

One Unending Fight

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One Unending Fight

by [broccolicheddarchicken](#)

Summary

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Shane still didn't know what to say, and he still had no clue why Ilya had brought it up. "Oh."

Ilya looked up at him then. His eyebrows were slightly furrowed, his jaw tight. Something was going unsaid.

Is he asking me for permission?

Honestly, Shane wanted to tell him no. Ilya going to that party felt like a waste of their time together, and they got so *little* of it. Still, if he really wanted to go, Shane wouldn't stop him.

"Did you want to go or something?" Shane asked. He pulled the pillow out of his lap. His feet had been tucked under his legs, so he moved them to be flat on the ground. "I could stay here, I guess. Or head back to—"

"I want you to go too. I want you to come with me to the party."

The Boxing Day fight from chapter 22 of *The Long Game*, from Shane's perspective. (AKA "I already chose you, Hollander.")

Notes

Fun fact: I only wrote this because I felt like I needed to understand this fight from Shane's perspective in order to write a DIFFERENT fic for the upcoming promptfest, lol.

Title from chapter 23 of *The Long Game*. All of the dialogue in this is pulled directly from chapter 22 of *The Long Game*, I didn't write a single word of it.

thank you to the darling artimus13 for beta reading this fic!! couldn't have done it without you. you really bring my polish up to the next level every time lol.

As always: I hope you enjoy reading this at least half as much as I enjoyed writing it :)

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

Ilya was weird for all of Boxing Day. Not weird in a way that Shane was overly concerned about, but weird in a way that he definitely noticed. It was like he wasn't really all there. It was a stark change from what Shane was used to. Ilya was often distant or spacey when they were on the phone during road trips, but he could ascribe it to Ilya missing him. Usually, when they were together, Ilya was happy and carefree and lost in the moment *with* Shane.

Though, hadn't it been like this for all of Christmas? They'd been together for days and Ilya had been teetering on some kind of edge for almost all of it. He was hiding it behind his usual smiles, but there were flashes of something brewing underneath. Ilya was so good at grounding Shane; Shane had no clue how save Ilya from his own head.

Lately, even before the break, Shane wasn't the biggest fan of Ilya's moods—today wasn't an exception. They'd been tip-toeing around each other for most of December, and he was starting to feel like something big was wedging itself between them, but both of them were putting on the blinders and pretending it wasn't there so they could enjoy the few moments they had together. Shane wished he knew what it was. He wished he knew what was going through Ilya's mind, but Shane couldn't ask, not really. Prying just annoyed Ilya and made him close off even more.

It was like dealing with a skittish feral cat—Shane knew he had to wait for Ilya to come to him—which was the exact opposite of the way he liked to handle things. He hated to let a problem sit; it left him feeling anxious and disjointed, sometimes to the point of nausea. His first instinct was to fix things right away and not stop until they were completely repaired.

In this case, he couldn't fix things through his own solo brute force. It took Ilya's cooperation, which he didn't have. Resigned to the fact that whatever it was wouldn't be getting brought up before he left the next day, he let Ilya direct their activities. Ilya made him his breakfast smoothie, and they worked out for most of the morning. He pretended not to notice Ilya chewing on the inside of his cheek when he thought Shane wasn't looking. They showered together and after they laughed and kissed, and it felt almost okay. At least they weren't bickering every five minutes like they had yesterday.

Maybe Shane was overthinking things. Maybe Ilya was just dealing with residual stress from all their fighting on Christmas. Maybe none of their little arguments had been about anything either of them actually cared about. It was so stupid in hindsight. They'd always had a bad habit of snipping at each other over dumb shit, but Shane felt like it was happening a lot more lately.

Whatever, they were over it now. Today was going much better.

It was just past lunchtime when Ilya suggested they go watch an episode or two of a show they'd been working through together. They rarely got to actually watch it in the same room, they usually would watch it from buses or planes or hotel rooms and text or call about it after.

Shane thought it would be nice to be, like, a regular couple for once and watch it together, and maybe it would get Ilya's mind off of whatever was bothering him. They settled on the

couch, Shane sitting next to his boyfriend with a pillow in his lap. He grabbed the remote to turn the TV on.

