

you kiss me in a way that's gonna screw me up forever

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you kiss me in a way that's gonna screw me up forever

by [spoiledmalk](#)

Summary

“Okay, fine, fine, fine. I’ll stop bugging you about Miles. Or anyone for that matter.”

“Thank you.”

“I do have a question, though.”

Sigh.

“Yes?”

“Actually, two questions. One - do you know that guy across the bar? And two - do you know why he’s been looking at me like I killed his dog?”

or: For some reason, Shane and Ilya keep running into each other at boring research conferences. Shane’s almost positive Ilya can’t stand him.

Notes

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

These conferences weren't always a nightmare.

That was a more recent development.

It wasn't the crowds, although Shane didn't particularly love being in a presentation room with a hundred strangers. It wasn't even the mandatory pleasantries he exchanged with the policy wonks, although Shane hated that too.

The problem was that Shane could pretty much always sense where Ilya Rozanov was when they were in a room together.

Sometimes he felt as though his body was keenly attuned to pay attention to Ilya's every move when they were in a shared vicinity. When Shane first joined the local Non-Profit Housing Association as a Senior Researcher, he'd heard rumblings through the network about a hotshot Russian post-doc taking the world - and all the available federal grants - by storm. His coworker JJ described Rozanov as a "uniquely gifted researcher, with a knack for being a smug asshole".

There were six months in between Shane hearing about who Ilya was and actually crossing paths with him in real life. He was somehow everything and nothing like he'd imagined. Shane was embarrassed to admit, but he'd Googled Ilya at least a dozen times in those six months. He'd read some of Ilya's work in the meantime, too.

Dr. Ilya Rozanov is a senior scientist at the Institute for Mental Health Policy and holds a Research Chair focused on 2SLGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness and Mental Health. His research excellence and leadership have been widely recognized, including receiving the Trailblazer Award in Population and Public Health in the Early Career category.

Dr. Rozanov's work has directly contributed to transformative practice and policy change, including the establishment of Canada's first housing programs specifically designed for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. He has collaborated extensively with municipal, provincial, and federal governments to help shape policies and strategies that better support 2SLGBTQ+ young people experiencing homelessness.

He was *really* good.

Shane's finger drew circles on his trackpad, hovering over the link to Ilya's research portfolio.

Maybe even stared at his picture a little bit too.

Rozanov's headshot was simple; he was wearing a black t-shirt and a black blazer, sitting up against a white backdrop. His gaze stared down the lens of the camera, but the severity of his expression felt akin to staring down the barrel of a gun. His hair was light brown and looked soft, his locks curling over his ears and around the nape of his neck, almost like a halo. Sometimes, when Shane looked at the picture for too long, he felt like Rozanov could see him staring.

The first interaction Shane ever had with Ilya was virtual. Shane had just been assigned to attend the Housing and Homelessness Research Community of Practice, and Ilya was a regular attendee. Each attendee was required to share updates on research, policies, and initiatives they were working on, and look for opportunities to collaborate across the sector. Ilya appeared as he did in his headshot, serious and confident. There was an air of coolness every time he spoke, with a sense of self-assuredness that only came with experience. He wasn't afraid to call out other researchers or ask questions about their methodologies.

At the end of the meeting, the co-chair asked the group if anyone had the capacity to walk Shane through some of the materials in advance of the next meeting.

"I don't have time to holdhand new member." Rozanov's voice echoed through his laptop speakers. "He can email if he has question."

Shane reddened in response.

It's not like *he'd* asked Rozanov to help him, but the public rejection stung.

Shane interjected, telling the co-chair he didn't need the help and he'd reach out if he was unsure about anything, but he'd already decided he wouldn't do any such thing.

JJ was right.

Rozanov was a smug asshole.

The first time they met in real life didn't go *much* better than the Zoom call had.

It was December in Ottawa, and Shane was late in attending a seminar. The wind was biting, and his fingers were so cold they burned. He had a toque pulled low over his forehead and a scarf wrapped tightly around his neck. He walked briskly and pushed through the revolving door of the InterContinental. The lobby bustled with life, families brightly chatting, and hotel staff quickly ushering people into their taxis.

Shane stood in front of the elevator, tapping his foot impatiently. The digital display above the doors moved at a crawling pace, stopping at every single floor on the way down.

"Should have taken stairs." An accented voice grumbled.

He turned to his left and his eyes widened for a moment.

Ilya Rozanov was standing beside him. Enveloped in a thick black coat, he looked cold and angry, almost like a disgruntled cat. The tip of his nose was bright pink, flushed from the below-zero temperatures outside. Shane was sure he'd been staring an uncomfortable amount of time because Rozanov's piercing gaze met his almost expectantly, awaiting a response to his non-question.

"Uh. Yeah, I think it's elevator access only. There was a sign in the lobby about maintenance work in the stairwell."

Rozanov's mouth twisted unhappily.

The elevator dinged, and the doors opened. Three children - probably about 8-10 years old - ran out, giggling mischievously. Rozanov shook his head at them before walking into the elevator. He turned around and looked at Shane, and pointedly glanced at the empty spot to his left, beckoning him inside. They both looked at the panel of buttons.

Every floor had been pressed.

"*Blyat*," Rozanov muttered.

Shane didn't know a lick of Russian, but he knew that Rozanov probably said something impolite. They awkwardly stood beside one another in silence as the elevator stopped and opened its doors, one floor at a time.

