Win Conditions

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/75695936.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Rose Landry
Additional Tags:	s01e04: Rose, Canon Divergence, Getting Together, Mutual Pining, Confessions, brief angst, very minor Shane/Rose, Anal Sex, Riding, Fix-It, a Gay Crisis somewhat resolved
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-13 Words: 6,858 Chapters: 1/1

Win Conditions

by thecouchsofa

Summary

At the club, Shane realises what he wants.

So he follows it out the front door.

Notes

Hey Siri, play ‘All The Things She Said’. No need to add the crying backtrack, I’ll provide that myself.

I word vomited the majority of this into a doc immediately after watching episode 4; not even re-reading the books helps dull my yearning for them to work their shit out onscreen.

See the end of the work for more notes

Rozanov was leaving.

It had been a while since Shane took in a proper breath. Ciel was so loud inside, the atmosphere a living, breathing thing; capillaries of smoke and vodka and lust, the kind of debauchery that he preferred to watch from a distance rather than actively participate in. The thudding bass hurt his chest, and people kept stepping on his toes and pressing in against him on all sides, crowding him into a minor state of panic. Rose's perfume was cloying and her lips were sticky from the gloss she'd applied in the bathroom.

He'd shuddered when they'd pressed to his cheek.

She hadn't noticed.

And now Rozanov was leaving.

Alone – which was noteworthy, given he'd spent the last hour attached at the mouth to multiple women, none of whom had borne any sort of resemblance to Shane. He hadn't approached, had stayed firmly on the other side of the room, completely untouchable. Behind a firm barrier that was transparent, yet insurmountable, unless Shane did something incredibly drastic like rip Rozanov's dance partner away and kiss him right there, in the middle of a packed nightclub. Which was so out of the realm of possibility that it wasn't even worth considering.

Rozanov's eyes, however, never strayed. As he ran his hands down the body of the woman dancing against him, he watched Shane. As he kissed her neck, he watched Shane. As he whispered in her ear, he watched Shane.

But then he disappeared into the undulating crowd, and a weight lifted off Shane's shoulders. It was replaced not two seconds later by a different kind of heaviness; a dark curtain that covered his eyes and constricted his lungs. It felt like a goodbye that had gone unverbalised. Like blocking a once-familiar cell number, or deleting a photo album dedicated to a freshly dead relationship. It was salt in the wound of their silent text thread, Rozanov's name so far down Shane's 'recent contacts' list that he had to scroll to find it.

If Rozanov wasn't here, Shane could silence the need that gnawed at him, gnarled fingers wrapping around his ribcage, ready to cut through sinew and bone. He had one of the most beautiful women in the world in front of him, and he could think of nothing but how Rozanov had smirked when he'd pushed him against the boards in their last game. How his voice had dropped low when he'd asked Shane to stay the night. Of how badly Shane had wanted to say no, even when every part of him had screamed *yes*.

If Rozanov walked outside, when would Shane see him again, off the ice? Would he ever text Shane again? There was no guarantee. And the thought of that was even more terrifying than what he'd need to do if he wanted to prevent it.

He couldn't trust his brain – it tied him up in knots, spinning in circles until he felt sick, and didn't know which way was up. So his feet made the decision for him.

Rose's hands dropped to her sides as Shane stepped away. She tilted her head, glossy lips curving into a smile. "Are you heading to the bar? Could you get me another one?"

His mouth felt so, so, dry. The hair rose on the back of his neck as he stood there, heart pounding faster and faster until his ears started to ring. "I can't."

"You have two hands," she said, brightly. "Miles can get his own, don't worry about him."

Miles. Who was right up against Shane's back, still dancing. Who had placed his hands atop Rose's on Shane's hips and thought nothing of it. Who wasn't operating as though there was a gun actively pointed at him whenever he expressed admiration for how Shane looked, or when he winked at Rose and informed her that she'd made *a good choice*.

In contrast, Shane felt as though he was actively being hunted when he pictured sweaty torsos and corded muscles, or anything less than flowery and delicate and hyperfeminine.

Judging by the look on Rozanov's face, maybe he *was* being hunted. Only his pursuer had given up too early.

"I can't," Shane said again. He slid his hands into his pockets and turned his body, breaking Miles' hold. "Fuck, I can't do this right now."

