

United Front

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United Front

by [kooksie](#)

Summary

After Russia crashes and burns at the Olympics, six months pass where Ilya cuts Shane out completely, refusing to answer his texts. So when they both get booked for yet another ad campaign, Shane arrives on set with a strict plan to ignore Ilya entirely.

But then he learns the premise of the entire campaign: making fun of Ilya's English.

It will take a lot for Shane to forgive him, sure. It won't take nearly as much for Shane to stand up for him.

Notes

This work is inspired by episode 5, where Ilya says "English is too hard right now." I wanted to delve more into his experience working as a professional in his nonnative tongue.

This made-up video shoot takes place at the time of the bathroom scene at the NHL Awards, so think: First time they have seen each other after those 6 months of no contact.

Bonus: See if you can count how many times I use actual dialogue from the show in my made-up scenario haha. I wasn't trying to but sometimes it just fit.

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

Shane can't be sure which sensation is more overwhelming: the swipe of a hulking mascara wand through his eyelashes by the makeup artist on set, or Ilya Rozanov roving his unblinking eyes over Shane's body like he wants to swallow him whole.

"Um," Shane voices, not for the first time, "is there a reason why I'm getting makeup and he's not?" Shane points with his thumb in Ilya's direction, careful to avoid his gaze.

The makeup artist, a British redhead with eyebrow piercings, glances between them both. She shrugs. "It was the director's choice. He wants Ilya to have a more rugged look."

"You like rugged?" Ilya tilts his head, his smirk widening as he looks the makeup artist up and down. Predictably, she blushes and glances down at her feet. Shane feels like he could throw up in his mouth.

"Who doesn't?" She squeaks. Ilya quirks his head in return, looking awfully pleased with himself.

"You two must see each other pretty frequently, huh?" She glances between the two of them like she's following the ball in a tennis match.

Shane can see Ilya's gaze shifting back towards him from the corner of his eye, looking to Shane to answer the question. Shane refuses to look back at him. He presses his lips together as if to seal them shut.

A beat of awkward silence ensues where the artist chuckles to herself to fill it. Ilya finally interrupts.

"Yes," Ilya offers. His response is so brisk that Shane thinks it would have been better had he not answered at all.

The makeup artist brushes some translucent powder onto Shane's cheeks. Some of it gets into his nostril, and he scrunches his nose to try to clear it. "I mean, I know all about the rivalry. Is it hard, to do campaigns like these together?"

Shane, again, pointedly stays quiet.

"It is not hard for me," Ilya chirps. Shane can't see his expression because his eyes are glued resolutely to his lap, but his shoulders tense at the utter ease and self-satisfaction in that voice. "Maybe is hard for Hollander." And in that sentence, Shane can practically *hear* the obnoxious smirk that accompanies it.

"I love being in LA," Shane says instead, side-stepping the question. "I was glad when I heard the shoot was here."

"Do you like LA or Montreal more?" Ilya asks, tone innocent. Shane clenches his fists. Only Rozanov would ask such a self-evident question directly to Shane. It forces him to acknowledge Ilya for the first time this entire day.

That doesn't mean he needs to look at the guy, and so Shane doesn't, instead focusing on the sensation of a manicured hand cording through his hair, gelling it. He takes a page from Ilya's book: answer in as few words as possible.

"Montreal."

Shane doesn't see Ilya's face, but imagining his celebration at capturing Shane's attention is enough to stir anger in Shane's stomach.

"For me, is LA. I like the women," Ilya spits, tone sickly sweet. Shane feels the makeup artist's hand still in his hair as she comprehends Ilya's words. She giggles at the same time that Shane stiffens.

The second the hand leaves his hair, Shane is shooting up from his seat, phone in hand. “I’m gonna go find my parents. Oh, and thank you,” Shane adds, giving a stiff smile to the makeup artist. *Thank you for poking and prodding me like a show horse*, he thinks but doesn’t say.

He rushes out of the makeup trailer and passes Ilya before the other man can so much as say goodbye.

Outside the makeup trailer, in the breezy Beverly Hills air, Shane can breathe a little easier. He spots his parents talking with a gray-haired man in a paper-thin scarf and a beret.

