

you don't have to be sorry for doing it on your own

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76496446) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76496446>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Svetlana Vetrova , Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Friendship , Fluff and Angst , Depression , Implied/Referenced Suicide , Canon Compliant , but only with the show , Character Study , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , references to sex but nothing explicit
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-27 Words: 4,472 Chapters: 1/1

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by [playexodus](#)

Summary

Ilya had realized it the moment he'd opened his eyes a few days prior, too warm under the covers to be comfortable. Nothing had even happened yet, but he'd felt immediately distant from himself. Like somewhere between sleeping and waking, he'd stepped out of his body and into another.

Notes

This fic is set in between Heated Rivalry and The Long Game, somewhere in the first year of their relationship. Ilya has yet to become a free agent and move to Ottawa, but it's going to happen soon. I've taken liberties with the length of time they spend together at the cottage (they have more than two weeks), and my interpretation of their characters is largely derived from the show, not the book.

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

Shane was looking at him again.

Granted, Shane looked at him a lot. Ilya was used to it. Stolen glances. Challenging glares. Puppy eyes. Filthy stares. Glazed looks. Ilya was especially fond of the latter two.

This was different.

Shane sat on the couch, some old game footage playing on low volume from the TV. He wasn't watching it though - his full attention turned to Ilya as he padded into the kitchen. He was holding a steaming mug of something in his hands as he twisted over the back of the couch, elbow resting on the edge. Didn't say a word after murmuring *good morning*.

Ilya made himself coffee, catching glimpses of Shane in between. He was wearing those fucking glasses again, the ones that drove Ilya crazy. Mouth turned down slightly at the corners. Sun streaming through the windows, catching his freckled cheeks. Eyes wider than usual, blinking oh-so-slowly.

Ilya carded his fingers through his messy curls.

He knew what he'd usually say if he caught Shane watching him. Some variation of: *Like what you see? Working up an appetite, hmm? I'm more than just a pretty face, you know. Keep staring like that and we won't be going anywhere tonight. You just like me for my ass, don't you.* Or his personal favourite - *Come here and let me fuck you already, sweetheart.*

But it wasn't going to be that kind of day. It hadn't even been that kind of week. Ilya had realized it the moment he'd opened his eyes a few days prior, too warm under the covers to be comfortable. Nothing had even happened yet, but he'd felt immediately distant from himself. Like somewhere between sleeping and waking, he'd stepped out of his body and into another.

"My parents are asking if you're coming to dinner this weekend," Shane had said, lying beside him, phone in hand.

Ilya had felt his heart sink in a way that he hated himself for. He liked David, liked Yuna. He saw so much of Shane in them - how could he not? But every part of him recoiled at the idea of taking the empty shell of his body and stepping into that warmth that Shane had grown up with, that Ilya had only gotten a brief taste of before his own mother had died. Of poisoning that, somehow.

"Mmm, I don't know, I'd rather just stay here. We still have - what - another sixteen burgers left in the freezer? Still need to get through those."

Shane gave him a long look, then shoved him. "Fuck off, Rozanov."

Ilya had given him his widest grin, and said, "Make me."

In the present, Ilya went through the motions. Bread in the toaster. Egg, cracked in a preheated pan. Avocado, pitted, de-skinned and sliced. He cleaned as he cooked, the way Shane preferred to do it. Then - plate, toast, butter, avocado, red pepper flakes, fried egg, in that order.

He ate in silence. Shane sipped his drink.

A few weeks before they started dating, he remembered snapping at Shane on the phone. He hadn't been himself, between his rib injury, the anxiety over Shane's concussion, losing the playoff game - and he knew Shane could tell. He hadn't meant to do it, but it came out all cruel anyway. "Enough with the questions, okay? It's not helping if you just keep - poking around. Can you just - I don't know, wait until I'm ready?"

Shane had gone very quiet, and the guilt had followed immediately. "I - no. Shane, that was not -"

"No," Shane had interrupted. "No, it's okay. I can wait. I'll wait."