"Dance?" She'd stopped moving, had reached out to put a hand on Shane's arm. It should have felt comforting – it would have, if Rozanov had done it. Which was horrible and fucked up and not at all what Shane needed to focus on. Now, it was restrictive. Revealing. Yet another jagged piece of this awful tapestry that Shane had helped weave. "I won't be offended if you sit down – you had a big game today."

"A *bad* game," he mumbled. He could save this. He could pretend that he was just pissed about the result, about how terribly he'd skated, how sloppy his stick handling had been. But he didn't want to do that.

"We all have bad days. Remember my last movie?" This time, her smile was less sure. She glanced over Shane's shoulder and shook her head; the warm press at Shane's back disappeared, Miles retreating. "Do you want to get some air? I can come with you."

"No. Thanks."

It was awful. Everything about this was. And once he opened that door, he could never close it again. But maybe he didn't have to open it all the way. A door wasn't a door when it was ajar, after all. Or so his dad joked.

"I'm sorry," Shane said. He turned to look over his shoulder, eyes searching the crowd. Somehow, he'd thought maybe Rozanov would have been able to sense what was going on – he'd spent the evening staring, after all. It stood to reason that he might notice a shift in Shane's demeanour. But he was nowhere to be seen. Which meant that time was slipping away faster than Shane could grab hold of it.

More frantically now, he said, "Us. I can't do *us* right now."

He watched as she turned to look where he had, following his line of sight. Something crossed her expression then – a look that he'd seen before on another face in a hotel gym, when he'd taken a water bottle from an outstretched hand.

Recognition.

Slowly, Rose nodded. She tugged Shane's beer from his grip and said, "I had a theory. But I wasn't going to … I was waiting for you to say something. I didn't think that you might not know. About yourself." She looked down, then back up; her brows were drawn together, concern clear on her face. "Did you not? Know, I mean?"

He took another step back, the ringing in his ears intensifying. He still couldn't see Rozanov. "I don't…"

"I thought it was a 'both' situation, but I guess not." She took another drink, then pursed her lips. "It's ok, Shane. Jesus, you look…"

He swallowed. "Stupid?"

"*Stressed*."

A laugh burst out of him and then Rose's lips were curving upward in a smile. "Don't think you're off the hook – I expect a text tomorrow. You're too nice of a boy to ghost me, Shane Hollander."

"I will." An out. She was offering him an out – and a far more gracious one than he deserved. He was struck by the sudden urge to hug her, but the uncharacteristic hunch of her shoulders made him think better of it. "I'm really sorry."

She huffed a laugh, then took his hand and squeezed it gently. The pink and blue lights flashed across her face as she said, "Go do what you need to do."

Go after him.

Whether or not she meant that, Shane didn't know.

But it's what he heard.

So he squeezed her hand back and walked out the front door.

Outside, a few Raiders players milled about. They glanced at him with interest, and he heard one whisper to the other, the word *Rose* said alongside an amused chuckle. Shane couldn't ask them where Rozanov had gone, even though they would definitely know. That knowledge was so close, but he wasn't allowed to access it. Couldn't risk the secret that he was still protecting, despite not knowing if it was even still relevant.

Where was he? Would Rozanov have caught an Uber, or would someone have driven him there? Shane hadn't seen him come in. And, he realised, he didn't actually know how Rozanov usually got to his house when they met up after Montreal games. He'd never thought to ask.

“Fuck,” Shane muttered to himself. He pushed his hands deeper into his pockets, the cold air licking at his exposed skin. The street was fairly quiet; most of the other businesses had closed for the day, and all of the restaurants had their doors shut to keep out the chill. Around the corner of the club was the lot where Miles had parked; he’d made a joke about needing Shane to walk him to his car later, fend off all the other big, strong hockey boys lurking around and protect his honour.

One of the Boston players lit up a cigarette; it was a harsh smell, not sweet and cloying like the ones Rozanov preferred. The smoke wafted, the cloud expanding in the air before it dissipated, thin strands fading into the blackness of the night.

Would Rozanov have gone home so quickly? Or would he want to lick his wounds first? When threatened, he had the tendency to lash out, but then he stewed for as long as he could. Again, Shane’s feet made the decision for him.

Sidewalk turned to gravel and Shane was rounding the corner. The lot wasn’t large – just a few rows of cars and a single dim streetlight. There was a tiny window, higher than Shane could reach without getting a boost, and music from the club filtered outside.

