

you, you into me

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you, you into me

by [mypetersburg](#)

Summary

Ilya stands at the door of his hotel room, and he looks good. Really good. Shane feels his stomach dip and seize in that familiar twist. He's used to it by now, the way his chest tightens like a band when he looks at Ilya. He can give it a name. He wishes he could give it more.

"You watched my match?"

"Bad tennis." Ilya blows a raspberry. "I would have wrapped it up in hour and a half."

OR - Shane at the U.S. Open, desperate to beat Ilya, to claim world number one, and to make this thing between them something real. (it's a tennis AU!)

Notes

hi all!

heated rivalry au where they're just pro tennis players, lol. loosely follows the timeline of the show, particularly toward the back half. you don't need any tennis knowledge at all! title comes from the challengers score, of course.

shoutout to my legit irl for reading this you're the goat & nba au is coming...

i hope you enjoy!

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

In a post-match presser, a reporter once asked Shane if he felt lonely at the top. He was world number one at the time, fresh off of a win at the Australian Open and trying to be humble about it.

“It’s not lonely at all,” he’d answered. *“Not when it’s so loud all the time.”*

He got laughs from around the room, and fans on Twitter had reposted it, gushing about how genuine he was, how he noticed them. His mother, in Agent Mode, had flushed with pride.

Now, as he walks onto his night match on Arthur Ashe, he understands why the fans thought it was about them. Even through the music blasting through his headphones, he can hear the roar of the crowd. It’s a round one match, Shane’s playing against some qualifier who barely eked through, but the entirety of Arthur Ashe still wants blood. When he takes his headphones and warm-up jacket off, waving to the crowd, the noise nearly bowls him over.

It would make sense if the loud thing was the fans. For years, Shane has tried to make *that* the noise, the thing that pushes him to win and keep winning. But it’s just not. It never has been. It’s always Ilya, in Shane’s thoughts, in Shane’s phone, crowding into Shane’s space. How can it be lonely when your only true competition lives in every moment of your life, awake or asleep? Shane reaches into his bag as he takes a final swig of his electrolyte drink, feeling the reassuring buzz of his phone as another text from Ilya rips through. *That’s* the noise he needs, making sure it’s not lonely at the top.

Shane makes quick work of the qualifier, a kid from Sweden who’s barely nineteen. At twenty-three, Shane feels much older and wiser than him, though he’s not sure why. Maybe it’s because he won his first Slam at seventeen. Maybe it’s because he really is getting old, like Ilya always tells him.

“Great match,” Shane tells him at the net, shaking his head and smiling in a way that he hopes is friendly. Really, he’s spent, and he’s dreading the on-court interview that’s coming up. And then the presser, where he’ll inevitably get asked why he didn’t finish the kid off in three clean 6-0 sets. He’s not sure why. He’s going to have to answer the question enough times tonight that he better figure out an answer.

“Eh.” He shrugs. “The U.S. Open is the U.S. Open, even if I’m dead in the first round.”

“You still made it to the first round,” Shane says. It earns him a nice smile from the chair umpire and the Swedish kid, and Shane figures that’s enough post-game pleasantries.

They have Eubanks interview Shane for the on-court stuff, which is nice. He and Eubanks played together in the Laver Cup last fall, and he does a decent job of keeping his interviews

short and sweet. Before long, Shane's launching a few balls into the stands of Ashe and on his merry way to the locker room.

The minute he gets inside, he tosses his stuff on the most secluded bench and tries to act like he's not desperately fishing out his phone. There's plenty of texts, messages from his parents and Rose congratulating him, messages from Hayden about drilling together tomorrow, messages from the physio about the ice bath he's going to take once he's done tonight.

Even to himself, he pretends like he's reading them. But really, he scrolls through the messages as fast as possible to find a string of texts from **LILY**, and then tamps down a smile when he sees there's a whole thread. Ilya must have texted him throughout the match.

LILY

Good serve, Hollander. Maybe you try to hit it in more often.

Bad second serve. Too slow.

Tweener! You think this is a show!

Shane scowls outwardly at that. The tweener was cool. It won him the first set. He keeps scrolling, alternating between smiling and scowling, savoring every last word.

You could not do triple bagel?

How do you drop two games to qualifier? Not promising, Hollander.

This is why you get number two this year.