“Shane Hollander!” The man bellows, waving him over. Shane obeys, noting that the man’s accent is American - the beret must be a stylistic choice, then, and an odd one at that. He sidles up next to his mom. When the man reaches out his hand, Shane takes it. The handshake is so firm that the man practically drags Shane’s entire arm up and down with the motion.

“Martin’s the director for today’s shoot,” Yuna announces, her smile wide. She turns to Martin, her voice giddy. “Shane loves Prime Hen, you know. He’s always munching on your iconic chicken sandwich!”

Shane tries to smooth out his face before the director notices his expression of surprise. Truthfully, all he eats these days is salmon, rice, and vegetables. He hasn’t had a fried chicken sandwich in years. His mom already debriefed him about how this company is now the fastest growing food chain in the entire country, though, so he plays along.

“Yep,” Shane confirms, smiling. “Big fan.”

“That’s great. Just great. Well. We’re about ready to begin shooting.” The director claps his hands together, eyes scanning the set. When he finds who he’s looking for, his eyes light up. “Rozanov! Get on over here!”

Despite his prior attempts to avoid Ilya’s gaze like he’s Medusa, Shane allows himself one glance as Ilya walks over. While Shane required a stylist to tame his hair, Ilya’s bedhead is an effortless mop of sun-soaked curls that are coiled and voluminous in just the right places. His broad shoulders stretch out the t-shirt he’s wearing, and Shane thinks he could pick out Ilya’s

thundering footsteps from the whole world's footfalls in a lineup: something about that confident, careless gait is so uniquely him.

It's intoxicating. It's so goddamn *frustrating*.

"Ilya Rozanov," Martin murmurs, an air of infatuation in his voice. "This guy here -" Martin clamps a hand down hard onto Ilya's shoulder, and the sound of the smack makes Shane flinch - "He inspired this entire campaign."

Shane shoves down the snarky comment that threatens to spill out. Of course Ilya is the star of this commercial. He gets what he wants, whenever he wants it.

Ilya merely smiles back at Martin. He does an odd shrugging motion with his shoulders, but Martin's hand stays firmly on his shoulder.

"Is it odd for you to be doing an advert for chicken sandwiches, Rozanov?" Martin asks him, tilting his head. His beret looks about ready to fall off, with hardly any hair on that balding head to keep it in place.

Ilya merely shrugs. "It is fine."

Martin cackles as if Ilya just performed a stand-up routine here between the set dressing trucks. "They don't have fried chicken down in those Soviet bunkers, I bet! He doesn't need a Prime Hen menu: Just a handle of vodka and this guy's good." Martin pats Ilya's shoulder again for good measure.

"I do like vodka," Ilya admits. Martin cackles again, throwing his head back. Shane is drilling holes into the back of his mom's head with how strictly he is refusing to meet Ilya's eyes.

"Let's get you both suited up, okay? I'm talking full hockey gear." Martin points to the trailer behind them. "You can both get changed in there, got it?" Then, chuckling to himself, he

adds: "Try not to kill each other."

"We won't," Shane says politely, at the same time as Ilya says, "No promises." Martin, predictably, directs his laugh towards Ilya.

"And Shane," Martin tacks on. Shane wonders if this is the time he'll get showered in compliments too. "You'll have to actually look at Rozanov during the advert. Will that be a problem?"

Shane feels a rush of blood towards his face, and the back of his neck reddens in shame. Was he really that obvious? Yuna laughs awkwardly to fill the silence. "Um, no," Shane confirms, his voice uncharacteristically small. "Won't be a problem."

"Great." Martin's grin is toothy. "Once you're both dressed, you can meet us all at Stage 14. The idea for this campaign - well, you're gonna love it."

Shane watches his parents walk away with the longing of a wife watching her husband's ship leave for war: his heart genuinely drops to his feet to see them go. He is left here, alone, with Ilya. The sunlight beaming down on them and the quiet chatter of set dressers around them don't lessen any of the tension.

Shane sees Ilya's mouth open from the corner of his eye. To avoid hearing whatever Ilya has to say, he takes that as his cue to enter the trailer.

Inside, there's a bin labeled "Shane" and one labeled "Ilya." Shane rifles through his bin, finding all his gear, including compression shorts, shoulder and elbow pads, a helmet, and, interestingly, a jersey with "Hollander" scribbled on the back and an illustration of fried chicken on the front. Ilya undoubtedly has a matching jersey in his bin, but Shane doesn't wait around to find out.