There was nobody there, save for a single lone figure, leaning against the wall and smoking a cigarette. His face was turned away, only half of it visible at that angle, but Shane didn’t need good lighting in order to recognise Rozanov. Fuck, he didn’t even need to see at all, actually – he knew the smell of that smoke, how it soaked into the material of the jacket Rozanov always brought with him to away games. He knew the sound of Rozanov’s breath as he took a drag. He could *feel* him standing there, that magnetism that had drawn Shane to him all those years ago still enacting its pull.

Shane would know him anywhere.

So it was easy to tell that Rozanov didn’t look happy enough for someone who had spent all night being pursued by attractive women he was clearly interested in. He should have been beaming, considering he could do whatever the fuck he wanted out there on the dancefloor. Unlike Shane. Who never would, if he didn’t change something.

Gravel crunched under his shoes as he walked closer. He barely heard it, the thud of his heartbeat outcompeting all the other nighttime sounds, save for Rozanov’s breathing. Once he was within talking distance, he stopped.

Rozanov let out a long breath; his face was still turned away. “*Zhopa*. Do not test me – I am not afraid to fight tonight.”

Shane let out an awkward laugh. “Uh, let’s maybe keep that on the ice.”

Rozanov’s head whipped around, shock clear on his face. His cigarette dangled from his parted lips, and he made a grab for it to prevent it from falling to the ground. He hadn’t been expecting Shane – that much was clear.

“Hi,” Shane said, quieter now. He took another step closer, hunching his shoulders against the cold. He felt the sudden urge to stick out his hand, an olive branch to match the one in his

memories. But that one had been flexible, newly sprouted, not dragged down by the weight of time and outside expectations.

It might not have been Saskatchewan, but they *were* in a parking lot and Rozanov was still smoking by himself. And Shane had been thinking all day about seeing him, planning what to say, how to act, just as he had back then. Even after eight years, he was still nervous. He still cared.

Rozanov stared at him for a moment, blinking slowly. Then he turned his face away, his fingers coming up to wipe at his cheek.

Another few steps closer.

Shane squinted against the darkness, wishing that his eyes were better. That every time he went to the optometrist, they didn't tell him to start wearing his contacts or he'd make his vision even worse. That he wasn't so caught in in not ceding ground to his body that he was missing the way Rozanov's lips twitched, the way his hand shook when he lifted his cigarette to his mouth.

He couldn't see very well, but the faded glow of the streetlight was enough that when Rozanov turned back around, the skin under his eyes was visibly glistening. And he could just make out Rozanov's expression. It was unfamiliar – usually Rozanov was cocky to the point of irritation. Sometimes he was sweet, oftentimes he was confident. Self-assured. But this was something else – he looked miserable. He'd just won a game, had spent the evening dancing with a revolving door of attractive women, and he looked miserable.

Rozanov's tongue darted out to wet his bottom lip. "Where is your girlfriend?" He sniffed, visibly trying to cover the sound with a shuffle of his feet on the gravel and a well-timed drag of his cigarette. But this time, Shane was looking – properly looking. And he caught every bit of it.

"Nowhere," Shane replied. "She's not…"

A huff of laughter, the edges sharp. Rozanov shook his head, a cruel smile on his face. "Again, you are running."

I didn't run from you, Shane wanted to say. Only, he *had* done that, hadn't he? The last time they'd seen each other, he hadn't been able to get away fast enough. He'd needed to stop at a department store on the way back to his hotel and buy a new jacket, just in case Hayden noticed that he'd come back without one. The panic had felt bone deep, and it still welled up hours later, whenever he thought of Rozanov. About what his intentions were, what he wanted from Shane. What would happen if Shane let himself have what he now realised was being offered.

That thrum of anxiety was still there; it was ever-present now, Shane hyperaware of his actions, the perception of them, the misinterpretation of his intent. What the public and his teammates and his coach would think, how his sponsors would react if he did something as innocuous as like a post on Instagram that had a rainbow filter plastered over the top. That everyone would be able to tell what he was, because it was already so obvious.

