

Coffee Bean

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Coffee Bean

by [velvetnights](#)

Summary

Shane doesn't believe in hockey, fate, or men like Ilya Rozanov. Unfortunately, none of them care.

Notes

I was rather inspired by Scott Hunter and Kip meeting, so I wanted to put my spin on it with Ilya and Shane.

Hope you'll enjoy.

Chapter 1: First to 8th encounter

First encounter

It was snowing. Shane leaned against the counter and looked through the big windows. When he blinked, everything outside went white. The trees, the street, and even his 2005 Ford Fiesta parked right in front had a thick layer of it.

The coffee shop was empty. He sighed and turned around, staring at a blinking red sensor on a machine.

The bell chimed.

"Welcome to Coffee Bean, what can I get you?"

"What do you recommend?" the man asked, wearing nothing but a skin-tight running blouse; the snow was melting on him, seeping through the material, darkening it in places he wished he hadn't noticed.

"Depends. We have specialty coffee, but be warned, if you've never had it, you might find it perhaps too acidic and sour. It's a common complaint," Shane said; he tapped his fingers on the counter.

The man said nothing, stepping closer to the counter, his blonde hair still having snowflakes all over it. It fell over his forehead, as the snow melted, dripping onto Shane's freshly cleaned floors. He was making a mess. He had cleaned those floors not even 10 minutes ago.

"Alright, make me one you think I'd like," the man said. "Looks like you have all the time."

"Right."

Shane turned again, straightening his apron, and sighed. He didn't seem like the type to enjoy, or even appreciate specialty coffee. Or patience. Or anything that required sitting still.

Second encounter

It was him again. The bell chimed and the snow hadn't stopped since yesterday. His car barely looked like one, but a mound of snow that had rolled from a mountain top.

"Shane, right?" the man said, smiling.

He wore a black shirt and Shane wondered how his balls weren't freezing; or at least, looking at him as he stood relatively still, he wasn't trembling.

"Want to try a different"—

"Nah, nah, the one from yesterday was good. Make that."

"Sure."

The sensor was still blinking at him; an expensive blink, one he could fix once he had more than one customer each morning. He was sure his newly loyal customer was staring at his back.

"Here, same as yesterday. Oh, no, that's too much," Shane said, staring at the numbers on the POS machine.

"It's fine."

"No, it's not."

"Yes, it is," the man said, smiling. "Can I smoke in here?"

"No..."

"Worth a try. But you send a poor man into that..." he said, and pointed at the windows. "To smoke his cigarette with his specialty coffee."

"Yes. Or... you could quit smoking. You run, doesn't"—

"I barely smoke. Well... I'll see you around."

Third encounter

He was already focused on the door when the bell chimed and the man entered, wearing the same too body-fitting blouse.

"Morning, same order?" Shane asked.

"Yes, same order, Shane," he said, and leaned over the counter.

Shane straightened his apron.

"So... what's your name?"

"Rozanov."

"Isn't that more of a family name?"

"Fine, Ilya..." he said, grinning. "For you, it's Ilya."

Shane nodded as that settled it, even though it didn't. He turned back to the machine, hands moving on muscle memory.

Shane set the cup down in front of him without looking.

"You forgot the sugar," Ilya said.

Shane frowned. "You don't take sugar."

"I do today."

Shane hesitated, then slid the packet over.

"That's new," he said.

Ilya smiled, slowly. "So is my name."

Shane didn't like how that landed in his chest.

"Don't make a habit of it," he said.

"Too late," Ilya said.

Fourth encounter

He searched his name on Instagram. It was barely 7 AM.

As the page loaded, four customers walked in.

"Shit," Shane said, but before he locked the screen, his profile appeared. "Hockey?"

"We love hockey," the girl said, leaning against the counter. "Are you a hockey player undercover?"

"Just a barista," Shane said. "What can I get you?"

"A capuccino. God, you didn't happen to see Ilya Rozanov, did you?"

"Uhm, no..." Shane said and turned around.

"You know who he is, right?"

"Uhm, yeah...?"

"The Metros' captain. Ilya Rozanov."

"Right..." Shane said, hoping the milk foaming could suffocate his thoughts as well.

He didn't come into the shop that day. Or the next four. By the sixth, he searched his name on Google. Montreal Metros — away game in Boston.

Fifth encounter

The bell chimed and Shane dropped the rag he used to clean the counter for the fifth time that morning. A man entered, blonde, tall, well-built. He wasn't Ilya Rozanov.

"Morning. What can I get you?" Shane asked and sighed.

"Black coffee," the man said.

Shane nodded and turned around. His hands moved on autopilot.

He hated that he'd looked. Hated that his chest had done that stupid, hopeful thing before his brain caught up.

When he turned back, the man was already scrolling on his phone.

Shane slid the cup across the counter and didn't linger.

The man glanced up. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Shane said too fast.

"Rough morning?"

Shane almost laughed. Instead, he shook his head. "Just tired."

The man nodded, paid, and left.

The bell chimed again. Shane didn't look this time.

Instead, when it chimed for the fortieth time that day, and his back hurt more than in the morning, he glanced up, ready to take the order; Shane dropped the rag again.

"Need help with that?"

"No, uhm, haven't seen you in a while," Shane said.

"Been... busy. Travelling for work."

"Right."

"Still want your coffee?"

"Yes, no sugar."

"I wasn't going to."

"I know."

Shane turned back to the machine.

Ilya leaned against the counter like he used to, close enough that Shane could feel the heat of him without meaning to.

Neither of them spoke.

When Shane set the cup down, their fingers brushed.

Ilya didn't make a joke.

Shane didn't pull away.

Sixth encounter

It stopped snowing, eventually, but his Ford Fiesta looked like it had fought six snowstorms and three hurricanes. Someone had clipped his left mirror that morning. When Shane ran after him, he slid across the ice, straight into a row of dumpsters.

Shane stared at his phone: Montreal Metros against Boston Raiders - TONIGHT.

That night, the apartment empty and dark, Shane stared at the snow trails his boots left on the tiles he'd just wiped in the morning.

He didn't turn the TV on for hockey. He turned it on for noise.

The channel was already there.

Shane stood in his coat, keys still in his hand, and told himself he'd just wait for the kettle to boil.

He stayed through the anthem.

He recognized Ilya immediately, not because of the jersey, because of how he moved.

"Ilya Rozanov is on pace to decide this game," the presenter said. "And when he wants control on the ice, he usually gets it."

Shane turned the TV off.

"Oh, fuck off."

Seventh encounter

On Monday morning, Shane opened the shop ten minutes early.

He didn't know why. He wiped the counter twice before the bell chimed.

"Morning."

"Oh, hi, morning. The regular — no sugar. Or one sugar, since you won on Friday?" Shane asked.

He turned around, squeezing his fists, hard. That was not what he had rehearsed the entire morning.

"Right, yeah... no sugar, Shane. And thanks. We beat their asses. Did you watch the whole game?"

He walked to the coffee machine, pressing some buttons, turning the knobs, foaming the milk.

"Just the first few minutes."

"You don't seem like a hockey fan," Ilya said, leaning against the counter.

"I'm not."

"So you watched it for me?"

"Oh, don't"—

"I have two tickets for Friday's game. It's better live."

"I don't think so."

"Have you ever been to a hockey game, and watching it on TV doesn't count," Ilya said as Shane placed the cup in front of him.

"It's hot."

"Oh, it's really hot," Ilya grinned.

"I meant the coffee."

"Me too. So... Friday, two tickets? The spots are really good."

"I bet."

The bell chimed.

Shane exhaled, already turning away. "I've got customers."

Ilya stepped back, hands up. "Friday," he said lightly.

Shane didn't answer.

The tickets stayed in Ilya's pocket.

Eight encounter

"This is stupid," Shane said and sat down.

"No, it's great."

"How?"

People were taking their spots, and someone almost spilled the beer all over him. It was crowded, noisy, and filled with people who most probably had never drunk good coffee in their lives. Or good beer.

"Captain of the Metros gave you free tickets to watch him kick ass on the ice."

"Rose!"

"Shane..."

"You're... thinking."

"Of course I am, sugarplum. So, let me paint the picture: the guy comes every morning"—

"Only when he's in town"—

"Fine, comes every morning when he's in town to your coffee shop, knows your name and you just told him guys on ice are hot," Rose said.

"The coffee. I was talking about the coffee."

"Right. And you watched his game. Alone."

"The TV was"—

"Shut up. He's looking at you."

"No, he's not."

"He is. Wave," Rose said and grabbed his hand.

"No."

"Yes, wave."

So Shane waved and Ilya kept looking at him, skating on the ice. He didn't wave, not that Shane had expected him to, but his gaze did not leave him. Not until the game began, at least.

"He's hot. And into you," Rose said.

"He's not into me."

"All the signs point to"—

"I'm not gay," Shane whispered.

"I've always thought you might be a late bloomer. Look, what's the big deal? Men can like men. It's no big deal."

"It's a big deal for me."

Rose watched him for a moment, then nodded.

"Okay," she said. "Then it's a big deal."

Shane exhaled like he'd been holding it since he sat down.

The crowd roared. He flinched.

Shane looked back at the ice.

Ilya had stopped near the boards, helmet off, listening to someone yell something Shane couldn't hear.

He smiled.

Shane's chest did that stupid thing again.

"Fuck," he muttered.

Rose followed his gaze. "Yeah. All I'm saying is..." she sighed, rubbing her temples. "You don't have to decide after 28 years living on this Earth whether you like sweaty, hot dudes or not. But he's a hot sweaty dude. That's all. And he seems interested."

The game ended in a blur of noise and standing bodies, sweaty, noisy, but not particularly hot. Shane barely remembered the final score, only the way his hands hurt from clapping too hard, the way his chest still hadn't settled.

Outside, the cold hit him like a wall.

Snow crunched under his boots as people spilled out of the arena, laughing, shouting, already drunk on victory. Rose disappeared into the crowd with a quick hug and a text me, leaving him standing under a flickering streetlight, collar pulled up, breath fogging the air. He didn't know whether Ilya would even search for him. Why would he?

"Shane."

He turned.

Ilya stood a few feet away, jacket slung over his shoulder, hair still damp, cheeks flushed from the cold or the game, or both. Up close, he looked different. Quieter. Like the ice had stayed behind him.

"Hey," Shane said. Brilliant.

"I didn't know if you'd stay," Ilya said. "You left pretty fast."

"Crowds," Shane said. "Not really my thing."

"Yeah." Ilya nodded, like that made sense. "You still came."

Shane shrugged. "You said it was better live."

A smile tugged at Ilya's mouth. "Was it?"

Shane hesitated.

"...Yeah."

They stood there, snow drifting lazily between them, the roar of the arena muffled now, distant.

"I'm glad you came," Ilya said.

Shane nodded. His hands were cold. He didn't put them in his pockets.

"Good game," he said instead.

Ilya laughed softly. "You sound like a fan."

"I'm still not."

"Okay," Ilya said. "Then... coffee tomorrow?"

Shane looked at him.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah. Coffee."

Ilya's smile widened, just a little. "No sugar?"

"No sugar."

Ilya stepped back, lifted a hand in something that wasn't quite a wave.

"Night, Shane."

"Night."

Shane watched him disappear into the crowd before he realized his heart was doing that stupid thing again.

He exhaled slowly, breath turning white in the dark.

'It's a big deal', he thought.

Chapter 2: 9th to 10th encounter

Ninth encounter

Shane grinned as the bell chimed, then covered his face with a napkin, pretending to blow his nose.

"Morning, my biggest fan. Getting sick?"

"No. Hey. Hi. Morning."

"Then just shy?" Ilya asked.

Shane dropped the napkin. "No. So—coffee. Right."

"Coffee. Why don't you join me outside while I suffer in the snow, smoking my cigarette?"

"I told you to stop smoking."

"Coffee needs a cigarette. I don't make the rules," Ilya said, shrugging. "Make one for yourself. I'll pay. And no cigarette for you."

"No need. I own this place."

"Oh," Ilya said, grinning. "Mr. Entrepreneur Shane...?"

"Hollander."

"Come on, Mr. Businessman. I need my nicotine."

Shane slid the cup across the counter. "This one's on the house. For winning the game."

Ilya took the cup, their fingers brushing.

"Outside?" he asked.

Shane hesitated. Then nodded.

The cold hit Shane immediately. His breath fogged, the paper cup warming his hands in a way that felt embarrassingly good. Ilya leaned against the brick wall like the snow didn't exist, cigarette already lit.

"See?" Ilya said. "Survivable."

"If you say so," Shane muttered.

He exhaled smoke to the side, away from Shane. "You nervous?"

"No."

"You're gripping the cup so hard it might"— Ilya said and made a sound that resembled a small explosion.

Shane loosened his fingers on reflex. "You drag all your baristas outside to watch you smoke?"

"Only the ones who watch my games."

"I told you, I didn't—"

"I know," Ilya said. "You turned it off. But, you did come to my game, so... you do watch some."

