answer it honestly, plain and simple. Whenever Shane had a question that might mildly stray away from the idea that God is perfect and the only right God is the catholic one – only mildly, because Shane was still afraid God might find his questioning a sin – Ilya took the time to talk to Shane about it. He either showed him verses in the Bible that could answer his questions or even told Shane that, yes, Catholicism sometimes did not really have an answer to every specific thing. Sometimes he would explain to Shane that the orthodox church had some varying views to the catholic one, and Shane would be mind blown that this was even an option. But he respected Ilya. So much. And if the man, who was a priest and a man of God himself, was saying these things, Shane didn't see a reason to feel bad about believing them too.

On one Sunday in late March, Shane had offered to help Ilya in the church garden. After all, Shane felt like it was kind of his fault that the children had trampled over some of the flowerbeds and the rose bushes. Shane's hair had gotten a little longer, as his mother felt it

was bad luck to cut it before Easter, so he often had to rake his hand through it to push it out of his face. The sun being out longer also meant his freckles had darkened again, since they were almost gone in the winter. Shane had noticed, in these moments, that Ilya looked at him often. He rarely ever had a readable expression on his face, but Shane assumed he might look at him the same way Shane looked at Ilya. With some sort of fascination. Although whenever he had these thoughts, he quickly pushed them away. He highly doubted a priest would look at him like he was a beautiful field of flowers in the sun. It was silly to think, really.

“Is this enough weeding for you, Father?” Shane grinned at Ilya as he had just finished removing the weeds surrounding the tulips, his clothes definitely needing a wash after this. Ilya gave him an eyeroll. Shane had somehow figured out that Ilya found it very annoying when Shane called him Father. He wasn’t lying when he said it’s strange, back when they first met. He could physically see Ilya cringe when Shane called him that. But he had yet to outwardly tell him to stop.

“Yes, and if you keep up your attitude, I will find more for you to weed.” Ilya had taken up the task of cutting the rose bushes and clearing away anything the children had destroyed beyond repair. In a few more weeks, the garden would be in full bloom and as beautiful as ever. They did some good work today.

Shane just gave him a grin. He loved riling Ilya up, as of late. They had known each other for almost half a year at this point, and Shane really felt himself getting comfortable around the other man. Unfortunately, he was not fully over the fact that Ilya was still a priest, and that technically meant he had to be given a lot of respect. No matter how many times the other showed Shane he did not care about that in the least, it was still something that had been drilled into Shane for basically two decades. It wasn’t that easy to let go of it.

“I will make soup now, yes?” Shane glanced up from where he was still kneeling on the ground. “Soup?”

“You like soup, no? To eat?” Ilya tilted his head at Shane a little.

“I mean- yeah, sure, I do, but why would you-“

“Great, so I make soup.” Ilya didn’t wait for any further answer from Shane before he turned to return to his house. Shane just stared after him. Did the fucking priest just offer to cook for him? That surely wasn’t right.

Shane took a moment to collect himself before he got up and wiped most of the dirt from his clothes. With another satisfied look at the work they had done, he followed Ilya back into his little hut. Even though it was the end of March, it was still not extremely warm out, so the fire Ilya was stirring the pot of soup over did a good job of warming Shane when he stepped inside. “Smells good, what is it?”

“Potato and peas”, Ilya replied simply. Well, that made sense. There were not many fresh vegetables at this time of year, while potatoes kept fresh in cold cellars and peas were usually dried for the colder months anyway. Shane hummed in acknowledgement as he took off his coat and hung it on the nail in the wall, before he sat down on the chest next to the wooden stove, which contained small pieces of firewood. He liked sitting there, watching Ilya make

their usual herbal brew, or, right now, watching Ilya cook. He liked watching Ilya do anything, really.

“Are you cold?” The man eyed Shane for a moment, as if to gauge his temperature. Shane shook his head. “No, it’s okay, the fire is warm.” “I will bring you a blanket.”

“No, Ilya, you really don’t have to-“, but Ilya was already going towards his bedroom, before emerging with a soft wool blanket for Shane, putting it around the man sitting by the fire. “Is a little cold now, I only use fire when I cook, do not want to waste good wood.” The explanation made sense to Shane, but the fact that Ilya cared so much about Shane’s well-being that he brought him a blanket made Shane feel warm for a different reason than from the warmth the wool gave him. “Thanks”, he simply mumbled, and Ilya gave him a slight nod. They ate the soup a little while later – it was delicious – before they did an hour of their usual Bible reading.

April came and went quickly; the village was in full swing now that spring was here, since everyone was active on the fields again, and the children filled the streets with laughter. The sun was out for a lot of the time, which made their usually gloomy town brighter. In fact, as bright as Shane was feeling inside. Ever since he had started to realise that Ilya truly wanted his friendship, Shane felt basically unbeatable. He had started to help Ilya out in the church as well, since the priest had recommended he started to do some sacristan duties here and there, before Ilya actually asked the bishop for official permission. So, Shane’s days now mostly consisted of helping Ilya prepare for service or otherwise being helpful in the church in the mornings. Then he spent most days at noon either helping his father or writing for himself for a little while. In the afternoons, he usually spent more time with Ilya, either for Bible study or just hanging out around the priest while he did whatever it was priests did. Most days, he ended up helping his mother in the tavern in the evening, with Ilya often also being there, staying late and just keeping Shane company, while also doing his duty of mingling with the town folk. Shane was busy, sure, but it finally felt like there was a new sense of purpose in his life.

At the start of May, it was finally warm enough for Shane to visit the river again. He liked swimming in it, or just sitting by a big rock, letting his feet touch the water, while he took in the nature around him and let himself be inspired for his writing. On a particularly warm day that month, Shane decided it was finally time for his first swim of the year. He had the afternoon off because Ilya had told him he would be busy with something important, so it was the perfect occasion to go. He packed a cloth blanket to dry himself afterwards, and then he made the 30-minute walk down to his favourite part of the river. There, the water was surrounded by willows, and the land gave way to form a natural c-like shape, where Shane loved to lie and watch the water flow around him.

On this day, though, as he was quietly approaching the water, he saw a figure. He couldn’t quite make it out at first, and just assumed some traveller was making camp at the spot. But the closer he got, the more clearly he saw the golden head of hair. His eyes trailed downward, and instead of the usual cassock, he saw pale skin. And more pale skin. Only pale skin.

Oh. That was Ilya. Bathing in the river. Bare.

Lord, forgive me for what my eyes have just seen.

Shane wanted to scramble. To turn around and sprint off as fast as he could and then pretend he had never seen his priest naked in the river. But his feet wouldn't move. He couldn't do anything but stare. Ilya's skin was light, almost white, as the afternoon sun reflected off of it. His back was littered with moles, even more so than his face. He looked so at peace, not bothering about anything or hiding away, as he was washing himself. He clearly did not expect anyone to show up here. Of course not, the spot was at least 30 minutes away from the village, and it wasn't a well-travelled path. Shane thought he looked ethereal in this moment. With the sun hitting him through the leaves of the surrounding willow, making him look like an angel that decided to come to earth to take a little swim in the blue water. Ilya then turned, still unaware of Shane hiding in the distance, but now facing in his direction. Shane swallowed. He willed his eyes to look away, to not spy on the priest while he was naked and unsuspecting, but he couldn't.

Ilya was breathtaking. His body alone looked as if it had been carved from marble. He had muscles on him that Shane had only ever seen on knights before. He wasn't even sure how one could achieve that without working a manual labour job or being a soldier. There was some hair on his chest, darker than the one on his head, but still reflecting golden in the sun. On his stomach, below his belly button, there was a trail of hair leading down to – Okay, Shane should really stop looking at him. It was more than inappropriate to see a priest naked at all, let alone inspecting his body so closely. But Shane was just so fascinated. Without his permission, his eyes swept further down, now on Ilya's cock that was surrounded by a thick patch of hair. Shane had never exactly studied himself or any other man he had gotten a glimpse of naked before, but Ilya was definitely bigger than Shane. Not that he ever thought about that, really, but he had heard some of the other guys around his age proudly tell their peers how big their dicks were. Shane never really got behind that. He couldn't care less about the size of something he merely used to piss.

As he kept gazing at Ilya, he suddenly felt like his pants had gotten weirdly uncomfortable. Like they were suddenly too tight. He glanced down at himself and felt like his heart was about to jump out of his chest when he noticed the bulge on him. What on earth was that? He stared down at himself for a moment, in shock. Then, he decided he would try to push it down, maybe that would help. He startled even more when his own action made him let out an undignified, weird sound. Like a groan, but not really. Why had that felt *so* good? He just stared at himself for another moment, horrified. He tried it again. Pressing against his own dick a little firmer. Another groan. Or whatever that sound was. He had no idea what he was doing, but it felt wrong. Like, he shouldn't do something that made him react like that. He glanced up, realising he was still very inappropriately watching the naked priest, and exhaled when he hadn't been spotted yet.

Okay, he really needed to leave right now. He held his blanket in front of him the whole way until he was back at home, in the safety of his room. Nobody was supposed to see that, right? To his relief – yet also the slightest bit of frustration over having no idea why this just

happened – his dick was back to normal and soft again when he pulled down his pants in the privacy of his chambers. He inspected himself a little, then. It felt wrong. Like he was doing something forbidden. But the Bible had never said anything about looking at your own body, had it?

But Shane was clueless. Clueless about what had just happened or why it had happened. He wasn't even thinking about the fact that he had seen Ilya, bathing naked in the river, anymore. Just worried that something was very wrong with him. There had to be, right?

There was only one thing he could think of doing right now – he needed to find a medical book, right? Something that talked about male anatomy, and maybe there he would find an answer. Yes, that's what he would do.

So, he put his pants back on and made his way into his father's library. Somewhere, the man had to have a medical book. He searched through the many different genres, most of them either political or religious, before he found a section where his father kept just a couple of medical books. *A Physick Book Concerning the Nature of Man*. Jackpot.

Shane grabbed the book and locked himself in his chambers with it. Okay, this was it. He would find out what was wrong with him. He flipped through the pages. Muscles, bones, nerves... no, he didn't want to know how his stomach worked... Genitalia? Was that what Shane was looking for? He opened the book to the according page. A drawing of the male anatomy immediately sprung in his face. Okay, yeah, that seems fitting. Let's see... ah! There...

“At certain times, whether by the sight of a woman, by remembrance, or by no evident cause at all, there arises in the body a stirring of the vital spirits. These spirits, warmed in the heart and refined in the blood, are drawn downward by natural inclination to the secret parts. With them flows blood made subtle by heat. When this blood is gathered in those vessels appointed for the purpose, the member is made firm and lifted, not by will alone, nor always by reason, but by the working of nature herself.

This firmness is called erection. It is not a sickness, nor a sign of excess by itself, but a preparation, as the plough is readied before the sowing of seed. Nature, being prudent, makes the member stiff so that the seed may be placed rightly in the woman, where it may take root. Thus, what seems sudden or shameful to the ignorant is in truth a motion directed toward generation.”

Shane frowned as he read it. So, was that what happened to him? That didn't make any sense. He hadn't looked at a woman or anything of the sort. He read through the text again, trying to make sense of it. He knew the basics about procreation, that it took a male and a female, and a male would need to put his penis in a female's vagina. He was aware of that much; he had read some medical books before. What he was not aware of was the fact that apparently the... *member* had to be firm in the process? What a weird thing.

Well, at least he now knew there wasn't anything wrong with him. But he still had no idea why it happened in the first place. The book did mention that it could happen for no reason at all, but Shane didn't like those odds. It had never happened to him before this. And there was still no explanation why it had felt so... good.

Shane felt a bit distracted for the rest of the day. It didn't make any sense to him. There had not even been any woman nearby, and he definitely had never looked at a woman with lust. Not even necessarily because of God or because it was a sin – he was well aware that a lot of people didn't see it that strictly. There were bathhouses and similar facilities in the nearby city, advertising various services that had nothing to do with procreation. But because he had just never wanted it.

When he lay in his bed that night, he couldn't sleep. His mind was still spinning, trying to think of a good reason why this had happened to him. It truly made no sense. But he was not content to chalk it up to chance. What if it happened at random while he was in church or another public place? How humiliating would that be? No, he needed to find the reason and make sure to eliminate it.

Shane took a breath. He really needed to sleep; it was already past midnight. Okay, think about something else... like... Ilya. Yes. Think about Ilya. Think about Ilya's bright eyes and his golden hair and the nice herb brew he always made for Shane. Think about how warm Ilya made him feel. Think about how soft and pale his skin had looked today, how his body had looked like literal marble. Think about how there was a little trail of hair, down to Ilya's-

Oh, God. Shane startled when he suddenly felt his own dick firm up again. What was happening to him?! He was literally in bed, eyes closed, not even thinking about a woman, just thinking about Ilya.

Wait.

Could he-? No, right? That was impossible. The book clearly talked about erection happening when one was looking at or remembering a woman. Ilya was a man. So, there was no possible way that when Shane was thinking about his face or his... strong body... or his... *dick*... Shane shook his head. No, it could not be because of that. How idiotic was it to think that? Obviously, marriage was between man and woman, and so was procreation. Two men could not procreate together, obviously. So, there was no way his erection was caused by any thoughts of Ilya.

But – well, it was still there. He felt it. Felt his dick strain against his underclothes. He shifted a little, trying to lessen the pressure and let out a groan in the process. Fuck. That felt good. Way too good. Shane was bewildered. What was he supposed to do with this now? He couldn't possibly sleep like this. But how did he make it leave? He moved again and huffed out a breath at the friction. Okay, maybe he could just... try this? With a little bit of doubt lingering in his mind, he took a shaky hand and let it travel down his body. He had never even thought about doing this before. But his mind felt cloudy, and he couldn't really stop himself. He put his hand over the stiffness in his pants. He wasn't sure what to do now. Press it? He tried it. It felt okay, but not as good as when it had brushed the cloth of his pants. So maybe he could just – *oh yeah*. Fuck. Shane started moving his hand over his underwear, relishing in the friction it created. It felt so damn intense. And so good. He tried to keep his mouth shut, not wanting to wake his parents with any of the noises he was making. It just felt too good. Suddenly, there was a tickling sensation that he felt down to his toes, and then his hips arched off the bed while he let out a cry. Shane was baffled when a wet spot suddenly formed in his underpants.

What-? Did he just... pee himself? No, that can't be, it felt way too good for that. He glanced down at himself, but he wasn't too sure what to do. The erection was swelling down now, though, and he didn't feel that burning ache anymore. That was – good, right? He did the correct thing then, didn't he? Suddenly, he felt an overwhelming sleepiness. Maybe it could wait until tomorrow to worry about this. He closed his eyes and was asleep within seconds.

The next morning, Shane felt in deep thought. None of this made sense to him. He didn't know why he had felt like that, what caused it, and why whatever he did to himself last night had felt so good. During his morning tasks, the voice in his head telling him he had committed a sin grew louder and louder. What if he did? But that couldn't be, right? How could doing something that felt so good be a sin?

"You are quiet today", Ilya commented when Shane was helping him prepare for service that morning. "Hm?" Shane asked as he glanced over, not having listened to a word Ilya said. The priest gave him a confused look. "Are you sick, or something?"

"No", Shane just mumbled quietly. "Just... thinking." He regretted admitting to that as soon as Ilya spoke again.

"About what?"

