

a friend of my friend is my friend

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by Anonymous

Summary

Svetlana wants to meet Shane. One on one. Shane is less pleased about the idea.

Notes

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

When Svetlana asks to meet “Jane”, Shane predictably has a bit of a freak out about it. After being reassured that, no, they weren’t that obvious, Svetlana was just smart and had known Ilya for long enough to catch that he was being... well, obvious.

—

”No, but how did she *know*,” Shane had asked, shoulders hunched. Who else could have figured it out?

Ilya coughs, looking to the side a bit. “Svetlana... she would say—things.”

Shane frowns. “What ‘things’?”

Ilya purses his lips.

”Ilya,” Shane presses.

”She would say things about how good at hockey you were, or... how handsome you are, I don’t know. I tried to be, eh, ‘relaxed’, but... think I did too much,” he explains.

Shane looks at him flatly. “She said I was handsome and you, what, tried to play it cool?”

Ilya shrugs. “Guess so.”

He’s flabbergasted. ”And that was enough for her to guess that it was me specifically?”

“She knows me very well,” Ilya says weakly.

Oh, I know, he thinks, a little petulant. He imagines building, exploding. Instead of voicing that thought, he sighs. “Well, fuck.”

”You will meet her, then?” Ilya asks, for the second time.

Shane makes a face. “I don’t know. Do you want to meet *Rose*?” he asks, knowing the answer.

Ilya scowls. “It is not the same. Sveta and I have known each other for very long time. Since we were children.”

“Yeah, but—“

”Sveta is like family to me,” Ilya says, voice soft. “I know—it is strange for you. And we have history you do not like. But she is all I have. Other than you. I would like you to at least meet. Is okay if you are not, ah, best friends after.”

And doesn’t that just break his heart. Shane is petulant, and jealous, and annoyed, but above all else, he loves Ilya. So sure, he’ll meet his boyfriend’s childhood-best-friend-fuckbuddy. It’s sort of the least he can do.

Despite Ilya's general nature, Svetlana had never ended up in tabloid pictures with him past being a distant blur. So seeing her in full clarity was new. And Shane isn't surprised that she's probably one of the hottest women he'd ever seen, because that's just his luck. He's polite and tries not to look below her eye level for more than a second or two, so he doesn't really register her outfit except for her very puffy, very shiny jacket.

It's just Shane, because Svetlana had surprised him by asking to meet one-on-one in a cafe in Cambridge the morning of their afternoon game against Boston. It's a busy cafe, and he definitely gets a couple of looks, but no one seems to bother him or really care. He notices the vibe is sort of artsy in that rich, gentrified way, where everyone looks like a marketing manager for a company that's existed for less than five years. Not really a hockey demographic. The barista dully makes him one of the worst flat whites he's ever had.

Svetlana gives him three alternating cheek kisses as a greeting, because apparently Russians also did *la bise*, which he hasn't had nearly enough practice doing. He tries to pull away after two and her grip on his upper arm tightens as he's pulled in for a third. Then they're sitting across from each other, her with a mug of black coffee.

Shane doesn't say anything, clearing his throat like he's about to start, but he has no idea what to say. They're in public but people around them are preoccupied. Svetlana is just staring — okay, not *staring*, but regarding him.

What surprises him first is how mild her accent is when she speaks. "So, we finally meet, Jane." The way she says it toes the line between the sounds of his name and his pseudonym, and he feels warm. "I'm very excited — I'm a big fan of yours."

"Oh," he says. "Um, thank you."

She smiles. "You're very cute," she says, and he gets *deja vu*.

"I've gotten that before," he says, for some reason.

"I'm not surprised," she shrugs, taking a sip of her coffee. "So, tell me everything. Our friend is very shy; doesn't like to say anything. Very annoying."

Shy? he thinks, baffled. Ilya isn't shy. He's the least shy person Shane knows.

She seems to read his mind. "Okay, not shy, but... I'm sure you've seen it. He wears his heart on his sleeve but pretends he isn't. Gets very dismissive. '*It's no big deal, Sveta,*' this, and '*There's nothing to say Sveta, stop being nosy,*' that."

Shane remembers Florida, and snorts. "Yeah, he does that."

Svetlana smiles again. "He's sweet when he's not being an asshole, no?"

