

It's okay, I promise

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76858506) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76858506>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationships:	Shane Hollander & Hayden Pike , Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Hayden Pike/Jackie Pike
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Hayden Pike , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Secret Relationship , Male Friendship , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , Anxious Shane Hollander , Good Friend Hayden Pike , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , POV Hayden Pike
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-01 Words: 3,239 Chapters: 1/1

It's okay, I promise

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Summary

Hayden's words hung in the air, awkward and frantic. No answer.

"...buddy?" Hayden finally tried, voice hesitant.

Shane's lips trembled. A tiny, imperceptible quiver at first—but then his hands shot to his face, and the dam broke. Tears spilled over instantly.

Hayden froze, heart hammering, mind blank. What the actual fuck.

Or

How Hayden found out Shane didn't like women and decided to be an amazing friend about it

Notes

New year means I finally posted something!! Hope you'll like it :DD

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

So, here's the thing. Hayden can't help but notice that Shane is not really a ladies' man. No sporadic hook-ups, no dates, no flirting at the club. Nothing. And that's okay, really! No one expects Shane to follow the footsteps of his teammates and sleep around with whoever's willing.

But—

Hayden worries.

It isn't the lack of women that sets off alarm bells. It's the lack of *anything*. Shane doesn't complain about being single. He doesn't joke about it, either. When the guys rib him for being "too good for anyone" he just smiles and lets the conversation move on without him. There's no edge to it, no embarrassment that Hayden can recognize. No interest to pursue someone, just absence.

Sometimes Hayden catches himself watching Shane across the room—perched on the edge of a chair, phone face-down in his hands, listening more than talking. Always polite, always present, never quite *there*.

Hayden tries to tell himself it's nothing. Shane's always been like this: private, a little closed off, happier in one-on-one conversations than loud crowds. Maybe he just doesn't like bars. Maybe he's focused on hockey. Maybe he's waiting for the right person and doesn't entertain the thought of anything casual.

Still.

There are moments that linger in his mind. A teammate waving a phone in Shane's direction, offering to set him up with a friend of a friend. Shane's shoulders going tight, his laugh coming a beat too late. The way he says "I'm alright" like it's rehearsed.

Hayden files it away.

Because being single isn't a problem. Wanting space isn't a problem. But being this alone—standing just outside the circle, never stepping forward—that feels like something else. Something heavier.

And Hayden doesn't know what to do with that, except to carry it with him. To make sure Shane gets a ride home, to sit next to him during team meetings, to check in, casually, like he isn't keeping score of all the things Shane never says.

He tells himself he's overthinking it, but Shane is his best friend. And best friends aren't supposed to feel this unreachable.

Hayden does the only logical thing he can think of and calls his wife.

Jackie answers on the second ring, voice soft and familiar, and Hayden feels his shoulders drop immediately. Jackie—God. Jackie’s amazing. He doesn’t know how she does it, how she manages to be steady and brilliant and kind without ever making it feel like work. She just *is*. Somehow, she always knows when he needs her, even when he doesn’t quite know how to say it himself.

“Hey.” she says, smiling through the phone. He can hear it. “What’s up?”

Hayden smiles back like an idiot. Tells her about practice. About nothing. About everything. He asks what she had for dinner, listens while she talks, lets the normalcy of it wash over him. For a few minutes, he forgets the tight feeling in his chest entirely.

Jackie hums, amused, patient. She lets him circle the point because she knows him. Because she loves him.

There’s a pause—just a fraction too long.

“Okay baby.” she says gently. “What’s wrong?”

“I—” He rubs a hand over his face, staring at the ceiling. “I’m worried about Shane.”

Jackie doesn’t interrupt and that alone makes it easier.

“He’s fine.” Hayden says quickly, because that’s what he’s been telling himself. “I mean, he’s not hurt, he’s playing great, he’s—he’s okay. I just...” He trails off, searching for the right words. “He’s always alone, you know? Like *really* alone”.

He tells her about what he notices, about the jokes, the setups Shane never takes. About how everyone else seems to pass it off as Shane being shy or focused or picky. About how none of that bothers him—except that it does.

“I don’t think he’s unhappy.” Hayden adds, quieter now. “But I don’t think he’s happy, either.”

Jackie is silent for a moment. Thinking. Always thinking.

“And that scares you.” she says.

“Yeah.” Hayden admits. “He’s my best friend. I feel like I should be doing something, and I don’t even know what the problem is.”

Jackie’s voice softens. “You’re doing something. You’re paying attention.”

Hayden swallows. He hadn’t realized how badly he needed to hear that.