Ilya tilted his head, studying him.

"You don't have to be embarrassed," Ilya said. "I like that you tried."

"I wasn't trying," Shane snapped.

"Okay," Ilya said, smiling. "Then you just keep showing up accidentally. Or I keep showing up by accident to see this cute barista, sorry... Mr. Businessman with freckles on his cheeks."

The silence stretched. Snow crunched somewhere down the street. Shane's pulse was loud enough to be annoying.

"You flirt with everyone like this?" Shane asked.

"No," Ilya said. "I flirt with people who look like they're thinking too hard about me."

"That's not—"

"You get this look," Ilya went on, gentle and infuriating. "When I enter your shop. And then you get embarrassed."

Shane laughed, sharp and humorless. "I don't do that."

"Okay," Ilya said. He took a step closer. Just close enough that Shane could smell coffee and smoke and cold.

Shane's throat went dry.

"This is a bad idea," he said.

Ilya's smile softened. "Why?"

Shane shrugged.

He flicked the cigarette away, crushed it under his shoe.

Ilya reached for the door, holding it open.

"After you, Shane."

The bell chimed as they stepped back inside. Warm air, coffee, the familiar hum of machines. Shane moved past Ilya toward the counter, too fast, like momentum might save him.

"Your hands are freezing," Ilya said.

"They're fine."

"They're not."

Shane reached for the lid dispenser. Ilya reached for the same one.

Their fingers brushed. Barely anything.

Shane jerked his hand back so hard the lid skittered across the counter and hit the floor.

"Shit," he muttered, bending down.

"Hey," Ilya said softly.

Too soft.

Shane straightened too fast and nearly collided with him. They were suddenly too close, not touching, not quite, the space between them charged and stupid and loud. Shane felt stupid, excited, and confused, Rose's words running in circles, clouding whatever judgment he might have had left.

Ilya's hand hovered near Shane's wrist.

Shane could feel it anyway, even though he wasn't touching him.

"Don't," Shane said.

Ilya didn't move.

"Okay," he said quietly.

He dropped his hand. Took a step back, but his eyes stayed on Shane.

Shane swallowed. Suddenly, he could feel the freckles on his cheeks, their weight; was that where Ilya was looking?

"I'll... see you," he said.

"Yeah," Ilya replied. "You will."

The bell chimed again as Ilya left.

Shane stood there, staring at the space where Ilya had almost touched him, hands still shaking.

The coffee had gone cold. He smacked his fist into the counter.

10th encounter

It happened three days later. Shane told himself it didn't count. That he was tired. That the shop was busy for once. That his hands were always full; cups, change, receipts, reasons.

Ilya waited at the counter like always, scrolling on his phone.

"Same?" Shane asked.

"Yeah," Ilya said.

He wondered if he was upset, colder, and more formal than usual. Was it because of all the people around? But why did it bother him, all of a sudden?

Shane poured the milk too fast. It foamed over. He swore under his breath, reached for a towel, and knocked over the sugar jar.

"Sorry," he said, already bending to clean it.

"I've got it," Ilya said at the same time.

They crouched. Too close. Their shoulders brushed.

Shane straightened first, cup in hand, and turned too quickly.

The coffee sloshed.

Instinct took over.

Shane grabbed Ilya's wrist.

It was just to steady the cup. He couldn't have Ilya injure himself with hot coffee during hockey season.

Ilya stilled.

Shane stilled.

His thumb pressed against Ilya's pulse. He felt it immediately and he should have let go, but he didn't. Not right away. He smelled nice, musky, from running, but clean, like he had just taken a shower.

Ilya looked down at their hands, then back up at Shane.

"Shane," he said quietly.

The name landed differently, maybe because he had been overthinking it ever since the last encounter, juggling in his head what he could say when he saw him away. "I don't fancy you," probably, but then, it would have been a lie. Probably.

Shane released him like he'd been burned.

"I'm sorry. I didn't—"

"It's okay," Ilya said, but his voice was lower now. "You didn't spill."

Shane nodded, uselessly, and set the cup down. His hands were shaking.

Ilya wrapped his fingers around the cup, the same wrist Shane had touched, and didn't look away. "Let me help you clean the sugar."

"It's fine, really."

"I'm serious. Go take orders or whatever you do," Ilya said and walked to the back. "A broom?"

"In the service bathroom."

He even grabbed a Coffee Bean apron, scrubbing the floors as Shane walked around him, taking orders, making coffees, watching him; he was swearing under his breath, in Russian, each time he dropped the broom or Shane walked all over the sugar, carrying it on his shoes. He didn't tell him to leave, not even after the floor was clean, and the wave of customers wouldn't decrease.

"Is that... Ilya Rozanov?" a girl asked, all blushing, petite and pretty in a way that made Shane hide his face behind the coffee machine.

"I get this all the time," Ilya said, grinning. "But no. Can't skate to save my life. Sorry, cupcake."

Shane laughed, quietly.

It was 5 PM when Shane turned the sign on the door to CLOSED.

"Thanks."

"It was fun."

"Really?"

"You do need a helper, Mr. Businessman."

"It's usually not this busy."

"Then I am your lucky charm," Ilya winked. "Soo... is that it? Grab our shit and get out of here?"

"Uhm... no yet. I need to do the closing."

Ilya leaned against the counter, watching Shane wipe down the espresso machine.

"So," he said. "What else do you do during this thrilling closing ritual?"

Shane glanced at him. "You can leave, you know."

"I know," Ilya said. "But I'm already invested. A day in the life of a coffee mogul."

He reached for a stack of cups, promptly knocked half of them over.

"Oh, fuck off. How can you win on ice when"—

"Well... I use all my brain power for hockey. Obviously."

Another cup rolled off the counter.

Shane stared at it. Then at Ilya.

"Okay," he said. "Maybe just... don't touch anything."

"That feels unfair," Ilya said. "I'm very useful."

"You mopped sugar into the grout."

"I cleaned it."

"You relocated it."

Ilya laughed. "You're mean."

"I'm honest."

He handed Ilya a rag. "Wipe tables. Circular motions. Not... whatever that was."

Ilya tried. Immediately wiped straight through a wet patch and smeared it.

Shane opened his mouth.

Closed it.

Showed him instead.

"Like this," he said, slow, exaggerated.

Ilya watched, serious now. "Got it."

He did not, in fact, get it.

"Why is everything sticky?" Ilya asked.

"Because you used the syrup cloth."

"There are different cloths?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because otherwise everything tastes like vanilla."

Ilya considered this. "I don't see the problem."

Shane snorted before he could stop himself.

Ilya looked up, surprised. "Was that a laugh?"

"No."

"That was a laugh."

"It wasn't."

"I'm counting it."

They worked in silence for a minute.

"What made you open this place?" Ilya asked.

Shane shrugged. "I like coffee. I don't like bosses."

"Valid."

"And you?"

"Hockey," Ilya said. "And I don't like bosses."

Shane smiled despite himself.

Ilya caught it. Didn't comment. Just went back to wiping the same table for the fifth time.

"You missed a spot," Shane said.

"I absolutely did not."

"It's right there."

"I'm choosing to ignore it."

Shane laughed again, quieter this time.

Outside, the streetlights flickered on. The shop felt smaller. Warmer.

"Thanks for helping," Shane said finally.

"Anytime," Ilya replied. "But next time, I'm in charge."

Shane looked at him. "Absolutely not."

Ilya grinned. "Worth asking. Soo... partner. Any plans for tonight?"

"No. Why?"

"I could grab a beer. We could... if you want."

"Uhm, yeah, sure. We can."

"Good."

The bar was two streets over. Nothing special. Wooden tables, cheap lights, the kind of place that smelled faintly of spilled beer and old coats.

"This place okay?" Ilya asked.

"It's fine," Shane said. "They don't play music too loud."

"High praise."

They sat at the bar. Not too close. Not far either.

Two beers arrived. Shane took a sip, then another, shoulders finally loosening.

"Soo..." he said, staring into his glass. "Is this what hockey players do in their spare time?"

Ilya blinked. Then smiled, small and careful. "Save princesses in distress from coffee dangers? Sure."

They drank in silence for a minute.

"So," Ilya said. "You always close like that? Let strangers mop your floors?"

"You weren't a stranger."

"Oh, so did I enter acquaintance territory?"

"You did a bad job," Shane added.

"I tried."

"That was the problem."

Ilya laughed. "You're bossy."

"Only at work."

"Good to know. So anywhere else... you're sweet as that sugar you spilled."

A group at the table behind them cheered at something on the TV. Shane flinched, then relaxed when it wasn't hockey.

"I don't usually come out after work," he admitted.

"Why not?"

"Tired. And people."

"Yeah," Ilya said. "People are a lot."

Shane glanced at him. "You don't seem to mind them."

"I mind them," Ilya said. "I'm just used to it... You can tell me to leave whenever," Ilya said.

"I won't," Shane said. "But thanks. For helping me today. You really didn't have to, I could... give you a month of free coffee or"—

"I don't think my help was worth that much."

"I think you were the reason I had so many customers, anyway. It's usually pretty empty..."
Shane sighed, staring into his beer.

"Then I could hang around more often. I'm the honey for the bees."

"Don't call yourself that."

"Why? I'm sweet like honey."

"God. Don't. I need another beer," Shane said, feeling his cheeks burn.

"And one more beer you shall receive. You know what goes well with beer?"

"No. Don't."

"A cigarette."

Ilya was grinning, already up from his seat.

"I'm not going outside with yo"—he said but it was too late; Ilya grabbed his coat and pulled him towards the exit, both laughing.

The cold slapped Shane in the face as soon as they stepped outside.

"Oh my God," he said. "I hate you."

"No, you don't," Ilya replied, already lighting his cigarette. "You voluntarily followed me."

"I was abducted."

"You laughed."

"I laugh when I'm uncomfortable."

"Noted."

They stood under the awning, breath fogging in the air. Ilya leaned against the wall, relaxed, cigarette between his fingers. Shane hugged his coat tighter around himself.

"You could've just gone alone," Shane said.

"But then who would judge me?"

"I judge you anyway."

"True." Ilya exhaled smoke upward. "You're very judgmental for a nice guy."

"I'm not a nice guy."

"You let a stranger mop your floors."

"That was desperation."

"Sure."

A couple walked past them, talking loudly, bumping shoulders. Shane shifted instinctively to give them space. Ilya noticed. Didn't comment. Just stepped half a pace closer so Shane wasn't in the way.

It wasn't touching.

It was worse.

"You always work this much?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah."

"Do you like it?"

Shane thought about it. About mornings alone. About the quiet before the bell chimed. About today. About working with Ilya, even if not talking, just feeling his presence, the way he moved behind the counter, grumbling and displeased.

"I think so," he said. "Most days."

"Good," Ilya said. "It'd be sad if you hated something you're so... annoying about."

"Annoying?"

"You talk to your machines."

"They respond."

Ilya laughed, soft this time. "I believe you."

He stubbed the cigarette out and straightened. "Okay. No more poisoning the air."

"Thank you."

They headed back inside. Shane's cheeks were still warm, from the cold, from the beer, from something else he didn't want to name.

Back at the bar, Ilya raised a hand.

"Two more," he said.

Shane opened his mouth to argue, then closed it.

He didn't mind.

Chapter 3: 11th encounter

Chapter Notes

Declarations are happening, Shane is panicking

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

11th encounter

Shane didn't know when he let Ilya enter his life. He was just the regular from his coffee shop, just some guy who played hockey and won cups from time to time. They were just friends.

But after the beer, Shane started dreaming about him, and that didn't feel normal. It felt like a consequence. Like he'd broken some unspoken rule by taking Ilya out of their usual habitat, the coffee shop, where Shane knew the routines, the hours, the boundaries. Ilya was leaking like coffee spilled from a cup into his life.

In his dreams, there were no counters between them. No bell. No reason for Ilya to leave.

They were texting. Another development that kept Shane awake at night. The next day, Ilya left for New York and Shane expected nothing more than silence.

When the first text came, he smiled.

By the fourth, a locker-room selfie, sweaty, helmet marks still pressed into Ilya's face, Shane turned his phone face-down on the counter.

Ilya came back three days later, just as Shane was flipping the sign on the door.

CLOSED stared back at him in bold red letters. He turned the key anyway, habit more than thought, already tired, already thinking about milk inventory and whether he'd locked the back door.

A knock on the glass window.

Shane froze.

"I'm closed," he called, not turning around. "Sorry."

"Good," Ilya said, nose pressed into the fogged-up window.

Shane turned.

Ilya stood just outside, jacket zipped up, hair still damp like he'd showered recently, rubbing his hands together, and pressing on the doorknob from time to time in an aggravating manner.

"Don't break my door," Shane said again, laughing.

"If you open, then I won't."

"Fine," he said and unlocked the door with a sigh. "His majesty can come in."