Shane shuffles in his seat, looking around. He's reminded again that Ilya and this woman have had—*relations*. He imagines a car crash, briefly. He knew that Ilya had had casual encounters before him and that it was different with Shane, but it was also clearly different

with Svetlana. He tried not to be uncomfortable but he couldn't help it. He'd only had pieces of Ilya for so long and this person in front of him had a much clearer picture of Ilya than he did, probably even now, not in the least because they shared a language. Shane's piss-poor attempts at learning Russian had been fruitless.

Svetlana purses her lips. "Shane," she tries, gently.

"Mm," he replies, voice a croak, looking at the table. His eyes feel hot.

"You know, me and him, it was just for fun," she said slowly, trying to read him.

"Right," he says roughly. "He's said that." Fuck, this was embarrassing.

She gives him a pitying look. "You should know that I have known about you for a very long time. Not—not that it was you, or even that—" *it was a guy*, she doesn't say, but levels him a look through her brows that communicates that. "But I would catch him texting *Jane*, and he would be sooo distracted, barely listening to a word I'd said because he was too busy staring at his phone. Sometimes, not even texting. Just reading your old texts."

Shane nods, looking down at the table. That's... new. Shane had done that too, sometimes — scrolled through their old messages just to see their history together, mourning the gaps where he knew deleted pictures were supposed to go.

"The first time," she laughs, "and, don't get upset, okay, but the first time I caught him texting a 'Jane', there had been a big snowstorm or something and he couldn't get to Montreal."

"I remember that," he frowns. That was... oh God, that was fucking years ago. Ilya had made it seem like she learned about Jane months ago. The fuck?

"I decided, okay, he's in town. No game or practice. I'll go over to his place, surprise him. If you get what I mean," she adds uselessly, because obviously he gets what she means.

"I do," he adds testily.

"Listen," she admonishes, and he shrinks a little. "So I'm there, and I look good, okay? And he walks in, nearly jumps out of his skin when he sees me, looking all annoyed. And, no joke, he puts his hand up to shush me so he could keep texting you. I nearly walked out. He never did anything like that before, you know?"

Svetlana is telling this story like it's funny. And, okay, Shane is not amused to think about the fact that she and Ilya had definitely had sex right after — 'nearly' is not the same as 'actually' — but that was, what, 2011? As far back as 2011, Ilya was brushing off beautiful women just to send him very horny texts. It's not the pinnacle of romance on paper, probably, but for two twenty-year-olds, it was *something*.

Shane catches himself smiling down like some love-sick idiot, and swipes his hand across his mouth. "Uh, well that's news to me, I guess."

Svetlana takes a long sip of her coffee. “So. I want you to tell me everything. Because I’m nosy and he doesn’t tell me anything he thinks is embarrassing.”

He feels flushed again. “Uh, well I don’t want to—“

She rolls her eyes. “There is nothing private between me and him except you. Very annoying. At least how you met,” she insists.

Shane purses his lips. If Ilya hadn’t told Svetlana... he’s not sure. “Can I text and ask first? Sorry.”

She sighs, tipping her head back. “Fine,” she relents. “Go ahead.”

He pulls out his phone, sending a quick text to Ilya.

Shane: Hey, having coffee with Svetlana. She’s asking me to give her the “story” of how we met but I wanted to check you were okay with that.

Lily: *she is so nosy* 🙄🙄🙄

Lily: *tell her whatever u want*

Shane: Are you sure?

The typing bubble appears and disappears several times. Shane chews his lip.

Lily: *ya. its fine. she will annoy u forever otherwise*

Shane: She’s not annoying.

Lily: *u are getting alone?*

Lily: *along***

Shane: Yes, I think so.

Lily: 😊 yayy

Shane snorts and puts his phone away. Fuck, Ilya had been so different since the cottage. It made his chest tight just to think about. “Okay,” he says, “he said it was fine.”

Svetlana looks up from her own phone and raises her brows, putting it face-down on the table and giving him her full attention.

“It’s not that interesting of a story,” he warns, and she rolls her eyes again. “We were at Juniors in 2008. I wanted to tell him he was a good skater. Found him smoking outside and told him not to do that and he ignored me. Shook his hand twice in less than a minute. He was rude. I left. We lost. I think we said like ten words to each other at the draft. Saw each other at a gym.” He leaves out the part where they sat, panting on the floor at each other,

while Ilya made the first moves to get his attention. Thinking about how young they were makes his head hurt.