Rozanov broke the silence first.

"New member, *da*?"

Shane paused before responding.

"Shane Hollander." He held out his hand for Rozanov to shake. The silence stretched on for what felt like a beat too long before Rozanov firmly gripped his hand. His fingers were still chilly from the outdoors, the sensation sending a cold ripple through Shane.

"*Hollander*." Rozanov repeated his name, like he was testing out how it sounded in his mouth. His thumb rubbed the back of Shane's hand for a moment before pulling away.

"You never send email."

Shane stared blankly.

"Sorry?"

"You never email with question." Rozanov raised an eyebrow at him. "You know everything?"

"I reached out to Dr. Hunter. I thought you didn't have time to walk me through the materials."

A look of disdain washed over Rozanov's face. He appeared disgusted at the mention of Scott Hunter.

"I said email me with question. Scott Hunter is good researcher. Good but not great."

"Oh."

Shane noticed Rozanov's gaze flicker from his eye to his cheek. He rubbed it, thinking he must have something on his face.

The moment was broken.

Rozanov broke eye contact and turned back to the elevator door. For a moment, Shane felt like he had been chided for something he didn't do. He was about to toss a retort back at Rozanov, something about how if he wanted Shane to work with him, he should try being less of an ass, but in the end, Rozanov got the last word.

"You keep working with Hunter, and you will also be *good* researcher." He said it snidely, as though he's saying *good*, but he means *mediocre*. He walked out and turns down the hall to the meeting room.

Shane stood in the elevator alone for a moment before stepping out. He stares at the corridor Rozanov just strutted down.

Dick.

It wasn't like they saw each other regularly. In fact, Shane could count on two hands the number of times he'd seen Ilya this year (eight times, nine if he counted the one time he ran into Ilya at a sandwich shop in Ottawa last winter while he was on what Shane presumed was a date and proceeded to humiliate himself by stuttering through small talk and fleeing the shop so quickly he forgot his sandwich at the counter).

Shane had a LinkedIn request waiting for him from Rozanov that evening.

He'd stared at the request for three whole minutes before hitting accept.

There was also the time that Rozanov's research group won a regional grant for community outreach efforts that Shane's team had also been vying for. The team had gone out for drinks to commiserate on losing a valuable funding source. Shane had stepped up to the bar to order another round - beers for everyone else, a ginger ale for himself - when his phone lit up with a notification from LinkedIn.

He immediately recognized the profile picture attached to the message.

Better luck next time, Hollander.

He rolled his eyes at the message, a small smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

It's not always snipes and digs, though. Sometimes, Rozanov was actually nice to him.

In early spring, Shane presented at a Research Rounds session on some of the data he's been running analyses on. It was not a particularly exciting project, so he was surprised when he was standing at the podium in a small room of fewer than twenty attendees, and he saw a familiar face in the crowd.

Rozanov was seated in the second row, and with no one sitting in the row ahead of him, he had an unobstructed view straight to Shane's line of sight. He looked handsome, sporting black slacks and a navy sweater. His curls were slightly pushed back, and when he turned his head to look at the slides, Shane couldn't help but stare at the beauty mark on Rozanov's cheek.

He looks *really* good.

Shane felt his heart drop to the pit of his stomach for a moment, feeling totally unprepared, despite arriving feeling like the opposite. He'd spent a week preparing for this presentation, going over the materials time and time again, writing and rehearsing his speaking notes meticulously. He gripped the side panels of the podium tightly, grounding himself for a moment.

Deep breath.

He counted to three and began speaking.

Rozanov's gaze was attentive and polite, nodding when Shane made a point that he agreed with, and furrowing his brows only slightly when he heard something he thought was wrong. It's Shane's first time presenting in front of him, and although there's a room of sixteen other people watching him, he feels like he's presenting for an audience of one.

After the question period, Ilya posed a couple of questions on qualitative methodologies in front of the onlookers.

"Widespread applications of this work are at the community level, yes?"

"Correct."

"Do you think you're ready to scale up this pilot at provincial level? Your project has small sample population so far."

Shane swallowed nervously.

"Yes, I know it's a small group so far, but it's mostly for proof of concept so we *can* scale up in the years to come. Community engagement is hard because it's about building trust, but I

think I can do it.”

“You think?” Rozanov cocked an eyebrow at him, almost mockingly.

“I know,” Shane replied firmly.

Rozanov nodded, like he was pleased with Shane’s show of confidence.

With that, it’s time for lunch, and the group headed over to the buffet. Shane was stopped a couple of times by researchers from Carleton University before he was able to enter the line. Each time he’s asked a question about his work, he feels a little bit like he’s being watched.

Rozanov seemed to have filled up his plate and had grabbed a table with some of the others - Shane recognizes scholars like Marleau and Connors. Shane juggled a plate of pasta, a bowl of soup, and some cutlery; he’s about to grab the last Canada Dry in the cooler when it’s plucked from the ice.

To Shane’s chagrin, Rozanov had grabbed the last ginger ale.

Shane must not be good at hiding his disappointment, because Rozanov didn’t open the bottle after seeing his expression.

“You want?”

Shane shook his head, trying to school his expression back to normal.

“Is okay if you want, I can get other drink.”

“No, you grabbed it first.” He didn’t want to be an inconvenience over a soft drink.

