

The Conversation

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The Conversation

by [movedy0urchair](#)

Summary

A few hours after Ilya tells Shane about how serious his mental struggles might actually be, Shane can't sleep. Instead, he spirals, researches, doubts - until Ilya wakes up and they acutally talk about what's been unsaid between them.

Notes

When reading The Long Game, I kept waiting for an actual big conversation that they implied they would have in person after making up over the phone after their fight. That conversation didn't really come, and my friends and I agreed that it should have. This is that conversation. (set between chapter 37 and 38 of The Long Game)

They kissed, and Shane said, “What do you need right now?”

“Sleep,” Ilya answered honestly. He grinned impishly. “And maybe five or six blowjobs.”

Shane smiled so wide his eyes crinkled. “Blowjobs aren't a cure for depression, Ilya.”

“Are you a doctor now?”

Shane laughed and kissed him again. “Go to sleep, idiot.”

And Ilya had. His breath had slowed, the weight of his body become heavier, half atop of Shane as he stroked his fingers through the soft curls.

Shane hadn't slept. He stretched his neck just slightly – for what felt like the millionth time that night – checking the time on his phone.

Twenty past five.

Had he been alone, he'd have got up hours ago, at least to have a glass of water, get air, maybe work out until he felt tired enough.

But nothing could have made him get up now. He'd rather go through any injury he'd ever seen any player suffer on the ice than leave Ilya by himself after seeing him break down in his arms when he'd come home three hours before.

Shane had known Ilya wasn't alright for some time, but hearing him say it tonight, his eyes wide and looking right back at him – he would never unhear it. Hell, he'd be surprised if the guilt and overwhelming feeling of selfishness would allow him to sleep at all any time soon.

Because how could he sleep now? His heart was heavy, and he felt the overwhelming urge to pull Ilya closer. He didn't.

Instead, he exhaled shakily, trying to release some of the tension knotted in his chest. He pressed his lips together, refused himself to feel anything other than shame. Ilya's depression was not his to be sad about. He'd taken too much for granted. And it wouldn't happen again. Anything he'd do from the moment Ilya woke up was going to be to take care of him, make sure he did nothing that would lead to Ilya pushing him away, or to him thinking he couldn't tell Shane about every single thought in that beautiful head of his – *if* he felt like telling.

Though Ilya hadn't told him much earlier, Shane was positive he'd at least said the right thing then. He wasn't going to be scared off, he was going to help, he was going to wait and be there if he couldn't. Surely that would have been reassuring?

He wished so much that Ilya would just see himself the way Shane saw him.

The minutes crept on through the rest of the night, and when the sky became lighter outside, Shane could no longer stand the weight of his thoughts. He stretched out his arm toward the bedside table to reach for his phone, set on dedicating any minute without Ilya to finding out how he could become the husband that the man snoring quietly in his arms deserved.

He was halfway through an article about supporting long term partners and family members after being diagnosed with depression when he felt a kiss pressed to his collarbone, had barely noticed Ilya shift in his arms, too engrossed in reading.

Shane quickly locked the screen, placing his phone back on the side and turning his body towards Ilya, his hand finding his warm cheek. It almost ached how badly he wanted to take care of him.

“Hey.” Shane's voice was soft, his hand cradling Ilya's face. He exhaled slowly as Ilya shifted slightly, pressing a kiss to his palm.

“Hey.” His voice was sleepy, far away, until his lids fluttered – and he looked up at Shane.

He sat up abruptly, the movement sudden and making Shane's heart sink. “What? Are you okay?”

“You're not,” Ilya said, his tone certain.

Shane blinked back at him, shifting to sit up too, leaning back against the headboard, Ilya's hand finding his before he could reach out, resting them together on the sheet over Shane's knee.

“I can see your head working,” Ilya stated, his voice low, still thick with sleep, but now more alert.

“I'm fine.” Shane shook his head.

“How long have you been awake?” Ilya's eyes rested on Shane's face, unchanged, persistent.

Until Shane caved. “I didn't sleep.”

Ilya took in a slow breath. “Why?” His shoulders dropped, his tone softened.

