

In Vino Veritas

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In Vino Veritas

by [AutumnFoxed](#)

Summary

Shane reached out without thinking, his fingers brushing against the rough fabric of Ilya's jacket sleeve.

Ilya flinched away. "Dun' touch me!"

Shane blinked, thrown. "What the - "

"I already have boyfriend!" Ilya declared, pulling his jacket around himself like a shield. "Are practically engaged!"

Shane just stared. "Ilya. It's me."

"Only my boyfriend may unwrap me." Ilya announced. "Is respect."

Ilya gets drunk and refuses to be touched by anyone except his boyfriend. Unfortunately for Shane, Ilya does not realize his boyfriend is the one taking him home.

Notes

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

Shane stepped out of the community center with a concussion's worth of Russian grammar rattling around in his head.

He'd done... fine. Probably. He'd definitely mixed up "to write" with "to cry" again. It happens.

He fumbled for his keys when his phone buzzed. An unknown Ottawa number.

Shane answered. "Hello?"

Noise vomited into his ear. Bass. A roar of voices. Manic laughter that sounded like hyenas at a buffet.

"Hollander?" a voice yelled. "That you?"

Shane winced, holding the phone a few inches away. "Troy?"

"Yeah, we're at McNally's."

"And?"

"And Roz is... conducting an experiment. To see how many shots it takes to become a public spectacle."

Shane opened the car door and sank into the driver's seat. Ilya could handle nicotine like a champion. Alcohol, however, treated him like a stranger it wanted to throw down a flight of stairs.

"How many drinks?" Shane asked.

"Well... what's your definition of 'a drink'?"

Shane gently thumped his forehead against the steering wheel. "Is he conscious?"

"Oh, he's giving a TED Talk on consciousness."

Right on schedule, a familiar, sludge-thick voice cut through the noise. "I DO NOT NEED CAR. I NEED - " there was a sound of mental gears stripping, " - HOLLA'NDER."

Shane squeezed his eyes shut. "Naturally."

"We tried the water intervention. He accused us of attempting to dilute his Russian spirit. Called it a capitalist plot."

"Obviously."

"Then we tried to put him in an Uber."

Shane sat up straight. "You tried to put him in a *stranger's* car."

“It was not a successful strategy. He bit Evan.”

Shane stared blankly at his dashboard air freshener. “He... used his teeth. On Evan.”

“It was more of a warning nip! But, technically, yes, teeth made contact.”

Another shout, closer to the phone. “Y'RE NOT MY PERSON!”

Shane let out a puff of air. “Is he at least safe?”

“Physically, he’s a tank. Emotionally, he’s a raw nerve. He did a full tour of the bar top earlier. Did a little dance.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“And he’s been asking where his jacket is for twenty minutes. He’s wearing it.”

Shane turned the key in the ignition. “Just give me the address. I’m on my way.”

“Praise everything. He’s refusing to sit down because he says you have a specific bedtime voice and he won’t accept imposters.”

Shane merged into traffic, the city lights blurring past.

The call ended with one last cry of “*SHAAAAANE!*” that sounded both accusatory and weirdly possessive.

Shane tightened his grip on the wheel and pointed his car toward the bar.

Ten minutes later, McNally’s announced itself from a block away. Shane took a bracing breath at the door, then stepped into the wall of sound.

He did not need to search.

Ilya was holding court from atop the actual bar, sitting on it like a disheveled king on a sticky throne. One leg swung lazily, the other was tucked up. His jacket was performing an escape off one shoulder. His hair was a curly rebellion. A half-empty glass sat perilously close to his knee.

He was gesturing grandly to the captivated room and declaring, “YOU COULD PLAY FOR METROS. NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED. I PUT MY JACKET ON ICE; IT BLOCK MORE SHOTS THAN THEM!”

Wyatt had his face buried in his hands. Boody was doubled over, weeping with laughter. Troy looked like he’d just finished a double shift in a coal mine. Evan was filming vertically, probably for blackmail. Luca stood slightly apart, wide-eyed, sipping his soda as if watching a lion tamer lose an argument with the lion.

Shane approached the bar king. “Ilya,” he said, carefully.

Ilya's head swiveled. He squinted, like he was trying to bring Shane into focus through a thick fog of vodka.

"I'm just here to take you home," Shane said, keeping his tone soft and non-threatening.

Ilya pointed a wobbly but accusatory finger. "Nice try, hologram."

"Ilya."

"I am man of great loyalty," Ilya announced, wagging the finger now. "Will not be seduced by facsimile."

"Seduced by what," Shane asked, the exhaustion seeping into his words, "the promise of horizontal surfaces and hydration?"

Troy let out a snort. Bood had to clutch the edge of a table, his shoulders shaking.

Shane took one more step, his hand coming up out of habit to guide Ilya's elbow.

