

Lessons in Courting

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Lessons in Courting

by [marie_pothos](#)

Summary

When Ilya Rozanov arrives in London during the Courting Season, he has no intentions of finding a spouse.

Then, he sees Shane Hollander.

5 Times Ilya courted Shane, and 1 time he didn't have to

Notes

Listen. I'm playing fast and loose with this regency au. Nothing is factual. I took all my inspiration from Bridgeton which I haven't watched in three years. Homophobia doesn't exist in this universe. You're either a Courter (and you do the courting) or you're a Courtee (you get courted)

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

Ilya Rozanov stepped out of the carriage and gazed up at the house in front of him. Large, red bricked with vines growing up the sides, it looked exactly as Svetlana had described it in her letters. The carriage trundled away around the corner to the back of the house where the stables would be, Ilya assumed. He turned in a slow circle, admiring the neighborhood square. There were plenty of people out for afternoon strolls and many were shooting him interested, curious glances.

Many of which were hopeful Courtees. Ilya grinned to himself. Coming to London had been his best idea yet. When Svetlana had moved and written to him about the balls, the parties, the elegant women and beautiful men, the Courting Season, he knew there was nowhere else he wanted to be more.

“Ilyushenka!”

Ilya turned back to the house, his smile widening as Svetlana made her way down the front steps. He strode quickly to greet her, pulling her into a tight hug.

“You made it,” she said, pulling back from him and examining his face. “The trip was fine?”

“Da, trip was fine,” he replied. He held out his arm and she took it, leading him back into the house.

“Everything you wanted has arrived,” she informed him. There was a line of servants waiting in the corridor for him. A matronly woman stepped forward and Svetlana gestured towards her. “This is Mrs. Smith. She takes care of household.”

Ilya took her hand and bowed over it, pressing a kiss to her knuckles. “I will be most honored for you to run the household, Mrs. Smith.”

A beaming smile stole across Mrs. Smith's face. "Well, Lord Rozanov, aren't you a dear," she said as he stood up.

"Wait a bit," Svetlana said, "it will wear off." Mrs. Smith laughed heartily, and waved the pair away. The servants dispersed throughout the house, seemingly carrying on with their daily chores.

"When is the first ball?" Ilya asked, glancing around the foyer. "There are many Courtees I am ready to meet."

"If you want to find a spouse, you must take it seriously," Svetlana warned. Ilya followed her across the hall into his new study, his shoes clicking across the tiled floor. "The English, they are, strict with their rules."

Ilya frowned. "I read your letters. I know rules."

Svetlana sighed, dropping down into an armchair. Ilya sat across from her, running his fingers lightly over the cushions. It was nice. Svetlana had done a good job.

"There are," she struggled to find the words, "hidden rules as well. Like when you arrive at a Courtee's house, you must bring a gift. Usually flowers, sometimes pastries. But no one tells you this when you arrive! It is known, but unknown."

Ilya turned this thought over in his mind. Hidden rules. He had arrived in London hoping for a few Courting Seasons to have fun and meet many beautiful people. Maybe find a mistress or lover or two. But hidden rules could make things harder for him.

"There is a ball tonight," Svetlana said, drawing him out of his reverie. "Hosted by the Hollanders. Very important family. Their son, Shane, is debuting this season. Everyone thought he would wait until he turned 20 to be a Courter, but he announced that he was being a Courtee and shocked many. Very interesting."

“I hope he finds nice spouse,” Ilya said uninterestedly, poking at the side table. The cabinet swung open and he saw his favorite vodka hidden within. He exclaimed delightedly, and knelt to grab some glasses.

“A drink before we go, yes?” He turned over his shoulder to Svetlana.

“Of course,” she replied, shrugging. “We drink to you finding a spouse, maybe finally settling down.”

Ilya snorted. “Maybe next year. Or year after that. Or year after that.”

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Ilya descended the carriage steps and held his hand out for Svetlana who took it gratefully. Her pale yellow dress hugged her figure attractively, and she rolled her shoulders back, tossing her hair over her shoulders.

“You look lovely,” Ilya reassured her. She squeezed his hands through their gloves and allowed him to escort her to the ball. The house was grander than anything Ilya had seen and he found himself begrudgingly impressed by this Hollander family.

An older couple stood near the door, greeting the guests as they made their way into the ballroom. Ilya watched them smiling graciously and determined that they were the Viscount and Viscountess Hollander. The woman was standing with her arm in her husband’s arm, a light shimmering blue ball gown draping elegantly to the floor. A silver shawl wrapped around her narrow shoulders and her hair was in a swirl on the back of her head. The Viscount was in a formal suit, but when he turned, Ilya saw a flash of silver and blue from inside the coat. A subtle match to his wife.

“Good evening, Viscount, Viscountess,” Svetlana curtsied gracefully and then stepped back to introduce Ilya. “This is my cousin, Ilya Rozanov. He has just moved to London and is entering the Courting Season.”

The Viscount and Viscountess both turned beaming smiles onto Ilya. He bowed at the waist and smiled. "Thank you for inviting me into your lovely home this evening," he said, hoping his accent wasn't too thick to be understood.

"The pleasure is ours, sir," Viscountess Hollander replied. "Any relation of Svetlana is a friend of ours."

"Please enjoy yourself," Viscount Hollander said, and Ilya extended his arm again to Svetlana and escorted her into the room.

"Cousin?" Ilya murmured to her as he tried to take in the opulent ballroom. The room was decorated in glittering candelabras and colorful fabric draped along the columns. The candles reflected in the many window panes, creating a sea of shimmering lights.

"Da," Svetlana returned. "Another hidden English rule. If we are family, we can escort each other to places. If we are not family, we must always have a chaperone since we are both unmarried. Is a stupid rule, but one I am not willing to break."

"Ah," Ilya replied. "Then, I will be the best cousin. No one will compare." Svetlana rolled her eyes and led him across the room. There was a quartet playing light music in one corner of the room, and a table full of refreshments in another. Svetlana took two glasses of champagne and handed one over to Ilya.

Several hours passed as Svetlana introduced Ilya to various people. There were too many names for Ilya to remember, nor did he try very hard. He flirted, he charmed, he kissed the hands of both men and women when they approached him. At some point, Svetlana excused them from a rather boring conversation to get more drinks.