But now, that anxiety was covered by something even larger – the thought that Rozanov might go away for good this time. That he might stop texting Shane. That Shane would become trapped in an endless spiral of lying to himself if he didn't take this chance. That he'd never be able to be truthful with his parents, with his friends, or with himself. That he'd never again see that look on someone's face – the one that Rozanov had thrown him, right before he pulled Shane's head onto his bare shoulder and stroked his hair, kissed the top of his head. That he'd never again feel so wholly encompassed by someone. That, for the rest of his life, he'd have to fake it. That in twenty years he'd kiss his wife goodnight before opening Grindr on his phone in the bathroom, behind a locked the door.

That he'd never be himself, doomed to live a half life in the shadow of what he truly wanted – that feeling of completeness, of acceptance, of someone seeing who he really was and loving him anyway. He couldn't fake that forever. Not when he'd already had it for years, despite it never having been said out loud.

"Go back inside, Hollander," Rozanov muttered. He extinguished his cigarette on the brick wall; Shane expected him to drop it on the ground, but instead he slipped it into the pocket of his jacket.

"Aren't you scared of … catching on fire or something?"

Rozanov raised his eyebrows. "No – I am not an idiot."

"Why did you—?"

"I do not like litter."

"Right," Shane said. "Forgot you were some kind of wildlife warrior."

For a long moment, Rozanov just looked at him. Then, "I am going home. You should go back inside before someone robs you."

Shane let out a huff of laughter. "We're in the middle of Montreal."

"So?"

"So I'm not worried about that."

But, he wanted to say, *I'm worried about you.* Because the person before him didn't feel the same; he'd lost that characteristic swagger, that overconfidence that Shane loved and hated in equal measure. He looked tired, hollowed out and left to dry in the sun.

Maybe that was Shane's fault. Maybe he deserved to feel guilty about that.

A strained laugh. A roll of those shuttered eyes, so distant in a face that was so near. "Goodnight, Hollander."

Panic shot through Shane as Rozanov pushed off the wall. He could lose this for good tonight. And he couldn't let that happen.

“Don’t,” Shane said. He stepped forward, blocking Rozanov’s path. “Don’t do that. Call me something else.”

“What – boring? Idiot?”

“Shane.”

Rozanov took a step back, surprise flashing across his usually stoic face. When he spoke, his voice was quieter but tinged with venom. “I did not think you liked that.”

“Why?”

“Because,” Rozanov shot back, “you got a … what the fuck was I supposed to think?” He paused, kicking at the gravel. “I do not need this right now, Hollander. Go back inside and dance with your pretty girlfriend. Go home, go fuck yourself, do whatever the fuck you want.”

“Okay,” Shane said, “I should do what I want?”

“Yes,” Rozanov snapped. He threw his hands up, rolled his eyes; it was at Shane’s expense, just like it usually was. But this time, Shane saw Rozanov’s posturing for what it was – a thin sheen of bravado over a roaring chasm of hurt. And now he’d never be able to unsee it. Nor did he want to.

The first step was terrifying; everything in Shane screamed at him to use his words, to speak in a hushed tone so as not to be overheard. To explain himself in a way that the Boston players around the corner wouldn’t catch. But he also knew he needed to do more than that, or he wouldn’t be believed, not fully.

So Shane darted forward and pressed their mouths together. He felt Ilya inhale sharply, taking Shane’s breath away in more ways than one. Shane squeezed his eyes shut, doing his best to block out any thoughts of someone discovering them. He put his hands on Ilya’s waist, let his weight push them both against the wall.

Hands came up to cup Shane’s jaw and then Ilya was kissing him back. But only for a moment. When he froze, his mind catching up to reality, Shane felt it in every inch of his body. He didn’t let up, determined to show Ilya exactly what he wanted; if it wasn’t reciprocated, Ilya would push him off. And then Shane would go. Where, he had no idea. Certainly not back inside, but also not home. Hayden’s, maybe. And pretend that the despair leaking from every pore was because *Rose* had dumped him.

Ilya tilted his head back, breaking the seal of their lips. “Hollander.” His hands were on Shane’s shoulders now, keeping a scant bit of distance between their upper bodies.

Shane shook his head. When he breathed out, it was shaky. He didn’t want to open his eyes because he was afraid of what he might see reflected back at him.

But then the hand on Shane’s jaw contracted and Ilya was pulling him back in. His other hand went to Shane’s nape, and he curled his fingers in Shane’s hair; he tilted Shane’s head, his

tongue darting out to swipe across Shane's lips, and a hot wave of relief flooded through him. Ilya hadn't told him to fuck off. He was relaxing into it, as though the last few horrible weeks hadn't happened. As though they could pick up right where they'd left off.