Whap. Ilya's hand slapped his away with startling speed. "NO TOUCHING FROM STRANGERS," he barked.

Evan lost his composure, howling. Luca just stared, whispering a soft, "Oh my god."

"Alright," Shane said, all business. "Time to vacate the throne."

"No," Ilya said, planting his hands on his knees. "Is my kingdom of... this."

Wyatt, wiping tears from his eyes, called out, "His kingdom is your couch, Hollander."

It took several minutes of delicate diplomacy. Shane promised to "stand at a respectful proximity." Luca offered a cocktail napkin with a poorly drawn smiley face. Finally, with the dignity of a deposed monarch, Ilya relinquished his throne and dismounted. The floor received him.

The walk to the car was an excruciating pilgrimage. Ilya kept stopping to deliver profound observations - halting to point at the moon and explain that it was the same one hanging over Russia, which apparently made the night very global; and growing perplexed by the word *sidewalk*, which, in his view, promised lateral movement and delivered none.

Wyatt was still giggling as they pushed out into the night. "You're a saint, Hollander."

Shane didn't answer. He was too busy using his body as a human shield between Ilya and the street, because Ilya seemed determined to inspect the asphalt up close.

Shane opened the passenger door of the car. "Okay, in you go."

Ilya obeyed, folding himself into the seat with surprising coordination. Then, as Shane reached across him for the seatbelt, *whap.* Another slap.

“It’s the law, Ilya.”

“Yes,” Ilya agreed. “An’ Shane would want me safe. But he is a good man. He wants... consent.”

Shane stepped back. “You’re right. My mistake.”

Ilya grabbed the belt himself and missed the latch. Tried again. Somehow managed to tuck it behind his back like a tail.

Shane leaned in, clicked the belt into place in one fluid motion, and retreated.

They pulled out of the lot.

Ilya sighed. “Shhhane Hollander,” he said, like it was the title of a favorite poem.

Shane kept his eyes glued to the road.

“He wakes up early,” Ilya mused. “Like farmer. Or spy. Eats his breakfast like it is mission to be completed.”

“That’s... a vivid description,” Shane said carefully.

Ilya sank back into the seat, the belt cutting across his chest. “Would do ’nything for that man,” he declared.

Anything was a very dangerous word, Shane thought.

“Would move countries,” Ilya continued, listing them on his fingers. “Again. I would learn about... taxes. Eat whole wheat pasta with hidden vegetables.”

Shane couldn’t help but glance over. “You call that pasta ‘rabbit food.’”

“Yes,” Ilya conceded. “But for him, I would eat it.”

Shane pressed his lips together to stop the smile.

“I bring him water,” Ilya said, proud of this strategy. “His brain is so busy, it forgets to tell his body to drink. I am his water assistant.”

“That’s very considerate,” Shane murmured.

“I watch him sleep sometimes,” Ilya added casually.

Shane’s breath hiked. “You what?”

“Not in creepy way!” Ilya clarified, waving a hand. “In guardian way.”

Ah. There it was. The Rozanov Logic.

“I would wait,” Ilya said, his voice dropping into something startlingly earnest. “Outside the rink. Outside his door. Outside of everything. However long he needs.”

Then Ilya frowned, a small crease appearing between his brows. “Is this too much information?”

“No,” Shane said, the word coming out hoarse. “It’s... it’s fine.”

“Good,” Ilya said, visibly relieved. “Because there is more.”

Of course there was.

“I would fight anyone who is mean to him,” Ilya stated. “Coach. Reporter. That guy who cuts in line at coffee shop. God.”

“You keep challenging God,” Shane muttered. An unbidden laugh escaped him.

Ilya shifted in his seat, peering through the darkness at Shane’s profile. “You laugh like him,” he said, suspicion and wonder mixing in his tone. “Is also suspicious. But I allow it.”

They stopped at a red light. Ilya squinted, his gaze dropping.

“Your hands,” he said suddenly. “Are same.”

Shane froze. “The same as what?”

“As Shane’s,” Ilya said, as if it was obvious. “Has very careful hands. Like they are afraid to ask for too much.”

Shane felt his chest constrict.

“I love his hands,” Ilya added.

The light turned green. Shane didn’t move.

A car horn blared behind them. Shane jolted, lurching the car forward, his face heating with a flush of embarrassment.

“Also love his brain,” Ilya continued, unbothered by the near-accident. “Is very loud in there. But it is good, smart loud.”

“That’s... great,” Shane managed.

“If Shane tells me to jump,” Ilya said, nodding with conviction, “I first ask, ‘How high, my love?’ Then I jump twice that height.”

“You really don’t have to do that,” Shane said softly.

“Yes. I do,” Ilya looked offended. “Shane is good. Very good. Best.”

