

Your Fireworks Set Me Off

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77342421) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77342421>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid , Game Changers Heated Rivalry - All Media Types
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Fluff and Angst , Depression , Missing Scene , Angst , Comfort/Angst , Domestic Boyfriends , Spoilers for Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Autistic Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , Depressed Ilya Rozanov , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , Jealous Shane Hollander , Established Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Domestic Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-08 Completed: 2026-01-09 Words: 6,169 Chapters: 3/3

Your Fireworks Set Me Off

by [hollanovbaby](#)

Summary

Two scenes that should have been in The Long Game,

OR the time Shane and Ilya really spoke about Ilya's depression
and the time Ilya suggested Shane sees other people

Chapter 1: The (Mental Health) Conversation

Chapter 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.

Chapter 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 fiance 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."

Chapter 2: The Fight (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Ilya wonders if he's good enough for Shane, or if he may need more than Ilya can give him. He brings it up - and Shane doesn't take it well.

Chapter Notes

Halfway through "The Long Game", Ilya is at his third therapy appointment and he thinks about a fight Shane and him had. This is that fight.

Ilya and Shane had talked about other people. A couple of years ago he'd told Shane, as casually as possible, that if he wanted to have sex with other men when they were apart—which was most of the time—he could. Since Shane had figured out he was gay around the same time he'd realized he had fallen in love with Ilya, it wouldn't be unreasonable for him to want to explore sex beyond what Ilya could give him. What did it matter as long as his heart belonged to Ilya? That's what Ilya had told himself.

Shane hadn't taken Ilya's offer well. He'd thought it had been Ilya's backhanded way of letting Shane know that he'd cheated on him, or that he wanted to. Ilya had told him that he didn't believe in cheating because he didn't own Shane. It had ended with Shane storming out of Ilya's house in Ottawa and driving back to Montreal, which had been a horrible waste of a rare night they could have had together. He'd ignored Ilya's texts for three days after.

Then, on the fourth day, he'd called Ilya from his hotel room in Philadelphia and said, "You really wouldn't mind if I had sex with someone else?"

And that was when Ilya had realized how much he would mind it. He'd felt sick at the idea of someone else touching Shane, and he hadn't been sure if Shane was asking because he'd already done it, or if he was about to or what. Maybe someone had been heading to his Philadelphia hotel room at that very moment.

But all Ilya had said was, "Of course not. If that is what you want."

"I don't want, you fucking moron," Shane had spat. The relief had been so intense that Ilya had nearly sunk to his knees in his living room.

(Chapter Twenty-One, "The Long Game")

All day, Ilya had been distracted. He barely remembered anything between getting up and leaving the house that morning, his head hadn't been in it at practice either. Even when he'd come home to Shane waiting for him at his house, he could only think about the worry that had haunted him since the night before, and throughout the night.

What if I'm not enough for him?

Sure, Ilya had been plagued by doubts like that before, but after Shane and him had hung up the night before, the fear had manifested itself so deep that it still hadn't let him go when he was curled up on the sofa, Shane's fingers in his hair, Ilya's head on his strong thigh.

It wasn't anything Shane had said. It was the realisation of how easily it seemed to have become for Shane to speak, at least to Ilya, about the fact that he was gay. When it was just them, it seemed like Shane never hesitated now to say it openly.

For years, that difference had been obvious to Ilya. While it'd taken Shane a long time to even admit to himself, liking men had never been an issue to Ilya when it came to his idea of himself. While he'd feared other people knowing, he'd had years to explore that side of himself. He knew it wasn't the same, that Shane had grown up with a different idea of himself, that his environment had been much different from Ilya's. He also knew it wasn't the same because Ilya wasn't gay.

“How was practice today?”

Ilya instantly detected the worry in Shane's tone. He stayed as he was, staring ahead at the TV. He hadn't caught any of the film Shane had put on. “Was fine.”

Shane inhaled audibly. “You tired?”

He was. He'd barely slept. For a lack of a better word, he felt *guilty*. As much as he loved Shane – or maybe *because* he loved Shane – he wanted him to have everything he could possibly need. It was more important than Ilya being comfortable. Shane was more important than anything.

“Ilya?”

He turned, looking up at him finally with the back of his head pressed to Shane's thigh. At some point in the day, he'd decided he wasn't going to bring it up. Shane would tell him if he felt he were missing something because of their relationship.

Now, he'd changed his mind. Shane put him first, he was concerned and careful, and Ilya loved that about him. So he knew he had to do the same. “I want to ask you something.”

He could see the sudden panic flicker across Shane's face before he got himself under control. “What?” Shane cleared his throat, his eyes locked on Ilya's.

“I've been thinking,” Ilya said slowly, trying to choose the right words. “While we've been apart.”

Shane tensed. He muted the TV.