"Bood is having a party tonight," Ilya said from next to him, sort of quietly.

Huh?

The statement was random enough to temporarily distract Shane from what he was doing. "Zane Boodram? He's having a party on Boxing Day?"

Shane didn't know much about Bood. He liked to grill, he was generally well-behaved on the ice, and like Ilya, he was a better player than his time on the Centaurs would imply. Shane liked him purely for the fact that he was Ilya's friend, but he wasn't sure why they were talking about him and his Boxing Day party.

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"I want you to go too. I want you to come with me to the party."

For a second, Shane thought he'd heard Ilya wrong. He waited, reprocessed, and concluded that no, he hadn't—Ilya really did want him to come with him to that party.

That changed the conversation entirely. He twisted on the couch so he could face Ilya straight on. "You want me to go to a party with your teammates? Why?"

"They are cool people. You might have fun."

Ilya's voice was casual, but he still seemed to be carrying an edge. Shane had no doubt Ilya's teammates were great. He always said that the overall "vibes" on the Centaurs were much better than they had been in Boston.

The thought of going to a *party* with Ilya was exciting. Exhilarating, even. Shane had garnered a reputation for being a massive stick in the mud, but that was mostly because the one person who could get him out of his shell wasn't an option to spend time with in public.

Right. As excited as he was about the prospect of going out with Ilya, they couldn't. Ilya wasn't an option. He would at least try to let him down gently.

"But... wouldn't it be weird, if we showed up together?"

Ilya shrugged. "They knew you would be in Ottawa for Christmas. We are friends, so I invite you to a party. No big deal."

Ilya had put some thought into this. Shane decided that the least he could do was genuinely consider it. It was true that he and Ilya were publicly friends, and friends invited each other to things, right? Maybe Shane had been looking for something to do and asked his good friend Ilya Rozanov, notorious party animal, if he had any plans.

On the other hand, this was Shane's hometown. He had other friends here, and he and Ilya weren't seen as *close*. Publicly, the understanding was that they had a somewhat flimsy relationship based around running the Irina Foundation. They hadn't ever been spotted just *hanging out*. Would anyone really buy that Ilya was Shane's first call?

Shane shook his head when he came to his conclusion. "Too weird. I don't think so."

Ilya flexed his fingers for a few seconds. He didn't say anything. Then, clearly annoyed, he got up and walked in the direction of the kitchen.

"You can go. It's fine," Shane said as he followed behind. He hadn't meant to upset Ilya—it was just too risky. He didn't want to keep Ilya away from his friends; maybe being able to go alone was a fair compromise?

"*Great*," Ilya spat. Shane flinched. He wasn't used to the venom. Not from his boyfriend, with his sweet words and his Russian crooning. It caught him off guard.

He *really* didn't understand what was going on.

"What's wrong?" Shane asked.

"What isn't wrong?"

Lots of things, Shane wanted to say. It was Boxing Day. They were together. Things had been good so far. Was Ilya really this unhappy? Had Shane misread their entire day together?

What if it wasn't just about the party? What if it was about *them*?

Shane was a mix of worried about Ilya and irritated with him. It was a new emotion, but it had become common the last few weeks. "What does *that* mean?"

Ilya whipped around so fast that his hair bounced.

"It means I have a boyfriend who doesn't want anyone to know I am his boyfriend."

Yeah, Shane barely bit back. *Nobody is supposed to know*. That was the whole point. They'd both known that was the way it would be when this first started. It's not like it would be

advantageous for *Ilya* if his friends knew about their relationship. Hell, it would probably be worse for him. Shane was pretty damn sure that Ilya was terrified of getting sent back to Russia.

"Uh, sorry. Did I miss something? I thought we were on the same page about this."

Ilya was turning back and forth in the kitchen, shifting his weight between his feet. He ran his hand through his hair. "We are not on the same *anything*."

What the fuck was even going on right now? The beginning and the end of it was that they could *not* be seen in public together. It would be the death of both of them—Ilya knew that!

"I don't fucking understand you." Shane was exasperated. They'd been having a good day and this argument felt like total nonsense. Why couldn't they just watch the stupid show?

"Sorry," Ilya said with a nasty tilt of his head. "My English, you know."