They turned onto their street, the familiar houses sliding past. Shane pulled the car up beside the lineup of Ilya's European cars, which gleamed under the streetlight like predatory animals napping in a very sensible suburban driveway. The red one. The black one. The silver one that seemed to scream about its own horsepower for no reason.

He killed the engine and just sat for a moment, eyes forward, because he already knew what was coming.

Right on cue, Ilya squinted through the windshield at the cars with the misty-eyed pride of a rancher surveying his prize cattle.

"Ah," Ilya said, his voice thick with reverence. "My beautiful babies."

Shane let his head fall back against the headrest. "Please tell me you haven't given them new names again."

Ilya's finger shot out, pointing decisively at the black sports car. "That one is Shane Two."

Shane didn't even open his eyes. "Let me guess. There's no Shane One."

"Of course there is," Ilya said, as if explaining something very simple to a very slow child. "Shane One is at home."

"That's not - " Shane cut himself off, took a breath. "Why is there a Shane Two?"

"Because Shane One is precious," Ilya explained. "Shane Two is for going very fast. Is different kind of love."

Shane decided escape was the best option. He opened his door and got out, the cool night air a relief. He walked around, opened the passenger door, and presented himself. "Okay. We're here. Home."

Ilya just sat there, buckled in.

Shane waited.

"You are very convincing illusion," Ilya declared.

"Ilya."

"But," Ilya continued, holding up a lecturing finger, "only Hollander is permitted to help me from car."

Shane sighed. "I *am* Hollander."

"So you say."

Shane held out his hand anyway, palm up. An offering. "You asked for me. I came."

Ilya studied the hand as if checking for fingerprints. Finally, he gave a regal nod. “Okay. But you must be gentle. He is always gentle.”

“I know,” Shane said, his voice softening despite himself.

Ilya took his hand, and then he didn’t let go. It was a full-on cling, his fingers lacing tightly with Shane’s as if they were shackled together.

They made it exactly three steps toward the front door before Ilya planted his feet.

Ilya cast a sweeping glance around the empty driveway and darkened lawns. “Must ensure no one witnesses me in this state.”

“There’s literally no one out here.”

“Still,” Ilya insisted. “Shane would be disappointed if I caused a scene. Must protect his reputation.”

Shane’s heart did an aching twist in his chest. “You could never embarrass me.”

Ilya seemed to ponder this, then accepted it with a nod. “Okay. But I walk with dignity.”

He immediately listed to the left like a sinking ship.

Shane tightened his hold, pulling him upright.

Ilya gasped, affronted. “No!”

“You were about to introduce yourself to the hydrangeas.”

“Is my business,” Ilya said firmly. “Falling requires mutual agreement.”

Inside, the house was quiet and warm. Shane nudged the door shut with his foot and flipped the hallway light on.

Ilya froze in the entryway, his eyes wide.

“Is Shane’s house,” Ilya said, full of awe. “Must be on my best behavior.”

“You live here, Ilya.”

“Only because he is generous,” Ilya corrected him with seriousness. “Is privilege.”

Their journey down the hall was a slow-motion tour guided by Ilya’s vodka-soaked reverence. He paused to pat the runner rug. “Shane selected this. Is practical and does not slip.” He nodded respectfully at a thriving pothos on the console. “This plant is alive. He remembers to water it.”

By the time they reached the bedroom, Shane felt thoroughly unraveled, caught between endless amusement and a tenderness that threatened to swallow him whole.

“Alright,” Shane said, guiding him to the edge of the bed. “Shoes off.”

Ilya recoiled, clutching the front of his jacket like a Victorian heroine. “Only *he* may undress me,” he stated, injecting the word with immense gravity. “Is matter of respect.”

Shane crossed his arms. “You’re planning to sleep in your shoes? In my bed?”

“Is *our* bed,” Ilya corrected haughtily. “But yes.”

“With whatever mystery substance you picked up at McNally’s ground into the sheets?”

Ilya hesitated. His face fell as he envisioned it. “Shane... would not like mystery substances in bedding.”

“No,” Shane agreed. “He would hate it.”

Ilya let out a world-weary sigh, as if agreeing to a great sacrifice. He lifted one foot, wobbled violently, and latched onto Shane’s shoulder. The first shoe came off, then the other, dumped unceremoniously on the floor.

Emboldened, Shane reached for the zipper of Ilya’s jacket.

Ilya looked scandalized. “HEY!”

“You’ll be more comfortable.”

“I am uncomfortable with premature intimacy!” Ilya announced, pulling the jacket tighter. “Except with Shane!”

Shane just nodded, swallowing a laugh. In the end, he settled for steering him backward until his knees hit the mattress and guiding him down. Ilya collapsed onto the pillows with a satisfied groan, fully dressed in his jeans and jacket, like a disheveled burrito.

“Good,” Ilya murmured, snuggling into the comforter.

