

Side Effects May Vary

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Side Effects May Vary

by [Inrainbowz](#)

Summary

“For our next session, I’d like you to list all the reasons why you’re so resistant to the idea of taking antidepressants.”

Ilya sometimes resents that therapy is so much *work*. And that it has the audacity to actually help.

Now to talk to Shane about the sex thing.

Notes

Like all of you I'm being consumed by this fandom and these two. I have other works on the making, I'm very happy to get back into that place where I just want to write and write. Thank you Heated Rivalry.

This deals with themes of depression, medication, and sex. I don't know if it's a thing but Ilya has, like, internalized bias against psychiatry? In the line of he doesn't necessarily believe in therapy and mental health and stuff - especially when it applies to him. He still goes but y'know. It also touches on his mother's suicide. I expressed this aspect to the best of my abilities. Mostly I wanted to explore their relationship with sex, and I will again probably.

Hope you'll enjoy!

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

“I’m back.”

“How was it?”

“Fine, fine.”

Ilya shrugged off his thick coat and hung it haphazardly on the rack by the door. It was overflowing already with their various winter gear, and it was one too many. It sagged on the floor, taking a few other jackets and scarves with it, and pooled at Ilya’s feet in a sad little pile of uncooperative fabric.

He had to admit he needed a moment, staring down moodily and feeling sorry for himself, before he bent down to pick it all up and hang it back properly. He spared a passing thought to a time when he would just have left it on the floor to be dealt with later, or not at all. But they liked to keep the house tidy. And it wasn’t just Shane, even if he was indeed more particular about all things pertaining to organizing, cleaning, and tidying up. But Ilya was no slob. In his parents’ house having a messy room wasn’t an option, partly because his father wouldn’t stand for it, but mostly because the flat was cramped already. They had shared a room with Alexei all throughout their childhood, up until their mother’s death. They had moved several times in a short period after that, their possessions dwindling each time until Ilya could fit it all in two suitcases and a backpack. By the time money came flowing, both from his hockey prospect and his father’s cozying up with government officials on his behalf, they just lived in a place he barely went to, a stranger in his own house.

Fuck, this session had hit him hard.

There was a time when Shane would have been greeting him at the door, when they didn’t have even a minute together to waste. But they had time now. They could even afford to spend it apart when needed. Ilya thought he wouldn’t handle so well this shift to a more sedate pace, as if the urgency was a necessary part of their dynamic. It was a relief, to discover it wasn’t. That he would enjoy the luxury of not needing to be in Shane’s face every second.

But he really needed it now.

Ilya sped up to the living room where he hoped to find... Bingo. Shane was sitting on the couch reading, sensible glasses on his serious face, posture straight and proper as if waiting in a lobby for a job interview. Ilya had never met someone so incapable of slouching and sprawling.

But he could fix that.

He flopped onto the couch and pushed to rest his head on Shane’s lap, making sure to knock off his book in the process. Shane was prepared though, lifting his hands with perfect timing and the smallest hint of a smile as he pretended to be annoyed at the interruption. Ilya snatched the book in one fluid move, eager for the full attention of his man.

“I was reading that,” he said with a huff, but made no move to get it back.

“Yeah, yeah”, Ilya said distractingly, looking for one of Shane’s fancy bookmarks to slip into the book. He secured it between the pages so that he could toss the book – carefully – on the other side of the couch and fall back into Shane’s lap, but not before catching a terribly fond smile on the man’s face.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Ilya turned around to bury his face in Shane’s stomach and to escape the weight of his gaze. He felt a little raw, as usual after the appointments, but still, wasn’t it absurd that he could still get flustered, after all these years, by Shane’s affection? It was just a stupid book. Shane took care of his things, and so Ilya did too.

He hummed deeply as Shane started to card his fingers through his curls. He had not realized he was so tense until it leached out of him slowly, soothed by his husband’s hands one touch at a time.

“Was it a hard one?” Shane asked quietly. Ilya debated pretending to be sleepy enough not to answer, but this urge, too, had gotten easier to bypass.

“Not really. A little. It’s just, ah. Draining. And last time was long time ago, so.”

The worst thing about therapy was probably that it actually did work as it was supposed to. Okay, that wasn’t the worst thing. But the most annoying for sure. Because even if he didn’t want to admit it, the self-help book and mommy blogs were right – consistency *did* make it better. Regular appointments did translate to actual improvement on his day-to-day, and missing a few weeks because of practice and games and him being stubborn did come bite him in the ass when he finally dragged his way back.

