

Structural Integrity

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by [circa21537 \(mossydreamz\)](#), [mossydreamz](#), [rhythm-n-bruise \(mossydreamz\)](#).

Summary

After Shane left in a hurry, Ilya had been stuck in a mood. Seeing him with Rose had done nothing to help. He gathers up all his courage and decides that the least they owe to each other is a real conversation.

“Can we talk?” Ilya pries the door open enough to make Shane look at him, to see the somberness in his eyes. It’s hard to let his guard down; they’re load-bearing walls, but he’s prying the door to himself open as much as the door into Shane’s building. There’s no skirting around this anymore.

Shane sneers and shakes his head. “Says the guy who ghosts me for months at a time.”

It isn’t a hard no and he isn’t trying to push Ilya back out the door, so Ilya steps fully inside, letting the door close behind him and the click of the latch echoes through the stairwell. “I know. I’m sorry.”

Notes

This series is a canon divergence after episode 4 of the first season.

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

WINTER 2016

The cab pulls up under watchful eyes as Rose comes out of the building and kisses Shane good night. She slides into the backseat and as the car pulls out of the parking lot, Ilya flicks his third cigarette, half-smoked, off into a puddle by the dumpsters where he was waiting. He jogs to get to the door before it closes and shoves his foot in. "Hollander!"

Shane smells the acrid tang of burnt tobacco before he registers that it's Ilya. A bolt of adrenaline shocks through him before anger replaces it. "The fuck are you doing here?"

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Shane's expression turns then to suspicion. He's never seen Ilya so serious. Maybe that time he'd told him to fuck off at the Olympics. It rattles something in him, makes him worry. "Sorry for what?" He'd been the one to walk away, after all.

"For whatever I did that freaked you out." Ilya shoves his hands into the pockets of his jacket to keep them from floating towards Shane, wanting to cradle the back of his neck and rest against the crest of his hip. His eyes keep moving around, to the floor, to the stairs, to the darkened space behind the stairs, but he can't quite look at Shane. He feels like this vulnerability will break him if he looks at Shane right now.

Shane relaxes a little, but crosses his arms over his chest and leans back against the railing of the stairs. "You didn't... it wasn't... *I'm* sorry, okay? It wasn't you, I just—"

"Just what?" His voice has never been so quiet, so soft and thin.

Shane fidgets for a while, thinking over it, searching for words to arrange that might give an answer without giving too much away. "I'm just... scared. And I'm not ready for whatever..." He gestures with one hand back and forth between them. "Whatever the fuck this is. Whatever it was starting to become."

"Oh but you're ready with her?" Ilya snaps before he can stop himself, feeling that opening in his defenses draw closed again briefly. He sighs out slowly through his nose and tries again. "What's the difference between her and me?"

Shane is shocked into silence. The words feel like they're skipping off his mind like a stone whipped across the surface of a lake. He had never considered that Rozanov felt— that he also—

“What?”

At last, Ilya lifts his eyes to Shane's and Shane can see hurt. Real hurt. Not annoyed, not angry, not fucking with him. “You tell me you can't and then you start fucking movie star. Why?”

“Cuz she's—man, I dunno! What the fuck do you care?”

“Because I do!” Ilya snaps again, and his eyes go back to the floor as tears swell. He blinks them away, knowing they are as much anger as anything else.

Shane sniffs thoughtfully, rocking back and forth against the railing. “Because I don't have to keep her a secret...” His voice is barely audible even in the quiet space.

Ilya laughs sardonically, shaking his head and looking up at the ceiling. “Oooh, Hollander. You don't have the first fucking clue about keeping secrets. Where I come from? Is secrets. You, you're just... fucking scared!”

“Aren't you?!”

“...Terrified.”

Haltingly, Shane drops his arms, takes a step closer. “This is hard.” Another step. “I didn't know when we first... I didn't think it would really matter.”

“And it matters to you now, yes?” Ilya asks with the bravest bit of hope in his voice.

Shane sighs heavily and nods. “You're so fucking hard to read, Rozanov. It didn't really seem like it mattered to you that much.” He bends his knees to get lower, trying to catch Ilya's eyes and the other refuses, looking away, trying to nonchalantly swipe under his eye. “You told me I was boring. That you don't like me as a person, that I'm just a good mouth.”

“I was fucking with you! I thought you knew, I'm always joking.”

“Yeah, well maybe I don't like being fucked with.”

“Then that's why I'm sorry... I don't—” he clears his throat and a tear escapes, trailing down his cheek. “I don't know how to be serious. I don't know how to open up. But it was always good with you. Not just sex good, it felt... safe. With you. Nobody else has had that side of me, Shane.” He bites his lip a little too hard, catching himself using Shane's given name again. “Maybe doesn't seem like it? But you had more of me than you think.”