Room number?

Shane rolls his eyes at the last one. Two years ago, they tried to stop hooking up *during* the Slams, tried to save it for the end of the tournament. But that became impossible, and Shane probably doesn't really care about making sure he gets fourteen hours a night in complete darkness if it means he gets just a little bit of time with Ilya.

He knows why Ilya wants to hook up tonight, anyway. Despite giving up two games, Shane still played well. *Really* well. He never does his matches halfway, even if the draw sucks, and good tennis turns them both on.

Still, it's the U.S. Open. And Ilya has a match tomorrow. And Shane really needs to beat him this year, or else he'll finish out at world number two. It's good to resist, even if just for

appearances.

Smiling, he taps out a message back: **In your dreams.**

And then, after it becomes too hard not to: **1110.**

Ten minutes after Shane gets to his hotel room for the night, there's a knock on his door. He forces himself to stop smiling as he swings it open, but that goes to shit when Ilya steps inside, wearing sweatpants and a hoodie and looking unbelievably good. It's been at least a month. Shane missed him.

"Hi," Shane says, once he's checked the hallway and shut the door.

"Hi," Ilya says back. He looks *really* good. Shane feels his stomach dip and seize in that familiar twist. He's used to it by now, the way his chest tightens like a band when he looks at Ilya. He can give it a name. He wishes he could give it more.

"You watched my match?"

"Bad tennis." Ilya blows a raspberry. "I would have wrapped it up in hour and a half."

"He had a good serve."

"Because he was playing you, yes. You make any serve look good."

"You're an asshole," Shane says, a tried and true line, and can't take it anymore. By the time he crosses the room to Ilya, his mouth is already open.

Ilya kisses him the way he always does, like Shane is something he'd gladly devour whole. Shane kisses back the way he always does, like he could actually tell Ilya *I need you to stay with me* through his tongue alone.

Lately, he's been wanting to ask Ilya to come stay with him after the U.S. Open, just for a bit. They have a few weeks to rest before Shanghai and Beijing, and Ilya's not even playing in both. It's not out of the question.

But Shane's too nervous to hear Ilya's answer, so he settles for pulling off his sweatshirt and letting Ilya push him onto the bed.

After, Shane lays with his head on Ilya's shoulder and lets Ilya idly play with his hair. This stuff is newer, a post-Wimbledon soft thing that Shane really likes.

"How do you feel about tomorrow?" Shane asks.

"Like I am playing a shitty American, so I will be fine."

"Yeah, but New York loves their own. They're going to boo you all night."

"They like their world number one more." Ilya tugs at his hair. "Which I will still be after final, Hollander."

"Fat chance," Shane says around a yawn. "Maybe this was all a technique to distract you and throw you off your game tomorrow."

"Ah, dirty tricks. This is why you will stay at number two."

"That's not what Tennis TV thinks."

"They are stupid." Ilya yawns too, then caps it off with a kiss to Shane's hair. "Are you still doing doubles with Pike?"

Shane gives Hayden one Grand Slam a year where they can play doubles. It gets to be too much when they play together everywhere, as much as Shane likes it. He can handle it at a few ATP 1000s or 500s, but it's usually out of the question at all four Slams. Hayden typically picks the U.S. Open, anyway. Last year, they almost won the whole thing.

This year, Shane privately hopes they do. For Hayden, yeah, but also to piss Ilya off.

"Yeah, we play the day after tomorrow. Looks like an easy pairing."

"This is my technique. Get you to carry Pike for two weeks, and then triple bagel you in the final. No one will ask you to sign ball after that."

"How about you get through Comeau first?"

"Oh, so you know who I am playing?" Ilya asks, triumphant and smiling. Shane flushes and ducks his head. By the time he's effectively buried his face under Ilya's arm, he nearly spits out the question about the cottage.

"No," he says instead.

As if he hasn't mapped out every possible route they both could take for the final. As if Shane won't watch him on the practice courts tomorrow, and blame the high flush on his cheeks on the sun. As if Shane wouldn't sell his soul for final after final after final against Ilya.

He and Ilya both make it through to week two, though it's not a surprise. Hayden twists his ankle in his match and doesn't make it through the Round of 16, so he goes all-in on their doubles game. Shane doesn't have the heart to tell him that it's not about doubles, that it's all about how he gets to see Ilya in the final.