She gives him a blank look. “That’s your story?” she asks.

”Well, that’s what happened,” he says, confused. “That’s how we met.”

”Okay, but... there was nothing else?” she pushes.

”Like what?” he asks. Seriously, he’d given a full account of the whole thing.

”Like... you know,” she waves her hand at her head.

He really doesn’t know, so he shakes his head.

She sighs. “Okay, very romantic. Continue.”

”Oh, um,” he scratches the back of his neck, “We played again the next year. We won.”

Svetlana gives him a look that makes him push forward. “Then we had a commercial,” he continues. “It—I didn’t know but he asked for us to do it together. It was... fun. People were already pitting us against each other, but I don’t know, we just had fun. That was, um. That night was—“ he coughs. Why the fuck is he saying that. “I guess that was where it started.”

Svetlana nods, leaning back in her chair. “Very cute,” she says. She’s clearly thinking but doesn’t say more.

”Uh, I wouldn’t describe the early years as ‘cute’ at all,” he laughs.

”I’m just...” she starts, then frowns, crossing her arms over her chest. “I know you were... unofficial, let’s say,” she tries. “But Rose Landry?”

He knows his face does something, but he’s not sure what. He clicks his jaw. “You know about that?”

”Everyone knew about that,” she says flatly.

He sighs, avoiding eye contact. “He really told you, like, nothing,” he mutters. “You probably think I’m an asshole.”

”I don’t,” she says carefully, “but he was... he was very sad.”

He winces. Ilya said to say whatever he wanted. Svetlana wanted to understand Ilya and piece together a decade of odd, out-of-character behaviour and secrecy. His parents had done the same, though with way fewer questions (except when his dad sat him down and asked the same question about Rose, and what that whole thing was about). And he doesn’t want her, Ilya’s only real, close friend, to think he was just some dismissive asshole.

”I freaked out,” he says simply. “He was really—” he starts, and catches his volume, lowering his voice. “When—after Sochi happened—I *know* it was complicated, but he

brushed me off and ghosted me for like, six months.” Shane hates the way his voice cracks when he says it. Even now it affects him. “He was really clear about it. And then, I don’t know. We—I won’t get into details, but after he ghosted me, he kind of acted like nothing happened. And it just really confused me, I guess.”

He’s looking at the table so he doesn’t see her reaction. He continues. “We—I tried to, I don’t know, talk to him about Russia. But instead of just telling me something like, ‘Hey, I really don’t want to talk about that,’ he just kicked me out. Not—like *that*, but it was kind of clear.” He shrugs in a way he hopes is nonchalant but knows looks put on and forced. “And then it was just business as usual. Casual, whatever.”

He looks up for a second and sees Svetlana has a considering expression, brows drawn a little together and a little pouty. He bites the inside of his cheek and goes on. “So, I don’t know. After a couple of years of that he just... out of nowhere, he started acting totally different. Asked me to stay the night. Got—got my favourite drinks in the fridge. Made me food. We watched TV together. Tried to—“ and he flushes, hissing the next word, “*cuddle*,” like it was the dirtiest thing he’d so far. “And he was saying all of this confusing stuff about—anyway. I was just—it was a lot. It was just a lot for me at once. He’d set these pretty clear lines in the sand and then he was stepping over all of them and I just freaked out and ended it.”

Svetlana gives him an understanding look. “He’s not very good at saying what he thinks, is he?” she says, looking outside for a second.

He shrugs. “Neither am I. But it’s better now, I guess that’s all that matters.”

”He never told me any of that,” Svetlana says. “I would just catch him looking at tabloid pictures and frowning, all upset. I tried to tease him about it but it didn’t work. You’re the only person I’ve ever seen make him quiet.”

Shane picks at a hangnail. “Oh.”

”I’m very happy that you tried again together,” she says earnestly.

Shane feels a bit emotional at that, because of course he does. So much of the world feels against them. It’s nice, even if it’s not the first person he would have picked, to have someone be genuinely happy for them.

”It only took a few tries,” he jokes, and it falls a little flat. “I finally got him to the cottage for the summer and he talked about marrying you.”

Her eyebrows shoot straight up at that. “What?”

Shane gets the feeling he’s made some kind of grievous mistake. “Oh, uh—“

”What the hell are you talking about,” Svetlana says, less a question and more of a command.