Shane was in a bit of a moral dilemma now. He knew Ilya was a priest, and technically, he should be totally honest with him. On the other hand, he had watched this man yesterday, while he was naked, and he wasn't sure he could admit that. Shane took a breath. "I'm not- I don't know if I can... tell you."

Now that got Ilya to stop whatever he was doing and look at Shane. Really look at him. The Shane Ilya had gotten to know over the past 6 months was always honest, always ready to ask Ilya questions, and never really refused to talk about anything. So, if he didn't want to talk about this, especially not to Ilya, something must be really wrong.

“Why not?”

“I don’t know if... I’m...” Shane looked away. “I think I sinned?”

Ilya frowned at that. He could not imagine a person less likely to sin than Shane. Especially since he had been studying the bible together with Shane for months, and Shane was quite aware of what was a sin. So, for him to be unsure about whether he even committed one was very strange.

“Come. I make herbal brew, and you tell me.”

So, Shane found himself sitting by Ilya’s dining table and trying to find the words to tell a priest that he touched his own erection last night. His face was burning up, probably beet red. Ilya just sat across from him, calm and quiet, waiting until Shane started to talk.

“So, like... yesterday I think I had...” Shane swallowed, “...I think I had an... erection?” Shane mumbled the word. Ilya raised an eyebrow. “And- and I mean, I looked it up, in one of father’s books, and I just- I did not know-“

“An erection.” Ilya echoed. “Your penis was hard?”

Gosh, Shane really despised Ilya’s bluntness right now. He just nodded, too embarrassed to even meet the priest’s eyes.

“Did you look at a woman?”

“No!” Shane exclaimed, a bit too loudly. “No, it just- happened. Randomly.”

Ilya nodded. Honestly, he believed Shane. He didn’t think Shane had ever even considered the possibility of looking at a woman with lust.

“Okay. So, you had erection. And?”

Shane frowned. The nerve of this man. “I... touched it?”

Now, Ilya seemed really surprised. Both eyebrows raised. “Really?”

Shane immediately flushed harder. That was bad, right? Ilya was probably going to tell him how that was a sin and that he was never allowed to do that again.

“Okay. Well, is normal, no?”

What? Shane glanced up to finally meet Ilya’s eyes. “Normal?”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. Natural body function.”

Shane was baffled. He knew Ilya probably had received some education in the sciences when he became a priest, but he wasn’t sure how far his knowledge went. “And touching it? Is- is that-?”

“Also normal.”

Shane was baffled. So, was all of this really normal? Now he really needed to know. “And- what did- I mean... at the end, it felt...” This was humiliating. “It felt really good, and then it was... wet?”

Ilya nodded again at that, as if he was not surprised by Shane's description. “That is called the spilling of seed.” He sounded very neutral when he explained it to Shane. “Which is used to make... baby.”

Oh. Yeah, Shane had read about that. A man's seed would enter the woman and somehow create new life with the help of God. Shane just wasn't aware his seed could leave him without it being in a woman. “But it- I mean, I was... alone, and not...”

“It can happen alone, too. Not just for procreation.”

“And is that – allowed?” That was really the question burning on Shane's tongue.

Ilya considered it for a moment. He shrugged slightly, his hands folding on the table. “There is... not a clear answer... many different opinions, in Bible and church. Some people think that... any secretion of seed without creating new life is bad and... counts as lust. Other clerics, like me think that... it is okay to do. Normal. Natural. As long as it does not become... addiction, you know?”

Shane nodded. So, Ilya thought this was okay? That was a huge relief, actually. For a moment, then, Shane wondered if Ilya's opinion was more important to him than God's. He rid himself of that thought quickly. Obviously, God's opinion was the only one he really needed to listen to.

“And... well, I still don't really know why it happened.” Shane then admitted. He really wanted to get to the bottom of this.

“Are you sure you did not look at a woman?” Shane could tell the tone Ilya used when asking was more teasing than sincere. After all, even though he was a priest, at the end of the day, he was still a 20-year-old guy.

“I did not!” Shane replied, feeling almost offended by the suggestion. As if he would ever look at a *woman* like that.

Ilya smirked a bit at it, although he turned his face away to hide it from Shane. “You know, it is possible to feel like this without looking at a woman.”

Shane perked up at that comment. That sounded more like the root of his problem. “Oh? Yeah? Like what?”

“Well... there are many things that could make you feel... aroused.”

Aroused. Was that the word for how Shane felt? “Many things? Which things?”

Chapter 5: Along the river

Chapter Summary

Some Ilya lore for you

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya looked at him for a long moment, and Shane could tell he was suppressing a smirk. Shane didn't particularly like that reaction. He just wanted to know what the hell was wrong with him. "Things like... well... whatever your mind finds... nice. Very nice."

So, what, *very nice* was enough for the spirit to firm up his member? What did that even mean? "Very nice?"

Ilya couldn't help his laugh now. "Yes, Shane, very nice. I cannot tell you what "very nice" means. It is different for everyone."

Shane somehow couldn't help but feel like Ilya was mocking him somehow. "So, what if it just – happens randomly. One day. When I'm out in public."

Ilya now laughed again. This couldn't possibly be this funny, could it? "Trust me, it will not."

Well. He did trust Ilya. How could he not? He was the priest and probably Shane's best friend. And if he said that, then it must be the truth, right? Or, at least what Ilya believed to be the truth. Shane just nodded in agreement then. He hoped Ilya was correct.

It had been a week since Shane had experienced that peculiar sensation for the first time. And every night since then, it had happened again. And every night, he fought himself on doing something about it. Ilya's words were still in his head. It was fine, unless it became an addiction. When was something considered an addiction? Was every day for a week an addiction already? Shane wasn't sure, but he also did not really want to find out. But the ache also didn't lessen, not at all. And by now, Shane had realised a very strong correlation with his problem.

It would always occur late at night, when he was in bed, thinking. Thinking about Ilya, specifically. Thinking about how he saw the man in the river, naked and glorious. By now, and with the help of that initial conversation with the priest, Shane had identified that Ilya was something that aroused him. Especially seeing Ilya naked. And he had absolutely no idea what to do with that. Not in the least. He had never even imagined it possible for a man to become... *aroused*, by another man. Why would it be? Marriage and procreation were

between man and woman. Why would God make it possible for him to feel this way about another man, then? Was there something wrong with his mind? Had demons taken possession over him? Whatever it was, Shane had the feeling that it wasn't right. If it was, why had he never heard about this before?

Over the following days, Shane spent hours looking through any book he could find in his father's library for any kind of answer. Most of them weren't exactly easy to understand or interpret. None were quite as straightforward as Shane would have liked. He always hated how the Bible would speak in riddles, leaving many things up for interpretation. If this really was God's will, why didn't he write it in a way anyone could understand? What about the people who could not read at all and had to depend on a priest's interpretation of it? Shane remembered many conversations he had with Ilya, in which Ilya agreed that the Bible often didn't provide clear answers, and that scholars didn't always agree on interpretations.

It was probably the first time in his life when Shane felt very frustrated with God. He had spent his whole life trying to do what God wanted, what the Bible told him to do, to avoid what was considered a sin. And for what? For a priest to possibly misinterpret it, and then in the end, Shane would still end up in hell? It felt ridiculous. He was upset. And he wasn't exactly the best at hiding that.

He knew his parents had noticed his bad moods at breakfast and dinner, though they had not asked about them yet. He was a grown man, and he could handle his own issues. His family knew that and thankfully, at least for now, respected it.

Ilya, on the other hand? Well, he was a whole different issue. For one, he was an issue because Shane still regularly became aroused thinking about the other man. And that clearly was a problem. The other thing was that Ilya simply could not mind his business when it came to Shane. He had noticed Shane's sinister mood brewing for the past few days. Shane knew he noticed. He had been giving him weird looks the whole time. Like he was trying to read Shane's mind.

On day three of Shane's mood being absolutely sour, Ilya didn't want to beat around the bush anymore. When they were sitting in Ilya's main room, now drinking cold and sweetened herbal brew Ilya had prepared the night before, he finally asked. "What is up with you lately? You seem... upset."

What shocked both Ilya and Shane himself was Shane's reaction to that seemingly very calm question. Shane suddenly leapt up from his chair, almost knocking it over in the process. "I don't have to tell you anything!"

Ilya's eyes went so wide that he felt them almost falling out of his face. What the fuck was that reaction? From sweet, calm, always friendly Shane? Somehow, Ilya was a little impressed. He knew Shane usually trusted him with just about anything, told whatever Ilya wanted to know, primarily because of Shane's deeply rooted respect for Ilya – or rather the fact that Ilya was a priest. He never really cared for that kind of respect. Sure, he did appreciate it, but he wondered if there would ever be a time when Shane had enough of it. And apparently, they had reached it today.

"Shane-" Ilya stood up too now, trying to salvage whatever had just gone down.

“Don’t-“ Shane nearly spit while he took a few steps backwards. “This is all your goddamn fault.” Ooh, Shane using God’s name in vain? Ilya hadn’t heard that before.

But he was also confused as fuck. He didn’t do anything, had he? Well, not that he could remember, anyway. It wasn’t like Ilya was doing much at all these days, besides the usual priest stuff. Which consisted of skimming the Bible for readings during service, preparing other items for the service, making house visits when someone was sick, performing baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and receiving and sending letters to the bishop. Lots of fun, exciting stuff.

It wasn’t like he minded doing all of this. Could he imagine a more exciting life, maybe as a soldier or a knight, or perhaps just a simple life as a merchant in a big city? Sure. But being here was still better than the shitshow that had gone down in Russia. It wasn’t like he had ever wanted to become a priest. But his father had been one, so was there really ever a choice? His father’s decision had been final from the very day Ilya was born, and there wasn’t a lot he could do about it.

The rebellious phase he had in his early teen years didn’t really help to soothe over his family’s opinion of him. Getting caught with the neighbour’s boy in the back of the shed definitely didn’t. It *did* get him the beating of a lifetime, though. He was still kind of surprised he came out of that one alive.

Well, he didn’t stay with his family for long after that. At 16, he was sent away to serve a priest, which took about a week’s worth of horseback travel to even reach in the first place. He had been nervous to arrive at the monastery at first. Obviously, he knew how opinionated the clergy were. And he was also quite sure his father had told this priest about Ilya’s escapades with other boys. Honestly, Ilya was expecting to die in that monastery. Not because he thought he would stay there until the end of his life, but because he had expected to be killed for his homosexuality relatively quickly.

But, as he had learned, the priest he had started to assist was in fact very much of the belief that God loved every one of his children equally. And we, as humans, should not judge the decisions other people have made, as long as they didn’t hurt anyone. Yeah, Ilya took a very long time to accept that view of the world. And after all, just because this one priest lived with the idea that everyone was equal, it didn’t mean that other people did, too. Let alone the people in charge of the laws. Homosexuality was considered an illness and a crime, as bad as adultery, which usually would result in the death penalty. Ilya didn’t exactly like that outlook for his life. He would have preferred to die at his father’s hands rather than at the hands of some executioner.

After he had finished his training and was officially a priest, he knew he did not want to stay in Russia. He wasn’t sure where else he wanted to go, but he surely wouldn’t return to his family. He also did not want to spend the rest of his life as a monk.

During his time in the monastery, he met a man who said he was from Europe, west of the lands they were in. Ilya had spent the next two years, until he was twenty, learning the man’s language and listening to tales about his home. The summers were supposed to be warm, and the winters comparatively mild to those in Russia. Ilya thought that sounded quite nice. Maybe that should be his next destination.

After not much thought or preparation, Ilya finally left the brotherhood. He set out west with no real destination in mind. He saw it as a kind of pilgrimage. During his travels, he had met many different people and heard many different stories. He had crossed small, conservative villages and big, open cities. In one or more of those big cities, he had spent one or the other night with whatever pretty fella he had found in a tavern, late at night.

If Ilya was honest with himself, he wasn't sure if he believed in God. His education had taught him nothing else, but his life had shown him that he couldn't always trust in the fact that God would save you. He couldn't count the number of times, how many prayers or how many tears he had wasted on asking God to take this burden off of him. How hard he had tried to suppress his urges and desires. How badly he wanted to at least lust over women, instead of men. But it had been of no use. At the end, all he ever wanted was to live a quiet life together with a man he could call his lover. He was aware that it was a ridiculous wish, one that would never come true.

He hadn't really expected the elders of the village to take him in when he finally arrived here. Why would they? He was merely a single man and probably of no use to them. But to Ilya's surprise, the town had been in desperate need of a priest. Ilya had been brought up orthodox, and told them as much. After a bit of negotiation and clearing with the town scribe, if an orthodox priest could also take on Catholic duties, who then sent a letter to a bishop to confirm that, they had decided that Ilya was probably the best they got. So, he had gotten settled in the small hut next to the town's church. It wasn't big, but Ilya wasn't bothered by it. It wasn't like he had many possessions. Not because he was a humble priest who had left his material life behind, but because he had never worked anywhere other than the monastery and therefore hadn't made much money in his life yet.

When he first crossed paths with Shane, he was immediately struck. The other man had dark hair and dark eyes, and freckles dusting his rosy cheeks. He was breathtaking. Beautiful. So many words Ilya wanted to say, but he hardly even knew them in their language. It wasn't exactly a coincidence when he approached Shane after he had read to the children in the church's garden. He had watched from inside the church, listened to the dramatic way Shane had portrayed the story to the children. He was enamoured. Shane was absolutely precious. There was no other word for it.

He hadn't expected to fall for Shane as fast or as hard as he did. Obviously, he knew this would never be possible. Loving Shane openly, the way he wanted to. Shane was deeply religious, and Ilya doubted he even really knew what sex was. In the time he had gotten to know Shane, he realised that Shane probably had an even more religious upbringing than Ilya had. He had not been bad for a day in his life, and it was kind of adorable to Ilya. Shane was just so innocent. The day Shane came to him to confess that he had touched his own erection, Ilya had to try so hard not to pin him down then and there. He tried his very hardest to explain what had happened to him in easy terms, but he could tell Shane wasn't really getting it.

Ilya wouldn't know what he would do if Shane asked him if homosexuality was bad. He knew what the bible said about it. He knew what most people thought about it. It wasn't exactly a secret, unless you were as clueless as Shane was.

In all honesty, Ilya couldn't give less of a shit what the Bible said. At this point, Ilya had devoted his whole life to God and sharing the gospel. If that wasn't enough to get into heaven, while also wanting to love a man like a wife at the same time, Ilya wasn't even sure he wanted to go there. No human was perfect. Not even a priest. Hell, not even the pope, probably. If God really expected flawlessness from humankind, maybe he should have made them perfect.

Right now, though, Ilya was still facing the problem that Shane seemed very angry with him, for no apparent reason. "What is my fault?", he finally replied.

Shane just scoffed, making an elaborate hand gesture, as if that answered anything. Before Ilya could react, Shane had stormed out the door. Well. That wasn't good. Ilya didn't even have the slightest clue what this could be about. The only mildly controversial discussion they had lately was about Shane asking if masturbating was a sin. Ilya had answered that in a way he thought was best for Shane. Yeah, many scholars believed it was. But it was also a very natural urge that couldn't really be ignored forever. Ilya would know. It wasn't healthy to do so. So, telling Shane it was fine to do - because Ilya knew Shane wouldn't be able to refuse himself anyway - was better than making Shane think he was sinning anytime he touched himself.

Ilya stared at the closed door for a few moments. Shane probably did not want to talk to him right now, right? Maybe it was best to let him cool off and wait for him to come back on his own. Yeah. Ilya would do that.