He grabs his bin and turns around in search of a smaller room within the trailer to change. When he whips around, Ilya is standing right in front of him.

Shane jolts at the same time as Ilya chuckles. “Well.” Ilya smirks in that carefree way only he knows how to do, a smirk that says he knows he ignored Shane for six months and had a grand old time doing it.

“Excuse me,” Shane mutters, attempting to sidestep Rozanov with his bin. He is hot with anger, like someone struck a match beneath his feet.

“Hold on,” Ilya urges. He grabs onto Shane’s bin and sets it down at their feet. Shane is so frozen in place that he lets Ilya do it, but when he unfreezes, so does his anger.

“What? What the fuck do you want, Rozanov?” Shane spits, bumping Ilya with his chest until Ilya takes a step back. “You haven’t answered a text from me in, like, six months. You won’t even acknowledge I exist unless there’s a fucking camera pointed at us, and then it’s for some fucking clown show. So, yeah, what the *fuck* do you actually want from me?”

Ilya scratches at his forearm. He tilts his head, lips puckered as he thinks.

“Well?” Shane urges, face red.

“I want you to suck my dick.”

Shane scoffs, shaking his head as he turns away from Ilya. “Oh, fuck you. You are unbelievable. You suck *my* dick.”

Shane has turned away to face the table with the bins, now, so he feels Ilya’s fingers grip his face before he sees them. Ilya places his thumb against Shane’s chin, using his grip strength to maneuver Shane’s head to face him once more. Shane’s head swivels back in Ilya’s direction like a ball on a pendulum. Ilya tilts his hand, and Shane’s head tilts with it. Shane feels wobbly on his feet, suddenly, and allows himself to be manhandled.

“Maybe ask nicely,” Ilya breathes, his breath hot against Shane’s skin. “Hm?”

Ilya loosens his grip for a moment to stroke Shane's chin with his thumb. The thumb goes so far as to graze Shane's jaw, mapping the lines of his face. But then Ilya's finger travels upwards, pokes at Shane's bottom lip, and sinks deeper as if to plop the thumb right into Shane's wet mouth.

The feeling is so unfamiliar after all these months that it shocks Shane back into reality.

"No," he spits, fuming. Ilya drops his hand as if burned. "No. You ignored me for *six months*. You can handle being ignored for one day."

Ilya stares back at Shane rather mournfully. Shane knows it's only because Ilya is chasing his own release. But Shane has feelings, goddamnit, ones that Ilya doesn't care to acknowledge.

To make matters worse, a brief look around the trailer confirms Shane's creeping suspicion: There is no other room to get changed in.

"Turn around," Shane orders, rifling through his bin again.

"This is nothing I have not seen before," Ilya remarks.

Shane stiffens. "I said, turn around."

Surprisingly, Ilya obeys. Shane slips his shirt off with his eyes glued to Ilya's broad back, suspicious he'll turn back around when Shane isn't looking. Ilya's shoulderblades are pressed against his shirt fabric like two mountains. He drums his foot against the floor, impatient, but he doesn't complain, not even when Shane's gelled hair gets caught in the jersey and he hobbles around blind for a bit, the shirt covering his eyes.

"Alright," Shane announces. "You can turn back now."

Ilya does, donning a knowing smirk that seriously makes Shane consider whether Ilya has an extra pair of eyes on the back of his head. “I can do subtle, you know. Subtle is sexy.”

Shane stares back at him, his long lashes fluttering curiously. “When did your English get so good?”

Ilya flashes him a lopsided smile. Then, without warning, he yanks his shirt off with one hand, bunching up the material at the sleeve and pulling it up and over as if he were stretching his arms out to yawn. “My turn,” he says, as if he didn’t already make that glaringly obvious.

Shane averts his gaze respectfully. But he can’t force himself to think respectful thoughts, not with Ilya’s abdominal muscles flexing as he stretched his shirt over his head.

“You do not have to turn around, not for me,” Ilya adds. Shane scoffs. But he can’t help the way his eyes drift over to Ilya as he changes. Now down to his boxers, he shrugs on the compression shorts and breezers like they’re a second skin. Shane fiddles with his fingers as he waits.