It's all the reporters ask him about, too. At the end of every on-court interview: *"So, did you catch Rozanov last night? What do you think about his game this year?"* At the end of every post-match presser: *"How do you feel about your chances against Ilya Rozanov? Do you feel confident about ending the year out as number one?"*

Shane even gets it from Ilya, when they end up in each other's hotel rooms, hooking up even though Shane keeps saying it's probably making them both tired and fallible. *"If you cannot get a stronger second serve, you cannot beat me, Hollander. If you drop a set to another shitty player, I will win the final like piece of cake."*

Yeah, yeah. Shane asks his coach to drill second serves, just in case.

On the treadmill the night before the double's quarterfinal, Shane watches videos of Ilya's match on ESPN. Before he even opened his phone, he double and triple checked that the gym was empty, but he still finds himself glancing over his shoulder every few seconds, petrified.

He's gotten to the point in his career where it kind of doesn't matter what happens if someone sees him doing this. He and Ilya are the New Generation of players (trademark certainly pending by his mother), and they do press conferences and promotional videos and exhibition matches all the time. It's *tennis*, for God's sake. It's not like they're going to drop their rackets, rip off their hats (Shane) and headbands (Ilya), and knock each other out on the court. It makes sense for Shane to watch his projected competition for inspiration while he runs.

The problem is the rest of it. It's the flush in his cheeks, it's the way he's breathing a little too hard, it's the way his chest stutters when Ilya nails a particularly beautiful backhand.

That's too far for anybody to walk in on. That's where it crosses the line from being friendly at ATP events into clearly being obsessed. And look, Shane can't deny it, not really. He's been obsessed for years. He's a bad liar – his mother always says that his eyes are too honest.

If someone point blank asked him, *"Are you in love with Ilya Rozanov?"*, Shane's answer would have to be a *"Yes, yes, isn't it obvious, yes. But please don't tell him that though,*

because I cannot ruin this thing we have going on.”

In his headphones, Ilya lets out a roar. Shane tears his eyes from where he’s been looking, unfocused, at the mirror and turns them to the replay. He watches as Ilya serves up a beautiful 140 mile an hour ace. Ilya turns to his box, lets out a slew of Russian, and clenches one fist.

Shane’s shorts suddenly feel tighter. He slams the emergency stop button and stands in the silence of the gym, panting.

At Wimbledon, they’d reached a sort of breaking point. Shane hadn’t seen Ilya since their messy clay court season, when Ilya had said his name and asked him to stay and, well. Shane doesn’t feel like revisiting everything that happened next.

But at Wimbledon, it had been too much. Ilya, at the hotel bar. Ilya, tanned against his tennis whites. Ilya, breaking a racket over his knee in the locker room.

“Who will be in your box,” Ilya had asked, the two of them waiting to get touched up before they did a promotional video for the All England club.

“My parents, my coach. Probably the sports psychologist.”

“Not Rose?”

Shane remembers the way Ilya’s lip had curled around the name, the way his teeth bit the first syllable. He could’ve come right there, just listening to Ilya massacre four measly letters.

“No,” he had said instead. “Not Rose.”

“Too busy?”

“We, uh – we’re not together anymore.” Shane shrugged. “Not compatible.”

It didn’t matter that Ilya beat him in the final, a week and a half later (barely, by the way – five set nail-biter). That’s not what Shane would remember from that Wimbledon. He wouldn’t even remember the sex they had that night, mind-blowing and all-consuming after too long spent apart.

No, the thing Shane would always remember was the way Ilya looked when Shane told him that he and Rose were done. The smile that cracked his face practically in two. The way he danced around the shoot after that, everybody’s best friend.

That’s probably when Shane really realized he was in love with him. That’s definitely when Shane realized that maybe this could be something real, if they approached it just right.

And, okay, fine. It hasn't become something real, not yet. But Ilya still calls Shane. He still texts. He still shows up in Shane's hotel room, still mumbles what's starting to sound dangerously like something *real* when he cums, still holds Shane and kisses his hair and fiddles with his hands.

So, Wimbledon had been good. Things have always reached some kind of a head for them at the Slams, where two thousand points are on the line and anything goes.

That's why Shane's going to ask about the cottage here, just as long as he can work up the nerve.