Since Shane was a good, kind soul and the best person in the world, he didn’t say something in the line of “I told you so”. He didn’t even convey anything close. He never heckled Ilya about his dodgy commitment to therapy, was only ever supportive whether Ilya decided to go or not. It was something they handled separately. Even if they talked about it and put it in their shared calendars, it was admitted that they needed to work on it on their own. Shane didn’t struggle as much as Ilya with it, but he would say it was unfair to compare – he had been going for years, regularly but not that often, on an incomprehensible schedule that was consistent nonetheless. He was a sucker for routine and schedules; to him, knowing exactly when he was going next, in what circumstances and to what goal, was a relief and a building block.

While Ilya somehow still expected every time to finally hear – “okay, we’re good. You’re cured. No need to come back.”

“Are you okay?” Shane asked. Ilya didn’t like to hear the concern in his voice, didn’t like that he was the one to cause it. And he loved it at the same time, felt it wrap around him, warm and safe. He wriggled to lie on his back and look at Shane. Damn, how he loved that face.

“I’m a bit. Struggling.”

Shane hummed, a pleased, proud little smile softening his expression, and Ilya just *had* to rise and kiss him then. There was no way Shane had not noticed that he wasn’t in particularly high spirits recently, that the days were hard. He was pleased that Ilya had told him, that he would say it aloud with little prompting instead of hiding it away, bottling it up.

Clinical depression, Rami had said. He had said other words too, more technical, but that was the one Ilya remembered. Not just depression, as in something bad happened and he would be sad for a while and then get over it. Depression as in, things could be fine. Things *were* fine. And yet, he didn’t want to get out of bed in the morning, didn’t want to go to sleep at night. And yet, he was irritated by inconsequential things, he was bored by things he enjoyed, he was tired by lying around doing nothing. Depression as in, he would never be done with it. Never be fixed.

Sometimes the prospect of dragging this around until the day he died was crushing.

“What did your therapist say? Any tips?”

Ilya shrugged. And then, he lied.

“No.”

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It had been difficult to find a therapist who fit. Ilya could admit that *he* had been difficult about it. He found fault with the first four he met, some legitimate, some not so much. It unnerved him that everyone was so comprehensive about it, going on about how it was normal to test it out, that it wasn’t so easy to find a good match, as if it were a real thing and not just Ilya trying to sabotage it. The fifth one was a recommendation from Rose, of all people. That only could have been ground for him ditching it, but it was during a time when an injury kept him holed up at home and away from the ice while Shane traveled with his team, and he knew he needed the help. Needed to make it work.

She only told him much later that the guy specialized in both childhood trauma and queer issues. She knew him well, knew not to tell him when she said he was someone an ex-boyfriend of hers had been going to for years. She knew he would have refused on principle, because Ilya Rozanov didn’t have childhood trauma and he didn’t have issues with his queerness. He didn’t even have depression; depression wasn’t real. Well, no, it was, and it was good that people got the help they needed for it. But *he* didn’t have depression.

He was made to meet Rami, really. He had challenged him on their first meeting, to go on a first-name basis, treating it like a beer between friends and not a medical encounter because Ilya needed this but also he didn’t, it wasn’t for him, it was...

“Okay, Ilya. I’m Rami, it’s nice to meet you. Do you want to tell me why you’re here?”

“I don’t know. I’m not depressed.”

“Why not?”

And somehow, Ilya, instead of explaining all the reasons why he was fine, he was doing great, he was managing, or just staying silent like he had with the previous one, had answered out of the blue, “My father didn’t believe in depression.”

“I guess we’ll start from there then,” Rami had said without a smile, without much of anything showing on his face. He was unnerving in his stillness and lack of reaction. Ilya hated him on sight.

Ilya went back.

It seemed pretty unfair that he wasn’t getting better. That despite his best efforts and the fact that his life was pretty great at the moment, he was on a downward slope and struggling to pull the brakes. Of course, that in itself was a talking point during his appointments, the fact that he had such a hard time accepting his depression as a fact of life and his recovery as a slow, never-ending process.

But recently, it felt like therapy in itself was the reason for his spiraling.

“For our next session, I’d like you to list all the reasons why you’re so resistant to the idea of taking antidepressants.”

Only when trying to write it down did he realize how many there were. Some were classics, or so he was told – unwillingness to get into a treatment that could be for life, the inconvenience of it all and the stress of having to remember.