"It's just a thought," Ilya added quickly, now moving to sit up, catching Shane's hand in his as it slid from his hair. "Something you maybe want."

His boyfriend's brows furrowed, making his skin crinkle just slightly over his freckles.

He took a deep breath. "You know, I had a lot of time coming to terms with... liking men and women." He licked his lips. "And I ask myself if maybe you should have that, too. Especially since we're apart so much."

Shane's eyes widened.

Ilya froze when Shane withdrew his hand.

"What are you saying, Ilya?"

His heart was beating faster now. "Nothing," he said quickly, panic rising instantly inside him. He hadn't explained it very well. He'd offended Shane. He desperately wanted to turn back time, just a few minutes. He didn't want to fight, the distance already felt tangible. He reached for Shane's face, but the way Shane watched his hand move made him drop it.

"That's not nothing."

He could see Shane's mind was going a million kilometres an hour. "Shane," he said. "Please. All I mean is... if you decide that just... just me isn't working for you and that you might need things I can't give you-"

"*Just* you?" Shane shook his head, his eyes wide open. "What the hell are you talking about?" Pure fear was written across his features now.

"You know, you-"

"Ilya, did you have sex with someone else?"

Ilya's heart sank. "No," he said quickly. "God, no, Shane, I..."

Shane stood up and Ilya wanted to beg him to come back, to forget he'd ever said anything. He'd only wanted to try and be better, to try and be selfless. What did it matter if Shane wanted to explore if he ended up coming back to Ilya? If he could stay his boyfriend?

"Do you want to?" Shane asked.

Ilya was at a loss for words. How had he given him that idea? He shook his head.

Shane raked his fingers through his hair, now pacing in front of the TV. "Then what?" he asked, his voice rising slightly higher. "You... you're asking if *I* want to cheat?"

Again, Ilya shook his head. "I don't... believe it's cheating."

Shane huffed. “Having sex with someone else? I'd say that's pretty much the definition of cheating.”

“No, no, I just... I mean, I don't *own* you.”

Shane turned his back. After the year they'd just spent as a couple, figuring out how to be closer to each other, Ilya moving, changing teams... it wasn't like he thought he *owned* Ilya, or that he felt like Ilya owned him, but he liked to think that Ilya was his. He'd told him so. And Shane had told Ilya he was his.

And now, it was like he'd pulled the rug from under him. Was there someone on Ilya's team that he hadn't told him about? Had he met someone somewhere else?

If Ilya didn't consider Shane to be his, maybe he'd misread their relationship all along. They'd never said they weren't going to sleep with other people, Shane had just... assumed it was what being boyfriends meant for both of them. Because what other reason could Ilya have to bring this up? What could there possibly be that Shane needed that Ilya couldn't give him?

“Just tell me,” he said, his voice now quieter as he turned back to face Ilya.

Ilya looked up at him. “There's nothing to tell,” he pleaded. He shook his head. “Shane, I did not have sex with anyone else. I just wanted you to know that if you were thinking about exploring things I cannot give you, things with other men... it would be okay with me.”

Shane swallowed hard. If Ilya decided he wanted to have sex with other people, Shane would not be okay with it. In fact, it would break his heart. And it was. Much like the idea that it would be okay with Ilya if Shane had sex with other people. Slowly, he nodded. What else was there to say?

He'd misjudged their relationship. He hadn't communicated. He couldn't even blame Ilya, he realised. It was on him, he'd never asked him what their relationship meant on the outside. Before the tears would become too obvious, he turned away again. He headed towards the hallway.

“No,” he heard behind himself, followed by quick steps.

When he turned around by the door, Ilya was right there.

“Shane,” he insisted, taking a shaky breath in. “I did nothing. I swear to you. On everything okay?” He swallowed. “Don't go. Forget I said anything. I didn't mean-”

“You didn't mean what? I heard you, Ilya, loud and clear, you said it would be okay with you if I had sex with other people.” He shook his head.

God, he was such a fool. Even before the first summer with Ilya, he hadn't even *thought* about another man that way.

"I just wanted to be... I didn't want to hold you back," Ilya said. "If you need something I can't give you, I love you so much, I'd hate myself if I denied you-"

"Don't," Shane said through gritted teeth. "Don't you dare say that right now."

Ilya's lips parted.

Shane's shoulders dropped. He wanted to pull him into his chest so he wouldn't have to see him cry. But then he'd cry himself.

Ilya's voice was nothing but a hint. "Don't say that I love you?"

Shane pressed his lips together. Now the tears were rolling down his face. He shook his head.

Since the very first time the words had left Ilya's lips in English, there had not been a single time that Shane had not said them back. And now, he'd told Ilya not to say them in the first place. And his boyfriend's hand was on the handle of his front door.