Ilya finished eating, rinsed his plate and knife and placed them both in the dishwasher.

Then he picked up his mug of coffee, and went to his boyfriend.

Shane relaxed into the couch as he came around. He was still looking at Ilya, his eyes intent and searching like they'd been all week.

"Looking at you, no one would know we're in the off season," Ilya said dryly, planting a kiss against his cheek. "If you want to find the flaws in your game, I can list them for you right now. No need to go through the footage."

Shane rolled his eyes fondly. "You're worse than Mom. But no, I got bored waiting for you to wake up." He took Ilya's mug and placed it with his own on the table in front of them. Then he wrapped his arms around him, holding him close. He tucked his head into his neck, hair tickling the underside of his chin, the soft scent of him wading into Ilya's senses.

Ilya felt his throat constrict, even though his arms automatically returned the embrace.

"Shane," he said, voice cracking slightly.

Shane was silent for a moment, then he ruffled his hair. "Okay."

He withdrew, but Ilya still reached for his hand, drawing it into his lap. He rubbed at his wrist, tracing the lines of his palm with his fingers. Then he shuffled a bit closer, enough to let their bodies brush against each other.

"Talk to me," Shane said.

Ilya pressed his lips together. *It's Shane*, he reminded himself. *You don't have to pretend*. "I feel all - wrong. Empty inside." He hesitated. "Or - like I'm walking on ice, but no skates. Waiting to fall. I don't know, it's hard to explain."

He wanted to be himself. He wanted to tease Shane until he laughed, wanted to dance him around the room to terrible American pop music, wanted to talk hockey until Shane got so riled up he'd need to go for a swim. And Ilya would follow.

He wanted to want those things.

He looked at Shane again, wishing he knew how to articulate his feelings in English. He wondered if Shane had made enough progress in Russian to understand him if he tried to explain it. Then he thought about it and realized - even in Russian, he wasn't sure it would come out right.

Shane bit his lip. "I've been thinking."

Ilya raised an eyebrow.

"You're all - you keep withdrawing. Like sometimes," Shane seemed to struggle a bit, his hands tangling together and then coming apart. "I think you're somewhere else, and I can't reach you."

Ilya looked away again. Panic sank its claws into his throat. And the guilt, the fear that Shane had maybe had enough of him being like this, made his hearing go fuzzy. Shane was still talking, but he was too muddled to listen. He scrambled to hold himself together, swallow past the discomfort.

"- you've had a long year and talking to someone might help. I was thinking...when was the last time you saw Svetlana?" Shane said it so hesitantly, Ilya wasn't sure he heard him right.

"What?"

"Well, if you don't want to you don't have to." He looked pained at his reaction. "I just thought, talking to someone without having to say it in English might help. And she loves you, right?"

Ilya looked at him for a moment. The tangled panicky feeling unhooked its claws, retreating. "Right."

Shane seemed relieved, warmed by his response. He took Ilya's hand again, his bottom lip jutting out slightly the way it did when he was trying to control his expression. "Do you think you'll be able to see her soon? Maybe she'll come to Montreal?"

"You - you would be okay with that?"

"Yes? Why wouldn't I be?"

"My ex-girlfriend. You want her to visit? Take time away from us?" He gestured to the space between them.

Shane smiled wryly. "I don't think you've ever referred to her as your ex-girlfriend before."

Ilya waved his hand. "My ex, my friend that I used to have sex with years ago. I thought you were the jealous type, yes? You don't like her."

"You say that like you're completely normal about Rose," Shane said pointedly. Then he sighed. "It's not her, really. You clearly love her, and she's not going anywhere. So I can either learn to love her, or be upset every time she comes up." Ilya watched as he shrugged and picked up his mug again, swallowing before he continued. "She makes you happy, so..."

The goal horn blared from the tv, loud in the silence that followed. Ilya didn't look away from Shane. Shane didn't look away from him either.

