

red ropes of fate

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red ropes of fate

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Summary

"It starts with an auction at his mom's charity.

Shane's eyes scan through the various pieces, and finally settle on a mannequin at the end of the row. The black felt is wrapped in layers of corded red rope. Layers and layers of intricate knots, lines doubling back on one another, building tessellating diamonds and swirls in luxuriously-soft silk. It cages the mannequin's torso, running over nondescript lumps in its chest area, under its arms, and—Shane's tongue darts out, moistening his dry lips—down around the androgynous pubic mound.

A thought flashes through his mind.

I wonder how that would feel on me. "

Notes

► Content warnings

Set after the events of [meet me in the dark](#). You'll probably want to read that one first.

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

It starts with an auction at his mom's charity.

"Oh, I'm just so sad you'll miss the main event!" Yuna says.

Shane is helping her carry some final boxes as she sets up the space. She can certainly afford professional movers, especially for something like an art show—but it's an easy excuse for her to ask him to swing by, and he would never dream of saying no. The show is mostly set up already, anyway. The Bijutsu Foundation's elegant calligraphy-styled logo is emblazoned tastefully across a banner welcoming patrons at the door, and each exhibit has been carefully arranged by their respective artists.

Yuna continues. "It's too bad that your away game conflicts. Maybe if I donate enough money they'll redo your schedule..."

He laughs, setting his box down. It's not heavy—Yuna would never let him strain his bad shoulder ahead of a hockey game, not after being forced to sit out for so long due to his injury—and Yuna bends down to begin pulling little decorative bows out of it. "Mom, if you could have done that, you already would've. I'm glad I get a chance to see the art pieces ahead of time, at least."

They *are* beautiful. To honor the charity's cultural background, the featured artists all have Japanese heritage in some shape or form. Airy scrolls with ink brushes are hung along the exhibit hall; delicate *netsuke*-style carvings rest on tall pedestals.

"See anything you like?"

Shane's eyes scan through the pieces, and settle on a mannequin at the end of the row. He walks closer to see—the black felt is wrapped with layers of corded red rope. Layers and layers of intricate knots, lines doubling back on one another, building tessellating diamonds and swirls in luxuriously-soft silk. It cages the mannequin's torso, running over nondescript lumps in its chest area, under its arms, and—Shane's tongue darts out, moistening his dry lips—down around the androgynous pubic mound.

A thought flashes through his mind, wildly inappropriate to have with his mom standing five feet away.

I wonder how that would feel on me.

He peers closer at the gallery tag, squinting without his glasses. "*Shibari?*" A form of decorative sexual bondage, dating back to the Edo period, he reads. Also known as *kinbaku*.

He turns to look at his mom. "This seems out of place."

"I didn't think you were a prude, Shane," Yuna says, raising a brow. "It's unconventional, yes, but it's still an artistic practice."

“N-no, that’s not what I—” He stammers, feeling heat creep over his cheeks and down his neck. “It just... surprised me.” Reaching his hand up absentmindedly, he rubs his bad shoulder.

“Oh,” Yuna says, and now a look of guilt crosses her face. “Is it because of...” *that time when he was kidnapped and tied up for hours and got stabbed in the neck and shoulder and nearly died*, she doesn’t say. “I should’ve warned you. I’m so sorry, honey.”

Shane knows the skin around his eyes tightens. “Don’t apologize. It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

Thankfully, Yuna drops it.

Shane’s mind doesn’t, though.

It starts with the Wikipedia page. Shane’s just curious, honest. Wonders how such a conservative society could make something like *bondage* into a subculture...

He’s the grandson of a Japanese crime lord, though. Maybe he really should be more familiar with the urge to fly in the face of polite society.

He reads the whole page. Clicks on the citation links. Reads those. It’s not enough. He reads more—blogs, forums, articles. With a guilty start, he realizes that he’s looking for the ones with photos, specifically. Can’t tear his eyes away from the way the rope cups the models’ bodies, digging into soft flesh, sensual and provocative. All of the models are women, or have female-presenting bodies, even if their faces are cut off. He can’t stop picturing the ropes on a man’s body. On *his* body.

The thing is, his mom’s not entirely wrong. Thinking about being tied up makes him want to puke. An image flashes behind Shane’s eyes, of black steel and gun barrels, and he shudders. He never wants to feel that way again.