He complies. “We—we’d been talking about his citizenship,” he explains. “And he—he did this before, too, when I freaked out. Talked about girls. How much he liked them.” *How is*

this helpful context?? his brain shouts at him. “Mentioned that if he needed to, he could marry you. For citizenship.”

He looks at her face but can't for the life of him read her expression. She's... scowling? Swirling her cup pensively. She mutters something to herself in Russian.

“I'm guessing you never talked about that,” he says weakly.

“No,” she shakes her head. “No, we didn't.”

Ilya was going to kill him. “So you wouldn't? If he asked.”

Svetlana looks surprised. Opens her mouth, closes it again. Then she sighs, shoulders dropping. “No, if he asked me, I would.”

Now *he's* frowning. They—he and Ilya—were past this being a real problem but it still annoys him. He has a right to be annoyed about that, whether they had a real plan to get him a second passport or not.

“Russia is complicated. If he—we would do anything to help each other. Of course I would.”

It shocks him for a moment. Clearly this had never come up between them, Ilya had just sort of assumed it was an option. Maybe Svetlana was annoyed about that on some level, that he'd just assumed. Shane had no idea. But the acceptance that she would, in fact, marry her friend just so he could have an American passport, comes to Svetlana so quickly.

“Right,” he says, testy even to his own ears.

She rolls her eyes. “Oh, give me a break. Wouldn't you? If he asked.”

He turns bright red, he can feel it. Of course he would. And isn't that a scary thought? He and Ilya had only been officially exclusive and together for, what, six months? They had never lived together. He didn't want to do the awful math of counting how many weeks they had factually spent in each other's companies over the course of ten years. And yet, he knew he would. And not just to give him a passport, that was for sure.

Shane doesn't say anything but it's answer enough.

“Well, that's good. Nice emergency option if you need it,” she says lightly, patting his hand. It's the first contact since the *bise*, and he jumps a little. “Very dumb that he said that though.”

He barks a rough laugh. “Yeah! Yeah, I was pissed.”

“I bet you were,” she says, implying something but he's not sure what.

“What does that mean?” he asks, feeling a bit emboldened.

Svetlana raises a brow at him. “Come on, Shane.”

"No, seriously," he says. "I'm a pretty level-headed guy." Except for when he freaked out. But that was once.

"I'm sure you were very level-headed," she agrees, "and very pissed. He... our friend sometimes takes the long road to say something very simple."

Shane furrows his brow. "Like?" he presses.

She sighs. "One time, I was seeing this guy. Devin, artsy type, from central Mass."

Okay, what the hell did that have to do with anything?

"He didn't like Devin, at all. I knew that, because he's very obvious, but whatever, right?" she shrugs. "But one time, we were watching some movie. I don't remember what it was, but he picked it. And he just starts telling me how shitty and rude the main love interest was. And I know he was trying to be very casual about it, but clearly all he wanted to say was, '*Break up with this asshole, he sucks, just like this guy.*' But he's allergic to just saying what he means."

Shane nods at the revelation, thinking back to the extremely bizarre way that Shane had since realized was Ilya's way of asking if he was bisexual, if he was seeing anyone else; of saying that he liked Shane, back at his house in Boston.

Svetlana adds, "To discourage this behaviour I pretended I was still dating Devin for three more months. This didn't work, clearly. He still talks in circles when he doesn't want to be confrontational."

Shane huffs a laugh to himself. "It's funny. He's so direct the rest of the time."

"Well, that's because sex is easy for him," she says, looking up at the sky.

Shane imagines a building exploding somewhere, and says in a regular voice, "Well, I guess so."

She gives him a bemused look, smiling a little wolfishly. "Come on," she says, teasing.

"I'm not talking about that," he says, voice monotone.

She sighs again. "Fiiine," she drawls.

"We're in public," he hisses.

"No one cares," she says. "No one here has any idea who you are."

Shane tries not to feel insulted, because he doesn't have an ego. "It's Boston."

"It's Cambridge," she corrects. "I promise you these people specifically do not care about you at all. They are working on their Substacks."

"Their what?"

"Nevermind," she sighs. "Well, okay, the timeline is established, sort of," she concedes, as a way of saying, 'I'm not done with you yet but we're at least going to pause here.' "I want you to tell me about yourself. I've read all the interviews, so none of that."