Shane glanced at the counter, the empty machine, the already-cleaned steam wand. He should have said something reasonable. Something professional. Something that didn't make his chest feel tight for no reason.

"So... what are you here for?"

Ilya shrugged. "You."

Shane stared at him.

"That sounded worse than I meant," Ilya added quickly. "Not like— I mean. I wanted to see you."

"Oh," Shane said.

The shop hummed softly around them, fridge buzzing, lights low and warm.

"You could've texted," Shane said.

"I did," Ilya replied. "You took twenty minutes to answer."

"I was closing."

"Exactly," Ilya said, smiling. "Perfect timing."

Shane exhaled through his nose.

He stepped further inside, the door swinging shut behind him, the bell chiming again, softer this time.

"So," Ilya said. "Am I being kicked out?"

"No. I was just wrapping up."

"Good. So, I won again"—

"I saw."

"Oh, so you do watch my games."

"Rose made me."

"Bullshit, you missed me. You wanted to see my face on the big screen."

"Well, I see it now."

"Yeah... do you want to see it later as well?" Ilya asked, stepping closer to him.

"Depends."

"I was thinking... since you told me you have a PS5, I could beat your ass at FIFA."

"You can't beat me at FIFA."

"Yes, I can."

He didn't want to take Ilya home. No, that was a lie. He wanted, but as he unlocked the door, his body did that weird thing where he could barely focus, his skin hot, his heart thumping strangely in his chest.

"Shoes off," Shane said.

"Yes, sir. I assumed you'd be the type."

"It's just"—

"You look very orderly."

"I just like things being neat."

"Yeah, yeah. So, be warned, I'll beat your ass at FIFA and then all the coffees will be on the house."

"Oh, you wish."

"I helped you close the shop."

"I let you."

"Keep telling yourself that, Mr. Businessman."

"Beer?" Shane asked, opening the fridge.

"I can't believe you keep beer in your house."

"Why not?"

"Why not?" Shane said.

"You look like a wine guy," Ilya replied, toeing his shoes off by the door. "Or, like... fancy whiskey you pretend not to care about."

"I drink whatever's cold."

"Respectable," Ilya said, peering into the fridge as Shane handed him a bottle.

They settled on the couch, knees almost touching, not quite. Shane handed him a controller.

"You sure you want to embarrass yourself in my own house?" Shane asked.

"I embarrass myself professionally," Ilya said. "This is nothing."

The game loaded. The music filled the room, familiar and grounding. Shane leaned back, finally breathing normally again.

Five minutes in, Ilya swore in Russian.

"That doesn't count," he said. "The controls are weird."

"They're not weird," Shane replied. "You're just bad."

"I play real sports."

"And yet," Shane said, scoring again.

Ilya groaned, tipping his head back dramatically. "Unbelievable. This is rigged."

"Accept defeat with dignity."

"I don't have dignity," Ilya said, glancing at him sideways. "I have excuses."

They laughed. Actual laughter, and he noticed how Ilya's eyes crinkled, how his nose scrunched up, how his right hand sometimes covered his mouth.

At some point, Ilya leaned closer, elbows on knees, fully focused. Shane observed the crease between his brows, the way he muttered to himself, how competitive he was even about something that didn't matter.

"You're quiet," Ilya said without looking away from the screen.

"I'm concentrating."

"Oh, so when I do it, I'm intense, but when you do it—"

"You're losing," Shane said.

"Barely."

They finished the match. Shane won by one goal.

Ilya stared at the screen. Then at Shane.

"You got lucky."

"I got skill."

"Rematch."

Shane hesitated. Just a second.

Then he nodded. "Fine."

They played again. This time, Ilya won.

He didn't gloat. Just grinned, wide and boyish and pleased with himself, lounging on the couch, arms behind his head.

"So," he said, nudging Shane's knee with his own. "Free coffee, right?"

Shane rolled his eyes.

"Free coffee."

"I knew you couldn't resist me."

"Why is that?" Shane asked, suddenly, the controller slippery in his hands.

"Just my... natural charm."

"That's not an answer."

"Who says it isn't?" Ilya asked, leaning closer to him, elbows on his knees. "Then why can't you resist me, Shane?"

Shane dropped the controller, and he bent down to grab it; this time, their fingers brushed. Ilya didn't pull away, his thumb running along his knuckles, softly.

"Is this alright?" Ilya asked, and Shane nodded, afraid to look at him. "You've never... been with a man, have you?"

"No."

"That's alright."

"Is this what it's all about? Hanging out with me to—to"—

"Oh, come on, Shane. If it were about just sex, I wouldn't have taken so long to get into your sheets. Seriously. Or played FIFA with you. And lost."

"Then what is this about?"

"I like you. More than a friend, obviously."

"Oh..."

"Yeah, it's fine. Just say the word and I will forget we've ever had this conversation," Ilya said. "If you don't... swing this way."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Shane said and groaned, covering his eyes with both hands. "I don't... I've never ever even considered... uhm, being or sleeping with a man. Until now."

"Ok, I can work with that."

"No, you can't."

"Why?"

"Stop asking me these questions. Maybe I—I don't like you like that. How would I even know?"

Ilya shrugged.

"I don't have a textbook for being gay, if that's what you're asking."

"I don't need a textbook," Shane said and stood up, pacing around the room, hands on his hips. "Alright, maybe I do."

"Are you ashamed?"

"No."

"Then...? Scared you'll like it more than being with a woman?"

"Yes! Maybe!"

"I like both men and women," Ilya said. "It's... different. And women like me."

"Please don't go into details."

"I wasn't going to."

"Good. Uhm, maybe you should go."

"Okay..." Ilya said and stood up. "Look... it doesn't have to be anything. We can be friends."

"Can we?"

"We've been friends, are friends and I beat your ass at FIFA."

"I let you win."

"Shane, just text me when you're not freaking out, and maybe call Rose."

"I'm not freaking out."

"You dig a hole into the carpet."

"I think better when I walk. This is..." he said, fingers in his hair. "I can't be like you. Carefree."

"I'm not carefree."

"Don't you do a damn good job at pretending you are."

"I feel like you need a cigarette or your head will implode."

Shane breathed out, loudly, so loudly he feared one lung might pop out.

"If you can have... anyone you want, and obviously, you can, why even bother"—

"Because..." Ilya sighed. "Jesus, you are fishing for compliments. Even though you are..." he said and pointed at him. "Doing that most of the time... I just. You know what? Let's leave it at this. I like you. No explanation needed."

Chapter End Notes

So, I really like how the story progresses up until this point, and I think I will stick to the encounter tracker haha, it's quite fun. I actually planned for this part to be in the previous chapter, but then again, this feels like quite an important development and I think it deserves its own chapter.

Comments and feedback are much appreciated, they really do matter :D

Chapter 4: 12th encounter

Chapter Notes

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

12th encounter

Shane typed *Sorry* and deleted it.

He typed *I didn't mean it like that* and deleted that too.

At 2:13 AM, he put his phone face down on the nightstand and stared at the ceiling until his eyes burned. At 3:30 AM, he typed and sent *I like you too*.

He then covered his head with a pillow and screamed until his throat was sore.

Shane didn't sleep.

When the alarm went off at six, he considered throwing his phone across the room. Instead, he checked it.

No reply.

The reply came while he was pulling espresso shots the next morning.

His phone buzzed once.

Shane ignored it for a full minute before looking.

Ilya: Look outside

And Shane did just that. Ilya sat on the hood of his Ford Fiesta, no longer covered in snow, dangling his feet.

Ilya: Two coffees. No cigarette for u

Shane stared at the screen.

Then at the window.

Then back at the screen, like one of them might change. But Ilya was really there and his heart was beating too fast, and his hands were sweaty, his body too hot underneath his sweater.

"Are you kidding me," he said.

He didn't bother with his coat. He grabbed two paper cups, filled them on autopilot, lids snapped on crooked. He pushed the door open hard enough that the bell rattled.

Ilya looked up, smiling like he'd been there all along.

"You're going to dent my car," Shane said.

"I already did," Ilya replied easily. "With my presence."

"Move," Shane said.

"You'll freeze your ass off."

"I'm fine."

"If you say so," Ilya said and lit a cigarette. "So..."

"Please don't even mention the text."

"I wasn't going to. I'm leaving for Boston tomorrow. I thought you should know."

"Oh..."

"It's for a few days but... I was thinking."

Shane laughed, starting to shiver. He was cold and a little reckless, leaning over Ilya's shoulder.

"Go on... were you just thinking in general or"—

"Let's road trip to Boston. It's what... 5 hours by car and you already have this beauty. And before you say anything... today is Friday."

Shane stared at him.

"No," he said immediately.

Ilya smiled. "That was fast."

"I can't just—I can't... just pack and leave like... I'm not 20 anymore. I have responsibilities."

"You don't open on Saturday or Sunday."

"That's not the point."

"Then what's the point?" Ilya asked, exhaling smoke away from him. "That you don't want to go?"

Shane opened his mouth. Closed it. His teeth were chattering now, whether from the cold or not.

"I didn't say that," he muttered.

Ilya's smile shifted, something quieter underneath it. "You could say no. I'd survive."

"You didn't even ask if I'm free."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "Are you?"

Shane looked back at the shop. The lights were on. The day was already moving without him.

"...I don't know," he said. "I've never done something like that."

Ilya tilted his head. "Like what?"

"Like deciding something this fast."

"That's funny," Ilya said. "You make coffee for a living."

Shane snorted despite himself. "You're not funny."

"Also untrue."

The cigarette burned down between Ilya's fingers. He crushed it out on the curb, then shoved his hands into his jacket pockets.

"Think about it," he said. "I'll finish my coffee. If you say no, I'll get back in my car and pretend this was just a very weird caffeine-related impulse."

"And if I say yes?"

Ilya stepped a little closer. Enough that their knees were touching, enough that Ilya almost put both hands on his knees but stopped.

"Then we leave after you close," he said. "No pressure. Just... a drive. See where it takes us."

Shane swallowed.

"Just a drive," he repeated.

"Scout's honor," Ilya said, holding up two fingers. "I was never a scout, but still. We don't have those in Russia."

Shane closed his eyes for half a second.

"Jesus Christ," he muttered. Then he looked at Ilya. "You're paying for gas."

Ilya's grin was instant, bright, victorious. "Deal."

"And if you smoke in my car—"

"I won't."

"—I will turn around."

"You won't."

"I absolutely will."

Ilya leaned in, voice low, amused. "You're already halfway there, Shane."

Shane hated that he was right.

"Finish your coffee," Shane said, already turning back toward the door. "I have to open in five minutes."

Ilya followed him with his gaze. "I'll help you. With your... Coffee Mogul duties."

"Don't you have practice or something?"

"Today, nah," Ilya said and pushed him towards the shop. "Come on, you'll freeze and I'll have no one to road trip with."

"Why didn't you... ask me yesterday?" Shane asked, back inside where his hands turned bright red, aching, and his cheeks crimson.

"You were too in your head."

"Ok, grab an apron. You're not allowed to touch the espresso machines."

"Yes sir. What am I allowed to touch, then?" Ilya asked.

"The broom. And the cloths. But not the vanilla syrup one. Or the vanilla syrup."

"Understood."

They worked.

Ilya swept. Badly. Missed corners. Got coffee grounds everywhere but the bin. Shane fixed it without comment, just nudged the broom with his foot and sighed.

"Perfectionist," Ilya said, shaking his head with a bit sigh.

The morning rush came in waves. Regulars. Names Shane knew by heart. Orders he started before they finished speaking.

Ilya stayed out of the way, mostly. Handed lids. Restocked napkins. Smiled at people like he was used to being looked at.

One woman stared too long.

"That guy single?" she asked Shane, nodding at Ilya.

"No," Shane said immediately, then paused. "I mean—he's... busy."

Ilya grinned at him from behind the counter, then blew a kiss the woman's way.

At some point, Ilya stole a sip from Shane's cup.

"You're going to drink all my coffee," Shane said.

"You'll make more."

"That's not the point. You drank four already. Four that I counted."

"It is literally the point," Ilya said, already reaching for the sugar packets. "Free coffee. Oh, and cigarette break. Don't give me the look. I deserve it."

They moved around each other easily, not touching, almost touching. Passing behind. Reaching at the same time. A hand at Shane's lower back, brief and accidental and very much not.

Shane felt it anyway.

When the rush died down, the shop went quiet again. Sunlight crept across the floor. The smell of coffee settled into something warm and familiar.

Ilya leaned on the counter. "So."

"So," Shane echoed, wiping his hands on a towel.

"You still thinking about it?"

Shane looked around his shop. The machines. The cups. The sign on the door.

Then at Ilya, waiting.

"Finish sweeping," he said. "Then I can pack."

"Fuck yes. I knew you were no quitter," Ilya said. "Did I tell you I'm a lot of fun on roadtrips?"

"Usually, when people brag this much it means"—

"Bla bla bla. I even have a road trip playlist."