Rozanov paused, his gaze boring into Shane. He looked at him intently, like he was trying to understand what was going on inside his head. Shane didn’t particularly like the idea of that.

He’s about to further protest Ilya’s offer when the ginger ale bottle is held directly in front of him. Rozanov waved it slightly in front of him, almost demanding he take it.

Shane gave in.

He placed the bowl of soup and the spoon on the buffet table to free up a hand. Reaching his hand out, he gripped the cool bottle, condensation dripping down his wrist. His hand covered Rozanov’s hand, also still holding the cold plastic. For a few seconds, their hands were flush against one another, neither one pulling away. Rozanov’s skin was warm and soft to the touch, and Shane couldn’t help but feel a shiver pulse through him.

Rozanov gently removed his hands from the bottle, and Shane unscrewed the cap. He glanced at Ilya, who gestured in a go-ahead manner, as if encouraging him to drink.

Tipping the bottle back, Shane took a sip of the ginger ale, the crisp fizz crackling its way down his throat. There was something about ginger ale that gave Shane comfort. Whenever

he was nervous or stressed, in an unfamiliar environment, it was one of the few things that brought him a sense of routine, of comfort.

He could feel Rozanov's heated gaze on him as he took a few more sips. When he screwed the cap back on and glanced at Rozanov to thank him, he couldn't help but notice the rosy tint on Ilya's cheeks. His eyes appeared a little glazed over, and the pink flush seemed to reach the tips of his ears. Before he could even speak, Rozanov cleared his throat in what appeared to be a sheepish way and excused himself before beelining for his table.

He didn't say much to Shane for the rest of the day.

The next time Shane ran into Rozanov was in Montreal.

He's in the lobby of the Marriott on Rue De la Gauchetière, waiting to check in, when he overheard a voice he could recognize anywhere.

"Does the room have a free minibar?"

"Yes, Mr. Rozanov. Everything except the bottles of vodka and beer is covered under your booking."

"What is point of free *minibar* if I cannot drink alcohol?" He sounded confused, like he couldn't believe such a foolish concept existed.

The woman behind the front desk looked apologetic and held out his room key with both hands.

"Your room is 2212, you just have to take the elevator around the corner and go up to the second floor."

Shane watched as Rozanov nodded, taking the key card with one hand and picking up his carry-on with the other. He thought he might just turn and walk towards the elevator, but when Rozanov catches his eye, he does a double-take.

His eyes were bright, and he looked happy to see Shane. He lifted the hand with the key card and waved at him. Shane waved back awkwardly before stepping up to check in. When he turned around, Ilya was gone.

The keycard the front desk handed him says 2213.

When Shane stepped out of the elevator and looked down the hall, he almost expected to see Rozanov standing outside the room across from his. He hurried into his room and closed the door behind him as fast as possible. Leaning with his back against the door, he exhaled deeply.

A whole weekend across the hall from Ilya Rozanov.

A whole weekend of being keenly attuned to his presence in every room.

A whole weekend.

There were welcome drinks available for all conference attendees that evening at the hotel bar. Shane usually never attended these mixers. Too many people, too much noise, and too many odd looks when he would order a ginger ale.

He wasn't planning on going, but Rose was in town, and she had very politely pleaded to meet him at his hotel, briefly before catching a flight that night.

Rose Landry and Shane had attended the same grad school several years ago and had always remained friends. At one point, Shane might have fancied himself in love with Rose. It was the closest thing he'd ever felt to it.

He knew he wasn't in love with her, though.

Something just wasn't *right*.

It wasn't the right fit.

Largely because she was a woman, but even Rose knew some things couldn't be forced.

He loved talking to her, hanging out with her, and she never pressured him to be anything he wasn't. Except when she made him attend these mixers.

The lobby was lively with conference attendees, and the bar was buzzing. Shane scanned the crowd, looking for wavy, auburn hair to catch his eye. When he glanced at the table with two chairs by the window, he noticed Rose eagerly waving her hands, beckoning him over.

He felt a smile tug at his lips and strode over to her. She stood up in anticipation of his arrival and wrapped her arms tightly around him when he reached her. Shane rubbed her back and embraced her.

Rose squealed in excitement and sat down.

“Come, sit! I’m so glad we can catch up for a little bit. When was the last time I saw you? Vancouver?”

“I think it was Halifax, last spring.”

Her eyes widened, remembering their short stint on the East Coast.

“Yes! Right before the Statistics Summit.”

Shane nodded. Rose smiled at him and grabbed his hand in elation.

They fell back into familiar rhythms almost immediately. Rose had so many stories to tell, from her time out west, her secondment at a startup in Chicago, and her upcoming presentation at a different conference this weekend. A server came by to take his order - ginger ale - and Rose’s - a glass of white - before leaving them to it.

Gaggles of other researchers and scholars bustled in and out of the bar and the lobby. Some Shane recognizes, and others he had never met before. He was so caught up in conversations with Rose that he didn’t notice an hour had flown by.

“So. Are you seeing anyone?” She asked directly.

Shane almost choked on his drink. He coughed for a moment, trying to catch his breath. When he glanced back at Rose, she was looking at him expectantly.

“No. I’m not. You know this, too, because you ask me *every* chance you get.” He joked.

“I just want you to find someone, Shane! You know, since you can’t have this,” she gestured to herself, “you should have the next best thing.” Rose ribbed him gently about the crush he’d fancied himself having on her. He shook his head, laughing in response.