As they turned back to survey the room, a man caught Ilya's eye. Strong shouldered, dark hair that had been styled off his forehead, his evening suit hugged his figure perfectly. He was talking with a young man and woman who were laughing, but he appeared to be nervous or uncomfortable. A hesitant smile was forming on his face and Ilya knew at once that he needed to be closer to him.

“Who is that?” he said to Svetlana in Russian, nodding at the man with his head. She turned, glancing across the room.

“Ah, Lord Hollander. Shane. The son of the hosts.” She eyed Ilya with a smirk on her face. *“He is entering his first Courting Season this year.”* She batted her eyes innocently at him, *“He is very handsome, yes?”*

“Introduce me to him,” Ilya demanded. Svetlana laughed, threw back the last of her champagne and began to lead Ilya across the room. Ilya hurriedly deposited his own glass on a nearby table, taking some time to straighten his suit and hair.

As they approached, Shane only became more beautiful. His eyes were a deep brown, and there were, to Ilya’s delight, a smattering of freckles across his cheekbones and the bridge of his nose. He stood a few inches shorter than Ilya, which was not an issue because Ilya could see this would make him all the easier to kiss.

“Lord Hollander, I would like to introduce you to my cousin, Sir Ilya Rozanov.” Svetlana gestured to Ilya and Shane turned to greet him. He held out his hand for Ilya to grasp, but Ilya brought it up to his lips. He pressed a gentle kiss to the knuckles of Shane’s glove. A flush worked its way across Shane’s cheeks, making the freckles stand out more.

“I would like very much to court you,” Ilya stated. Shane sputtered and Svetlana snorted in a very unladylike fashion behind him. *“You are very pretty, and I think we would be a good match,”* Ilya finished. There, courting had begun successfully.

Shane gaped at him. He collected himself and put on a winning smile that strained at the edges. *“Sir Rozanov, while you may think that, there are rules that must be followed during the Season.”* His voice was steady, but Ilya could hear the hidden depths beneath them. Ilya smiled at him.

“I love rules, will you teach them to me?” Ilya replied. Shane tugged his hand out of Ilya’s and Ilya frowned. He reached for Shane’s hand again, and his frown deepened when Shane took a step away from him. This was not going how he thought.

“No, I cannot teach you the rules,” Shane hissed, glancing around nervously. “I have a reputation to maintain and a match to make this season. I do not have time to teach you.”

“Ah, but if you do not teach me, how will we marry,” Ilya grinned at Shane. He made sure it was his most winning smile. Shane’s eyes darted down to his lips for a brief second. Ilya felt his heart begin to beat faster. He leaned forward towards Shane, but at the last moment, Shane seemed to remember where he was and took another step back.

“Sir, you are most forward,” Shane said unhappily. He looked uncertain, as if no one had ever told him their direct thoughts before.

Ilya looked at him curiously. “Will it make you happy if I learn the rules?”

“Yes,” Shane replied shortly.

“Then, I will learn for you, *moy pomidor*,” Ilya declared. “I will learn your rules and court you. This will make you happy?”

Shane gritted his teeth, “Yes. Now go far away from here.” He bit out the last words, his eyes glittering with frustration.

Ilya nodded and gave Shane a bow. “You will see me again, Lord Hollander.” He turned to Svetlana, “Come, I must learn now.”

Svetlana rolled her eyes and gave a short curtsy to Shane. “My apologies, Lord Hollander. I hope the rest of your evening is pleasant.” Shane bowed to Svetlana and Ilya, and then turned to disappear into the crowd.

“You should not tease him,” Svetlana scolded as Ilya led her back towards their carriage. Ilya shot a glance back over his shoulder, one last glimpse of Shane Hollander. To his delight, Shane was watching them leave, ignoring the man next to him who seemed to be chattering

away. Ilya winked at him, and Shane turned quickly away. Ilya was sure that the other man was blushing.

“Was not teasing,” Ilya replied, looking for his coachman, as they stepped out into the night air. “I will marry Shane Hollander by the end of this season. He is my husband.”

Svetlana shot him a look. “Lesson one, do not declare that strange men are your husbands. No one else will want to be courted by you.”

“Is fine,” Ilya said, helping Svetlana into their carriage. “There is no one else I will court.”

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Lesson One: A walk in the park is the best chance to get to know your Courtee or Courter.

Ilya and Svetlana were strolling casually along the park path, nodding and greeting people along the way. Ilya was thrumming with impatience, glancing in various directions every few minutes, trying to catch a glimpse of Shane.

“*You said he would be here,*” he hissed unhappily in Russian. The only reason he had awoken so early was because Svetlana had told him the night before that many Courting pairs took to the park to get to know each other. It was a safe and public location, often with chaperones following behind them.

“*I assumed he would be,*” Svetlana replied. “*I never said he would be, just that there was a strong possibility that he would at some point take a walk in the park.*” She nodded at a pair of passing ladies who smiled prettily back at her. Ilya glowered at his feet.

“*So, what? Am I supposed to live in the park until Shane maybe decides to come visit?*” his unhappy tone had his voice rising and Svetlana shot him a warning glance.

“Call him Lord Hollander in public. You would not want to ruin his reputation before you get to know him.”

Ilya groaned and Sveltana prodded him in the ribs. *“Stand up straight. People will talk if you behave like a child in public. What will you do when Lord Hollander hears of this behavior?”*

Ilya straightened up immediately. *“You think people would tell him about me?”*

Sveltana rolled her eyes. *“After your performance last night? I’m sure they will.”*

Ilya sighed, but smiled politely at the next few groups of people they passed. Svetlana stopped a few times to introduce Ilya to people he hadn’t met at the ball or to greet a few of her friends. Ilya played along, smiling and charming as best as he could. But, he knew his heart wasn’t in it. He only wanted to see a dark haired man with freckles.

Finally, *finally*, Ilya felt Svetlana tense against his side, and she whispered, *“There he is.”*

Ilya’s head whipped up, his eyes darting across his surroundings until he saw him. Shane Hollander. He looked incredible in a dark blue coat that fell to his thighs. A white collared shirt peeked out from a black waistcoat that hugged his figure tightly. Black pants were tucked into tall riding boots and Ilya had to stop himself from sighing happily.

