

i don't smoke (except for when i'm missing you)

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i don't smoke (except for when i'm missing you)

by [easilycherished](#)

Summary

Ilya was a machine. He was an animal trained.

He brought the cigarette up to his lips and sucked in. His chest burned.

Yesterday the door was ajar when he passed by his parents' bedroom. Standing still in the hallway he watched for a minute as his mother, sitting like a soldier at her vanity, used her fingers to spread a thick peach-colored paint across her left cheekbone and around her eye.

Ilya took another breath. He lit his lungs on fire.

Notes

this boy and his substance use have bewitched me heart and soul

I've started working on a companion to the painkillers fic about Ilya and Alexei and cocaine, so consider this a smoke break while you wait

title from I Don't Smoke by Mitski

► content warnings

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

Ilya tasted his first cigarette at eleven years old.

It was a grey mid-January afternoon, and every weekday that year it was Alexei's job to pick him up from school and walk him to the rink for practice. He was always at least half an hour late though, so when Dima tapped him on the shoulder at lunch time and told him to come around to the back of the building at the end of the day, Ilya wasn't worried about getting in trouble.

It turned out that Andrei had snuck some cigarettes out of the pack his older brother had shoplifted from the corner store last week, and when Ilya came outside he was teaching Dima and a few other boys how to light them. There was a lot of coughing involved, and whole bunch of stomping their feet to keep warm.

They all expressed very strong opinions on the best and worst kinds of cigarettes, mostly based on what their fathers and uncles smoked -- filtered versus unfiltered, American or Japanese or British, some still waxed lyrical about the taste of the old Soviet brands.

Ilya said nothing, but thought of his mother.

There was a hazy memory that sometimes floated through his mind as he fell asleep: silky fabric, a fluffy powder brush teased across his nose, his mother's laughter, a breathing bright jewel he couldn't touch.

More than that though, he was reminded of cold dark mornings at the lake in the park. Ilya skated, and his mother pulled the crushed red and white cardboard from the lining of her coat. The wind wafted the sharp smoke out over the ice, past Ilya, and away, so that by the time they returned home with the sun they smelled of nothing but sweet frozen air.

Ilya took one of the lit cigarettes when it was offered to him, balancing it awkwardly between his fingers and watching the small trail of grey curl upwards from its tip.

His father had found a pack of Winstons in Alexei's room last month. When the resulting storm had passed, Ilya had found himself next to his armchair as he talked.

"It's disgusting," his father repeated. "It's a disgusting habit for disgusting weak minded, weak bodied people. You, Ilya, you will not be weak. You are to be iron, you are to be a bear of Russia. Your mind is for discipline. Your body is for victory. There will be no weakness."

Ilya was a machine. He was an animal trained.

He brought the cigarette up to his lips and sucked in. His chest burned.

Yesterday the door was ajar when he passed by his parents' bedroom. Standing still in the hallway he watched for a minute as his mother, sitting like a soldier at her vanity, used her fingers to spread a thick peach-colored paint across her left cheekbone and around her eye.

Ilya took another breath. He lit his lungs on fire.

Maybe it was just the relief from the stench of bodies and vodka, but stepping out into the night Ilya could have sworn that somewhere between the concrete and the gasoline he could smell something green. Something spring.

He walked a few meters from the entrance to the club and claimed a patch of sidewalk for their trio, taking some steps away from the other groups of drunken smokers.

As his friends approached, Ilya pulled a pack of cigarettes from his back pocket, flipped open its shiny red top, and selected two of them. Holding one between his pinky and ring finger, he lit the other, taking a small puff, and offered it to Svetlana. She accepted with a smile and took a long inhale. Once his own was burning, he handed the pack and the lighter to Sasha.

“Why do you always do hers and never mine?” Sasha gave him an exaggerated pout.

Ilya took a drag and then looked Sasha in the eyes as he slowly blew out a long stream of smoke.

“Because I don’t want to fuck you.”

With the bathroom-floor grime still fresh on the knees of his jeans, it was an absurdity. Ilya relished in the performance of it anyway.

Sasha smirked. Sveta rolled her eyes.

Sasha tilted his head, contemplating, then leaned in close to Ilya and paused there, his pupils dark and wide. Next, while stealing Ilya’s cigarette from his hand with delicate fingers, he reached behind him with the other and returned the pack and lighter to one of Ilya’s pockets, then slipped his palm into the empty one and squeezed.

“Are you sure about that... baby?”

He wasn’t shouting, but it certainly wasn’t a whisper. Ilya went rigid and there was a rushing in his ears. They were on the fucking street.

Sasha had been getting sloppy lately. Ilya had been letting him.

In an instant Ilya shoved Sasha off of himself, hard. He stumbled backwards but didn’t fall, which was probably for the best.

“Get the fuck off me, you fag.” It wasn’t a shout, but it wasn’t a whisper.

Sasha glared at him for a moment, then let his lanky muscles go languid. With a dramatic eyeroll, he released the cigarette with a flick of his wrist, turned on his heel, and stomped back into the club.

Ilya slouched back against the wall behind him, rubbing the heel of his hand between his eyes. His high was wearing off.

