

vodka-assisted catharsis

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/75706786) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/75706786>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Book 2: Heated Rivalry (Game Changers) , Inspired by Heated Rivalry (TV) , Heated Rivalry spoilers , Fluff , Light Angst , Slice of Life , i wrote a scene i thought was missing from the book but inspired by the tv show , thank u canada for my life , plop this in chapter 27 of the book , Character Study , POV Ilya Rozanov , takes place post-s01e06 show-wise
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-13 Words: 1,961 Chapters: 1/1

vodka-assisted catharsis

by [allicanseeispink](#)

Summary

In which Ilya Rozanov finally says what he means.

Notes

Reader discretion is advised for book spoilers. Should be okay to read without any spoilers if you've seen S01E06 The Cottage

► Click here to find out where in the book this takes place!

Hi, in my humble opinion, the book is lacking in a moment of pure catharsis where the slate is cleared for the romance partners, you know? Like in Persuasion when Capt. Wentworth spills his heart out to Anne in that letter. Or when Elizabeth learns that Mr. Darcy did all of that for her. But that's okay. We love DIY.

This is my birthday gift to myself because it's literally my birthday today. This one's for me.

This is inspired by the tweets of my oomf Shelly, [ao3 user playexodus](#), who always has great show livetweets.

EDIT 14/12/2025: Changed the rating to T because there's a mention of sex. Oops. Also improved my sentence construction of the "where in the book this take's place" blurb in this author's note. Sorry about that, it's literally 4:07 a.m. rn.

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

The cottage looks the same as when they left it that morning.

“Cottage,” Shane calls it, like it’s a place with crocheted blankets and a sagging porch. In reality it is glass and dark wood and sharp angles, all clean lines and money, sitting on the edge of the lake. The windows catch the last of the sun and throw it deep into the room, so the pale floor looks briefly like it’s lit from underneath. Light pools on the counters, climbs the clean edges of the cabinets, turns the glass walls into mirrors that show Ilya and Shane in fragments—hands, shoulders, the line of a jaw—then releases them again when he shifts.

Ilya steps inside and lets the door close behind him, quiet as a held breath.

Shane had said, *I need some air*, and walked out ahead of him, shoes still on, shoulders tight like he was bracing for impact with nothing at all. Ilya had watched him go with the same old instinct—to wait, to give space, to not make it worse—and immediately hated himself for how automatic that reflex still is.

It is old muscle memory. It comes from places in him that do not speak English, or any language he knows how to put on a page.

In Ilya’s childhood apartment in Moscow, the light was sparse. It came in thin and tired through the balcony door that didn’t seal properly, laid itself in dull stripes across worn linoleum, and stopped short of the living room as if it knew what lived there. Dust hung in it sometimes, visible in the afternoon like a slow snowfall, and then the sun would slide away behind the neighboring block and the room would go flat, gray, waiting. The air carried old cigarette smoke trapped in curtains, the sour bite of spilled beer that never quite left the couch, the metallic tang of the radiator when it overheated and clicked like a warning. The building made noise on its own—pipes knocking, a neighbor’s television bleeding through the wall.

When his mother died, he learned to make himself quieter than all of it.

He could feel a feeling start in his chest and swallow it before it reached his face. He could blink back tears before they made his eyes hot. He could keep his voice level when his father’s temper shifted, when the bottle emptied, when the silence in the living room turned dangerous. He moved through the kitchen in socks so the floorboards wouldn’t complain. He opened cupboards with two fingers and eased them shut, hand still on the door until it latched without a sound. If his throat tightened, he drank water slowly, like he was teaching his body to behave.

He became good at wanting things in secret. He became good at looking fine.

Here, he sets his palm on the dark wood and it gives back a little warmth, like the house has been storing it all day. The glass doesn't rattle when he moves. The floor doesn't answer him. The light keeps coming, generous and unbothered, spreading across the space as if it expects him to stay long enough to watch it fade.

He sets the keys down and heads for the kitchen.

He knows where Shane keeps the decent stuff now. It is new knowledge, learned the way most things between them get learned—by accident, in passing, without anyone naming it. He opens the cabinet and takes out the bottle he brought with him, wrapped in a pair of socks for the drive. It is Russian vodka, the kind you buy because it is clean and honest, not because the label looks expensive under bar lights. In Moscow, nobody orders vodka by the brand name an American can pronounce. You drink what burns right and leaves your head clear the next morning.

He takes down two glasses.

Outside, the lake is flat and darkening, the sun low enough that everything is gold-edged and deceptive. The private dock stretches out like a thought Shane hasn't finished yet. Shane is already there, leaning against one of the posts, staring out at nothing in particular.

Ilya walks toward him, bottle tucked under his arm, glasses clinking softly.

"The last time I had that stuff," Shane says without turning, "was in Las Vegas. Remember?"

Ilya snorts. "That was not *this* stuff. This vodka is special."

Shane smiles a little at that, finally glancing back. His face is still tight around the edges. "It tasted like lighter fluid."

"This one tastes like regret," Ilya says. "Much better quality."

He sets the glasses down on the dock between them and pours carefully, an inch in each. The vodka catches the light and turns briefly to silver. He looks up.

Shane is half-turned toward the lake, the setting sun sliding across his face like it is trying to memorize him. It picks out the freckles on his cheekbones one by one, softens the hard line of his jaw, turns the edges of his dark hair copper where the wind lifts it. There is a small crease between his brows, like he is still holding himself together out of habit, but his mouth is loose, not clenched. The usual sharpness isn't there. He isn't scanning for the next hit or the next angle. He's simply there, breathing steadily, letting the quiet reach him.