Others were more subtle.

“I believe my mother had depression”, he said the next time they went into this topic. It wasn’t their sole focus, Rami was rarely insistent on any subject, content to let Ilya jump from one idea to another without much logic. The man didn’t say much, something Ilya resented him for on the days when he felt especially not in the mood to monologue. Had he been paid by the words, they could have shaved a zero off the price of a session.

“She was never diagnosed?”

“No, no,” he said with a little laugh, unnerved. “No, that wouldn’t do. There was no such thing as... mental health. She was weak, and she needed to be stronger. That was all.”

“Do you think things could have gone differently? If she had help?”

He inhaled sharply and glanced at the clock, hoping that he could stall until the end of their appointment. No such luck; they had more than twenty minutes left to go. Not that Ilya couldn’t derail a conversation for all this time, but, well. The point, the price.

“If it is that simple, if it takes only some pills, then...”

Then what? How could he feel so awful and just take a fucking candy about it? He knew it wasn’t that easy, but still...

“Some people are medicated and still commit suicide.”

Ilya rolled his eyes. Didn't he know that? It was pills that killed her. Not antidepressants, of course. He didn't know if they had something strong enough at home, or if she had gotten it to that end. He was adamant not to dwell on that.

“Thank you, it is very comforting.”

“Do you think it's unfair?”

“Damn, you are in a mood today.”

Rami stayed perfectly serious and quiet. He was mostly relentless – that was the one word Ilya needed to describe him. He had to look it up, a word that would convey this kind of forceful insistence that never let up.

“She did it all on her own. No therapy, no drugs, no support.”

Not that it had worked out in the end. Not that he didn't wish she could have...

“A good thing you don't have to go through the same hardships.”

It was probably a good thing, yes.

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The main reason was also the most shallow one in Ilya's opinion, and one Rami insisted he needed to “talk to Shane about”, something Ilya really, really didn't want to do. It was bad of him he knew, and Rami was right, as usual. Still, he couldn't do it.

“I don't need to tell him about it,” Ilya decided instead. He caught the disapproval on Rami's face in a rare twitch of his eyebrows, but his tone was the same flat and professional one when he answered that it was also an option, albeit not the one he would recommend.

Ilya talked about their relationship with his therapist, of course. It was a star subject, as it was in Ilya's topics of discussion and, just, his life. It mostly revolved around deserving, being good enough, and convincing himself that it was real and built to last. He was okay at that, most of the time. But if there was one thing...

There was this one exercise he really struggled with. Sometimes he pretended he couldn't understand the question just so he could buy himself some time, which made Rami's lips tighten ever so slightly. A minor victory, since the man just had to express it again in simpler terms.

“Could you please tell me what about you has value?”

And at the end of the day, when he wasn't in the mood for pretending he could find something else, there were just two answers: the hockey, and the sex.

Rami said he couldn't give Shane as an answer, so.

There were several things attached to it: with hockey came his performances and skills, his leadership, his ability to drive his team to victory. The money and fame didn't hurt, probably.

And then there were the things that went with the sex. His skills, again, his good looks, his charm. His stamina.

Why did people approach him, who did he have in this life? His teammates, because he was good at hockey. And the rest, because he was good in bed. Ilya took great pride in both.

Of course the question was also related to Shane, as most things were. What value did Ilya have that Shane would want to be, and stay, with him.

Well. Hockey. Sex. And surely other things. But those were the main ones. The original ones, at least. Where would they be if not for those two?

Where would they be if Ilya couldn't sex Shane up properly anymore?

Lower sex drive was a common side effect of antidepressants.

It wasn't everyone, he knew. Ilya had approached this particular freak-out the way Shane did – with research. He'd stalked threads on forums and blogs, never leaving a single comment of course. Some people didn't experience anything in that sense, and some found themselves almost entirely desensitized. For some it was already a symptom, but save for a thankfully few major episodes, Ilya never had any issue in that department. And he really didn't want that to change.

Ilya took the prescription. He bought the pills. He shoved them at the bottom of his bedside drawer and spent the next three weeks thinking about little else and making love to Shane as much as he could.

In a mortifying turn of events, Shane noticed.

"Are we like... celebrating something? Or is it your way of asking for an apology."

"What?"

"You've been pretty- affectionate, lately."

Ilya wiggled his eyebrow suggestively.

"Oh, is that what it's called?"

"Shut up."

