

Evenly Matched

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/74654931) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/74654931>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Canon Compliant , Missing Scene , Alternate Scene , mild spoilers for The Long Game , Reminiscing , Fluff , Smut , Feelings , based on the books
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-11-23 Words: 3,443 Chapters: 1/1

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by [itsme_hi_imtheproblem](#)

Summary

"You were so scared of wanting me," Ilya said. "Was cute."

Shane's face grew even warmer. "Shut up."

"Like little deer. Little gay deer." Ilya tenderly stroked his hand through Shane's hair.

"No I wasn't," Shane protested weakly as a shiver traveled down his spine. For a second he was back in that shower. Watching Ilya. Paralyzed. Transfixed.

While watching a documentary about their year-long rivalry, Ilya and Shane reminisce about the beginnings of their relationship.

Notes

This is an alternate version for a scene in The Long Game where they watch the documentary that was made about them. I desperately needed this because I am a sucker for some good old reminiscing, so I wrote it.

There are obviously spoilers for Heated Rivalry and very mild spoilers for The Long Game. I think this can be read without knowing that book since it mostly references scenes from Heated Rivalry.

(Also this is my first time writing for a new fandom and I'm slightly terrified.)

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

Shane couldn't help the slight tingle of nerves in the pit of his stomach as he nestled closer against Ilya's chest. He was like 90 percent certain that the documentary would be dry and boring and straightforward. Of course Ilya hadn't said anything about sucking his balls. Despite all of Ilya's teasing, Shane knew he would never actually be *that* stupid just to rile him up. Yeah, no, he wouldn't.

But what if over the years there had been moments that had been captured on film? Where they'd been reckless. Not one hundred percent in control of their facial expressions. They had definitely been really fucking stupid a bunch of times out on the ice, gotten carried away, cameras forgotten for the moment. What if someone had caught on?

"What?" Ilya asked, pulling back and studying Shane's face. "You're worried?"

Shane didn't even know how he could tell.

"Was joke," Ilya said. "I did *not* talk about your balls."

Despite himself, Shane grinned and gave Ilya's pec a playful slap. "I know," he said.

"Then what?" Ilya frowned.

Shane swallowed. "It's stupid," he said.

Ilya just raised his eyebrows.

Shane took a deep breath. "What if... what if we were being more obvious than we thought?"

"You're worried they found us out?"

Shane grimaced. "Yes?"

Something flickered across Ilya's face but it was gone before Shane could read him. Ilya's features relaxed and he shook his head. "They have not. I mean... edits are everywhere, but nobody believes them."

Shane's heart skipped a beat. "Edits? What edits?"

Ilya shrugged. "You know. Instagram. TikTok. YouTube."

"What?"

Ilya narrowed his eyes. "Apps. On your phone. You know, with pictures and—"

"I know the apps!" Shane interrupted him, trying not to let the panic take over. "What do you mean by edits?"

"You don't know about edits?"

Shane felt his nostrils flare with his forceful inhale in an attempt to stay calm. "No," he said through gritted teeth.

"Is nothing," Ilya said, a smirk playing in the corner of his mouth. "Relax. They have been online for years. Is what fans do. Some are good." He grinned. "Sexy."

"Okay," Shane tried to keep his voice level. "So you're saying there are... edits about us? There have been for... years?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes. There are for lots of players. Don't worry. We're not special."

Shane couldn't believe he was only finding out about this now. Maybe he should get TikTok after all.

"You wanna watch now?" Ilya waved the remote in front of the TV. "Or do you need to check out edits on your phone?"

Determinedly, Shane shook his head. It was probably best if he didn't go down that rabbit hole. He would only end up more anxious in the end. "No, you can start."

Ilya gave him another searching look, then gently pressed his lips to Shane's forehead and hit play.

Another flash of adrenaline surged through Shane's chest. It was going to be fine.

And it was. It was weird seeing images from his childhood hockey days. From Ilya's. Shane hadn't seen those in years. Probably not since before their rookie season when he'd been slightly unhealthily obsessed with Ilya and had watched and rewatched every single scrap of video material on him that he'd been able to find. To prepare.

"Ah, memories," Ilya said, his chest vibrating with a chuckle as videos and stills from their first CCM ad campaign appeared on the screen. It made sense to have these in the documentary about their rivalry, since that had been the whole point of that campaign and the images were just objectively great.

Even after all these years, Shane could still feel a blush warm his cheeks. "I didn't even know that footage still existed," he said in an attempt to hide his embarrassment. It was futile, of course. Ilya knew him too well. Always had.

"You were so scared of wanting me," Ilya said. "Was cute."

Shane's face grew even warmer. "Shut up."