Or halfway through where they'd left off, maybe.

When Ilya finally pulled back, Shane groaned. His head spun, a mixture of anxiety and relief pulsing behind his eyes, merging into what he was fairly sure would become a stress headache in a few hours. He'd need to book a massage before his next proper workout, definitely prior to his next game.

Ilya's throat bobbed as he swallowed. The haunted look in his eyes had lessened, but it wasn't entirely gone. He looked younger, somehow. Stripped bare by something as simple and familiar as Shane kissing him.

"You should go," Ilya said. He squeezed the nape of Shane's neck once before releasing him. "I do not share well."

"I don't either."

Ilya threw him a rueful smile. "Yes, okay. Fuck, I need another cigarette."

"They're bad for you," Shane said, weakly.

"Many things that I like are bad for me."

I'm not, he ached to say. *You think I'm a fucking boy scout, so good and boring that it annoys you. So why are you still looking at me like that? Can't you see why I'm here?*

But Ilya couldn't – that much was clear. He wasn't looking at Shane anymore, had turned his attention to his shoes; the toe of one was carving a divot into the gravel of the parking lot, staining the expensive material grey.

"I don't…" Shane let out a long breath. He glanced over his shoulder, but nobody else was around. "I don't like girls. Like that. At your house, you asked me. And I lied."

Ilya's brow furrowed; he met Shane's eyes, confusion writ across his face. "You think I am stupid?"

"No. Well, sometimes. But, uh…" He let out a wry laugh, rubbed at the back of his neck. "I don't like them like I like men. Or how I like you." He checked over his shoulder again – still nobody there. "And you can just … turn off what you feel for guys, live normally, date people. But I can't do that, and it makes me … I don't even know. Jealous, I guess."

Ilya's lips parted; he blinked at Shane for a moment, before saying, "It does not work that way."

"What doesn't?"

“Sexuality. It does not *turn off*. I like girls, yes. I also like everything else, but not every*one* else.” He tugged his bottom lip between his teeth; when he released it, it came away shiny. “I like you, Hollander. I did not lie about that.”

“Okay,” Shane said, more to himself than to the man before him. “I want to … fuck, I don’t even know.” He laughed, and Ilya cracked a smile. He placed a hand on Ilya’s forearm, dragged it down until their pinkies were hooked together. “I want to go home – but I want you to come with me.”

“Yes,” Ilya said, without pausing to consider.

“Yes?” Shane asked, his tone miserably hopeful.

“Yes,” Ilya said, and then he pressed a kiss to Shane’s forehead.

Their Ubers arrived at different times; Shane’s first, by around four minutes, according to the app. When he opened the passenger side door, he greeted the driver in English, then in French. At the same time, he couldn’t help but look back, making sure that Ilya was still leaning against the wall where Shane had left him moments before.

He was – they locked eyes, and Ilya winked. Shane ducked his head and pulled the car door closed; hopefully the interior was dark enough that the driver wouldn’t see him blush.

It took fifteen minutes to get from Downtown to Westmount in traffic. The entire time, Shane spiralled. He did his best to pay attention to the small talk about his night, what he did for work, whether he’d caught any flack from the fans about a recent loss. But thoughts of Ilya dominated his mind – what if he decided not to come? He could very easily change his mind and head back to whatever hotel Boston had booked their rooms in. He could decide that Shane was too fucked up, that this was too complicated and he’d prefer to take the easy route – pick up a nice girl, take her home and send her out via the front door in broad daylight the next morning. No lies, no larger than normal tabloid reaction.

In the quietest, most hidden part of Shane’s mind, he wondered that, if the shoe was on the other foot, he’d do the same. If he had the option to lean into his attraction to women, rather than trying to conjure it out of thin air, would he choose the path of least resistance? He didn’t want to think about that yet. Not when this was so new and raw and he’d only just managed to grasp it with both hands.

Once inside, Shane stayed by the back entrance. He couldn’t sit, too anxious to keep himself from moving. But he stared for a while at the spot where he’d rested all those years ago, as Ilya put on his shoes in preparation to leave Shane’s apartment for the first time. It seemed to take an eternity.

The knock finally came eleven minutes later.

Ilya entered cautiously, as though he expected Shane to change *his* mind. Then their eyes met, and he smiled; when he ducked his head, the lines around his mouth caught the light, becoming more prominent. Again, he looked younger.

