

If There Ever Was A Doubt

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If There Ever Was A Doubt

by [ClimbTheMountain2020](#)

Summary

Two years post-The Long Game, Shane and Ilya are living the life they always dreamed of. But sometimes, the nightmares catch up to Ilya. Shane knows how much Ilya sacrificed to give them this life. Now, he wants to give Ilya something in return.

Notes

Spoiler warning! If you have only watched the show and not read through The Long Game, there will be spoilers ahead!

Bless the lovely @acourtofladydeath for always beta reading and idea bouncing with me!
Love spanning multiple fandoms with you <3

Shane

Shane opened his eyes to the familiar slanted wood ceilings, the glossy finish of them glowing with the reflection of the bathroom night light in the dark. On the dresser, the clock flashed 6:03. It wasn't much before Shane normally woke up—even in the off-season, he found it hard to sleep in anymore. Out of the bay windows and over the lake, he could see the sky beginning to fade from dark blue into swaths of light purple.

The mumbling beside him told him what had woken him.

Against his side, Ilya's warm arm twitched, the sensation of his skin on Shane's giving him immediate goosebumps. He wasn't sure how long he'd continue to always react to him this way, but two years out from their marriage Shane was happy to see it still happened every time they brushed against each other.

Shane didn't like touch, but he always craved Ilya's.

In the quiet morning, there was only the sound of Ilya's deep breathing. Shane stole the opportunity to look at him in the dim light. Over a decade later, he still thought he was the most handsome man he might have ever seen—especially when he slept.

For one, he wasn't running his mouth. But the way his lips fell open just slightly with sleep left him with a boyish look that he so infrequently held awake. It was helped by the tousled curls that fell softly over his forehead.

Shane knew it was a privilege to see him this way—the way so few others had ever gotten to. His heart thumped pathetically and he smiled, almost hearing Ilya's voice in his head.

“You are such a romantic for me, Hollander, yes?”

How bad was it that, now, he could predict the teasing that his husband would lob on him down to the inflection, even when he wasn't conscious.

Shane took another look, and decided against waking Ilya. He'd been up late—not even back in bed before Shane had fallen asleep last night—working on something in the garage. He wouldn't let him see it, so Shane was already assuming he'd bought something for their upcoming anniversary despite their *no gifts* agreement. Either that, or he was preparing to purchase another dog for them.

As though she'd heard his thoughts, the tip-tap of Anya's feet came across the wood floors into the room, muting once they hit the carpet and jumped onto Shane's legs. He pet her, scratching behind the ears as she settled between them, plopping her chin down onto her paws. He'd seen the way Ilya had been browsing pet adoption sites lately, though he'd kept quiet. He'd found over the years that what Ilya wanted most was companionship. Plus, Shane loved Anya. He wouldn't mind having a buddy for her around, another personality in the house for them to love.

He'd just decided to get up and start breakfast—maybe french toast for Ilya—when he heard the murmuring again. Beside him, Ilya's legs shifted restlessly again. Then, Shane heard it.

“Мама.” Ilya's voice was quiet, but strained. He didn't open his eyes.

Ilya was having another nightmare.

Shane shifted, torn between wanting to wake him to save him from the heartbreak he knew would be incoming and the grief that would occur if he pulled him from the dreams too early.

“Пойдем со мной. Я хочу, чтобы ты с ним познакомился.”

Come with me. I want you to meet him.

Shane's Russian was almost passable now, though it had taken a while to get there. When they'd officially moved in together and Shane had first noticed Ilya having nightmares, he'd written some of the phrases down, the sadness so heavy in his chest as he'd badly translated the scribbled words the next day.

Now, there was no need. It didn't make hearing the words any less painful. Without the added barrier of needing to write them down and translate them later, the words pierced him in real time, each one harder to hear than the last.

Ilya stirred again, his brow furrowing, face sad somehow even with eyes closed.

“Как бы мне хотелось, чтобы ты был здесь.”

I wish you were here.

Shane lay back down, his arm coming softly across Ilya's stomach, holding him without waking him. His husband had been a deep sleeper since they'd first shared a bed, but Shane thought the touch, on some level, would let him know he wasn't alone.

“Не уходи. Пожалуйста, мама.”