His words hang between them for a moment that stretches and stretches. Shane reaches up and brushes the tear with his knuckles from where it hangs at Ilya's chin. Ilya tries to jerk away but Shane catches his jaw, nearly putting a hand around his throat, and kisses him. Softly, like an apology. Ilya's face swims in front of him, so close he's out of focus, and his

eyes seem wild, the grey vivid against the redness from his tears. "Ilya, I have no fucking clue what to do with that."

Ilya laughs in a half-sob. "Yeah, fuck, me neither."

"Do... do you wanna come upstairs? And, like... talk more?" Shane lets go of Ilya's jaw and takes another step back.

Ilya snorts, clears his throat, pulls himself back together. "You think is good idea?"

"Yeah, I think maybe is good idea," Shane offers back, even as a nervous little voice in his head says that it's maybe a bad idea, too. He turns and begins to slowly ascend the stairs. He's halfway up the first flight when Ilya begins to follow and they climb in silence, quiet until long after they've made it into Shane's apartment.

Ilya sinks into an armchair across the coffee table from the sofa, onto which Shane carefully sits, all his nerves and racing thoughts caught up in his tense posture. They just look at each other for a while, neither knowing what to say. Shane tries to start first.

"We've never... this is stupid, I guess, but you've never called me Shane before that last time at your house. It felt so different. Like... too real for me. It just got way too real and I've been holding all this at arms' length for a long time, and it freaked me out, and I bolted. And I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry for being asshole. I know I'm... I get it, I'm, what's the phrase, rough around the edges. I don't say how I feel. I joke around too much. But I thought... I thought I had shown it. I always thought we understood each other, because I don't just fucking ask, or say. You think you're scared? I told you, I'm terrified." He scoots forward and leans his elbows onto his thighs, spreading his hands in front of him. "Look. We've been doing this for a long time now, yes?"

"Definitely been a while," Shane agrees.

"Risky, sure, maybe a lot to lose. But, Hollander... Shane. The thing that scares me most is losing you." His voice breaks on the last word, nearly lost entirely. "And... now I did."

The silence returns but Ilya is patient, watching Shane wring his hands and give it a lot of thought. "Rose is... she's really great, actually. I like her a lot, we have fun together. And I'm not always scared about who knows, who sees, who finds out. Fucking around in secret is one thing, but I don't know that I can bear hiding it if we let it get..."

"Real?"

"...yeah. Yeah, real. Serious."

"And this is why you panicked?"

"I didn't panic!" Shane lies, knowing full well that his vision had tunneled while he was stumbling over his words to leave Ilya's place that lovely, terrifying, precious late morning.

“Okay, I panicked. We’ve never slept over before, we’ve never shared a meal. You fucking cooked for me!”

“Yeah, am nice guy sometimes!” Ilya counters, trying to inject some levity if only for his own sake.

Shane rolls his eyes. “Yeah, and that’s kind of the first time I’ve seen that side of you. Even... even the way you kissed me was different. I dunno...”

Ilya thinks back, realizing yes, in his own home, he’d been much more open. It wasn’t like he hadn’t considered these things, too, that it felt like they were venturing deeper into the forest, but it had excited him. In the back of his mind, he’d been waiting for it to naturally evolve into something more tender. Grounded. When Shane reacted the way he had, Ilya assumed that he didn’t want that. Now, he’s not so sure what Shane wants, or if Shane even knows, himself.

He stands from his chair and goes to sit next to Shane, moving slowly like he’s trying not to frighten a wild animal. He sits close but not touching, folding his hands in his lap. “I kept you behind closed doors because you were mine. At least while we were together. Private. ... Precious.” He licks his lips and struggles to find words. This is so hard, fighting against the stone lodged in his throat, the tightness in his chest, the shaking in his hands. His instinct is to flip the switch back into cool, calm, confident Rozanov, to protect himself behind nonchalance and arrogance, but he knows that’s how they got here to begin with. The rest of him, the parts that are left without that mask, they feel weak, atrophied, and weary of how much this will hurt.

“We can’t be out. Maybe if we were just regular whoever the fucks, but we—”

“I know! No, I get it, I know. Fuck, I don’t think I could even go back home if it was public.” Shane lays a sympathetic hand on his knee, squeezing gently. Ilya lays his hand over it. “Sometimes secrets are nice. But... I don’t want to keep secrets from you anymore.”

“Like what?” Shane asks cautiously, leaving his hand under Ilya’s, both of their fingers naturally petting gently against each other.