He tugged at Svetlana, trying to hurry her forward, but she yanked him back. *“Stop that. Can’t you see he’s with another?”*

Ilya dragged his gaze off of Shane finally to take in the taller man standing next to him. He was old. That was all Ilya saw. And talking to Shane with a gentle smile which Ilya decidedly hated. He watched as the man gave Shane a bouquet of flowers and Shane promptly sneezed several times in succession.

“Who is that?” he asked Sveltana. *“Why is Lord Hollander talking to such an old man?”*

Svetlana sighed in exasperation. *“That is Lord Scott Hunter. He is not that old and he is one of the most eligible bachelors in the city right now. Lord Hollander could not do much better.”*

Ilya shot her a look of fury, and she patted his arm. *“Let’s follow them and wait for an opening,”* she murmured. She began her leisurely stroll in the pair’s direction, and Ilya noticed a woman following behind the two Lords as well. At some point, she had taken the bouquet from Shane and was holding it for him. *“Lord Hollander’s chaperone,”* Svetlana whispered. Ilya nodded to himself, now he knew who he needed to bribe for a moment alone with Shane.

Following at a sedate pace, Svetlana and Ilya watched as Lord Hunter made, what appeared to be, charming conversation, and Shane replied. Ilya noticed with some satisfaction that Shane seemed hesitant to answer, or as if he was picking his words carefully. Nothing like the heated barbs he had thrown at Ilya at the ball the previous night. Shane’s shoulders were set in a tense line and all Ilya wanted to do was to swoop in and relax him.

As the pair in front of him approached the dock, Ilya noticed a host of people waiting in line for boats. Ilya wrinkled his nose. Why would anyone want to be rowed around in a small, dingy boat in the middle of a London pond, was beyond him. But, if Shane had asked it of him, Ilya would have rowed him across an ocean.

Lord Hunter stepped away to procure a boat, and Ilya saw his chance. Shane stood staring out over the pond, and took a deep breath. Rolling his shoulders back, he forced himself to relax and here was Ilya’s moment. He sidled up to Shane, and said, “So, how would I court you properly at a park?”

Shane jumped, and turned to glare at Ilya. Ilya felt his heart beat quicken as Shane’s eyes fell on him. “Lord Rozanov,” he greeted with a bow, and Ilya returned it impatiently.

“Well?” he asked again, and Shane looked at him in exasperation.

“Why did you bother coming to London to join the Courting Season if you do not know the rules?” Shane shot back.

“Ah, well, I did not plan to Court anyone. But, I saw you and changed my mind,” Ilya said with a grin.

A flush worked its way across Shane’s freckles and Ilya felt his heart melt a little at the way Shane’s eyes darted across his face. Shane’s jaw tightened and he glanced to where Lord Hunter was still waiting for a boat.

“You are very direct,” Shane said.

Ilya frowned. “Is that so bad?”

Shane frowned, a furrow creasing in between his brows. “I am simply unused to it.” He seemed to struggle with himself for a moment then continued. “Not everyone says what they mean, and it makes life here very difficult at times.”

“I see,” Ilya said. “I will always be direct with you then, Lord Hollander. Is important to you, is important to me.”

A look of surprise darted across Shane’s face, followed by a shy smile as he ducked his head away from Ilya. Ilya beamed, glancing over his shoulder to where Svetlana was chatting with Shane’s chaperone, keeping her from intervening.

“So, Courting you, yes?” Ilya continued. Shane looked at him directly now. “I come to your parents’ house, and what? We talk?”

Shane rolled his eyes, a bemused smile dancing across his face. “You could ask me about my interests or hobbies.”

“What are your interests or hobbies?” Ilya asked dutifully.

“Fencing,” Shane replied immediately, then blanched. He glanced around nervously. Ilya looked at him curiously, and Shane sighed. “It’s not proper for a man of my standing in society to be engaging in violent acts.” It sounded rehearsed.

“You talked to Lord Hunter about fencing?” Ilya asked and Shane shook his head. “Very good, we keep it between us.” Ilya winked, and saw that Lord Hunter was approaching in a boat, rowing steadily towards where they were standing on the dock.

“Ah, here he is. Have fun in your boat, Lord Hollander.” Shane grimaced and then put a smile on his face that seemed almost like a mask to Ilya. “I will see you soon, *moy rytsar’*.” He turned and walked back up the dock towards Svetlana, bowing to Shane’s chaperone, then taking Svetlana’s arm and leading her out of the park.

“*Well?*” Svetlana asked, as they made their way to the busy streets of London.

“*It went very well. I need to find a sword maker now.*”

“*What?*”

—

Lesson Two: Never arrive at your Courtee’s house empty handed. Flowers or even a small gift shows your intentions.

Ilya walked up the front steps of the Hollander’s house, his long package tucked under one arm. Several footmen loitered outside, clearly waiting for their employees to leave the Hollander home. Ilya tried not to sigh as he counted ten men. It meant there were at least ten Courters inside of the house waiting to speak to Shane.

As he feared, when the butler took his card and led him into the foyer, there was a line of men waiting down the hallway. Almost all of them were carrying flowers. Ilya let himself feel a tad smug then. None of them had noticed that Shane was clearly allergic. He knew his intended better than the rest.

Taking up residence on a chair at the further end of the hallway, Ilya watched the other men quietly converse amongst each other. Lord Hunter was standing next to a much younger man, much closer to Ilya's age. There were several other men Ilya recognized from the ball, but none that he was willing to speak with. He pursed his lips and took a breath, settling down to wait for some time.

A woman bustled out of the sitting room, closing the door behind her. Ilya leaned out of his seat to hear her more clearly as she spoke. "Gentlemen, Lord Hollander will return momentarily. He is taking a few moments to refresh himself." She began to stride down the hallway towards Ilya, and he managed to catch her attention.

"Excuse me, Miss Martha," Ilya said, and the woman glanced at him in astonishment. This was Shane's chaperone from the previous week. Ilya had made sure to demand all the details from Svetlana's short conversation with her. She was clearly unused to the men calling her by her name.

"Yes, Lord," she paused.

"Rozanov," Ilya supplied.