They finished changing the sheets so that they could lie down again, Shane finding his natural place on Ilya's chest with a contented sigh, but there was no way he would let it go.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked Ilya's navel, as he traced delicate patterns on his stomach with light fingers. Ilya was pretty sure it was ice skating routines – Shane had been intensely invested in the sport lately, enough that Ilya could tease him about a potential career

change and how good he would look in skin-tight costumes, leaping through the air. Maybe Ilya could convince their PR team to do one of those youtube things, “Hockey Player vs. Ice Skaters”.

“Ilya?”

“Hm? Sorry, was imagining you in thighs.”

“Damn, you’re insufferable.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, I don’t want to talk about it.”

Shane’s movement paused for just a brief moment before he resumed without a word. Ilya exhaled a long, weary sigh.

“But I should.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to. I do. But it’s... shit. It’s ashamed.”

“Shameful?”

Ilya hummed. That was a good one. Shameful, full of shame. It was pretty spot on.

They talked at length about their relationship, they had become rather good at that. Expressing feelings, setting boundaries, all that stuff. Shane approached romance as he did everything else – with a plan, research, probably a spreadsheet somewhere. Ilya knew he had a document on his computer where he kept track of all the things relating to his partner – every anecdote and story, every single thing he mentioned enjoying in passing, the people he was in contact with. He kept track of Ilya’s stats as thoroughly as he did his own, even if he never commented on it or built the same infuriatingly obscure diagrams he did to analyze his own performances.

Shane turned his face into Ilya’s skin and blew a fucking balloon into his stomach. Ilya bent in half in surprise and laughter, almost expelling Shane from the bed.

“What the fuck? Hollander!”

“Stop thinking so much. You’ll hurt yourself.”

The strategy was so transparent it was embarrassing. The most embarrassing thing, of course, was that it worked, getting Ilya out of his head and back into the warmth of their bed. As retaliation, he descended on an unsuspecting Shane and tickled all the spots he could reach and knew would make him squirm, urging him to beg for mercy as he lost his breath

laughing. It ended with them making out sloppily, but the reprieve was short – when Ilya made to grab lower, Shane stopped him.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I actually can’t have any more sex today.”

“Oh, don’t undervalue yourself like that. Self-confidence is important.”

“It is, isn’t it?”

Damn, he’d walked right into that one.

“Not today,” he said in a small voice, like a coward. Shane only nodded, understanding, trusting. Devastating in its efficiency – Ilya would just have to give in and tell him, and soon.

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He proceeded to take the opposite course of action first. Over the next week, he went about trying not to have sex with Shane at all.

It was pathetic how bad it made him feel, and the confusion and worry rolling off Shane every time made it worse. It was built into so many of their interactions, it was such a given, that Ilya would try to get his hands all over Shane if he could, that they took every opportunity to get each other off, or just worked up, which was always so stupidly easy, that Ilya had found himself barely approaching him at all. As if they couldn’t touch without going there.

They could. They could, right? They went outside together sometimes. And it wasn’t to say that there was never a time when they were too tired, or angry at one another. But it wasn’t very often. Ilya couldn’t imagine it changing, and he especially couldn’t fathom what that would look like.

That was the other scary thing. If the drug could change him in that way – if it could battle the pit that had been gaping in the middle of his head since he was a teenager, and if it could erase the want that burned at all times in his guts for his husband, then what else could it do?

What would become of him then? Who was he even, if not this? At the end of the day, Ilya didn’t hate himself to the point that he wanted to be someone else. Maybe he should have, but he didn’t. The thing was, the person he was was someone Shane Hollander was in love with, and he needed to keep being that.

When the weekend came and they didn’t have anything planned besides the awful domestics of restocking the fridge and doing laundry, they settled on the couch in front of some series or another, only for Shane to immediately climb Ilya’s body and stare at him with a god-honest pout.

“Боже мой, don’t look at me like that,” Ilya growled before sticking both hands in Shane’s totally on-purpose loose shorts. They were naked and panting in record time, and not for the first time Ilya wondered how they managed to go weeks, months apart before. How he could ever give this up.

He did his best to make Shane forget about the weird imbalance of the past few days, but he had underestimated the trouble he was causing him, because despite a few hours of sweaty, amazing, vigorous sex, the tiny frown between Shane's eyebrows was back as soon as they woke up from their recovery nap.

Shane didn't ask though. Ilya had a feeling he wouldn't, so it was up to him.