He only became mildly concerned when it was the second day in a row Shane hadn't shown up in the morning to help Ilya in the sacristy. One day, Ilya kind of understood, because Shane seemed very mad, but two? That was very strange. And made Ilya worry. A lot more than he wanted to admit.

When it reached past noon, and he still hadn't gotten a glimpse of Shane all day, he decided to have a late lunch at the tavern. Maybe Shane was working there. Or maybe his grandmother knew where he was. Of course, Ilya couldn't really go through town without almost every second person stopping him for a chat. As much as he appreciated the town's people welcoming him into the community like this, he really did not have any interest in hearing the millionth story about some relative from a different city who was haunted by demons and needed someone to pray for them. But he just nodded and gave a polite answer. Eventually, he reached the front door of the tavern. He pushed inside and was immediately greeted by the face of Shane's mother. She always smiled nicely at him. Ilya liked her. She was a lovely lady. And definitely where Shane got his good looks from. Anyways.

"Ah, Ilya", she had said as he walked in. Ilya liked it whenever people actually listened to his wish of being called by his first name instead of something stupid like "Father". He was twenty years old, for fucks sake. No need to refer to him like that.

"Good afternoon", he simply said. "I was wondering if you still had some lunch for me?"
And mostly where the fuck Shane is. Yuna smiled at him. "Of course we do, for you, always.

Come, sit.” He followed her to a table by the front of the room. Okay, now or never. “I haven’t seen Shane since Monday”, Ilya commented as he sat down. “Is he sick?”

Yuna frowned a little at that and sighed. “I honestly don’t know what has gotten into him. He hasn’t talked to me in days, really.” Okay, now that was definitely very wrong. Shane loved his family. Ilya knew he did. They loved him, too. So, for Shane to stop talking to his own family, it had to be very bad. “I thought he might still be coming to you, but...” Ilya could hear the worry in her voice, see it on her face. It did nothing to soothe his own concern. “Is he at home, or?” She shook her head. “No, he went toward the river earlier this morning. He didn’t answer me when I asked where he was going.”

Ilya frowned even more at her words. The river. What would Shane do at the river?

Well, Ilya was apparently going for a walk to the river this afternoon.

Chapter End Notes

Would you guys prefer this fic to have a more realistic ending or a cutesy, lovey-dovey fairy-tale ending? Let me know :)

Chapter 6: Это сразу ясно

Chapter Notes

Halfway through this chapter, the spirit of sadness and despair overcame me. This fandom does not know happiness.

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

It wasn't like he wanted to snap like that at Ilya. Not at all. He knew the man wasn't actually at fault for how Shane felt. Well, but he kind of was. With his stupid golden hair and those icy blue eyes and the infuriatingly calm way he always answered every idiotic question Shane had.

Shane had realised over the past few days that he was very possibly in love with Ilya. Which felt very silly to even say out loud. They were both men. Shane didn't think two men could fall in love. But clearly, here he was, feeling the closest thing to the love he read about in books he had ever felt, for Ilya. It was absurd, really. If he hadn't felt this way himself, he probably doubted it was even real. That's how he had always felt about loving women. It was unimaginable to Shane. To feel something like that for a woman. To enjoy spending all of your time with them. To want to kiss them. To want to do things with them that God surely would disapprove of. To imagine spending the rest of your life with them.

But he now felt all of those things. For Ilya. And he couldn't explain that to himself.

He decided to make use of the time he usually spent helping Ilya or his parents by instead visiting his favourite spot, down by the river, since he hadn't actually been able to stay there the last time he went. He took a book with him, a vial of ink and his feather. He wasn't really sure what his goal was, but maybe this would help him clear his head. Maybe he could think about something other than his stupid feelings for once.

Shane had done a lot of thinking in the past days. Too much thinking, really. He did equally as much praying. Praying to God to tell him if he was still on the right path. To give him a sign that whatever he was going through was okay. That he didn't need to feel like he was burning from the inside out whenever he was considering the possibility that he felt something like love for Ilya. But it was in vain. God either didn't listen to his prayers or didn't care to answer them. He wasn't sure what was worse.

He had spent his whole life following every one of God's teachings to the best of his abilities. He never committed even the most minor sin, not even a white lie. He had gone to church literally every single Sunday of his life. Never missed a single holiday. Never missed confession. And that's his reward? That God didn't even respond to his prayers during the most difficult moral question of his life? What a joke.

Shane didn't want to doubt God. He really didn't. God was all he ever knew. Well, technically, it was the church. The catholic church. Not God himself. He had a conversation with Ilya about that, one time. When Shane had made a comment about God always being so cryptic in his scriptures, and Ilya had replied, "You know God did not write Bible, yes?"

That kind of shut Shane up for a moment. All his life, there had always been that incontestable truth that the Bible were God's words, and you should never doubt them. But if he thought about it, it of course made sense. God didn't actually write the Bible himself. Not with his own hand, at least. It merely compiled the many different scriptures of people who claimed to have spoken to God or Jesus and, therefore, have the power to write it down. In the past few days, Shane wondered – what if those people, the scholars and the clerics, hadn't actually spoken to God? What if they just wrote down stories and rules that they wanted people to follow, instead of it being God's will?

That thought kind of started to make Shane spiral. What if he had lived his whole life, actually just following the will and teachings of some old bastard that wanted people to obey him, instead of God? What if he had wasted his energy, his belief, his spirit on things God actually did not give a fuck about? What if he could have lived the past ten years on this earth, where he was actively trying to avoid even the most minor misstep, instead enjoying his life, like the other adolescents in his village had done?

"Hey."

Shane literally jumped at the voice. He had been zoned out, staring at the river rushing past him, sitting in the grass for who knows how long at this point. He could see the sky already turning from blue to purple and melting into orange further up. He didn't look over when Ilya sat down next to him. He didn't even know what to say. Or how the man had found him out here.

Ilya was silent. He didn't say a word. Just sat there, in the silence, with Shane.

From the corner of his eye, Shane saw something weird. Usually, Ilya's legs were always hidden away underneath his long, black cassock. But right now, Shane could clearly see their outline, beneath the brown hose he was wearing. He turned his head just slightly to glimpse at the simple woollen tunic Ilya had on. Ilya used the moment to glance back at Shane, meeting his eyes. His expression was neutral, mostly, but Shane could tell the underlying concern etched into it.

"Why are you wearing that?" It was strange, to say the least, seeing the priest in casual peasant clothing instead of his clerical habit.

"Because I come here as friend, not priest."

Shane was stunned for a moment. Sure, he and Ilya were friends, but he didn't think that their friendship was standing above Ilya's belonging to the clergy. And for Ilya to ditch his holy

wear for a simple tunic and hose, just to be there for Shane as a friend, made him feel achingly warm inside.

“You didn’t have to”, Shane said as his gaze returned to the river.

“Yes. I did.” Ilya’s tone left no room for argument. “Tell me what is up.” Shane could feel Ilya scoot closer to him, not close enough to touch, but enough that he could sense the warmth coming from the other man.

“Have you ever loved someone?” The words left Shane’s mouth before he could think about them.

Ilya kept looking at him. “You mean, like a wife?”

Shane nodded. “Well, I know you’re not allowed to get married, but... You know, did you ever love someone enough that you wanted to marry them?”

Ilya was quiet for a long moment. Shane didn’t look at him. He heard him exhale. “Yes.” That’s all he said. In that moment, Shane felt like someone might have understood how he was feeling, for the first time in his life.

“And was that... hard? To know you can’t marry *her*?” He still didn’t look at Ilya. He felt like he would start to cry if he did.

Ilya was silent once more. “It *is* hard.”

Hm. Shane couldn’t really do much with that answer. Obviously, it was hard to love someone you couldn’t ever be with.

“How do you know if you are in love?” Shane put the question out there, possibly speaking something into existence that he didn’t want to think about too hard yet.

“You just know”, Ilya had replied. Simple. To the point. Like always. That was probably one of the things Shane loved about him.

And that kind of solidified it for Shane. He knew he was in love. No matter how hard he tried to reason with himself. No matter how many tears he cried about it. No matter how many times he tried to consult the Bible to find answers it didn’t have.

“Do you think God would be very mad if... I was in love with someone I shouldn’t be with?” Shane had tears in his eyes.

Ilya was quiet for an even longer time now. Shane half expected the other man to start reprimanding him for even saying something as stupid as that.

“I think...”, Ilya seemed to choose his words carefully, “if God is mad about such things, about love, maybe he should not be worshipped.”

That really knocked the breath out of Shane's lungs. An actual priest just told him that there was a possibility that God might do something that made him unworthy of worship. That could not be real.

"Be honest with me, are you actually a priest?" Shane eyed him suspiciously.

That got a rough, startled laugh out of Ilya. The sound was so beautiful. "Da, yes, I am."

"I don't know if I believe you", Shane said, and for once, there was a playful expression on his face, as he still acted sceptical.

"Oh, you can trust me, I am man of God." Ilya held up his hands in mock surrender.

"Really?" Shane raised an eyebrow, his tone clearly hinting at the fact that he wasn't at all serious about this.

Ilya couldn't help his smirk. "Absolutely."

Shane wondered what the worst thing that could happen would be if he did something incredibly stupid right now. But for some weird reason, he didn't feel like he actually cared about consequences at the moment. He couldn't care less if God was bothered by this. All that was on his mind was the beautiful smirk on Ilya's gorgeous face.

Suddenly, he turned from where he was sitting on the grass towards Ilya, before he threw himself on top of the man, straddling his hips and pinning his arms to the ground. His face was closer to Ilya's than it had ever been. "I don't believe you."

At that point, Ilya's eyes were just wide. Shocked and wide and even more shocked. Not necessarily because he was scandalised by being touched like this by another man – hell, Shane probably didn't even realise the sexual nature of their position – but because Shane was the last person Ilya had expected a playful reaction like that from.

After his brain had caught up, precisely three seconds after Shane's attack, Ilya grinned. Before Shane could even react, he had him flipped - now Shane was on his back, his wrists struggling against Ilya's strong hands as he was beneath the other man.

"You can trust me", Ilya had said lowly against his ear then. It was very hard to keep himself in control and not just rut his own hips against Shane. But Ilya was very good at keeping his desires in check. Mostly. Maybe a little less when it came to Shane.

Now it was Shane's turn to look wide-eyed at Ilya. It felt a tiny bit satisfying. And also very good. So normal. Like they were just two regular guys goofing around, who didn't need to care about societal expectations or whatever bullshit people had made out to be "God's will".

"You should get off of me", Shane suddenly croaked out. Ilya didn't like his tone. He sounded almost strangled. Oh gosh, did he hurt him? Fuck he probably had. Ilya immediately released Shane's wrist and got off the man beneath him, sitting back on the grass instead.

Ilya let his gaze sweep over Shane, searching for any injury. “Sorry, did I hurt you-“ Oh. *Oh*. Ilya’s mouth went dry at the sight of a bulge in Shane’s pants. A bulge that Ilya had very clearly caused. Fuck, he needed to get a grip or else his dick would get equally as hard as Shane’s.

Shane, for his part, looked absolutely mortified. He had his eyes shut, his face turned away, like he was bracing to be hit or something. Ilya’s heart clenched. It made him remember the times when his own father had found him fooling around with another boy, and the beating he always had received for it. Each one worse than the last. He shook his head. Not the time to think about that.

“Hey, Shane...” He leaned down to take hold of Shane’s face and make Shane look at him again. The other man slowly opened his eyes, and Ilya saw the tears in them. “Is okay”, he said softly, holding the eye contact for a moment before he did something reckless and let his forehead drop against Shane’s. His hand found its way into Shane’s hair as he softly stroked through it. It was so silky, not at all like the mess he had on his own head. Ilya closed his own eyes and felt the other man let out a shaky exhale.

“It’s not okay”, he heard Shane mumble. To hear that hurt, small voice from Shane broke his heart.

“Says who?” Ilya guessed that Shane had probably already read the many instances of the Bible condemning homosexuality and anything akin to it.

“God?” It sounded more like a question than an actual conviction from Shane. Which surprised Ilya, slightly. Even though Shane had always questioned things in the Bible, he never outwardly admitted he doubted God.

“I don’t think he does”, Ilya mumbled quietly. It was the only thing he could say right now.

“I tried praying”, Shane mumbled then, and Ilya felt the tears that had started to come out of Shane’s eyes. He wanted to dry every last one. “I asked him to give me a sign that this is okay.” Shane’s voice nearly broke. “He never answered me.”

Ilya always thought of himself as a strong man. He really did. A strong man with a strong will. But having *the person he had been in love with from the day they first met* cry like that was not something Ilya was strong enough to handle. So, he did the most foolish thing he had done in a while and pulled Shane into his arms. Into an actual, enveloping hug. Ilya wasn’t sure when the last time was that he had held someone like this. If he thought about it, the answer would probably be never.

Shane took that as permission to wrap his own arms back around Ilya, now basically sitting on his lap and burrowing his face in Ilya’s shoulder. He let it all out. He wasn’t even sure what ‘*it*’ was. The frustration with God? The fear of not going to heaven? The aching need and longing Ilya had caused inside of him?

But he couldn’t really think about it, not when he was so warm in Ilya’s arms, when Ilya’s big hand was softly running over his back as he was quietly shushing and rocking Shane. Shane

had no idea how long they stayed like that. Probably for a while. Preferably, he wanted to stay forever. But just like anything else in life, even this moment had to pass eventually.

“We should go back, before it gets dark”, Ilya mumbled into Shane’s hair. Neither of them really seemed keen to let go of the other yet.

“Can I stay with you tonight?”

Absolutely not. No way. There was absolutely no way that anything good would come of Shane staying the night in Ilya’s chambers. Ilya would do something stupid and reckless. He was not that strong.

“Of course.” In fact, Ilya was a very weak man.

When they had made their way back to the village, Ilya gave Shane the keys to the church, so he could let himself inside Ilya’s chambers, before Ilya made the short walk down to Shane’s parents’ house. It was just before dinner time, so he assumed they would be home. He took a deep breath before he knocked on the door, suddenly realising he was still not dressed in his cassock. Well, he would just have to work with that.

The door opened to Shane’s mother, who glanced at him confused and needed a second to realise the priest was standing before her. “Ilya-?”

“I talked to Shane. Not as priest, but as friend. He asked if it was fine for him to stay at the church tonight, as he did not want to come home yet. I wanted you to know.” The words spilt out of Ilya a little too fast, but he had forgotten how awkward it was to see the town’s people outside of the usual holy habit he wore all the time. He just wanted to leave as quickly as he could.

He saw her face soften. Ilya knew that most of the people in the town had some weird respect for his title and occupation, but at the end of the day, he was literally just a guy. Not even a particularly old one at that. And he felt like, in that moment, it also became clear to Shane’s mother.

“You are a good man, Ilya.” She smiled at him. “Thank you. For caring for Shane. I appreciate it a lot.”

Ilya nodded. If only she knew how much Ilya cared. She probably wouldn’t be as happy about that.

“I will... try to have him come home tomorrow.” It was the least he could do. He already corrupted her son enough as is. Who knew how bad it would get tonight? At least he could make Shane go home and tell his parents everything was all right with him.

When he entered the little priest’s hut after his talk with Shane’s mother, he was greeted by the sight of Shane starting a fire for the stove. It was the end of May, and usually it was not cold out, so Ilya did not have a fire going all day. He wondered what Shane wanted the stove

to heat up for. Maybe he was hungry. Ilya wondered when the last time was that Shane had properly eaten. Probably a while ago.