When Ilya is done changing, Shane gives him a final once-over to make sure nothing is on backwards. When that is confirmed, he nods to Ilya like a cordial co-worker would before making for the trailer exit.

Ilya grabs his wrist before his hand reaches the doorknob.

“You were hard. Weren’t you?” Ilya whispers.

Shane’s wrist is on fire where Ilya’s fingers are wrapped around it. The fingers are tight against his skin, but his pants have become a little tighter too, and he hates the way Ilya can read him like a book and yet Shane can’t do the same. “Fuck you,” Shane pants. He yanks the door open and steps out into the sweltering heat.

They both waddle down to Stage 14 in their gear, Shane traveling a few paces ahead of Ilya. When they arrive, Shane is doubtful his mascara looks just as artful as when he left the artist's trailer. He hates the feeling of any product he doesn't personally own on his face, so if most of it has indeed smeared off, he thinks to himself: *Good riddance*.

"There they are!" Martin claps his hands together from his director's chair. "My leading ladies," he jokes, grinning.

Shane shifts his weight from foot to foot. He eyes the set: They have built a false front wall like in old Western movies, where it looks exactly like a Prime Hen restaurant from the front, but from the back, it's a patchy wooden wall. There is a picnic table in front of the wall that looks seriously small for two grown men, not to mention two professional athletes.

Shane's parents eye the structure appraisingly. "Looks great," Yuna mouths to Shane. Shane gives her a thumbs up.

Martin guides Shane and Ilya by a hand on their backs. "You'll both sit on either side of this table." They both plop down. The wood creaks ominously underneath them. "The whole point of this campaign is to show that everyone can get along when they're eating Prime Hen chicken. What better way to show that than two guys who hate each other's guts?"

Shane nods along, feeling suddenly nervous. "I triple checked with my mom - er, my team. We didn't receive a script."

"No for me also," Ilya chimes in. Shane's eyes flicker to Ilya's face, and amidst all the bright lights shining down on them he's scared to admit he finds comfort in it.

"Yes, that's because we want the dialogue to flow very naturally between you two. Sometimes, when you rehearse so much, it sounds - well - rehearsed. You get me?"

Shane and Ilya nod in unison.

“Ilya, you get me? Should I explain again?”

Ilya shakes his head. “I understand.”

“Good. Great. Because of that, you’ll be reading from cue cards.” Martin claps his hands twice. Three employees emerge from seemingly thin air, one carrying a platter of chicken sandwiches, another carrying a fake phone, and the third carrying a makeup brush and - goddamnit, Shane thinks, the brush is headed his way, swiping at the freckles on his cheeks as if to brush off invisible dust. This makeup artist, a new one, seems to consider touching up Ilya before she gets cold feet and slinks away. Shane takes one look at Ilya and finds he had been sending a cold, vaguely threatening glare to the makeup artist.

“What, you don’t want to get dolled up?” Shane can’t help the small smile that creeps in on his face at catching Ilya actively scaring someone.

“No. That was blush that she put on you. Never in life have I blushed,” Ilya says, shaking his head. “Russians do not do this.”

Shane cringes. “Oh God. Blush? I probably look straight out of an anime.”

Ilya quirks his eyebrow, a slow-growing smirk on his lips. “Which one? I will watch.”

Shane rolls his eyes as Martin snaps to get their attention. “Shane, your lines are in red. Ilya, yours are in blue. Got it?”

Shane coughs lightly. “Um. Should we do a bit of a practice one first, or...?”

“I am ready,” Ilya announces. Shane shoots him an icy look.

“Great. Then let’s begin. Rolling in 3, 2...” Shane waits for a 1, but it never comes. “Action!”

Shane's eyes dart to the first cue card. His line. "Do you want to order, or should I?" He glances at Ilya after he says it, cringing inwardly. The only emotions he knows how to portray on his face are the ones he's actively feeling, which makes these sorts of gigs so difficult for him.

Ilya reads his line next. "No, Hollander, do not worry. I can do it." The cue card instructs Ilya to pick up the fake phone, so he does it, bringing it to his ears. The movement doesn't even look stilted; Shane is mildly impressed. "Hello. I want the chicken sandwich. The... how you say... *normal* one."

