

uncharted territory

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uncharted territory

by [voltairehair](#)

Summary

Ilya doesn't know how to be a boyfriend. Neither does Shane. They figure it out.

Notes

see end for russian translations, its google translate apologies in advance
my first foray into hollanov land. pls let me know what you think!

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

Ilya doesn't know how to be a boyfriend.

It's something he thought about on the plane ride over. Being a boyfriend. Not that - they hadn't discussed - it's not what they were, not yet. But he had leant against that cold wall in Moscow months ago and ripped his heart out of his chest and practically held it out for Shane, telling him in a language that he doesn't understand that it's his, wholly. To do whatever he wants with, as long as it gets to stay close to him. Not even thinking to ask him to take it, to keep it in his care. Not even thinking that was something he'd ever want. But then he asked Ilya to come to the cottage and Scott Hunter kissed a man on national television and maybe...maybe.

And this week, he thinks he's been learning. He can see the way Shane visibly relaxes when Ilya's hands grab hold of him, the way his eyes flutter shut when he brushes his thumb along the back of his neck, the smile he tries to tamp down when Ilya kisses him just because he's close and he can, the way the tears brimmed in his eyes when Ilya came the closest to telling him everything he's feeling, calling his freckles beautiful and basically begging him to stay in his life.

He can do this, he thinks and he actually loves it. Loves getting to learn Shane, to study his habits and make space for them in his everyday life. The side of the bed he sleeps on, the way he takes his eggs in the morning, how he likes to read before he goes to sleep and turns a bright, cherry tomato red when he's asked to read aloud, to share the story with the man laying next to him. How he'll always say yes, his blush never fading as he holds open his arm for Ilya to lay against, hand stroking through his curls as he reads to him. And yes, Ilya thinks he could really do this. He could do this for the rest of his life.

Until he's right there when Shane's entire world comes crashing down.

He watches Shane pace the living room, on the edge of a complete nervous breakdown and he feels frozen, for a moment. He's never really had to do this part, the comfort part. Not entirely on its own, not without sex preceding it. He's always been weak when it comes to Shane, is the thing. Tried for all his might to pretend he is actually the party boy womanizer they all make him out to be, the Russian made of steel with a lust for blood and victory. And all pretenses fell away the second they met up in that hotel room the first night, when he told Shane to take off his clothes and watched him diligently fold them before he stood in front of Ilya and he felt a warmth in his chest that he hadn't felt for years, staring at this beautiful boy in front of him that he was supposed to hate.

It has never been lost on him, not once in all these years of them, the great trust Shane was putting in him every time they met up. How he had never ever had someone have him like that, never let anyone kiss or touch him the way he let Ilya, the way he wanted Ilya. And he took that seriously. And he knows how to fuck, to be blunt. He's good at it and has done everything he can to always make it good for Shane.

Making sure every time they were together to be gentle even if his words were not, to hold his chin while they kissed, to grab his chest while he sucked him off, using his hands and mouth to show Shane how wanted he was. To constantly check in that it felt good and okay

until he could read Shane's body better than his favorite novel. He's confident in his ability to care for Shane when they're fucking, it's how to provide that comfort outside of that space where he's more trepidatious.

He thinks now, watching Shane, of comfort. His mother, stroking his hair. Chasing him around the house while they played pretend together. The pattering of her feet down the hall as she came to tuck him in. And how that comfort was suddenly taken from him, so abruptly. How at the funeral Alexei had looked at him in disgust as he tried to hide his tears, "мальчики не плачут". Boys don't cry, Ilya. And so he didn't. For years. Except he had, the other night. In Shane's arms. He hadn't even thought twice about it, feeling so overwhelmed and cared for and loved - that's what Shane had said, hadn't he? "Oh my god, I love you so fucking much." Suddenly Ilya's six new favorite words of all time.