Don't go. Please, mama.

The words were smooth, falling like poetry from Ilya's lips, but each one tore a hole through Shane. He knew that Ilya would always grieve his mother, knew that there was no fixing this. Shane's own mom went out of her way to spend time with Ilya, even one-on-one, and Ilya had told him more than once how much it meant to him. But there was no filling the chasm that had been left behind when Irina had died.

Ilya's body twitched a bit, writhing as though trying to fight some inescapable pain before deflating onto the bed again, the sadness so clear in his posture even laying down. Anya lifted her head to look, concern painted in her eyes too. Shane reached his other hand down to lay on her back. To show he had them both. That he could comfort them both, even if he couldn't fix it.

“Прости, мама. Прости, я не могу вернуться домой.”

I'm sorry Mama. I'm sorry, I can't come home.

It was the same nightmare every time. He'd get to see his mother in his dreams, but the cost was that he always woke knowing he never would again. That she'd never meet Shane. That he could never visit her grave, never be close to her again.

Shane had never forgotten the fight he and Ilya had before they'd come out publicly.

"I already chose you, Hollander."

Shane had thought he meant hockey, meant moving. But it was so much more than that. He'd given up *everything* to be with Shane, including the ability to ever go back to Moscow when they came out.

He'd never gotten to even say goodbye since the news broke so abruptly.

Shane closed his eyes and tucked his nose against Ilya's shoulder, breathing him in. The guilt and shame of that year and Shane not understanding what Ilya was going through still ate at him like acid when he thought about it, even though they'd long since talked about it and moved on. Even though things were okay now.

But the truth was that Ilya had always given more, even from the start. Even when it hadn't seemed that way.

Ilya didn't miss Moscow, and Shane knew that. But his mother was there. He'd never visit her again, never set foot on Russian soil. Shane's eyes burned. Beneath him, Ilya's breathing had calmed, his heartbeat back to baseline. Anya's head rested on Ilya's shin, and his face had smoothed back to the peace of sleep.

Ilya had given *everything* up for this, and Shane loved him so much sometimes that it hurt.

As he lay close, the sun beginning to rise in earnest and splashing the walls and the trees beyond the window with color, an idea began to form in Shane's mind.

Did he have time? He could certainly find the resources. He didn't think it would be overstepping, but Shane didn't always know for sure.

Pieces flew together as he lay on Ilya's chest, each step forming in his mind like puzzle pieces that had just been waiting to build something. Waiting for Shane to think of it.

He couldn't give Ilya his mother back, but perhaps he could give Ilya the comfort he'd always given Shane.

He slipped quietly and slowly out from beneath the covers, grabbing his phone from the nightstand and padding into the kitchen.

His mom would be awake by now, and she always knew how to help. He swiped open her messages.

Mom, I have an idea. Are you up?

+++

Ilya

Ilya watched as the trees blurred outside the window of the car.

“It’s been nice weather so far this summer, yeah?” David asked, pulling Ilya’s attention off the reflections on the lake’s surface as they passed.

“Yeah, it’s good. Has been hotter this year than I remember.” It was true. Though he had mostly adjusted to summers in Canada, it was still hotter than he was used to. The air was always heavier, and when he would run, he would sweat buckets.

David nodded, turning down the street and away from the shimmering lake. “Hey, thanks for helping me out today. I know Shane and Yuna had that...thing.”

David was almost as bad at lying as Shane was. Still, Ilya had enjoyed their day.

“Thank you for inviting me. I enjoyed the lunch.” David had texted early this morning, asking if Ilya might help him pick up some lumber and, in exchange, David would treat him to lunch. They’d gone to Mary Brown’s Chicken—David’s choice, but not really, since Ilya knew David knew it was his favorite.

Ilya smiled to himself. He had never really known family like this—had never had a father figure who even pretended to care for him past what he could gain in terms of pride or name. It was his reminder to never take days like today for granted.

Even if he had a suspicion that he was being lied to.

“I had great time, David. Thank you for the lunch.”

As they turned back down the final street to the cottage, the lake came back into sight, sun streaming across the lapping surface and sending the reflections up against the dark pines around it.