For fuck's sake. Like Shane had ever used their language barrier against Ilya. He didn't know how they'd both gotten so angry, but it was too late to salvage, now.

"That's not what I—" Shane started, and then cut himself off. Ilya's English wasn't the point right now. Ilya had *known* that wasn't what Shane meant and was trying to get him sidetracked.

Frustration and confusion were beginning to turn to actual anger. Shane was done with looking at this whole thing sideways—Ilya was going to tell him exactly what he meant by all of it. "Could you please explain what the fuck is happening? Because last I checked we didn't go to each other's team parties. Or tell anyone about our relationship."

"No," Ilya said. He was standing over Shane. Shane had to tip his head back to keep eye contact. "I don't tell anyone about our relationship. *You* tell Hayden, and Jackie, and Rose, and your parents, and who the fuck knows who else."

The words irritated Shane—no, they *infuriated* him. It was unfair. Shane hadn't 'told' Hayden or Jackie or his parents, and Ilya knew it. Being discovered was not the same thing as sharing. Ilya *also* knew that although his parents had found out the wrong way, their acceptance meant the world to Shane. The day they sat down and explained themselves to the Hollanders was one of the most impactful days of Shane's life. Ilya had been so sweet and supportive, and had even called Shane his boyfriend for the first time. In the years since, his parents had accepted Ilya into their family entirely. Ilya should be fucking *grateful* they knew.

Was he seriously going to spit that back in Shane's face?

And then Rose. That was another thing entirely. God forbid Shane tell one friend, who was a literal movie star and knew better than anyone to respect their privacy. For fuck's sake, he'd gotten Ilya's permission first! Did Ilya think he just ran around, mouthing off to anyone who asked?

"That's literally everyone! You know that."

"It is five more people than I have told."

Certainly that wasn't true. Certainly Ilya had told *someone*, at some point. Shane just couldn't remember who off the top of his head. He waved a hand in the air as he searched for a name... and came up blank. Unfortunately for Ilya, this conversation had gone dirty a while ago, and Shane was completely unwilling to concede his boyfriend a point. He snatched at the one person he'd come up with.

"What about Ryan Price?"

Sure, Ryan had also *found out* and not been told, but Ilya had already started that game by bringing up his parents and Hayden.

"Oh, yes. My best friend Ryan Price. I have not spoken to him since the last camp."

"Well—"

Well, that was true. Shane had known Ryan was a weak example before he'd brought him up, but he was grasping at straws.

"I have *no one*," Ilya said. "No one I can talk to about us."

"That's not true. My parents love you."

They did. On the phone, Mom often told Shane how fun Ilya was, how much they loved watching games with him or having him over for game nights, how he was such a lovely addition to their family. If Ilya needed someone to talk to, Shane's parents would be there.

Ilya didn't respond. He tipped his head back and let out a dramatic sigh, walking back to the living room. He was acting like a bratty fucking teenager, and Shane was sick of it. It's not like this relationship was a walk in the park for Shane. It's not like Shane hadn't wanted to tell other people. He'd had to lie to J.J.'s fucking face more times than he could count.

It's not like the force of keeping them a secret wasn't threatening to tear *Shane* apart, too.

Shane followed Ilya into the living room; he was getting real sick of Ilya walking away. "It's not easy for me either, you know. We're both hiding, and we've both made sacrifices that—"

Shane had still been walking towards him when Ilya whipped around again. His turn was so sudden that they nearly bumped into each other. Shane stopped himself just in time.

"What sacrifices, Shane? What have *you* given up?"

He said it like Shane wasn't pulling his weight in their relationship. Was Ilya being purposefully obtuse? Shane was risking his *life's fucking work* to be with this man. Apparently that wasn't enough for him. What the fuck more did Ilya need? Shane didn't have anything else to give.

"Seriously? If we get outed, our fucking careers might be over! Everything I care about—" Shane snapped his fingers "—gone."

"Everything," Ilya deadpanned. He'd been shifting and fidgeting this entire conversation, but now he was unnaturally still, feet planted on the ground. He was still staring at Shane, no, he was staring *through* him.

