

Cigarettes After Sex

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Cigarettes After Sex

by [shaneviews](#)

Summary

Shane begins sending letters to Ilya Rozanov, his next-door neighbor, in an attempt to stop the constant cigarette smoke from drifting into his apartment. The idea was to solve the problem, not start a war.

Notes

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

Dear Mr. Rozanov,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to bring to your attention a recurring issue that has unfortunately been affecting my apartment with some frequency.

Your habit of smoking on the balcony has resulted in cigarette smoke entering my living space through the adjacent area. I understand that the balcony is part of your residence, but the proximity between our apartments makes the situation difficult to ignore.

I would sincerely appreciate it if you could be more mindful.

Thank you in advance for your understanding.

Sincerely,

Shane Hollander

Apartment 4B



Shane wasn't someone who got bothered easily, something his mother always pointed out as a potential flaw, even though he never really agreed with her.

For him, it was simply easier that way.

Letting life follow its own course, without interfering too much, without carrying unnecessary anger, without allowing himself to get stressed over things that, more often than not, ended up resolving themselves.

He genuinely believed that.

Until Ilya Rozanov showed up.

When the building manager announced that the apartment next door would finally be occupied, Shane reacted with an almost boring calmness. There was no exaggerated curiosity or expectation, just a vague thought that maybe it would be nice to have someone there.

A nearby human presence, even if distant, someone whose footsteps in the hallway wouldn't feel strange. The only detail was the balcony, pressed right up against his, separated only by a divider that existed more out of architectural politeness than any real sense of privacy.

Still, Shane had never had issues with that before; his previous neighbors had been quiet, discreet, almost invisible- exactly the way he liked it.

Ilya seemed to follow the same pattern, at least at first glance.

Polite, calm, the kind of person who nodded in greeting in the hallway and didn't ask too many questions. And even though Shane tried to ignore this fact with all his might, he was also absurdly attractive; blond hair that always looked effortlessly tousled, blue eyes far too light to be fair, a rosy mouth.

There was something about him that felt like a misplaced angel, as if he'd fallen from the sky and gotten the address wrong, ending up in that ordinary hallway, in that ordinary building, right next to Shane's carefully uncomplicated life.

At first, Shane thought none of it would make any difference.

He was *deeply* wrong.

It all started on a day too ordinary to deserve attention.

Shane didn't have classes that afternoon and decided to take advantage of the rare luxury of free time, bringing a book and a cup of coffee out onto the balcony. The sky was clear, the air relatively cool, and for a few minutes everything felt exactly the way it should.

Quiet and comfortable. Predictable.

Then the smell came.

At first faint, almost imperceptible, then stronger, insistent, slipping past the divider between the balconies with irritating ease. Cheap nicotine, warm smoke, a bitter taste that seemed to lodge itself straight in the back of his throat.

Shane coughed immediately, his body reacting before he even had time to process what was happening. His eyes burned, his chest tightened, and he could already feel his allergy announcing itself.

He closed the book slowly, as if the gesture might somehow contain the smell in the air. It didn't.

The smoke lingered, thick enough to turn what should have been his refuge into something hostile. Shane inhaled carefully, holding his breath for a few seconds too long, hoping it would pass quickly.

It didn't.

From the other side of the divider, he heard the soft click of a lighter being flicked again, followed by an exhale that lasted far too long to be ignored. That was when Shane realized, with uncomfortable clarity, that this wasn't an isolated incident.

It was a habit. A recurring problem.

And for the first time in a long while, something small was managing to throw him off balance.

He stood up from the chair, taking the coffee back inside without even finishing it, already feeling irritation blend with physical discomfort. It definitely made a difference.



The first letter wasn't written until two weeks after the incident; far too long for someone who claimed not to be bothered by much. Shane spent those days trying to convince himself that it wasn't a real problem, just a passing inconvenience, something he could work around by closing the balcony door, changing his schedule, taking a deep breath, and moving on.

More than once, he thought it might not be fair to complain. After all, it was Ilya's apartment, and the balcony was his.

Inside one's own space, a person could do whatever they wanted, right?

Shane repeated that thought like a mantra every time the smell appeared, every time his throat itched, every time his eyes burned more than they should have.

Hayden didn't agree for even a second.

They were sitting in the university cafeteria when Shane mentioned it, absentmindedly pushing food around his plate while describing the situation. Hayden listened in silence for exactly thirty seconds before straightening up in his chair, his eyes lighting up in that very specific way that meant trouble.

"This isn't just annoying neighbor behavior," Hayden said, grabbing a napkin. "This is interference with your use of your space."

Shane frowned. "But he's on his own balcony."