"Like little deer. Little gay deer." Ilya tenderly stroked his hand through Shane's hair.

"No I wasn't," Shane protested weakly as a shiver traveled down his spine. For a second he was back in that shower. Watching Ilya. Paralyzed. Transfixed. Overwhelmed by the sight of him. By his masculinity. The memory of Ilya's hand around his own dick sent a warm tingle to Shane's crotch.

"Yes," Ilya murmured, his lips grazing the shell of Shane's ear, and the tingling intensified. "You had little gay crisis because of me." His breath was hot and Shane's eyes fell closed for a moment.

Shane considered protesting because Ilya sounded way too smug. But he knew what would really give him back the upper hand in this. He smiled, turned his head and gazed up at Ilya.

"Wasn't little," he said as he casually traced a single finger up Ilya's thigh. "I had a very... big... hard... gay crisis because of you."

With satisfaction he watched the slight darkening of Ilya's eyes despite the snort he let out. Shane sighed. If nineteen-year-old him had known that this was where they'd end up, he would probably have died. Of laughter most likely.

"I almost feel sorry for him," Shane said, nodding at the screen where nineteen-year-old him was being welcomed by the Voyagers.

Ilya cocked an eyebrow.

"He never stood a chance."

As if on cue, nineteen-year-old Ilya appeared on the TV with his cocky grin. Shane felt himself smile in response.

Ilya's hand tightened around Shane's upper arm and his mouth pressed into Shane's hair. "No," he said. "It was me. I never stood a chance against *that* guy."

The video showed Shane smiling and celebrating his first NHL goal.

"You and your Bambi eyes and your sexy freckles and your pretty face and your eager cock."

"You're such a romantic."

"You love it."

Shane grinned. "I do."

"No, but seriously." Ilya squeezed him more tightly again. "I was lost cause. No chance."

Shane's heart flipped. He would never ever get tired of hearing it. Smiling, he kissed Ilya's stubby jaw, then said, "I feel like we've had this conversation before."

"Yes. And we will again." Ilya tilted his head and captured Shane's lips in a soft kiss with barely any heat. Still, Shane's body started humming softly as he slid his fingers into the hair at Ilya's nape and held him close for a few heartbeats.

"I will score fifty goals," TV-Ilya said and Shane couldn't help but scoff. To this day, he still considered that to be one of the most insane things Ilya had ever done.

Ilya was fully focused on the video now. "Damn, I am good," he said, nodding proudly at the montage of his most impressive first season goals.

"Annoying and obnoxious is what you are," Shane muttered as he admired the raw talent Ilya had exhibited at nineteen. His moves had been youthful, effortless. Ruthless. The amazing player he would become clearly visible already.

"You're good too," Ilya conceded when the documentary proceeded to show Shane's first season goal shots.

Shane hummed. Yes, he'd been good. Obviously. But looking at it now he mostly noticed where he'd still lacked skill and refinement.

"You would have deserved that one," Shane said when the image switched to him accepting Rookie Of The Year.

"Yes," Ilya agreed. "But they decided it was you."

Shane shook his head. "No, but... without you, without your stupid fifty goal challenge—I don't think I would have pushed myself as hard as I did."

Ilya grinned. "See. Wasn't stupid. Was fun. I think that first season was the most fun one."

"Maybe they should have given that award to both of us," Shane said. "To share. I wonder what would have happened."

"I'd have taken it and thrown it from that roof terrace because it would have been useless," Ilya said darkly.

"I almost threw *you* off that roof terrace," Shane countered.

"Me? Why?" Ilya gasped in feigned shock.

"You know why."

The corner of Ilya's mouth ticked up. "Remind me."

"Because..." Shane leaned closer, placed his hand on Ilya's chest and slowly dragged it downwards. "You were being fucking reckless. Kissing me on that terrace where anyone could have seen..."

Ilya's lips twitched slightly when Shane's hand hovered over his crotch for a moment before it came to innocently lie on top of his thigh. "I was disappointed, yes. And angry. But... Was also proud. Of you. I didn't realize then, but... I was."

"You... you were?" Ilya had never told him that. It made Shane weirdly emotional. His throat felt a little tight when he thought back to the moment he'd discovered Ilya on the roof terrace. How he'd had to silence the part of him that felt sorry for Ilya. And he realized that, even then, even that early in their rivalry when he still genuinely couldn't stand Ilya, he would have been proud of him too. Because in a weird way, it would have been a reward for Shane

as well. Playing at eye level with the best only proved that he'd chosen a worthy opponent. So in a sense, they had always elevated their rivalry and each other through their respective successes.

"I'm always proud of you," Ilya said easily.