So maybe comfort has become a foreign concept to him. Something that he has that gets taken away in an instant. Something he tried to create, tried to seem so casual about months ago when he had prepared that tuna before inviting Shane over. When they had had the most intimate sex of their lives and he got too caught up in the moment, felt too much. Always too much, Ilya. Only speak when spoken to, Ilya. And no sooner had he said Shane's name than he was out the door. And he thought it was all over until Shane showed up at his hotel room in Florida, telling him he can't keep pretending there isn't anything between them and he held him while he cried.

And he'd had comfort and safety again, in his grasp, these last few days. No care in the world besides being with the man he loved, playing games or napping or swimming together. How ten minutes ago all he was thinking about was how he was going to take Shane apart and then he locked eyes with Shane's dad standing stock still in the kitchen. Feeling Shane's body go completely rigid in a way it had never before. His heart in his throat wondering those few seconds as he watched Shane go after his dad if this, this greatest comfort and love he'd ever found, was about to be taken from him too.

Except it's different this time. Because Shane had said he was sorry about the last time, had promised it wouldn't be like that again. And he came back. Right back, to him. He won't let it slip through his fingers now, not like this. And yes, maybe he doesn't know how to be a boyfriend. But he knows Shane.

And yes, the last time Shane freaked out, he ran away but now he's standing right in front of Ilya, his hands hovering until Ilya reaches out, gently guiding them towards him, a slight suggestion that Shane latches onto. And suddenly he's right in his space, holding onto him like he needs his touch to breathe. Not knowing that there is no bigger declaration of love that he could be making than this one right here, no bigger proof that this thing between them has truly changed, become real. To seek comfort in the arms of the man you love. His heart almost breaks at the thought of how many of these moments of panic Shane has had over the years, with no one to turn to for help. It won't be like that anymore. He's going to be right here.

He wraps his arms around him and holds tight, speaking gently and softly, but firmly. Reassures Shane that he can do this, he can be brave, he already is. He gives him the push he needs to face this reality, wake up from this nightmare. Uses his arms and hands to convey

that he's here, he's steady, he's not going anywhere. You will always be safe, right here. With me. In my arms.

His heart skips a beat at the relief on Shane's face when he offers to go with him, to face this reality together, hopefully the way they will face most things from now on. And then Shane crumpled in his arms, crouching to his knees and leaning his forehead against Ilya's hip with his arms wrapped around his legs, completely giving himself over to Ilya's touch and words. And Ilya's completely breathless for a moment, every English word he ever learned immediately leaving his brain as his hand keeps stroking through Shane's hair. In awe of this, of them. Of who they have become to each other. Of who he promises to always be for Shane, his boyfriend.

"Ты никогда больше не будешь одна, моя дорогая." he murmurs softly, a quiet vow to this man who has become his world. "Ты такая смелая и можешь всё. Я буду рядом, моя любовь. Моя любовь, мой свет, моя жизнь"

Shane doesn't know how to be a boyfriend.

Or he should say, he doesn't know how to be a good boyfriend. Though Rose has assured him time and time again that he wasn't too bad at it.

"I mean sure, you did look like you wanted to die whenever you entered me but we had really nice conversations." she had said once, mostly to horrify him, which had worked too well as she cackled and reassured him that he really was sweet, that he would be good at it for a very lucky man.

Boyfriend. That's what Ilya called himself, in front of his parents as he stroked the back of his neck in the way he somehow knows Shane needs, murmuring in his deep, gentle voice that Shane's good here, he's good.

And he's tried, all week, to prove himself of the title, maybe subconsciously though he never actually does anything without thinking about it first. Over and over and over. And he's thought about this, a lot. He's thought about what it would be like to be someone's, to have someone be his. To have the man he's already considered his actually belong to him. He knows he absolutely did not play it cool when Ilya had said he also hadn't been with anyone else for months, his smile practically splitting his face open as he basically just kept repeating the word "Really?". But he couldn't help it, just another way Ilya's shown him that this is real, that he's not alone in feeling what he's feeling.