Shane blanks. "Huh?"

She purses her lips. "Our friend tells me *no-thing*," she says, insistent. "Nothing. I asked him about where you grew up and he looked like he swallowed a lemon. Told me to google it."

"Oh," he says.

"I want to know more about you, outside of hockey statistics. Which, by the way, very nice," she adds.

"Thank you," he says genuinely. "Um, I don't know. I like... hockey," he says, wincing at how dumb he sounds saying it. "And books," about hockey. "I read a lot. I watch a lot of movies, since we fly everywhere, and reading on planes gives me a headache." He doesn't wear his glasses in front of his teammates. "I like yoga," he adds.

"Oh, I know," she says, giving him an appraising look. Svetlana likes you very much, Ilya's voice says in his head.

"Um," he chokes. "I don't know. I do a lot of meal prep? I care a lot about nutrition, so I cook a lot of my own food. I'm okay at that, I guess. I like real estate," he adds at the end, lamely.

"Like, selling houses?" she asks, frowning a little.

"Uh, kinda," he says. "I have a few residential and commercial properties that I've renovated and rent out. I'm not really involved in the design stuff, though, I don't really have an eye for it."

"Right," Svetlana says. "Well, I sell cars," she offers.

"I know," he says. "You sold... our friend," he says awkwardly, "that green one, right?"

"The Lamborghini, yes," she says. "You like it?"

Shane's brain short-circuits. He hates that fucking car. "Sure," he says, and she laughs, delighted.

"Let me guess, you drive... a Benz. G-Wagon?" she tries, squinting. "Grey."

He frowns. She's not *that* far off, which annoys him. "Black Range Rover," he grits out.

"Very hockey player," she says sagely. "You boys love your SUVs."

"They're practical," he defends.

"You know, the visibility over the hood of the Lambo is much safer than the Range Rover," she says, voice teasing.

"What?" he asks, taken aback.

"Mm-hm," she nods, sipping her drink. "The visibility over the hood. For the Lambo it's like, two feet maybe? The Range Rover is more like ten. Scary for residential areas."

Shane gives her a blank look. "You're fucking with me."

"I'm not," she says. "It's a thing, look it up."

One very harrowing google search later, he resolves to get a sedan for local driving.

"I can get you a good deal—" she starts, voice lilting.

"I am not interested in what your dealership offers, thanks," he says drily. He's seen the cars. He'd sooner drive a second-hand car off Facebook before he drove one of them.

She snorts. "Okay, okay."

They lapse into comfortable silence, before Shane clears his throat again.

"I told you about me," he says. "I don't really know anything about you except that you and Him. Are friends." He sounds awkward and stilted even to himself.

Svetlana leans back, surprised. "Oh, hm. I don't know. I like hockey," she starts, in a mirror of his own little speech. "I grew up between the States and Russia, but I was in Arizona, not Boston. Very hot. It was a nice change from Moscow, sometimes." She hums, like she's remembering things. "I went to an all-girls school, so I mostly saw our friend when our fathers spent time together when we were younger. It was an interesting experience." She doesn't elaborate.

"Were... you guys met when you were really young, then?" he asks.

She nods. "His father thought I was a good influence," she laughs. "I probably was. But I also took him to the first parties I went to, so. And I was the one who... anyway," she shrugs, frowning at the table. At first, he had thought it would be something about them having sex, or something (he imagines a sinkhole opening up somewhere unknown) but her expression is different. "We were close. And I think it was better that I was there than not there. So probably a good influence, overall."

There's not really an insecurity there, Shane doesn't think. He doesn't think Svetlana worries she's some kind of bad influence on Ilya, but he can tell she wants to be some kind of positive force. He offers the first nice thing he's said to Svetlana, or about her: "I think it's probably the only thing he was right about," he says, a bit awkwardly.

She looks at him, surprised, but smiles warmly after a moment. "Probably," she agrees, and puts her hand over his in a nice gesture. He's still conscious of the people around them and gives her a look he hopes communicates his good intent before drawing back.

There's another lapse, and they just look at the pedestrian walkway outside, watching people pass back and forth in amicable silence.

Svetlana starts after a minute, a little seriously, “Shane.” His attention is drawn to her, and she takes a second to look back at him. “You should know that Boston loves him.”