Again, Shane shook his head. “It's nothing,” he said. As much as he loved that Ilya could read him so easily – even though he hadn't *always* appreciated it – right then he wished it were different. He didn't want Ilya to feel pressure to tell him anything he wasn't ready to, and he certainly didn't want Ilya to comfort *him* about his depression.

“Sweetheart.” He brushed his thumb over Shane's knuckles. “Is not nothing.”

And then the words bubbled out of him before he could stop himself. “I'm so sorry. I'm sorry I made you feel like you couldn't tell me you were going to therapy. I'm sorry I didn't see how much you were struggling, how much you... gave up. And how hard that was—”

“Hey,” Ilya interrupted, shaking his head. He squeezed Shane's hand. “We talked about this.” His eyes were wide, searching, confused.

Shane inhaled deeply. “I know,” he said. “But last night... it showed me that even when we did... I should have made sure you knew that I see what you gave up. For me.”

“But I told you, I'd do it again. That I'd give up anything. It is my choice.”

Shane nodded, remembered only too well. But he hadn't done enough. And he didn't want Ilya to feel like he had to make any more sacrifices to be with him. “I'm sorry you had to spell it out for me.”

“I don't hold it against you, *moya lyubov*.”

Shane sighed. “But you could. It's not an excuse, but I guess I just... you are part of my family now, everyone that's in my corner is... well... in *our* corner.”

“I know.” Ilya nodded. “And I've never had that kind of... corner.” He smiled weakly.

“But it's different,” Shane concluded. “I get it.” He paused for a moment, chose his words carefully to phrase the question that had been weighing so heavy on him. “Is there anything that... I did? Or didn't do... that made you not tell me about going to therapy?”

Ilya looked back at him in silence for a moment, then intertwined his fingers with Shane's, lifting his head. “I don't know,” he said, shrugging slightly. “Nothing you did wrong. It helps to just... talk to someone who is on the outside. And she knows how to understand. I don't want to put that on you. You're not... you should not have to, my love.”

Shane swallowed hard. The way Ilya spoke made him painfully realise that he was still, even now, trying to take care of Shane. “Please,” he said quietly, before he could stop himself.

“You did nothing wrong,” Ilya insisted. “I think part of me wanted to... fix it on my own, without ever having to mention it to you.” He lowered his gaze. “I wanted to come to you and be better. A better boyfriend.” He smiled. “Husband.”

Despite the softness, despite Ilya's smile, Shane felt his stomach twist with guilt. Here was the man he loved, finally speaking openly about how he felt – and thinking he had to hide part of himself. Right before Ilya had woken up, Shane's mind had wandered to a dark place, the research an attempt to push back the fear, but now Ilya had dragged it right back to the surface. Maybe he hadn't just been overthinking.

“Shane.”

He realised how he must have looked, frozen in terror for a moment. “Ilya.” He drew his hand from Ilya's, cradling his face with both palms pressed to Ilya's cheeks. “You know when you told me about your mother...”

Ilya looked back at him, quiet, waiting.

“You said you didn't want me to think she was weak.”

Ilya pressed his lips together, but Shane could feel the shift in him.

He brushed his thumbs over Ilya's cheeks. "*You* are not weak."

His heart ached when he saw Ilya's eyes glaze over.

"You don't have to 'fix' yourself before coming to me," Shane continued, wiping the tears from under Ilya's eyes. "I want to marry you as you are."

Ilya blinked quickly, sniffing, grimacing, looking away the way he always did when first realising he was crying.

"I just..." Shane stopped himself, afraid again of the words coming too quickly, coming out wrong. "You can tell me if I'm wrong, but I just hope you don't feel like you can't come to me with what you're feeling, because... because your mother kept... how she felt to herself."

For a moment, there was silence between them. Then, Ilya sobbed, and it tore Shane right in half, his hands falling from Ilya's face, wrapping his arm around him the moment his head crashed into Shane's chest.

Ilya didn't know how much time passed as he allowed the tears to run freely, his body shaking against Shane's the same way it had when he'd come home that night. Only now, he felt relief. He felt understood. He felt seen.