"Oh, yes, Lord Rozanov," she said, a sudden smile dancing across her face. "It's nice to put a face to a name, sir. How may I help you?"

Ilya bit his lip to tamp down on his grin. Shane had been speaking about him. "I wanted to know, if it is possible, I may meet Lord Hollander last? I have a surprise for him." He patted his long package and Martha raised an eyebrow.

"Well, I'm sure I can arrange that, Lord Rozanov. May I ask why?"

Leaning in conspiratorially, Ilya whispered, "I bought Lord Hollander present. Better than flowers. He will not sneeze at my present."

A pleased look settled across Martha's face. "I see you understand why Lord Hollander needed to take a break. I've been having to throw out all his bouquets in between visitors." She hesitated, "You do know, Lord Rozanov, that if someone arrives after you, and I invite them in first, it will look like Lord Hollander is snubbing you."

Ilya paused, he was sure Svetlana had taught him this word, snubbing. "It will look like he does not wish to see me, yes?" He looked at her worriedly, hoping he translated the word correctly.

"Yes, sir. That is how it will appear. But, between you and I," Martha leaned down to whisper, "I think Lord Hollander will be most excited to see you. Especially if you brought him what I believe you brought him."

Ilya nodded in approval. "I do not care. People thinking the worst of me is no matter. I need to be the last man to see Sha- Lord Hollander today." He hoped she didn't catch his near slip of Shane's first name.

Martha stood up again, her eyes twinkling in approval. "I will do my best, sir. Shall I let Lord Hollander know that you are waiting for him?"

"Whatever you think is best," Ilya shrugged. "I do not wish for him to be impatient. But, I do not wish for his surprise to be ruined," he warned playfully.

Marth nodded her head, pleased. "Of course, Lord Rozanov. Now, please excuse me, sir, I have to hide more bouquets." She hurried off down the hallway and Ilya settled back down in his seat, ready and excited to wait.

Hours passed, and Ilya remained seated as men entered and exited the Hollander home. Many of them watched Ilya suspiciously out of the corner of their eyes. As the day dragged on, many of the looks turned to pity or smug smirks. Martha had been right, many of them believed that Shane was refusing to meet with Ilya.

Lord Hunter had even stopped by on his way out. “Try not to worry too much, Lord Rozanov,” he said, as he adjusted his riding coat. “Lord Hollander is sure to meet with you soon.”

“And you shall meet your grave soon, old man,” Ilya replied in Russian. Lord Hunter looked at him in confusion. “Thank you for the good words,” Ilya replied, his eyes widening in pretended innocence. “My English is not so good. Good words? Words that are to make me feel better, yes?”

“Advice,” muttered Lord Hunter, looking around in embarrassment.

“Advice!” Ilya cried loudly, catching the attention of the remaining men in the hallway. “Such a simple word, and yet, I forget. Silly of me.” Lord Hunter murmured his goodbyes, and quickly departed. Ilya sniffed in condescension. Maybe now the ancient being would not bother him anymore. Hopefully, he would go court someone his own age.

Finally, Martha opened the door, after the last man had left the hallway. “Lord Rozanov? Are you ready?” Ilya’s heart began to pound in his chest as he stood up and made his way into the sitting room.

Shane was standing near the fireplace, quickly wiping his nose on a handkerchief. He looked momentarily embarrassed, and then a smile graced his face as Ilya entered the room. “Good afternoon, Lord Rozanov. I hear that you waited a long time to see me today.” Martha bustled around the room, gathering bouquets into her arms and passing them to servants who stood at the opposite end of the room.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed. “I waited a long time, but was worth it. I brought you something.” He saw Martha close the door on the last of the servants, settling down in a chair across the room from them. At least there was the illusion of privacy.

“Not flowers, I hope,” Shane muttered, and Ilya laughed. A flush worked its way across Shane’s cheeks and Ilya felt his smile grow wider.

“No, flowers make you sneeze. Why would I bring you flowers? I want you to marry me, not sneeze on me.”

On the other end of the room, Ilya saw Martha start with surprise at his words, but Shane just rolled his eyes. “Flowers are an appropriate courting gift, Lord Rozanov.”

“Call me Ilya,” Ilya asked, his tone just shy of begging.

Shane’s eyebrows flew up. “That would be a bit presumptuous of me, isn’t it?” He couldn’t seem to help the smile that grew across his face as he watched Ilya.

“I like presumptuous,” Ilya declared.

Shane chuckled and gestured to the couch as he sat on one side. Ilya stepped forward and presented Shane with his present. Shane frowned slightly. “Lord Rozanov, this may be too much.”

Ilya waved his hand impatiently. “Open it first, then decide if it is too much, yes?”

Shane carefully unwrapped the string tying the box shut. Upon opening the box, his mouth fell open in shock. “Ilya,” he breathed, his eyes still focused on the contents. “Oh! I mean, Lord Rozanov, I sincerely apologize,” his eyes darted up to look at Ilya nervously.

“I like it,” Ilya said softly, taking a seat opposite. He watched as Shane’s eyes darted down to the present, delight sparkling in his eyes.

“It’s not proper,” Shane said. Ilya rolled his eyes this time. Shane’s attention was already back at the two fencing swords nestled in the gift wrapping. Ilya had spent an entire morning with a designer he had found in the city, discussing the proper swords to get for someone who had never fought before. Which swords to start with and then which Ilya could come back and purchase after Shane had improved past basic beginning skills.

“Is it right?” he asked, gesturing toward the box. “I do not know if I bought right swords.”

“In fencing, they’re called foils,” Shane corrected, glancing at Ilya.

“Tell me more,” Ilya said, shifting slightly towards Shane. Shane’s eyes lit up, and he held one of the foils across his lap, showing the finer details of the sword to Ilya. It was when Shane was demonstrating the proper hold that his eyes caught on a detail on the grip. He quickly brought the handle up closer to his eyes.

“Are these my initials?” he asked, his eyes widening. There, glistening on the polished silver were the small scripted letters, S.H.

“Yes,” Ilya said. “I wanted everyone to know that they were yours. And, now you cannot give them back. I have no use for swords with your initials on them.”

Shane’s eyes met Ilya’s and they shone with wonder as Ilya felt his heart lighten. This was a good gift. He was glad that he had waited for this moment with Shane. Shane smiled at him, and let out a disbelieving laugh.