Shane jerked his head to the side and together, they ascended.

Inside, Shane toed off his shoes and placed them on the rack by the door. He watched as Ilya did the same, then hung his jacket on the rack beside Shane's things. It made something warm bloom in his chest.

Ilya let out a long exhale. He stepped in closer, running a hand down the side of Shane's face, before placing it on the spot where his neck met his shoulder. "This is…"

"I don't know yet," Shane said. He figured that was the question Ilya wanted answered, anyway. *What are we? What the fuck are we even doing here? Have you finally made up your mind?*

Ilya ducked his head, the tip of his nose brushing Shane's. "This is okay?"

"Yeah," Shane replied, more an exhale than a word. "Don't … whatever this is, I don't want it to stop."

Ilya nodded. His thumb pressed against the hollow of Shane's throat as he leaned in and kissed him. He took Shane's bottom lip between his own, pressed one hand to Shane's throat, the other to Shane's lower back.

There was heat in his touch – there always was. But it didn't match what Shane was feeling, that vulnerability that he'd finally allowed to claw to the surface, that now threatened to burst through his skin. He had to slow it down, to show Ilya that what he needed right then wasn't a quick, dirty fuck over the arm of the couch. He wanted chilled cans of ginger ale, and homecooked food, and his first name whispered with more reverence than a prayer. So he took Ilya's hand and led him up the stairs.

Shane's bedroom was dark, the lamp in the corner the only source of light. He fumbled with the switch, blinking against the sudden brightness when it finally turned on.

Ilya let out a huff of laughter. He shook his head, smirking at Shane's expense. "Idiot."

Blinking against the bright white spots in his vision, Shane approached. "Let me."

"Let you what? Blind yourself? I will win every game then, yes?"

"No," Shane replied, pressing a kiss to Ilya's jaw. "Your team's so shit that we'll still win."

"We beat you—"

"Who won the last *two* Cups?"

"Shut up," Ilya whispered. Then he was kissing Shane with purpose. He reached down to tug his own shirt over his head, pausing when Shane grabbed for the hem.

"Let me."

Ilya nodded. He moved when needed, raising his arms and pushing his hips out as Shane undressed him. He ran his hands up Shane's arms, mouthed at his shoulder, aligned the sides of their feet, knocked their knees together. He made sure they were always touching, and that heat in Shane's chest transformed from a burning ember into a roaring flame.

"What would you like?" Ilya's voice was a slow drawl, silky and honey-sweet.

Shane swallowed. "You."

Ilya raised an eyebrow, the corner of his mouth curling upward. "Yes. But what else?"

Shane shook his head. "Nothing else. Just … fuck."

"Do not hurt yourself, Hollander."

The next breath that left Shane's lungs was shaky. It was absolutely terrifying to voice this, to look his own anxieties dead in the face and march on anyway.

Again, he shook his head. "Don't call me that. Not right now. Do … what you did last time. Please."

Realisation flashed across Ilya's face. His next touch was firmer, his kisses greedier. He walked Shane backwards; when the backs of Shane's knees met the edge of the mattress, he didn't push him down. Instead, he carefully laid him back.

There was a lump in Shane's throat that he *could not* make visible. It would be too ridiculous to shed a tear about something so benign. So he grabbed for Ilya and pulled him down too, pushing and tugging until he was lying against the mountain of pillows that he hadn't uttered a single complaint about, and Shane was climbing into his lap.

Ilya murmured something in Russian that Shane couldn't make out. But he could infer the meaning, because Ilya was gazing up at him in a way that was entirely new. And it absolutely terrified him, but maybe that wasn't all bad. He could be scared of it while still allowing himself to express what he felt. It could scare him and maybe, somehow, not hurt him.

The bed was too big for Shane to reach what he needed to without serious readjustment. He half expected Ilya to move with him, to press him down and whisper in his ear what he was going to do to Shane now that he had him pinned. He loved that – they both did.

But Ilya stayed where he was. He put a hand on Shane's waist, then his thigh, always keeping an active point of contact. When Shane moved back into position, their gazes stayed locked. Ilya didn't look down, even when Shane did, so he didn't miss his hand and pour lube all over the bed. When Shane coated his fingers and slid them inside himself, Ilya watched his face. He touched Shane only above the waist, massaging Shane's shoulders, running his hands up Shane's chest, tangling his fingers in Shane's hair. His eyes spoke a thousand words, and Shane's breath caught in his throat whenever he glanced up to see Ilya was already looking.