Tears were stinging in his eyes. He'd asked Shane not to go and yet, here he stood. What if this was the last time he would lay eyes on him off the ice? If he asked again, what would be the point? Shane had made up his mind. Ilya wanted to scream, to fight for him, to *beg* him. He was frozen in fear.

But the way Shane looked at him told him everything he knew already. He wasn't good enough, and if he begged Shane, he would only keep him from what he deserved. Which was better than Ilya, better than a boyfriend who upset him so much on a night that should have been spent in a very different way.

If only he hadn't said anything. He'd still be curled up in Shane's lap, maybe even in bed with him now, kissing him, touching him. Being selfish.

He wanted to touch him so bad. The realisation came crashing down on him like an avalanche. Earlier that night, he'd kissed Shane Hollander for the last time.

"Shane-" He stopped himself.

Let him go. He deserves better.

When he didn't say anything else, Shane put on his shoes, slid into his jacket. He opened the door and a second later, it fell shut behind him.

Ilya heard his steps in the snow, then the door of his car opened, shut. The engine started. The car rolled off the drive.

He knew he should have felt relief that he'd finally set Shane free, that he wasn't holding him back anymore. God, what was he thinking? Why wasn't he fighting? He was being ridiculous, surely this wasn't what Shane wanted.

Maybe, in time, Shane would realise he would be better off without Ilya.

But surely he wouldn't have been so upset and left in the first place? Ilya had hurt him.

He squeezed his eyes shut, as if it would stop the war raging in his head. He needed something, he needed... Shane.

If he were good enough, he'd have fought. Right?

He no longer knew what the right thing to do was. He sank to the ground right there, his head buried his hands, his heart thudding like it was going to jump out of his chest.

Suddenly, the house felt empty, and even larger than it usually did. The lights of the TV were flickering behind him. The light outside the door was gone.

Shane was gone.

Chapter 3: (After) The Fight (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

After three days of no contact, Shane calls Ilya to talk about their miscommunication.

Never in Ilya's life had three days felt so unbearably long. Every minute that passed left him more convinced that he really had spoken to Shane off the ice for the last time.

Back in the day, he'd spent months without hearing from him. Now, it seemed like he couldn't do it. His head had gone back and forth, between fighting for Shane, fighting to become a man that would be good enough to be Shane Hollander's boyfriend and being the man that loved him so much that he would, selflessly, let him go.

He'd never thought of himself as selfless before. Why, when he wanted something this much that it physically hurt, was he starting to try now?

Because it's Shane, idiot.

Since he'd arrived at Shane's cottage the year before, not a single day had passed in which he hadn't heard from Shane. As much as he'd told himself he could be strong, that it was better for Shane, it was killing Ilya.

When he'd allowed himself to dream, to listen to Shane's plans for the future, he'd dared to hope that they really would get married one day, that they wouldn't have to hide, that they would have a family. Tears stung in his eyes. The past year, had he thought himself into some kind of delusion, hoping he could have the future Shane had been planning for them? How had he gone and sabotaged all that? What had possessed him to claim that it wouldn't bother him if Shane slept with other men? The thought of Shane even speaking to another attractive man made him jealous sometimes.

The more time passed, the more he realised that he had to come to terms with the fact that Shane was no longer his boyfriend. It'd also made him realise how what he'd said must have come across to Shane. If Shane had asked him if he wanted to have sex with other people, Ilya would've been more than irritated. Ilya, too, would have thought that it was Shane's way of asking if they should *both* meet other people while they were apart. It also would have made him wonder how much Shane really wanted him if he said he didn't mind if Ilya slept with someone else.

God. Even if he was going to leave Shane alone, if he was going to let him find someone better, he couldn't let him believe that he didn't love him.

He stood up from the sofa, switched off the TV, ready to pack a bag and find the next flight out to Philadelphia. Just as he unlocked his phone, there was an incoming call.

Ilya's heartbeat picked up instantly. "Shane?"

"You really wouldn't mind if I had sex with someone else?"

Ilya held his breath. He'd been right to ask. He felt his stomach twist. It'd only been a matter of time until Shane would want more than what Ilya could offer. Of course his mind had run through all worst case scenarios. And they included him using his freedom and distance from Ilya to do exactly what Ilya had suggested. Or at least considering it.

Ilya's heart sank. What if he was calling to tell him he'd been right? Maybe he was calling to tell him he loved him and wanted to be his boyfriend still – but he wanted to see other men. It was better than losing him completely, so Ilya closed his eyes, tried to steady his voice as he spoke. "Of course not. If that is what you want."

On the other end of the line, Shane scoffed. "I don't want, you fucking moron," he spat.

The weight that had been pressing on Ilya's chest lifted within a split second, and he sank to his knees in the middle of the living room. "Blyad," he muttered under his breath.

Shane laughed shakily. "I know that one."