Ilya helped him pack, throwing too many pairs of underwear and socks into a duffel bag, followed by a handful of sweaters and pants he hadn't worn in years.

"What are you doing?"

"Helping," Ilya said and sat down on the bed.

"I have a system."

"This one I want to hear."

"They—they... I have a separate bag for the socks, one for underwear, and another one for—I don't even like this," he said, pointing at a striped sweater.

"You will," Ilya said. "On the road. It'll grow on you."

"It literally doesn't fit me."

"That's because you're not wearing it with confidence."

"That's not how clothes work."

"It is if you're attractive," Ilya said.

"Like you...?"

"No, like you. Come on, it's getting late and I was particularly productive packing for you."

"I... you were chaotic."

"Fine... give me... your packing bags. Come on," Ilya said.

Shane repacked everything carefully. Socks folded. Underwear aligned. Shirts stacked by thickness.

"You know," Ilya said, after a moment, "for a guy who claims he doesn't do things on impulse, you're driving five hours with a stranger."

"I know you," Shane said.

"Do you?"

Shane zipped the bag. "Enough."

"Enough is good enough for me."

Chapter End Notes

So, not to toot my own horn here I am very excited about this road trip idea.

Chapter 5: 13th encounter

Chapter Notes

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

13th encounter

Shane stared at the steering wheel, keys slippery in his hand, already smelling their faint metallic scent.

"Please work."

"What was that?" Ilya asked.

"Nothing," he said and put the key into the ignition; twisted it and the engine coughed, like a patient with some questionable lung disease, buzzed, violently, but didn't die.

His Ford Fiesta was on life support.

"Yes!"

"When was the last time this car left this parking spot?"

"Uhm..."

"You're not giving me much confidence."

"You were the one who said let's take your car," Shane grumbled, but ran a hand along the board. Gently.

"Does it have a name?"

"What?"

"Your car. Come on, you seem the type to name your possessions. I still think you have a favourite espresso machine even though they both look the same."

"Sandy."

"What, I didn't hear you."

"Sandy."

Ilya grinned and they drove off. They made it out of the parking lot without the car dying, which felt like a small victory. Shane kept both hands on the wheel, posture stiff, eyes flicking between the road and the dashboard like it might betray him at any second.

Ilya buckled in and immediately started poking around.

"Okay," he said. "Where do you hide the magic?"

"There is no magic," Shane said. "Please don't break anything."

"I'm not breaking it. I'm improving the experience."

He pulled his phone out, tapped the screen a few times, then frowned. "Bluetooth?"

"No."

"Aux?"

"No."

"USB?"

Shane shot him a look. "This car predates joy."

Ilya laughed and leaned forward, inspecting the radio as it might confess under pressure. He pressed a button. The display flickered weakly, then went dark.

"Don't," Shane said.

"I didn't do anything."

"You looked at it aggressively."

"I was trying to connect us emotionally."

"There is no connection," Shane said. "It's radio only. And sometimes not even that."

Ilya leaned back, defeated. "Wow. This is... vintage."

"It's reliable," Shane said. "In its own way."

He turned the dial. Static hissed, then resolved into a song halfway through the chorus. Something soft. Old. The kind of song that played in grocery stores and at the end of long drives.

Ilya didn't comment. He rested his elbow against the door, watching the snow blur past the window, tapping his fingers against his thigh in time with the beat.

The road stretched ahead of them, gray and quiet. The city thinned out. Shane's shoulders loosened, just a little.

At a red light, he realized he was humming.

He stopped immediately.

Ilya glanced over. "Hey."

"What?"

"Don't stop."

"I wasn't—"

"You were humming."

Shane cleared his throat. "It's just—habit."

"Okay," Ilya said, smiling faintly. "I like it."

The light turned green. They kept driving.

A few seconds passed. Then Shane started humming again, softer this time, barely there. He kept his eyes on the road, pretending very hard not to notice when Ilya joined in under his breath, off-key and out of tune. Probably, they were both out of tune, singing like two stray cats perched on a dumpster. They drifted in and out of it, just sound and motion and the steady, rattling comfort of Sandy doing her best.

At some point, Shane glanced over.

Ilya was already looking at him.

They smiled. Just a shared look, and Shane glanced back at the dashboard, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. He could still feel Ilya's gaze on him; so he straightened his back. Cleared his throat.

The song ended. Static returned.

Shane didn't change the station, nor did Ilya.

"So... where does Sandy come from. The name, not the car."

"Uhm..." Shane said, and laughed. "Back in college, I thought I could take Sandy to the beach. I was with Rose"—

"Of course you were."

"And we drove down there. Everything was fine until it wasn't, the wheels got stuck in the sand. We had to push the car, I mean, I did. Rose doesn't even have a license. She killed the engine 10 times."

"Eleven is the lucky charm, then."

"And then, I think she pushed the gas too hard, it looked like a sand storm. But she pulled the car out, onto the street."

"Do you still find sand in the engine?"

"And seats."

They both laughed.

Fifteen minutes later, Shane pulled over into a gas station.

"Pee break."

"I could pee directly from the car," Ilya said.

"How?"

"Pull down the window, and then I"—

"Stop talking, go pee and I'll buy some coffee."

"The Coffee Mogul buys shitty gas station coffee?" Ilya asked, laughing.

"It's research," Shane said. "I like to know what I'm up against."

Ilya shook his head, still smiling, and disappeared toward the bathrooms.

Inside, the gas station smelled like burnt coffee and rubber mats. Shane stared at the machine for a second, skeptical, then pressed the button anyway. The cup filled with something dark and aggressively alive.

He grabbed two. Hesitated. Added a third, just in case.

When he stepped back outside, Ilya was already leaning against Sandy, jacket unzipped, phone in hand.

"You didn't have to get me one," he said.

"I know," Shane replied, handing it over.

Ilya took a sip. Paused.

"Oh," he said. "Oh wow."

"Bad?" Shane asked.

"Tastes like burnt shit," Ilya said slowly. "You spoiled me with your fancy specialty coffee."

Shane snorted.

They stood there for a moment, the hum of cars passing on the road, the sky dark, and mounds of snow scattered across the parking area. Shane closed his eyes, trying to settle his breath and his heart; the cold seeped right through his clothes, but the shivering was from something else. He really was on his way to Boston. Was he making a big mistake? Shane glanced at Ilya, smoking his cigarette while sipping from the coffee, at the soft trails of smoke, taken by the wind.

"You okay? Are you about to puke?"

"No. Just thinking."

That, apparently, was a dangerous sport. Shane's grip on the steering wheel tightened, then loosened when his palms started to sweat. He wiped one hand on his jeans and focused on the road stretching ahead of them. Snow hit the dashboard, soft and delicate, melting with each collision.

"Earth to Shane," Ilya said. "Turn right. Off the highway."

"Shit. Right—sorry."

They made the turn. Sandy protested, then settled.

"I like quiet," Ilya went on, "but you look like you're having your third existential crisis today."

Shane hesitated. "Where... are we sleeping tonight?"

Ilya blinked. "What?"

"I mean—never mind."

Ilya laughed. "You get really cute when you're flustered."

"I'm not flustered."

"Mm. Sure."

Silence fell, and Shane wiped his palms one more time on his jeans. Then, more gently, Ilya said: "If it's about rooms, we can get you your own. Or figure something else out."

"I can handle it," Shane said quickly. "I was just wondering if—like—if the team had extra rooms or—"

"We'll figure it out," Ilya said. "Okay?"

Shane nodded, eyes fixed on Ilya's leg, at his fingers fiddled with the cigarette pack.

"Another turn coming up," Ilya added. "Try not to crash us while you're pretending not to look at me."

"I was looking at the road."

"You were admiring how good I look in this light."

Shane huffed despite himself and made the turn.

The rest of the drive blurred.

Highway lights. A toll booth; Ilya buying snacks Shane didn't want and eating half of them anyway, red Cheeto dust covering the little mat at Ilya's feet; Sandy rattling, faithful to the end, until the city finally swallowed them whole.

The hotel lobby looked expensive. Bright, clean, and neat, the floors so polished they reflected Shane's face. At 1 AM, he wobbled to the front desk, right behind Ilya, and waited, staring at the receptionist's red lips.

"King-sized bed," the receptionist said, cheerfully. Too cheerfully for that hour, Shane told himself. She had to know the entire Montreal Metros team was staying there. Had to. "Enjoy your stay."

Ilya didn't react. He took the keycard, nodded, and walked toward the elevator.

The doors closed behind them with another yet too cheerful chime, and Shane focused on his snow-covered boots. He then stared at the floor numbers lighting up, one by one, like a countdown he hadn't agreed to. Their shoulders brushed as they stepped out of the elevator.

When Ilya opened the door, the room was bigger than he had hoped for; clean and neat, cream coloured and bright, the bed standing in the middle. King-sized.

"I think Scott Hunter is next door," Ilya said.

"Who?"

"He transferred to Montreal last season. And... he brought his boyfriend, Kip, with him. So... you wouldn't be alone at the game."

"Oh..."

"If you want. You don't have to"—

"No, it's fine. Didn't know hockey players are openly... gay."

"Well, it was a whole thing last year. Scott made it public after he won the cup. Hey..." Ilya said and placed both hands on his shoulders. "You can just tell them, Kip, whatever, that we came here as friends."

"Did we?" Shane asked.

"Depends what happens next."

"And... what happens next?" Shane asked, and Ilya dropped both hands, his gaze on him.

Ilya didn't answer right away. He stepped closer instead, close enough that Shane could feel the warmth of him, the faint smell of smoke and soap and probably, Cheeto dust.

"I think about you," Ilya said quietly. "More than I should."

Shane swallowed.

"Your apron is cute," Ilya added, softer now, almost a tease. "But that's not the point."

"What is the point?" Shane asked.

Ilya lifted a hand, hesitating just a second before cupping Shane's face. "That I want to do this right."

He searched Shane's expression. "Can I kiss you?"

Chapter End Notes

Will they kiss? Hihhi

Anyway, I liked writing this road trip, it was fun and I'm actually quite happy I came up with the name Sandy for the car.

Chapter 6: 14th encounter

Chapter Notes

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

14th encounter??

Shane stared at their shoes, at the puddle forming at their feet, at how the hardwood was no longer clean. But dirty. He looked back up at Ilya, and pressed his cheek into the palm of his hand, warm, despite the cold outside.

"Shane..."

He was sweating underneath his puffer jacket and his sweater, suddenly aware of his own body: how his elbow itched, how his feet hurt, how a stray hair tickled his left eye.

Before he could talk himself out of it, he leaned forward, his lips brushing Ilya's, barely. His eyes were closed, palms itching against his thighs.

Ilya smiled, brushing his nose against his, hand still on his cheek, thumb stroking left to right, slowly.

"Fuck, Shane."

Then Ilya leaned in as well, gentle, patient, his lips soft against Shane's. A warmth spread through Shane that had nothing to do with the coat he was wearing. He was really kissing Ilya Rozanov. And he liked it. His lips were chapped, but it didn't matter, it didn't matter that he was shaking, that both of his hands were on Ilya's chest, that he bumped their noses and laughed.

"You're ridiculously cute," Ilya said, foreheads resting together.

"I'm not."

"Well, Mr. Cutie-Pie, which side of the bed?" Ilya asked.

"Left. Always."

"Noted. Shower?"

"Yeah... shower," Shane said and Ilya kissed him again. Short, little pecks that smelled of smoke, but he didn't mind it.

He thought he would.

He also thought he'd be married by then, not driving Sandy, and owning a house in the Suburbs. But there was no black Porsche waiting for him outside or wife and two kids at home, so perhaps, kissing Ilya Rozanov in a hotel room, hundreds of miles away from home on a Friday night, wasn't that peculiar after all.

He kept touching his lips as he showered, and well after that, when he walked through a cloud of steam out of the bathroom. Ilya lounged on the bed, on the right side, focused on his phone.

The night was uneventful. Ilya kept his promise, if a promise had been made. He woke him up with a grumble at 6 AM, kissed his forehead, and then, Shane fell back asleep until 10 AM. Ilya's side of the bed was cold.

Boston felt older than Montreal. Heavier. He wasn't sure if he liked it, as he walked the streets alone that morning, hands shoved deep into his coat pockets, shoulders hunched against the cold.

He walked into five coffee shops, chosen on instinct, and proximity, rather than Google reviews, and sampled their coffee selection.

The first one, he almost spilled it back into the cup; it burnt his tongue. Too bitter. Burnt. Not enough body and no crema. He watched the guy do it, poorly, and Shane thought to himself he'd flourish in such a place.

The second was better, but not quite exquisite; no particular flavour about it, but the milk foam was indeed creamy, covering the sub-par extraction. It needed higher pressure and finer grinding. By the fifth, Shane was dizzy, and in desperate need of a bathroom.

