

Perception Change

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77286096) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77286096>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Canon Compliant , Jealousy , Possessive Behavior , Miscommunication , Light Angst , They love each other they're just figuring some stuff out
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-07 Words: 2,707 Chapters: 1/1

Perception Change

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Summary

“The woman with you was beautiful.”

The comment felt like whiplash. “What?”

“The woman with you.”

Shane was with a woman? The only parts of the night he could remember were Ilya’s ass, his eyes, his laugh, and when Hayden spilled an entire pint of beer down his shirt. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Notes

I have fallen down the hollanov rabbit hole... I should have known this was coming. This is set maybe a month or two after the end of season 1 of HR.

I hope you enjoy!

Warnings: mentions of homophobia and racism.

Ilya had changed into comfortable clothes by the time Shane picked him up. His shorts were too short, his shirt too tight. Shane stared at the steering wheel and didn't dare look over until they were four miles out of the city and the roads around them were empty.

"You're still wearing slutty shirt."

Shane let himself smile faintly. He'd left the party thirty minutes after Ilya, and instead of driving to his apartment, he'd stopped by a drive through Italian and ordered an anaemic looking salad and tried not to get too excited at the thought of picking Ilya up and having him alone for an entire weekend. "It's not slutty."

Ilya tugged gently at the black satin sleeve. "Buttoned up but still slutty. Only you could manage this."

If Shane didn't acknowledge the blush making its way up his neck then it wasn't happening. "I didn't choose the shirt."

Ilya laughed, but the sound was flatter than normal. Gone was his cute, oddly innocent sounding giggle, and in its place was something he'd force out for an unpleasant interview. "I know. You have team for that."

When Shane glanced over, all he could see of Ilya's face was the angle of his cheekbone, the slope of his neck, the way his hair curled around his ear. "What's wrong?"

"Hm?" Ilya blindly patted around the centre console until he found the edge of Shane's thigh and squeezed. "Nothing. Excited to relax with you."

"Are you tired?"

"Not so bad."

Shane glanced again. Still no head movement. "Ilya?"

"Shane?"

No further questions escaped his throat, despite the growing worry. Ilya had already said nothing was wrong, and if Shane kept asking he'd just piss him off, close him down. He didn't want to do that – this was the first time in a month that they'd seen each other in person. "Nothing. Sorry."

"No apologies." Ilya squeezed Shane's thigh again.

They drove in silence for a while. Shane tried to sneak glances he hoped Ilya would catch, but Ilya didn't look over once. Not that Shane saw, anyway. It was fine. Everyone had

subdued moods at times, even if they were laughing hysterically at a party only an hour or so beforehand. It could have been forced – Ilya was good at that when he wanted to be. Somewhere between his real laugh and his interview laugh was his crowd-pleasing laugh, the one that had echoed around Shane all evening. Even with their backs to one another, Ilya was everywhere, a burning sun in a room far too crowded, far too small to contain him.

“ –that shirt.”

Shane forced himself back into his body, but didn’t look over again. “Sorry, what?”

“I love that shirt.”

Ilya sounded warmer now – Shane should have expected it, the easing of tension the further away from civilization they drove. To one of Yuna’s cabins, often rented as a yoga retreat, but Shane’s alone for three days. It had a hot tub. He hadn’t mentioned that to Ilya, too excited in case it proved to be a welcome surprise, too anxious in case it turned out Ilya hated hot tubs for some reason. Shane hated them when they weren’t cleaned properly, but he hoped Ilya trusted Shane’s parents enough to run a tight ship and get the hot tub cleaned frequently. After a small but definitely noticeable silent freak out about the reception of the hot tub, Shane forced out, “The not-slutty-but-still-slutty shirt?”

“Yes. Complex, like you.”

“Not boring?”

“Not boring,” Ilya agreed, surprising Shane. It almost always took at least ten minutes of bickering for him to relent and admit to the bluff of his teasing.

“You looked great,” Shane said, trying for the same kind of honesty. It was true enough; Ilya had looked *great*. He always looked great, but his suit sat well across his shoulders and chest, and even in the swell of conversations with friends and strangers, Shane had struggled to keep his eyes off the swell of Ilya’s ass in his pinstripe slacks.

“You looked better.”

Shane scoffed, neck heating. “Obviously.”

Ilya laughed again, more genuine, but still not normal. Still facing the passenger window, watching the dark scenery pass by. “The woman with you was beautiful.”

The comment felt like whiplash. “What?”

“The woman with you.”

Shane was with a woman? The only parts of the night he could remember were Ilya’s ass, his eyes, his laugh, and when Hayden spilled an entire pint of beer down his shirt. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“She was blonde. Pretty, like I say. She kept touching your arm.”

“Oh!” He meant Katy. She’d hung around for twenty minutes or so, but they’d mainly talked about her brother. “You mean Katy Pierce?”

“Katy,” Ilya said faintly. “Probably I do. You know her name.”