“Nah, don’t mention it. I know how much you like that place.” He patted the steering wheel once for good measure. “And I always appreciate the company. And the help.” He pointed up to the truck bed where they’d put in the lumber. “Body’s not quite what it used to be, so I’ll take all the help I can get.”

Ilya nodded, testing the waters as they pulled up to the cottage, noting Shane’s car still in the driveway as it had been all morning. “Where did Yuna say the PR event was today?”

David's cheeks tinged pink, his throat clearing, and Ilya held back a grin. David was keeping secrets for his son, Ilya just wasn't sure what they were yet.

"I, ah, I can't be certain. Yuna just said that they'd be back this afternoon. She's the one who suggested I ask you for help!" His enthusiasm was a little too much, and Ilya decided to show him mercy rather than keep prying. Shane's secrets would come out in due time.

"Well, more fried chicken for us, ah?"

David nodded, looking relieved as they parked.

"You are sure you do not need me to help you unload at the house?" Yuna and David lived just a few minutes further down the road—the cabin that Shane had gone to growing up only a short drive up the lakeside.

"Nah, I've got it from here. Just that loading and unloading and making it all the way over the store that gets me."

Ilya nodded again, pulling the door to the truck open and climbing out. Before going up the steps, he turned back. "Thanks again, David. Was good day."

David smiled back, patting the old metal frame of the driver's side window twice before pulling out of the gravel drive. As Ilya climbed the stairs to their porch, he took out his phone to Google whatever PR event Shane had today. He was entirely unsurprised to find nothing on the public schedule.

"You are a scoundrel, Hollander," he laughed, sliding his key into the lock and hearing Anya's skittering footsteps on the wood floors inside to greet him. She wound between his legs as he pushed into the house and secured the door behind him.

"Да, да. Привет, Любимая," he cooed as she barked once, lifting her head so he'd pet her. She didn't need to ask twice. Ilya had never had pets growing up, had never known how unconditionally he might love an animal. Every day now, it was a great feat to not fill his house with all the puppies he saw on the online ads who did not have homes.

His phone chimed in his pocket, and Ilya smiled. It was the special one he saved only for Shane, so he always knew when it was him.

You home?

Ilya nearly laughed at Shane's clipped message. Even through a text, he could practically feel the tension in Shane's body, which could mean only one thing: Shane had caved and bought an anniversary gift for him.

The two had mutually decided to not get each other any gifts, despite it being their two year anniversary. They were planning to spend a week in Prince Edward Island, and had agreed that would be plenty. Now, as Ilya typed his confirmation back, he felt less bad about the massive new workout machine he'd bought for Shane and been hiding in the garage for

weeks. Additionally, the specially curated eight-course, macro-friendly meal he'd reserved for them on the island seemed like a much better idea.

Yes. I am at home. Why are you not at home? He texted back.

"Tricky, tricky, Hollander," he whispered, closing his phone and taking Anya out to the backyard. He stood on the porch while she ran around, the herding ball he'd bought her last month bouncing around the yard while she chased it. Behind her, the light sparkled over the lake and Ilya paused to take it in. He would never tire of this view, of this life. He was so glad they spent the off-season here—so fortunate that he was able to call this place his home. So fortunate...in so many ways that he almost couldn't believe it sometimes.

When he remembered how life felt, even just a few years ago, it seemed impossible to him. Like he was looking at the life of someone else. Things weren't perfect—no one's life was—but when he measured the happiness he felt now, he knew without a doubt it was the most at peace he'd ever been. The most loved.

He sat and stretched out in the Adirondack chair, his spine popping as he did. It was the off season, but there would be another soon. How much longer would he do this? What else would he even do if he didn't do this? Hockey was all he'd known for so much of his life, and though part of him thought with how much he loved summers, that he would love a downshift. Another part of him wondered what his worth might be outside of the sport.

He stopped himself. That was a negative generalization. Galina had taught him to catch those and work through the logic of them. Shane did not love him for his hockey. They had met *because* of hockey. It was a gift, but not his only one.

He breathed deep, the summer air filled with pine.

Perhaps there was a bigger adventure coming next. Perhaps, he and Shane would continue the talk they kept halfway bringing up then skirting around about having children. Both of them wanted it—both of them were unsure.