“What?” Ilya questioned.

“No, nothing. It’s such a thoughtful gift.” Shane ran a finger appreciatively along the blade. “No one has brought me anything with myself actually in mind.”

“Ah, this was easy for me.” Ilya winked as Shane looked up in confusion. “You are always on my mind.”

“Dear lord,” Shane muttered, shaking his head as the tips of his ears turned as red as his cheeks. Ilya grinned in appreciation. He stood up clapping his hands together.

“Now, you will show me how to fight, yes?” Shane hesitated, looking towards Martha, who was sitting in the back of the room.

“If you and Lord Rozanov happen to slip off to the courtyard, I would know nothing about it,” she informed Shane. She winked at Ilya as Shane looked down nervously.

“Shane,” Ilya murmured. Shane looked back up at him, his eyes shining in the afternoon sun streaming in through the windows. “I would very much like to spend more time with you. Listening to your interests and hobbies.”

Shane ducked his head shyly, and stood up, collecting the foils in his hands. “Then, let us depart for the courtyard, Ilya.” He added Ilya’s name to the end of his sentence nervously, hopefully. Ilya beamed at him, holding out his arm to escort Shane to wherever he would take him.

“We shall, how do you English say, cross swords?”

Shane jolted, “Jesus Christ.” Ilya laughed all the way down the hallway and out into the sun.

Lesson Three: It is always important to get to know your Courtee’s family .

Ilya poked his head into the formal dining room, glancing quickly over his shoulder as he snuck inside and closed the door behind him. The room was full of candelabras, glittering flames winking at his covert crime. Ilya hurried along the dining room table, laid out with intricate china dishes and silver utensils.

After Shane had taught him how to fence, and Ilya had made a fool out of himself for the man, Shane had shyly asked if Ilya would be attending the Landrys’ dinner in the upcoming week. Ilya had reassured him that he would in fact be there, and then spent three days with Svetlana securing their invitations.

Ilya and Svetlana had arrived promptly, and Shane had brought his parents over to introduce them to Ilya, again. It felt more significant somehow than their quick meeting at their ball several weeks ago now. Viscount Hollander had shook Ilya's hand and had made a comment about how nice it was to finally meet him. Ilya had shot a confused glance at Shane, because surely the Viscount remembered meeting Ilya before, but Shane was staring at the floor with a flush growing across his cheeks.

Ilya had done his best to be charming and respectful; the Viscountess had given him several smiles he had hoped were approving. He knew that if he truly wanted to marry Shane, he would have to win the approval of his parents first.

So, it had been a nightmare when Ilya had asked Shane if he could sit with him that night, and Shane had replied, "Lady Landry has given us all places at her table. There will be namecards, so there's no need to worry about where to sit." He had given such a winning smile, that Ilya had been helpless not to smile back.

Ilya had excused himself and that was where he found himself now. Crouching over a dining room table, trying to read place cards by candlelight. He had found Shane's and his parents' cards easily enough, they were towards the right end of the long table; however, he was struggling to find his own.

He was making his way down the table when the door opened and a serving boy walked in, silverware in hand. Ilya stood up straight, shocked by the interruption, and the young boy halted in his steps.

"You aren't supposed to be in here," the boy said, suspicion and nerves clouding his voice. Ilya grimaced, and tried to think quickly.

"Is true. But, if you help me, I will reward you."

The serving boy crossed his arms. "What would I do?"

"I want to find my card and move it," Ilya explained, still not daring to move.

Confusion landed on the boy's face. "Why?" he asked.

"For love," Ilya responded, and the boy grimaced.

"Gross." He flushed and bowed quickly. "Sorry, my lord. I meant no offense."

Ilya waved him aside and then said, "I will give you all the money in my pocket right now to help me."

The boy's eyes widened and he hurriedly put the silverware he was carrying down on the table. "Done. What's your name, sir?"

"Rozanov, Ilya Rozanov." The boy nodded once, and quickly began making his way up the opposite side of the table from Ilya.

After a few seconds, "Sir, here you are!" Ilya strode over to where the boy was standing.

"Excellent, thank you," he glanced down at the boy, pausing expectantly.

"Luca Haas, sir."

"Mister Haas, thank you so much. I will take my card and move it now." Ilya walked back over towards Shane's card, grabbing the card of someone named Kip. He placed it back down in his old spot, and seeing that he had originally been seated next to Scott Hunter, grinned at the success of his plan.

"Mister Haas, one more favor I must ask of you," Ilya said, and Luca stood up straighter, his brown hair flopping across his forehead. Ilya pointed to Kip and Scott's cards, which were next to each other. "Will this arrangement cause problems?"

Luca pondered this seriously, and Ilya felt warmth trickle through his chest at the serious expression on his face.

“No, sir. Lord Hunter is a Courter and brought no family, and Lord Grady is a Courtee in his third year. I don’t believe this will cause any scandals.”

“Excellent,” Ilya reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a wad of bills. Luca’s eyes went round.

“For your hard work, and your silence,” Ilya said, pressing the bills into Luca’s hands. Luca’s mouth was agape.

“Sir, I don’t know how to explain this to my mother.”

“Tell her someone was very impressed with you,” Ilya shrugged. “Is the truth.” He turned to sneak back out of the room, but not before he saw the grin spreading across Luca’s face.

Closing the door quietly behind him, Ilya returned to the drawing room where almost all of the guests were congregating, waiting for the dinner bell. He quickly located Shane, and inserted himself back into his conversation.

“Where did you go?” Shane asked, a demanding hint to his voice that sent a thrill down Ilya’s spine. He saw the Viscountess raise an eyebrow at Shane’s rudeness, but he didn’t acknowledge it.

“I had matters I had to take care of,” Ilya replied. He gently tugged Shane’s hand up to his lips and pressed a soft kiss to his knuckles. “I believe I will be able to give you my full attention now.”

A grin stole across Shane's face, and Ilya turned back to apologize to Shane's parents for leaving, but the words died in his throat. The Viscount and Viscountess were looking at Ilya with such warmth, that he was unsure of how to respond.