He wandered without a plan. Past brick buildings and iron railings, past storefronts that felt too polished, too intentional. He stopped at a bookstore and thumbed through a paperback he didn't buy. He watched a street musician play the same three chords on repeat and stayed longer than necessary, thinking about Ilya, about his kisses, his mouth, how nice it had all felt.

Every so often, his phone buzzed.

Ilya, from the rink.

A blurry photo of skates lined up on concrete.

A voice note that was mostly the sound of someone yelling in French in the background.

Shane smiled at his phone like an idiot and then tucked it back into his pocket, pulse oddly steady with sudden spikes whenever Ilya sent him a selfie.

By the time the sun dipped, the city had shifted. Jerseys appeared. Blue and white everywhere. He walked there, at some point, regretting his brave decision, but 30 minutes before the game, he approached the entrance. The smell of greasy, fried food and beer cut through the cold, as laughter bounced off the concrete.

Shane slowed, suddenly aware of himself again. His hands. His jacket. The fact that he was here for one person, and one person only. Ilya Rozanov.

"Shane?"

He turned.

The guy standing in front of him was tall, broad-shouldered, and wearing a Metros scarf looped casually around his neck.

"Yeah," Shane said. "Hi...?"

"I'm Kip," he said, sticking out a hand. "Scott's inside losing his mind over warm-ups. You must be Shane."

"I must be," Shane replied, shaking his hand.

Kip's smile widened. "You're real. Good. I was starting to think Ilya made you up."

"He does that," Shane said before he could stop himself.

Kip laughed, delighted. "Oh, I like you already."

Shane felt his shoulders loosen, just a little.

"You nervous?" Kip asked, glancing toward the arena doors.

"A bit," Shane admitted.

What did Kip know? He seemed too jolly, too welcoming as they walked to the doors together, the noise swelling around them, and eventually they found their seats. Of course, Ilya had given one right next to Kip.

"Don't be anxious," Kip said. "You've been to hockey games before, haven't you?"

"One other."

Kip laughed and placed the scarf around Shane's neck.

"Here, like a true fan."

"There's no"—

"I want it back though, it's just for this one, then you can buy your own. If you keep coming to his games."

"I guess," Shane smiled.

He stared at the ice rink, at the players skating in, waving at the crowd; it roared louder at certain people, people he had no idea who they were. His eyes were searching for Ilya.

The arena exploded when he skated in, people cheering behind them, others standing up to wave and be noticed. Ilya glanced up, scanning the stands, and then he saw him; his grin broke wide, yet guarded, and he waved.

"Come on, wave back," Kip said and nudged him in the ribs.

Shane hesitated for half a second too long. Then he raised his hand, awkward, unsure.

Ilya's grin softened. He tapped the ice with his stick once, quick and sharp, like punctuation, and skated off toward the bench.

"Oh, you're done for," Kip said.

"What?" Shane asked.

"He does that," Kip said. "The I see you thing. You don't come back from that. Scott did that to me when we first started dating. I was on cloud nine."

Shane swallowed and focused on the ice as the puck dropped, the sound sharp and sudden, the game surging forward without waiting for him to catch up.

"We're just friends..." Shane said after a while, when the noise died down.

"Right, Ilya told Scott he's bringing his barista friend for a road trip. We thought he was joking."

"Right..."

He didn't understand all of it. The rules blurred together, the lines, the calls. But he watched Ilya move, fast, precise, intentional. Different than off the ice.

Every time Ilya came close to their side of the rink, Shane felt it in his chest, like a tug.

At one point, Ilya glanced up again. Just a flicker this time. Shane didn't look away.

Kip leaned back in his seat, satisfied.

"Can I ask you something?" Kip said.

"Sure."

"But don't take it the wrong way."

"I won't."

"For how long... have you been... dating?"

"What?!" Shane said and dropped his half-empty beer cup all over his feet.

"Oh, shit."

"It's fine. We haven't been... it's"—

"You don't have to tell me. Sorry for... intruding. I'll get you some napkins."

"Oh—no, it's fine," Shane said quickly, crouching to mop at his shoes with his sleeve. "I'm just... clumsy."

Kip was already handing him napkins anyway, because of course he was.

"Sorry," Kip said again. "I didn't mean to—"

"It's really okay," Shane said, straightening, cheeks burning. "We're not... dating. I mean. We know each other. We're—"

He stopped, because that sentence had no ending. They had kissed and shared a bed, texted daily, and sometimes, Shane dreamed about him. Only sometimes.

Kip nodded. "Got it."

Shane blinked. "That's it?"

"That's it," Kip said. "People are complicated. Especially around hockey players."

Then, softer: "Especially around Ilya."

Shane huffed a laugh before he could stop himself. "Yeah."

Kip glanced down at the rink, where Ilya was leaning over the boards, helmet off, towel around his neck, laughing with someone Shane didn't recognize.

"He doesn't bring many people," Kip said. "I don't think he's ever brought someone other than you and Svetlana."

"Svetlana?"

"His friend from Russia. I don't know much about her. He's..." Kip said, grinning, then covered his face. "Please don't tell him I said this. He's kind of an asshole, has this reputation."

"For what?" Shane asked, immediately regretting it.

Kip shrugged. "Being Ilya."

On the ice, a player slammed into the boards hard enough to make the glass shudder. Shane flinched on instinct, then leaned forward, scanning jerseys until he found him, number clear, posture unmistakable.

Ilya skated past their section and looked up. His grin flickered into something smaller when he saw Shane, like he'd forgotten where he was for half a second.

Kip followed Shane's gaze. "You're bad luck," he said lightly. "He never looks up."

Shane huffed. "Lucky me."

The puck dropped. The crowd surged to its feet.

The Metros won.

Shane wasn't sure when it happened exactly, some blur of bodies crashing into the glass, a goal screamed into existence, the horn blaring loud enough to rattle his ribs. People around him jumped to their feet, beer sloshing, strangers hugging. So he jumped as well, pulled up by Kip.

He whooped beside him. "Told you."

Shane stood slower, heart pounding, eyes locked on the ice.

Ilya skated past their section again, helmet off, hair damp, grin sharp, victorious. He looked up and this time, Shane didn't look away, as Ilya lifted two fingers like it was the Hunger Games.

He lifted his beer in response, ridiculous, smiling despite himself.

"You're coming," Kip said, already pulling his coat on. "After-party."

"Oh, I don't—"

"Too late. Scott already texted. And before you ask—no, it's not optional."

The cold outside hit hard, but Kip intertwined their arms, walking side by side, trying to keep up with him. Sirens somewhere. Laughter spilling onto sidewalks. They walked fast, Kip weaving through the crowd like he'd done it a hundred times before. Perhaps he had. And Shane felt like a fish out of water, or a duck in water, carried by the currents without much to say.

The club was underground. The bass thumped through Shane's chest before he even saw the door.

Inside, it was chaos, music heavy and relentless, bodies packed close, sweat and cologne and spilled alcohol. Shane hesitated for half a second, then followed Kip through. The last time he'd been to a club, Rose had dragged him to a dingy one next to their shared flat; they'd been 20 and stupid. She'd vomited in his bathtub while he had taken the toilet as his resting place for the better part of the morning. Afterwards, he'd sworn he'd never touch alcohol. Rose had made no promises.

Scott was easy to spot. Tall, broad, already flushed, arm slung around a guy Shane recognized vaguely from photos.

"There he is," Scott said, pointing. "You're Shane."

"Hi," Shane said, raising his voice.

Kip slid in beside Scott, already talking, already laughing, already leaning into his touch with such ease, Shane felt envious. It seemed so easy for them. So simple. They looked like a couple, no doubt for anyone watching them. Two people in love.

Then Shane felt it, before he saw him.

A hand at his lower back, warm, smoky breath at his ear.

"Hey," Ilya said.

Shane turned.

Up close, Ilya looked wrecked, hair still damp, and pointing in different directions, but in a way that made him look more attractive, not unkempt. He was in a black T-shirt, sweat-dark at the collar.

"You okay?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah," Shane said. "Just... loud."

Ilya smiled. "Yeah."

He didn't move his hand, thump slipping underneath his sweater. Shane suddenly regretted not wearing something thinner underneath.

They stood like that for a moment, bodies angled together, not touching much, but enough.

Scott glanced over, and smiled.

"Drink?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded.

They moved toward the bar together, the crowd parting a little around Ilya without him even trying. Shane stayed close, fingers brushing his wrist once, by accident, or not.

The bartender slid two drinks across the counter. Ilya paid without looking.

Shane took his glass, barely tasted it before someone called Ilya's name from behind them. A guy Shane didn't know leaned in, already grinning, already too close. Tall. Confident. Team jacket half-unzipped, just as sweaty as Ilya.

"Hell of a game," the guy said, clapping Ilya on the shoulder. "You were on fire."

Ilya smiled. "Thanks."

The guy stayed there. Didn't move.

"You coming to the thing at Jules' place later?" he asked.

"Maybe," Ilya said. "We'll see."

We.

The word shouldn't have mattered. It did.

Shane shifted his weight, suddenly hyperaware of where his hands were, too close, then not close enough. Should he make it clearer that they were a thing? The music thudded louder in his skull.

The guy's eyes flicked to Shane, up and down, and Shane pulled down on his collar, suddenly too tight, too close to his neck.

"And who's this?" he asked.

Ilya didn't hesitate. "Shane."

"Hey," the guy said, nodding once.

Shane nodded back, stiff.

The guy leaned closer to Ilya again, voice lowered. Shane couldn't hear what he said, only saw Ilya laugh under his breath, head tipping forward slightly. Familiar. Intimate in a way that wasn't romantic, or didn't seem like it. He'd suddenly realized he'd never truly seen Ilya interact with anyone but him. How was he like with others? A flirt, someone mean, an asshole, maybe, as Kip had told him?

Something hot and unpleasant curled in Shane's stomach, watching them both laugh, ignoring him. He knew he wasn't part of the conversation and suddenly, even though he was inside it, Ilya's world seemed so far away from him.

He took a sip of his drink. Too fast. Whiskey.

The guy finally peeled away, disappearing back into the crowd with a raised hand.

Shane exhaled, slow, and took another sip, until he emptied his glass.

Ilya turned back to him immediately.

"You good?"

"Yeah," Shane said, too quickly. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"Okay," he said. Then, quieter, whispered into his ear: "You look tense."

"I'm not," Shane said, then paused. "I just—this isn't really my scene."

Ilya nodded. "Yeah. I know."

He shifted closer, knees touching.

"If you want to leave," Ilya added, "we can."

Shane glanced toward the crowd, toward the place where the guy had disappeared, then back at Ilya, back at his empty glass.

"No," he said. "I don't want to leave." He glanced at the bartender. "Can I get another one of these? On the rocks, please."

Ilya shook his head.

"Okay," he said. "I want you to stay."

Shane didn't remember when his shoulders had loosened, or when the noise stopped feeling like an assault and started feeling fuzzy. Probably after his 5th glass of whiskey, or between the 3rd and the 4th, when suddenly, he found himself to be a better dancer than usual. The music blurred into something tolerable. Maybe even good.

He was laughing when Ilya glanced over.

Shane stood with Scott, close enough that their shoulders brushed every time Shane leaned in to hear him over the music. Scott was tall in a different way than Ilya, broader, softer around the edges.

"No, seriously," Scott was saying, "if you ever want to open a place near the rink, you'd be rich in a month."

Shane laughed, touching Scott's arm without thinking. "That's what I keep telling Ilya."

Scott followed Shane's gaze instinctively, spotting Ilya across the room.

Shane smiled back, warm and a little dazed, swaying just slightly on his feet. He reached out again, steadying himself with Scott's sleeve, giggling out of the blue.

From across the room, Ilya watched.

Shane laughed again. Loud this time. His head tipped back, throat exposed, the scarf slipping slightly off one shoulder as Scott said something almost funny.

Shane shoved him lightly in the chest, playful, careless. Then he glanced around and found Ilya watching, again.

Their eyes met.

Shane's smile softened. Through his drunken haze, a warmth spread right from the center of his chest to his extremities; he needed Ilya, and the urge was so strong, he excused himself. He weaved through people, bumping into a shoulder on the way. When he reached him, he stopped too close, swaying. From left to right, right to left, the lights morphing into people, everything so colorful yet amusing.

"Hey," Shane said, voice lower now. "You disappeared."

"I didn't," Ilya said. "You did."

Shane frowned. "Oh. I was... just there," he said, pointing at the floor with his finger.

He reached out without asking, fingers hooking into the hem of Ilya's jacket, grounding himself.

Ilya glanced down at the hand. Then backed up.

"You having fun?" he asked.

"Yeah. Scott was fun," Shane said. "I guess... But I like it better when you're here."

He leaned in, close enough that only Shane could hear.

"You're very friendly when you drink," he said.

Shane squinted at him. "Is that bad?"

Ilya smiled. "No necessarily. Never seen you... this flirty, that's all. It's different."

He slid a hand to Shane's lower back, firm enough, fingers finding their way underneath his sweater.