“You know my friend Miles? He’s always asking about you - I can give you his number if you wa--”

“No, no, no. I appreciate you trying to help your gay friend, but I don’t think I’m looking for anything right now.” Not when he was pretty much always thinking about Rozanov. It didn’t seem fair to anyone else to have to deal with Shane’s barrage of unresolved feelings on the subject.

“Okay, fine, fine, fine. I’ll stop bugging you about Miles. Or anyone for that matter.”

“Thank you.”

“I do have a question, though.”

Sigh.

“Yes?”

“Actually, two questions. One - do you know that guy across the bar? And two - do you know why he’s been looking at me like I killed his dog?”

Shane followed her line of sight, wondering whose giving Rose a dirty look before his gaze landed on a curly head of hair sitting in the high-top tables.

Rozanov.

In Rose’s defense, it did look like he was glaring at her; Rozanov’s eyes also seemed to be flickering down at where she was holding Shane’s hand on the table. Shane suspects he felt his gaze on him because Rozanov’s eyes flash over at Shane, and his frown dissipated, almost like he’s forcing his face to neutralize.

Shane wasn’t exactly sure what Rozanov’s issue with Rose was, but he wasn’t sure he wanted to find out just yet.

“Oh. That’s Rozanov - Ilya Rozanov - he’s presenting at the conference I’m attending this weekend.”

“You know him?”

“Barely, we’ve only interacted a few times.”

Rose hummed in response, pensive.

“Maybe he’s upset I’m hogging all of your time.”

Shane laughed at how ridiculous that sounds. Rozanov, trying to hang out with *him*? It felt almost laughable.

“We don’t even know each other.”

Rose rolled her eyes fondly, picking up her purse and coat to make her exit. Shane tried to push back his chair to walk her out, but she placed a hand firmly on his shoulder.

Leaning down to whisper in his ear, she said, “Maybe he wants that to change.”

She winked at him meaningfully and kissed his cheek before walking out.

“I’ll text you!” She called out as she was walking out to catch her Uber.

Shane sat for a moment, thinking on her words. He sipped his drink and glanced out the window before someone pulled back the chair in front of him.

“Is this seat taken?”

Rozanov was gazing at him expectantly.

Shane shook his head, gesturing for him to take the seat.

“I never see you attend these things.”

“Mixers? Yeah, I don’t really love being in these big crowds.”

“But you came today.” He stated, matter-of-factly.

Shane was a little taken aback by his directness - not that Rozanov wasn’t *always* direct, but it felt more pointed this time.

“Oh, I didn’t really come downstairs for this specifically. My friend was in town and wanted to catch up - the hotel bar seemed like a good enough spot.”

Rozanov didn’t respond right away.

A sly expression painted itself on his face when he did.

“Ah, your *friend*. She is beautiful, no?”

Shane felt a little nauseous at the direction this conversation seemed headed in. *Is that why Rozanov had joined him at the table? To fiend for information about Rose?*

“Um. Yes, very. She’s just a friend, though.”

Rozanov seems pleased by this response, and Shane feels a little miserable at the thought of him prying for Rose’s information.

They didn’t discuss Rose much after that, though. He asked Shane about how he knew Rose, and once the conversation turned to Shane’s experiences in grad school, she didn’t come up after that.

Shane wasn’t really sure what he expected a conversation with Rozanov to be like. A normal conversation, anyway, not like the other ones they’d had. It feels really natural. Rozanov is obviously intelligent, but he’s *funny*. And he didn’t only talk about himself. In fact, he seemed to relish every new fact he learns about Shane.

He doesn’t just ask questions without offering up information of his own. When Shane pried about his life in Russia, he was reserved but honest. Shared a little bit about how life in Russia wasn’t easy, and that he doesn’t really talk to his dad or brother much. Shane noted he doesn’t mention his mother, but he doesn’t want to be nosier than he had already been.

When Rozanov asks about his own life, Shane’s more than happy to share. He shared stories about how his parents used to get up at the crack of dawn to drive him to skating practice for most of his childhood, training for hockey until he was sixteen, when an injury put a pin in those plans forever.

He even told Rozanov about his summers at the cottage in Algonquin. Spending weekends by the lake, paddleboarding, fishing, and scarfing down sticky s’mores by the heat of the campfire. He’s in the middle of a story when he notices Rozanov watching him with a slight smile, a fond look on his face.

Shane’s voice trailed off before he cleared his throat, blushing in response to Rozanov’s watchful gaze.

“Are you attending lecture tomorrow? I’m presenting at 11.”

Shane had been planning on attending, but mostly because his curiosity about everything to do with Rozanov felt insatiable. They’d spend the last hour together just talking, and all those anxieties Shane usually had when talking to people felt non-existent. He could probably sit with Ilya for hours, and it would still only feel like fifteen minutes.

“Did you want me to attend?” Shane asked almost jokingly, it’s not like Rozanov would be paralyzed without his attendance.

“Yes.”

He said it plainly - direct and honest, his usual style. Shane’s a little bewildered by Rozanov’s confession, but is more overjoyed than he’d like to admit.

“Okay. I’ll be there.”

“Good.”

The rest of the evening had flown by without a hiccup. Rozanov had introduced Shane to some of his colleagues and sat beside Shane in a booth as the group regaled stories of their time in graduate school. His thigh had been flush with Shane’s for 47 minutes.