He must have been wrestling with this all week, Ilya realized. Watching, observing, cataloguing. Holding himself back from prying the answers out of him. Thinking, all on his own, to figure out what might return Ilya to himself. Then letting go of his own jealousy to make the suggestion.

"Shane," he said. He turned his head away, willing himself not to crumble.

His boyfriend opened his arms. "Okay?"

Ilya crawled forward, letting himself be held. *Just for a bit*, he told his reluctant alien body. *Just let me have this.*

Sveta landed in Montreal a few days later. She looked so out of place in the airport, with her oversized fur coat and her curls impeccable after hours of flying. *Just wear a bonnet*, she'd told Ilya. *It'll keep your hair from going flat and frizzy when you're asleep.*

Absolutely not, Ilya had responded. Besides, hockey helmets and sweat always ruined any type of styling, so he reserved his efforts for off-days.

He took her suitcase. "What's in here that's making it so heavy? Aren't you leaving for America in a few days?"

She clicked her tongue. "Are you complaining? I brought those snacks you wanted, we can dump them right now if it's too much."

Ilya grinned. "You got that brand of *tula pryanyik* that I like? Finally. I tried to get them shipped to Boston but the package got lost."

Sveta looked at him fondly. "It's good to see you smile. I've been worried about you."

He lifted her suitcase into the trunk. "Yeah. Sure."

Her eyes followed him as he went to open the door for her, but she said nothing else, so neither did he.

It had been a while since they had spent time together. Sveta hadn't said anything about it, but Ilya was hoping they could just stay at the hotel, order room service. He wanted to gorge

himself on snacks and watch hockey with her until he had to drive her back to the airport, like old times.

“So. Is *Jane* keeping you happy out here?” Sveta said.

Ilya kept his eyes on the road. “Mhmm.” He cleared his throat. “He - he’s got a cottage outside the city. In Lanaudière,” he said carefully, trying not to mangle the r sound. Shane had said it so perfectly, rolled right off his tongue. Ilya smiled. *Talk dirty to me again, sweetheart*, he’d responded at the time. Shane had gone an adorable shade of pink and mumbled, *It’s just French*.

Sveta hummed. “So I’m not going to get to meet him?”

“What, I’m not enough for you?” Ilya made a wounded noise.

She rapped him lightly on the arm. “You call me from the other side of the world and I come running. The least you can do is introduce me to your boyfriend.”

Ilya shook his head. He turned into the parking garage below their hotel. “This weekend’s for us. It’s a long drive out to the cottage anyway, and he’s got plans with his parents.”

Sveta gave him a long look. “If you say so.”

Ilya got his wish.

Barring his morning workout, they both spent the day in bed. He ordered poutine from a random restaurant down the street - a large for Sveta, a small for him. He wasn’t fond of the sloppy mix of gravy and squeaky cheese, but he enjoyed it more when it was layered on top of chicken. She preferred the traditional version.

He had missed his best friend. Something in him eased as they fell into familiar patterns - quitting the movie halfway through to watch hockey, arguing about the players, stealing from each others’ plates. He was having fun, he really was. But the ache inside him persisted. It made him - withdraw, like Shane said. He could tell, because Sveta kept giving him odd looks. He felt more and more like an impostor, even as he willed himself to be normal.

By the end of the day, he was wound up enough to suggest they both go for a walk.

They ventured into an arcade, where Ilya goaded Sveta into spending a decent amount of money trying to win a Pikachu plushie. When she finally got it, she yelped in victory, shoving it in his face as he doubled over in laughter. She huffed at him and said, “Your niece really loves Pokemon, you know that? I’m taking this back for her.”

Ilya stumbled. The claws were back in his throat.

“Fuck,” he whispered. He didn’t have the ability to defend himself against this - this overwhelming wave that he didn’t have a name for, sweeping the ground from beneath him. His surroundings blurred as tears spilled down his cheeks.