He leaned against the doorway that separated the priest's chambers from the rest of the church and just watched Shane. He had entered quietly, so the other man hadn't noticed Ilya yet. His heart clenched a little, watching Shane tend to the fire, knowing that he wanted nothing more than to come home to this view every single night of his life.

"What's the fire for?", he finally asked, keeping his voice quiet so as not to startle Shane, before he finally walked into the hearth. Shane glanced up from where he just put a few small pieces of wood into the fire that was burning underneath the stone top.

"Soup?" Shane glanced back at him as if he was worried he had overstepped by wanting to cook inside Ilya's home. But Ilya nodded. "What soup?" he asked as he crossed the room, retrieving a basket of fresh vegetables he liked to keep in a cool corner, to avoid always needing to go into the cellar whenever he wanted to eat something. "There are... carrots... kartoshka, luk, ..."

"Sorry, what did you say?" Shane turned to him with a raised brow, and Ilya realised his mistake of answering in Russian. "Ah, uhm...", he glanced down at the vegetables in the basket, willing his brain to remember them in the correct language. "Potato? And... the white thing that make you cry?"

Shane grinned a little at that description. "You mean an onion?"

"Yes! Onion. That." Ilya nodded, holding the onion up for Shane.

"Okay, we can just use all of them, right?"

And so, Shane and Ilya spent the next hour cooking soup together. It was oddly domestic. Ilya was used to cooking alone; in general, besides being a priest and having vowed never to marry, so therefore living alone, men did not cook anyway. It was your mother's job to cook for you until you moved into your new home with your wife, who then took over that role.

But in his past few months at this village, Ilya had learned that the people here were extremely different to what he had known in Russia. Yes, they were very religious, that he was used to, but in a social aspect, Ilya was almost shocked by how unusual they were. Ilya had noticed that hardly any of the usual roles of men and women were being performed. Sure, backbreaking labour was often done by more men than women, given that they were often naturally stronger, but that didn't mean that none of the women worked in challenging labour jobs. Equally, he had noticed that many of the men in the village cared deeply for their children and were deeply involved in childcare. Men and women equally took care of the homes, the cooking, and the cleaning. Something he had never experienced that way back in his homeland. Women also were shopkeepers and merchants – not just because their husbands were, but because the eldest daughter naturally took over the businesses of their parents. That was also what he noticed from Shane's parents. It was his mother who took over the family business of the tavern, instead of her husband caring for it. It was very unusual, to say the least.

He had asked one of the elders about it one time, back when he was still relatively new in town. He had gotten a quite satisfying answer, really. The elder had told him that their village had existed for hundreds of years, and that everyone inside the village had dozens of ancestors who had also lived in this exact village already. Well, you know, besides the spouses that married into the village from other towns and cities – the town fortunately was not really that big on incest. The elder had explained to Ilya that everyone in their town was an equal, no matter if man or woman. It was a bit of a foreign concept to Ilya.

Not because he disagreed, not at all. He had always found his own mother to be a million times stronger than his father, a better leader and a better person overall. It made sense to Ilya that people saw other women in that same way. He would never forgive his father for taking her from him when he was a mere child. But that was a story he didn't want to dwell on anymore.

After that conversation, Ilya explained the whole thing to himself like this: The same families had lived in the village for centuries, over dozens of generations. Meanwhile, the town had always been quite close-knit, just housing 500 people, and not once more than a thousand. Over these many years, it had just been a natural development that everyone in a town as small as this had to pull their weight. No matter if you were man or woman, you had to do the work that needed to be done. It didn't matter if that was childcare, working in the field, or keeping the shops. Someone had to do it, and at some point, it no longer mattered who did.

That was one of the reasons why Ilya liked the village so much. They didn't just welcome him with open arms, but they welcomed each other. Sometimes he wondered if that hospitality would extend to his own differences, which he had from most people here. If people would still welcome him if they knew he would rather wed a man than a woman. He wasn't sure he wanted to find out. He was content to live in a village that at least didn't think women were only good for birthing and raising children, while men had to work themselves to death on the fields.

He knew that was how his father had seen the world. How he had viewed Ilya's mother. Just as a vessel for his seed, something he could toss around and yell at whenever she didn't immediately comply with his commands. Sometimes he wished his father hadn't married his mother. He was able to do so because, in the Orthodox Church, as long as you were married before you were ordained as a priest, you could keep your wife and continue to have children, even while you were in the clergy. But maybe, if they hadn't, she would still be alive today. Maybe then Ilya wouldn't be on this earth, but he would be fine with that.

He would have been okay with giving his life if it meant his mother could have kept hers.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not crying, you are

Chapter 7: Дьявол

Chapter Notes

I just had the absolute best idea for the end of this fic, and you will all bawl your eyes out from the sheer happiness and fluff of it - but first, you get another devastating chapter, enjoy

“You make it better”, Shane commented as they sat next to each other around Ilya’s table, eating the soup.

“You think? Is good”, Ilya just shrugged as he ate a spoonful. “Maybe I just make it with more love.” He hadn’t meant to say that; he really had not. It was too much he had admitted, yet not enough at all.

Shane looked at him for a moment. “Are you?”

Ilya’s heart stilled. “Am I what, Shane?”

“In love.”

Oh shit. Fuck. This was bad. Very bad. “No. I am priest. Celibate.” *As if he had ever stuck to that rule.*

“Doesn’t celibate just refer to sex?”

Ilya almost spat out his soup when he heard that word leave Shane’s mouth. Sex. How did Shane even know what that was? Sweet, innocent, clueless Shane, who didn’t even know what a boner was, two weeks ago. “Sex? How do you know that word?”

“I read it. In one of father’s books.” Shane sounded almost defiant now. Like he wanted Ilya to know he wasn’t *that* clueless.

It had almost been surprising to Ilya how naïve and inexperienced Shane really was when they first met. Sure, he knew the wider public lacked the education Ilya had received, which included a bit of medicine and the basics of human biology, but most people still weren’t as innocent as Shane. Most boys in their teenage years often stray from their beliefs and from God and instead become very interested in girls. And so did their bodies. So, by age 20, most men had experienced an erection and possibly also touched it. Ilya had definitely been one of those boys.

But Shane was – indescribable, in that regard. As far as Ilya was concerned, he had never even glanced at a woman with a single ounce of lust before. Shane had mentioned his disinterest in marriage and finding a wife, and Ilya had always had at least the slightest hint

that it was because Shane was not attracted to women at all. For Ilya, it was a bit different. He did like women; he had found many of them attractive. But he also liked men, more than he liked women. He figured that Shane was only interested in men, but he hadn't been aware that it was even possible. Obviously, he wasn't. Shane had a sheltered childhood, with loving parents in a happy marriage, and had never experienced life beyond his own safe village.

Ilya had heard about other boys in the village, from their parents, who came to him for advice, looking for anything they could do to get their perverted children back on the right path. Most of the time, Ilya had assured them that this was natural and bound to happen with male children, especially. And as long as they did not accidentally get some girl pregnant out of wedlock, there wasn't really a problem with it, Ilya figured. So, he knew that this complete disinterest and naivety about sex and attraction was more of a Shane-specific ordeal.

"And why did you read book about sex, hm?" Ilya couldn't keep the teasing tone out of his voice. Something about Shane showing interest in that, showing interest in attraction and maybe even lust, was doing things to Ilya he had sworn to keep tucked away when he became a priest.

Shane averted his eyes, not looking at Ilya. Even in the low candlelight, Ilya could tell Shane was blushing. Hard. "Is okay. Is... good, I think. Not good to be clueless about body, you know?" Ilya really wanted Shane to internalise that it was okay. It was okay to be curious about your own body; it was okay to respond to your own desires. "You should know how this... *stuff* works."

"*You* think so?" You. Shane had just asked what Ilya thought. Not what God or the Bible thought. He wanted to hear Ilya's opinion instead. He swallowed. "I do, yes. I mean, how would you have nice marriage and make many mini-Shane if you don't know how it works?"

That got a little smile out of Shane. And the idea of having a bunch of kids that looked like Shane run around his house made Ilya feel a certain way. He didn't want to dwell on that.

"I don't know if I even want that", Shane said. "Marriage. A wife... I wish... I wish I was a priest or something, so I wouldn't have to worry about it."

That made Ilya's heart hurt. He knew there wasn't really a choice here. Shane would be more or less forced, either by his parents or by society, to find a wife one day and procreate, to keep the village and his heritage alive. "You will find nice wife", was all Ilya could say to that. *Maybe a wife that didn't mind if you disappeared with the priest for a few hours on Sundays.*

"Eat your soup", he finally commented, shutting down this conversation for good. Before he said any more stupid things. He watched Shane yawn from the corner of his eye and noticed the tiredness in his own body. "Do you want to go to sleep?"

Shane just nodded. "Yeah."

Ilya nodded in return before he stood up to put away their dirty dishes into the bucket by the door. He would need to take them down to the river tomorrow to clean. "You can take my bed. I will sleep out here."

He didn't look at Shane at the moment, but he could hear the frown when he spoke: "No way, it's *your* bed, I can sleep out here!"

Ilya turned back towards Shane, a dry look on his face. "No." His voice was final. Usually, Shane knew that meant to not further argue with Ilya.

"Yes." Ilya's eyebrow rose at the defiant tone. That was new. Very new. And a little hot.

"What do you mean, yes? I told you, you will sleep in my bed, no argument."

"I am arguing it right now."

Ilya couldn't hold back his grin. Something about Shane talking back to him did very bad things to his self-restraint. "You will not sleep out here."

"Well, neither will you." Ilya thought that Shane looked a little like an angry kitten right now. Trying to be all scary and mean, but in reality, just really cute.

"Okay, we will both sleep in my bed." Once more, the words had left his mouth without permission. Shane really had a knack for bringing that out in Ilya.

"In your bed?" Shane now didn't seem as confident as he was just a moment ago. But Ilya could see he was still trying to stay defiant, refusing to let Ilya sleep anywhere but his own bedroom. "Okay. We will both sleep in your bed."

"Okay." It was really not okay. Ilya wasn't sure if he would make it the whole night without touching Shane. Without wrapping his arms around the other man, breathing in his scent, and kissing his soft lips. But he could contain himself. He knew he could. He had done so for the past 6 months, whenever he had sat next to Shane during their Bible study sessions, while he had to keep from ravishing the other man then and there.

"You can go get comfortable in my chamber, then, and I will put out fire." *And try to come up with a plan on how to not get embarrassingly turned on while you are going to sleep next to me.*

Shane finally agreed, before he walked off towards the only other room in the house, which kept Ilya's bed. Fortunately, as a priest, he was viewed by the villagers as of higher status, so he didn't have to sleep on a mere sack of hay like some of the peasantry; instead, he had an actual wooden bed with a wool-filled mattress. It wasn't huge, but it could probably comfortably let two people lie on it.

When Ilya followed him a few minutes later, he was met with the view of Shane, just in his cotton underpants, carefully folding the rest of his clothing up to wear again tomorrow. Ilya stilled in the doorway. Sure, somewhere in the back of his mind, it was obvious that Shane would get undressed for sleep, but he hadn't really thought about that. But right now, he was keenly aware of every inch of Shane's exposed skin. Fuck. This was torture.

Ilya silently entered the room and walked past Shane to the other side of the bed, where he now started to undress too. He wondered if Shane felt scandalised about seeing a priest strip

down like that in front of him. He probably did. Judging by the hitch in his breathing, Ilya had just heard, he definitely did.

Ilya knew he looked good. Really good, even. Yeah, as a priest, he should have let his ego behind him, but who was he kidding? He always woke up early in the morning for exercise, needing that kind of discipline in his life. He wanted to keep himself in good health, and he did not want any excess soft flesh on him. Muscles kept the body better satiated than fat did, and Ilya was extremely controlled with his routine. It was not just a way to keep his body healthy; it also helped him build self-discipline and keep his mind and will firm. It was just a bonus that it made his body look like it was carved from stone. A bonus that wasn't lost on Shane either.

Ilya didn't comment on it and just sat down on the bed. "I don't bite", he commented as he saw the unsure look on Shane's face. *God, he wanted to bite so bad.* Shane took that as permission to finally sit down too. He still hesitated for a moment, then finally leaned back, pulling the woollen blanket over him. Ilya did too, having brought a second blanket from the wooden closet, which was the only other piece of furniture in the room. They lay there for a few moments, neither of them saying a word, but neither was sleeping either.

"This is strange", Ilya was the first to say. It got a choked-off laugh from Shane. "You tell me."

Ilya turned his head to look at Shane. "Have you ever shared a bed with anyone before?" he knew Shane hadn't. Ilya wasn't even sure himself if he literally meant sleeping with someone in the same bed before, or if he was asking if Shane has had sex. The answer was no to both questions, obviously.

"No", Shane shook his head. "Have you?"

Maybe this was the point where Ilya should just tell Shane. The point where he told Shane that he preferred to be with men and that he really wanted to be with him. "Yes."

Ilya's answer seemed to surprise Shane. He probably thought Ilya was a virgin, a cleric who actually took his vow of celibacy seriously. In his few years as a priest, Ilya had learned that hardly any cleric – unless they were really conservative or in a monastery – actually took that vow seriously. Most had at least one mistress, many had several. Children out of wedlock, affairs left and right. In that sense, Ilya was still relatively good. It had been about a year since he had taken anyone to bed. Not that he didn't want to. But, well, Shane wasn't exactly experienced.

"Many times." Better now than never, Ilya figured.

Shane's eyes went wide. "Many? Like – even after you became a priest?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes, a few times after, too."

"But that's–"

“Forbidden. I know, Shane.” He looked at him for a moment. “Let me tell you secret.” Ilya now turned his body to lie on his side, facing Shane fully. “I do not know a single priest without Mistress.” *And if they didn’t have a mistress, they were most likely doing bad things to the altar boys, but Ilya didn’t want to get into all of that with Shane.*

Shane’s eyes widened even more. Ilya was mildly amused by the way Shane’s eyes had swept over his chest when he turned to his side. “Seriously? But I thought, the Bible said-“

“Many priests do not care what the Bible says, Shane. They just care about themselves. I know, is hard to hear, but trust me, I know.”

Shane looked like his whole worldview had just been shattered. It probably had. “So, what, priests can have Mistresses and not follow the Bible, but if I tell a lie, I go to hell?”

That was the kind of attitude Ilya loved on Shane. The naivety finally giving way to the same frustration Ilya had felt about the church for years. “Hell is a... complicated concept.” Yes, Ilya had been reading a few more books lately, and he picked up some new vocabulary. “Nobody really knows what it is. Where it is. How it is.” Ilya shrugged. “I like to believe it... is only for... evil people. Murderers. Thieves. Those people, you know?”

Shane was silent for a moment. “And what if you’re wrong?” He paused. “What if everyone who doesn’t follow the Bible’s teachings perfectly goes to hell?”

Ilya had thought about those questions many times before. “Then God is a bad person that wants perfection from people he did not make perfect.”

He knew all of this was a lot to take in for Shane. Ilya had seen how Shane’s belief had started to crumble over the past few days – well, it probably had already started a few months ago, when Shane finally felt safe enough around Ilya to ask him complicated questions about the Bible and the Catholic church, that other priests might not have answered as neutrally as Ilya had. And now, everything Shane had valued in his life suddenly didn’t seem to make sense anymore. Why would Shane try to be the perfect Christian when even priests didn’t care to do that?