"And I'm proud of you," Shane replied and squeezed his knee. He loved that he could tell how much Ilya loved hearing that, even though he was still too proud to admit it most of the time.

On the screen, Ilya lifted his first ever Stanley Cup in the air.

"I was proud of you there," Shane said.

Ilya hummed, his eyes fixed on the TV.

Shane felt a lump grow in his throat as he watched the tears stream down young Ilya's face. Even today, they still touched him. "I almost cried when I saw that back then. In a room full of people," he said, voice a little hoarse.

"You were jealous?" Ilya glanced down at him.

"No. Yes, but... I just saw how much it meant to you and I just..." Shane broke off and swallowed hard. It was ridiculous. He wrapped his arm more tightly around Ilya's ribs and squeezed him.

"That meant a lot to me too," Ilya said, nodding at the video in which he had just been declared MVP. He leaned closer and murmured, "And I'm not talking about the award."

Heat rose into Shane's cheeks. Sometimes he hated the fact that he seemed to turn into an entirely different person when he had sex with Ilya. A person who wasn't self-conscious or embarrassed. A person who was bold and just did what Ilya asked him to do. Or asked for what he wanted. It had become easier over the years to not get as flustered afterwards over the things his lust-clouded alter ego had done. But to this day he didn't know where he'd gotten the courage back in that Vegas hotel room at that point in their relationship, to bare himself in every way possible in front of the guy he'd still mostly hated at that point. Or that was what he'd convinced himself of.

Warmth bloomed low in Shane's abdomen and he shifted slightly, sliding his knee over Ilya's thigh, pressing himself even closer into his side. It was weird seeing their story painted on the screen the way it was, as the story of the two great rivals who couldn't have been more different. Shane snorted when there was a cut from him doing yoga in front of the lake to Ilya surrounded by his ridiculous collection of sports cars. He hated that he still kind of thought it was hot, seeing Ilya gush about a violently green car.

"You know, looking at that, we're actually kind of a cliché," Shane said with a chuckle. "The good boy and the bad guy."

"Like... beauty and the beast?" Ilya suggested with a grin.

"Hah!" Shane laughed. "Are you calling me the beast?"

Ilya rolled his eyes. "You know I'm not. You're beauty, obviously."

Shane shook his head.

Ilya threw him a scrutinizing look. "Except you don't look good in yellow."

Shane snorted and dug a finger into Ilya's side, making him yelp. Ilya quickly snatched Shane's hand and brought it up to his mouth, his teeth gently digging into Shane's finger. "Careful," he growled playfully. Before Shane could come up with a reply, his attention was drawn to the documentary again. In amazement, he watched Ilya laughing and kissing his face. In front of everyone. In the middle of the 2017 All Star game.

"That was really fucking stupid," he said. Because those two did not look like rivals. Not even a little bit. Those two looked like idiots who were lying to themselves about how madly in love they were with each other.

"Yes," Ilya agreed. "Wow. Don't think I've seen this."

The (ridiculous) commentary about how the two rivals being forced to play together had caused some serious tension washed over Shane. "How did nobody... clock us? Did you see that?"

Ilya laughed softly. "I did." His smile faded. "We looked happy."

Something cold and heavy laid itself around Shane's chest. They had looked happy. And nobody had cared. Because nobody had known. They'd thought it was a joke. They would have cared otherwise. And it wasn't fair.

It took a while until Ilya managed to shake the feeling again. He didn't know why he hadn't expected it. Maybe because he'd done such a good job of pretending it had never happened. Now he had been terribly unprepared to see Shane's lifeless body crumpled on the ice on the TV and had been forced to relive it all in the span of a few seconds with no warning. Even though Shane had comforted him and he'd found himself calming down, the shock still lingered.

The worst part was that it had reminded him that something like this might very well happen again. And potentially with a less fortunate outcome. What if it did and they'd never... been more than they were now? Still hidden, still a secret. Would they even let him into a hospital room? What if one of them—

Ilya stopped himself from going there. He turned his head, buried his nose in Shane's hair and breathed him in, eyes closed, feeling his warm, living, breathing body against him. Then he tried to focus back on the documentary. Which turned out to be difficult. He would have given anything to rewind a few minutes and go back to reminiscing and teasing. But Shane had also gone quiet and didn't seem like he was on a trip down memory lane anymore.

It was nice to have the documentary show them with their foundation and at the summer camps. For a moment, Ilya hoped that they might have ended on the friendship angle, leaving their rivalry in the past. Helping them change the narrative, opening a space for a (distant) future where it wouldn't be entirely unthinkable that Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov were in a committed, loving relationship. And in a way they did swerve from the rivalry angle. But not because they had realized that hockey players were people as well who deserved to not be pressed into a mold to fit an entertaining narrative.