"And the effect is in your apartment," Hayden replied without hesitation. "Basic law. No one can use their property in a way that interferes with someone else's legitimate use of theirs. That's nuisance. Ongoing disturbance. Depending on where you are, it can even become a health issue."

Shane blinked, surprised. "Seriously?"

"Smoke is a classic," Hayden continued, far too animated for someone who hadn't even finished law school yet. "Smell, noise, vibrations. If it crosses over and affects you, it doesn't matter where it came from. You're not asking him to stop existing, just not to make you sick."

Shane looked down at his plate, pushing the food from side to side. "I don't want to start trouble."

"Then start the most civilized way possible," Hayden shrugged. "A polite letter. You're not wrong for asking for the bare minimum."

That was the part that stayed with Shane afterward. Not the legal argument itself, but the certainty in Hayden's voice when he said Shane wasn't wrong. That it wasn't an overreaction.

That it wasn't being dramatic.

That night, Shane opened his laptop, closed it, opened it again. Grabbed a piece of paper, gave up, went back to the computer. He chose every word with excessive care, as if drafting something that might be used against him in an invisible courtroom.

When he finished, he reread it three times before printing.

It was just a letter. Polite. Reasonable.

At least, that's what Shane kept telling himself as he folded the paper with too much care, aligning the edges as if that might guarantee everything would go according to plan.

He didn't want to run into Ilya. Didn't want to explain anything out loud, didn't want to see his expression when he received the letter, didn't want to turn that request into a real conversation just yet.

So Shane *waited*.

He waited until he heard footsteps in the hallway, the distant sound of the elevator opening and closing, followed by that particular silence. Only then did he leave his apartment, his heart beating far too fast for something so mundane, and stop in front of the door next door.

Ilya Rozanov's door.

He held the letter for a second longer than necessary, took one last deep breath, and carefully slid it under the door. He went back to his apartment too quickly, locked the door, and spent the rest of the night trying not to think about it.

The reply came the next day.

Not in the form of a letter - which Shane immediately considered a breach of etiquette - but as an absurdly large post-it stuck right in the center of his door. Too big. Shamelessly visible. Shane hadn't even known post-its came in that size.

He had just come back from campus, shoulders heavy, head pounding, all he wanted was to get inside, kick off his shoes, and pretend the world didn't exist for a few hours. Seeing that bright yellow square glued to his door didn't help.

He sighed, dropped his backpack on the floor, and tore the paper off with more force than necessary.

The handwriting was slanted, rushed, clearly handwritten.

Dear Neighbor,

I read your very polite letter. Smoke go up, yes, this is how smoke works. Balcony is mine, apartment is mine too.

But okay, I try not kill you with cigar.

No promises.

Ilya

Shane read it once. Then again.

The irony was right there, along with the broken English, the provocative tone, and that overly casual signature for someone who had just declared war in such a... charming way. He closed his eyes for a second, took a deep breath, and felt something unexpected mix with his irritation.

This was definitely not the kind of response he had imagined.



The next day, Shane woke up determined not to think about the post-it.

He failed before even brushing his teeth.

The yellow paper was stuck to the kitchen fridge, held up by a crooked magnet, right at eye level. According to him, it was there so he could look at it and get angry. To remind himself how irritating his neighbor was, of the mocking tone, the bad English, the sheer audacity of replying to a formal complaint with a giant Post-it.

According to him.

In reality, Shane had read that message so many times he knew every line by heart. And at some point the night before, between one sigh and another, he'd added a *tiny heart* next to Ilya's name, drawn with the tip of a nearly empty pen. Too small to mean anything. Too small to be taken seriously.

He avoided looking at it.

The second letter was written with less hesitation, but a different kind of tension. Shane sat at the kitchen table with the Post-it beside him, like a piece of evidence, and started writing. The politeness was still there, carefully preserved, but now something else threaded through the sentences. A thin line of irritation.

And, against his will, a touch of correction he couldn't stop himself from making.

He printed the letter again. But before folding it, he grabbed a blue pen, underlined a few words, and added small corrections in the margins, in neat, careful handwriting.

Smoke goes up.

A cigarette.

He paused, staring at the paper. This was ridiculous. He was correcting his neighbor's English in the middle of a formal complaint about cigarette smoke. Shane ran a hand over his face, sighed, and decided that if he'd already gone this far, he might as well be consistent.

He folded the letter, took a deep breath, and waited for the right moment, just like the night before. Footsteps in the hallway. Elevator. Silence.

He slid the letter under Ilya's door and went back home with that uncomfortable mix of duty fulfilled and thinly disguised anticipation. He tried to convince himself it was just a practical matter, an adjustment in shared living, nothing more.