“You should sleep”, Ilya said, finally. He knew Shane was already overwhelmed, and any further conversation probably wouldn’t lead to anything productive. To his surprise, Shane just nodded. To Ilya, he seemed like he was in a kind of daze. The daze you’re in when you realise anything you had ever believed in might not be right. That maybe you didn’t actually follow God’s will, and just the will of whoever was lucky enough to write the Bible, centuries ago. Ilya had been there.

When he woke up the next morning, bright and early like Ilya always did, he found himself snuggled against Shane, his arm over the other’s waist. He was confused for a moment until

the happenings of last night returned to him. Right. Shane had slept in his bed. He looked so peaceful, sleeping like this. No thought bothered his mind. Just rest and ease. Ilya looked at him and wanted to count the freckles on his face like that.

As if he sensed that someone was watching him, Shane stirred too. He slowly blinked his eyes open and furrowed his brow when he saw Ilya's face.

"Morning." Ilya couldn't make his voice any less soft if he wanted to.

"Morning?" Shane blinked a few more times, and Ilya could see the memories from yesterday come back to Shane's mind. "Oh", Shane simply breathed then, like somehow that explained every emotion going through him at the moment.

Ilya couldn't help but smile. Shane was so adorable. Even more so when he just woke up and his hair stuck in every direction, and his brain wasn't fully online yet. Ilya wasn't sure what overcame him in that moment, but he reached out to brush a few strands of hair out of Shane's face. He relished seeing the rosiness it brought to Shane's cheeks. He was so pretty.

Shane just stared back at him, like he wasn't sure if this was real life or if he was dreaming. "I need to get up", Ilya commented. He really had to. His morning routine didn't wait, even when there was a beautiful man in his bed. Even when he was still having his arm over Shane's waist and his hand was still stroking the other's cheek.

"Okay", Shane simply mumbled, his voice sounding hoarse.

With all the willpower Ilya could manage, he finally pulled away, sitting up before getting off the bed altogether. He had things to do. He needed to do his morning exercises before heading to the church to welcome people for morning prayer. "You can stay for as long as you want", he told Shane when he was getting dressed. This time, he was putting his usual cassock back on again. He couldn't look at Shane, or else he would crawl right back into bed with him.

Shane stared at the door after Ilya had left. He was a mess. An emotional wreck, really.

If he wasn't sure about being in love with Ilya before, he definitely was sure now. How could he resist that man any longer? Forget even how calm and patient he was with Shane, but simply the fact that he looked like *that* was going to put Shane in an early grave. He was so screwed.

He slowly peeled himself out from under the comfort of the blanket and got up, putting his clothes from last night back on. He wandered into the main room of the house, wondering what to do with his time now. Usually, he got up a few hours later than this, and then would immediately head to the church to help Ilya prepare whatever had to be done. He wasn't really sure if he was ready for that today.

Ilya wasn't too concerned when Shane didn't show up to help him that morning. He figured Shane had maybe fallen back asleep, or was still too upset and overwhelmed from their conversation last night. When he returned to his house around noon, he was surprised to see the fire going and pottage boiling on the stove. Had Shane made this? Well, who else would

have? His gaze fell upon Shane, who sat by the dining table across the room, focused on the book beneath him that Ilya recognised as being the Bible. Shane didn't look up when Ilya walked in. Ilya didn't like the atmosphere in the room. It was tense, almost like he could hear Shane's thoughts brewing in his head.

"Hey?" Ilya slowly crossed the room, as if afraid to startle Shane. He didn't get a reaction. He came to a stop in front of Shane, looking down at him, an eyebrow raised. There was a short pause before Shane suddenly pushed the book towards Ilya, with an almost outraged expression.

"What does this mean?"

The Bible was open to Leviticus chapter 18, and Shane was pointing to verse 12. *'Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.'*

Ilya was pretty sure Shane knew what it meant. It was probably not the first time he had read it. "It means you should not have sex with men." There. Straight to the point. He didn't want to lie to Shane.

Shane didn't meet Ilya's eyes. He just stared down at the table. Ilya saw the tears in his eyes. "Have you ever done that?"

The question sounded more like an accusation to Ilya. "Yes."

Shane's head snapped up. "Yes?"

Ilya felt a weird defensiveness creep up in him. A similar feeling to what he had felt when his father discovered him fooling around with boys. "Yes." He wasn't about to let Shane drag him down for this. "Have you ever eaten pork?"

Now Shane raised his eyebrow. Of course, he had. Everyone had. It was a special treat to eat a roasted pig at a wedding or during Christmastide celebrations. "Yeah?"

Ilya then turned back to the Bible, flipping through it until he found chapter 11 of Leviticus. He turned the book back to Shane. "Verse 7", Ilya added.

Shane frowned some more as he read it. *'And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you.'*

"The whole village is going to hell", Ilya commented drily.

Shane frowned, looking between Ilya and the words of the Bible. How did he not know this? How did nobody in the village know this? Eating pork was always something that was kept for special occasions, as meat was not a daily part of anyone's diet. And now, there it was, clearly written that as a Christian, you should not eat pork.

"Why are you showing me this--"

"Because", Ilya said, and he felt the anger rise in him, as the cruel words his father had always told him came back into his mind. "The Bible is bullshit." There. He said it. Because

he truly believed it was. Most of the Bible was just a mere vessel for a few idiotic clerics to put their own beliefs onto the whole of humanity. It wasn't that he thought God wasn't real or that he felt like God wasn't worth worshipping. But the Bible? Yeah, he could live without that.

Shane just stared at him for a long, tense moment. Ilya didn't know what he looked like at the moment, but he felt like he was one second away from exploding. He had taken so much anger and violence from his father throughout his whole childhood. Violence that had numerous times made Ilya think he was about to suffer the same fate as his mother had. And now, he was about to receive the same violence from Shane. The only person he had ever really felt something close to true love for.

To add to his own anger now, Shane stood up and was already moving towards the door, probably to escape the situation like the coward he always was. But Ilya wouldn't let him leave like that. Not this time. He made two big steps towards Shane, then grabbed his wrist, before Shane could reach the door. Shane jerked back, staring at Ilya while the man was still holding onto him.

"Shane." Ilya was breathing heavily. He didn't even know when the situation escalated like this – or why. He was just trying to be honest. And that's what he got back for it? Shane being upset because – why? Because Ilya said he thought the Bible was bullshit? Because he didn't want Shane to hate himself over loving a man the same way Ilya had done his whole life?

"Let me go." Shane sounded as defiant as ever.

"Nyet." Ilya was not about to let Shane run away from this.

There was a long moment of silence. The only sound was the crackle of the fire behind them in the hearth. Ilya held Shane's gaze and was met with defiance and disgust. It hurt. It hurt more than any curse word or hit from his father ever did.

Shane was furious. He couldn't believe he had been sitting there, with his best friend, a fucking priest, who was telling him that eating pork and having sex with a man were on the same level of sinning. That the Bible was bullshit. And to think he had spent the past 6 months of his life spending every waking moment with Ilya, thinking the man had helped him find his way back to God, when all he was doing now was to tell Shane how he shouldn't listen to the Bible.

Maybe that had been Ilya's plan all along. Get Shane to fall in love with him, corrupt him, so he could make Shane sin. Maybe Ilya was sent by the devil. At this point, that thought didn't even feel ridiculous anymore.

Chapter 8: Они ебутся

Chapter Notes

Okay, finally, some smut for you freaks.

Don't translate the title.

“Shane”, Ilya said again, any other rational thought leaving him. He didn't even know what to say. Please don't hate me because I like men? Please don't hate me because I said something bad about a religion that thinks I shouldn't even be allowed to live?

Shane was quiet. He just stared at Ilya, eyes wide and breathing heavy. “Do you want to go to hell?!”

It didn't sound like Shane was asking, but more like he was telling Ilya his inevitable future. “Well, seems like I am already going there, no?!” Ilya had yelled back. He hated himself for raising his voice at Shane. But he was hurt. So fucking hurt. He blinked away the tears stinging in his eyes.

Shane stared at him for a long moment. Every emotion he had felt in the past few weeks just rushed through him at once. He had never known peace and contentment as he had in those months he spent basically glued to Ilya's side. He thought putting Ilya into his life was some divine intervention from God, a sign that should bring Shane back onto the right path. But watching the man he idolised and quite frankly adored tear up in front of him, because of something Shane had said, terrified him more than any possibility of going to hell ever had. Ilya had gifted him the best months of his life, up to this point. Not God. It wasn't the holy spirit that had taken hold of Shane. It was love.

Was a lifetime of love worth an eternity in hell?

Well, Shane guessed he was about to find out.

He used the way Ilya was still holding onto his wrist to pull himself closer to the other man, Shane's hand coming up behind Ilya's head, threading through his golden locks. He saw just a glimpse of Ilya's eyes widening before Shane pulled him in the rest of the way, pressing their lips together. It felt... weird. Was this how kissing worked? Just having his mouth on another? That was a bit strange. Should he close his eyes? Ilya's eyes were still open. Well,

they were also wide and looked like he had just seen a ghost, so maybe that reaction wasn't anything to go off of.

Before Shane could overthink it further, he was suddenly shoved back, his back hitting the door behind him, hard, knocking the breath out of him. He just stared at Ilya for a second, the other man's body heaving with laboured breaths. Uh-oh. That didn't seem like the reaction one wanted to get from a kiss, right? Was Ilya mad at him? Maybe Shane shouldn't have done this. It was definitely not really thought through, he could admit that much.

Ilya's mind was blank. Not a clear thought left in it. Shane had just kissed him. Yes, it was a pretty bad one, and Shane was incredibly awkward about it, but it was the thought that counted. The silent confession that Ilya wasn't the only one losing his mind. That Shane felt the pull between them, too. Ilya wanted it to happen again. He wanted more. So much more.

He basically charged forward then, until he was pressed against Shane, crashing their mouths back together. He could tell Shane was feeling this kiss much more now, judging by the sweet little noise he made against Ilya's lips and the way his hands scrambled to hold onto Ilya's arm. Ilya felt like he was in a trance. Shane's lips tasted so fucking good. The little noises he made were music to Ilya's ears. He could keep kissing this man forever.

He shoved one knee in between Shane's legs, annoyed by the fact that his cassock was keeping him from moving it far enough. But it was plenty to make Shane let out an actual moan against his lips, an open-mouthed one, that made him unable to kiss Ilya back for a moment. The sound travelled straight down to Ilya's cock. He wanted him so bad. He let one hand slide beneath Shane's tunic, ripping it out from where it was tucked into Shane's pants. He needed him, and he needed it now.

"Wait-", Shane suddenly said, and it made Ilya pull back, reality crashing back in and bursting the bubble that had wrapped around them. Both men were breathing heavily now, but no longer out of anger. Ilya just looked at Shane, one hand still on his bare skin. "I don't- what do we-"

Ilya could guess what Shane was trying to ask. Were they about to fuck? How did this even work? Should they even do it here? Those were all questions Ilya had wondered about, too, the first time he had hooked up with another man.

"We don't have to rush", Ilya mumbled, but all he wanted to do in the moment was to dive back into Shane's mouth. "Do you trust me?"

Shane looked up at Ilya, then nodded. He did trust him. More than anyone else, probably. More than God, at this point.

"Then just let me have you", Ilya whispered, before he leaned back in. He paused for a moment, letting his lips hover over Shane's, to give the other man room to pull back. When he didn't, he pressed them together once more. This time, it was sweeter, slower, softer. It drew moans from Shane just the same, especially when Ilya let his hand wander further up, one finger just softly brushing Shane's hard nipple. "Ilya-", Shane breathed, and Ilya could imagine what he was trying to say. He could feel the other's erection with the way he was rutting his hips against Ilya's thigh.

“Already?” The teasing smirk on Ilya’s face did nothing to stop Shane’s orgasm from slamming into him. He tensed, his hand gripping Ilya harder than it had already, as his knees buckled beneath him. He felt Ilya’s hand wrap around his waist to hold him up, and Shane let his head drop forward against Ilya’s shoulder. Fuck. And Ilya hadn’t even touched him properly yet.

Ilya was watching Shane in awe as his orgasm hit for absolutely zero reason. Deep down, he felt a bit of satisfaction over the fact that just a little bit of kissing had already done it for Shane. “Was that good?” Ilya asked quietly, pressing a kiss to the side of Shane’s head while the other still tried to catch his breath.

“Perfect”, Shane mumbled, and for once, it felt like the truth. This was perfect. Absolutely utterly perfect. Being able to have Ilya like this, the first person he ever even wanted this way, was beyond any feeling Shane could even describe. No amount of praying or going to church or reading the Bible could ever measure up to this.

It was probably worth going to hell for.

Shane leaned back again, still feeling Ilya’s hand on his back, as he looked up at the other man. “What about... you?” He wasn’t really sure how to ask, but he also really wanted to touch Ilya’s dick. Was he terrified about it? Of course. Did he still want to do that? Definitely.

Ilya glanced over, towards the window, where the sun had already moved past noon. He had things to do in the afternoon. He needed to visit one of the elders, who was dying and in need of anointing. He promised a mother to come by in order to give a baptism to her sick child. He had to meet with the father of a young woman to plan a wedding for next month.

“I can wait”, he chose to say, because if he gave in now, he would not leave his house for the next three weeks. Shane just nodded, clearly a bit stumped but also understanding. “You can... stay here, if you want”, he offered Shane. “And later, at night, when I come back home...” He let his hand trail from Shane’s waist downward until he squeezed his ass. It made Shane let out a startled moan. “We will see.”

Shane was somewhat of a mess, waiting in Ilya’s house for Ilya to return from his priestly duties. His mind was racing still, replaying their kisses over and over, causing more than one erection for Shane that afternoon. But he didn’t touch himself. He didn’t want to waste an erection on himself when it could be Ilya touching him.

To his own surprise, Shane felt way less concerned about the whole ‘this is a sin’ thing than he thought he would. It felt like kissing Ilya had just made everything fall into place. He couldn’t even overthink it if he wanted to. So he spent the afternoon giddy and excited, hoping Ilya would be back sooner rather than later.

The only thing that was still heavy on his mind was his family. He hadn’t spoken to them since yesterday morning. He wondered if his mother was concerned about his whereabouts.

She probably was. He thought about how his mother had always told him, since he was a little boy, that she would always love him, no matter what he chose to do with his life. No matter if he wanted to take over running the tavern or follow in his father's footsteps of being the town scribe. He appreciated that, of course. Yet, he wasn't really sure if that also meant they would still love him if he was in love with a man. He wasn't even sure whether anyone else was aware that this was an option. Shane hadn't known before it happened to him either.

Yet, he guessed, his family had always been special. For one, the fact that a man from the village was able to marry a woman from a far eastern land, who had dark hair and eyes that were not at all usual here, was something Shane knew caused a bit of outrage in the nearer cities, which had gotten wind of the marriage. But the people of the town did not really care. As far as Shane was concerned, there hadn't been a single person to object during the wedding. Another thing was the fact that Shane's parents were actually in love with each other. In times when marriage was little more than a political move, or a way to ensure that daughters were cared for and the next generation was secured, Shane had been told the story of how his parents first met and immediately fell in love countless times. Even today, over 20 years later, his mother still tells Shane how in love she was with his father. Shane had always found it a little disgusting when he saw the two of them kiss, but he figured it was better than having parents who hated each other. He knew there were definitely some couples like that in their town – he had heard a lot of tavern gossip.