Shane is too busy staring at Ilya's face during his lines to register that they weren't his own words. He glances back at the cue card, and finds that "how you say" is actually written on it.

"Cut," Martin shouts. "Okay. Good. Shane, you're a little stiff, but you'll loosen up in no time. Great." He claps his hands together again. "Ilya, buddy, comrade." He walks over to their table from his director's chair and fist bumps Ilya's shoulder. "For the food order - that was just an idea, on the cue cards. Really make it your own."

Ilya furrows his eyebrows. "You mean for the line, 'hello, I want the chicken sandwich?'"

Martin seems to ignore the comment. "Just, I want you to say it with a little less confidence. Like you're not sure you're saying it right."

Ilya stares down at the chicken sandwich prop between the two of them. "I am saying it right."

"Yeah," Martin nods, "but that's not the joke."

Shane is a little confused himself. Martin walks back over to the chair and yells "Action" again.

“Do you want to order, or should I?” Shane forgets *again* to stare at Ilya when he says it.

“No, Hollander, do not worry. I can do it.” Ilya clears his throat and picks up the phone. “Hello. I want... the chicken? Sandwich? How you say? Normal one.”

Martin yells “cut” again. Walks over to them again. Big smile on his face, again. Touches Ilya’s shoulder, again. “Can you make the accent even thicker? Like, really sell the confusion.”

Ilya tilts his head. “So, not talk how I talk?”

Shane stiffens in his seat. “Rozanov’s English is really good,” he says, directed towards Martin. “He can do way more than order a sandwich.”

Martin bites his lip. “So, okay. I see where we diverge here. This campaign, in part it’s about bonding over Prime Hen chicken, but it’s also about how even someone who doesn’t know a lick of English can sit down and enjoy a nice meal. Basically, fried chicken is the language we all speak. Get it?”

Ilya is quiet for a few moments. “I do not know if I get it.”

Martin nods brusquely. “That’s okay. Totally okay. I didn’t think you would, first try.”

Shane feels a vein in his forehead twitch at that. He opens his mouth to interject, not sure what might come out, but Martin drones on.

“For the next take, can you do a very heavy Russian accent? We don’t really need to understand you. We’ll add subtitles.” Martin points behind them, to the false front wall of the restaurant. “Another idea I had: When you’re ordering the chicken sandwich, say into the phone that you want the *white meat, grilled chicken* sandwich. Got it?”

Shane's not sure even *he* got that. Nothing Martin said just now is written on the cue cards. He turns to Ilya, prepared for the prideful firecracker beside him to rip the director a new one.

Ilya simply nods. "Got it." Shane stares at him like he's grown a second head.

"Action!"

Shane forgets it's his line to start. Ilya kicks his shin under the table. "You wanna order, or should I?" He is still looking straight at the camera rather than at Ilya, goddamnit. Next time.

"No. I can do." Ilya's Russian accent is so exaggerated, so not *him*, that Shane nearly breaks character, so sure that Ilya is joking. But he picks up the fake phone and brings it up to his ear like before. "Hello. I want..." Ilya hesitates for a beat. "White meat, grilled chicken sandwich. Please."

It's only when Shane hears the words in Ilya's voice that realization dawns on him about why Martin wanted him to order that meal in particular: With Ilya's accent, the "wh" in white turns to "vh." Shane remembers, suddenly, a conversation he and Ilya had offhandedly one night after sex, when Ilya told him that there is no "w" sound in Russian. The "gri-" in "grilled" doesn't exist in Russian either - not how English speakers say it, anyway.

Under the layers of his hockey gear, Shane suddenly feels cold.

"Cut!" Martin yells. When he walks over, he's chuckling. "Great. Great stuff. I know we're getting on you guys for just this first part, but the setup is most important. The rest of the lines come easy." He turns to Shane. "Doing great, Shane, just look at Ilya when you say your line."

Shane clears his throat. "I'm just not sure -"

Martin turns to Ilya. “Man, I love what you did. The accent. I love it. Do it heavier, if you can. Really lay it on. Vh-ite meat, gree-lled chicken sandwich.” He chuckles, shaking his head, the beret hanging on by a goddamn thread. “You gotta love it.”