Dimly, he was aware of Sveta's arms around him, calling his name. "What's wrong?" she kept asking.

Everything, he thought. *Everything*.

The first time Ilya won a hockey game, his mother was watching from the stands.

He hadn't seen her smile like that in a long time, all because of him. Pride shone from her eyes as she embraced him after he skated off the rink.

"You were wonderful! You're such a natural, honey!" She felt so warm when she hugged him, her curls tickling his face.

Even his father's face looked less stiff as he nodded his approval. "Be more aggressive if you want to score goals and be a real player," he said. But it didn't matter to Ilya. His father could say whatever he wanted, so long as his mom looked like that. Happy.

The older Ilya got, the fewer games his mother attended. Ilya kept playing anyway, eager to get home to tell her about it, see her face, feel her warmth again. Her smile grew so strained, like translucent glass. Then Ilya was twelve years old, and he came home, and she was on the bathroom floor, colder than ice.

An accident, his father insisted. Ilya knew better. He should have been there. He should have done something, anything, to help her. He should have taken her hand.

He vaguely recalled Sveta guiding them both back to the hotel, letting him lean his weight on her. She took off his shoes and sat him down on the bed. When he didn't move a muscle, she cradled his face gently in her hands.

"Should I call Jane, maybe?"

"I'm fine," he shrugged her off. "I'll be fine, you don't have to hover so much."

She glared at him and turned away immediately, but he caught her wrist.

"Alright, sorry. That was mean, okay? Sorry."

She looked at him, her eyes impossibly sad. "I always wished I could stop you from trying to hide how you really felt. That's just how you've been. You crack jokes, you smile, you piss people off and you pretend. You draw the line, and you don't let anyone in. Then you met Jane." She stroked his hair. "You changed. Slowly, but you changed. I thought - you finally found someone that you wouldn't have to draw any lines for."

Ilya withered into himself, covering his face with his hands.

“What happened, Ilya?” She said softly. “You feel so far away again. You keep going places in that head of yours and you think no one notices -”

“I *know*,” Ilya said, voice breaking. “I know that. I’ve just - it’s fucking hard, okay?”

He felt the tears slip through, unable to stop himself.

“It’s not your fault,” she said. Ilya heard her snuffle and realized she was crying too. “I know you’re trying. You’re doing your best, you’re always doing your best.”

He hugged her close, face buried in her stomach as she stroked his hair. He cried for a while like that.

He hadn’t realized how closely Sveta had been watching him. They had never had this kind of conversation before, except for the few words they had exchanged at his father’s funeral. He’d always valued her, but maybe he’d been too self absorbed to notice her reaching out for him, just waiting for him to take the next step.

By the time she helped him change out of his clothes and ordered them both dinner, Ilya had made his decision. It was time to unhook the claws himself, one by one.

“When I started to like Shane for real, it was all I could think about,” he began.

Sveta turned slowly from the door, holding their food. “So we’re using real names now?”

Ilya felt his cheeks warm, despite himself. “I’m trying this new thing where I don’t hide my feelings from my best friend, okay?”

At that, the amusement on her face turned to warmth. “Okay, sorry.” She laid the food out on the bed and gestured for him to continue.

“He was - he *is* sweet. And lovely. I just wanted to be around him all the time. I didn’t want to go back to Russia, didn’t want to hear from my brother, didn’t want to think about anything else because Shane made me so happy. Then my father died and I thought it would be easy to let it all go. I did, all year.” He took a deep breath.

“But since the end of the season, I’ve been waking up with this terrible feeling,” he said, waving a hand around his chest. “It’s hard to explain. I feel...if I open up my chest, there would be nothing but empty space inside. And how could I tell Shane that? How could I possibly tell the person that makes me the happiest man in the world, that I feel like an impostor in his wonderful life?” He felt himself start crying again, all his carefully built habits to mask his feelings deserting him at once. “He doesn’t deserve that. He’s done nothing to make me feel that way. And then I just want to go home, to my mother - but I can’t.” He threw up his hands. “So what am I supposed to do? My father is gone, my mother is gone, my brother is terrible and I can’t do anything about it. I couldn’t do anything for my parents, for anyone, and it’s killing me. I might never know what my niece likes.”