"I believe I must talk with Lady Landry," the Viscountess said suddenly. She smiled graciously at Ilya. "I want to make sure you are seated with us tonight. I believe we may have much to discuss with each other." She swept away as the Viscount watched her fondly depart.

"Lord Rozanov, tell me all about these fencing swords you bought for Shane," the Viscount said, turning to Ilya, a knowing gleam in his eye. Ilya worried for a moment that he had gotten Shane in trouble. Was he not supposed to have the swords? He glanced nervously at Shane, who was rolling his eyes at his father. Ilya assumed that everything was fine and turned back to the Viscount.

"Ah, they are actually called 'foils,'" Ilya corrected. He turned back to Shane, "Lord Hollander taught me this."

"Did he now?" the Viscount said with amusement. "I wonder when he had the time to teach you."

"Father," Shane grumbled, just as his mother returned. She reached for Ilya's arm and he extended it quickly, as the dinner bell rang, summoning the crowd into the dining room.

"It has all been arranged," she said to Ilya. "I explained to Lady Landry that we simply couldn't stop our conversation. She understood completely."

Ilya shot a quick look over his shoulder at Shane, who was following them out of the room with a bemused smile hiding in his lips.

"Now, Lord Rozanov, have you ever attended the opera?"

Ilya turned his full attention back to the woman on his arm. “Never once. Please, tell me everything. We have all evening.”

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Lesson Four: Be seen in public with your Courtee. It makes your intentions clear to everyone.

Ilya paced impatiently outside of the London Opera House, his coattails rustling in the balmy summer breeze. The Viscountess had invited him to the opera to sit in the Hollanders’ box the previous night at the dinner. Shane had looked at him eagerly and Ilya had barely been able to tear his eyes away to accept the Viscountess’ offer. He tugged on his gloves anxiously, peering down the street for the hundredth time.

Finally, he saw the carriage in the distance, and he forced himself to relax his shoulders. Ilya took a step back from the street and waited as patiently as he could, his hands clasped behind his back. The carriage rolled to a stop in front of him, and Ilya forced himself to wait for the coachman to open the doors.

The Viscount emerged first, smiling jovially at Ilya, and shaking his hand quickly before turning back to the carriage. He offered his arm to his wife, who descended gracefully from the carriage, giving Ilya a quick embrace. Ilya had hoped that her invitation had meant that the Hollanders approved of him courting their only son, but as the Viscountess smiled at him, he knew he had won their support.

A smile grew across Ilya’s face as he turned back to the carriage. Shane was beginning to descend the steps, and Ilya hurried to extend his hand. Shane rolled his eyes, but took Ilya’s gloved hand in his own.

“Good evening, Lord Rozanov. Were you waiting long?” Shane stepped onto the pavement next to Ilya, and didn’t immediately drop his hand. Ilya felt his breath catch as Shane’s gloved thumb rubbed Ilya’s knuckles soothingly.

“No,” Ilya said too quickly, and Shane raised an eyebrow in suspicion.

“Ah, I was waiting long, but was worth it,” Ilya admitted. Shane grinned at him, ducking his head and squeezing Ilya’s hand. Ilya turned and drew Shane’s arm through his, guiding him towards the building. Shane’s parents were standing a little ways off, smiling at the pair approaching them.

“I have never been to the opera,” Ilya said, as the group began making their way into the building. He gently tried to tug Shane closer to his side, but Shane insisted on keeping a respectable amount of space between them. Ilya sighed, but felt heartened when Shane chuckled at his efforts.

“Sit by me, and I shall translate for you,” Shane murmured as they made their way up the ornate staircase. “This opera in particular I have seen before, so I should be able to help you as well.”

Without thinking, Ilya brought Shane’s hand up to his lips and pressed a kiss to his knuckles. “Thank you, *dorogoy*.” He felt Shane suck in a breath and he glanced over to meet his eyes. Shane’s hand was still pressed to Ilya’s lips and he could feel the warmth bleed through Shane’s glove. He wanted nothing more than to take the glove off and feel Shane’s skin beneath his lips. To taste his skin on his tongue and press kisses up his hand, to his arm, then his neck.

Ilya forced himself to place Shane’s hand back on his arm. He worried for a moment before he saw the heat in Shane’s eyes. Suddenly, Ilya became aware that he would be sitting rather close to Shane in a darkened room for several hours. With Shane’s parents in the same room. That helped calm him down a bit.

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Lesson Five: Be sure to dance with your Courtee. Do not forget to respect their dance card.

Ilya sipped at his glass of champagne as he eyed the ballroom around him. It was full of flowers draping across every surface, interspersed with candles causing the entire room to feel dreamy. He grimaced. Shane would be sneezing all night. He did not approve of these decorations.

“The Viscount, Viscountess, and Lord Hollander!” the doorman announced to the ballroom, and Ilya’s heart lodged in his throat as he saw the Hollander family make their way down the marble staircase to the floor below. Shane was a few steps behind his parents, wearing an evening suit of a deep, dark green. It made his hair look all the darker and Ilya was sure that when he got closer, it would make his brown eyes more vibrant.

A crowd of people descended on the Hollanders as they stepped onto the floor, and Ilya saw Shane smiling mechanically at several ladies who were using fans to demurely hide their faces. He watched as Shane peered above the crowd, searching for something. Searching for him, Ilya realized in the same instant, and he took a step forward.

Shane saw him, and his smile became real as their eyes met across the room. Ilya quickly walked towards the group, and carefully inserted himself in between a few of the ladies.

“Ladies, you must excuse me,” he said, offering Shane his hand. “I have important things to discuss with Lord Hollander.” Shane took his hand gratefully, and let himself be dragged out of the group. He smiled up at Ilya, and Ilya felt some satisfaction in knowing that he had been right. The green did make Shane’s eyes more vibrant.

“Good evening, Lord Rozanov,” Shane said, politely.

“Yes, is a good evening now,” Ilya replied, delighted when Shane blushed.

Ilya led Shane over to the side of the ballroom, where plenty of people were chatting with each other. They watched the dancing couples swirl around for a few moments when Ilya remembered something.

“Show me your dance card,” he said, his fingers itching to grab at the card dangling from Shane’s wrist. The card that would indicate who Shane would be dancing with for the different songs all evening. He was free to pencil in anyone he liked, but some men would have asked for Shane to save them a dance earlier this week.