Shane sat down on the edge of the bed, the mattress dipping under his weight. “Ilya?”

“Mmm?”

“You’re home. You’re safe.”

Ilya’s eyes were already closed, a dopey, sincere smile spreading across his face. “I know,” he slurred. “M’Shane always takes care of me.”

Shane stood at the foot of the bed, his throat tight. He told himself the feeling was just exhaustion, the natural result of a ridiculous night. He told himself Ilya was always like this - a force of nature who spoke in hyperbole even when sober. He told himself a lot of things that felt thin and flimsy in the silence of the room.

Ilya cracked one eye open and peered at him with focus.

“You are very trustworthy stranger,” he announced.

“That’s... good to know,” Shane managed, his own voice feeling foreign.

“And because you helped me,” Ilya continued, “and because after my mama and my Shane, you are most helpful person to me...”

Shane’s heart gave a hard *thump* against his ribs.

“I will tell you secret,” Ilya beckoned Shane closer with a wobbly finger, and when Shane leaned in, Ilya’s beer-scented breath ghosted over his cheek. “But you cannot tell Shane. Is surprise.”

Shane froze. “Okay.”

Ilya’s hand fumbled in the air between them, as if trying to pluck the right words from the darkness. “I am looking at rings,” he confessed, the words a hushed, thrilling whisper.

The floor seemed to shift slightly under Shane’s feet.

“...Rings,” he repeated.

“Yes,” Ilya said, his expression turning thoughtful, analytical. “Not loud ones. *Simple*. Shane does not like loud things. Loud rings,” he added with a flash of disdain, “are for idiots.”

Shane could only stare, his mind blank and buzzing all at once.

“I look online,” Ilya went on, his gaze drifting to the ceiling as if seeing a catalog there. “And in store windows. Sometimes I think, ‘Ilya, you are a fool to hope for this.’ But then I keep looking.”

A knot formed in Shane’s chest.

“I am scared,” Ilya admitted, the bravado melting away into something vulnerable. “What if I am not enough? What if Hollander deserve someone better? Someone calm. Someone who does not... bite teammates over Uber fights.”

A choked laugh escaped Shane before he could stop it.

Then Ilya nodded, as if resolving the fear himself. “But if Shane says no, I will simply pass away from the embarrassment.”

“He won’t say no,” Shane said, the words coming out immediately.

Ilya absorbed this. “Good.”

Shane just sat there, stunned. His whole world had quietly reordered itself in the last sixty seconds. *Proposal. Rings. Simple*. Of course Ilya, who observed everything about him with the focus of a strategist, had noticed that, too.

Overwhelmed, he reached out without thinking, his fingers brushing against the rough fabric of Ilya's jacket sleeve.

Ilya flinched away with shocking agility, scrambling back against the headboard. "Dun' touch me!"

Shane blinked, thrown. "What the - "

"I already have boyf'riend!" Ilya declared, pulling his jacket around himself like a shield. "Are practically engaged!"

Shane just stared. "Ilya. It's me."

"Only my boyfriend may unwrap me!" Ilya yelled. "Is respect!"

Shane dragged a hand down his face, the tender moment evaporating into the familiar absurdity. "You're going to sweat to death in that jacket."

"Love requires sacrifice," Ilya intoned.

Defeated, Shane walked to the window and shoved it open a few inches. A slice of cold night air swept into the room. "Better?"

Ilya considered the new breeze. "Yes. Is acceptable compromise."

Shane turned back, crossing his arms. "How about a shower? You smell like a brewery floor."

"Shane loves me at my *worst*," Ilya stated.

"Unfortunately true," Shane muttered under his breath.

He retreated to the ensuite, ran a washcloth under cool water, and brought it back. "Here. At least wipe your face off. You have bar... essence... on you."

Ilya accepted the cloth and proceeded to dab delicately at his forehead and chin, completely missing the actual stickiness near his mouth and nose. He held the cloth out afterward and curled onto his side, still fully dressed, one foot still inexplicably sporting a shoe. His hand groped blindly across the empty space until it found Shane's pillow. He dragged it to his chest, hugging it tightly, burying his nose in the fabric.

Within seconds, his breathing deepened, evening out into the familiar rhythm of sleep.

Just before he slipped fully under, his voice emerged, muffled and drowsy into the pillowcase. "Y're nice. Shane would like you."

Shane stood there in the dim light from the hall, his heart a wrecked thing in his chest.

"I hope so," he whispered to the sleeping man.

He didn't move to the couch, or to the guest room. He stayed there, while the man who was secretly planning to marry him snored into his pillow.

End Notes

I somehow ended up reading wholesome drunk husband stories on reddit (yes, they exist. yes, I was shocked too) and well... this happened.

Leave me a kudos/comment if you enjoyed it <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!