And yet—

He can’t help but imagine how it would feel to have ropes against his skin, but this time without the fear. Feel the smoothness of woven silk, rather than the harsh cold of a dilapidated warehouse. Feel knots made to restrain but not hurt, rather than going numb from a careless mass of cable tied too tight. To feel loved, rather than loathed.

Shane bites his lip, and opens a new tab to search for a reputable rope seller.

(Naturally, he ends up having to buy what he wants from a digital sex shop.)

“What are you looking at?” Ilya tries to peer over Shane’s shoulder. His coffee cup nearly sloshes over, narrowly missing dousing Shane with whipped cream topped with crushed peppermint candy.

Shane slams his laptop closed. His face burns. “Nothing.”

“Oh-kay,” Ilya says, drawing the word out. “Does not seem like nothing.”

“None of your business.”

“If you did not want me looking at your porn, you could have said so,” Ilya laughs, because he knows that Shane would never be caught dead looking at porn in a public space. Shane coughs out what he hopes is a laugh, because Shane had in fact been looking at a beginner’s guide to shibari.

“I bet that’s what you’re up to in that stupid car dealership,” he says, a weak attempt at a rejoinder.

Ilya wiggles his eyebrows. “Hm, wouldn’t you like to know.”

Shane has nothing to say to that, because he’s just received an email that his order has arrived. At Ilya’s house. Because he lives with Ilya now.

He fights the urge to put his head in his hands and sigh.

The rope is whisper-soft in his hand. He slides his finger down the length of it, marvelling at its quality. It’s a braided silken cord; even though the bedroom is dark, the rich redness practically glows against his skin. Shane feels a little ridiculous, but without drawing the curtains tightly and locking the bedroom door, he’d been unable to muster up the courage to open the package.

Ilya’s at work for the next few hours. Shane has no classes for the rest of the day. He can do this.

He strips out of his pants, keeping his underwear on. Sitting on the bed, leg out in front of him, Shane takes a deep breath. His legs weren’t tied when he was kidnapped, so he shouldn’t have any issues with it; he’ll be fine.

The blog recommends starting with a single column tie. Wholly unfamiliar with ropework, Shane struggles to orient the strands properly—he finds himself immediately tangled up by

all the loops and twists. He grunts in frustration as he unwinds the mess from around his bare thigh. But he doesn't give up. Gradually, as he repeats the motions, his lines straighten out; his knots take on shape.

Having a task to keep his mind occupied helps, he thinks. No time to stop and remember the last time he was tied up, when he's lost his active strand and can't figure out where to loosen the tension. And he's in control here. At any point, he can reach over to the nightstand and use the safety scissors he bought to cut himself out.

He doesn't end up needing them. In an afternoon, he's graduated from single knots to building simple patterns across his leg. By the time the sun sets beyond the curtains, Shane thinks he has an idea of what he's doing. On his leg, at least. The idea of tackling more complex topography gives him a stress headache. Just as he finishes coiling the rope neatly, placing it in the bottom drawer of his study desk, the front door opens to signal Ilya's return.

Shane straightens. Runs a hand over his cheeks to make sure he's not blushing, and goes out to greet his boyfriend.

He practices whenever he can. When Ilya's working late at the dealership, when Shane has a lull between classes, when his parents fly out of town on vacation for a week. Thinks he might be becoming obsessed with it, just a bit. After each session, he can't stop running his hands over the light red prints on his thigh, pressing his fingers into the indents on his skin. What would it feel like to have that sensation all over his body? To build more complex patterns out of multiple lengths of rope? How about being suspended in the air, to feel the rope digging into his skin from gravity?

He shudders at the thought of some of the positions he's seen online. Imagines being held open for Ilya, one leg trussed up—or maybe hogtied?—helpless to take whatever his boyfriend sees fit to give him. Would Ilya be as aroused as Shane is from just thinking of it?

Then he slaps his hands to his cheeks, mortified at his imagination. He bundles the rope up and puts it away again, doing his best to settle his thoughts with it.

They're having a quiet night in after busy weeks for both of them, Ilya from the car dealership and Shane from his classes. They order from the Chinese place down the street, and bump shoulders as they tidy up the table after eating. Based on Ilya's expression, Shane knows where they're headed, where their nights are always headed—he had taken a shower

earlier, in anticipation, while waiting for Ilya to come home. They move toward the bedroom in languid, unhurried movements, kissing lazily. Shane swipes his tongue across Ilya teeth, enjoying the warmth of his boyfriend's mouth.