Shane raised an eyebrow at him, and Ilya huffed. “Please, show me your dance card,” he requested. Shane handed it to him, and Ilya tried not to look too eager as he opened it.

“Lord Hunter?” he asked incredulously, and Shane shrugged.

“He asked me last week at the dinner while you disappeared. I cannot imagine he still wants to uphold his request though, seeing as how he proposed to Mister Kip Grady last night.”

“Moves fast for an old man,” Ilya muttered, and crossed Lord Hunter’s name off Shane’s dance card. He quickly penciled in his own name before Shane could stop him. Shane sputtered out a laugh, covering his mouth quickly with a gloved hand. Ilya smiled mischievously at him, loving that he had made Shane laugh.

“Lord Bennett? Lord Price?” Ilya read off the card, and Shane shrugged.

“They asked. I do not feel like I can refuse.”

“You can always refuse,” Ilya said firmly, and Shane smiled at him softly. Ilya turned back down to Shane’s dance card, and saw that the last three lines were blank. He looked up at Shane in surprise, and to his delight, Shane was looking at his feet in embarrassment.

“I was hoping, Lord Rozanov,” Shane began, then paused and looked into Ilya’s eyes. “Ilya,” he corrected softly, and Ilya felt his heart triple in size. “I was hoping you might do me the honor of several dances.”

Ilya felt the corners of his mouth twitch up. “I believe it is against your rules for a Courtee to ask a Courter to dance.”

“Some rules can be broken,” Shane replied lightly. “Unless you think I shouldn’t.”

“No, no!” Ilya protested, hurrying to write his name in all three of the blanks. “Break the rules, Lord Hollander.” He frowned a bit, and then pointed the small pencil at Shane. “Only this one though, tonight. Don’t break more rules.”

“I promise,” Shane said. He looked over his shoulder. “I should find Lord Barrett. I did promise him the first dance.” He looked hesitantly at Ilya, who took his hand.

“I will be waiting, *dorogoy*,” he said, bringing Shane’s hand up to his lips. He bent over Shane’s hand into a bow, and looked up at him through his lashes. “Do not make me wait long.” He pressed a lingering kiss into Shane’s knuckles, one that he hoped Shane would feel throughout his dances with other men.

Shane swallowed and swayed into Ilya’s space. If Ilya had gotten his way, in that moment, there would have been nothing that could have torn Shane away from his side. He watched as Shane disappeared into the crowds, and Ilya hesitated for a few moments, hovering on the edge of the dance floor. He had never been one to hold himself back from a dance, but there was something about dancing with a person who was not Shane that unsettled him.

Taking a few steps back, Ilya glanced around the room, hoping that his nerves didn’t appear on his face. He had long since lost Svetlana to the crowd, assuming he would be spending all of the evening with Shane. Silly of him, to make such assumptions.

“There you are,” a voice said, and a hand clapped down onto his shoulder. Viscount Hollander was standing behind him, a jovial grin on his face. Ilya gave him a short bow, and the Viscount waved him off.

“I was hoping to run into you tonight,” the Viscount said. “I’ve never been one for balls. Yuna uses them to help bolster some of our investments, but I would much rather be at home with a book.”

“Home sounds nice right now,” Ilya agreed, trying to keep an eye out for Shane on the dance floor. The bodies were moving too quickly for him to keep track of the faces, and he focused back on the Viscount. The older man had a knowing grin on his face, and Ilya grimaced.

“I apologize, Viscou-”

“David, Ilya. Please call me David,” he winked at Ilya. “I have a feeling that we’ll be seeing a lot more of each other in the future.”

Ilya felt a warmth rush through him and he smiled at the man next to him. “I hope so, sir.” David rolled his eyes at him, a fond smile still on his face.

Suddenly, Ilya caught sight of Shane moving across the edge of the dance floor. He had found Lord Price by now, and the pair looked incredibly uncomfortable, and completely silent. Neither man was speaking to the other.

Ilya winced, and he heard David chuckle next to him. “That was how we knew, you know.”

“Excuse me?” Ilya asked, failing to understand the phrase David had said.

David smiled knowingly. “That was how Yuna and I knew how Shane felt about you. He smiled at you, and when talking about you. And he spoke to you, and not simply the polite conversation he’s been told to speak. He actually speaks to you about himself. That was how we knew.”

Ilya tore his eyes away from Shane, who was moving out of sight again, and looked back to David. “I want to hear him speak,” he said, haltingly, worrying the words weren’t correct. “I want to know him. *Him*,” Ilya emphasized. “I know that flowers make him sneeze, and that he likes fencing. He’s polite and considerate of others. His laugh is wonderful, and when he is mad, his face,” Ilya couldn’t think of the word, so he wrinkled his nose in imitation and David laughed.

“Scrunches,” he said, and Ilya nodded.

“Scrunches,” he repeated. He cleared his throat. “I know things about Lord Hollander, but I want to know them all.” He looked at David nervously, hoping he would hear the hidden meaning in Ilya’s words.

David nodded, “I understand, Ilya. I sincerely hope you get to know them all.” Shane emerged from the dancers, making his way quickly back to them. Ilya felt his heart lighten as Shane approached, the smile on his face matched the one growing on Shane’s.

David murmured a goodbye to Ilya, and patted his son on the shoulder before he left them. Ilya smiled at the man before him, clasping his hands behind his back so he wouldn’t reach out to touch Shane.

“Lord Rozanov,” Shane said, and Ilya smirked at him.

“Lord Hollander,” he answered. “I was promised a dance, yes?” He held out his hand, which Shane eagerly grasped, and led Shane out to the dance floor. They gave each other short bows, and stepped closer. Placing one of his hands on Shane’s lower back, Ilya raised their intertwined hands to rest on his chest. Shane’s other hand rested on Ilya’s shoulder and if he moved his fingers a little to the right, he could have tugged on Ilya’s curls. Ilya took a deep breath in; this would be an exercise in patience.

The music started and Ilya led Shane through the first steps around the ballroom. Taking his hand off Shane’s back, he held out his arm for Shane to step under and around. Shane did so gracefully, coming back to rest in Ilya’s arms, as he moved them into the next step.