But Shane being in love with a man was still a whole other story. One he wasn't sure was even legal. He wasn't too well-versed in the laws the crown enforced, but during his research in the past few days, he had picked up one of his father's books about law. He found a lot of different things that technically were illegal – adultery, infidelity of all sorts, homosexuality – which, Shane figured, was the word to describe him and Ilya. But like with every crime, if nobody brought him to court, there wouldn't be a punishment. The only question now was whether someone would bring them to court over this. Shane didn't really want to find out.

As the sun slowly started to set and dyed the sky in shades of pink and orange, Shane was sitting on the bench in Ilya's main room, reading one of the few books Ilya had that weren't some translation of the bible. It was a fictional book, thankfully one without an obnoxious princess, but rather about a badass magician fighting evil with his magic wand. Shane was really getting immersed in the story when the door finally opened, and Ilya returned from his duties.

Ilya couldn't help his stupid smile when he watched Shane jump up from where he was sitting and rush over to him like an excited puppy, just so he could give him a kiss. He couldn't help but be surprised by that action. Ilya had expected Shane to spiral over their situation this afternoon. To realise again what a bad idea this was, and maybe to be consumed by the fear of going to hell over it. At the very least, Ilya had not expected Shane to be this comfortable about showing this kind of intimacy to him already. But Ilya had also realised that Shane never really learned the social norms around intimacy in the first place – because he literally had no clue. His parents never had to reprimand him or shame him into not talking about it because Shane had never even thought about it to begin with. In that way, Shane was still very innocent. And Ilya found it adorable.

“Hi”, he said softly, one arm wrapping around Shane as the shorter man smiled up at him. “I missed you”, Shane murmured. It made Ilya melt. “I missed you too.” He really had. He could barely remember half of the prayers he had to say today, and he was pretty sure he had butchered some Latin when doing that baptism earlier.

“What did you do?” he asked, glancing over at the book on the table. “I read a little. And thought about you.” Ilya never wanted Shane to gain any awareness about what he could say to a lover and what he maybe shouldn’t say. Because being this clingy after one kiss surely was too soon, but Ilya felt like being selfish for once. He wanted to bask in this. To bask in the love Shane would give him for now. Because who knew how long he was allowed to keep it.

“Are you hungry?” Ilya still had his arms around Shane, and his nose buried in his hair. He was so warm. He felt Shane shake his head. Good. Because Ilya was very hungry. For something that wasn’t food.

He crouched down until he could put his hands under Shane's ass and lift the other man up, doing so with ease. Shane squealed, startled for a moment. “Hey, what are you-“ He kicked his feet a little, but his protests quickly dissolved into giggles. Ilya was burning. He wanted him so bad. And tonight, he would be selfish enough to take it all. Everything Shane gave him, he would worship.

He carried Shane into his bedroom and set him down on the bed. For good measure, even though nobody usually was around this part of the church, Ilya propped a blanket into the window. He didn’t need anyone to see this. When he turned back around to look at Shane, he felt feral. Shane sat on his bed, breathing heavily, and with an evident bulge on him. Ilya would go to hell for what he was going to do to this man tonight.

So very slowly, almost like a predator stalking its prey, he moved back towards the bed and in front of Shane. He could see the other man’s breath hitch from where he was standing. Equally as slowly, Ilya started to open each and every button on his cassock. Shane’s eyes were glued to his hands, taking in the growing sliver of skin Ilya was showing him. Finally, he could let his gown drop and step out of it, only left in his undergarments and very clearly turned on.

Shane swallowed as he watched Ilya undress. His dick was so achingly hard already. He had no idea what would happen now. He barely knew how sex between man and woman worked. But none of that mattered right now. The only thing that mattered was finally getting his hands back on Ilya. Shane practically lurched forward when Ilya stepped within his reach, no idea where to put his hands but feeling the deep, primal urge to touch and claim.

Ilya willingly went down when Shane grabbed him, climbing onto the bed while forcing Shane to lie down. He caught the other’s lips in a heated kiss, revelling in the sounds Shane made for him. Ilya knew Shane was innocent and had never experienced anything like this before, but he just couldn’t slow down on him. Ilya moved from kissing his lips to going down to Shane’s neck, making his hips arch up with a groan. He was trying hard not to leave marks on him, but he was itching to do so.

“Can I-“ Ilya tugged on Shane’s tunic, needing the man to get naked beneath him. Shane just nodded frantically. He needed this so badly, too. Ilya didn’t need to be told twice. He helped Shane out of his clothes before he lay bare underneath Ilya. Ilya’s breath caught in his chest. *Fuck*. Shane was so fucking beautiful. The freckles on his face were also prominent all over his body. His hair was dark yet sparse, only in thin patches around his cock, yet his chest was smooth.

And goddamn, Shane’s cock. He had seen it bulge through his pants a couple of times already, but it’s even prettier than Ilya had imagined. It wasn’t overly big, just perfectly proportionate to Shane’s body. It was mostly straight, maybe the slightest bend to the right. Ilya was transfixed. Without thinking about it, he leaned down to press kisses all over Shane’s tip.

“*Ah*, Ilya-“ Shane’s hand threaded through his hair, his voice already wrecked. That was all the permission Ilya needed at this point. His lips closed over Shane’s tip, slowly bobbing his head and taking in a little bit more of him anytime he moved down again. He felt him writhe beneath him already, and he knew Shane probably wouldn’t be able to take a lot of this.

He was right when he heard a high-pitched moan, and suddenly Shane spilled into his mouth. Ilya had his hands firmly on Shane’s hips to keep him down, so he could swallow every last drop. When he pulled off of Shane’s dick with an audible *plop*, he glanced back up at Shane’s face. He was flushed, breathing heavily, eyes closed. “I think I just saw God”, Shane whispered. Ilya couldn’t help his laugh. His blowjob skills surely were not *that* good.

They stayed like that for a couple of moments, until Shane caught his breath again. “My turn?” Shane then asked, tilting his head down to where Ilya was resting his own against Shane’s stomach. “Do you want to?” *Fuck yeah*, he did want to.

“I have no idea how”, Shane muttered. Like Ilya didn’t know that.

The other man just chuckled as he finally sat up, before propping himself against the head of the bed. “Come here”, Ilya patted his thighs, and Shane crawled over to straddle his hips. Ilya pulled him down into a kiss again, his hips grinding up against Shane. “I want to do – that, too”, Shane had mumbled against Ilya’s lips.

“Blow me?”

“Is that what it’s called?” Shane made a face like he didn’t particularly enjoy that expression.

“Yeah.” At this point, Ilya figured all that was on his face was a stupid love-sick expression. He didn’t mind it one bit.

“Tell me how”, Shane then said as he slipped off of Ilya’s lap and turned towards his dick. Ilya was still in his undergarments, so he quickly helped himself out of them. Shane looked less confident than Ilya had when he gazed at his dick. It was fucking huge. Well, maybe not inhumanly huge, but for Shane, who had barely seen his own dick hard, it was gigantic. He took a breath. He could do this. Just do whatever Ilya had done.

He leaned down and tried to just give Ilya's dick a few kisses. He startled when he heard Ilya let out a hiss. Fuck, did he already mess this up? He looked up to the other man, who met his eyes with a half-lidded gaze. "Is good, don't worry", Ilya assured him. That had been the little push he needed to keep going. He leaned back down, continuing the kisses. He figured he was doing it for a bit too long when Ilya started to softly pet his hair, seemingly not that aroused by Shane's actions anymore.

Then, finally, he got over himself and started to take Ilya's dick in his mouth. Okay, this was weird. Really weird. It had felt so nice when Ilya did it. Just soft and wet. Shane felt like all he was doing was scrape his teeth over Ilya's skin. He made a weird face, trying to cover his teeth with his lips, not wanting to hurt Ilya. He heard Ilya giggle from above him. Slightly offended and very embarrassed, he pulled away.

"This sucks."

Ilya would never get over how Shane had none of the shame that one would usually learn from their parents or society around them. He just said whatever. Ilya loved it.

"Try uh..." *How the fuck did you teach the guy you so desperately wanted to suck your dick how to do it?* "Try to... have more spit in your mouth. Is dry."

That made sense to Shane. He thought at least. He wasn't too sure how to suddenly produce more saliva, but he could try. Hopefully. He leaned back down and paused over Ilya's dick for a moment, trying to get his mouth wet. When he finally leaned back down, he heard the most delicious sound he had ever gotten from Ilya. It was a deep moan while the man's hand gripped a handful of Shane's hair. "Like that, yeah..." Ilya grit out, sounding breathless.

Shane appreciated how Ilya's hand lightly guided his head up and down, helping him maintain the correct pace and depth. He had no idea how long he was supposed to do this. For Shane, it never took long to reach his climax. He had no idea if that was normal. He got a little more motivated when Ilya's moans got more frequent, and his hand pushed Shane's head down a little more strongly. But then, suddenly, he pulled Shane off his dick by his hair. "Sorry, sorry-" Ilya mumbled, because yes, that hurt a bit, but Shane was immediately distracted by the sight of Ilya's hips lifting off the bed, and suddenly he was spilling all over himself. Fuck. Shane did not think he had ever seen anything hotter in his life. Well, not like there had been much competition. But watching Ilya finish like that, just from Shane's mouth, was something else.

"I love you", the words suddenly stumbled out of Shane's mouth while the cum was already starting to cool on Ilya's stomach.

Chapter 9: Милдред

Chapter Notes

tbh this chapter might suck, but I had a really REALLY hard time writing one of the scenes

also, peep the planned chapters going from 10 to 11, oopsie

+ if you ever wonder, 'did Kat write it that way/use that reference on purpose?' Yes, I did.

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

Ilya felt like he was about to cry. Or come again. Maybe both. Shane had barely given him time to clean himself off before dropping that bomb on him.

Well, it wasn't like Ilya hadn't expected it. He was pretty aware that Shane probably would not have wanted to do anything sexual with Ilya if he hadn't been sure about the fact that he loved him. And it wasn't like Ilya didn't feel the same. Still, saying it out loud was a huge deal anyway.

He reached out to grab the back of Shane's head and pull it towards him, resting his forehead against Shane's. "Ya tebya lyublyu, durachok."

Shane raised an eyebrow at that but didn't pull away. "Translate?"

"I love you, you little fool." Ilya kissed Shane again. But slow. Their lips didn't even really move. Just pressing against each other, while both of them tried not to cry.

Shane wasn't even sure why he felt this way. Everything was good, wasn't it? He was here, with the man he loved and – well, who knew what the future held, but for now it was good, wasn't it? The thought crossed Shane's mind that maybe his tears were the result of God's wrath. Maybe they had just committed the worst sin Shane had ever committed. But then, Ilya started to laugh, and every doubt in his mind vanished.

"What's so funny?" Shane frowned.

"You look like little kitten when confused", Ilya mused.

After that one legendary day in May, Shane finally felt like he was floating through life again. He had returned to his parents' house the day after, sitting down with them for a talk. Obviously, he did not admit to them how he started screwing the priest, and his

homosexuality was why he had been in such a bad mood lately. He merely told them he had been deeply unhappy with the course of his life and wanted to change some things about it. The first of those was moving out of his parents' home. He knew it was a bit of an unconventional thing to do when he was not married yet – usually adults would stay with their parents until they were married off – but his parents didn't exactly mind him leaving home. He told them the priest's house had an empty room he could put a bed and a dresser in, and Ilya would be happy to host him if Shane kept helping out in the sacristy.

As soon as Ilya's name fell in that conversation, Shane's parents, of course, agreed. What bad could come from their son moving in with the priest and working in the church?

Well...

Shane gasped when Ilya had him against the table, where the shorter man had just been bent over the bible, reading. Ilya had been in the process of hanging up bundles of herbs near the fire so that they would dry for the winter. When he looked over and got a glimpse of Shane sitting like that, with his knees on the chair and his ass up, basically begging for Ilya's attention – well, who was Ilya to deny that? He put down the lavender, wiping his hands on a cloth, before slowly stalking over towards Shane. At first, he had just slowly let a hand run over Shane's back, glancing at the Bible verse the man was currently reading.

It wasn't like Shane had suddenly lost all of his belief in God. He hadn't, not at all. He still very much believed that someone was watching over him, someone who had created all life on this earth. But his relationship with the Bible was strained. He had read through some passages countless times, finding flaws, contradictions and things that were just plain wrong or nonsensical. It was still hard for him to accept that the Bible was neither God's words nor the undeniable truth. But he did slowly come to terms with the fact that maybe this didn't mean that he had to stop believing in God altogether. Perhaps he just had to find different ways to live his belief and worship God in a way that made sense to him, in a way that made him feel good about devoting his life to it.

Ilya's hand slowly wandered downwards, from Shane's back and lower towards the curve of his ass. It got a little sigh out of Shane.

"Read to me", Ilya said then, as his hand slipped beneath the hem of Shane's pants.

Shane hesitated at that for a moment. He couldn't read this holy book while Ilya was touching him, could he? But then he felt Ilya's hand grab his ass, and all rational thought left him. "Yes, Father", Shane breathed, which earned him a groan from Ilya and a swat on his ass.

"Cheeky", Ilya commented.

Then, finally, Shane dragged his eyes back onto the page. 1st Corinthians, chapter 13. He could do this.

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful..." Shane needed to pause, the feeling of Ilya's finger circling his entrance being too good. He let out another sigh.

They had not actually had sex yet, mainly because Shane was really unsure how Ilya would ever fit down there – and at first Shane also had zero idea where the fuck Ilya would even put his dick. After a little anatomy lesson, Ilya had shown Shane exactly where he could put it and gave a demonstration with his fingers and a little bit of oil. Shane had seen stars that day.

“– it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” The lines on the page were getting a little blurry as Ilyas' finger pressed against him.

“You read so well...”, Ilya cooed. “Such a good boy.”

Shane suppressed the whimper threatening to escape him. Then he felt Ilya pull away, and he really wanted to let out a whine. “Keep reading”, Ilya called out from wherever he had gone across the room, and Shane obliged.

“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” Shane swallowed, the words he was reading making him feel weirdly emotional. *Prophecies will pass away, but love never ends.* Shane shuddered a bit at that.

Finally, Ilya returned and was back at Shane's side, now softly pulling the Bible away from underneath Shane and closing the book. “Stay like that”, he instructed, before Shane felt how his pants were pulled down, exposing him to the slightly cool air of the room. Ilya's hands found their way back onto his ass, now slick with oil. Shane's breath hitched at the feeling of a finger against him again, letting out a groan when Ilya finally let it slip inside of him. He couldn't even explain how much he loved that sensation.

Even now, after Shane had been living with Ilya for about two months, it still didn't take a lot for the man to climax. Ilya had barely added a second finger before Shane had already spilt with a moan, thankfully onto the cloth Ilya had been smart enough to put on the table before.

“You sound so pretty when you do that”, Ilya had cooed as he cleaned Shane off. *Fuck*, Shane was so gone for him already.

But, as Shane had learned by now, whenever he felt like his life had reached an all-time high, it crashed even worse.

By now it was late summer, and the sun wasn't out for as much of the day anymore, and Ilya had returned to his house during noon, getting greeted by Shane, who had just finished cooking the pottage. Ilya absolutely adored this domesticity. He never strayed far from home during his workdays, since his priestly duties mostly took place in the church next door; at most, he would visit a few houses in the village. But anytime he returned to Shane, he felt like he hadn't seen the man in ages.