On the practice courts the day before the double's semifinal, Shane finds himself in a different spot entirely. Hayden's annoyed, it's obvious, but he can't make himself care.

He's got the singles semifinal against Hayes in two days. It means something to him. Hayes is world number thirty-five, but he's playing like a brick wall this year. Shane's been watching videos of him all week. He's spent countless hours with his phone in his hands and his coach leaning over him, breathing down his neck in a way that makes Shane's skin feel three sizes too tight.

He's proud of how far he's made it, happy with a semifinal, but he's been in the final of every single tournament he's played this year, save for Indian Wells. It's been a good year – probably his best yet. If he can't get into the final, if he can't beat Ilya, then Shane will feel like he's failed. It doesn't matter that he hasn't. It doesn't matter that the point disparity between him and Vaughn, the current world number three, is too vast to cover. Shane wants the final, and then he wants to finish out number one.

And he wants it against Ilya. Not because it's *Ilya*, but because it's Ilya. The only person who can really keep up with him. Beating Ilya feels like proving himself, like he's seventeen and sliding around on the clay in France again, his stomach in his chest. It feels like *winning*, like the kind of winning that makes him feel like he could hold a fireball in his hands. The kind that feels loud.

"Shane!" Hayden snaps, whizzing an easy groundstroke past him. Shane flushes, embarrassed at being caught thinking. He could stand like this for hours, feet rooted to the ground, running every possibility. It's usually what he does if he's not with Ilya at night, his face pressed into the pillows.

"Sorry."

"I don't want to lose tomorrow. I don't like those French guys."

“They’re not so bad.”

“They make *fun* of us,” Hayden says, eyes wide. “They called my French bad in the locker room yesterday.”

“Your French *is* bad.”

“Just watch the ball, dick.” But Hayden’s laughing, so Shane doesn’t feel too bad. He shuffles back to the baseline, jumps up and down a few times to get himself back into it. He spreads his feet apart and slides into a ready position, rocking back and forth a bit.

When he looks up, about to tell Hayden he’s ready, he catches Ilya coming onto the courts. He’s all the way at the end, so Shane can’t make out the fine details, but he still feels his mouth go dry. He watches Ilya tilt his head back and drink a gulp of water. He imagines a bit of sweat dripping down Ilya’s neck, down his back, imagines following it with his tongue—

“*Shane!*”

Another ball flies past him.

Once he’s off the practice courts, out of the shower, and in his hotel room for a blissful few hours of silence, Shane’s phone buzzes with a text.

LILY

Oh my god Hollander, hit the ball. Where are you going to look during final? My sexy face or bright yellow tennis ball?

Are you alone?

Can I come up?

They thrash the French guys easily, and Shane feels like it’s enough of an apology for how horrible he was during practice yesterday.

Hayden jumps up and down, yelling like they've won the whole thing, throwing his arms around Shane like the prize money is already in his hands. Shane celebrates with him, but he can't get the idea of Ilya's semifinal out of his head. It's in a few hours, a prime night session under eighty-eight-degree weather. Shane almost wishes he could sit in Ashe and watch. It's not unheard of, really. Players watch other players' matches all the time. It's normal, really.

The problem would be the look on Shane's face. People would know, if they saw him. It's better to do it in the hotel room, where he can react however he wants, where his rationale if his mother or his coach comes up is simply that he's scoping out his competition. He just hopes they don't consider the fact that he has to actually *win* his semifinal tomorrow before Ilya becomes his competition.

The couch in Shane's hotel room is nice, so he tries not to think about how unsanitary it is considering what's been done to it. He throws a blanket over the cushions and stiffly reclines back, cranking the volume on ESPN.

He's just in time to watch Scott Hunter's walkout. Scott's a fan favorite at the U.S. Open, an American who's always been able to cling to the top five in time enough to get a decent draw here. He's been playing well this year, too. Shane's happy he doesn't have to meet him in the semifinal, because it really is a toss-up. Even against Ilya, who has an unbelievable serve and a brutal backhand, it'll be a good match.