He starts to say more—about the way Shane tenses, the way he shuts down—but Jackie gently steers the conversation, asking questions that Hayden didn’t think of before.

And then, almost casually, like it’s the most natural thought in the world, she says:

“Hey. Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah.”

“What if Shane just... doesn’t like women?”

The words land quietly.

Hayden doesn’t respond right away. His brain stalls, rewinds, plays back a thousand little moments he’d catalogued and dismissed. The lack of interest. The rehearsed smiles. The way concern always sat heavier than confusion.

“Oh.” he says finally.

Not shocked. Not panicked. Just... stunned.

Jackie waits, letting the idea settle, letting Hayden come to it on his own.

“Oh my god. Jackie, I never thought of that.”

“I know.” she says gently. “That’s okay.”

And suddenly, Hayden isn’t just worried anymore.

He’s *careful*.

After the call, Hayden doesn’t do anything dramatic.

He doesn’t sit Shane down, doesn’t ask him questions he isn’t ready to hear the answers to. He doesn’t say a word to anyone else, but he pays attention.

It feels different now, watching Shane with that thought in the back of his mind. Not bad, just clearer, like someone’s adjusted the focus on a lens he didn’t realize was blurry.

When they’re with the guys Shane laughs at the right moments, but there’s a hesitation to it Hayden hadn’t noticed before, a careful timing, like he’s checking the room before he lets himself react. When the guys start talking about women—about dates, about numbers, about who’s “worth the effort”—Shane nods, but otherwise goes quiet. Never adds anything.

When someone nudges Shane and says “Man, we gotta get you out there” Shane’s mouth curves into a smile that doesn’t reach his eyes. “I’m good” he says, soft but final.

Good. Not busy. Not maybe later. Just good.

Hayden clocks the word this time.

He starts noticing how often Shane removes himself from the edges of those conversations. How he volunteers to grab water, to clean up, to do anything that gives him an excuse to step away without making a scene. How *relieved* he looks when the topic changes.

It would be easy to miss if you weren't looking for it.

Hayden hates that he hadn't looked sooner.

He thinks about Jackie's voice in his ear. *What if he just doesn't like women?* He thinks about how terrifying that possibility might feel for someone like Shane—quiet, private, playing in a league that still isn't kind.

So Hayden does what he always does when he doesn't know how to help: he tries to normalize.

The next time they're alone, stretching after practice, Hayden brings it up casually.

"So" he says, like it just occurred to him. "You ever think about dating? I mean, seriously dating."

Shane stiffens. Not dramatically, barely enough to notice.

Hayden misses it at first. Keeps talking, filling the silence like he always does. "Not the random stuff. Like, actually seeing someone. You deserve that, you know."

Shane's answer comes a second too late. "I'm fine." he says.

Hayden nods, accepts it.

Only later does he realize Shane never meets his eyes.

He tries again a few days later. Different wording. Same result. Each time, Shane grows a little quieter, a little tenser, like a wire being pulled tighter and tighter beneath the surface. Hayden notices eventually—but by then, he's already convinced himself he's helping.

That he's opening the door.

He doesn't realize he's pressing on a fault line.

Hayden leaned back against the locker room wall, quietly proud of himself. He's been asking Shane about dating. No assumptions, no pressure, and *no mentioning women*. Just a simple question, from man to man. And Shane hadn't shut him down (!). Well, he skirted around the issue, giving half-answers and shrugs, but Hayden counted that as a win.

Maybe he's opening up to me. Hayden's chest lifted a little. *Maybe I'm finally making a difference. Maybe he trusts me enough to talk.*

He let himself smile. A little victory, a little warm rush of hope. Shane, quiet and reserved Shane, letting him in even a fraction. It was the kind of moment Hayden had been waiting for.

He was thinking of what else he can do, maybe buy a small pride flag sticker and put it inside of his locker, not noticeable to anyone but him and Shane, who sporadically borrows things from him, but then, while he was scrolling through AliExpress a certain add made him stop in his tracks. Looking at the beautiful flower earrings, which had nothing to do with what he was trying to find by the way, he remembered, like a punch to the gut, a certain name he hasn't thought about in ages. Lily.

Oh.

Oh no.

All at once, Hayden's chest tightened. Years of messages. That quiet little name Shane had dropped ages ago after Hayden saw the messages on his phone.

What if Jackie was wrong? What if I've been completely off? His stomach sank. Oh god, what if they were dating? What if they broke up somewhere along the way and Shaden is going through a secret breakup?