“Hello, my love”, Ilya said with a smile as he pulled the other man close. “I missed you”, he muttered against Shane's lips, before he kissed him. The kiss started slow and sweet, but turned heated and filthy very quickly. Ilya crowded Shane back against the counter, one hand

already slipping beneath his tunic to tease Shane's nipple. He relished the sound of Shane's moan against his lips before he pulled back to take in Shane's beautiful, flushed face.

Well, he would have, if he hadn't been so startled by the absolutely paper-white face of Shane's father, staring back at him through the small window of the house. Holy shit. Shane frowned as he took in Ilya's expression, causing him to turn as well and *-oh*. Shane froze up in Ilya's arms. His dad looked at them for another excruciating moment before he turned and quickly rushed away.

Shane felt violently ill.

This was exactly what he wanted not to happen.

Ilya looked similarly pale.

This was a nightmare.

"Shane", Ilya said quietly, knowing that, at best, this would 'just' make Shane's parents stop talking to Shane and at worst would lead to both of their deaths.

But Shane was already panicking and way past any point of listening to Ilya. "This- this is-" he barely could breathe in enough oxygen to keep his brain working, "I- I need to go- need to go tell them-"

"Tell them what?" Ilya was trying so fucking hard to stay calm. Stay level-headed. Don't freak out. For Shane. It was always just for Shane.

But the deep-seated fear, the knowledge of what his father had done to him when he found him with the neighbour boy, the knowledge of what he had done to Ilya's mother when she tried to protect him – it was a lot to power through.

"I don't know!", Shane snapped as he paced the room, ripping at his hair like that would help his brain to produce a coherent thought.

"Let me talk to them." Ilya had no idea where that confidence came from. He didn't even know if it was actually a good idea. But he couldn't stand there, watching Shane freak out and possibly facing the same fate he had faced, all those years ago, with his own father. "I will talk to them. Tell them that-" Ilya wasn't even sure what. "They respect me, Shane. You know they do. And – worst case, if they do not, the rest of village still does."

Shane glanced at him, his face already tear-streaked. “Are you sure?” His voice was quiet.

But Ilya nodded, his decision made. “I do not want you to get hurt, okay? You stay here and I talk to them. And – if something happens or-“ *God fucking forbid* “Someone comes to the house, you go to the spot at the river, and I meet you as soon as I can, okay?”

Ilya’s mind was a blur as he made his way down to Shane’s parents. His eyes were burning a little, his ears ringing. He had never felt this scared about something since he was a little kid. He wasn’t just scared for himself, but way more than that, he was concerned for Shane. For Shane’s safety, for his future, for his life.

He knocked on the front door, hands shaking. He glanced around, wondering if he should just take off running, pack Shane in a bag, and never fucking look back. But it was too late now. Shane’s mother had already opened the door.

“Father.”

Ouch. Ilya wasn’t sure why that formality stung so much. He just nodded, though. “Mistress. May I come in?”

She looked at him for a long moment before she nodded and stepped aside. When Ilya followed her into the main room of the house, Shane’s father, together with his grandmother, was already sitting there. Judging by their faces, Shane’s dad had already told them what he saw. Shane’s dad looked a second away from crossing the room and beating him up.

Ilya had no idea what to say. ‘Sorry I’m fucking your son’? God help him; this would end badly.

“So”, Shane’s father was the first to speak up. “Care to explain yourself?” He had never heard the man speak with that much hostility.

Okay. This was it. He should deflect. Tell them they were just playing around. Tell them Shane’s dad had conjured it all up in his head. Tell them there was nothing between them.

“I love Shane.”

Well. Or his mouth could just do its own thing, sure.

“You love Shane?” Yuna spoke up then. She looked at him like he had stolen her most prized possession. In that moment, it occurred to Ilya that maybe he had done that.

“I do.” His voice was steadier than he thought he was able to manage.

“He is a man”, David very helpfully pointed out.

“I- uhm. Yes. I know.”

“You can not love a man”, Shane’s dad added.

Well, tell his heart that. “I do love him. I have never... I have never loved a woman in my life, but I imagine this is what it’s like.”

Now, Yuna spoke up once more. “And what about your vow to God? Being celibate?”

Before Ilya could even open his mouth, suddenly, Shane’s grandmother spoke. At this point, she was a very old woman, often talking nonsense or bickering about anyone and anything.

“Oh, don’t be foolish, Yuna. Priests have never been much concerned with such matters! They copulate like rabbits, down in the cities!”

Everyone in the room froze, staring at the sweet old lady, who suddenly cussed like that – and, Ilya noted, defended *him*.

“Mother, this is not-“

“Oh yes, it is! Have you ever seen our boy take notice of a woman? I long wondered whether something ailed him, but his desire was simply elsewhere!” She sounded almost happy that she had figured out that Shane wasn’t ill or otherwise ‘weird’ – just into men. Ilya wasn’t sure whether he liked hearing Shane’s grandmother talk about Shane’s desire, but she wasn’t exactly wrong either.

“Mother, please, you cannot seriously condone this-“

“Quiet!” She let her cane hit the ground once. “The priest is a hard-working, nice, *handsome* young man.” Ilya bit his tongue at the way she had said ‘handsome’. Grandma was *freaky*, apparently. Maybe that’s why Shane’s grandfather always complained about hip pain. Anyway, back to the story.

“I will not stand for this-“ David started, interrupted yet again by Shane’s grandmother hitting the ground with her cane. “He can stay with the boy.”

Now, Yuna, David and Ilya all looked at Shane’s grandmother with the same shock on their faces. “He can-“

“Stay with the boy. Yes. Maybe the priest can ask God’s permission for marriage.”

Ilya was stunned. Fucking stunned. This was a dream. This was not happening.

“Foolishness!” David now yelled. “What will the town think, the elders, when they find out about this – abomination!”

Shane’s grandmother gave him a look that could only be described as unimpressed. “You think the elders will dislike it if our boy is friends with the priest?”

“But they’re not friends, mother, they-“ David let the end of the sentence open and everyone in the room could fill in the gap.

“What should we care? He is a priest; he will know what God would want.” He was so incredibly glad for Shane’s grandmother in this moment.

“But it’s a sin! Man shall not lie with Man, the Bible says that!” David kept on being outraged, while Yuna had sat down by the table, her head in her hands. Ilya just kept standing awkwardly in the middle of the room, not having uttered a single word for minutes.

“Oh, you can read, *God yield you*.” The fucking laugh Ilya had to suppress as Shane’s grandmother said that, in her dry, unimpressed tone. “The Bible also says we shall not judge on God’s behalf. And God knows you are not innocent.”

Judging by the look on David’s face, there was some kind of backstory Ilya wasn’t aware of. He almost looked like a scolded schoolboy who had just gotten detention. “Yes, mother, I am aware.”

There was a silence in the room after that. Nobody really knew what to say. Clearly, Shane’s parents still were not at all okay with this. “You will marry him, will you?” Shane’s grandmother now glanced at Ilya.

“I- uhm.” Ilya wasn’t sure what to say. Even if there hadn’t been the whole issue of them both being men, there was still the issue of Ilya being a priest, and it was very much not allowed for priests to receive both the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Sacrament of Matrimony, either way. “If it was possible, I would get laicised.” That wasn’t wrong. If it meant he was allowed to marry Shane, he would put down his priesthood in a heartbeat.

“You would put down your priesthood for Shane?” Now, Yuna finally spoke up again. It sounded a little like an accusation. Like she didn’t like the fact that Ilya would be more loyal to Shane than to his occupation.

“Yes. I would.” Ilya was final on that. He would. In a heartbeat.

“Well, it doesn’t matter because they can’t get married anyway!” David seemed to still be the most enraged out of all of them.

Yuna took a deep breath before she turned to her husband: “So, what, do you prefer if this would reach the town? Can you imagine the outrage? The scandal this would put on our family?”

“I would prefer if they never saw each other again!”

“Well, that clearly won’t work, will it?” True. They both lived in the same tiny village, barely five minutes apart. Ilya felt the tiniest bit bad about making Shane’s parents fight like this, but since he had expected to get beaten up by Shane’s father, this was a very acceptable outcome.

“Take a breath”, Shane’s grandma commented. “They will sin anyway. They are boys. Have you heard Linda’s daughter got knocked up by the blacksmith’s son before wedlock? Now *that* is a scandal we would not want.”

David seemed like he was one second away from bursting a vein. He pinched the back of his nose. “At least he can’t get with child.” He mumbled that more to himself than anyone in particular.

“So, what is your plan, Ilya?” Yuna looked at him now, and Ilya knew this was far from over or dealt with, but the fact that she had used his first name calmed him immensely.

“I am not sure”, Ilya said truthfully. “I mean – we did not plan on anyone finding out. I did not think someone-“ he glanced at Shane’s father. “That someone would ever be behind the church and look into window.”

David looked a little sheepish at that. “I just wanted to ask if you had some onions for us.”

“It’s not like we want anyone to know”, Ilya continued. “We both realise this is not something anyone should know about.”

Both Shane’s parents nodded at that, seemingly relieved that at least this part they could agree on. It wasn’t like it was very hard to hide a relationship, at least physically. It was frowned upon for anyone to show affection in public, even if you were husband and wife. The only problems came about when someone would spy on them in the comfort of their own home. Which wasn’t that hard to do, considering the priest’s hut was just on the ground floor, and even though there was rarely anyone around that part of the church, it wasn’t impossible to see them. Clearly.

“What if they move into Aunt Mildred’s home?” Everyone glanced at Yuna then. She continued. “She recently passed, and the heritage all falls on us, since she doesn’t have children of her own.”

Ilya perked up at that. Move into a proper house with Shane? That sounded like a fucking dream.

“Shane could move into it, officially, and nobody would question it. And if the priest spent a lot of time there, nobody would care either”, Shane’s mother concluded. That plan sounded too fucking good to be true. Ilya was sure he had actually been beaten up and was currently passed out somewhere, hallucinating all this.

Shane had been anxiously pacing Ilya’s house for God knows how long at this point. What if something happened? What if – no, he didn’t even want to think about it. His father had never been the violent type, but at this point, Shane had conjured every possible scenario in his head. Maybe he would never see Ilya alive again. Gosh, no, he didn’t even want to consider that.

He flinched when he heard the front door open, half expecting it to be his father or maybe a sheriff who was going to put Shane in the pillory.

But it was Ilya. Smiling.

“Hey?” Shane’s voice was quiet. He had no idea what to expect.

“Did you know your father’s aunt died?” Maybe not the best way to start this conversation.

Shane frowned. “Mildred? I did, yes, why?”

“Well, seems like we are moving into her house, down by the river.”

Chapter End Notes

yes, this was obviously inspired by the scene with Shane's parents at the cottage

Chapter 10: Fools

Chapter Notes

Okay, so I actually managed to complete the story within my planned 10 chapters, so enjoy!

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

Shane had learned by now that he shouldn't dwell on any feeling of completion or contentment. It always would let him down in the end.

He hadn't talked to his parents much since his father had caught him and Ilya. It wasn't that they didn't want to talk to him, no, but the dynamic had clearly shifted. Shane wasn't sure if it was because his parents, especially his father, now thought less of him because he was in love with a man. Maybe it was. Yet, Shane could admit that he wasn't exactly trying to talk to them often either. If he was honest with himself, he had been avoiding them. He just wasn't sure how to look at them, how to interact with them, now that they knew his secret. There was this sense of impending doom looming in the back of his mind. It couldn't have been this easy, this simple for them. There had to come a catch somewhere soon. He didn't believe this was it – they had moved into his aunt's house a few weeks ago, and now they could just live happily ever after? That wasn't how life worked. It had never been how his life had worked.

But he didn't want to burden anyone with his thoughts. With the feeling of anxiety that haunted him day and night. With the way he was struggling to fall asleep, and whenever he did, he woke up drenched in sweat from the nightmares. Nightmares of the town finding out, of someone ratting them out to whatever higher power was there, to someone who could get them killed.

It wasn't like Ilya didn't notice. He was acutely aware of Shane's sleep struggles and could see them on his face in the mornings. He knew Shane was living in constant fear. In fear of being discovered, in fear of someone, even his own family, disapproving of their love in a way that could threaten their lives. He knew he had to do something.

"When will you return?" Shane asked quietly, as he helped Ilya pack some provisions he would need for his journey. Ilya had received a letter from a bishop a few cities away, asking him for an audience, now that he had been a priest in the lands the bishop oversaw for a year. Of course, Ilya couldn't refuse it. Shane knew how much it pained him to leave, even though it would just be for a few days, some weeks at most. The journey didn't take that long, two days and one night on horseback, but Ilya wasn't sure yet how long his visit in the city would last. Maybe he would only be back for the new moon. Shane desperately hoped that wouldn't be the case.

The first day without Ilya was agony. Shane hadn't even realised how much he had gotten used to sleeping next to him, waking up with him, sharing lunch with him, falling back asleep together. And right now, it wasn't really like he could fill that loneliness with any other social contacts. Sure, he had some people in the village he considered friends, but they wouldn't even come close to filling the void. And his family? Well, he had still not really talked to his father since then. He saw his mother and grandmother in the tavern regularly, and while his grandmother acted as she always had, his mother often acted as if he didn't exist.

Shane didn't want to think about how much that had hurt. He knew all of this was a shock to his parents, and, according to what Ilya had told him about their conversation, his father had been the most enraged about it. He knew his mother probably wasn't too happy about it either – she had always wanted Shane to find a nice girl to settle down with, produce a few heirs and then take over the tavern. He knew it had hurt her to realise that this wish would never come true.

And, most of all, he knew both of his parents were worried that any of this would reach the village. He was aware of how hard his grandparents had fought to become part of the community, and how hard his own parents had worked to make their family as well respected and loved as it was today. Shane knew that the news of him having a relationship with the priest would catapult them right back down to the bottom of the pyramid. Nobody would respect them anymore; nobody would respect parents who let their son go through with such a disgrace. They weren't just two men who loved each other – they had sex before marriage, they broke Ilya's vow of celibacy, and they were two people of different social standings. It wouldn't even work if one of them were a woman.

In the days Ilya was gone, Shane had a lot of time to think about these things. He had tried to talk to his mother, merely about bland town gossip, just to hear her voice again. But anytime he tried, she looked at him with tears in her eyes and had to leave the room. He felt horrible. Like he had put a curse on his family, sent God's wrath onto them. And now, Ilya wasn't even there to talk him out of that thinking. Maybe this wasn't worth it. Maybe he should have never even entertained the thought that this could work. He had been foolish to think it would. He wished he could go back in time and tell himself not to do this.

While Ilya was gone, Shane finally decided to return to his regular book-reading for the town's children. He had still continued to do it every once in a while, over the past few weeks, but not nearly as often as he had been doing it a year ago. He had borrowed some of the books he had read from Ilya's personal collection, and the children absolutely loved the one about the magician, just as Shane had.

Every day, after he had read to the children behind the church, he returned to their new home down by the river and cried. He didn't even know why he cried. Well, he did have a lot of reasons to. They all boiled down to how lonely he felt. How empty he felt inside. Even when Ilya was around, there was a certain loneliness Shane felt. Sure, Ilya was kind of in the same situation as Shane was in, but not really. Shane had lived in this village his whole life. He had been very close to his family his whole life. And now, suddenly, he had virtually nobody anymore. He couldn't even talk to the people he loved anymore, without them acting like he didn't even exist. Sure, Ilya had left his family, too. But his family had always been awful. His father was always horrible. Shane's father hadn't. He had watched Shane grow up; he had

made Shane become the man he was today. And for what? For Shane to betray his own bloodline by loving a man.