He'd never really considered before what he'd be like as a parent, and he had no clue if he would be any good. But Ilya thought he was very good at loving Shane, and very good at loving Anya. He thought he could be very good at loving someone else, too.

He had no real experience with children, other than Hayden and Jackie's, who he adored, though he'd never admit it. Whenever they left the house, a disaster in their wake, Ilya had started to find he missed the sound, the house full of laughter and loud joy. That, he thought, he could do. Even if his own house had never ever felt that way.

Anya climbed the steps of the porch, nudging him with her nose to go back in.

"Alright, alright. Пришло время ужина. Time for dinner."

She recognized the word dinner, both in Russian and in English, and hustled through the door. His phone chimed again just as he poured her food, and Shane's text lit up the screen.

I'll be back soon. From the PR event.

“Such a horrendous liar,” Ilya laughed, rolling his eyes but sending a thumbs up in return with the message *See you soon*. Ilya’s interest was piqued.

Shane’s surprises were never really surprises, but they were always enough to warm what Ilya had once thought would always be an icy space where a heart belonged. He was a horrible liar, but his gift giving skills were something Ilya would always be both in awe of and grateful for.

It was only a few more minutes before Ilya heard the front door open, Anya’s routine repeating as she came to greet Shane as she had Ilya. He hadn’t needed to wait, because he’d watched on the Ring camera as Shane had, oddly enough, emerged from the woods.

“Hey,” Shane said breathlessly as Ilya took him in. Even in his loose shorts and foundation tee, he thought he was stunning. He wanted to put his hands on him.

“How was your PR event in the forest?” he asked, grinning. Shane stammered, red highlighted his freckled cheekbones.

God, but he loved him. He didn’t give him time to dig himself a deeper hole, simply coming forward and kissing him instead. Every kiss still felt electric, like they were back in 2014, spending months apart between seeing each other, even though they’d been in each other’s arms this morning.

“Listen, I know our anniversary isn’t for a week, and we said no gifts, but I may have—”

“You don’t say,” Ilya deadpanned. Shane rolled his eyes, huffing.

“Okay, well come on.” He pulled back, walking to the back door and holding it open for Ilya.

“My gift is in the woods? Is it your PR event?” Shane shoved him playfully as the door shut behind them, leaving the two to walk across the yard and down to the path near the woods where they sometimes did morning runs together.

“You will finally kill me, Hollander?” he asked, knowing the grammar wasn’t quite right, but letting the question hang anyway. His English wasn’t always perfect, but Shane had made it a point to tell him how much he loved Ilya’s accented English over and over. If he’d done it to make Ilya feel better, he’d succeeded.

Shane laughed, shaking his head as he took Ilya’s hand and led him further down the path. All this land that bordered this section of the lake was theirs, almost all the way up to the turn in the road. When Shane had purchased it years ago, he’d wanted privacy, and that privacy had made such a difference in the days before they were out. This place had always felt like a sanctuary to Ilya, even when things were hard, and he felt that peace every time he ran on these wooded paths.

He and Shane bumped together as they walked, their bodies finding each other as often as they could. One bump turned into another, both picking up the pace and walking faster until

Ilya took off, shoving Shane lightly before running ahead on the path.

“It’s not—it’s not a race, Ilya!” But there was laughter in his voice. They were like this often, the spark of competition never really dying between them. And Ilya loved how evenly matched they were. Ilya would always win, of course, but Shane always gave him a close run.

Today, Shane was on his heels—no complaints or banter, almost like he seemed happy to let Ilya lead. Was this part of his gift?

They were approaching the familiar clearing that came right before the path split, one direction to the road and the other to the water. But Ilya didn’t have time to decide which path to take, because today, the clearing held something different. He stopped so hard the dirt flew up in front of him, Shane colliding with his back at the abruptness, hands warm on his skin.

Today, there was something in the familiar clearing that wasn’t there before. He’d run this path a thousand times, but never—never had he...

Ilya stepped forward slowly, then again. His body leaned in as though it was functioning on its own.

A small stone, a burst of flowers, the sun shining down and framing it perfectly.

His breath caught so violently at the recognition that he almost choked.

“What is this?” His voice was a cracked whisper, the emotion a fist around his throat.