He indulged in a few more minutes of tangled limbs and lazy nuzzling, feeling like he had to make up for the distance.

He might have overshot, he realized now. Cuddling with their hands in each other's pants didn't have to be a sex thing, it often wasn't. Ilya felt a little embarrassed sometimes about how needy he was for Shane's proximity, his touch, his space. He had managed to miss him after a week of still living in the same house and just keeping some air between their skin. What was wrong with him.

"I think I should tell you now", he said at last.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, yes. It's therapy work. I need you to do it."

They put some pants and sweatshirts back on, as the house wasn't so warm when they weren't glued to each other head to toe. Shane was too environmentally conscious to let Ilya push the heating enough that they could walk around naked at all times. What a loser.

"Bed or couch?"

"Couch. Or I will have to fuck you again."

Sometimes it occurred to Ilya that maybe he ought to tone down on the teasing and the jokes and the "innuendos" (loved that word), like their teammates complained about. Sometimes if he felt bad enough he could even manage to be – yes, shameful of it, because it was immature and childlike and maybe even mean. But then how could he when Shane looked at him like that every single time? With just a corner of his lips lifting, and his eyes so annoyed and so fond, Ilya felt like he had told the greatest, lamest joke?

They sat cross-legged on the couch, facing each other. They both had great love for that couch. It was huge and terribly comfortable, soft and a little uncool now that the cushions weren't in such a pristine shape anymore, now that the fabric had discolored a bit on the spot where they sat most often. Shane loved his interior design of course, but he was also, again, concerned with waste and sensible purchases. No redecorating every six months, certainly not dismissing the saggy couch. This couch would probably sit there for the next twenty years, and how giddy that made Ilya feel was just another proof that Shane really rubbed off on him.

Ilya took Shane's hands in his own, playing with his deft fingers, trying to build up some momentum. Why was it still so hard? They had been together for ages. They knew everything about each other, to the most mundane, boring, weird thing. They were for real.

He had to keep that in mind. He had to be trusting. And he had to be brave.

“My therapist suggested starting me on antidepressants.”

“Oh. Okay. Last time, or...”

“No, no. Couple months ago already. Then we talked about it again.”

“Is there... a problem with that?”

Shane had his own prescription to deal with his anxiety, although it wasn't a fixed thing. Ilya would never begrudge him that, was the one to encourage him to rely on it when he needed.

It was one of Rami's favorite and most annoying exercises to play, the what if game. What if it were someone else opening up about the exact issues he was having? Worked every damn time, too. Of course Ilya would never talk to his friends, or a stranger for that matter, the way he talked about himself. Of course he wouldn't judge them like he judged himself. But recognizing that he was incapable of extending any form of sympathy or indulgence to his struggles didn't change a thing. Others could ask for help, but he couldn't. Others could relapse and still have worth, but he couldn't. And others could take medication, but he couldn't.

That was the easy part though. That was something he could get past with a couple hundred more bills thrown at his therapist. He could work on that.

“I guess. Maybe. Like, apart from the regular problem that it sucks.”

Shane nodded seriously, as if that made any sense. He often did that and Ilya couldn't tell if he really got what Ilya was clumsily trying to say, or if he just did it to be supportive.

“There can be... side effects. To the pills.”

“I know. Does that scare you?”

“Yes.”

“Which one?”

Oh no, he couldn't say it. He couldn't say it. It was too- too shameful. It was ridiculous, it was stupid. They had real issues to deal with, they were grown adults and professional athletes and public figures, he couldn't say it.

“Are you worried about your performances?”

Ilya snorted. He had no idea.

“I don't think you have to worry about hockey. I knew a player in college...”

“Antidepressants can affect your sex drive,” Ilya blurted out, the phrase well-rehearsed by now. There was no point in leaving the guessing to Shane. He was terrible at it.

Ilya had the feeble hope that it would be enough. That he just had to say that and Shane would magically get it, would understand all that was contained in this simple statement. But of course he didn't. Partly because Shane wasn't one to just get things not spoken clearly, but mostly because his mind wouldn't go there.

And indeed he frowned and gave it proper thinking, but in the end he just said, "It's possible, yes. Is that what's bothering you?"

Ilya ran a hand on his face, trying to rein in his frustration, because *that* Shane would pick on easily.

Did it bother him? Did it? Had anything ever bothered him more? Probably. Maybe not.

"You understand what that means, yes? Maybe I'll be..."