Shane glances over at Ilya again. Everyone on set right now should be concerned for Martin’s welfare. *Come on, king of snark, hit him where it hurts!*

Ilya’s tone is surprisingly docile when he speaks. “The fans know I do not sound like this.”

Martin shakes his head resolutely. “No, they don’t. Trust me, because I’m one of them. They only know you on the ice: cold, calculating, just fucking *Russian*.” Shane sees a bead of sweat drip down Ilya’s forehead. “Any interviews you’ve done, if you do speak, you don’t say much. Come on, they’re not looking to Ilya fucking Rozanov to have a way with words. That’s why this is such a great opportunity.” He gestures grandly to the tiny picnic table and fake building behind them.

Shane expects, yet again, for Ilya to rip this guy a new one. Instead, he crosses his arms. “Okay.”

Astonishment spurs Shane into action from across the picnic table. “Um, hold on, please. When Rozanov said the line earlier, exactly as you had written it, you said ‘that’s not the joke.’ So what is supposed to be the joke here?”

Martin pats Ilya’s shoulder again, and Shane swears for a moment he sees red. “You know,” Martin says cheekily.

“Do I?” Shane fights to keep his tone level and respectful. “Is the whole joke that - just that he can’t speak English?”

Martin opens and closes his mouth. “Well -”

“Because he can,” Shane adds. “And anyway, even if he couldn’t, I’m just not sure if that’s -” He swivels his head around the set, searching, but his parents have wandered off somewhere. “I just don’t think that’s -”

“Hollander,” Ilya starts.

“Appropriate,” Shane finishes.

“It’s fine,” Ilya says. Shane looks over at Ilya to find that the comment was directed towards *him*.

“It’s fine?” Shane clarifies, his eyes wide.

Ilya wipes the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. He shrugs dismissively and gestures towards the video village, where a gaggle of Production Assistants with headphones on their heads are chatting and sipping coffee. “If they think it’s funny...” He trails off.

Shane gulps, his heart beating fast. Martin claps his hands together again - *who is this guy*, Shane thinks, *a jolly chimp?* - and addresses just Ilya. “That’s the spirit, Rozanov. Comrade. You’re a good sport.” He pauses. “And hey, next time we do the take, can you drop the ‘please’ at the end of your order?” He turns to Shane with a look of mild disdain. “Shane, just remember to say your line to Ilya, not to the camera.”

Shane realizes, suddenly, that he’s embodying the stereotype his mother had warned him about: the one person of color on set who is making things “difficult.” The one guy in the entire NHL who can’t take a joke, and of course that guy is part of the measly handful of non-white players.

But he’s also Shane goddamn Hollander. And that man, across from him, still wiping the sweat from his face, is Ilya goddamn Rozanov.

Shane stands up at the same time as Martin yells “Action.”

“I need some air,” Shane announces, interrupting the take. Across from him at the table, Ilya is motionless. “Rozanov, can you please...” He trails off, hoping Ilya will take the hint, but he just stares back like a dog tilting his head in confusion. “Can you come over here?”

When Ilya stands, he nearly takes the whole picnic table with him. When they’re far away enough from the video village, Shane pulls Ilya by the arm and shoves him into a nearby storage closet before entering himself.

Surprisingly, Ilya speaks first. “When I said ‘I want you to suck my dick,’ I did not expect it to happen so soon.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “First of all, fuck you. Second of all, are you okay?”

Ilya actually scratches his head at that, like he cannot for the life of him understand what Shane is referring to. A stack of brooms clang together when Ilya lifts his arm. “I am fine, yes. Although it is a little hot in here.”

Shane squeezes his eyes shut, shaking his head. When he opens his eyes, they’re vulnerable, and when he speaks it’s in a whisper. “Rozanov, you first flirted with me by jacking off in a communal shower alongside me. *Me*, your arch-rival and a practical stranger. Hell, most players would assume your baby babble was shit talk, the way you get under their skin.” Shane points to the closed door of the closet. “You’re telling me that you, of all people, can’t tell off a racist shithead?”

Ilya bites his lip. “Hollander, I am going to say this very gently.” He holds both of his hands up in surrender. “I am white.”