When they finally reach the bedroom, he pauses to put his clothes away once he's fully naked. Normally, Ilya is running his mouth at this point, dirty talk that used to make Shane's ears glow. But he's quiet, all of a sudden. Shane turns around. His boyfriend is only partially undressed, shirt on the floor and pants halfway unbuttoned before getting distracted.

"What's wrong?"

Ilya looks at Shane, and wordlessly holds up the coil of red rope.

The red rope that Shane had forgotten to put away a few hours ago, in his rush to shower.

Complete mortification sweeps through him. If the ground could open up and swallow him whole, that would be ideal. Naturally, the plush carpet chooses to remain hale and whole. He thinks his whole body might be blushing, from how embarrassed he is. And not the good kind, either. His palms break out in a cold sweat and he has the urge to vomit. What a way to spoil the mood.

"Shane?"

"That's," he says, and stops. "It's not—I was just curious—" stumbles over himself in his rush to explain, reaching a helpless hand out toward the rope. "I didn't mean to hide it from you—"

But Ilya's face is thoughtful, rather than upset. "I knew you were up to something, *lyubimyy*. You are not so good at hiding things, you know." The corner of his mouth quirks up. "Did you imagine me in it? Want to wrap me up for the night? Naughty. You only need ask, Shane."

"I mean—" Shane stutters. Takes a breath. "We could do that. If you want to."

Ilya tilts his head, sensing an unspoken *but*. "Is that what *you* want?"

Shane freezes for a moment. He forces words past his numb lips. "I... sort of bought it—for me." His heart hammers in his chest. Blood roars in his ears. "To use on me, I mean."

He watches Ilya's expression change. One moment he's leering, enjoying Shane's embarrassment, and next it's morphed into pure concern.

"What are you saying?" He puts the rope down, stepping over to Shane. Ilya's hands come up to wrap around Shane's bare biceps, rubbing up and down in a soothing motion. "You want to be the one tied?"

Shane can't look at him. He focuses somewhere above Ilya's left shoulder, and bites his lip. Dips his head in a nod once, twice.

Ilya catches Shane's chin between his thumb and finger. He gently tilts Shane's face back to his, locking their eyes together. "Shane. You are sure about this? After what happened with Kuzmin..."

"I'm sure," Shane blurts out. His own hands ball into reflexive fists, resting on Ilya's chest, feeling like he might be swept away by a riptide at a moment's notice. Ilya doesn't call out the tremble in his hands. "I've been practicing. I can handle it." He takes a deep breath. "I think it will... help. I don't want to think about being cold and scared every time I think about being tied up. I don't want to remember thinking I was going to die."

"I did not kill Kuzmin slowly enough," Ilya says, expression thunderous. "He deserved to suffer."

"I don't want to think about Kuzmin right now." Shane presses onward. "I want to think of you."

Ilya studies him for another moment. Fear swirls in Shane's gut—*what if he says no, what if he thinks I'm weird, what if he says yes—*

"Okay," Ilya says. "Okay. We will try." Shane lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding. "But we go slow. Easy."

"I don't want slow, or easy." He doesn't. It rankles to still be treated as something fragile, after so much time has passed from his kidnapping. "I want to feel it."

Ilya inclines his head. "Then you always tell me how you are doing. We stop the moment you say so."

He blinks, hard. Ilya's trusting him. Letting him take lead. "Thank you," he murmurs.

Ilya takes his left wrist, pressing a soft kiss to the pulse point. "*Ya tebya lyublyu.*"

"I love you too."

They move back to the bed, and Ilya picks up the rope again. "How do you want? Arms in front, back?"

Shane picks up his phone, swiping to the bookmarked blog article he's been stealing guilty glances at for a few weeks now. "Um... can we try this?"

Ilya squints at it. "Looks complicated. I do not know if I can recreate."

"I can talk you through it. I've been... practicing." Shane admits, squirming slightly at finally confessing this secret. "On myself. When you were at work."

"And here I thought you were just jerking off," Ilya says, a laugh in his voice. "Watching porn without me. Was wondering if I should start feeling left out."

"Fuck off," Shane says, reflexive. "Are we doing this, or not?"

“Impatient,” Ilya teases, but begins uncoiling the rope. He squints down at the small photo on Shane’s phone screen. “I think you should get on bed. On your knees.” Most of the time, when he says those words, it’s sultry, seductive. Now it’s different—practical, a suggestion born from a careful desire to keep Shane comfortable.