Because Ilya has been sleeping with women, and that's been fine until it wasn't but he hadn't expected...He knows what inviting Ilya out here meant to him, what he was trying to say with the invitation, to declare that this is Important and Matters to him and he Wants This. And Ilya has been making his own declarations of the same and that just knocks the wind out of him. He knows Ilya knows it too, has been told he is nearly impossible to read but his face is something that Ilya has always been able to decipher, if the loving way he held the back of his head in that moment was any indication. They're doing this, really, properly.

So he doesn't know how to be a good boyfriend but he knows how to plan, his mother's son in every sense when it comes to that. Identifying the problem and fixing it, like a complicated knot he has to untie. Ilya wants a non-Russian passport, and thinks he needs to marry Sveltana in order to get one - problem.

Shane sat awake for hours that night, his brain running through multiple scenarios while simultaneously hinging on a loop of the way Ilya had said "beautiful freckles." Shaking Ilya awake when he solved it, excitedly barreling through his explanation while Ilya blinked at him, half awake and barely able to understand English until Shane took a breath and laid it all out for him - I want to be together for the rest of my life and here's how we do it - solution. And Ilya had been so overwhelmed he cried and told him he loved him - he loved him - so maybe he's not completely hopeless at this.

He's never really been one to speak that much. Keeps his cards close to his chest, keeps himself in control. His whole life has been about control. What he eats, his workout routine that hasn't changed in a decade, how he sounds in interviews, what time he shows up for practice, what time he leaves, when he goes to sleep at night. You're a representative, Shane. You're a big deal to a lot of kids. You cannot fail, Shane. Not the most sociable, they called him. Can play hockey but doesn't have a personality. Not much to say but wait till you see him on the ice. So he kept getting better at hockey and worse at building relationships. Running from his feelings at every turn until he felt like a hollowed out version of himself, living a life mostly in isolation.

He told himself it was better this way. Better this than they know too much about who he is and what he likes and how the first time he felt his shoulders release was when Ilya first put his mouth on his. Ilya. Who turned his entire world on its head when they locked eyes in the showers all those years ago. He makes him want to be better, to feel his feelings and not run from them, to say what he wants and what he doesn't want.

So, he planned.

He made sure the fridge was stocked with groceries so they wouldn't have to leave or order takeout, he made sure to buy Ilya's favorite sodas, the ones he's noticed on his end tables over the years. He rented the kayaks and bought the water shoes and filled the showers with toiletries, made sure he had nice sheets and pillows on his bed, made sure he had all his best video games and board games in case the weather got shitty. He was prepared for everything. Except for today.

And it was a fucking nightmare, legitimately. If he had to dream up the worst possible way for him to come out to his parents, his dad watching his boyfriend press him up against the window and grab his ass is at least top 3 and it happened anyway. And Ilya was next to him the whole time. Never wavering, charming his parents by eating the most portions of his Dad's pasta sauce than had ever been eaten in that household. Telling his parents that he had only ever been in love with one person. And that person was Shane.

It's all he's thinking about now, watching the glow of the flames flicker across Ilya's face from where he's laying on his chest. The day ended up being fine, better than fine, far better than he could've hoped given the circumstance but still it was so much talking and so much stress and in Ilya's case, so much pasta ("Your father gave me food coma, Hollander") that

they just set up camp out here and haven't really moved since, Shane's hand brushing through Ilya's curls, Ilya's hand squeezing Shane's hip every so often. And now he has time to just look. At his boyfriend.

Ilya.

Who has had the weight of the world on his shoulders since they met, who has grown up in a family life Shane cannot begin to understand, but would like to learn. He wants to learn everything about him, to be the one to hold him when he's sad or scared or angry. He keeps thinking about Ilya's mother and the horrific way his twelve year old self found her and he's never felt so aghast and utterly heartbroken for another person before.