Shane audibly groans. “You know what I mean. If it’s not racism, it’s - it’s xenophobia.”

Ilya sizes Shane up. “Is that fear of being a virgin?”

“Rozanov.” Shane's voice is unnervingly calm. “Be serious, for one goddamn second in your life. They’re making fun of you out there. You’re just gonna take that? That’s not like you.”

Ilya shrugs. He reaches his hand up to bite at his cuticles. Shane grabs onto his hand and lowers it gently. “I thought you were ignoring me today,” Ilya says, although his voice is devoid of its earlier venom.

“No, come on. You’re just gonna take that?” Shane repeats, insistent.

Finally, Ilya drops both of his arms at his sides, where they dangle limply. “It’s good money.”

Shane furrows his eyebrows. “Uh. Okay. Like you need even more money.”

It’s Ilya’s turn to scoff, this time. “You do not know me.”

“I am *trying* to get to know you. Right now.”

Ilya fidgets, shifting his weight from foot to foot. “Lots of mouths to feed. Back home.”

“Okay. Alright. I get that.” Shane releases a deep breath. “So, that’s why you’re not standing up for yourself?”

“They make me sound stupid, yes,” Ilya admits. “But I also sound stupid on my own.”

Shane shakes his head resolutely. “You do not sound stupid.”

“In English, I sound stupid.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Sometimes.”

“It’s - it’s just a language. It’s not *you*. Hell, Martin sounds stupid even in English!” That elicits a small chuckle from Ilya, which makes Shane’s heart thump just a little faster.

“I am not saying I agree. Just, I understand.” Somehow, that pains Shane the most to hear. “Russia is... it’s Russia. I do not need to tell you this, Hollander. You were at the Olympics. All countries say it: ‘Fuck Russia, Fuck Russia, Fuck Russia.’”

Shane feels a pang of guilt remembering how he joined in on some of those chants while rooting for his Canadian counterparts. “Well, I like Russia.”

Ilya glances at Shane appraisingly, his face grim. “Just do not look up our laws. Russia does not like you back.”

“Any-ways,” Shane says, avoiding the comment, “You are not Russia. You are not the entire country of Russia, and you’re not the government of Russia. You’re...” *Ilya*, he says in his head. “You’re Rozanov.”

Ilya looks around the dimly lit room. “What difference does it make?”

Shane brushes off some invisible dust from Ilya’s shoulder pads, just to touch him. “A pretty big one, I think.” Shane rubs his forehead, his heartbeat quickening. He pauses, before adding, tentatively: “And I know, if the roles were reversed and they were making fun of me out there for something I can’t even change, that you’d do the same.”

Ilya’s gaze softens, just slightly. “That is different.”

“No,” Shane insists. “Not in any way that matters.”

Ilya grabs onto Shane’s hand while he’s rubbing his forehead, lowering it so they meet each other’s eyes. “Hollander. I told you, I need the money. It is as simple as that.”

Shane feels genuine remorse when he says it, but he can’t help it. “I get that. I do. But I don’t want to participate in this if you’re the butt of the joke. I’m sorry. I can’t.”

Ilya sighs deeply. “So you are just going to walk out?”

“No,” Shane acquiesces. “Not yet, at least. I have an idea. We come back to set presenting a united front.”

“Whose front? Yours?”

“I actually need you to stop.”

“I am interested if yes.”

“You’re a fucking asshole.”

“I know.”

“You ignored me for six months, by the way.”

“I know.”

A pause.

“I am sorry.” He looks at Shane when he says it.

“Thanks,” Shane sighs, a sliver of relief settling into his bones. “Thanks for saying that.” He claps his hands together, because this director is not the only one who can do a fun, spontaneous gesture, thank you very much. “Okay. Beginning Mission: United Front.”

Martin looks about ready to combust when he sees Ilya and Shane walk back onto set. “Glad you both got some air,” he says stiffly. “We’re a tad behind schedule. Let’s get you both -”

“Actually,” Shane interrupts, “I would like to pitch an alternate idea for today’s shoot.” From the edge of the sound stage, Shane can see his parents look on in horror. “How about we lean into the ‘arch-rivals’ aspect of us two?” Shane gestures between him and Ilya, Ilya puffing out his chest as he does so. “Imagine this: We both reach for the same chicken sandwich at the same time. We bicker, who’s gonna get it, blah blah. And in the end...”