Shane obliges, climbing onto the mattress and sinking down so that he’s kneeling, setting his weight back onto his calves. He puts his arms behind his back, each hand gripping the opposite forearm. Nervousness and anticipation run through him in equal measure.

He can’t see what Ilya is doing, but feels the cool glide of the cord against his skin, on his right wrist. Shakes his head immediately. “Not an overhand knot. Start with a double loop, and make it a slip knot instead.”

“You were not kidding, when you said you practiced,” Ilya says. His lips are right next to Shane’s ear, which makes him jump a little.

“I only tried some basics on my leg,” Shane says. “I couldn’t actually tie myself up fully.”

Ilya hums in consideration. “I am not sure what slip knot is. Tell me how.”

Shane nods, and begins talking Ilya through each step. He picks it up quickly. Clearly, this is familiar territory for him, even if Japanese shibari has different techniques than ordinary rope work.

It sends a dark thrill down Shane’s spine—now that Ilya mostly works at his friend Svetlana’s car dealership, it’s easy to forget that he’s a former mafia boss. But the way that he ties his knots with confidence with Shane’s instruction, casually tugging periodically to check the slackness of the rope, it speaks to an easy familiarity born of years of experience. Experience restraining people for violent reasons. He wonders how many of them are still alive today.

And yet, despite knowing how dangerous Ilya can be, Shane finds himself thinking about how gentle Ilya’s hands are, one palm splayed across his back to keep him steady while the other winds the rope around his body. Callouses rough against the smooth skin of Shane’s arms, tracing over the raised scar tissue over his left shoulder. It’s strangely intimate, and the skin contact makes his skin break out in pleasant goosebumps. He lets his head roll back onto Ilya’s shoulder, lost in the sensation. He hears his own voice growing softer as Ilya secures more and more rope into place.

“Okay,” Ilya says, voice grown equally soft. The rumble of it on Shane’s back feels like it’s sending ripples through his body. “Your arms are done. What next?”

“My chest,” Shane says, but it comes out as a breathy sigh. He forces himself to open his eyes. “Thread the active strand under my arms to the other side. Maybe it’s easier to face you for the rest.”

He shuffles awkwardly on the bed, unable to steady himself with his arms. Ilya helps guide his turn, bringing the rope end with him as he goes. “Does it feel alright? Not too tight, your shoulder is okay?”

“It feels fine,” Shane says. “You’re really good at this.”

“I have a good teacher.”

Now that they’re facing each other again, he has a chance to study Ilya’s face. There’s a small furrow between his brows. When Shane moves to smooth a thumb over it, the restrained twitch in his arms reminds him of his position. Equal parts terror and anticipation shoots through him, tongue darting out to lick his lips.

Ilya pauses at the motion. Leans in and presses a soft kiss to Shane’s mouth. It’s sweet, almost chaste. Shane melts into it, the nervous static in his mind quieting.

The next part of the ropework is more complicated—they’ll build something like a harness for his torso. Shane pushes past the fog that’s descended on him, slowly walking Ilya through the process. Lines braced against one another, mutual tension building lattice work across his body. He has Ilya loop the end of the rope around his neck, before securing it into a final knot in the middle of his chest. Ilya slips two fingers into each major section of the rope, ensuring Shane won’t lose a limb from lack of blood flow. Warmth kindles in his chest at the action, driving away any lingering fears.

“How do I look?”

“Beautiful.” Ilya kisses Shane again, slipping in his tongue this time. “I could eat you up.”

“Fuck me, first.”

“You would want that?” Ilya draws back, expression serious. “I am happy just like this, Shane. Do not feel like you have to please me.”

“I want that,” Shane says, nodding vigorously. “I want to feel you.”

Instead of answering, Ilya shucks the rest of his pants off. Once he’s fully naked to match Shane, he climbs onto the bed. Brackets his knees on either side of Shane, trapping him in.

“You are so perfect,” Ilya murmurs, reaching out a hand to gently hold Shane’s face. He turns it this way and that, and Shane is helpless to follow the motion. “Brave. My brave Shane.”

Shane looks away. “I’m not that brave. You were the one who rescued me, when I was in trouble.”

“Many people would have lost their heads in your position,” Ilya says. “You saved yourself.” He runs his hand down Shane’s neck, his chest, his abs. “And now you are here with me.” He ducks his head to mouth over Shane’s scar. “I will keep you safe for the rest of your days, if you would let me be with you that long.”