He knows there's more he doesn't know, more horrors to unpack from the life Ilya had in Moscow. He can see its claws in him sometimes, like how every time he cries his first instinct is to turn his head away, to collect himself in private before facing Shane again. And he's not thought twice about refusing to let that happen, always gently turning Ilya back to him to reassure him that he's safe here, he can let it out, he can let go. And to Ilya's credit, he's been doing that all week, has been more relaxed and silly than Shane has ever seen him, showing a new side of himself for Shane to fall in love with. And he has.

Every day this week there's been something new to love - how competitive Ilya is even when they're playing a horrible game of soccer or how he turns into his childlike self the second he gets in the water but perhaps Shane's favorite new thing is learning that Ilya likes to be held. His head has found its permanent spot on Shane's chest as he curves his body against him, Shane's arms wrapped around his waist or curling through his hair. The league's most intimidating captain melting in his arms. Feeling safe, he hopes.

And so maybe he doesn't know how to be a boyfriend. But he knows he has never felt such a need to protect someone, to make them feel safe. It's what Ilya has done all day - talking to him gently but directly, keeping his hands on him when he knows he needs it, creating a safe space for him right in his arms. How despite all he's been through, he never once made Shane feel stupid or overdramatic for how he was freaking out. He just stayed there, right by Shane's side, loving him. In a way Shane has never ever been loved before.

And Shane has spent most of his life living a lie, or living an omission of the truth to the people he's closest to and he doesn't want to do that with this, the most important relationship he's ever had. And he's trying to fight against every instinct telling him to keep his thoughts to himself, to contain his emotions even though he feels like his heart may burst. But he had asked for both of them to be completely honest, hadn't he? To say what they're actually thinking and how they're really feeling? And he feels, so much. Right now. He can't keep it in anymore.

"I've never had someone sit next to me at my parent's house before."

Okay, Shane. Neither of you have spoken for like an hour and that's your opener?! Dude.

Ilya shifts where he's laying so he's fully facing Shane, sliding to the side a bit so they can face each other, his chin resting on his chest.

“I - sorry. I just. Today was fucking crazy and my brain and heart might explode and all I keep thinking about is how I’ve always sat alone at that table. Just me across from my parents, by myself.” he says, daring himself to keep being brave like he was today, to not break eye contact, to see the way Ilya’s eyes soften. “And today you were there, next to me. And it was so nice to have you take up that space.”

“It was nice to take up that space.” Ilya says back, the flames reflecting a glassy sheen in his eyes. Shane brings his other hand up to cup his face, thumb brushing back and forth along his cheekbone.

“What did you think of them?”

“Your parents?” Ilya asks and Shane nods.

Ilya looks away for a moment, eyes back to the flames. Shane drops his hand and rests it on his own stomach, where Ilya quickly laces their fingers together without looking. He flicks his eyes back up to Shane’s.

“They are kind. Your father is funny man. Boring, like you.” he says, giving Shane’s hand a squeeze. “Your mother is like a lion. Fierce. Very protective. I see a lot of her in you.”

“I don’t think I’m fierce.”

“You are. In many ways. I see it in hockey. Or when you take my cock.”

“*Jesus*, Ilya.” Shane says, feeling his skin flush a bright red much to Ilya’s visible delight.

“Or when I make you mad, you get this look.” he says, starting to imitate it, his entire face falling flat with anger in his eyes and Shane releases his curls to give him a whack on the head. Ilya’s mouth twitches with a hint of a smile. “It was nice, yes. Once you were breathing again. They are good people.”

Shane huffs a laugh, feeling like he can see the whole world in Ilya’s face right now. His open expression of adoration is almost impossible to take in and yet he cannot look away.

“Did they feel like people you’d be okay spending more time with? I just - I see my parents a lot and now that they know...” Shane trails off, eyes darting to the fire and he can feel Ilya’s eyes on him.

He’s skirting around what he actually wants to ask, which feels too intense to say out loud but he promised at the start of this trip that he’d say what he’s feeling. Ilya saw him through a panic attack today, he can probably handle an intense declaration about their future. He takes a deep breath, eyes locking with Ilya’s once more.