He stepped closer, closer again, bending down to touch the name carved into marble. It was so familiar. It had been so long.

“Shane.” The name was a sob, his own voice nearly unrecognizable. It was exactly the same. Exactly. The name, the carvings, the stone itself. The chip in the upper corner. It had devastated Ilya when he’d seen it the first time, his finger running over it over and over again as though he could fix it with touch alone.

But here, now, it was familiar. It was the only piece of Russia he ever truly missed.

This headstone was in much better condition, covered in bright flowers that he would never have found in Moscow. They were bright, the way she deserved, and Ilya could suddenly feel the tears on his face.

Ирина Розанова

Мать. Жена. Любимая.

“How?” He was crying in earnest now—he didn’t care. Shane had seen him cry plenty, the only one who he ever really let see him this way.

“I called in a few favors. Vanya was home for the off season. Moscow wasn’t very far from him, and he took a day trip. I asked if he’d take a lot of pictures, and he did.”

Fuck, Vanya. He was always so kind. He understood what Russia was like, and they’d become fast friends because of it. He didn’t ask much about his summers, and Vanya didn’t offer. He had to know how strange the distance felt—he knew the situation—knew how Russia treated people like Ilya and Shane.

“I took the pictures and had a replica made. I don’t know how close it looks...”

How could Ilya possibly explain to him that it looked so much like it that it was the closest he’d felt to his mother since she died. That having her here, in this place that felt like peace, at the happiest he’d ever been in his life, was a gift like he had never experienced.

“Obviously, it isn’t the same as having her here, but I thought you might find some comfort —” But Ilya was launching into Shane, their bodies colliding as he held him like he might disappear. Held him like he’d just given him something he thought he’d never have again. He felt Shane’s arms soften around him, holding him back tightly.

“You are everything. Everything, Shane, do you hear me?” He pulled back just enough to kiss him, his cooling tears smearing over freckles. Shane pressed his thumbs gently beneath Ilya’s eyes, brushing carefully.

“I’m sorry if this is overstepping—”

“Is not overstepping.” He kissed Shane on the cheek, pressing it a beat longer than normal, before turning back to the stone, crouching slowly, reverently, and reaching back out to touch it again. It felt unreal as he traced the letters, like she could be here.

“She would like this.” He finally found the words, though they, too caught in his throat. “She loved the forest. Loved the quiet places.” He laughed, but it shook. “She would love you, too.”

It wasn’t the first time he had told Shane that, but Ilya truly believed it. Irina had been a soft but strong force, quiet but fierce. He thought she would recognize that in Shane, be impressed with his competitive nature and ferocious loyalty.

“You think so?”

“She would say you are too thin, probably,” Ilya responded as he felt Shane come to sit on the ground at his side. “She was the first person to really care about me. To show me what love was supposed to look like.”

Ilya knew how hard she must have tried to hang on.

“She sounds like she was a smart, wonderful woman.”

“She was,” Ilya said fondly. Then, more softly, “She would be so happy I am loved.”

Shane wordlessly sank against him, shoulder to shoulder, knees touching. Above them, a cool breeze moved through the trees, the lake lapping at the shore just beyond where they sat. For the first time in as long as he could remember, the grief inside Ilya didn't feel as heavy. It felt almost like it had finally been given its own place to sit, to take it from his shoulders.

Ilya leaned his head against Shane's, closing his eyes and breathing in. He imagined coming here, leaving flowers, bringing Anya. He had a flash of, maybe one day, explaining to someone small and curious who Irina Rozanova had been, why she mattered so much. The thought brought the stinging tears back to his eyes.

When they finally stood, Ilya brushed his fingers over the chip in the stone one more time before stepping back. It was perfect.

"Thank you," Ilya said, steady now. The words still weren't enough, but they were true. "This means more than you could ever know."

Shane squeezed his hand.

"Even if you broke our no-gifts rule," Ilya laughed.

"You're telling me that the giant structure badly covered by a blanket in our garage right now isn't doing that?" He tugged Ilya back toward the house. The walk back was slower, both of them quiet, hands entwined.

And if there ever was a doubt, Ilya thought, as the sun filtered through the trees and Shane bumped his shoulder on purpose, it had been answered a long time ago.

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