Sometimes Shane wondered if this was even worth it anymore. If he should just visit the river and let the stream take him.

When Ilya returned, Shane was hardly able to feel any happiness about it. Sure, he was overjoyed that the only person who really still loved him was back, but he also just didn't feel any happiness overall.

"I brought you something, from the city", Ilya had said, as he handed Shane a couple of books he had gotten for him. They were all fantasy stories, just like Shane liked them. "No princesses, I checked." That had gotten a little smile from Shane.

Ilya grew increasingly worried, day after day, as Shane slept less and struggled to get out of bed more. He knew, obviously, that Shane was taking the whole thing with his family very hard. He didn't even think that it would help a lot if Shane's parents were more accepting. A huge part of what bothered Shane was the constant fear in which they lived. The constant fear of being discovered, the fear of what that meant for them and Shane's family. If they were found out, Shane's whole family probably couldn't show their face in the village anymore. And Shane would feel full responsibility for it.

One day, Shane woke up after having slept as awfully as ever, but to a note on their dining table. It was clearly in Ilya's handwriting.

'Meet me at river, noon'

Weirdly cryptic, Shane thought. But it wasn't like he had anything better to do, despite wallowing in self-pity all day. So, when the sun reached her peak that day, Shane made his way down to their favourite spot by the river. At least he had assumed that's what Ilya meant.

Already from afar, Shane could see the sitting silhouette of the priest by the riverbank. He was sitting on some sort of blanket, with a... basket? Shane was confused. Did Ilya seriously want him out here for a picnic? Shane hated himself for how little joy that thought brought him. A few months ago, he would have been over the moon if someone, especially Ilya, put that much thought into something to make Shane happy. But he just felt empty. And, quite frankly, a little scared that someone would see them out here.

"What is this?", Shane asked, trying to at least put on a smile as he finally reached Ilya.

Picnic?" The tears already welled up in Shane's eyes as he watched the man he loved smile at him, clearly having put a lot of thought into somehow making Shane a little happier again. He hated that it didn't work.

Ilya frowned at Shane's expression. "Hey, hey, no, Shane, no crying..."

Shane couldn't help it. For some reason, all of the feelings he had bottled up over the past weeks, the fear and the anxiety and the resulting exhaustion coming over him. He felt himself being pulled into Ilya's arms, and he let it happen, already too weak to resist, the tears falling.

"Shh", Ilya slowly rocked him. "What's going on?" He whispered into Shane's ear, so softly and lovingly, and it made Shane sob harder. He didn't deserve this. He didn't deserve someone to care about him this much.

"I'm scared", Shane finally whispered. "So scared." His voice was muffled against Ilya's chest.

"Scared of what?", Ilya asked softly.

"Someone..." he swallowed. "Someone seeing. Us."

Shane felt Ilya's arms tighten around him. It made him sob again. It was unfair, and Shane knew it. Unfair to everyone. Unfair to his parents, to want them to accept him and accept the possibility of the village turning their backs on them. Unfair to Ilya, not being able to take the love he was trying to give. Unfair to himself, not thinking he was worthy of any of it.

"Shane", Ilya said, gentle and soft. "I have... secret, to tell you."

Shane tensed up at that. A secret? He had no idea what Ilya was talking about. He didn't like the idea of a secret, not in his state, and not ever. Why was Ilya even having secrets from him? "A secret?", he croaked out.

"Yes." Ilya was quiet for a moment, still holding Shane tight. "I was not in city for bishop."

What? Shane's head was reeling. So, Ilya had lied to him? Why? What else was he doing?

"I mean, yes, the bishop did send me letter." Ilya paused. "I talked to him. He asked me if I was happy, here. I said no."

Shane frowned. What? Ilya was not happy in the village? Why didn't he know that? Was he so caught up in his own sorrows that he didn't even realise when Ilya was unhappy? "You're not?" Shane's voice was barely audible.

"No", Ilya shook his head. "Not if you are not happy."

Oh. Shane couldn't even stop his sobbing if he tried.

"And he asked me why not, and I said... I do not want to work as priest anymore." Ilya paused once more. Shane felt like he could feel his heartbeat in his ears. "He told me he had received a letter from a different bishop. From Russia. My father... is dead."

Shane froze up at that. He knew Ilya's father was a bad person, but he probably was still sad about this, right? Shane now looked up, reaching out to Ilya's cheek. "Ilya, I'm so sorr--"

"No", Ilya shook his head, covering Shane's head with his own. "Don't be sorry. He was a bad man. I am glad he is dead."

Shane just nodded. Whatever could he even say to that?

“He has left me... lot of wealth.” Ilya said, then. “And I... want to take it. I told bishop that... I do not want to keep living this way. I want to... take the money I deserve and live on small farm in middle of nowhere with... person I love.”

“*That’s* what you said to *the bishop*?!” Shane now sat up straight, still on Ilya’s lap, enraged in shock.

Ilya smiled a little and shrugged. “Ah, not word for word. But... in essence.”

“Okay, so- what are you going to do?” Shane felt his voice waver.

“I looked at house, in city. Well, it is a little farm... nice house, a few rooms, some stables for animals.” Ilya shrugged. “It’s a bit away from any neighbours.”

Shane’s eyes went wide. Ilya didn’t actually mean what Shane thought he meant, right? “Ilya, are you-“

“Yes, Shane. I am. I want to go there, with you. I will put down priesthood and live with you in small little farm, with small little animals, in private.”

Shane started to sob again. Not out of fear this time, but because he didn’t think he would feel this relieved in his life again. Well, the prospect of having to leave the village he grew up in, living next to his family, was a bit hard. But it was probably the best for everyone. And after all, it was only a 2-day travel away, if he ever wanted to visit.

When they had packed their little carriage and were now standing in the middle of Shane’s parents’ house, everyone was crying. Even Ilya, who had now put down his standing as a cleric and was dressed in regular people’s clothes. Well, definitely nicer than normal peasantry. Because his father, as bad a person as he had been, had left Ilya a lot of money after his death. And by owning that piece of land near the city now, Ilya was basically a landowner.

Shane was quiet throughout most of their travels. His mind was a mixture of sadness at leaving his family and the village behind, and a strong sense of freedom that would come with living with Ilya in a strange, new city with many more people than their old village, in a private farmhouse on the outskirts of town.

Nobody would care about them there. If anyone did think anything bad of them, they would just be avoided by the majority of the city’s population. Which they were more than okay with. They had no more reputation to lose here.

The farmhouse really was pretty. It had a large main room downstairs, a hearth with a big oven, and a couple of rooms upstairs that they could also heat. It was just far enough outside of the main city that hardly anyone came by, but close enough so they weren't completely cut off. The stables were big enough for a few pigs and maybe a cow, just enough to have a little self-sufficient farm. As far as Shane and Ilya knew, the farm had been left to the city after the people who lived here had moved away a few years ago. Ilya was able to buy it from the bishop – who Shane later found out was the same man that Ilya had served for, back in the monastery in Russia.

Sometimes, things really did fall into place.

One day, though, Shane felt like his life was about to collapse again. Ilya had been weird the whole week. Kind of off-standish, and weirdly absent from their conversations. He also had a lot of apparent 'meetings' in the city, which he wouldn't tell Shane about. Shane had his worries from the start, what on earth this could be about. The most prevalent thing on his mind was the thought that Ilya had met a woman. Now that he was no longer a priest, he could marry. And maybe Ilya had realised that's what he wanted?

No, it couldn't be. After all they had been through, it wasn't possible that Ilya would throw it away now, right?

Well, the whole thing came to a head the other night. Ilya had returned late, it was almost midnight, and Shane was seething. It had been a week of this nonsense, and Shane was done. "Where were you?" He basically snarled as he watched Ilya quietly walk into their bedroom.

Ilya startled, probably expecting Shane to be asleep already. "Shh", he merely said, making Shane's anger even worse. "Don't shush me, Ilya, tell me where on earth you were this late!" Ilya glanced at him then, probably realising that Shane was seriously upset over this. He sat down on the bed next to him. "Shane, my love." He tried to pull Shane into a hug, but Shane didn't have it. "Are you seeing another woman?" Ilya was extremely taken aback by this. "What?"

Shane scoffed. "Don't play fucking dumb. Have you been seeing someone else or not?"

"No, of course not! How could you even think–"

"Because I have been eating dinner by myself for the whole week!" Shane snapped. "And you have yet to tell me a good reason for why!"

Ilya exhaled. Okay, Shane had a point. "Okay, look, Shane, I promise, this will make all sense soon. Just give me a few more days, okay?"

Shane wanted to roll his eyes at that. But he knew that he had the tendency to dramatise things in his head. He could wait a few more days for an explanation.

A few more days later, though, Shane was even more confused than he had been in this whole situation. He woke up to Ilya gone, which was unusual, and a note on the table. God, how he hated those stupid notes. 'Come to the church at noon.'

The church? Why the hell would he go to the church? The note was laid on a bundle of clothes, which Shane assumed Ilya wanted him to wear? Maybe? Shane frowned as he looked at them. They seemed expensive. A deep blue tunic with gold embroidery and matching breeches. What the hell was this? Ilya had never gifted him something like that. And why on earth would he need to dress up like that to meet Ilya at the church? It didn't make sense at all.

But, he also was itching to find out what the hell Ilya had been hiding, finally. So, at noon, he put on the ridiculously expensive clothes and made his way to the church. He was confused when nobody was there as he walked up the path to the church doors. It was also quite cold out, almost Winter already, so Shane decided to wait inside. As he did, he was met with the sight of Ilya, dressed equally as expensively, and the bishop, dressed in a wedding vestment. What was going on here?

Shane's brow furrowed. As soon as Ilya saw him, the other man smiled. He stepped off the altar, walking down the path towards Shane. "Ilya, what are we-"

"Wedding." Ilya merely said.

Shane felt his heart give out. "*What?*"

"You and me. We have a wedding. Right now."

Shane's heart stopped entirely. This was not happening. This couldn't be happening. They were both men. Two men couldn't get married.

Ilya laughed, as if he could read Shane's thoughts. "Bishop is friend. Is okay. Asked God for permission."

Shane was completely speechless by now. So, what, Ilya had spent the past week secretly planning their wedding? And the bishop was in on it? This had to be a dream.

"Come on", Ilya said as he tugged on Shane's hand, already starting towards the aisle. Towards the altar. Towards the bishop. Who would marry them. Right now.

Shane was about to pass out.

He could not remember a single word that was said during the ceremony. Not one. His heart was beating in his throat, his eyes were blurry the whole time. This was actually happening. They were getting married. Like, an actual, regular, official wedding. Like any other couple. At the end of it, Ilya had slipped a ring onto Shane's finger. A beautiful silver one, with a blue stone in it, that Shane felt looked like the colour of Ilya's eyes. Ilya handed him another ring, which he put on Ilya's hand in return. It was the same shape, just made of dark brown stone. Like Shane's eyes. He was really going to pass out.

As soon as they were back in the comfort of their own home, Shane threw Ilya against the door. Every single emotion was pulsing through him. Anger that Ilya had hidden this for him. Anger that Shane had thought Ilya was cheating. An insane amount of excitement and relief that they were MARRIED!! Married by a bishop, an actual marriage in God's eyes, an actual marriage on an official paper. And now he was absolutely turned on to no end that Ilya had pulled it off like this.

"Someone wants to enjoy the wedding night", Ilya had smirked at him.

Shane felt like he was about to implode. His hands had never been this needy, his lips never that forward. He needed Ilya, he needed him everywhere. "Fuck, Shane", Ilya had moaned in his ear, and Shane felt feral.

He basically dragged Ilya up the stairs into their bedroom, getting him on the bed before climbing onto his lap. Shane's head was swimming. He felt drunk, without a single drop of alcohol in his system. He probably wouldn't remember a single detail of this day. But it was alright. He had Ilya to remind him. And the ring that now adorned his wedding finger.

He wasn't sure when exactly he had gotten his pants off, or for how long Ilya had been working him open already; the only thing he felt was the hot need pulsing through him as he finally sank down onto Ilya's cock for the first time ever. They kind of did wait for marriage, in that sense. It dragged a moan out of both men, and Shane knew none of them would last like this. He didn't care. They had their whole lives to keep fucking each other. Their whole lives to keep exploring each other. Their whole lives to spend with each other.

As husbands.

Shane stirred awake slowly when the sun hit his face through the window. He blinked his eyes open, twisting in Ilya's arms, which caused the other man to stir, too. "Hollander, what are you doing, is early", Ilya mumbled into his pillow, pulling his husband closer again. He closed his eyes, not wanting to wake up before their alarm had even sounded.

"I had like the craziest dream", Shane muttered back.

Ilya sighed. Okay, Shane would probably not let this go. "What dream?" He couldn't sound less interested if he tried. He hated Shane's habit of waking up before their alarm clock.

"So, basically, I think we were in like – the Middle Ages? And I lived with my parents in like a tiny little village, and then one day, you came to the village as the new priest, and it got like really crazy."

Ilya felt mildly amused by that. Leave it to Shane to even be boring in his dreams. “Oh, a priest?”, Ilya hummed, turning so he could sling one leg over Shane. “Did you call me Father, hm?” He nuzzled into Shane’s neck. “Maybe... daddy?” He ground his hips a little into Shane’s thigh.

Shane scoffed, giving him a slight shove. “You get called ‘daddy’ enough as is.”

As if on cue, little footsteps sounded from the hallway. Shane watched as the door, which was never fully shut at night for precisely this reason, got pushed open by little hands. He could only hear quiet giggles as the thing crawled onto the foot of the bed and underneath Ilya’s blanket. The man groaned playfully. “Shane, we have bedbug again!”

The small creature crawled up the length of the bed before emerging from the blanket with a tiny ‘boo!’. Ilya, of course, made big theatrics about getting spooked by this, before he grinned and wrapped his arms around the laughing toddler. “Shane, I caught the monster, help me!” Shane watched fondly as his husband started to softly tickle their daughter, who couldn’t yet say much more than ‘*Papa, ne!*’ between her giggles.

“I thought it was too early for fun, hm?” Shane commented with amusement. Ilya gave him a dry look before turning back to their child. “You hear this? Dada is always *so* boring.” Shane just rolled his eyes fondly. “I’ll go make the princess a bottle, before the drama starts.”

Ilya watched as Shane got up, their toddler snuggling into his arms; her little attack had apparently used up too much energy, bringing her right back to sleep. He smiled as he watched her close her eyes and her breathing even out as she cuddled him.

This really was all he ever wanted.

“Ya tebya lyublyu, durachok”, he whispered softly into her hair.

I love you, you little fool.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, wow, this fic is over. I’m a little sad about it. I hope you enjoyed that little plot-twist at the end :)

I’m currently in the process of planning a new fic – I want to do a similar AU, something medieval or at least a medieval-inspired fantasy world. I really want to write something where I can develop all the lore and rules of the world myself, because the amount of research on religious customs and the bible and feudal orders I had to do for this fic was honestly exhausting

So, if you want to, keep an eye out in the next few days (I might even publish chapter one tonight already) for the new fic!!

End Notes

Little self-promo update: I just published the first few chapters of [**The Concord of Souls**](#). It's a Royalty/Soulmate AU Heated Rivalry fic, and I have big plans for it. So, take a look if you're interested in that :)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!