“Like my dad. You asked how he was doing. He’s not doing okay. Is stressful, always on my mind. My brother, I pay him to take care of Papa, half the time he is calling me saying Alexei is not there. He just fucks off, and my dad, he gets confused and turned around and upset, and then he calls me, and I’m on the other side of the fucking planet, what the hell am I supposed to do?” It all comes out in a rush and he has to pause as the emotion works its way up from the tight, hot knot in his gut that it’s been in since his father’s diagnosis. “So... that’s one secret. Not even my coach knows, I tell no one. It’s my family, I have to protect them. My father, he is very important man back home, he—he deserves his dignity.”

Shane turns towards him, frowning, laying another hand on top of Ilya’s and rubbing comfortingly. “Fuck, Ilya... that’s awful, I’m so sorry. I had no idea.”

“Of course you didn’t, I never told you.” He looks down at their joined hands. “I have another secret.”

“Yeah? Okay, tell me.” Shane is kind and patient despite the tension, despite the circumstances and the awkwardness hanging in the air.

Ilya chews his lip, mouth pursed in a tight line. The words are there, they’ve been there for years, but he has trouble guiding them up to the back of his throat, over his tongue, past his teeth. “I...” He curses in Russian and shakes his head hard, closing his eyes as he blurts out, “I’m fucking in love with you.”

The air feels thick in the apartment. Ilya looks down at the floor through his lashes. Shane has gone still and blank, his mouth parted in surprise, like he had started to say something but thought better of it. After a little time, “Are you fucking with me?”

Ilya’s head snaps up and he glares at Shane headon. “No, I’m not fucking with you, Hollander. I love you. I have. For long time.” The wretched tears are back and he hangs his head again. “Is not what you want, is okay, we just needed to actually say the fucking things.”

“It is what I want,” Shane nearly shouts in a rush. Ilya’s eyes meet his again and there’s a look of fragile hope there. “It is... I just don’t know how we could actually... have it.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I know I’d be worried the whole time that we would get caught.” Caught. Like they were doing something illicit instead of sacred. “It’s like, I do want this, and I also am so scared of what that would be like that it would be so much easier if we weren’t in love.”

We. That word does not escape Ilya.

Shane continues. “I honestly never would have guessed. I mean, I figured you liked me, but just for... you know. You should play poker,” he says with a little grin, happy when Ilya returns it with a little huffed laugh.

“Mm, fond memories of Vegas,” he offers, leaning to bump his shoulder against Shane’s. Slowly, the tight atmosphere softens, syphoned off into the night. The air feels breathable again, even though nothing feels set in stone. *We*, Ilya thinks again. “Can I please kiss you?” he asks, and the ache in his voice has Shane meeting his mouth in reply, hands moving to spear into his curls and squeeze the back of his neck.

Ilya’s hands slide around to the small of Shane’s back, pulling him close and slipping his tongue along Shane’s bottom lip, nothing too salacious but needing to taste him. He dots kisses across the freckled cheeks and bridge of his nose, working towards his ear. “Now you know my secrets,” he whispers. “Feel special?”

“Very,” Shane breathes, angling his neck to give Ilya more room to pool hot breath into his ear and kiss down his throat. “God, fuck, hey, um... I was just with Rose. To be, like, transparent or whatever.”

Ilya pulls back and shrugs a shoulder. “I figured. Is okay.”

“Did you go home with that girl from the club?”

“No.”

“...did you follow me home?”

“I wanted to talk to you! I kept almost sending text and chickening out. If you hadn’t come out and opened the door, maybe... maybe I would have just left.”

Shane leans and kisses him softly. “I’m glad you didn’t leave. Fuck, this is so complicated now.”

“With Rose? Women are resilient. Especially movie star women.” He pauses and gives Shane a hard look. “You are going to break up with her, yes?”

Shane groans. “Yes! Yes, I... was going to, anyway. The sex was... she was great! She’s so cool and really sexy and pretty and everything, but I just... I’m not... wired like that, I guess.”

“So you were lying when you said you liked girls,” Ilya teases lightly with a smirk.

“Yeah. Big fucking lie.” Shane wrinkles his nose. “Mostly to myself, honestly.”

Ilya pulls him into a hug at this, massaging his scalp with one hand and a shoulderblade with the other. “Been there. I know it’s not easy.” Shane relaxes into him with a sigh, looping his arms around Ilya’s waist. They sit in the embrace for a drawn out while, Ilya kissing Shane’s hair and Shane nuzzling his nose into Ilya’s throat.

“I love you, too, y’know.”

Ilya barely hears the words, muffled against his shoulder. They freeze his hands and send a shiver through him that pools pleasant and warm in his chest. “Yes?”

“Yeah... and I wish sometimes I didn’t, for a lot of reasons, but I do.”

“I know. I get it. I’m sorry.” Ilya’s hands resume their stroking and comforting, as much a comfort to him to touch Shane as it is a comfort to Shane to be touched.