But when he stepped into the kitchen, his eyes went straight to the fridge.

To the yellow post-it.

To the tiny heart.

Shane shook his head, as if he could shake the thought away, and put water on to boil. Coffee needed to be made. The day needed to go on, and he was definitely not anxious about the next reply.

Definitely not.



Dear Mr. Rozanov,

Thank you for your reply. I'm glad to know you read my letter, even if I disagree with some of the points you raised.

I understand that the balcony and the apartment are, in fact, your property. However, when the smoke enters my space, it ceases to be merely a personal habit and starts to directly interfere with my use of my apartment.

Just to clarify a few details:

Smoke go up → smoke goes up

Kill you with cigar → kill you with a cigarette

This is not a criticism, just a correction.

I would appreciate it if you could at least consider smoking at alternate times or in a different location, in order to minimize the impact. I'm not asking for the impossible, just a bit of common sense between neighbors.

Sincerely,

Shane Hollander

Ilya Rozanov couldn't believe he was being bothered because of his cigarettes.

He reread the second letter with an arched eyebrow, leaning against the kitchen counter, letting out a low laugh as he realized that Shane apparently had enough time - *and willingness* - to correct his English in the middle of a formal complaint. Underlined, too. Complete with margin notes.

Ridiculous.

And yet, he read it more than once.

The blue pen had pressed into the paper with moderate force, enough to leave impressions on the back. The corrections were neat, careful, almost too gentle for someone who was clearly annoyed. Ilya ran his thumb over the word goes, feeling the faint texture of the dried ink, and huffed, amused.

'This is not a criticism,' Shane had written. That made Ilya laugh for real.

He tossed the letter onto the table, lit a cigarette out of pure reflex, and only realized what he was doing when the smoke rose; slow, predictable, exactly as Shane had described. He stubbed it out before it was halfway done, irritated with himself, and stared at the paper as if it might answer back.

The neighbor was unbearably polite. Organized. Meticulous. Ilya knew the type well. People like that didn't usually bother continuing to write letters unless they were, somehow, more invested than they let on.

He opened the drawer, grabbed a post-it - big, but not as outrageously big as the first one; lesson learned - and a black pen. He thought for a few seconds, chewing on the cap, then started writing, his handwriting slanted, quick, imperfect.

Because if Shane wanted corrections, Ilya could provide new material.

And maybe a little less smoke that night.

Maybe.

Dear Grammar Neighbor,

Okay, Professor Shane, I learn new thing today.

Smoke goes up. I write this correct now. You happy?

I still smoke. Not sorry.

But I try smoke later, when you not reading books and drinking fancy coffee.

Also: not 'kill you'. Was joke. You still alive, yes?

Ilya

(p.s. your English very good. Mine... work in progress) ”

The letters and post-its continued.

Not all the time, not constantly, but enough to become part of the routine. Shane began to recognize Ilya's handwriting before he even finished opening the door. Sometimes it was a small post-it, sometimes a carelessly folded piece of paper, sometimes just a single word scribbled quickly in response to a specific correction.

The smell of cigarettes didn't disappear completely, but it *changed*. It became less frequent, less invasive, as if it had learned to respect invisible boundaries.

The corrections changed too.

Shane stopped underlining things in blue pen and started writing the correct words at the end of the letter, almost like footnotes. Ilya began to get more right, make fewer mistakes, and occasionally make them on purpose, just to provoke him.

At some point, they stopped using last names.

Then they stopped signing altogether.

By the time Shane realized it, he was smiling to himself while sticking a new Post-it on the fridge, as if that were the most normal thing in the world.

It was weeks later, on a day that dragged on far too long, that the paper finally failed.

Shane came back from campus exhausted, his backpack heavy on his shoulder, his head too full to form any coherent thoughts. The hallway was quiet when he pressed the elevator button, distracted, looking at his phone.

The doors opened.

Ilya was inside.

For a second, neither of them moved. The version of Ilya standing there, in flesh and bone, was different from the one that existed on paper. Taller. *More real*. He didn't smell like cigarettes, but like something clean, woody, almost familiar in a strange way.

“Hi,” Shane said, the word coming out quieter than he meant it to.

Ilya blinked, surprised, then smiled crookedly, recognizing him immediately.

“Hi,” he replied. “You... *4B*.”

It wasn't a question.

Shane nodded, stepping into the elevator and standing slightly to the side, acutely aware of the closeness. The doors closed.

“Your English has improved,” Shane commented, before he could stop himself.

Ilya laughed softly. “I have a demanding teacher.”

The elevator felt smaller than it should have.

The silence that followed wasn't exactly uncomfortable, but it was heavy, as if both of them were trying to decide which version of the other fit better there.