“Of course,” Shane sighs. “I want to be with you, always.”

Ilya moves further along, sealing his lips over Shane’s left nipple. His other hand comes up to caress the other. Shane groans, arching his back to push his chest at Ilya. Snug in his bindings, he can’t do much else. The realization goes straight to his cock.

“C’mon, I want more,” Shane says, already panting.

Ilya looks up, kissing Shane’s nipple with a wet glide. “And what will you do to make me? Seeing as you are all wrapped up just for me.” He bends back down. Opens his mouth and sinks his teeth into the skin around his nipple, sucking hard.

Shane yelps. “Ah! Ilya!”

“Mmm. More of that.” Ilya pulls away to study Shane’s chest. Then he repeats his ministrations on Shane’s right side. Shane squirms at the bright pinpricks of pain and groans again. When Ilya is satisfied, he beams at his work, matching bite marks denting the skin around his nipples. He reaches up a hand and flicks one of Shane’s nubs teasingly.

“Fuck!” Shane gives a full-body twitch.

Ilya tugs on the knot at his chest, forcing Shane to lean forward further. “Your chest is so pretty. One day I will make you come from your nipples alone.”

Shane moans. “Not—not today.”

“Not today,” Ilya agrees.

In one motion, he flips Shane around, manhandling him with the help of the ropes binding Shane. Scruffing the back of his neck and tugging on the loop around it, Ilya pushes Shane’s head into the bed, until Shane collapses on his own weight. It leaves him face down, ass high in the air. Like these, he’s wholly exposed. Ilya nudges Shane’s knees further apart to fit a pillow under his hips.

“Still okay?” Ilya asks.

“More than okay,” Shane pants. “Fuck me.”

“Patience,” Ilya admonishes. He uses his thumbs to pull Shane’s cheeks apart, making Shane squirm. “Let me enjoy the view.”

“Don’t be such a fucking—” Shane says, and then Ilya leans forward and licks a long stripe from his taint to his hole. He cuts himself off with a long moan. “*Oh my god—*”

“My name is Ilya, actually,” his boyfriend teases.

And then he gets to work. His tongue slips into Shane’s tight muscle, slippery and warm, coaxing Shane open. He tries to push back into it, but Ilya’s hands come up to grip his hips, pinning him in place. Shane moans helplessly, trapped, ropes digging into his arms and torso, cock hard underneath him. Ilya slurps obscenely as he eats him out. His crucifix taps against Shane’s leg as it swings from Ilya’s chest.

“You feel so good,” Shane says, babbling. “Fuck, *ah—*”

Ilya pulls back. Shane can feel his chest panting for air. “You are so delicious,” he says.

“Nngh,” Shane answers intelligently.

Ilya laughs, and blows air across Shane’s hole, making him jump at the icy feeling. “Already so wet for me.”

He dips two fingers at once into Shane, his hole loose from Ilya’s tongue. Crooks them, hitting Shane’s prostate with unerring accuracy.

“*Shit!*” Shane swears. “More, Ilya, fuck—”

“Soon,” Ilya promises, pumping his fingers and continuing to exploit Shane’s prostate mercilessly. “I want to make you feel good.”

Shane’s speech is starting to slur. “You do, oh my god, you make me feel so good.”

Ilya works in a third finger. Shane feels boneless with pleasure. He presses his face into the bed, lost in everything happening to him. Then Ilya disappears, and he hears the sound of the lube bottle opening and Ilya slicking himself up.

When he enters into Shane, the slow glide feels perfect. Ilya’s able to bottom out on the first push. Shane tries to arch his back further than it already is, but finds he has nowhere left to go.

“Fuck me already,” he says, panting. “Ilya, *please* fuck me.”

“With pleasure,” Ilya says. He sets a steady beat. Languid, unhurried. It’s sensual to the extreme. Tears prick at Shane’s eyes as he becomes steadily overwhelmed with sensation—the friction of Ilya’s cock, the blunt head pressing against his prostate on each rock of Ilya’s hips, the snug hold of the ropes around his body—

“Breathe,” Ilya says. “Tell me you are still okay, Shane.”

It takes Shane a moment to respond. “Yes,” he says, but it comes out more like a hiss on the ‘s’. He thinks he might be drooling. “So good.”

“Good boy,” Ilya says. Punctuates the statement with a snap of his hips. Shane whines into the sheets.