Ilya has seen him under arena lights and in hotel rooms with curtains drawn, always in motion, always with something sharp in his eyes—focus, anger, pleasure, the need to win. This is different. This is Shane in the open. Shane after telling his parents. Shane who had said the words out loud and survived them.

Something in Ilya's chest tips forward.

He feels it in his throat first, that stupid pressure, like his body is trying to betray him by making him emotional in public. His thoughts crowd in all at once—how long he has wanted this, how long he has pretended he didn't, how close they came to missing each other entirely. It is too much to hold behind his teeth. It is already spilling, and he cannot force it back into the old shape. Shane did it in that house, with his mother watching him like she was seeing him for the first time. Shane spoke anyway. Ilya can do it here. He can tell the truth, even if it lands awkward and raw.

He lifts his glass to his lips.

The motion gives him a second to breathe. The burn gives him a second to commit.

He drinks it all at once.

"Ilya—hey." Shane's voice is light, joking on purpose. "Slow down."

Ilya exhales. He sets the glass down harder than he means to.

"No," he says. Then, because that sounds abrupt even to his own ears, he adds, "I just—*listen*. I should have talked to you sooner."

Shane turns fully toward him now. The joking ease slips a little; concern shows at the edges of his face, in the way his eyes sharpen and his shoulders come forward as if he's ready to catch Ilya before he falls. It is such a small change, almost nothing, and it lands like a hand on Ilya's back. Shane notices. Shane cares. Shane is paying attention.

The realization steadies Ilya more than the vodka did. It makes the moment feel possible. If Shane can look at him like that—worried, present—then Ilya can stop being clever. He can try, for once, to meet Shane where he is instead of circling him and calling it safety.

"I have liked you for a long time," Ilya continues, words tripping over each other slightly, as they always do when he stops rehearsing. "Years. I am just very bad at this."

"At...?" Shane prompts gently.

"This." Ilya gestures vaguely between them, at the lake, at the absurd expansive quiet. "Feelings. Knowing what I want. Nobody ever taught me. I only know how to play hockey."

Shane's mouth twists. "Well. I couldn't either. The mess was a two-way street."

"No." Ilya shakes his head, sharper than he intends. He makes himself slow down. Stay. "Listen. I love you. We already said that, yes. But you deserve tenderness. Someone who understands how to do that."

He swallows. The words come out crooked, but true.

"You folded your clothes before we first had sex," he says. "I noticed. I always notice things like that. You asked me if you should take your shoes off when you came to my place in Boston, like it was not just my apartment, but something important. You are kind in ways that

are very quiet. Even when I have not been kind back.” His mouth twists. “I need to do that. I needed to start doing that years ago.”

“I have no practice,” he says. “But I will try my best.”

The lake laps softly against the dock, patient, like it has all the time in the world.

Shane is quiet for a second, looking at him like he is taking Ilya in and putting him somewhere safe. Then his face softens, immediate, almost impatient with the idea that Ilya could be doubting this.

“Hey.” Shane steps in close. “You’re fine. Don’t worry. You don’t have to—” He stops himself, like he catches the old habit in his own mouth. He tries again. “You’re not doing it wrong. I’m here.”

It hits Ilya in the worst possible way. His throat tightens; his eyes burn. He blinks hard, furious with his own body.

“See,” he says, voice rough. “Even now you are doing it. Reassuring me. Always you are the one being good.”

Shane makes a small sound, like he doesn’t like that sentence at all. He reaches for Ilya and pulls him in, firm, close enough that Ilya can feel Shane’s breath against his cheek and the steady beat of him.

“Ilya,” Shane says, low and certain. “I love *you*.”

Ilya lets out a laugh that is almost a sob. He presses his forehead to Shane’s for a second, because he needs something solid.

“Very stupid of you,” he whispers.

Shane’s mouth curves. “Yeah,” he says. “I know.” And then he kisses him, slow and deliberate, close enough that Ilya has to steady himself against Shane’s shoulder, close enough that there is no space left for second-guessing or retreat.

They pull apart slowly, like neither of them is quite ready to let go.

“I love you,” Ilya says, because he can, because it feels worse not to.

Shane smiles at him, soft and a little stunned, and Ilya has to look away before it becomes too much. He gestures down at the dock, at the neglected glasses.

“You have not even tried the vodka yet,” he says. “I am just crying on you.”

Shane huffs a laugh and reaches for his glass. He takes a cautious sip, makes a face immediately. “Ah—yeah. That still burns. But it’s better than Vegas.”

“Obviously,” Ilya says. “Vegas was insult.”

Shane grins. “Hayden’s wife gave me marshmallow vodka once. It was actually pretty good.”

Ilya stares at him. “Marshmallow,” he repeats, like he is testing the word for structural integrity. He shakes his head. “Is okay. I will accept one flaw for my boyfriend.”

Shane laughs, full and easy, and bumps his shoulder into Ilya’s. “Generous.”

They stand there a while longer, trading small remarks, letting the bottle sit between them like it isn’t the point anymore. The lake darkens by degrees, the water going from blue to ink, the lights from the house behind them beginning to glow in the glass. Shane stays close, shoulder warm against Ilya’s arm, like it does not occur to him to move away.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! I love Heated Rivalry damn. Kudos and comments are welcome, if you feel like it.

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