Not that he’d been counting.

The group had parted ways at midnight, and Rozanov had walked in parallel with him to their floor.

Standing outside their respective rooms, they paused for a moment, staring at one another.

“Goodnight, Hollander.”

“Goodnight, Rozanov.”

Shane was restless for most of the night, tossing and turning, unable to get his thoughts to drift away from a certain Russian. By the time the sun peeked through the hotel room curtains, he had only gotten four hours of sleep.

While he was getting ready for a jam-packed schedule of lectures, his mind could only think of one thing.

Rozanov.

He kept flashing back to the way Ilya sat across from him at the bar, the way it felt like they had been *leaning* into each other, sipping their drinks over the amber candlelight. They joked, they smiled, their legs kept grazing one another. It felt normal.

Like they were friends.

Like they were --

Shane shook his head, willing the thought out of his mind, before pulling out a pale blue striped button-down from the closet. He needed to get it together. He had three hour-long sessions to attend this morning, one of which was Rozanov's.

He couldn't be spiralling like this; Rozanov would see right through him.

The rest of the morning passed by with ease. It was easy enough to attend these lectures, especially when they were ones Shane was interested in. That's not to say some of them aren't boring - not all full-time researchers have the charm and charisma that seems to come so naturally to Rozanov.

By the time Ilya's timeslot rolled around, Shane was seated at a round table in the audience, waiting intently. The way Rozanov had spoken about his session today, the way he'd gazed at Shane so earnestly, like it would mean something to have Shane here.

Shane didn't want to disappoint him.

He sat and waited patiently for Rozanov to take to the podium. He only carried his laptop to the stage, no speaking notes or loose sheets of paper in hand. When he started to speak, he was firm and confident, self-assured and intelligent, even a little cocky.

It was like he was magic.

He was made for this.

Shane watched Rozanov carefully walk through his methodologies, his findings, and even future applications of his work. Everyone in the audience was hooked onto his every word. After his slides were finished, he stepped back and allowed the question period to begin. He fielded questions from fellow scholars, graduate students, and even Ministry partners with ease.

Shane couldn't help but smile as he watched him.

He was pretty sure he was staring a little too long because Rozanov's eyes darted up momentarily and caught him watching him. He reddened a little, both in the moment and upon reflection, thinking of how stupid he probably looked, getting caught staring at him when he should probably be taking notes on what he heard.

Rozanov's smile dropped, meeting his gaze and holding it. Shane wanted to look away, knew he should look away, but he couldn't help himself. It was like he was entranced.

He wasn't smiling at him.

He looked pensive.

Serious.

He darted his gaze away down to his notes when it felt like he couldn't look any longer.

Shane felt like he had just lost a game he didn't even agree to play.

There's an ink drop from his pen on the lapel of his blazer that looks like a slightly misshapen butterfly. He traced it with his eyes and darted back up to Rozanov's face when he noticed he had also broken eye contact with him.

He felt something akin to disappointment, but put it aside when another audience member raised their hand to ask a question.

Shane pushed his chair back and quietly walked out of the room.

He felt a hot gaze on his back the entire time.

Later in the afternoon, all keynote speakers and attendees were allowed an opportunity to get to know one another and discuss their ongoing research. Shane's seated at a table with a couple of postdocs and one of his colleagues from the Housing Association. He doesn't know any of them particularly well, but he's trying to put himself out there. He smiled at all the right times, he tried to crack a joke here and there, but he mostly did a lot of listening.

He politely excused himself from the table after thirty minutes, needing some air and a bit of a recharge.

On his way out, he stopped when he heard someone call out his name. He turned and saw Rozanov standing beside someone, waving him over. He appeared to have been talking with Eric Bennett, a notable scholar working on national housing-first initiatives. Shane had always dreamt of working with Bennett on a project of some kind, but the rumour mill has always said he was particularly selective about candidates for his team and often only hired those with extensive community-based experience.

"Hollander, come talk for a bit."

"Uh, okay."

“Hollander, this is Dr. Bennett.”

Shane held out a hand, and Bennett clasped it, firmly shaking.

“Hi, Dr. Bennett, it’s such an honour,” Shane said, a little stiffly.

“Dr. Rozanov’s told me so much about you, Dr. Hollander,” Bennett rumbled.

Shane looked over at Rozanov, who was smiling a little sheepishly, scratching the back of his neck.

“He was telling me you *think* you’re ready to take on a provincial project,” Bennett remarked, like he thinks something is funny.

He thinks you’re ready.

Thinks.

Shane felt his cheeks grow hot. Rozanov was smiling at him, and Shane felt like he had gone temporarily deaf with embarrassment. He glanced between Rozanov and Dr. Bennett before excusing himself.

Shane could feel his heart beating in his ear as he pushed through the crowd. He thought he could hear a voice calling out to him from behind, but he didn’t want to turn around. Bounding down the hallway, he turns the corner and pushes open the door to his right.

It’s an office of some kind, not very large, with a grey office chair and a wooden desk in the corner. It seemed to be a private workspace of some sort. Nothing fancy, but it would do the job.

He just needs some silence; he needs a minute to stew.

A whole day of being *on* was taking its toll, and being around Rozanov was no help. Shane was feeling overstimulated, warm, and his mind was running a mile a minute. He heard the soft click of the door behind him and let out a deep breath.