“Did it feel like a family you’d want to be a part of? Someday? Because, um, that’s what I would want. You to be.”

He watches the way the words hit him, his face scrunching in an attempt to blink back tears but this time he doesn’t look away from Shane and instead leans into this touch when his hand comes back up to cradle his face.

And then he nods.

Hoooly shit.

“да.” Ilya says, his voice tight with emotion, his throat bobbing when he swallows as he blinks back his own watery eyes. Ilya turns his head to place a kiss on his palm. “Yes. You have nice family.”

They stare at each other for a moment, both letting every emotion play out on their faces. Shane’s vision goes blurry and he tries in vain to blink back the tears springing to his eyes. Since his conversation with Rose, all those months ago, he’s felt like a balloon slowly releasing air, slowly settling back into his body. And after today, yes he feels wrung out but he also feels whole, like he can say anything right now about how much he’s feeling for the man looking back at him with just as much emotion as he feels.

“Was first time having dinner at family table where there was no anger.” Ilya says, almost off-handedly. “Even when it was awkward. It was calm.”

Shane has to close his eyes at that, tilting his head towards the sky, his heart fracturing in his chest. Thinking of how today was probably the most stressed out he has ever felt at his parents’ house and the thought of this being one of the most relaxing times in a family environment that Ilya has ever had... *fuck*. He can feel Ilya’s eyes on him, his fingers brushing lightly against his jaw as if he is the one who needs comfort now. He takes a second, feeling so utterly horrified at how this man, this gentle giant of his, spent his childhood. He opens his eyes, tilting his head back to look at Ilya as he grabs his fingers, pressing his lips to them and holding tight.

“I wish you had a family that I could meet the way you met mine. Who was worthy of getting to see you happy.”

“дорогой.” Ilya murmurs, almost under his breath and that’s like the fifth time he’s called Shane that today and he has to ask him what that means but he cannot stop speaking once he has started.

“I really hate that you didn’t have a family who loved you like you deserve to be loved. And that the person who did left you way too soon.” he continues and he knows he’s speaking the most he has since he laid out their life plan at three in the morning and now he’s making another declaration of love which is so unlike him, so not who he thought he would be in a relationship but he needs Ilya to know this and he can do so much with his touches and his holding and his kisses but he needs Ilya to hear him, even if he’s laying there almost frozen, wide eyes locked on Shane’s.

“And I’m going to do everything I can to make sure you don’t spend another day on this earth not being loved the way you should be loved. Because I love you. So much. And I’m never going to stop.”

"ты ублюдок." Ilya mutters before surging up to smash his mouth onto Shane’s, his hand grasping his chin in the way he knows - has somehow known since they were teenagers - makes Shane melt right into his grasp. Shane’s hand tightens in his hair, he barely has time to

register the wetness against his cheeks before Ilya's tongue is sliding into his mouth and making him forget his own name. He's mumbling something in Russian between kisses, "навсегда, моя дорогая". His hand gliding from his chin to cup the side of his face, his thumb delicately stroking along Shane's cheekbone and this is everything he's ever wanted. Right here, on top of him.

So maybe he doesn't know how to be a boyfriend. Hasn't put in the ten thousand hours with the title to perfect it, the way he has with hockey, but he's spent more than ten thousand hours loving Ilya. And he *knows* him and is learning him every day. And he knows this - that this man in his arms makes him feel more than he ever thought possible and is going to be loved more than he ever imagined he could be.

Make sure Ilya is loved as much as humanly possible. That's the plan.

End Notes

Russian translations:

мальчики не плачут - Boys don't cry

Ты никогда больше не будешь одна, моя дорогая. Ты такая смелая и можешь всё. Я буду рядом, моя любовь. Моя любовь, мой свет, моя жизнь - You will never be alone again, my dear. You are so brave and you can do anything. I will be by your side, my love. My love, my light, my life.

да - yes

дорогой - sweetheart

ты ублюдок - you bastard

навсегда, моя дорогая - forever, my dear

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