Dancing had never been so easy. He felt as if he were floating, such a romantic notion, Ilya thought to himself, as he and Shane twirled together around the room once more. But, that was the kind of person Shane was. He made Ilya believe in floating.

“What are you smiling at, my Lord?” Shane asked, a teasing glint in his eyes.

Ilya exhaled noisily, enjoying the title from Shane’s lips far too much to be considered appropriate. “Ah, I am thinking, you are so very pretty. But, there is an English word, I forget,” he mockingly sighed at Shane, who was already blushing. “It is the word for ‘the most pretty’ or something like that.”

“Beautiful?” Shane said incredulously. “You forgot the word for ‘beautiful?’”

“Maybe I did not know it until this night,” Ilya said, with a wink. Shane’s face turned bright red, and he ducked his head into Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya threw back his head in laughter, knowing that they were turning heads. Shane was laughing as well in his arms. He waltzed Shane around the room, relying heavily on muscle memory to propel him through the dance. He was too captivated by Shane to put much effort into the dance.

As the dance came to a close, Ilya dipped Shane over one arm, smiling down into the face of the man he knew he was already falling in love with. Shane beamed up at him, his freckles standing out against the flush on his face.

The music ended and Ilya levered Shane upright, keeping him close. “I would very much like to speak to you privately, Shane,” he murmured. Shane’s eyes fluttered closed and he blinked a few times.

“I think that could be arranged,” he whispered back, his voice rasping a bit. He cleared his throat, and nodded his head towards the balcony. “Shall we?” Ilya extended his arm, and Shane took it, letting Ilya lead him out into the cool night air.

The grounds of the estate were beautiful. The lamps reflected off the greenery and statues. A fountain somewhere in the distance trickled water, and the music in the ballroom lilted carefully through the air. Ilya glanced around, delighted to see that they were alone on the balcony. He had wanted this to be a private conversation.

“Shane,” he said, inflecting as much affection as he could into the name. The man looked up at him, his eyes hopeful and nervous all at once.

“I hope you know how I feel about you,” Ilya began. “But, if you are uncertain, I want to make it clear. I want to marry you.” He felt Shane take a quick inhale next to him, their bodies close enough for Ilya to feel Shane’s hands beginning to shake. “I want to fall in love with you every day. I want to talk to you about your interests and hobbies and dance with you at every ball.” Shane let out a breathless chuckle and Ilya smiled, feeling bolstered by Shane’s joyful expression.

“I have not asked for your parents’ blessing yet-” Ilya began, but Shane interrupted.

“You have it, Ilya,” he said quickly.

Ilya huffed out a laugh. “Is good to know, yes. But, I need another blessing more.” Shane looked confused. “Your blessing, *dorogoy*,” Ilya continued. “When I come to your parents’ home tomorrow, I will ask them for their blessing. Then, I will propose and get down on one knee. But, I want you to want this too.”

Shane’s eyes were watery, and Ilya felt a lump in his own throat growing as Shane stared up at him. “You have my blessing, Ilya,” Shane said, looking him in the eyes. Ilya sniffed and ducked his head, wiping under his eyes for any stray moisture.

He felt a gloved hand gently touch his cheek, and he couldn’t help the jolt of surprise that coursed through him at Shane’s forwardness. His eyes darted to Shane’s, and saw a look of adoration on his face.

“Thank you,” Shane said, seriously, and Ilya nodded jerkily. “Tomorrow then?” Shane said, a smile breaking across his face.

Ilya let out a wet chuckle, sniffing again. He glanced around them, and swiftly pressed a kiss to Shane’s palm. “Yes, tomorrow. Wear something pretty,” he added.

Shane snorted, and the pair dissolved into ugly giggles. For the second time that night, Ilya wondered if his happiness could make him float away. Suddenly, Shane was shaking at his hand, fumbling with the dance card around his wrist.

“Shane?” Ilya questioned, and watched in delight as Shane stuffed his dance card into a flower box on the balcony.

“It would be improper to dance with anyone but you now,” Shane replied, a smirk on his face.

“My fiance,” Ilya cooed, “so polite. So rule following.”

“That’s me,” Shane agreed. “Now, let’s go dance more before our engagement.” Ilya sighed happily as Shane led him back to the ballroom, content to go wherever Shane led him.

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Ilya heard the door to the garden open and turned to see Shane walk in. His shirt was sticking to his chest in some places, the sweat Shane had worked up from his new fencing regimen glistened on his face and neck. Ilya felt his heart skip a beat. His husband was so pretty.

And how wonderful was that? *Husband*. It was his favorite word in the English language.

“*Moya lyubov*,” he called, and Shane’s face lit up. He leaned over the chair where Ilya was sitting, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

“No,” Ilya whined, “A real kiss, please.” Shane rolled his eyes fondly and leant down to press his lips to Ilya. Ilya did his best to deepen the kiss, opening his mouth to Shane’s and running his hand over Shane’s jaw. But, Shane pulled back quickly.

“Ilya, I’m sweaty, let me clean up and then I shall join you.”

“No,” Ilya whined again, dragging out the word as he reached for Shane helplessly. Shane smiled at him, his eyes crinkling at the edges with happiness. “I do not care that you are sweaty. I love sweaty,” Ilya said. “You are the most beautiful man always. I do not mind, please come back.”

Shane laughed. “You’ve already married me, you don’t have to lie to me.”

Ilya sat up indignantly, grabbing Shane by the hips and dragging him over the side of the chair and into his lap. Shane yelped as Ilya manhandled him. “Lie? What lie? You are the most handsome man always, yes? We are married, but I will never stop courting my beloved, *moye sokrovishche*.”

Shane leaned against Ilya’s shoulder, settling in on his thighs, his face set with concentration. “My treasure?” he guessed, and Ilya rewarded him with a kiss.

“Your Russian is getting very good,” Ilya praised, and Shane flushed. Ilya grinned and hauled Shane off his lap.

“Come, let us both get cleaned up,” he said, taking Shane’s hand and dragging him up the stairs. “I can think of a few things we can do before we clean,” he winked over his shoulder at Shane and let the laughter of his husband follow him up the stairs.

End Notes

If you liked it, let me know because I'm so happy to have combined my two favorite tv shows.

If you didn't like it, go away <3

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