He was only alone for a minute before he heard the doorknob turning behind him. Shane was about to turn and ask the intruder to give him a moment before realizing who it was.

Rozanov.

“What are you doing here?” He asked incredulously. “Haven’t you embarrassed me enough?”

“I wanted to check if you are okay. You ran away very fast.” Rozanov’s voice rumbled.

He’s only just entered the room, and Shane already feels claustrophobic. The air is tight, his skin feels warm and flushed.

“I only *ran* away because you were laughing at me with one of the most renowned scholars at this conference!”

“Laughing at you? I do no such thing!” Rozanov looks offended at the implication, but Shane saw the way he smirked at him in the conference room. Like he knew something embarrassing about Shane, and he’d been gossiping about him with others.

“Yeah, right.” Shane couldn’t help but roll his eyes. “You said you *think* I’m ready.”

“Hollander, you are having panic attack. I was only telling Bennett you are good candidate for his new project team.”

Shane paused, completely surprised at Rozanov’s admission.

“You *what*?”

“Are you not looking to join Bennett’s project? You say you are interested in collaborative meeting last week?”

“Oh.”

“Hollander, not everyone is out to get you,” Rozanov said as if he couldn’t believe how ridiculous he is.

Shane flushed in embarrassment, unable to stop himself from cringing at the way he’d stormed out of the room.

“I’m sorry,” he replied hotly, “I just didn’t know! Sometimes it feels like you’re making fun of me, and I don’t know why. I didn’t mean to accuse you.”

“I am sometimes making fun of you. Not this time. But sometimes. You look very pretty when you blush. Is nice to see.”

Shane froze at Rozanov’s comment, staring at him a little dumbfounded. Being called *pretty* is enough to send his mind into another tailspin, but he wasn’t allowed to spiral about that for very long.

Rozanov took a step towards Shane, crowding him. He retreated until the back of his thighs hit the desk. He sat on the desk as Rozanov leaned forward, his arms bracing either side of the table beside Shane’s legs. His thumbs grazed the fabric of Shane’s pants, fingering the cotton.

His gaze is heated, and his face is so close. Shane turned pink as he felt his temperature rise in response, darting his eyes away.

Too shy to make eye contact.

“Is okay?”

Shane stuttered before simply nodding. Rozanov smiled in response.

Reaching up a hand, Rozanov cupped the side of Shane’s face, leaning in even closer. He could feel his warm breath against his cheek. They were so close that if Shane turned his

head, they'd be kissing.

An inch or two closer.

He felt like he could count Rozanov's eyelashes.

Closing the gap between them, Rozanov pressed their lips together, gently.

Shane couldn't help the whine that came from his throat. This one kiss seemed to change everything. Placing his own grip on the lapel of Rozanov's blazer, he clutched him tight with both hands, kissing him deeper.

His mind seemed to go blank for a second.

When Rozanov ran a hand through Shane's hair, running the tips of his fingers through the softness, Shane's breath hitched. He couldn't breathe.

The slightest hint of tongue against his closed mouth sent fireworks off in his mind.

Rozanov's hand slid down to his throat, cupping his chin in his warm grasp. Licking into his mouth, Shane felt him hum in content.

His hand trailed down the front of Shane's shirt, tugging at his belt buckle when Shane heard it.

Someone was attempting to unlock the door of the room they're in.

He pulled back abruptly, putting significant distance between them. Rozanov's lips were red and swollen, and his eyes were a little glazed over in arousal. Shane glanced down and flushed when he saw his hardness through his hands.

Ilya smirked before peeling off his jacket and attempting to hold it in front of himself, inconspicuously. The door opened almost exactly in time, and Shane prayed to god that it didn't look like they had just been rubbing up against one another for the last several minutes.

A cleaning crew member was about to enter the room and paused when she saw them.

Shane awkwardly laughs before saying, "Wrong room."

She raised an eyebrow at him and glanced between Shane and Rozanov, who didn't do anything but shrug. She held the door open, and Shane bolted out of there, tail between his legs, trying to put a smooth distance between himself and Rozanov.

He managed to avoid Rozanov for the rest of the day, fleeing to his room once his last session of the day was done. There's a dinner being hosted in the hotel ballroom that he considered attending, but the prospect of making small talk with Rozanov after he knows what his lips feel like did not seem fun. He placed an order for room service and planned to panic in solitude for the rest of the evening.

His dinner had been delivered, and Shane had been spiralling in his room alone for at least an hour when he heard a knock on the door. He rolled off the bed, padding towards the door in dread.

He looked through the peephole, and his breath caught for a moment.

He's not surprised to see Ilya at his door. In fact, the chances of anyone *other* than Rozanov knocking at his door were very slim. Shane steadied himself for a moment, rubbing his palm against his chest for a moment before pulling the door open.

Ilya stared at him for a moment before breaking the silence. He was wearing a dress shirt and pants, shiny leather shoes reflecting the dim hallway lighting.

"Can we talk?"

Shane nodded.

"Can I come in?"

He nodded again, opening the door slightly to make way for Rozanov's entry.

Shane closed the door and turned to face Ilya.

They looked at each other apprehensively for a moment, not really sure what to say. Rozanov opened his mouth as if to speak and then closed it. He ran a hand through his curls, pulling at them like he was anxious - maybe even stressed.

"You seem to think I don't like you. I don't know why, but could not be further from truth."