Ilya exhaled. Hearing his voice, his *laugh* made his mind up in an instant. Where was Shane going to find someone that loved him more than Ilya did? "I'm so fucking sorry," he breathed. "I don't know what I was thinking."

"I don't think you were thinking, asshole."

Ilya nodded. "I think I was thinking a little too much."

To his surprise, Shane's tone softened. "Yeah, I've been there."

"I would mind," Ilya said, forcing the words before his mind could get in the way again. "Makes me fucking sick to think of you with anyone else." He wished he were there, to kiss Shane, to touch his hair, hold him close. "Can I see you?"

Ilya accepted the request to video call, and his heart fluttered when he saw Shane's face, his glasses, his freckles.

"Hey, Rozanov."

Ilya pressed his lips together. "I love you, Hollander." He shook his head. "Don't tell me not to tell you ever again."

Shane couldn't deny the exhaustion written all over Ilya's face. Guilt rose in him instantly. He'd ignored him for over three days. He'd spoken to his parents. Both had told him he was being an idiot for thinking for one second that Ilya would cheat on him, that Ilya wouldn't care if Shane met other men. And Shane had realised what Ilya was trying to do.

But that didn't mean he wasn't angry. "I love you," he said. He hoped so desperately that it wasn't too late.

The way Ilya looked back at him only fuelled the guilt. Shane regretted not calling him on his bullshit that night, he should have known better. But in that moment, fear had taken over him, and he'd run, scared to make a fool of himself, of having allowed himself to be vulnerable and open when he shouldn't have. Of wrongfully having trusted Ilya.

Shane knew better now. And he hated himself for running, could only imagine what it'd done to Ilya. "I'm sorry too," he said.

"No," Ilya said. "I probably would've reacted the same way. This has nothing to do with you, you know. It's all... my head. My problems."

Shane swallowed hard. "What do you mean?"

Ilya shrugged. He'd had so much time to think, and yet, he didn't know how to put it into words.

"Ilya..."

"I try really hard," he finally said. "To be the kind of boyfriend you deserve."

Shane's heart felt heavier. He cursed himself for running away. He wanted so much to reach out and hold Ilya close, squeeze him until he believed that he was good enough. But he knew it wasn't that simple. And he didn't know what to say.

Ilya spoke when Shane didn't. "All I wanted to do was... make sure that you would stay with me. I didn't want you to hate me for keeping you from anything. I wanted to be your boyfriend even if you needed something else."

"You're ridiculous," Shane breathed before he could stop himself.

"I'm sorry."

"No," Shane said quickly. "No, I didn't mean-... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. You said it was about you, not me." He took a deep breath. "I'm not saying you're ridiculous for thinking that, I-" He paused, tried to find the right words this time. "For me, it seems ridiculous, because I know how I feel about you. But I'd be a hypocrite if I said I've never been scared or doubted you before, because of my own insecurities. I mean, it's why I left in the first place. I thought you... didn't care."

"I care." Ilya's voice broke. "I care so much."

Shane nodded. It physically hurt that he couldn't touch Ilya. "I'm sorry I didn't text. It took me... way too long to understand what happened."

"It's okay," Ilya said. "You're... we're talking now."

"So you don't..." Shane bit his lip. "You don't want to be with anyone else? You... you haven't been?"

Ilya sucked in a breath, his eyes wide. Then, Shane saw him visibly relax. "No," he said firmly. "No, no, I just want you. I did not bring it up because I wanted anyone else."

Shane nodded. "Yeah. I should've known that. Just to be clear, you... being boyfriends... that means... being... with no one else."

Ilya smiled weakly. "Yeah," he said. "Of course it does."

"Well, you said it wasn't cheating to--"

Ilya shook his head. "Yeah, because I... I don't know. I don't want to own you, but..."

Shane breathed out shakily, relieved. "I am yours, you know."

Ilya blinked back at him. "Fuck," he muttered. "You're really sure, yes? That you don't want... more?"

"You're more than enough," Shane said. "You're all I want. I wish you were here right now." He nodded. "You don't have to try, you're everything I want," he repeated, not wanting to risk that Ilya would doubt him. Though he knew it was easier said than done, he had to try. "Please don't think that I deserve better, or try to protect me or make those decisions for me, I... I hate the thought that you'd leave me because--" He paused when he realised he was rambling, what he was saying, his fear so clear and out there between them. "Never leave me because you think I deserve better. Let me be the judge of that."

Ilya stared back at him, his expression going from confused to just... loving. Shane couldn't describe the look in his boyfriend's eyes as anything else.

"Okay."

Shane stared back at him. "Promise me... please."

Ilya smiled. "I promise." He pushed his bottom lip forward. "And I'm yours, too."

In an instant, Shane's heart felt lighter. "Yes, you are."

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