“So what are we gonna do?” Shane sounds woeful, hopeless. Ilya rests his cheek against Shane’s head and squeezes him to himself, not sure how to answer. In his mind, they could just let it blossom and keep it in their own private spaces, but he understood how complicated that was, how hiding felt like shame even when it wasn’t.

“We try and start over?”

“We started by sucking each other off,” Shane quips back in a flat tone.

Ilya chuckles a little. “Okay then we start again. We go back to before you freaked out.” He lets go of Shane and sits back on the couch. “I just came for you, you said my name, which sounds fucking amazing out of your mouth, by the way. Try again. What would you do?”

Shane sits awkwardly for a moment before he climbs into Ilya's lap, resting his hands on his shoulders, as they'd been that day. "Ilya," he repeats. His hands massage at Ilya's shoulders, up to his neck, down his arms, pulling them around him until Ilya is grabbing his hips. "Did you like my dessert?"

They both burst out in laughter, Shane collapsing against Ilya's chest, embarrassed and exhilarated all at once. The laughter dies down and Shane stays curled up against Ilya like this, a whirling mix of emotions in him. For now, he puts Rose at the back of his mind, a separate issue to address later. There is such a pounding rush in his heart to know Ilya loves him, and there is a strangling fear, too, of what that means, of what it could look like, and just how much they could both get hurt. He had thought Ilya too lackadaisical to be the type to fall in love, much less ever admit it. He'd been fine as a fuck buddy, up to a point, and now that the road extended beyond it he found himself unsure how to walk it. He supposed he would do so like anything else: one step at a time.

Ilya pats his ass. "Not to ruin the moment, but I need to piss. You're on my bladder."

"Oh, sorry." Shane climbs off him and curls up in the corner of the couch as Ilya gets up and disappears off into the guest bathroom on the first floor. He waits for him to return and thinks about asking him to stay, but the sheets are still mussed and smell like Rose's perfume. There's the guest bed, where his parents usually stay when they're in town, but somehow that feels weird. Deciding he can remedy this, he climbs up to his bedroom and strips the bed, balling up the sheets and stuffing them into his laundry hamper before pulling out some fresh linens from his closet. When he hears the bathroom door open, he calls down "I'm up here!"

Ilya comes up into the bedroom and moves to help Shane with the fitted sheet without being asked, making the bed together in a quiet that is mostly comfortable, frayed a bit around the edges, but repairable. When the bed is freshly made, Shane strips off his shirt and sweatpants, tossing them on top of the sheets in his hamper, and climbs under the covers. Ilya follows suit, laying on his side facing Shane, propped up on his elbow. Shane lays on his back and scoots to fit up against the line of Ilya's body, looking up at the ceiling.

"I don't think I can have sex again tonight. I was already kinda... not so great on my part with Rose, I drank a lot at the club."

"You never drink during the season," Ilya notes with concern.

"Yeah well I've never been in love with another player before, either." Or another man. Or really anyone for that matter.

Ilya slips an arm under Shane's head so that it rests in the crook of his elbow, adjusting himself to lay comfortably against the other. "No sex. Okay. Though... it's hot when you're in control. Making me cum. I'd probably let you fuck me if you wanted to."

Shane punches him in the arm playfully. "Not tonight!" Though he doesn't not not like the idea. The thought of Ilya under him, of being inside him, is enticing, for sure, his own preferences aside. He wonders if Ilya has ever done that, has ever "touched himself there", as he'd put it so delicately, but doesn't ask. He reaches to smack the lightswitch to the lamps

over each night stand and moves to fit himself against Ilya with a hand on his hip. Ilya pets his side and hums, his lips finding Shane's brow in the dark.

"How do you say 'I love you' in Russian?" Shane asks, looking at Ilya's profile carved from shadows.

"Я тебя люблю."

Shane tries it out, stunted and awkward on his tongue. Ilya repeats it and Shane tries again, seeming to get it right this time, feeling it hit Ilya not as some curiosity of language but as a statement he'd wanted to make, wanted Ilya to hear in a language that would sink a little deeper than their shared one.

Ilya shakes slightly under his hands. "Me, too," he whispers.

They drift to sleep in a tangle of limbs. Shane first and then Ilya after a long stretch of listening to Shane's slow sleep breaths. It wasn't going to be easy. There would be challenges neither of them saw coming, and a few more they did. They might burn bright for only a few months and then gutter like a spent candle, they might be caught and lose everything, but it was worth trying. For love, it was always worth trying.

End Notes

There is an on-going companion series to this one, [товарищ](#). While this fic can be read as a stand-alone, within the timeline of the joined series it falls first, followed by the [first](#) installment of товарищ.

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