He couldn't think of any word to properly express this ordeal, so he just made a pretty bad impression of a deflating thing with his hand. He threw in a razz for good measure.

Shane rolled his eyes.

"Yes, I know what low sex drive means. I get that you would find that frustrating."

"I would be frustrated? And what about you?"

"What? What about me?"

"Oh, come on! You know!"

Shane frowned, puzzled. Why did he have to be so dense at the worst moments.

"You wouldn't miss it? No problem at all?"

"Yeah, I guess would. I think we'll manage."

It was said without a trace of irony, as if it were a little ridiculous. Which it was. Ilya was aware. And yet, he couldn't help but ask again.

"Are you sure of that?"

Something must have shown then in his tone or on his face, to signal to Shane that this was more serious than Ilya let on.

"I think I don't understand what you're trying to tell me."

Hadn't Ilya heard that one before. It was a thing they had had to learn fast, both of them. Nothing was obvious, nothing was easily comprehensible, as long as it wasn't spelled out properly. Including the need for things to be spelled out. It could get pretty messy, but they had years of practice on that.

But it felt daunting to get into it. Ilya knew how it would sound, knew he was being irrational and kind of unfair, with Shane and with himself, with the both of them.

“I’m not sure I want to tell you. I think you will not like it.”

“Do you want me to try and guess?”

Ilya shook his head quickly, coaxing a chuckle out of them both and easing the tension just a fraction.

“No, it’s okay. I’ll tell. Okay, yes.”

He only realized he was biting the inside of his lips when Shane pressed his thumb to it. Just a light touch, tender, and Ilya shuddered, already overwhelmed. Having feelings was so stupid.

“Okay. We have sex a lot, yeah? And it’s good.”

Shane smiled, a little dreamy, a little lewd. Ilya couldn’t help but smile back.

“Yeah. I’m good at it. I’m good to you.”

“You always are.”

“I know it’s not all. But it’s a big thing. Big part, yes?”

Hell, they still were at a point in time where they had been “lovers” longer than “boyfriends”. It would still be a couple of years before it balanced out.

“I give it good. Often. That’s what you...”

That was what their relationship was built on, the very foundation. The obsession they had with each other’s body, how helplessly drawn they were to the other, even at the worst of times, even when they hated each other a bit. For years it was their only mean of communication, of conveying feelings and warmth. And Ilya loved it. He craved that connection, that intimacy. Craved the intensity of this desire that never waned, never faltered.

But now maybe it would, and it terrified him.

“You know that’s not all there is, right? That’s not all we are.”

And oh, Shane was being so careful with it. He was making an effort to stay attentive, to give the words meaning, doing his best to try and follow Ilya’s mind that worked so differently from his own.

“I know, I know. But...”

He knew it was absurd. A vast part of their relationship had been long-distance, with a lot of texting and calling to make up for it. And they lived together now – it wasn’t like they were in each other’s pants 24/7, no matter what stupid Pike said. They did have an “active sex

life”, as had been expressed several times by their teammates and friends when they got into the comparison. They had joked a few times that this was all this was, the reason why this worked, the reason why Shane stayed.

Shane, on occasion, had shared the joke. Ilya, too. It was funny, harmless.

Except when it wasn’t. Except when Ilya had to confront the reality of what, exactly, he brought to the table, he brought to Shane, if he couldn’t keep that up.

Even the social media crowd was in on this. It was *always* “*I wish Shane Hollander would bring me breakfast in bed*” and “*I wish Ilya Rozanov would choke me between his thighs*”. Which was fine, to each their own strength. As long as it held.

“*Could you please tell me what about you has value?*”

“Thank you for telling me,” Shane said, dutiful. Shane was nothing if not dutiful. He had learned a few of those – words of affirmation, verbal acknowledgments. When and why to say them. It should have felt rehearsed, insincere. It was the most endearing thing.

“Alright. Can I try saying something?” he asked, all serious and intense, intent on diving in, it seemed. Ilya nodded weakly.

“First of all, if I wanted to find men who are good in bed, I think I could manage.”

Ilya could only imagine what showed on his face because Shane panicked a little as he rushed on.

“Not that I will! Or would want to. Jesus, just... I imagine a lot of gay men know how to use their dick. Granted, maybe not as well as you. The *point* – he said to cut Ilya’s comment – is that... if that was all...”

Shane’s face scrunched up in frustration. Ilya had to resist kissing him all over. They had to keep focus.