When he'd come through the door, he'd been overwhelmed, the day and the past few weeks having finally caught up to him. Now, he was overwhelmed, too, but it was different. Everything he had kept to himself, it was right here between them – without him having to spell it out.

Like Galina, it seemed Shane knew just what to make of the war on Ilya's mind if he just offered up *something*.

It was no longer him and everything he was carrying, considering how much he could let Shane see. He only realised the full extent of how lonely he'd felt in contrast to how finally, now, he felt like it Shane and him together, against negative comments, against any kind of judgement, against his own judgement. And it knocked the wind out of him.

His hand found Shane's bicep, his grip bordering clinging, his other hand flat against Shane's back. Slowly, he lifted his head, his heart lighter the moment Shane's eyes met his, his fingers starting to brush through Ilya's hair.

"I don't deserve you, Hollander."

It looked like Shane was trying to fight tears now. "Yes, you do. You deserve the world."

Ilya exhaled shakily, his eyes still wide, watching Shane closely.

“You have given up your family, your country, your team...”

“They weren't—”

“I know,” Shane said. “But you gave it all up for me. You have gone to therapy, you went through something traumatic on that plane, you have shown me nothing but love and support and commitment... fuck, Ilya, you deserve everything. And I promise I'm going to give that to you.”

Ilya swallowed hard, more tears rolling down his cheeks as he watched his fiancé in awe. He wanted to believe him so badly. “Even if I don't get better?” His voice was just a hint, but he realised just how heavy the question was still weighing on him.

“Yes.” Shane moved his hand from Ilya's hair to the back of his neck. “I know it might not be so simple, but... what make you think you might not? Or are you just... scared?”

Ilya took a slow breath in, nodding slowly. “I thought it would fix me, you know. Talking to a therapist, even... having our relationship out in the open, finally. Having a family. Knowing I'm going to become your husband. But I still get... so fucking sad.” He pressed his lips together. “There must be something wrong with me.”

“There is nothing wrong with you,” Shane said. “You're brave. You're so strong, stronger than anybody I know. And I think your mother would think so too.”

Ilya exhaled shakily. He closed his eyes, and he saw her face. Not outside at the cottage, not as she slipped away, but clearly, as she waited for him off the rink after practice. There was no scenario in which Ilya skated right to her, with everything that weighed so heavily on him now, and she wouldn't tell him exactly what Shane was telling him. “Fuck,” he muttered under his breath. He looked up at Shane again. “Maybe you can fix me.”

Shane smiled, shaking his head. “I know I can't. I just need you to know that I'm in your corner. No matter what. You can push me away, but... I think you know from experience how well that goes down.”

Ilya smiled back at him, some of the tension leaving his body.

“If you feel like being hard on yourself, I'd rather you take it out on me. Don't want you giving my fiancé a tough time.”

His heart melted. He lifted himself further, bringing both his hands to Shane's shoulders. “I really will consider taking pills,” he said. “I will keep going to therapy. I will fix—”

“Stop.” Shane shook his head. “You don't have to prove anything to me. You do whatever you think is right, whatever you are comfortable with. And I will be here. With you.”

Ilya paused for a moment, realising once again Shane had understood before he could. He knew he should have told him sooner, that he hadn't given him enough credit. He wanted to

protect him, always. But he knew Shane wanted to protect Ilya just the same. And he hadn't let him.

“Okay?”

Ilya nodded. “Thank you.” His words were a gross understatement. So he brought his hand to take Shane's chin between his fingers and closed the space between them, kissing him, slow at first, then bringing his other hand to run through Shane's hair at the back of his neck, humming against his lips when Shane's hand found his chest, the other gripping his shoulder tightly. There was so much he wanted to say, so much he couldn't find the words for, neither in Russian nor English. But he poured it into the way he was soon kissing Shane urgently, desperately, and possessively, with everything he had.

“Fuck,” Ilya breathed when he drew back, both of them panting as he rested his forehead against Shane's, his fingers still running absently through his hair. “I think I'm ready for that coffee now. And the six blowjobs.”

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