“Ilya,” Sveta said softly.

“I miss home, but I have no home left in Russia. I have nowhere to go. I’m not - *needed* anywhere.” His voice broke, and he buried his face in his hands.

She gave him a long, sad look. Then she handed him a box of tissues from the side table.

“I want you to listen when I say this.” She waited until he nodded before continuing. “You have done enough. You are everything, Ilya. Yes - don’t look at me like that - you *are*. That place, your father and your brother, they were never home for you. They were your blood, but not your family.” She squeezed his hand. “You deserve a home and a family that needs *you*. That loves *you*, not just what you can give. Give yourself permission, okay? Put down roots in the place where you belong, for once in your life.”

Something inside of Ilya clicked back into place, his body feeling just a little more like his own.

Give yourself permission.

“Okay,” he said slowly. “Okay.”

Sveta kissed his forehead. “I love you. And I’m sorry if I pushed you too hard - I can wait until you’re ready to introduce me to Shane.”

Ilya smiled, despite himself. “It was actually his idea to invite you to visit. He could tell I wasn’t feeling like myself.” He took a deep breath. “Want to meet him? Tomorrow, for dinner.”

She grinned. “Sure. Let’s have dinner with your *sweet and lovely* Shane.”

“Hey,” Shane said, soft and familiar through the phone speaker. “You okay?”

Immediately, Ilya felt warm. “I am now.”

“You sound better,” Shane observed, amused. “Had fun?”

“We hung out in the hotel room, mostly. It was good.”

“That’s good.”

Ilya hummed. “Where are you?”

“At my parents.”

“Any plans tomorrow? Around dinnertime?”

“Hmm? Oh, loose ones, but I can get out of them. Are you coming back early? I thought Svetlana had a red-eye flight.”

Ilya sucked the back of his teeth. “Actually, I’m bringing her with me. She wants to meet you.”

Shane was quiet.

“If you are okay with that. I can tell her no. But she’s been waiting to meet you.”

He heard Shane inhale over the speaker. “Okay,” he said finally. “Yes. Okay.”

“It’s okay? Sure?”

“Yes. I mean, I’m trying. I want to meet her too.”

Ilya wanted to hug him. “On second thought, she always said she thought you were gorgeous,” he said. “I’m going to have to tell her to back off.”

Shane huffed out a laugh, as Ilya knew he would. “She did not say that.”

“She did. She has good taste, like me.”

Shane was silent for a moment. Ilya could tell he was processing, could imagine the pink flush in his cheeks and the little smile on his face. “Okay,” Shane said finally. “I don’t know what we’re gonna eat, but I guess we can figure that out.”

“I’ve got it, don’t worry. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Ilya hung up. There it was again - that feeling like he’d just been embraced for a long time.

It was nice.

Dinner went off without a hitch, so much so that Shane agreed to come with them to drop Sveta off at the airport afterwards. Once they arrived, Ilya unloaded Sveta’s (considerably lighter) suitcase from the car and handed it over. Shane stood with him, closer than he usually would when they were in public. Sveta regarded them both, a fond smile on her face.

“Jane,” she said warmly. “Thank you for welcoming me into your home.” She kissed his cheek. “And for loving Ilya enough to trust me too. I promise I won’t break that trust.”

Shane nodded. “Sorry for all the - you know. Secrecy and stuff.”

“Don’t apologize, not to me.” She smiled. “Ilya was right - you are sweet. Take care, okay? And you,” she said, turning to Ilya. “You’ll remember what I said, right?”

You are everything. He nodded.

“Good. I love you,” she said in Russian.

“Love you too,” he answered. “Text me when you land.”

“Ok. Bye!” She sauntered off, rolling her suitcase behind her.