Shane stares at Ilya expectantly.

“In the end...” He elbows Ilya in the ribs.

“In the end, they share,” Ilya finishes. Shane smiles at him fondly.

“O-kay,” Martin drawls. “That is awfully cute. The thing is, we already wrote a script.”

“Are you open to changing it? At all?” Shane asks.

Martin crosses his arms. "I do apologize. But no, not at this time."

"Okay then." Shane makes a gesture like he's dusting off his hands, ridding himself of this entire shoot. "In that case, I can't participate."

His parents gasp from the side of the room. "Shane -"

"Sorry," Shane offers, looking not very sorry at all.

Martin looks between Shane and Ilya expectantly. "I will say, I'm disappointed... I've heard great things about your work ethic, Shane." He redirects his attention to Ilya. "But really, the campaign hinges on Rozanov."

Ilya speaks up as if called on. "If Hollander is out, then I am out."

Martin's mouth drops open. "No."

"Yes," Ilya corrects. Then, he smirks, rather deviously. "You get me?"

Beside Martin, the video village is bustling with poorly concealed whispers and murmurs. Martin tries unsuccessfully to shush them.

"Mr. Bines," one scrawny PA approaches, "should we alert the writer's room of the change?"

Martin presses his lips together, brooding. Silently, he nods.

They're twisted up together in a dimly lit hotel room in Tampa when they hear it. Shane is groaning loudly, hands fisted into the white sheets, while Ilya is thrusting into him deeply and relentlessly from behind. Shane has tried and failed to prop himself up on his elbows so many times tonight, but his limbs transform to jelly time and time again when he feels Ilya's full length inside of him.

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya huffs, panting. He leans over Shane's arched back until his chest meets Shane's skin. He groans at the tightness, the utter lack of space between their bodies.

On the nightstand, the clock radio is playing a rock song from some local Florida station loud enough that they can feel the bass bounce around in their skulls.

"Oh God," Shane mumbles, spent. "Ilya, I think I'm gonna -"

"Do it," Ilya spits, pressing a wet kiss to Shane's lean back. "Come. Come for me."

"I can't - can't hold it back -"

Their own voices speak back to them. Neither registers where it comes from, at first.

"Don't start."

"I am not starting anything, Hollander!"

"We're really doing this?"

Ilya's thrusts peter out like a drone losing altitude. In the next moment, Shane can feel Ilya's body wrack with laughter from literally *inside* him. Ilya's chest bumps against Shane's back again.

"No way," Ilya pants, their sweat intermingling.

"Oh God," Shane groans, hiding his face in his hands. Ilya picks him up and swivels him around so he's on his back against the mattress. Shane whines at the temporary emptiness inside of him. Ilya answers his unspoken ask by sliding inside him again, but he doesn't move once he gets there. He's too busy trying to stave down his laughter.

"Oh, you're enjoying this, aren't you?" Shane mocks. Their own advertisement for freaking fried chicken is playing as an ad on the radio.

"No," Ilya tries. His mouth splits open into a grin despite his best efforts.

From the radio, a younger Shane Hollander's voice chimes in. *"After this, you're so going down."*

"After what?"

"Good question! After we demolish this spicy deluxe fried chicken sandwich, available for a limited time, only at Prime Hen."

Both Ilya and Shane groan in unison, their foreheads knocking together in a way that might be painful if the impact weren't so, so necessary to dislodge their cringe, as their younger selves shout out the final line: *"Some things are bigger than rivalries. Chow now!"*

"How is that still being aired?" Shane asks, shaking his head incredulously. Ilya shrugs, the movement slightly jostling his body against Shane's.

“We were right, you know.”

“About?”

“Some things are bigger than rivalries.”

Shane lifts his eyes higher to meet Ilya’s above him. Ilya is staring down at him like he’s something precious. He is starting to believe, now, that he really is, but what he is most sure of is that what they have is something precious.

“Yeah.” He tilts his chin up a little, angling his mouth so he can blow some of Ilya’s hair up and out of his line of sight. “Some things are.”

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading. This story is a bit different than the others I wrote. Please let me know what you think with a comment.

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