He loses track of time after that. His eyes drift shut at some point. Everything feels floaty, like when the hospital pumped him full of drugs, but better, because he knows Ilya will take care of him. There’s only the feeling of Ilya thrusting steadily inside of him, of Ilya pulling on the ropes, of arousal running down his spine. He lets the tide sweep him away.

“Ilya...” He can’t find the words to string together.

Ilya understands anyway. “Come for me,” he says. Grips Shane’s cock, thumbing at the spongy flesh right under his head. “Come, Shane.”

He does. He loses himself with it. It’s unlike any orgasm he’s had before. Where most of his orgasms (and sex with Ilya) tend to hit hard and fast, this one rolls slowly but surely through

him. Like the entire ocean rearing up into a tsunami, before crashing down over him in a warm embrace. For all that it's different, it's no less intense—in fact, Shane feels it all much more acutely despite the fuzz in his head. His entire body tenses with his climax.

The feeling of floating increases tenfold, and he thinks he might drift away if Ilya weren't anchoring him. It never seems to end, crests of pleasure coursing through him wave after wave. He can't quite catch his breath. The ropes on him constrict his chest each time his ribcage expands. His hole clenches down around Ilya, and he hears him swear distantly. He doesn't know how long it lasts. It's like his body can't stop coming.

Shane wonders if he's going to faint from it all. Isn't particularly alarmed by the thought. He knows Ilya will take care of him.

When he comes to, Ilya is still tugging at his softened cock. Normally he would reach out and grab Ilya's arm, but he can't this time. Instead he feels a wetness on his cheeks as he weathers the overstimulation with a soft noise in his throat.

"Ilya," he gasps into the sheets smashed against his face. No other words come to mind, having been wiped clear by his orgasm. "Ilya."

"Shane," Ilya grunts. "You feel so good. So tight. Like you were made for my cock."

He pulls out, all of a sudden. Before Shane can protest, Ilya hauls him up by the rope harness caging his torso, and flips him around so they're facing each other. It traps his bound arms underneath his back. Thankfully, the soft mattress absorbs any strain the position would place on his shoulder.

Ilya grabs Shane's thighs, pushing them up until he's bent double, knees by his ears. From this new angle, Shane peers up at Ilya through his eyelashes.

"You need to come," Shane says. It comes out petulant, almost accusing. Does Ilya not feel good too?

Ilya lets out a breathy chuckle. "Bossy. Maybe I will gag you next. Keep you quiet so I can have my fill." Shane gives a broken whine at the image.

He continues stroking Shane's cock, like he hasn't noticed Shane already came. Or maybe he wants him to come again. Shane wonders if he can. Another orgasm would certainly be painful and dry. The thought sends a bolt of arousal down his frayed nerves, turning the oversensitivity into pleasure, and he files the thought away for another time. Ilya tugs one last time, before letting go.

"Alright. My turn."

Then Ilya's thrusting in earnest again, this time hard and fast. Grunts fall past his lips. The motion pushes Shane up against the headboard. His arms are still pinned behind his back, and Shane grips his own forearms against the intensity of the feeling, digging nails into skin. Ilya's face is intense with focus, pounding into Shane so that his balls slap audibly against Shane's skin. The only other sound is their shared panting.

Ilya grabs the knot tied onto Shane's chest. Hauls him up to slam a brutal kiss against Shane's lips. Shane moans openly into it. Each time Ilya's cock skids across Shane's prostate, the abused nerve sends a haywire of sensation through his body.

Trapped as he is, open and pliant to Ilya's liking, Shane can't do more than lie there and take it. The sensation of floating returns in earnest—his vision tunnels, lashes wet, and only the feeling of Ilya inside him remains sharply in tune. Everything else fades into a blurred, muted static.

Ilya's rhythm grows erratic. Movements become short, unsteady, and Ilya swears in Russian. He buries himself in Shane, and he can feel Ilya's cock pulsing deep inside of him. It feels warm, wet. Shane braces his forehead against Ilya's, breathing in the same air, a messy string of spit trailing between their mouths.

He closes his eyes, ears ringing.

His memory is spotty, after that. There's the vague sensation of Ilya pulling out, a wet trickle running down his backside, which makes him whine and clench down on the sudden emptiness. Someone shushes him, rolls him onto his stomach. Then his arms are suddenly free. Warm hands massage his wrists; a soft cloth rubs against his skin. He couldn't move his own limbs if he tried, not that he really wants to. Content to let himself be manhandled while he drifts away.