They got back into the car.

“So,” Ilya said.

“So,” Shane repeated.

“You like her.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Whatever,” he said. “You told her you think I’m sweet?”

Ilya smiled. “You are. You were sweet tonight, yes? At dinner.”

His boyfriend shrugged. “She’s smart. She loves hockey as much as my mom. It wasn’t hard.”

“Still,” Ilya insisted. “You were trying.”

Shane finally gave him a small smile, nudging his shoulder. “Let’s go home.”

“How did you know? That seeing her was what I needed?”

They were back at the cottage, on the couch again. Shane had his feet tucked into Ilya’s lap, a blanket covering both of them. Ilya gently massaged his ankles, both of them not paying much attention to the TV screen showing reruns of an old show Ilya didn’t recognize.

Shane shrugged. “I realized there’s this whole part of you that I’ve never met, that she knows. You speak the same language. Literally, but also -” he tapped his own chest, “- right here. I thought maybe you would feel, I dunno, more at home talking to her. Or something.”

He sounded nonchalant about it. But there was something in the twist of his mouth, the way he couldn’t meet Ilya’s eyes as he said it.

“Not exactly,” Ilya said carefully. He rubbed Shane’s calf as he thought about what to say. “You’re right, she knows a lot about me. Doesn’t ask all these questions, like you. But she is not the one I feel at home with.”

Ilya didn’t elaborate, but he didn’t have to. His boyfriend looked back at him, eyes crinkling at the edges.

“I wish I was better at this -” Shane gestured between them. “Reading you, I mean. I’ve never been good at that kind of thing with people. I got scared. I didn’t know where you were, or how to make things better.” He swung his feet off his lap and tucked himself into Ilya’s side. “Then I thought you must be scared too. And I wondered if you felt like you had anyone to go to when you were scared, before we started dating.”

Ilya's eyes watered. *Sweet, always so sweet.* It was almost more than he could bear. He took Shane's hand and brought it to his lips, kissing his fingers gently. "It's not just you," he said quietly. "I mean, it's also me. I'm not used to - talking. Sveta said before I met you, I draw the line and I don't let anyone in, not even her." He swallowed. "There are things she understands, about my father, my brother, Russia. Things I don't know how to explain, but I will try. Just give me time."

Shane looked up at him, the fondness in his eyes warm and familiar. "It's not that, Ilya. I mean, don't get me wrong, I want you to talk to me about that stuff. I wish you'd look at me and just...magically feel better." He patted Ilya's chest, right over his heart. "But that's not really possible, or fair. We all need people who understand different parts of us. Anything that makes you feel better makes me feel better too."

Ilya smiled. "That's very..." He hesitated, putting his hands together and expanding them in a circle as he searched for the word. "Big-hearted? Of you."

"'Big-hearted'," Shane repeated, smiling. "Sure."

"What? It's not correct?"

"No, I think it's actually fine, that's what makes it better. I'm impressed."

"I don't get it..."

Shane kissed his cheek. "English is a stupid language. I'm going to get really good at Russian so you never have to talk to Svetlana again."

Ilya pulled him closer. "You're wrong, you know."

"Hmm? About what?"

"When I look at you, I *do* magically feel better. Not completely," he acknowledged.

"Sometimes only a little. But I always do."

Ilya wished he'd said as much a long time ago, just so he could've seen the delighted smile spread over his boyfriend's face sooner.

"Yeah?"

Ilya nodded, leaning in to kiss him. "You're just that sexy," he said, pitching his voice lower. "How could I not feel better -" He laughed as Shane shoved at him, his cheeks flushing again.

Here. Ilya would put down roots here, right where he belonged.

End Notes

Thanks for reading!

1. Title is from Matilda by Harry Styles.
2. Tula pryanik is a spiced gingerbread with a fruity filling.
3. Katya (of Trixie and Katya) said that Ilya would probably call Svetlana 'Sveta', which I thought was nice so I kept it in this fic.

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