Shane's mouth dropped open slightly, taken aback by Rozanov's confession.

"I like you. You are very competent researcher."

Shane cleared his throat briefly before dryly replying, "Competent researcher. This is you telling me you *like* me?"

Silence follows for a beat.

Ilya shrugged in response.

“What about all those times we ran into each other, and you were a dick for no reason?”

“I am Russian, this is how we show it.”

Shane sighed.

“I think you like me too. You are always staring at me.”

Shane’s a little mortified at being caught.

“Is okay, I like when you watch.”

Rozanov takes a confident step forward, and Shane retreats in response. His cheeks felt hot, and he couldn’t believe Rozanov was in his room right now, calling him out on his involuntary obsession.

He reached out a hand and caressed Shane’s face, thumb rubbing back and forth against his cheek. He can’t help but lean his face into Ilya’s hands.

“These freckles. They will kill me.” Rozanov rumbled the words, gravelly and low.

Shane opened his eyes and inched his face a little closer.

Rozanov leaned forward, capturing Shane’s lips in a kiss. It felt electric, like a million fireworks were going off in Shane’s mind all at once. There was a pause, a beat, and Shane sighed against Rozanov’s lips. He tilted his head to the side, kissing him back. Rozanov’s hands were skimming his upper arms, sending goosebumps along the surface of his skin. One of his hands snaked around Shane’s waist, pushing the small of his back so they could be closer. Rozanov’s other hand cupped Shane’s chin, tilting it a little more to the left so he could deepen their kiss.

Shane pressed up against Rozanov before feeling himself being pushed against the wall of the bedroom. He could almost feel Ilya smiling into their kiss before he was distracted by his shirt being unbuttoned.

Rozanov broke apart from his lips, but not for long. He pressed wet, open-mouthed kisses along his chin and jaw, going down further until finding the one spot on his throat to elicit a strangled moan from Shane’s mouth. He laughed a little at the torment he was causing Shane.

Shane might have been offended if he wasn’t enjoying himself so much. Ilya pushed the button up off Shane’s shoulders, and his cool hands finally touched Shane’s bare skin.

Shane flinched back at the sensation before Rozanov rubbed his sides apologetically.

“Sorry, hands will warm up soon.” He promised.

He pressed his lips against Shane’s, their torsos flush against one another. Shane’s hands rose from Rozanov’s waist and into the curls at the nape of his neck. He’d been thinking about Ilya’s hair for so long that touching it feels a little surreal. It’s soft and silky, like he doesn’t put any effort into it.

Ilya licked into his mouth, his tongue sweeping against Shane's. He tasted a little like spearmint toothpaste.

They're kissing for a few moments, and Shane feels so warm. Kissing Ilya is like nothing he's ever experienced. It's frenzied and heated and overwhelming. Shane can't get close enough, and everything feels *so* much. He's burning with desire, and his dick is straining against his slacks. They've only kissed, and he's already embarrassingly hard. He can't help but rub against Ilya's thigh, panting heavily.

Shane wanted to feel Ilya against him, skin against skin. He wanted to be pushed down, to feel the weight of Ilya's body on top of his. He wanted to be on his knees for him, to watch Ilya do the same for him. He felt Ilya's fingernails gently scrape against his nipple, and he couldn't help the needy whine that peels out of his throat. Shane leaned against the wall for support, and Ilya pulled away, his eyes alight at the thought of getting another moan out of Shane.

"You want it badly." He doesn't say it like it's a question, but rather like an undeniable truth.

"Look at you," he teased, rubbing a thumb against Shane's nipple again, "You react so well."

He reached down for Shane's belt and unbuckled it. Unbuttoning his pants, he pushed the slacks down Shane's hips, and they pooled to the floor. Rozanov looked at Shane expectantly, and he scrambled to step out of them. Picking up his shirt and his pants, he carefully folded them and placed them on the love seat by the hotel window.

Rozanov watched him as he moved, like a predator stalking his prey.

Before long, Shane was standing shirtless - and now pantsless - against the wall, clad in a pair of boxer briefs with a visibly hard dick.

Ilya's hands palmed his erection over his boxers, and Shane instinctively thrust into his hand. He was rubbing Shane's cock in a way that was driving him crazy.

"I'm not going to last long if you keep doing that." He panted.

Rozanov smirked.

"Who said I want you to last long?"

He leaned forward, kissing down Shane's chest. He lightly bit the underside of Shane's pec before leaving a trail of kisses down his ribs, his stomach. Rozanov peeled the waistband of Shane's boxers down, marvelling at the soft skin of his hips. He leaned in and sucked hard on Shane's hip bone.

Shane moaned and felt his dick twitch in response.

He looked down and watched Ilya tug his cock out of his boxers, the tip leaking. He stared for a moment, almost like he was studying it.

“Can you--” Before Shane can even finish asking, his cock is enveloped by wet heat. He watches Ilya’s mouth wrap around his dick, and his hips jerk forward instinctively. Rozanov grabs at his hips, his fingers digging into his ass.

“*Ilya.*” He said, no other words coming to his mind. His eyes shut for a moment, feeling nothing but the white-hot pleasure coursing through his veins. He could feel Ilya bobbing his head up and down over him, pulling him in deeper. Shane opened his eyes again, watching Ilya pull back, a string of saliva following his mouth.