“I know that is... how we started. And it is a big part of our life, one that I love. I love how you make me feel and I love how you want me like this. But I- you know it wouldn’t... It wouldn’t have lasted. Just on that, I mean. Back then... I don’t know, it stopped being just about that a fucking long time ago.”

Ilya imagined it sometimes. Them going on like this for years and years, just meeting a couple times a year and going on with their lives, texting sporadically and never talking about anything of substance. He knew it wouldn’t have worked out. Even if they had kept it up, how empty he would feel, if that was all he could get.

And what had they done the first time they had more than a couple of hours to share? Take a nap cuddling. Eat some food, watch a game. Talk.

Ilya scooted closer, he nudged Shane’s legs apart so that he could swing his own above his thighs, until he was almost sitting on his lap, tangled up, their faces close enough to touch. Shane’s hand came to rest on his hips and trace little circles with his thumbs as Ilya fiddled

with the worn edge of Shane's sweatshirt, which was Ilya's sweatshirt actually, now that he thought about it.

"I know it's not all we are. But we're not *not* that. I mean it's- it's a big part," he settled for saying again, for lack of a better way of phrasing it. It *was* a big part. Always. Still.

"It is," Shane agreed, a little placating maybe. Ilya knocked his forehead against his chin, a half-hearted protest.

"Ilya," Shane whispered between them, though he didn't insist on making eye contact, letting Ilya stare at the dip on his throat disappearing into the loose collar. "What do you think would happen if we stopped having sex?"

Ilya scoffed, and since he knew very well how to be petty, he shot back, "What do *you* think would happen if we stopped having sex?"

Unfortunately for him, Shane was mostly immune to baiting. It made arguing with him very unfun.

"It would be awful to think you may not want me anymore."

Ilya sat up with a – maybe slightly exaggerated – gasp.

"What! Me? Never!"

"And if that's not it," Shane went on, ignoring the interruption, although he couldn't hide his amusement entirely, "I *would* miss it. But you know. We've done that before."

It was a little humbling every time, to be reminded that Shane had never slept with another man, and barely with any other person at all ever since they'd met. Shane would say it was the process that was unappealing to him – cruising, seducing, making up a connection figuring out the logistics. Letting someone in that way. He always said he still couldn't to this day explain what had possessed him to go for it with Ilya. It was surely flattering.

"I want to be where you are. At the end of the day, I just... It's not about what we do. I can't explain it. I used to think- I didn't always think this was a real thing. Especially for me, I thought- I just. I love you," he finished lamely, fed up with his own lack of eloquence, with words tumbling over the next and him looking increasingly confused with his very own voice.

Ilya was too choked up to try and help him out of it. And it wasn't like it was the first time, like they hadn't exchanged pretty words before. They were married for fuck's sake. How could it still grip him so? It was unsurprising, but still grating, that Ilya could feel tears gathering at the corner of his eyes, his mouth pinched in a pout. He never got any better at handling Shane's blunt honesty. God, the words that came out of him.

Sometimes he felt like he tricked Shane into doing this. That it was manipulative somehow to express his fears since he knew Shane would immediately jump in to soothe them. Needless

to say, Rami thought poorly of this reasoning. Or no, not even that. He said, “Is it manipulative to ask for something you need?”

Of course, when he spun it like that...

“I love you too,” he said back, the words pulled out of him automatically, a natural response. As was the small smile it drew on Shane’s face.

“So what about you?” Shane asked, not one to be distracted from an answer he sought. Ilya shrugged, a little helpless.

“If we don’t have sex anymore? Well. We will have a lot more free time on our hands. We will get into board games or, or you will get even more into hockey, if that is possible. I will have to start watching home décor videos with you. You will realize I don’t have that much to say.”

Of course it didn’t fly – as if Shane was going to let that statement go unexamined.

“I don’t think we have sex because we’re bored. Or because we have nothing better to do.”

“I guess we will find out.”

“Ilya.”

He shrugged again. He got it; he was as fed up as Shane with this conversation. He didn’t know what the hell was wrong with him either.

“Was that... what you were trying to do? Testing it out?”

His tone made no secret of what he thought of that idea.

“It *would* be an issue if you suddenly pulled away with no explanation. This? This is something we can work out together.”

“I don’t want you to be missing out.”

“Worry about yourself.”