"But you came here with me," he added quietly, "Not with Scott."

Shane's ears flushed pink.

"I know," he said. "I want to go back to the hotel."

Chapter End Notes

Alright, no, I think this was my favourite chapter to write. A little bit of jealousy hihi

Chapter 7: 15th encounter

15th encounter

Shane stumbled into the hallway, the bright light no longer amusing, but headache-inducing, and ran to the bathroom, jacket, shoes, everything still on, and knelt in front of the toilet bowl. All he managed to do was lift the lid and he vomited.

"Fuck, Shane," Ilya said and bent down next to him.

"I'm fine..." he whispered, before another wave of nausea and bile hit the back of his throat, burning everything until it plunged into the murky water of the toilet. "Shit..."

"Well, now I know what your limit is. You are no drinker..."

"I'm"—Shane said, closing his eyes, and cursed the moment he had decided he was a whiskey drinker. "Fine."

"Yes, totally. Not dying in a hotel in Boston."

"Fuck off..." Shane said, pushed himself up, and slipped on the melted snow and ounces of pride still left somewhere, now long gone.

"Come on, hero," Ilya said, holding him upright. "Let's put you into bed. Did I ever mention you're adorable when you vomit?"

"Now you did."

He couldn't quite remember when he had fallen asleep, or how he woke up with a migraine the size of Canada, but as he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was Ilya. Eyes closed, softly breathing, body turned towards his; and Shane smiled, even though it hurt, running a finger down his cheek.

Despite the urge to cover his head with the duvet and never see the light of day ever again, Shane eventually stood up from the bed.

The room tilted immediately.

"Fuck," he whispered, bracing a hand against the nightstand until the spinning slowed.

He padded into the bathroom, squinting against the light, opening drawers with the grim determination of someone on a mission. Toothbrush. Hotel shampoo. Tiny sewing kit. No painkillers.

Of course.

He checked Ilya's bag next.

Tape. Extra socks. A protein bar. No ibuprofen.

Shane sighed, pressed his forehead briefly against the wall, then straightened. Fine. Coffee first. Survival rules.

The kitchenette was barely a kitchenette, a sink, a counter, a machine that looked offended by the concept of good coffee. Shane stared at it, wondering if going outside would in fact solve all of his problems. He glanced through the window and decided against it.

He filled the reservoir anyway. Measured the grounds by instinct, then paused, grimacing.

"Sorry," he said to the machine. "This isn't your fault."

The coffee sputtered to life.

He poured two cups. Hesitated. Added a third, stronger one, just in case.

"Any nightly regrets?" Ilya asked, and Shane almost dropped one of the cups onto his foot. Forgetting one pain with another.

"Fuck, you scared the shit out of me," Shane said.

"Sorry. You were so entranced in your little potion brewing ritual," Ilya said and stopped a few steps in front of him. "So, no regrets, huh?"

"No... should I?"

Ilya shrugged.

"Depends on how much you remember..."

"What did I do?"

"Nothing."

Shane rubbed his forehead. Then temples. Then pressed both hands over his head.

"Did I... piss you off? I—I swear, if I embarrassed you last night or—or—"

"You did not, Shane," Ilya said, stepping closer, still smiling. "I think... alcohol makes you less... you. Or more you, I can't decide."

"I got jealous."

"What?"

"The guy. The one from the bar. I was jealous."

"Why?" Ilya asked and closed the distance, hand on his cheek, running his thumb in soft circles. Shane shrugged, looking down.

"He was just some dude I barely knew. Not every guy I talk to is gay and trying to hit on me. Maybe women... but"—

"And I'm sorry about Scott."

"What about that?"

"I remember... vaguely."

"You were drunk and Scott knew that. He texted me If you're still alive."

"Oh..."

Shane stood there, fiddling with some loose plastic on the counter, trying to empty his head. He couldn't. Emptying his head had never been his strength. Just like whiskey tolerance.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I don't usually—I don't get like that. I don't even like whiskey. Or clubs. Or—"

He waved a hand.

"I don't like not knowing where I stand."

Ilya didn't interrupt.

Shane swallowed. "You have this whole... world. People who know you. Who talk to you like they belong there. And I just—"

He stopped himself, jaw tightening.

"I don't want to be the guy you bring once and then forget about."

Silence stretched like a cat, yawning.

Then Ilya stepped fully into his space, placing both hands on his hips.

"Hey," he said softly.

Shane looked up despite himself.

"You're not a guest," he said. "You came with me," Ilya went on. "You're here. In my room. In my bed. I don't invite all the sexy baristas I see to road trip with me."

Shane let out a shaky breath, laughing just a little.

"You don't look replaceable," Ilya added, almost teasing. "You look like someone I want to keep an eye on."

"That sounds threatening," Shane muttered.

Ilya smiled.

"It is. A little."

He leaned in, forehead resting against Shane's.

"If I wanted someone else," he said quietly, "you wouldn't be here."

Shane closed his eyes. His shoulders finally dropped.

"You really know how to sweet-talk someone, don't you?" Shane asked.

"You haven't even seen me at my full potential."

"Mhm... should I be"—

"Shhh..." Ilya said, placing a finger over his lips.

He kissed him, grabbed him by the middle, and hoisted him onto the countertop.

His mouth was warm and sure, and Shane made a small sound before he could stop himself and kissed back, hands coming up, fingers curling into the fabric of Ilya's T-shirt, pulling him closer, and closer, and closer.

Ilya's hand slid from his jaw to his waist.

The kiss deepened, until Shane's thoughts scattered completely, until the headache dulled into something distant and manageable.

Ilya broke the kiss just long enough to scoop Shane up from the countertop, his arms wrapping around his thighs and back. Shane's legs hooked around his waist on reflex, as Ilya carried him across the room to the bed. He lowered Shane onto the mattress without letting go entirely, smiling.

"I know... another cure for hangovers."

"Really?"

"Mhm... you might like it."

Shane shifted, swinging a leg over to straddle Ilya's lap as Ilya sat back against the headboard.

"Do you want me to touch you?"

"Mhm..."

"I can't hear you."

"Yes... I... I want you to touch me. Please."

"Fuck, Shane."

Ilya's hands roamed up Shane's sides, thumbs brushing the hem of his shirt before tugging it upward. Shane lifted his arms, letting Ilya peel the fabric off and toss it aside. The cool air hit Shane's bare skin, and he shivered, suddenly feeling too exposed. Ilya's palms slid over his chest, tracing the lines of muscle, pressing soft kisses all over the skin, from his shoulders down to his abdomen.

"For a Coffee Mogul... not bad."

"I go to the gym," Shane said, and closed his eyes when Ilya's tongue licked around his nipple.

He took it in his mouth, gently, and let go, to take off his own shirt. Shane's hands fumbled with his own pants, falling to the side as he pulled them off, legs dangling in the air, half-tied into his own clothes.

"Easy there... don't hit your head on the nightstand. I like that head of yours," Ilya said, and pulled him back up on top of him. "Fuck... no underwear?"

"I thought you changed me into"—

"All by yourself, last night," Ilya said, as he moved around, shifting Shane on his lap to take off his pants as well. "Is this okay?" he asked, wrapping a hand around both of their cocks, pressing them together in his grip.

Shane nodded.

The heat of their skin against each other was immediate, as their cocks slid side by side in Ilya's hold. He spat onto his palm, and Shane moaned, foreheads against each other, feeling the beads of sweat trickle down his temple.

He stroked slowly at first, thumb circling the heads where pre-cum smeared between them, mixing slickness. Ilya cupped his cheek, pressing his thumb into his mouth, and he licked it, wrapping his lips around it, sucking, tongue flicking the tip.

Shane gasped, hips bucking, fingers digging into his shoulders, hard; one hand moved to higher, fingers tangling into Ilya's hair; he pulled.

"Fuck, Shane..."

Ilya's free hand gripped Shane's ass, pulling him closer, guiding the rhythm as he pumped his hand up and down their lengths.

"I'm close—I'll"—Shane whispered, coming all over Ilya's fist. "Fuck, sorry, I..."

"Shit, I'm..." he said, and Shane kissed him, hard, biting his lower lip as Ilya came. "Shit..."

"Yeah... shit."

"Was that okay?"

"More than okay. I've never... felt anything like that," Shane said.

Ilya laughed and kissed him on his cheek, still smiling.

"Still hangover?"

"I think this... helped."

They left Boston early afternoon, armed with a thermos full of coffee, and snacks thrown away on the back seat of the car.

"Are you even allowed to eat all that junk?" Shane asked him as Ilya had thrown everything that looked possibly radioactive into their shopping cart. "If you don't snitch on me."

The streets were pale and quiet, snow piled at the edges like it had given up trying. Ilya drove. Shane didn't argue, until the engine died five times trying to get out of the parking lot, the back wheels deciding they wanted to skate.

"You have to be gentle with her."

"Jesus, Shane, it's a car."

"It's not just a"—

"Yeah, yeah, it's Sandy, and she likes it when I tickle her gently," Ilya said, laughing, and looked at him. "Kiss for good luck?"

Shane shook his head, but kissed him, and maybe it had nothing to do with it, but when Ilya pressed the gas, Sandy roared to life and they made their way onto the street.

The highway stretched out in front of them, grey and unassuming. The radio picked up one station for five minutes, then lost it again. Shane let it be. He didn't feel like choosing music. He didn't feel like choosing much of anything. Shane felt like watching Ilya drive, staring at the way his watch poked from underneath the sweater, how his muscles flexed, how his hair fell over his forehead.

At some point, Shane shifted closer. His knee brushed Ilya's, then stayed there. Later, Ilya's hand followed, resting on Shane's thigh, squeezing it from time to time.

Chapter 8: 16th encounter

Chapter Notes

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

"You're going on a date," Rose said, leaning against the counter.

"It's not a date."

"Yes, it is. I know it, you know it and most importantly, Ilya knows it."

Shane sighed, squeezing the cloth so hard, his palms hurt.

"Fine. We're going on a date. Happy?"

"So happy," Rose said, hugging him. "Soo..." She wandered around the kitchen. "A birdie chirped into my ear that you might need help. With the coffee shop? Now that you can't dedicate all your spare time to your business since you have a boyfriend."

"Ilya is not my boyfriend."

"You road tripped with him to freaking Boston. In Sandy. Did he find sand later in all of his cracks?"

"Fuck off. No. We road tripped to a lot of places and we're not dating."

"It's different," Rose said and rolled her eyes.

"How?"

"For starters, I've never seen or wished to see your dick."

"Gross."

"See? Totally different. But, back to my existential life crisis. I need a job, Shane. One that can pay my rent and possibly the electricity bill."

It was Shane's turn to sigh.

"What about your acting?"

"Well..." Rose said, tearing up a napkin on the counter.

"You're making a mess."

"Sue me. I sent... 50 tapes. 50. Guess for how many I got a callback?"

Shane shrugged, already dusting off the pieces of napkin into a bin.

"None. Oh, right. Someone told me I have great tits so I should try OnlyFans."

"Fine. You're officially a barista."

"You're the best-best-friend. Seriously," Rose screeched into his ear, jumping, and Shane watched as all the last pieces of napkin flew straight onto his freshly washed floors. "Do I need training?"

"Yes.. first rule... please keep this place clean."

Only later, as Shane stared at a stack of unpaid invoices, did he grab a handful of his hair and pulled, groaning. Perhaps, he wasn't the best-best-friend Rose thought of him, but he had a date.

And the bills stared at him, judgmental, as he put on his coat over a white dress shirt, and walked out the door.

Ilya was waiting for him outside, smoking a cigarette. He flicked it away as soon as he saw Shane, grinding it out under his shoe. He looked good. Too good.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey."

Shane stopped a few steps away, suddenly aware of the white shirt under his coat, of how he'd buttoned it twice just to make sure it looked right.

"You ready?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah," Shane said. "You could have come upstairs... while I was getting ready."

Ilya grinned. "I don't think we'd had any date, then..."

They walked side by side without touching. Close enough that their sleeves brushed once, then didn't again.

"So," Ilya said. "I'm taking you somewhere that's not a sports bar."

"Wow. Am I this special?"

"Maybe... don't get cocky."

The car smelled faintly like coffee and cigarette smoke, but mostly like Ilya. Shane buckled in, watching Ilya's hands on the wheel, again and again; steady, confident, like everything else he did, and suddenly, he wanted Ilya on the side of the road, somewhere dark, somewhere where he could feel those hands on his body.

"You nervous?" Ilya asked, glancing at him.

"A little."

Ilya smiled. "Good."

"Good?"

"Yeah," he said. "It's good. If you're still nervous after we've seen each other's dicks"—

"It's not li"—

"I think it's cute," Ilya said, his right hand settling on his thigh.

The city slipped past the windows, streetlights blurring, the silence between them stretching; Shane rested his elbow against the door, and after a while, he covered Ilya's hand with his own.

It was a date.

He didn't say it out loud. But Rose was right.