Sveta hummed and propped an arm on Ilya's shoulder, resting her chin on her wrist. With the other hand she tucked what remained of her cigarette between his lips and then ran her pointer finger down the side of his sweaty face. She was drunk, but not messy -- Sergei must have been on his good behavior this week. Ilya hated him. Sveta always said he was nothing to her, they were nothing, that was the whole point Ilyusha, but every time he fucked someone else all that nothing found Svetlana puking and crying in a back alley with Ilya holding her hair.

"Maybe, someday." She tapped his nose.

"Hm?" He raised his eyebrows.

"Maybe when you're a big star... off in America, surrounded by nothing but stupid ugly American girls... maybe then I'll take pity on you."

"A big star." Ilya bit back a smile.

"Maybe. If you manage to fix your backhand."

He let out a breath through his nose. "Well, then at least I have two more years to do it."

Sveta straightened up and stretched. "Yes, at least there's that."

She held out her hand and waited patiently. Ilya sighed, righted himself, crushed the last of the cigarette under his shoe, and let her take his hand and lead him back inside.

Ilya limped out of the gym, his foot throbbing, tense enough to snap in half and in desperate need of a smoke.

Rose. Fucking. Landry.

He had his hands in his locker before he remembered he didn't have a pack.

At the, you could say, "urging" of his coaches, doctors, and trainers, Ilya had slowly cut down on his smoking over the years since the draft. Especially during the season, he increasingly found it more inconvenient than pleasurable, and was now more likely to slip some backup nicotine patches into his bags and lockers than to keep a consistent stash of cigarettes.

(With the exception of his bedside table, of course. And his carry-on bag. He wasn't a fucking puritan.)

In a less heated moment he probably knew this was a good thing, but slamming the locker door and making his way out the back exit of the building, he was pretty sure it was the worst decision he had ever made.

The training facility was new, opened just in time for the season, so he didn't really know his way around the neighborhood yet. He cut down a side street until he hit a wider road and

took a right, trying to head in the direction of the gas station he usually passed on his drive in.

It was an annoyingly beautiful day -- 16 degrees and sunny, the sky almost comically blue. Yesterday Ilya had gotten stuck talking to one of the PTs, Mikey, who was from Southie. He was nice enough, but his accent was so thick Ilya only ever caught half of anything he said. This time he had managed to parse out something about “peak leaf season” and “that summer drought fucking with the colors.” Ilya has spent his summer dealing with a different kind of drought so he could sympathize, but the trees seemed pretty showy to him anyway, their reds and yellows bright against the buildings and littering the sidewalk.

Thankfully, he only made it another block before he hit a convenience store. He ducked inside, the bell on the door clanging behind him.

The kid at the counter couldn’t have been older than 14, slouched on his stool in an oversized Pats sweatshirt, texting.

“Pack of Marlboro Reds, please.”

He lifted his head lazily, dark bangs sweeping across his forehead. Freckles. Almost like in an alternate universe—

While the kid rang up the cigarettes, Ilya snagged a lighter from the counter display and held it up for him to see. He nodded wordlessly and punched in the additional charge, flopping back onto his seat when Ilya slid a five and a ten over to him.

“Keep the change.”

Starting back the way he came, Ilya stopped when the practice arena came into view; he really wasn’t in the mood for a lecture. He moved into the shade of the nearest building, unwrapped his contraband, and nearly moaned at the texture of the smooth paper between his lips. He could feel the knots in his neck loosen at the smell alone, the anticipation of the relief.

Steadying the cigarette with his fingers, Ilya thumbed the lever on his new lighter.

It clicked. And clicked. And clicked.

Even before the lighter sparked on the first try, Ilya knew this would be the second best cigarette of his life.

The first best really shouldn’t even have counted as the best, because he hadn’t known that it was at the time. Also because Regina, Saskatchewan was a stupid boring place that didn’t deserve the honor.

But still, second best.

The world outside the cottage windows was blue when he fished the old pack from the inner pocket of his suitcase, finding it flattened but the cigarettes still thankfully whole. He pulled

one out and tossed the box back into the open carry-on.

Stepping quietly through the sliding doors, Ilya grabbed the lighter from next to the fire pit and loped down the lawn to settle onto the big flat rock overlooking the lake. Using a long-barrelled lighter for a cigarette definitely looked silly, but why bother searching for spare matches when he had known exactly where this one was?

It was a singular luxury to smoke just for the sensations of it, for the easy breaths and the dark taste on his tongue. This morning there was no buzzing in his head to quiet, no impossible tension to calm.

The birds were surprisingly loud here, but as Ilya watched the ruby sun pink the sky he couldn't really blame them.

And then there was Shane, his Shane, with two mugs and one of the blankets from the couch tossed over his shoulder.

"I made coffee."

"Thank you." Ilya felt his face soften even further as he took the steaming cup and set it down next to himself on the rock.

Shane nodded towards Ilya's bare chest. "Thought you might be cold."

He wasn't, but Ilya nodded anyway, getting what he really wanted when Shane stepped close and wrapped them both up in the knitted grey wool, together.

"Good?" Shane gazed up at him.

"Good." Today Ilya was warm to the marrow of his bones.

The lake was streaked with light, its soft ripples bouncing gold onto the trees.

Ilya took a deep slow drag from his cigarette, blew the smoke out towards the water, and let the new morning breeze take it away.

End Notes

something about Ilya being the version of Irina with enough love to change the ending

► a note on Marlboro Reds

kudos and comments are all received with my undying love and lots of kisses

I'm also on tumblr @easilycherished

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