”I know,” he says, confused.

She shakes her head. “Boston, his team, the staff. They all really like him. And he likes it here a lot. This place was a dream come true. And he likes winning.”

”Right,” he says, annoyed, because he knows all of this. What’s her point?

“I’ll be direct,” she says, dropping her voice and leaning forward into his space. “He is giving a lot up for you. A lot. I know it’s worth it to him, and he doesn’t second guess it at all. But... And don’t take this the wrong way. I still don’t know you very well. I’m worried you might take it for granted. I’m asking you to work very hard not to.”

Shane’s throat closes. Had Ilya told her about his interest in Ottawa? He knew there were rumours when Ilya hadn’t immediately signed back with the Raiders, and that Ilya had described Svetlana has a bit of a hockey genius, but still. “I’m not going to. I don’t,” he croaks.

She nods, not quite convinced. “It’s natural to.”

”I won’t,” he repeats.

”He’ll probably have a hard time,” she says. “He’ll be under a lot of pressure and scrutiny. And you know how he deals with things. Badly.”

Shane wants to be defensive, even when he’s the one under scrutiny, because he loves Ilya more than he can really contend with. He thinks about Ilya, under so much pressure at Sochi, telling him to fuck off. Ilya, kicking him out of his room when Shane tried to ask him about Russia. How he tried to blow Shane off when he came out to him. Even at the cottage, telling him to stop asking so many questions. Ilya is many amazing, wonderful things — careful, attentive, considerate, sweet, hot, clever — but he was also the most avoidant, absolute bastard Shane had ever met. You have to love the whole package.

”Badly,” he agrees. “Yeah.”

”Right,” Svetlana nods. “So—I’m not saying you need to be passive or let him be an asshole. I’m saying the opposite, okay?”

”Sure,” he says. He’s still uncomfortable, even if he vaguely appreciates this pseudo-shovel-talk-slash-advice he’s getting. He knows that Svetlana is in Ilya’s corner, that they’re each other’s “person” or whatever, more than just friends. He knows that Svetlana knows Ilya better than anyone else does. He’s glad that Ilya has someone like that, really, when he has his parents and Rose to some extent, and Hayden and JJ, in a way.

She looks like she wants to say more, but holds her tongue. Shane can’t decide whether he wants to press her to say more. Grabbing her phone, she passes it to him. It’s all in English,

unlike Ilya's phone. "Put your contact in. We should stay in touch. If we're in the same town, we can grab another coffee."

Not, 'we should be friends', he notices. He's not sure why he's disappointed. He nods, taking the phone and puts his contact info in.

She shoots him a text — *This is Sveta*. — and puts her phone down again. "Text me any time, okay?" she says, earnestly.

They agree that they should part ways, and after putting away their mugs — Shane realizes his is full. The barista isn't even surprised — they stand outside on the windy street, waiting for separate Ubers.

Shane wants to say — something. He doesn't know what. So he just starts talking. "I just wanted to say. I—he's the most—" and fuck, he really can't put it in words. "I've never had anything like this. I know when I was talking it sounded like we were always out of sync, I guess. But I feel like I'm out of sync with everyone. And he—" *understands me. Sees me. Hears what I'm not saying. Loves me*, "—we're not out of sync, you know? I want this to work more than anything. I'm going to work really hard for it. I know we've been kind of bad at talking to each other because we were messing around for like, nearly a decade, but... I feel like ever since we got on the same page, I just—"

"Shane," she interrupts.

He clamps his mouth shut, looking away from the point of focus cobblestone he'd been staring at, realizing he's breathing a little too heavily. Squeezing his eyes together, they feel hot. He pinches at his lashes, sniffing against the cold.

"Shane," Svetlana starts again. "I didn't mean that I didn't think any of that wasn't the case," she says slowly, like he's a spooked horse. "I know you two are... good. Very good, even," she adds. "I don't doubt it. I just know Ilya."

"So do I," he says, a bit snappy, and he winces. "I know it's not the same, but—"

"It's not the same," she agrees. "Don't overthink it. You fit very well together. You don't have to convince me. I just worry, you know?"

Shane sees that worry. And she's right, she really doesn't know him — only through a television screen and Ilya's infatuation and about an hour in a cafe in Cambridge. It wouldn't be enough for anyone to be convinced. He can't really blame her for not being sold, even though it stings because, well, he's never not convinced anyone of his merit immediately.