And then Hayden saw him—Shane, walking into the room, calm as ever, unaware of the storm building behind Hayden's eyes. He moved slowly, almost lazily, but every step made Hayden's chest thump harder. Shane glanced up, caught Hayden staring, and gave the smallest, faint smile.

Hayden didn't think. He didn't wait. He launched himself forward.

"Shane—hey—wait, I need to ask you something." He said, words tumbling out faster than his brain could filter.

Shane froze mid-step. Hayden's mouth opened, closed, opened again. He rubbed the back of his neck, stammering. "Uh... so... I mean... uh... thinking of... vacation? Or—uh—yeah, I mean... not that it matters... just... uh—"

Shane's eyebrows rose slowly, just a flicker at first, then higher as Hayden's nonsense tumbled out. The subtle shift in Shane's posture made Hayden's chest squeeze. *Wow, I sound like a possessed person.*

"Okay, right. yes. I just wanted to ask — you and Lily still keeping in touch?"

Shane's whole body went rigid and Hayden could feel his own muscles tense.

"I mean—!" He hurried to add. "It's just, I realized I usually catch a glance or two of you texting— not that I think anyone noticed! — but I don't think I saw you smile at your phone so I just thought I'd ask. So. If you want to tell me something I'm a great listener. Just ask my wife."

Shane didn't move. He didn't blink. His hands went to his sides, then into his pockets, then back to his sides. His body shrank inward, folding slightly, shoulders curling as if he could disappear.

Hayden's words hung in the air, awkward and frantic. No answer.

"...buddy?" Hayden finally tried, voice hesitant.

Shane's lips trembled. A tiny, imperceptible quiver at first—but then his hands shot to his face, and the dam broke. Tears spilled over instantly.

Hayden froze, heart hammering, mind blank. *What the fuck. No, what the fuck is happening.*

Then, instinct kicked in. He went to stand at Shane's side, voice rushed.

"Maybe... maybe I was wrong! If you weren't together, then that's fine too! And if... and if something happened, that's fine! Really! And if you don't like women, it's all fine to me! I just... I just—"

Shane stopped for a fraction of a second, eyes wide with absolute disbelief.

Hayden's words tumbled faster, desperate:

"I just... I didn't mean to—look, I just want you to know you don't have to explain anything! I'm not judging!"

Shane's sobs came again, louder this time, his entire body shaking uncontrollably. Hayden could see that he could barely breathe. His eyes were darting to Hayden like he didn't know if he was safe.

Hayden didn't think. He just moved. He wrapped his arms around Shane, pulling him close. Shane stiffened immediately, instinctively, trying to wriggle out of the embrace.

"Hey, hey, it's okay." Hayden said, voice low but urgent. "Whatever's happening, I don't care. I don't care. You're safe. It's okay."

Shane shook his head slightly, pressing back against Hayden, trying to escape, but Hayden held him tighter. "I swear" Hayden breathed, voice breaking a little "you don't have to explain anything. Anything at all. I just want you to be okay. That's all I care about."

Shane's hands twitched at Hayden's sides, like he wanted to push away but couldn't. His chest heaved, ragged breaths catching in his throat, lips trembling as tears streaked down.

"You're okay." Hayden repeated over and over, letting the words sink in. "You're okay. You're not in trouble. You're not doing anything wrong. I don't care who you like. I don't care about Lily or anyone else. I just... want you to be okay. That's it. That's all."

Shane stopped struggling. His tears kept falling, but his body began to eventually relax against Hayden's chest, small shuddering breaths still catching but less than before. Hayden's arms tightened around him, steadying, warm, safe.

For a long moment, neither of them spoke.

Then, almost a whisper, Shane's voice broke through:
"I... I'm gay."

Hayden froze for half a second, heart hammering — and then, softly, gently, he repeated, just to make sure Shane heard him.

"You're gay."

Wow. He's never doubting Jackie again.

Shane nodded into Hayden's chest, silent, too afraid to look up.

"Yeah. Yeah, that's okay. That's fine. I don't care. That's fine."

And Hayden finally let himself exhale. Because Shane had said it and now he could do something to help. He didn't know what, but that's what reddit threads are for. Hayden loved technology.

Shane stayed pressed against Hayden for a long moment, letting himself breathe, letting the words settle. Then, shakily, he pulled back just enough to murmur barely audible:

"You're gonna hate me."

Hayden immediately started protesting but Shane cut him off, shaking his head. "No, I mean it. You *will* hate me."

Hayden frowned, panic creeping back in.

Shane took a deep, trembling breath. "Lily isn't... she's not... she's a he. A guy."

Hayden's brain stuttered. *Wait. What.*

Shane seemed to be on a roll now, blurting every secret he's ever had, not stopping to let Hayden process.