“Holy shit,” Shane muttered, tipping his head back and letting out a long breath; he slid his fingers free, fumbling for the condom. It dropped to the bed, his fingers too slick to properly grip the foil packet. “Can you…?”

The loss of that eye contact, however brief, made Shane’s stomach swoop unpleasantly. It was necessary, would get him what he wanted, but that didn’t mean that he had to like it.

“Fuck,” Ilya groaned. His arm muscles bunched as he jerked himself, coating his cock in lube. He let out a shaky exhale as he lined up, head tilting back so that his eyes met Shane’s. “I…”

Shane leaned forward, arching his back; one of Ilya’s hands slid lower, cupping his hip. He tilted his head down, pressing their foreheads together. “Okay?”

Ilya’s lips parted. His brow furrowed and his eyes bored into Shane’s; they were screaming something at him, something long buried that was bubbling to the surface. He nodded, and Shane began to sink down.

It was glorious, that stretch. That sensation of being entirely taken in by another person; he knew now how rare that feeling was. He’d never grow tired of it, not even if he got it every day. If Ilya let him.

“Fuck,” Ilya muttered. He bit down on his bottom lip, the tip of his nose rubbing alongside Shane’s. His fingers tightened on Shane’s hip, then the back of his neck, his cock twitching as Shane sat down.

Looking into his eyes, there were so many things that Shane wanted to say. Some of them would serve him well, others would entirely derail what he’d worked for tonight. He didn’t know where the line was yet, how much Ilya would allow him to confess before it become too much to bear. So he settled for rectifying one regret at a time.

“Ilya,” he whispered. This time it was purposeful. He wanted to say it, and to have it be heard. For Ilya to infer exactly what it meant for Shane to do this. He wanted all of it.

Ilya closed his eyes. When he opened them again, his grip on Shane tightened. “Say it again.”

Shane did; the sound of it was lyrical in his mouth, the letters spilling over each other as they fought to get into the correct formation. He said it again and again, both aloud and in his head, as Ilya kissed him everywhere he could reach. He thrust upwards, holding Shane in place with both hands, and panted into his open mouth.

Despite the quick rolls of his hips, Shane kept his upper body in place. He could feel his core muscles tensing, driving him unintentionally closer to orgasm. He put a hand on Ilya’s chest, his palm covering the golden crucifix that lay there. The point of it dug into his skin and he curled his fingers around the chain.

“Fuck, Shane,” Ilya groaned. He tipped his head back, and Shane moved with him.

Forehead to Ilya’s cheek, Shane whispered, “I really fucking like you.”

Ilya's reply was a sharp laugh that merged into a groan. His whole body jerked and he gripped tight to Shane's hips as he came, a stream of Russian words falling from his plush mouth. His chest heaved as he caught his breath, eyes opening to stare Shane down.

"You pick now to say you like me?" he asked. "Is … I do not even know." He let out a put-upon sigh that was so dramatic it made Shane snort. "Is time for you to say 'not as person', yes?"

"That's your line," Shane said, sucking in a breath when Ilya wrapped a hand around his cock. "And, uh, I don't think it's true. For me."

Ilya raised an eyebrow, the pace of his hand speeding up. "You like me as person?"

"Fuck, I think so."

A hint of sarcasm still tinged Ilya's tone as he muttered, "Wow."

When Shane came, it was with a smile. He pressed his mouth to Ilya's, let himself be kissed as his lips went slack and his moans increased in pitch. He leaned into those strong arms that wrapped around him, let the sounds of their bodies moving together fill his ears.

When he opened his eyes again, Ilya was already looking.

They kissed for so long that Shane's lips began to tingle. But he couldn't find it in himself to mind all that much.

"Is there some sort of unspoken rule," Shane asked, some twenty minutes later, "that you aren't allowed to stop touching me?"

Ilya had gone off to shower, leaving the door open and constantly checking over his shoulder, as though expecting that Shane would somehow abandon his own apartment or dematerialise or get abducted by aliens or something. He came back to bed with his hair wet, and looked incredibly put-out when Shane demanded he go back into the ensuite and use the hair dryer, for fuck's sake.