"I'm... I want to make it worth it for him. I don't know if it will be, yet. Ottawa's my hometown and I love it but it's pretty boring. And I know he's... not boring. And I know it's a huge downgrade for him in a lot of ways," he says in a rush. "And I know you'll be farther away," he adds, frowning at the ground, "and that will bother him. But... I want to make it work. I want—" and his throat really fights this next part, "—my family to be his family. I'm thinking about the rest of our lives."

Svetlana gives him a long look before it goes soft, and she nods at the floor, lips in a pout. “Okay, Jane,” she says, before straightening her back, turning to face him properly. To his complete surprise, she opens her arms.

”Uh,” he says, elegantly.

For the last time today, but probably not the last time ever, she rolls her eyes, sighing dramatically. She pulls him into a hug, and it’s loud from the sounds of their jackets sliding against each other. He pats her on the back, awkwardly. She pats him on the back, giving him a light squeeze.

”You should learn Russian,” she says into his ear, pulling back with a little grin.

He winces. “I’m really trying, but the apps are killing me, and I can’t get good at speaking from the books.”

She looks delighted for a moment and then schools it. “Well, good thing you have the number of a native speaker who can help you practice, *da*?”

He blinks in surprise. “Oh.”

She pulls back fully, checking her phone. “Uber’s here,” she lets him know, nodding to a fancy car with its blinkers on on the street. “Thank you for meeting me, Shane,” she says earnestly. “I know it was difficult. I appreciate it.”

”Of course,” Shane replies, embarrassed that it was obvious.

”Stay in touch, okay? Take care,” she says with a wave, walking briskly to the car.

Shane watches her go, looking at his own phone and realizing his Uber had arrived ages ago and cancelled on him and he was being hit with a fee. “*Fuck*,” he hisses. When he looks up, Svetlana’s car is gone, so he rebooks.

He’s... not sure how that went, really. But the hug was a good sign, probably? She’d been so hard to read. He wasn’t sure what she was looking for in him. It was so hard to just say that he didn’t know what was going to happen because they had the worst possible jobs in the world to be in love with each other, but that he wanted it so badly he’d do basically anything to make it happen. Why hadn’t he just said that?

—

He doesn’t get to see Ilya until after their game (Boston won), letting himself into Ilya’s place and toeing off his shoes tiredly. He’d already taken one shower and could do with another, but before he can make it more than three steps into the foyer he’s being grabbed and pulled into a desperate kiss.

The surprise goes away pretty quickly, and he’s returning it, pawing at Ilya’s back and hitching his hips up. Ilya laughs against his mouth and pulls back to grin at him, before pressing their cheeks together hard and giving him a kiss there, too.

"Svetlana called me," he murmurs, voice soft. "Told me about your talk."

"Oh," Shane huffs, brain shifting gears from horny at the kiss to lovey-dovey at the cheek press to anxious about Svetlana in rapid succession.

Ilya, being as close to his head as he is, hears the gears turn, and pulls back, searching his face. He gets this worried expression for a moment before dragging them to his couch, pulling Shane against his chest.

"Do you want to know what she said?" he asks.

No, he thinks. "Sure," he says.

Ilya snorts. "She said I have been very difficult for you," he informs Shane.

Shane, appropriately, shoots straight up. "That is *not*—"

"Shh," Ilya interrupts, clamping his hand over Shane's mouth. "She said it is very good that you are so stubborn."

This feels like a performance review, and Shane scowls, licking Ilya's hand.

Ilya recoils, wiping his hand on Shane's cheek.

"Ew!" he cries, using his sleeve to wipe his own spit off his cheek.

"You, *ew*!" Ilya laughs.

"You haven't been difficult," Shane insists.

Ilya raises his eyebrows at him, as if to say, '*Let's not lie to each other here.*'

"Okay, like, maybe a little. But," and his voice cracks a little, humiliatingly, "loving you is so easy. Or—if it's hard it's not because it's *you*. Just because I don't get you all the time. Or because our jobs make it hard. But not—" he stops himself, feeling inarticulate. He hopes Ilya understands.

Ilya turns his head to the side with a pained expression. Shane brings his hand to both cheeks, pulls him back to meet his face, kisses him. Ilya rests his hands at his waist.