“We went to school together. I was surprised to see her – it’s been... what, almost ten years? I don’t feel old enough for it to have been so long.”

“She was beautiful.”

Shane squinted. Katy had always been kind above anything else, which had led her to speak to Shane after so many years. “I guess.”

“Don’t act like you didn’t notice.”

Shane shrugged uncomfortably. “I mean, I spent most of the night staring at your ass.”

Finally, Ilya looked over. His expression was stony, but his eyes were bright. “You lie. You laughed with her.”

“For a while, sure. We were catching up. I...stared at your ass for most of it.” Shane’s neck heated again, but fuck it. They were being honest, weren’t they? And weren’t they boyfriends? He could enjoy Ilya’s ass in public and play it off as shortsightedness without his glasses if anyone asked. He was staring off into the distance trying to focus his eyes, not ogling the best ass on the continent.

“She’s beautiful.”

Shane was still thinking about Ilya’s ass. “Sure.”

“She was flirting with you.”

It was Shane’s turn to splutter out a laugh. “*Flirting?* No. No, not even slightly.”

“She was. I know these things.”

Shane took the narrow turning for his mom’s cabin, and the world narrowed around the car to tight, overgrown trees and starry night skies. He tried to think of how to reply, but before he could, Ilya spoke again.

“The way she touched you – I recognise this. It’s how I want to touch you at parties.”

Katy had touched him when laughing, sure, but just curling a hand around his arm to steady herself. *He’s changed so much*, she’d said through giggles, *I swear you wouldn’t even recognise him now, all settled into the life of a finance bachelor*. Shane had laughed too and hoped it sounded genuine. She was kind, and he wanted to show respect. He didn’t give a shit about her awful brother. He did give a shit about Ilya wanting to hold his arm while they laughed together in public though. It shot right from his heart to his stomach in a painful spasm.

“I want that too,” Shane said after a moment.

“With her?”

“Ilya, shut up.”

“She wanted more.”

“I’m *gay*. ”

“Not to her.”

Shane was more relieved than excited to pull up at the cabin. He climbed out of the car as soon as the engine was off, perturbed, and continued the conversation as they fought over who got to carry both of their luggage. “You think I’d just... what, flirt with her to be polite?”

“Rose Landry’s ex is good catch for beautiful women, yes?”

Shane stomped up the decking, luggageless and growing more frustrated. “We’ve discussed this. You know better than anyone that I won’t be doing anything like that again.”

“Even for safety? You could get... what do you call it, a beard?”

“What?” Shane asked, confused. He rattled the key in the door until it swung open with a groan. “My facial hair is patchy as hell, you know that.” The lights flicked on, and it was even cosier than he remembered from childhood. Overstuffed couches, a large fireplace, and an even larger deck wrapping around the rear of the house.

“Fake girlfriend, I mean. To stop rumours.”

“What rumours?” The only rumours Shane had heard recently were that Ilya had a wife somewhere in Russia he was too scared to show to the public. He’d giggled himself hoarse when they’d read the articles about *that*.

Ilya deposited their bags onto the couch and wandered around, eying the décor, the dark colours, the dim lights. “Not your usual style, but still nice.”

“What rumours?”

Ilya shrugged, still wandering slowly. He stopped by a bookcase full of old DVDs, some of which were from Shane’s childhood.

Shane watched, something in his chest drawing tighter and tighter. He’d cried until he’d puked watching ‘The Land Before Time’ at seven years old. Ilya wiped dust from the case. There he was, in his casual clothes with his messy curls and his relaxed posture and his silent refusal to hold any kind of eye contact, and here *Shane* was, still wearing the slacks and shirt he’d had to hire someone else to pick out for him, with his neat hair and his half eaten shitty salad rotting in his car, and once again everything felt more than slightly hopeless. “Do you want to leave?” Shane heard himself ask quietly.

The muscles of Ilya's back tensed before he turned to face Shane. "What?"

It was Shane's turn to avoid eye contact, his own eyes stinging as he focused his vision on their bags. "I can drive you back to your hotel if you want."

"Why would I want this?"

Shane pressed his lips together and tried to calm his heartbeat. "You've been weird since I picked you up."

"A beautiful woman was flirting in front of me with my boyfriend."

"I'm *gay*!"

"No one *knows* this!" Ilya shouted back, eyes suddenly wild. He stepped closer; Shane stepped back.

"How do you think I feel?" Shane asked, voice shaking with indignation and pulsing anger. "You're famous for being a fuckboy! I'd be fucking bald if I let myself get stressed whenever you were seen in public with a woman flirting with you."

"It's different." Ilya took another step closer. Shane's back hit the closed door with a soft thud. Ilya took another step. "You admit she flirted?"

"If she was I didn't know," Shane said, as honest as he could be. She hadn't been flirting in his eyes, but if Ilya thought she had been then there was no arguing with his perception, Shane could only talk about his own. "If she was flirting with me I didn't notice, I swear."