And Shane was fully content to throw those stones very far across that glass house, because he couldn't stop touching Ilya either. The moment that he returned to bed – sans wet hair – Shane pulled him in close. He laid a hand on Ilya's chest, rubbing the crucifix with his thumb as he did his best to sort through his tangle of thoughts.

"I'm sorry," he said, "for running away."

"Yes," Ilya drawled, carding a hand through Shane's hair.

"You do give the worst mixed signals though. Maybe work on that."

Ilya snorted, a wry smile coming onto his face. "I cooked you dinner, bought you favourite drink. And you get girlfriend. Who is sending mixed signals here?"

“You,” Shane murmured. “Still you. Or maybe it’s both of our faults. But we’re talking about it, so … that’s good.”

“We do not usually talk.”

“No,” Shane agreed, “we don’t. We should probably do it more.”

“Ah, but then your mouth is not on my cock. It should always be there, yes?”

“Asshole,” Shane muttered. He pressed a kiss to Ilya’s shoulder, still warm from his shower.

“I am not good at talking.”

“Yeah, I know. Neither am I. So we’re probably doomed to fuck up whatever—” He waved a hand at their naked bodies, their legs entwined under the blankets, Shane’s arm thrown over Ilya’s waist. “—*this* is.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “Sex? We do not fuck up sex. We are good at sex.”

“No – *us* as something. Together.”

The eyebrow went higher. “You broke up with Rose Landry tonight, yes? I am rebound?”

“Oh my god,” Shane groaned. He attempted to bury his face in Ilya’s neck, but was thwarted by the hand in his hair.

Ilya grinned at him, looking incandescently happy to be making a joke at Shane’s expense. “She does not suck cock as good as me, yes?”

“Jesus Christ.”

“Hmm?”

“I wouldn’t … know. Stop *looking* at me like that.”

Ilya laughed. His smile softened as he said, “Do not worry – we will not fuck this up on purpose.”

“Well that’s reassuring.”

“Do you want it?”

“I do,” Shane said. “I really fucking do.” He pushed up, tilting his chin so that their lips aligned. The kiss was slow, languid, and Shane felt heat stirring in his lower stomach.

Ilya kissed back for a few moments before his hands started to wander, sliding down Shane’s chest to cup his pectorals. “Maybe we will room together at All-Star game.”

“Not,” Shane said, throwing a leg over Ilya’s hips, “in a million fucking years. They’d be insane to do that. They’re still milking our rivalry for everything it’s worth.”

“Hmm, I will ask. Make bribe, make promises, get room assignments changed.”

“*No*, you won’t.”

Ilya shot him a smile that was all teeth and bright eyes, like a child who was still learning how to pose for their first picture day. The sight of it made Shane’s breath catch in his throat and he stopped moving, half in Ilya’s lap.

He could see it so clearly now; there was so much more to figure out, but he could so clearly picture a beach in Tampa with their temporary teammates scattered around. He imagined Ilya sitting right there beside him, sunset colours staining his skin. He thought about them getting breakfast together, then lunch, then dinner. Training in tandem and sneaking into each other’s rooms, fucking for hours with the curtains open and waking up wrapped around each other.

It was the world’s biggest gamble, and Shane was going to have to go all in if he wanted even a small taste of it. But looking at Ilya’s wide smile, at the softness in his eyes, at the way he held Shane as though he were something precious … it felt like playing with house money. That, despite all evidence to the contrary, he couldn’t lose.

He ducked his head to seal their lips together, whispering, “I’ll call Bardow, see what he says about the arrangements. He likes me, he’ll spill the beans if I ask.”

“Good.” Ilya tilted his chin up, gazing at Shane with eyes that were full of emotion. “Do not back out or I will call you chicken.”

“I’m not a fucking chicken,” Shane hissed. He ducked his head, biting at Ilya’s shoulder. When he pulled back, it was with a faux frown on his face. Already the script for the call he’d promised to make was forming in his head.

He should have been nervous. Should have been second-guessing himself like always.

But as he looked down at Ilya’s smile, at the sunshine radiating off of him, Shane had never been more sure of anything in his life.

That somehow, he’d finally managed to make the right choice.

And he was ready to go all in.

End Notes

Shane is absolutely the type to sit in the passenger seat of the Uber and ask the driver if their night's been busy so far, Ilya gets in the back and buries his face in his phone. I will be taking no pushback on this.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!