No, to Ilya's dismay the filmmakers posed the question whether the rivalry would withstand Ilya playing for a shit team where he was no longer a real match for the Voyager's star player. As if Ilya had needed yet another reason to feel awful today. This whole thing had been a bad idea from the start. They should have used their precious time more wisely. Why weren't they fucking right now?

The voice-over ended with some bullshit about it being in the league's and the fans' best interest that Ilya would get traded to a better team soon, to reignite the rivalry and give Shane a worthy opponent again.

When the recording ended, neither of them said a word. Ilya could *hear* Shane think and he already knew what he was going to say even before he sat up to look at Ilya. "Don't believe them," he said as if *he* didn't believe them. Ilya could see that he did, at least part of him.

"Is true," he said with a shrug.

Shane shook his head. "No, it's not. You're still an awesome player. The best."

"They don't think so," Ilya said, nodding towards the TV. "They've decided that between the two of us it's you."

"Well, who are they to make that call?" Shane called out.

"There's no call to make. My team sucks. It's the truth. I'm still great, but without a linemate who knows what the fuck he's doing, I can't do shit. And I won't be playing you for the Cup anytime soon." He wouldn't even come close to Shane's numbers either. Not goals, not assists, not anywhere that mattered.

It was fine. Ilya had made that decision for the both of them and he didn't regret it. It wasn't like the documentary's conclusion was all that surprising to him. He'd been well aware. But from the look on Shane's face maybe *he* hadn't been.

A sudden thought sent a pang to Ilya's heart. What if Shane would feel differently about him if the realization fully settled in? That the one thing that had propelled them together, the fact that they were each other's equal on the ice, perhaps wasn't true anymore? The reason they'd fallen in love just... gone?

"Congrats," he said gruffly, urged by some cold, dark place inside of him.

Shane frowned.

"You won. You're the better player between the two of us," Ilya said stubbornly, not meeting his eyes.

"No." Shane's voice was firm.

Something in his tone made Ilya lift his head to meet his eyes.

"No," Shane repeated, just as determined. "I don't accept that." He grabbed Ilya's chin and kissed him hard, almost rough.

A blazing pulse of heat flashed through Ilya's body. Shane being aggressive and forward like this never failed to turn him on.

"If anything, it's a tie," Shane said when he pulled back. His lips shone dark in the light of the lamp.

"There's no tie in hockey," Ilya replied.

"Shut up," Shane said and climbed into Ilya's lap before crashing their mouths back together. Very effectively shutting Ilya up, except for the low groan escaping him when Shane rocked his pelvis.

Ilya pushed his tongue into Shane's mouth and shoved his hands up the back of Shane's t-shirt, desperate to feel his warm skin beneath his palms. And maybe there could be no tie in hockey and maybe Shane would ultimately be known as the better player. But in this, in sex, they were equals. Always. And maybe today Ilya needed the proof, needed to reassure himself that that held true even if he allowed Shane to take control.

Breaking the kiss, Ilya mouthed his way along Shane's smooth jaw and sucked on the spot he knew drove Shane crazy just below his ear. He was rewarded with a breathy moan and a hand blindly fumbling at his waistband. Briefly, he dug his teeth into Shane's earlobe, before pressing his lips to his ear and murmuring, "I want you to ride me."

"Fuck," Shane cursed, grinding into Ilya's lap.

"Yes," Ilya managed, a little less calm and collected than he had intended as arousal flooded him.

Shane attacked his neck with hard, open-mouthed kisses. Closing his eyes, Ilya tilted his head back, to give Shane's hungry lips better access, while he wrapped his hands tightly around Shane's hips, holding him in place. He rocked his own pelvis, chasing friction for his aching cock. Moaning, Shane dropped his forehead onto Ilya's collarbone, then captured his mouth in a deep, filthy kiss.

When he was finally moving on top of Ilya a while later, riding him hard and fast, his hands twisting in Ilya's hair, and Ilya was meeting him, thrusting his hips upwards, pulling him down by his shoulders, Ilya's mind finally went quiet. Nothing mattered except the increasingly desperate sounds passing Shane's parted lips and the feeling of his own release building inside of him. This was perfect. They were perfect.

"Ilya, I'm—" Shane gasped, his hips stuttering. "Fuck. So close..."

"Is alright," Ilya breathed, "me too." He leaned his head against the couch and glanced up at Shane's beautiful, flushed face. *Stunning*. Tightening his grip on Shane's shoulders he thrust upwards just as Shane pushed down and they crashed over the edge, together, eyes locked, their names on each other's lips.

End Notes

Thank you for reading 💜

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