When he blinks awake, he finds that he's tucked under the covers, a body pressed up against his back. Ilya's thigh is slotted between his own. His arm snakes under Shane's armpit around his chest, thumb rubbing soft circles into skin. There's a pleasant ache in his backside, and along all the points where the rope dug into him the most. Part of him almost looks forward to seeing the marks.

He turns his head as best he can, looking sleepily at Ilya.

"Was that good?"

Ilya flutters his eyes open. "Was that good, he asks. When my entire soul left my body through my dick."

Shane laughs. "I think I left my body, too. Went somewhere else for awhile. Somewhere nice."

"I'm glad." Ilya kisses the back of his neck. "You will be the death of me, Shane Hollander."

"I hope we have a long time before that happens," Shane says. "Did you... like the ropes?"

"Of course. I like anything you like."

"Be honest."

"I am. I want to do it again sometime. Maybe we can discuss together, *da?*"

“Yeah. I’m sorry I sprung it on you.”

Ilya shushes him. “Don’t be silly. Nothing to be sorry for.”

“Mm-hmm. Thanks for being cool with it.”

“Hollander, I should be thanking *you*.”

“Hmph. Then say it properly.”

“Thank you, Shane. For letting me love you.”

“...thank you for letting me love you, too.”

Shane gawks at the large box that Ilya’s just opened.

It’s a familiar sight: a black velvet mannequin wrapped in red ropes. A card flutters to the ground as Ilya tosses the wrapping paper and broken cardboard to the side. The Bijutsu Arts Charity logo winks at him. The back is signed by none other than Yuna Hollander, thanking Mr. Rozanov for his purchase.

Shane’s cheeks burn as red as the ropes. “You only did this to tease me.”

“No, no,” Ilya protests. “I like art. Your mother was very helpful. Gave me friends and family discount on shipping.”

“That was for charity! You *asshole*.”

“Hey, I had the winning bid. Don’t act like, ah, what’s the word? Plebian.” Ilya pushes a framed sheet of paper at Shane. It’s the artist’s statement. “Look, the description, I thought it was very romantic.”

Shane glares daggers at Ilya, but slides on his reading glasses. He’s seen it before, but he humors Ilya by reading it over again. Skims over the opening paragraphs that had first hooked him, and takes in the last few notes.

This piece brings together shibari with the ‘red string of fate,’ he reads, a popular myth in Japan and many parts of East Asia. Many believe that soulmates are bound together by invisible red thread, destined to find one another this way.

Shane picks up the frame to read more closely. *Through the taboo subject of kink, the artist seeks to challenge perceptions of love in modern society—isn’t sexual desire, too, a form of love? Doesn’t everyone deserve to love openly and freely? This answer is left to the viewer: to avert your eyes and walk away, or to embrace love in all its forms.*

“Huh,” Shane says. “It’s more profound than I thought.”

“You doubted me,” Ilya says, offended. “I can appreciate beautiful things, Shane.” He leans over to peck Shane’s cheek. “Especially the beautiful thing right in front of me.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

But he reaches his hand out, and hooks his pinky around Ilya’s. In his mind, he imagines red string stretching out between them, transcending time and space to keep them connected. Tying them together. The thought makes him smile.

End Notes

me when fanfic has Shane exploring his japanese heritage: go wasian boy reconnect with your culture

me writing Shane discovering shibari: no wasian boy not like that

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sort of inspired by this [tumblr](#) post. also this [tweet](#) about shane being freakier than ilya, and all the memes it spawned for like a week.

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I apologize for any inaccuracies about ropes, knots, and BDSM culture. You should definitely talk your kinks over with your partner(s) beforehand. Also, I do NOT recommend attempting trauma recovery the way Shane does here, at least not without a mental health professional's guidance

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EDIT May 21: I originally intended this to be set after Ilya officially meets Shane's parents. However, now that I'm actually writing the meet-the-parents fic, I simply can't imagine yuna casually selling Ilya the shibari mannequin and giving him discounted shipping if she knew he was boinking her son. Therefore this is now set before Ilya meets yuna officially. Fear not, he still gets the friends and family shipping discount—yuna thinks he's shane's friend from the fundraiser in ch1 of meet me in the dark ;)

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thanks for reading! especially if you've gone through all the fics in this series so far. I appreciate comments in all shapes and forms, as well as kudos and bookmarks <3

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