Ilya's walkout is better than Scott's. Despite the fact that he riles up the American crowds, taunts them in the on-court interviews and bitches about the muggy conditions at the tournament, Americans love Ilya. He's number one. He's funny. He's good tennis. It's no surprise that they lose their minds when he walks out. Shane's mouth goes dry, the way he does every time he sees Ilya on court. Nike dresses him in good kits, better than the Reebok ones, and he always looks incredible. It's nice when they're not competing, and Shane can watch and appreciate and let his mind wander.

It doesn't wander too far, though. Part of this really is to scope out his competition – regardless, he'll play one of them in the final. He doesn't really entertain a world where Hayes beats him, so it'll be either Scott Hunter or Ilya. It doesn't hurt to study.

Ilya wins the first set, a steady 6-3 that has Scott Hunter grimacing at his box. Ilya doesn't celebrate, just wipes his face with a towel and stares straight ahead as ESPN rolls over to commercial. It's one of Shane for Reebok, which is humiliating enough that he throws his

hands over his face so he doesn't have to watch. By the time it switches back to ESPN, Ilya is down love-thirty in the first game of the second set.

It doesn't mean anything, not when there's so much tennis left to play, but it clenches something cold in Shane's stomach. Scott Hunter looks renewed. He's lost the scowl, and he returns every shot like he's hitting against a ball machine.

Shane watches the set score bounce back and forth until Scott wins it 6-4. Ilya looks pissy, his face red while he smacks his tennis racket against the inside of his shoes.

It all goes terribly downhill from there. Scott Hunter gets stronger, and Ilya gets sloppy, and then it's match point. It's deuce, and Scott is up with the advantage. The minute Ilya throws the ball up for his serve, Shane knows how this is going to go.

The ball lands, almost in horrific slow-motion, just wide. So close that maybe it's on the line. Ilya raises his hand, signals for the review, and the chair umpire confirms it: *fault*.

Scott Hunter falls to the ground like his feet have been swept out from under him, his hands on his face. On ESPN, McEnroe can barely keep the smile out of his voice: *"It's his first final in years, you have to feel good for Scott, but imagine being Rozanov. This should've been an easy win for him, considering how Scott played for most of the spring."*

Ilya casts one glance toward his box and then looks away, gives Scott the hug he's supposed to, shakes hands with the chair umpire, and then loses his mind.

Shane watches him smash one racket, and then another. He breaks the third one over his knee, the same way he did at Wimbledon. Shane winces as carbon fibre goes flying across Ashe. The crowd roars, caught between approval and disapproval at once. Ilya picks up half of the racket and bashes it against his bench for good measure. The whole time, he screams a torrent of Russian swears, words Shane's almost certain he's heard mumbled under Ilya's breath while they have sex.

Shane swallows, sinking lower into his couch cushions as if Ilya can see him. A text from his mom comes through: ***Scott Hunter is in the final!***

The cottage slips away, second by second, as Ilya fishes around in his bag for another racket.

Shane has a night match against Hayes tomorrow, and he intends to sleep early. He does, but then his phone starts buzzing on the nightstand, and he knows who it's from. And he really can't turn that down. He's past the point of being able to.

LILY

Guess you will win final now, Hollander.

Or maybe it will be Hayes and Hunter.

Are you awake.

Shane squints at his phone screen and then sighs, resigned. He taps out a response a little sluggishly, calmed by the deep breathing he forced himself to do earlier.

Sorry about the match, he texts, which feels a little lame. **You'll still finish out ranked number one.**

It's not really true, now, and they both know it. If Shane can make the final, he'll have just enough points to rank above Ilya. Barely – it could topple before the end of the year, especially at the final Masters events. But if Shane can win the final, it'll probably be a comfortable lead.

LILY

It does not matter.

I am going to come to your room.

The text sends a thrill through Shane. He likes how forward Ilya always is. He likes that Ilya is coming to him with his horrible mood, even if it's just for a quick fuck. Shane would take Ilya any way he could get him, including this.

He flits around his hotel room, turning on the lights and straightening the pillows, pretending to be busy until he hears the knock on the door.

"Hello," Ilya says when Shane opens it, just a touch too loudly. He's not smiling. His accent is a little thicker, which always happens when he's upset.

“Hey.” Shane tries to act casual while he pulls him inside, pokes his head around the hallway, then locks the door.

Ilya just stands there, looking Shane up and down in his boxers and t-shirt. Shane feels his cheeks heat. He feels already naked, standing here with Ilya raking his eyes over him like this.