His lips were pink and swollen, and he looked perfect. Ilya looked up at him, tenderly holding Shane’s cock. His tongue flicked along the length, licking a stripe along the underside. He pulled Shane back into his mouth, pushing a little further each time, sliding deeper into his throat.

Shane moaned and couldn’t help but run a hand through Ilya’s curls. He tugged at his hair a little bit, and Shane’s back arched with every thrust deeper into Ilya’s mouth.

He had never seen anything so beautiful in his life.

He whimpered and whined, feeling a pressure building along his spine.

“Oh my god, I’m going to--”

Shane tried to pull away; he didn’t want to cum in Ilya’s mouth if that wasn’t what *he* wanted.

Ilya pulled his hips forward, sucking again and again and again until--

A coil of heat pulsed through Shane before he spills down Ilya’s throat.

Rozanov pulled up to standing position, sealing their lips once more in a kiss. Turning them both around in a swift move, they both fell on top of the bed, and Shane wrapped his legs around Ilya’s waist.

He wasted no time removing Ilya’s shirt and pants, and Rozanov kicked them off the bed onto the floor. He pressed frantic, hot kisses along Shane’s throat, trailing up and down his neck. Shane felt a shiver climb up his spine, and he circled his hips against Ilya’s. Rozanov softly nibbled on his upper lip.

Shane wrapped a hand around Rozanov’s length, stroking up and down. He thumbed the wetness at the tip, spreading it down. He hissed in response, groaning against Shane’s ear. He kissed down Ilya’s neck and chest, lightly biting his nipple on his way down.

“Are you sure?” Rozanov questioned.

Shane’s only response was to continue trailing lower, making a path towards Rozanov’s cock. He nipped the skin on Ilya’s hips and heard a gasp from above.

Ilya’s dick is big.

Shane doesn't know if he's necessarily surprised by this, but he's definitely nervous. He's probably looking like it, too, because Rozanov cupped his jaw and prompted him to make eye contact.

"You don't have to. I'm not asshole."

Shane snorts.

"Actually, I think I'd be the asshole if I left you like this," gesturing towards Ilya's erection.

Having this conversation aloud is what gives Shane the confidence to continue. He tentatively licked the head of Rozanov's cock, pulling a whine from him. He ran his tongue along the length of his dick and watched Ilya throw his head back with a whimper.

When he felt Rozanov run a hand through his hair and grip tight, he closed his eyes, pulling his cock into his mouth. He *is* a little big. Shane thought he could probably get used to it after a few breaths.

He hesitantly sucked, feeling a little uncertain. He'd never done this before, but if the sounds Ilya is making are anything to go by, he thinks he's doing an okay job.

He felt a tug at his hair, and his eyes fluttered open.

"Look at me."

His gaze caught Ilya's, blue eyes watching him bob up and down.

"You are doing so well," Rozanov praised, his hips thrusting gently into Shane's mouth. "Being so good, just for me."

Shane didn't break eye contact, but felt a hot flush course through his body. He wanted to do well. He wants to be good. For Ilya.

"Look at how pretty you blush. Prettiest boy I've ever seen." Shane's body is practically preening in response, sucking Rozanov harder. He felt his breath hitch for a moment before breathing out through his nose.

Soon, it becomes harder and harder to understand Rozanov. He switched between English and Russian with ease, parts of the conversation now unknowable to Shane. Rozanov choked out a moan, his fingers digging into Shane's shoulders. He's thrust into Shane's mouth, rocking back and forth.

Rozanov tapped Shane's shoulder hurriedly.

"Hollander, I'm going to--"

Shane took the opportunity to grip Rozanov's hips firmly, sucking firmly. Experimentally, he took more of Rozanov in, the head of his cock almost grazing the back of his throat. Rozanov moaned loudly, his body tensing up for a moment before Shane tasted his release.

After a few moments, Shane took his mouth off Ilya's softening cock, swallowing his spend. He trailed up Ilya's sticky, warm body before cuddling him close.

They're lying beside one another, panting heavily when Ilya laughed delightedly - Shane could probably hear him make that sound forever. Ilya pulled Shane in close until their bodies were once again flush with one another, sticky and spent. Shane nuzzled in close, putting his face in Ilya's neck, kissing his collarbone lightly.

Ilya gently scratched Shane's sweat-slicked back, stroking it once, twice, thrice, before rubbing the base of his spine. He leans down, softly kissing Shane's lips.

"Feeling okay?"

Shane hummed in response, pecking his lips several times in quick succession.

"We can go on date soon, yes? You will stop avoiding me?"

Shane giggled, nodding. He couldn't really believe what he was hearing.

"I have one condition."

Shane stilled.

"Okay." He whispered nervously.

"Do not need to ask Scott Hunter for help. I am all the help you need."

Shane burst out laughing before brushing his thumb along Ilya's cheek, tenderly, softly, *lovingly*.

He could work with that.

End Notes

i'm pretty sure everything i've portrayed about postdoc research/non-profit research can be taken with a grain of salt. this is fiction and i know neither of them would ever be working so solitarily on large publicly funded research projects. If you're an actual PhD student/graduate, i pre-emptively apologize for misrepresenting your entire career, but just know i did it with the sole purpose of getting these two to fuck.

i hope you enjoyed, though! these two have literally taken over every aspect of my life i cannot stop talking about them.

thank u to meha & max for beta-reading hehehe i needed ur support in my first foray into m/m.

as always, you can find me on twitter @aglassofmalk

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