When they stopped, Shane looked up at the place in front of them; warm light spilling through the windows, understated, deliberate, not cheap, not flashy. Suddenly, he preferred a sports bar.

He swallowed.

"If you hate it," Ilya said, already opening his door, "we can leave."

"I won't," Shane said.

Ilya stopped, glanced at him.

"You sure?"

Shane met his eyes. "Yeah."

Ilya smiled again, and stepped out of the car, coming around to open Shane's door like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Shane laughed as he took his hand.

"Monsieur," Ilya said with a little bow.

"Merci. Apres vous, s'il vous plait."

"I forgot you're a bilingual fucker."

"Hey, you speak Russian too."

The place was smaller than Shane expected. Low-lit, narrow, warm in a way that felt intentional rather than trendy. There were a few other couples scattered around, too many wine glasses, forks clinking against plates, jazz music, which didn't seem like Ilya's style.

Shane slid into the booth first, tugging his coat off and hanging it over the back. He immediately regretted the chair choice; the table was closer than he thought, his knees brushing it when he shifted.

Ilya sat across from him.

"Actually," he said, standing again. "This side's better."

"For... strategy?" Shane asked.

"Maybe..." Ilya said, already sliding in beside him.

Their thighs touched. Just barely. Shane went very still.

The waiter came quickly. Too quickly.

"Can I start you off with something to drink?"

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it. He glanced at the menu, then at Ilya, then back at the menu like it might offer guidance if he stared hard enough.

"I'll have—"

He stopped. Laughed once, under his breath, fixed his shirt collar even though it needed no fixing. "Sorry. I don't actually know what I want."

"That's okay," the waiter said.

Ilya didn't look at him. He looked at Shane.

"You like dry, right?" he asked. "No whiskey, I hope."

Shane nodded. "Yeah. No whiskey, God... no."

"White," Ilya said to the waiter. "Whatever you recommend."

"Sure thing."

The moment the waiter left, Shane exhaled, shoulders dropping, just as Ilya placed his hand again on his thigh, thumb rubbing circles.

Slow, soft.

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For... anyway. I'm bad at making decisions on the spot."

Ilya smiled. "I figured."

They opened their menus. Shane read every line twice and still didn't absorb any of it. His leg bounced once under the table before he forced it still, fingers tightening around the edge of the menu.

"You okay?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah. Just—" Shane sighed. "I don't do this a lot."

"Dates?"

"Dates and places where the lighting makes me feel like I should be more put-together than I am."

"You're doing fine."

Shane snorted. "I almost ordered water..."

"Hey," Ilya said. "You could have ordered whiskey and later puked in the toilet."

When the wine arrived, Ilya tasted it first, then nudged the glass toward Shane.

"Try."

Shane did.

"Yeah," he said. "That's... yeah. Better than whiskey."

"Soo..." Ilya said, swishing the wine around. "What do people do on dates?"

"Oh... you're asking me?"

"Come on, a cute barista, I'm sure a lot of girls hit on you."

Shane covered his face, and suddenly, all he could think about was the mountain of bill doom.

"They don't. You're the first... I mean, you're the first person I've been on a date with in a very long time."

"Oh."

"So I guess that leaves you the expert."

"I don't do dating," Ilya said and Shane took a big gulp out of his wine.

He almost emptied it.

"So we both suck at dating."

"Basically but it means—Alright, don't freak out. It's an experiment. See where it takes us. Sandy took us to Boston and I had little faith in her."

"It's a good car."

"I found sand in my boots," Ilya said and they both laughed.

"Rose always complains about it. Right, she'll start tomorrow, at the coffee shop."

"Why?"

"Acting is... I guess she could make good money if she went into OnlyFans with an open mind and"—

"Shane Hollander."

"I was just saying. She'll ruin Bobby."

"Who's Bobby?"

"No one."

"Shane," Ilya said, and squeezed his thigh.

"Fine. The first espresso machine I ever bought."

"I knew it. You know what? You can name my balls."

"That's different."

"Give it your best shot."

"I need... a better look."

"Oh, really?" Ilya asked. "Is that you saying you want some more?"

"Maybe...?"

They paid without ceremony. Ilya reached for the bill before Shane could even pretend to argue, and Shane let him; another small surrender he'd think about later.

Outside, the city felt looser. Night air, a little damp, streetlights reflecting off the pavement like everything had been lightly varnished. They walked close without talking about it, shoulders brushing, steps syncing by accident.

"You cold?" Ilya asked.

"No," Shane said, and then corrected himself. "I mean—yeah. A little. But the car is right there."

"Your loss. Shit, I need cigarettes," Ilya said and Shane grumbled something about early death.

They stopped at the corner store; Shane bought gum and aspirin, Ilya bought two packs of Camels, just in case.

Shane couldn't remember the trip back to his apartment. Only the screechy shut of the door behind them. Ilya moved first, his hand pressing flat against Shane's chest, guiding him back until his shoulders hit the door with a soft thud.

"Fuck," Shane said.

"Stop panicking, and kiss me," Ilya said, cupping his face. "We've done this before..."

"I know."

He crushed his lips against Shane's, rough at first, teeth grazing his bottom lip, as Shane's hands fisted into Ilya's sweater, pulling him closer, tasting the faint bitterness of whiskey and the salt of sweat.

"What if I—I... you know."

"What?" he said, laughing.

"I'm bad at it..."

Ilya sighed, resting his forehead against Shane's.

"It's not rocket science. If you... don't like it, then you don't, and we stop and play FIFA instead, or... I give you a handjob. Just say the words, and"—

"Nono, we can kiss. And more..."

"Jesus, Shane Hollander, you're killing me."

He kissed him again, slower, gentler. Ilya's fingers threaded into Shane's hair, tilting his head back to deepen the kiss, tongue entering his mouth.

Shane's knees weakened if not for the door; he'd imagined it a hundred times ever since the stupid hockey game. Ever since watching Ilya Rozanov play, dressed in his stupid gear, sliding across the ice, looking at him. He'd imagined kneeling down in front of him and finally knowing how it felt like.

Ilya's free hand roamed down Shane's side, gripping his hip hard enough to bruise, pinning him in place.

Breaking the kiss with a gasp, Ilya rested his forehead against Shane's, both of them panting.

"I've wanted this," Ilya said, his thumb tracing Shane's swollen lower lip.

Shane nodded.

He slid his hands under Ilya's shirt, feeling the taut muscles of his abdomen flex under his touch. So hot, skin smooth, perfect even.

Shane dropped to his knees, all the courage, the sudden boldness that had surged through him at Ilya's words, disappeared. He stared at his groin, wondering what the fuck he was doing.

Ilya's eyes widened slightly, but his fingers trailed through his hair. Shane's fingers trembled as he worked Ilya's belt open, the metallic clink loud in the silence. He tugged the zipper down, freeing Ilya's cock from the confines of his jeans.

"Fuck, Shane. Fuck."

"Yeah, fuck..." he whispered.

Wrapping his hand around the base, Shane leaned in, his tongue darting out to lick a slow stripe from root to tip. Ilya hissed, his hand tightening in Shane's hair. He stopped, eyes closed, and breathed in and out through his nose. He was doing it. Actually doing it.

Shane took the head into his mouth, sucking gently at first, exploring with his tongue; the salty tang that made his own cock throb painfully in his pants. He bobbed his head, taking more with each pass, his lips stretching around the girth as he hollowed his cheeks. He focused on his teeth, on not scratching or biting him. His cheeks began to ache, and his eyes started to water with each motion.

Ilya's hips jerked involuntarily, a curse slipping from his lips in Russian, something low and filthy. In fact, Shane hoped it had to do with his abilities, and that it was good filthy, not bad filthy.

He worked his tongue along the underside, swirling around the sensitive spot just below the head, while his hand stroked what he couldn't yet take. Saliva dripped down Ilya's shaft, making everything slick and obscene; he liked it, the slight ache in his knees, the way his fingers tugged at his hair, the fact that Ilya's ragged breaths were because of him.

His eyes flicked up to meet Ilya's, watching the way his jaw clenched, the flush creeping up his neck, to his cheeks. He liked the look on him, the fact that he held some power over him.

Ilya thrust shallowly, fucking into Shane's mouth with careful restraint, his free hand bracing against the door above Shane's head.

"Fuck, Shane... just like that," Ilya said, voice breaking as Shane hummed around him, the vibration drawing a shudder from Ilya's frame.

The pressure built quickly, Ilya's balls tightening as Shane sucked harder, his own arousal leaking through his underwear. He touched himself.

Ilya hauled him up immediately, kissing him, tasting himself on Shane's tongue, as he finished all over his hand.

"Fuck, Shane."

Chapter End Notes

Alright, I cannot believe I am nearing the end of this fic yuhuu. I really tried my best with the smut scenes, even though I feel like they could be much better and sexier but... I guess practice will make perfect :))

Chapter 9

Shane stared at the bubbling milk in Rose's pitcher, the frother screeching like a colicky baby in the middle of the night. It was 7 AM and Shane drank the second coffee of the day. Rose's second attempt at abstract latte art looked more like sad bubble bath foam than smooth, silky crema. But he drank it anyway. It was better than gas station coffee.

For a second, he thought about the invoices waiting in the drawer under the till. The number at the bottom of the last one. He pushed it away and focused on the milk instead.

"So... I think it looks better. It's all in the wrist, right?" Rose asked, swishing the pitcher around.

"Right. You angle the cup, pour three-quarters of the milk and then you do the latte art."

"Like this?"

"It's better than the other two," Shane said.

"I suck at this, don't I?"

"It's just... your third coffee. The customers won't mind."

Rose groaned, taking a sip of the coffee.

"It tastes good."

"Just.. clean the wand. It'll get crusty really quickly."

"Yes, boss. I can't believe I work for you."

"Me neither."

Rose watched him wipe down the counter, the steam wand, the spill she hadn't noticed.

"Shane. Thank you. Seriously."

The bell over the door rang. Once. Then again. Then it didn't stop ringing at all, like a warped Christmas carol.

Shane looked up.

Ilya stood in the doorway with Scott, both of them too tall, too loud, and immediately recognizable. Too recognizable. People didn't really want coffee, they wanted an autograph, a sliver of attention. Ilya was already grinning, leaning against the counter, and blew a short kiss his way.

"Slept well?"

"Jesus," Shane whispered. "What are you two doing here?" He glanced around. "Why are there so many people?"

Scott shrugged.

"I heard it's the best coffee in town."

"Oh no," Rose whispered, staring at the queue forming behind them.

Within minutes, the line doubled.

"Jesus fu—"

"Why are there so many people," Rose said, voice cracking as she fumbled the portafilter. Milk sloshed over the counter.

"Okay," Shane said. "Deep breath. One drink at a time."

"Or..." Ilya grinned. "I have a better idea. No offence, Rose, but I've watched Shane make coffee enough times to know—"

"I suck," she whispered. "So what's your grand idea?"

"Alright. Shane, you're on coffee. Scott—cleaning, orders to the tables. Rose, you take orders."

"And you?"

"I manage," Ilya said, knocking his knuckles against the counter. "Come on."

The line only grew once Scott started signing autographs on every napkin he handed out with coffee. By 12 PM, Rose pushed her phone into Shane's face.

"Look."

"I am looking."

"Hottest spot in town to meet hockey players."

"We're not a meet'n'greet," Shane said. "They don't even say anything about the coffee."

"Down there. The coffee is a bonus."

"Great," Shane said, and turned to wipe the espresso wand again.

It was the twentieth customer that day; at some point, Shane had lost count and started yelling for Scott or Ilya, or both, to take photos with the next blonde, awfully pretty girl chewing bubblegum and wearing sparkly lip gloss.

"You should put a tax on it," Scott whispered.

"On what?"

"The photos. And autographs. If they come in just for me," he grinned, "they have to pay. Photo more expensive. Autograph cheaper."

"I'm not whoring you out."

Scott shrugged. "You're lucky Ilya is your boyfriend."

"I don't whore out anyone. And he's not."

Scott blinked at him. "Alright. Then you should probably tell Ilya he's definitely not your boyfriend. Jeez, Shane."

Shane pointed toward the counter. "Go—go whore yourself out or something."

Scott laughed and turned just in time to pose with another phone already aimed at his face.

Shane felt him before he saw anything; Ilya watched him for a moment too long, cloth still in his hands. The noise pressed in, the phones angled toward him, the way someone whispered his name like it was part of the show. He kept his head down, hands moving on muscle memory alone. His coffee shop was buzzing, chiming, people were laughing, and the coffee smell was everywhere, deep into his pores.

"Hey," Ilya said. "Bathroom. Now."

"What—"

"Now," Ilya repeated, already tugging him by the wrist.

The bathroom was cramped and smelled faintly of lemon cleaner and burned milk. The door barely shut before Ilya crowded him back against it, hands warm on his waist.

"You're doing that thing," Ilya said.

"What thing?"