“You were asleep.” It’s not really a question.

“No, I wasn’t.” Shane’s almost nervous. “I was in bed, but I wasn’t awake.”

“You watched the semifinal.”

“Yeah.”

“I sucked, no?”

“No, you didn’t suck.” Shane wants to reach up and comfort Ilya, but that might be too far. Probably wouldn’t be though, all things considered. Not with the way Ilya cried at Wimbledon, or the way he called Shane from Russia and his father’s funeral.

Fuck it, he decides. He tentatively reaches up to touch Ilya’s jaw, then slides his hand around to cup the back of his head, carefully massaging his fingers against the nape of Ilya’s neck. Ilya’s eyes close and he leans into the touch almost automatically. The motion floods Shane with the same feeling he gets when he cums or wins a match: dizzy, a consuming head-high.

“I saw the rackets,” Shane says, just to direct the feeling somewhere else. “That fine is going to be insane.”

Despite it all, Ilya laughs. It instantly makes Shane feel a few pounds lighter, like he’s floating on air.

“Do you even have any rackets left in your bag?”

“One,” Ilya says, and then laughs a little harder. He shakes his head, says something that sounds horribly fond in Russian, and then his mouth is on Shane’s before Shane can even think up a response.

Shane doesn’t expect Ilya to stay, but he does. He washes up in the hotel bathroom and comes back, wraps himself around Shane in bed, and doesn’t say anything for a few long moments.

Shane sits while Ilya strokes his hand over his cheekbones, kisses his jaw, and forces himself not to say a word. The moment feels almost too precious to spoil.

“You should have lost doubles semi,” Ilya says, apparently content to ruin the moment.

“Fucking thanks.”

“No, I mean it is good you did not.” He brushes his thumb across Shane’s cheek again. “Pike is like dead weight.”

“That’s not true.”

“Yes, it is. How can you be bad at net as doubles player?”

“He’s a *singles* player too,” Shane corrects. It feels good to argue with Ilya like this, easy and soft and sleepy. Anyway, if that’ll distract Ilya from the sting of just missing a Slam final, he’ll happily do it.

“Bleh. Barely. He could not even make it past sixteen.”

“He twisted his ankle.”

“Oh, but he walks on it fine every other day?”

“Whatever,” Shane says, but he’s laughing. “We’re going to win the doubles final, you know.”

“Oh, wow. Should we roll out red carpet? Where is Sampras? Someone should tell him.”

“Don’t be an asshole.”

“I just lost U.S. Open, Hollander. Let me – what is it? Grieve.”

“You’re still better than Scott Hunter,” Shane says, and tilts his head to kiss him. Ilya kisses him back, but it’s not greedy and desperate like it usually is. It feels like that time at Ilya’s, right before Shane ran out and ruined everything. Soft, easy. Like he’s kissing Shane because he likes him, like he’s kissing Shane because he wants him here.

“You are better than Scott Hunter,” Ilya says almost reverently. “You will beat him.”

Shane feels like he’s been punched in the stomach. He leans forward and kisses Ilya again, just because he knows he can.

“I have to beat Hayes first.”

“Fuck Hayes. He is lucky to even be here.”

“He’s playing well right now, you know.”

“Shut the fuck up, Hollander. You will beat him in four.”

“Oh, not three?” Shane’s laughing again. He feels almost high.

“Three? Greedy.” Ilya closes his eyes, his arm tight around Shane. “No, it will take four. You will have weak first serve in the first set. You will come around in second, get cocky in third, and win in fourth.”

“What, you have it all figured out?”

“Duh, Hollander.” Ilya opens his eyes lazily. “I watch all your matches. I know you.”

I know you. Shane’s stomach heaves. He thinks that if he opens his mouth, he would see his heart sitting atop his tongue, beating and convulsing in time to the rhythm of Ilya’s voice. *I watch all your matches, I know you.*

Shane thinks of saying something well and truly stupid, and then he does it anyway.

“Come to my cottage after this,” he says, all in a rush. “For just a few weeks before we have to train again. It’ll be private, just us.”

“Hollander...”

There’s three full seconds of dead air, and he considers throwing himself out the window. But Ilya still has a hand in his hair, and he hasn’t run screaming out of bed yet. They’re too far past it, and they both know it. Shane soldiers on.