Ilya shifted his weight onto one leg, hands in the pockets of his jacket, watching the panel as the elevator climbed floor by floor. “I didn't remember what you looked like,” he said suddenly, without looking at Shane. “I mean... just from the way you write.”

Shane swallowed. “And I thought you made a point of getting things wrong.”

“Only sometimes,” Ilya replied, looking at him now, blue eyes holding something that was no longer just teasing. “You always corrected me.”

“I couldn't help it.”

Ilya smiled at that, a small smile. “I noticed.”

The elevator jolted slightly as it stopped on an intermediate floor. The doors opened onto an empty hallway and closed again, making them even more aware of the closeness.

“I cut back,” Ilya admitted unexpectedly. “On the cigarettes. Not because of the letter. I mean... *not only*.”

Shane turned his head slowly. “I noticed.”

There was a second of silence, heavy and fragile, as if any wrong word might undo weeks of careful connection built on paper. Shane realized, with startling clarity, that this conversation was just a continuation of all the others; only without the protection of ink.

“You drew a heart,” Ilya said suddenly, far too casually.

Shane froze. “What?”

“On the post-it,” Ilya continued, clearly amused now. “Very small. Next to my name. I saw it when one of your friends came over and left the door open.”

Shane's face heated instantly. “That didn't mean-”

“I know,” Ilya interrupted gently. “But I liked it.”

The doors opened on their floor before Shane could reply. The hallway felt too bright, too open, after that confined space. He hesitated for a moment, hand on his backpack strap.

“Shane,” Ilya called.

He turned.

“My English isn’t perfect yet,” Ilya said, almost serious. “But I do know when someone wants to go out with me.”

Shane smiled. “Maybe you’re not completely wrong.”

Ilya laughed - loud this time - as the doors closed between them.



The café had already closed by the time they stepped outside.

It was their third meeting, even though neither of them had said the word out loud. The first had been the elevator, the second, a quick coffee and the third came with the strange ease of people who already knew where the other’s hands went when they talked.

The night was cold, the street nearly empty, lit by old lampposts that made everything feel a little more intimate than it really was. They walked side by side, close enough for their arms to brush now and then, in no hurry to get anywhere.

Ilya laughed at something Shane said and, without thinking, reached into the pocket of his coat. The gesture was automatic, trained by years. The cigarette appeared between his fingers before he realized it.

Shane looked.

Not with disapproval and not with accusation. He just *looked*.

Ilya froze for half a second, then noticed the silence and raised an eyebrow, almost laughing at himself. “Sorry,” he said, already knowing he didn’t need to apologize. “Reflex.”

Shane tilted his head, assessing the scene. Then shrugged. “It’s fine.”

Ilya blinked, surprised. “Really?”

“Just...” Shane paused briefly, the corner of his mouth lifting into a slow smile. “*Cigarettes after sex*, please.”

The silence that followed lasted exactly long enough for the joke to land.

Ilya stopped walking.

Then he laughed- open, sincere, the kind that starts in the chest. “Is that a rule or an invitation?”

Shane felt his face warm, but he didn't back down. "I'm open to negotiations."

Ilya slipped the cigarette back into his pocket, not out of obligation but by choice, and stepped closer. "You correct English, social rules, and now habits?"

"Only when I think it's worth it."

They stood there for a moment under the streetlight, too close to pretend it was still just bickering. Ilya tilted his head slightly, as if testing a new word before using it.

"Then," he said softly, "I'd better memorize that rule."

Shane smiled.

He was the one who stepped forward first, his hand finding Ilya's coat with a touch just uncertain enough to be honest. When their lips met, there was no rush. It was soft, warm, a careful fit, as if they were both learning how to pronounce something new together.

Ilya tasted like coffee and cold night air, and Shane felt his body relax the moment he realized it was real. Mouth, breath, closeness.

He pulled back just enough to breathe, still too close to pretend indifference. "You taste like coffee."

Ilya smiled, his gaze dark and attentive, and rested his forehead against Shane's, his nose brushing lightly against his cheek. "If we kiss a little more," he murmured, his voice low and full of promise, "that goes away."

Shane laughed, a short, disbelieving sound, feeling something light - *dangerous* - settle in his chest, as if it had finally found the right place.

He leaned in again, unhurried, with no argument beyond wanting to.

And Shane had never been one to turn down a theory.



Ilya,

I'm still thinking about the theory regarding cigarettes after sex.

Like any good experiment, I think it deserves a round of testing.

Tomorrow, 7 p.m.

Coffee first. We'll see about the rest afterward.

Shane

End Notes

maybe... pt2?
thanks for reading!

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