Which, fair enough. Ilya was the one with the extended sex life. He was the one who initiated most of the time. What did he really know of Shane’s own drive? They had never discussed it before. Shane was always responsive, so it never came up, but now Ilya was imagining that maybe he would appreciate it if it let up, actually. Maybe he didn’t care for it all that much and Ilya was being too insistent.

Shane misread his silent musing entirely because he grew tense suddenly, and his next words were every careful.

“Are you worried I would- that I could- Because I wouldn’t. I would never do that to you.”

It was so far from what Ilya had in mind, he needed a moment to even get what Shane was talking about.

“No, no-no, that’s not what I’m saying. That’s not it. I didn’t think about that.”

Or he had, but just in passing. He had, even before. Shane ought to be curious. Shane could want to experience something else. Someone else. Especially if Ilya wasn’t showing up.

“You could get bored,” he said then, to dig in a little deeper now that they were there, to provoke him maybe, since he was so calm about all this and it made Ilya feel even more stupid. He could have stood for Shane reacting a little more strongly to this whole thing. Put them at the same level.

“Is that what you think?” Shane asked in a quiet voice, careful, careful. He was sorting through the possible outcomes of that conversation. He was trying to map it out, as he did when he felt unsure, when he wasn’t in control anymore. They weren’t fighting even if it sort of felt like they were. That wasn’t what Ilya wanted.

He took a deep, steadying breath. They *weren’t* fighting. They didn’t have to.

“No. It’s not. I’m sorry. It’s just- worry.”

Worry wasn’t the right word, but he couldn’t find one that fit better. Fear was too strong, even if it was maybe closer.

“Does it- worry you?” he asked in turn, a little guilty to admit it would make him feel better. Shane levelled him an unimpressed look.

“Everything worries me.”

It drew a little laugh from them both, at least. Ilya breathed again, a little calmer. He felt like they had just avoided the plunge, that they had tethered on the edge and pulled back. And it wasn’t even that hard. Shane relaxed in his arms, coming down too.

“Shall we try again then?” he asked, trying and failing to sound very serious.

“What?”

“No sex for like. A week. Or a month even. To see what it’s like.”

“Nooo no no no. No need. No need. Maybe nothing will even happen!”

Shane looked *so* smug then, that little pest.

“Okay, it was stupid, okay! You’re annoying.”

“No you’re annoying.”

Ilya barreled into Shane’s chest to tip him on his back and crush him with his weight, just a normal way to continue that conversation. Shane wrapped his arms around him, buried his

face in Ilya's curls. For a moment they just breathed together. Ilya was exhausted all of a sudden.

"If your therapist suggested it, I think you ought to try," Shane mumbled into the hair he was stroking gently. "And we'll go from there. There are always adjustments, and you don't know how you'll react to it. And if it's too much, we'll figure it out. The point is that it makes you feel better, not worse."

"Will that even work? What if it makes me..."

He trailed off, not even knowing what he wanted to say.

"It's not supposed to reboot your brain or something. Hopefully, it will make things easier."

And maybe that was a huge thing already.

"You will tell, yes?" Ilya asked, demanded. "If something is wrong."

"That's my line."

He supposed that was what being in a relationship was – endlessly talking about things. Adjusting. Changing, too, maybe. And maybe it didn't even have to be the scariest thing.

"We can look up the leaflet together when you pick up the prescription, if you want," Shane suggested earnestly, the most romantic thing he could have possibly said. Ilya burrowed deeper against him.

"I have it already."

"You do?"

"I was thinking to start. Without saying. Just to see. But..."

He pushed himself up to be able to look at Shane, hands on his chest, a bit too close to see him properly.

"No secret, yes?"

Shane nodded with an awful face, soft and fond, and he ran his fingers in Ilya's hair as if petting a well-behaved puppy. Ilya wanted to eat him.

"That was brave of you. Thank you."

Ilya kissed him then so that they couldn't see each other anymore, so that he could hide against Shane's body and keep them from speaking another word. Shane allowed it, always responsive and open, always welcoming.

No doubt would he ask about the stupid leaflet again any minute, and then go on a dive exploring different types of medication and their inner workings. No doubt Ilya would show up to therapy next time with a laundry list of questions to present as a way to ease his

husband's mind, and totally not his own. No doubt Shane would be overly monitoring for the first few weeks, would fret enough to get on Ilya's nerves and make him feel like his life could be sustained by this love alone.

No doubt.

[\(A little thing to go with this\)](#)

End Notes

I need to write more. Thank you for reading! Don't hesitate to leave a word if you enjoyed :)

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