“I know, but think about it. All the time in the world, without any matches or wins or losses. Just us.”

“Shane, I don’t—” Ilya sighs. Shane takes the first name as a good sign. “Maybe.”

“Maybe?” It’s not a no. It’s not a yes, either.

“Beat Scott Hunter, and I come,” Ilya says. He doesn’t think it’s a promise.

Shane pretends it’s as good as a yes. But his stomach clenches, and his mouth feels dry, and maybe this can’t be something real after all.

He beats Hayes in four, and Ilya is maddeningly right: he drops the third. Shane wonders if Ilya actually predicted the outcome, if he knows Shane that easily and well, or if he just wanted to fuck with him. Unbelievably, Shane thinks it’s probably the first option.

He wins the double’s final, too. And then he spends all his time training, obsessively working on his second serve and his volleys and his groundstrokes. He runs on the treadmill until he feels like his legs are going to give out. He texts with Ilya, though it feels stilted and

awkward in wake of the *maybe*. He sleeps early and wakes up early, and spends his waking hours that aren't dedicated to training watching videos of Scott Hunter.

It's world number one on the line, now. It's everything.

It has nothing to do with the fact that if Shane doesn't fill every waking moment of his day, he wonders why Ilya hasn't asked to come up. It has nothing to do with the fact that Ilya said *maybe*. It has nothing to do with the fact that Shane might've ruined everything that's good for him with one stupid question.

"Turn the machine on," he calls to his couch, and slaps his racket against his heels.

Shane's somewhat used to the horrible feeling of maybe taking it too far with Ilya. He remembers being in Germany once, playing a grass tournament for maybe 500 or 250 ATP points. It was early into *this*, right after Shane's first Slam win.

Shane had crashed out royally in the Quarter Final, badly enough that his coach couldn't look at him for an hour after. And then he freaked out about it enough that even Ilya looked alarmed when Shane went to his hotel room the next evening.

"What is wrong with you?" Ilya had asked. It was before Shane could even get his clothes off, which usually happened as soon as the door was shut.

"Nothing." Shane shook his head, reached for Ilya's shorts. "Come on."

"Hollander, you look—" Ilya waved his hand around, looking for the word. His English was worse then. "Paper. Like sheet of paper."

"I'm fine."

Shane was decidedly not fine. After he lost the Quarter Final, he threw up in the locker room bathroom. His coach told him it was fine, it was one loss, but Shane knew it was more than that. It was the beginning of an unraveling if he didn't work hard enough. Plenty of people threw everything away after a Slam win. Plenty of players were one-hit wonders, guys lucky enough to get a good draw and shitty enough to never win anything meaningful again.

Shane remembers working himself up in Ilya's hotel room, thinking and thinking until he realized he couldn't pull himself out of it.

"It is one loss, Hollander." Ilya gently cuffed him on the cheek. "Nobody likes to play grass."

"You won your Quarter Final."

“You won Garros. You are still champion.”

“I won *one*.” *You already have two Slam wins*, Shane considered saying.

He couldn’t even spit it out though, because he suddenly felt tears prick at the corners of his eyes. *Fuck*. He wasn’t going to cry in front of Ilya, not here, not like this.

Ilya noticed, too, because of course he did. Shane remembers the face he made, something twisted up, and it didn’t make him feel any better. He remembers the way his stomach dropped, remembers the way his cheeks burned.

“Hollander,” Ilya had said, a little too nice. “Relax. Quarter final is still good.”

Shane had kissed him, just to make the conversation end. After they had sex that night, neither of them really said much. There was something heavy in the air, thick and hot and oppressive. Shane knew what it meant, and he left the hotel room quickly.

A few days later, Ilya won the whole tournament. And he didn’t text Shane back for a few months. Probably because of the crying. Probably because Shane couldn’t make it past a Quarter Final.

What’s happening here cannot be worse than what happened in Germany. *Probably*. Things are different now, things are lighter. Shane probably could cry in front of him again, considering Ilya has already evened the score.

Still, Shane has to beat Scott Hunter in the final anyway. Just to be sure.

By the time the final rolls around, Shane is so amped up that he feels nothing. It’s just the slap of his sneakers against the ground as he slides on his bag, shakes hands with Scott Hunter in the tunnel, and waits for his walkout.