"This is why it's different." They were almost toe to toe. Ilya's hand came up, and for a brief minute Shane thought he was going to be pushed out of the way of the door. Instead, the pad of Ilya's thumb pressed into the skin of Shane's cheek. "These days you know it's different. Everyone that flirts I reject. Publicly. Nice, but... blunt."

"Because of your secret wife in Russia," Shane said weakly.

Ilya shook his head. "Because of my secret boyfriend in Canada." His thumb moved to the centre of Shane's lower lip, pressing down slightly, somehow still ridiculously gentle. "My pretty, secret boyfriend, too hockey-brained to know when to reject flirting. Too beautiful for people to stop trying with, despite his boring, oblivious hockey brain. Despite the bite marks they can't see." He dragged the tip of his nose against Shane's cheek, then down his throat. "Despite his angry boyfriend."

Shane clung to Ilya and closed his eyes tightly against the pain in his chest. "I wish I could tell people. I wish I could – I wish, I—"

"Shh." Ilya raised his head to kiss Shane's temple and wound his arms around Shane's waist. "I know. I know, I'm sorry. Is not you I'm angry with, not you. Never really you."

"You hate me," Shane said stubbornly, eyes still squeezed shut.

“I love you.”

Shane’s breath shuddered out of him. He still wasn’t used to hearing it; the words winded him every time Ilya said them. “I love you too.”

“I’m sorry,” Ilya said again. “I’m not angry with you. Hate seeing people clinging to you, staring at you with big eyes like that. Adoration and admiration and love is fine. Good. You make me proud with this, but... want? No. They are not allowed.”

Shane held him tighter, so much love inside of him that he wanted to cry. “It’s just you.”

“Is what your hockey brain thinks,” Ilya said darkly. “Like lamb in a wolf den. Thousands of people would draw blood to touch you.”

“But you’re the only person I want touching me,” Shane said, finally opening his eyes. Ilya’s were watery, a muscle in his jaw tense and flickering beneath the skin. He looked half scared, half furious. “Ilya, I swear, Katy spent the entire conversation trying to convince me that her brother was a good guy after years of being an asshole. She didn’t even ask for my number, she just wanted me to speak to him. I think she was trying to make him feel better.”

Ilya had finally started to calm down. “Is he fan of yours?”

“I don’t think so, he bullied me for almost five years.”

The calm departed as quickly as it had settled. “I’ll kill him.”

Shane kissed him - he couldn’t help it. Ilya was so fucking cute, his lips so unbearably inviting.

After a couple of minutes Ilya pulled back with a groan, his mouth wet. “No, you can’t distract me. You can, but – please stop. What is his name? I need it.”

“You don’t. It’s fine.” Shane stroked Ilya’s hair away from his face. He’d never met someone so confident yet insecure, so hardened yet fragile. The fluctuations of Ilya’s vulnerabilities were still something Shane was trying to adapt to. He wanted to be more reliable, steadier – and instead here he was, rising to every bite, meeting anger with anger every time, even when it turned out to be misplaced frustration. “I’m sorry I brought it up.”

“He hurt you?”

“Not physically.” A couple of shoves at most, but pointed comments about the lunches Shane brought to school, the way his mom looked. Digs at his height, his freckles, his eyes.

“Mentally then. Why?”

Shane let his eyes stray to their luggage again, uncomfortable not because of Ilya but the admittance of what they already knew: “I was a nerd. Maybe worse, I was a nerd that was better at hockey than him. Imagine being beaten at your favourite thing by a loser.”

“This is not something I have to imagine.”

Shane laughed weakly. “Asshole.”

Ilya kissed him again, distracting them both with the way his tongue explored Shane’s mouth like it was the first time, every time. “You’re older now,” he murmured into Shane’s mouth. “Best Canadian player. Most handsome. Maybe he’s crushing you now.”

“Hm?” Shane asked, distracted by Ilya’s mouth, his slight smile, the tension now entirely gone. The sun was back; the stars were out. The entire galaxy was in his eyes.

“She was maybe passing on his flirting. He’s crushing you.”

It took an embarrassing length of time for Shane to catch on. “You think Michael Pierce has a *crush* on me?”

“Why not? I do.”

“You’re insane.”

“I want you to call him in front of me, like with Hayden Pike. I blow you while you reject him.” Ilya grinned, more than slightly mischievous. “Talk about how much better at hockey you still are. Rub it in. Make him cry.”

Flowers bloomed in Shane’s lungs, stems and petals tangling in his breathing. “I love you,” he said. “I really, really love you. You know that right? No one else matters. I don’t care who flirts with me, I don’t care if I notice or not. I love you. For me, it’s you. Just you.”

Ilya kissed him again, soft this time. Gentle and slow, boyish and sweet. “My Shane,” he whispered. “I love you too. Just you.”

Shane smiled against his mouth. “This cabin has a hot tub, by the way.”

Ilya kissed him again. “I change my mind. I love Yuna more.”

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