"I know," Ilya croaks, voice wet. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Shane says, voice firm.

"But she is right that I made it difficult for you in the beginning," Ilya adds.

"So did I, probably in a lot of ways I didn't notice," Shane retorts.

Ilya is quiet. "Yes, probably. We talked about that as well."

Huh. "Will you..." Shane starts, swallowing audibly. "Will you tell me about those times? I don't... I know some of them, I think. I don't know all of them."

Ilya shakes his head. "It doesn't matter."

"It does," Shane insists. "If you remember them it matters."

Ilya scowls at Shane's chest. "Okay," he agrees. "But not right now. Later. Promise."

Shane huffs a breath, pleased, and kisses Ilya high on his cheek, pulling him into the crook of his neck. He's not exactly excited about the idea of being told every memorable way he's fucked up since they were, what, eighteen? But if he thinks of them like action items, then it's a lot easier to contend with.

After a moment, Ilya adds, "She also said she likes you and that I should be very nice to you. That you are, ah, a 'catch'. I think that is the similar thing in English."

"Really?" Shane asks, surprised.

"You did not think she liked you?" he asks, pulling back to frown a little.

"No, not that," Shane says hastily, "I just wasn't sure. I thought I could have done better."

"Svetlana is amazing," Ilya says, "but she does this *thing* where she gets very, ah," and makes a face like he's examining Shane, trying to dissect his brain, cradling his head and turning it side to side. "Intimidating for you, I think."

"Oh my God, yeah," Shane breathes. "It was kind of scary. Not that she was *scary*-scary, but... I just wanted to make a good impression."

"I know, *moy lyobov*. I am very thankful," Ilya says, leaning in.

Before Ilya can escalate this, which Shane really, really wants, he gets in his last word. "I know how important she is to you. I'm sorry I was being a dick about meeting her. She seemed really great."

Ilya's eyes close, and they're so close Shane can feel the puff of air on his face. "It is okay. She is an important friend. Complicated history is difficult — she said you were 'obviously jealous but did a very grown-up job dealing with it', by the way. I love you both and I want you to be friends. I'm glad you tried. I'm more glad it went well. So can I *please suck your dick now*."

Shane wants to go back to the jealous thing and pick that piece of feedback apart but Ilya is a very convincing individual.

"Yeah," he breathes. "As long as you get coffee with Rose next time you're in L.A.," he jokes, because he can't help himself.

Ilya rolls his eyes. "Ughhh," he groans, immature. "*Shanee*," he drawls.

"*Ilyaaa*," he mocks.

Tipping his head back on the couch dramatically. Shane loves how playful he is; he can't help but grin at the sight. "If it is between never sucking your dick again, and having coffee with Rose Landry, then I guess I will have coffee with Rose Landry. I *guess*."

Shane feels very lucky, and so in love. He just has to make sure Ilya knows it, and knows how easy it is for him to love Ilya.

"*Menya zovut Shane. Kak tebya zovut?*" he blurts, stupidly, his name coming out with a plain Canadian accent and his efforts on *menya zovut* menial at best. It's the only phrase he can remember right now because it's actually been a while since he studied anything. *My name is Shane, what's your name?* He can also count to twenty nine.

The air is silent for a moment. Ilya's eyes widen into saucers, completely taken aback, and he blinks comically before bursting into delighted laughter. He laughs for, actually, an insultingly long time, and Shane's feathers are definitely ruffled — his pronunciation wasn't that bad. Before he can feel too embarrassed and pull back, Ilya is pressing big, fat kisses all over his face. It's wet and a little gross. Between each one, he says, "*Menya zovut Ilya, Ilya, Ilya*," and then, "*Ya tebya lyublyu*," and, okay, Shane is laughing too, relieved.

"What else do you know?" Ilya asks.

"Oh, literally just that. Russian is really fucking hard," Shane complains.

Ilya nods sagely. Before he can open his mouth, Shane interrupts, voice flat, "I know what else is hard. Take me to bed, will you?"

"I will give you a very detailed lesson," Ilya says, hoisting him up. Shane scrambles to grab him for purchase. "In Russian, of course."

"Of course," Shane agrees, and lets himself be taken.

End Notes

thanks for reading :) i've only been to cambridge Once you'll have to forgive me if it's actually a deeply fervent hockey town. imagine they're at like a liberal arts college's local student union cafe with me.

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