He turns on the same music he always does, bends down and tightens his laces the same way he always does, shakes out his wrists the same order he always does.

Arthur Ashe is deafening when he walks out. They want to see Scott win, but it doesn’t matter. Shane can’t lose this. *Everything* rides on it, literally everything, and he’s not willing to give up any of it.

Before he knows it, the match starts. Shane gets into his rhythm okay, feels his arms and legs burn in that familiar, comfortable way. The tingle spreads up his elbow as he serves, throwing his whole body into it. His second serves are good today. The crowd warms to him, enough that it could shift the tide of the match.

Shane thinks about Ilya's mouth, about *beat Scott Hunter and I come*, and serves a perfect ace.

Shane knows by the third set that the championship belongs to Scott Hunter. He plays it out as best he can, tries to stop the inevitable. Still, he slaps his final shot just long, barely over the baseline. Tears prick his eyes, and he pinches at them before they can fall.

He looks at his shoes instead of looking at Scott, uninterested in seeing him fall to the ground, in watching him cry tears of joy, in seeing the look on his mother and coach's faces.

Fuck. It stings to lose a Slam, always. It stings to lose *this* Slam even more. Shane was the projected favorite. This win was supposed to be his.

Ilya's not coming to the cottage now. He's not going to talk to Shane anymore, either. Shane lost where it counted, and he overshot what they were, and it's all just fucking stupid.

"Congratulations, man," Shane says to Scott, pulling him into a hug at the net. Scott's crying. So is Shane.

"Thank you, Shane." Scott hugs him again. "Oh my God. Thank you."

"You deserve it." It's like glass in his mouth. He forces a smile, distantly wonders if he looks like a human or not.

There's the whole ceremony coming up, where Shane will get his shitty second place trophy. It'll feel cheap, despite the fact that he certainly didn't have an easy run to the final. Still, he didn't even lose it to someone like Ilya. He lost it to a fucking comeback tour.

He's got a few minutes before he has to receive his consolation prize, so he grabs his bag and ducks into his tunnel, waving to the crowd and ducking his head.

He doesn't go all the way back, though. Partially because there's not enough time. Partially because he wants to see Scott Hunter greet his box, hug his people. It's like pressing down on a bruise, and Shane thinks he deserves it right about now.

He reaches for his phone before he can stop himself, but there's no text from Ilya. Of course there's no text from Ilya. Why would there be a text from Ilya?

Shane forces himself to look away from the phone, watching Scott climb into the stands and hug his coach, his trainers, his team. There's a guy standing there, kind of toward the back, looking horribly uncertain about the whole thing. Shane glances at him for a second, and then wonders why, and then realizes it's because Scott is charging toward him with something determined in the line of his shoulders.

“Holy fuck,” Shane says, unable to stop it, as Scott Hunter bends his head and kisses the guy.

Not a chaste kiss. Not something on the cheek, an overzealous player kissing his coach or his brother. No, this is real, this is right on the mouth, this is serious.

The floor falls out from under Shane. He thinks he could fall forever, straight to the core of the earth. His body goes hot, and then cold, and then he feels nothing at all. The noise of the crowd disappears, sucked into white noise and then silence in his ears.

Distantly, Shane thinks his jaw might be wide open. His world cracks in half. Scott is still kissing the guy, holding his face, touching his hair. Shane thinks of hotel rooms and dark hallways and whispered phone calls. He can’t feel his feet. He can’t feel his hands. He’s not even sure he’s really here.

The camera guy finally makes his way to Scott’s box. Shane watches on the huge screen as Scott breaks away, tilts his head to rest against the other guy’s forehead. There’s this huge smile on his face, like he’s holding all the precious things in the world.

Shane’s phone buzzes to life with one single text.

LILY

I’m coming to the cottage.

The noise of Arthur Ashe suddenly floods back, and all Shane can hear is loud, *loud* cheers.

End Notes

haiiiiiii again its me... hope you liked this! haven't written any form of fic in a few years.
happy new year, i guess.

also, please god picture shane doing the jannik sinner gucci wimbledon walkout, except 2018
or whatever. like for my soul.

and please also please picture ilya's racket smash mirroring bublik's legendary french
freakout.

anyway, thanks for reading mwah! <3

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