"You know... staring into the unknown and wondering how your life choices brought you to this glorious moment of your life. Rose can handle the espresso machine if you need"—

Shane scoffed. "I'm fine. Just working."

"I know." Ilya leaned in anyway, forehead to his.

Shane swallowed. Then kissed him.

It was rushed, all teeth and breath and hands clutching fabric as Ilya pushed him harder into the door. Ilya kissed him back just as hard, like he was trying to press him back into his own body.

"Hey," Ilya whispered against his mouth. "Breathe."

Shane did. Once. Twice.

Then Ilya ruined it.

"I know about the unpaid bills," he said softly.

Shane froze.

"What?"

"The drawer. Under the till. I wasn't—"

"You went through my things?" Shane snapped, pushing him back. "Jesus Christ, Ilya."

"I wasn't snooping—"

"That's exactly what you were doing."

The door felt too close now. The sink. The mirror. His own face, flushed and angry and exposed.

"I don't need you to manage me," Shane said. "Or fix this. Or feel sorry for me. Is this why you brought Scott in and spent the entire day whoring yourselves out? Does Scott know?!"

"I wasn't—"

"Please," Shane cut in. "Just... don't."

They stood there for too long, Shane staring at his blurred reflection in the tiles. Then Shane opened the door and went back out.

"Heeey," Rose said, stopping in front of him. "So... we have some reporters"—

"I don't give a shit. Let Scott and Ilya do an interview or whatever of how they're keeping afloat a local business afloat."

"What?!"

"Ask Ilya."

At some point, after the reporters left and Ilya charmed them, making the worst cappuccino imaginable and proving he was more than muscle and hockey, Shane turned the sign on the door to CLOSED.

Scott made his exit without announcing it some time later. Just the bell chimed; a sudden rush of cold air hit him in the face. One second he was there, wiping down a table, the next, it was just the three of them: Shane, Ilya, and Rose. Someone had left a signed napkin behind; Shane folded it once and tucked it under the counter.

He flipped the sign fully to CLOSED and locked the door.

Then he started cleaning. He put in his earphones, his old, scotch-taped ones from college.

Shane wiped the counter twice. Scrubbed the milk crust off the steam wand until the metal shone. Ran water through the portafilter again and again, even though it was already clean, staring at the way it filtered through it. His shoulders eased with every small task, every thing returned to its place.

Ilya hovered for a second, moving from one foot to another. Then, he grabbed a rag and started on the tables without a word. Rose stacked cups, washed them, and set them upside down on the towel to dry. No one spoke. The shop hummed quietly, the espresso machine cooling down with a soft click.

When everything was done, no cups left out, no spills, no crumbs, Rose wiped her hands on her apron and walked over.

She didn't say anything. Just hugged him, quick but tight, her cheek pressed to his shoulder.

"You good?" she whispered.

Shane nodded. "Yeah."

"Okay." She grabbed her bag. "Text me."

The bell rang once when she left. Then silence.

Shane went back to the till.

He pulled out the drawer, laid the bills flat, counted the cash, and did the balance slowly. When he finished, he stared at the number on the receipt for a long moment.

Then he laughed.

He leaned back against the counter, receipt still in his hand, and laughed again, breathless, wiping away some tears.

"Soo..." Ilya said, and stepped closer to him, arms crossed. "It's either bad or very good."

"Very good," Shane said, and put the invoices and papers back underneath the till. "I mean... too good. My accountant might think I robbed a bank or something."

Silence fell, as Shane circled the counter and sat down, holding his knees to his chest. Ilya followed, shoulders touching, and sighed, pressing his forehead against his fists.

"I know I snooped and I"—

"I don't need to be rescued, alright?"

"I didn't"—

"Does Scott even know?"

"About?"

"That the coffee shop is a failure and you paraded him here like a monkey at a circus"—

"I told him nothing. And I know you need no saving."

"Do you?"

"I tried to help. I... care about you, Shane. And—and seeing you pour so much into this place... does Rose even know?"

"No... I didn't want to tell anyone."

Ilya sighed again and leaned against Shane's shoulder.

"You can punch me."

"I won't punch you..."

"Why? I snooped and I thought I knew best"—

Shane laughed.

"Well... it kind of worked out which sucks. Because today was the best day this coffee shop has ever seen. All because of you and Scott, not the coffee or—or"—

"People liked the coffee."

"Sure."

"I'm sorry."

"I know... uhm, if I have to close"—

"You won't."

"How would you even know...?"

"Because... come on, Rose and me and even Scott, we can help. If you want us to. I want to see you happy, Shane. And it's... kind of special. This place. We met here..."

"Jesus, you're so corny."

"Whatever."

They sat there for a moment, shoulders still touching. The shop smelled faintly of coffee and lemon cleaner, like the day had been erased but not quite forgotten.

Shane stared at the floor.

"So... want to celebrate with some FIFA and take-out?"

"Don't tempt me."

"But I am. Tick-tock, time is running out"— Shane said and stood up, just as Ilya grabbed his wrist to pull him into a kiss.

"Asshole."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever you say."

They locked up together.

Shane turned the sign on the door, flipped off the lights one by one, and the shop dimmed into the night. Ilya held the door while he set the alarm, jingling his keys, cigarette dangling from his lips.

Outside, the city had settled. Less noise. Fewer people.

They didn't talk much on the walk back.

"Bye Sandy, bye Bobby!" Ilya said, waving at the car.

He kicked at the curb, Shane shoved his hands into his coat pockets. Their shoulders brushed every few steps, unintentional, then not. It was intentional the way Ilya glanced back, and then slipped his hand into Shane's pocket, fingers intertwined.

By the time they reached Shane's apartment, his stomach grumbled so loudly, Ilya slipped as he took off his shoes.

Shane queued up FIFA on muscle memory while Ilya ordered take-out from the same place Shane always ordered from.

They played one match. Then half of another.

Somewhere between the third goal and the cold fries, they were no longer playing. He straddled Ilya's lap and their mouths crashed together, tongues tangling as they breathed hard into each other. Ilya pulled back, nipping along Shane's jaw and down to his throat, where he sucked hard enough to leave a mark. Shane arched up, a low groan slipping out.

"No marks..."

"Didn't you get hickies when you were in high school?" Ilya asked.

"Never."

"I don't believe it."

"Ask Rose."

"Oh, so you were that kind of student."

"Like what?"

"Like..." he said and pulled off Shane's t-shirt. "The kind I'd want to fuck."

He kissed Shane's chest, moving lower, mouth closing over one nipple, sucking and grazing it with his teeth until it stiffened. Ilya rocked against him once, their cocks sliding together through fabric, then tugged Shane's boxers off.

Shane's shaft stood rigid already. Ilya gripped it, pumping it, smearing the pre-cum around. Shane thrust into his fist, fingers digging into his shoulders, leaving red marks all over.

"Come on, the bed."

Shane stood up, running to the bedroom, and Ilya caught him, kissing him again and again, clothes falling off, until he pressed him against the mattress.

"On your stomach."

Shane flipped over, raising his hips. Ilya parted him open, and kissed the curve of one ass cheek, then licked, hands holding him in place. Shane jerked, letting out a startled "Shit."

Ilya flattened his tongue against the hole; Shane's muscles went rigid, then lax as Ilya swirled around the rim, coating it in spit. He pushed his tongue inside, fucking in shallow jabs. Shane shoved his face into the pillow, hips grinding back.

Fingers dug into his flesh, holding him open while he ate him out and Shane let him. He'd let him do much more.

"Condoms?"

"Top drawers... uhm, you know I've never"—

"I know. I'll take it slow, okay... if it hurts or anything, slap me or something."

Ilya grabbed lube from the side table along with the unopened packet of condoms.

"Oh... so you've been thinking about it."

"Actually... check the expiry date. Uhm, they are from... I don't even know when."

"Two months to go. Jesus, Shane," Ilya laughed and kissed his shoulder. "I'm just going to..."

He coated two fingers in lubricant, then circled his entrance.

"Breathe out."

Shane did, and the first finger sank in smoothly from the saliva, though he tightened around it.

Ilya pumped slowly, bending the digit to nudge his prostate. Shane whined: "Keep going," just as Ilya slipped in a second finger, spreading them to loosen the grip, sliding and curling

until Shane panted into the pillow. The third drew a sharp breath, but Ilya kissed his back, whispering, "Doing okay?"

"Yeah... don't stop."

He rolled Shane onto his back and Ilya pressed forward. Shane's eyes squeezed shut, a hiss escaping as the burn hit.

"Easy," he said, fingers biting into Ilya's biceps.

Ilya paused, buried halfway, waiting until Shane relaxed. Then he sank the rest, groin flush against Shane's ass. They held still, noses brushing, kissing him on the lips, the cheeks, and forehead, until Shane urged him to continue.

Ilya drew back and thrust in slow strokes, and Shane's dick rubbed against his stomach with every motion. Shane hooked his ankles behind Ilya's back, heels digging in.

"Is this okay?"

"Yes. Fuck... yeah."

Ilya sped up, hips snapping, skin smacking loudly. Shane closed his eyes, panting, and reached down, fisting his cock to match the pace.

Then Ilya pulled out fast and got him on his hands and knees. Shane pushed his ass up, just as Ilya clutched his waist and drove in deeper than before. Ilya's arm wrapped around, yanking Shane's cock in rough pulls, matching the rhythm; sweat beaded on their skin, and he felt it drop down from his forehead, straight onto the pillow.

"I—I-I think I'm coming. Are you close," Ilya said as Shane stuttered.

Shane groaned, finishing all over the sheets, and Ilya thrust up harder, sucking his earlobe as he came.

"Fuck..."

"Yeah... fuck," Shane whispered, slumped on the bed, underneath Ilya's body weight. "We should... put a towel down next time. I'll have to... throw these in the trash."

"I just fucked you, and you're thinking about sheets?" Ilya asked, laughing, pulling himself up to lie next to him on the bed.

"They were expensive."

"Then we fucked on expensive sheets... I'll get you new ones."

"You should."

"Oh, fuck off, Shane Hollander," Ilya said and pulled him into a kiss. "Did you like it? And please don't mention the sheets again."

"Yeah. Did you?"

"Oh, I think it's obvious I did."

"Good then. But towel next time."

"Not if you ride me."

Chapter 10: 40th encounter

Chapter Notes

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

EPILOGUE

Shane heard the bell chime before he saw the person entering the shop. It was just another Thursday, at 9 AM and it was snowing already, Sandy no longer visible from inside. He thought about cleaning her, but the shop filled up.

"I think the hockey posters do work," Rose said, nudging him.

"You think? Hello, welcome to Coffee Bean, what can I get for you?" he asked and afterwards, the bell wouldn't stop chiming, the espresso machines wouldn't stop pulling espresso shots that would soon be turned into cappuccinos or flat whites.

Ever since the news channel coverage, somehow everywhere, after Ilya's cappuccino foam design had vaguely, tragically resembled an erect penis.

People asked for it specifically. The Ilya Special.

It was on the menu. On the posters above his head. Right next to The Scott Surprise and Game Night Discount.

Rose made them now. Two nights of drinking too much coffee later, they both had a perfectly non-anatomically correct penis latte art in their repertoire.

People loved it.

Shane sometimes dreamt about foam spirals and milk pitchers, about Ilya's penis dropping onto a coffee with a big, wet splash. Sometimes, it was just about Ilya leaning against the counter, sleeves rolled up, smirking, ready to push him against any straight surface and kiss him.

And sometimes, it was just about a stack of unpaid bills.

Closing time came quietly.

The sign on the door flipped to CLOSED, the espresso machine hissed one last time before Shane shut it down. Chairs were still scattered, the floor faintly sticky in places, the air thick with coffee and sugar and something fried from the takeout bags piling up on the counter.

Rose kicked off her shoes and sat on the counter like she owned the place, dangling them with a satisfied grin on her face.

"So... if this is a party, who goes to buy some beer?" Ilya asked.

Scott had already claimed a chair, legs stretched out, phone in hand, as Kip leaned against the window, peeling the label off a water bottle with surgical focus.

"Oh, come on. So who"—

"You," Shane said and kissed him. "It's just around the corner."

"I'm coming with you," Rose announced, raising her cup that still had some remains of coffee from the morning. "We need to celebrate the best job I've ever had!"

"You spilled oat milk on a man's coat today," Shane said.

"He deserved it," she replied instantly, pushing Ilya through the door.

Scott snorted. "She told a woman we don't do decaf because it 'kills the soul.'"

"That's called branding."

Shane leaned back, against the counter and took it all in; his shop, Rose and Ilya running down the street, laughing, Scott, chewing a cold fry, and Kip. At Bobby, and Sandy, still covered in snow, at the stupid hockey posters, and sighed.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, so I didn't know how to end this and I suppose it's a rather meeh epilogue, so I might revisit this but I feel like this was such a fluffy fic that I didn't quite have that big of a dramatic post ending chapter.

Anyway, thank you for reading!

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