"And the guy is—is Ilya. Ilya Rozanov."

Hayden blinked. Twice. Slowly. "...Ilya Rozanov?" His voice cracked. "But you—" Hayden laughed, as if the whole idea was ridiculous and Shane trembled. *Okay, mental breakdown later. Hayden needs to get his shit together ASAP.*

"So you're dating—? Talking with? Ilya Rozanov. That's. I guess that makes sense. Mhm." Hayden finished with a nod.

Shane separated himself from Hayden completely, face all blotchy. "What?"

"I mean, you just had to go and snag the best hockey player out there." Hayden said, shaking his head, something he hopes is a grin rather than a grimace tugging at the corners of his mouth. *Be supportive. Be. supportive.*

Shane's mouth opened, face burning hotter by the second and a single tear sliding down his cheek. "I—It's not like that—"

Hayden held up a hand, voice softening. "Hey, hey. I'm not mad. Not at you. Not at him (*Kind of at him actually*). I care about you. That's it. Safe. Happy. That's all that matters."

Shane blinked, barely able to meet his eyes. "...Really?"

"Really." Hayden said, letting out a small breath, trying to keep his grin from faltering. "You're my best friend dude."

Hayden flopped onto his bed, running a hand through his hair.

What the fuck just happened?

He could still feel Shane trembling against him, could still hear the words, could still—*Lily is Ilya?* Ilya Rozanov? His brain kept looping like a bad gif.

He yanked the pillow away, sitting up abruptly. "Okay. Okay. This is fine. I can be normal about this. I am a mature adult."

He lay back down immediately.

"No, I'm not."

He stared at the ceiling again, heart still racing, brain ping-ponging between *he trusted me* and *Ilya fucking Rozanov*, trying very hard not to scream into the mattress.

The next day, neither of them spoke about it. Breakfast. Locker room. Warm-ups. Not a word.

Hayden kept stealing glances at Shane, trying to read him, but Shane was focused and professional—the Shane everyone else saw before the game, locked in and ready to lead them to victory.

On the ice, the game was brutal. The opposing team played hard and fast, checks coming heavy, the puck rarely staying still long enough to breathe. The score stayed tight through the first two periods, every shift a grind, every mistake punished.

Hayden forced himself to focus—on plays, on positioning, on keeping their momentum—but his eyes kept finding Shane anyway. And Shane delivered. Faceoff after faceoff, clean passes, sharp decisions. He moved like nothing else existed.

By the third period, the crowd was on its feet. The energy was electric, every hit drawing gasps, every shot sending the arena into chaos. When the final buzzer sounded and the

scoreboard tilted in their favour, relief slammed into Hayden's chest.

They'd won.

The guys celebrated, sticks clashing, noise filling the rink—but Shane just nodded once, exhaling like he'd been holding his breath all game.

It wasn't until later—after the showers, after the noise had dulled and the locker room had thinned—that they finally found themselves alone.

“Good game” Hayden said, voice easy. “You were sharp out there. Seriously, that's my captain.”

Shane gave an unsure smile, drying his hair slowly with a towel. “I tried. Uhm, you also played well.”

Hayden nodded, grinning a little, trying to keep his tone light, but careful. Now or never. “Yeah, you were focused, alright. But hey—don't, let's not pretend yesterday didn't happen, yeah? I know we didn't talk much after everything, but no judgment from me, okay? You can talk to me if you want.”

Shane exhaled, letting his shoulders droop. “I don't get how can you be so normal about this. I literally lied to you for years, Hayden.”

Normal, Hayden thought. Yeah, normal. That's him. Totally.

“You clearly had your reasons dude. Sorry to say but I don't see how someone liking men could scare me away. You're stuck with me” He said, gesturing at himself.

Shane blinked, lips twitching. “Yeah. I guess I can get used to that.”

A beat of silence passed between them. Comfortable.

Then Shane's phone buzzed on the bench between them, bright and loud against the quiet room.

Lily calling.

Shane froze instantly, eyes wide, thumb hovering over the screen.

Hayden noticed immediately, leaning back with a grin tugging at his lips. “Well” he said lightly, shaking his head “look who's popular.”

Shane shot him a sharp look but Hayden just shrugged, still teasing. “Go ahead. Don't leave the guy waiting. I'll... pretend I didn't just witness history.”

Shane stared at him and then picked up the phone. As he walked away to answer, glancing at Hayden as he was doing so, Hayden smile with only one thought clear in his mind. *I must be the most amazing best friend to ever exist.*

End Notes

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