Don't be ridiculous, Shane wanted to say. Ilya was being annoyingly pedantic—obviously, not literally every single thing Shane cared about would disappear if he got outed, but that didn't mean it wouldn't be a fucking catastrophe. What Ilya was trying to imply pissed him off further. *Yes, Ilya, for fuck's sake, I care about you.*

Fine. "Not *everything*." He'd concede, if only to get them focused again. "But hockey is pretty fucking important to me."

Ilya scoffed. "No shit."

The anger that had been ebbing inside him for this entire conversation finally boiled over. Shane was not about to be insulted by his fucking All-Star boyfriend for being dedicated to his sport. It wasn't *his* fault Ilya couldn't win a game anymore.

And then it clicked.

Is that what this was? Ilya's own career had gone to shit, so he didn't feel the need to protect it, and he was annoyed that Shane still wanted to keep his? Hell, maybe Ilya was trying to take Shane down with him. If Ilya was going to turn this into an ultimatum between him and hockey, he'd better start making some plans for where he'd spend his summer.

"Oh, fuck you. Sorry I still want to win cups instead of smoking weed with my teammates between losses."

Shane regretted the jab as soon as he saw Ilya's pained expression. He had already been angry—they both had been for a while now—but that sentence *really* set him off. He turned on Shane, his eyes wide, his lips parted, and took a single ragged breath. His hands curled into fists, held for a moment, then released.

It was only then that Shane realized: the tone of Ilya's anger had shifted. They'd been acting openly bitchy towards each other since this first started, but now his rage seemed... quiet. Controlled. He was keeping it on a tight leash.

Shane came to his conclusion slowly. Ilya was worried about what would happen if he let it go.

"You wouldn't even choose me, would you?" Ilya asked in a deliberate voice. "If it is between me and hockey."

What kind of a question is that?

"Of course I would," Shane said after a moment's hesitation. He wished it had been instant, but in the space between hearing the question and speaking, his mind did him the favor of

pointing out his hypocrisy: not thirty seconds ago, he'd thought the opposite of what he was now saying.

No. The hypothetical he'd considered earlier was different. If *Ilya* made it an ultimatum, Shane would choose hockey, because that wasn't fucking fair. If *circumstance* forced him to pick, he'd take Ilya. Always.

"*Would you?*" Ilya asked. Fuck. He was still staring Shane down.

It was too much. Shane felt himself flinch under Ilya's gaze, pulling his head back slightly.

Fine. Maybe Shane was struggling a little. But he *would* choose Ilya. He knew he would. That was enough. That had to be enough.

Was Ilya expecting him to tell him it would be easy? It wasn't fair. He'd put everything he had into his game for thirty years; forgive him if the thought of letting his whole life go to waste was a little unsettling.

Surely Ilya didn't understand how it felt to be asked to pick between your two loves. He adjusted his stance, balanced himself, and braced for the coming fight.

"*Would you choose me?*" He tilted his chin up when he asked the question.

Like Shane, Ilya didn't answer right away. He was flexing his fingers again, his shoulders almost shaking with his breaths. Shane couldn't recall another time he'd looked so *angry*, like a wildfire was being kept just under the surface of his skin.

Answer the question.

"You should go," Ilya finally said. It was anticlimactic.

No way, there was no way Shane was leaving right now. Why the fuck was Ilya not answering him? Shane had answered. He'd answered quickly, even if he'd struggled with it more than he'd have liked.

Maybe Ilya *had* come to an answer in his mind; maybe that answer was no.

Suddenly, this conversation felt important. Suddenly, Shane's body went cold and he needed to know. He needed to know what Ilya's answer was. Ilya was *once again* walking away, this time headed towards the stairs. *Once again*, Shane had to follow.

"What? No way. Fuck that. Answer the question."

"No," Ilya's tone was firm. "Go home, Shane. We can talk... later."

Shane's brow furrowed. Was Ilya really kicking him out? Why the hell would Ilya do that now, during a very important conversation, when he'd never done that before? Shane had to know. Ilya had never been kicked out or left Shane's place even after some absolute knockouts. Shane had stormed out of Ilya's two or three times, but Shane was Shane. Ilya

was... he wasn't supposed to want Shane to leave. Even when they were at their worst, Ilya always seemed desperate for a few more hours together.

He couldn't truly want Shane to leave, could he?

The confusion must have been clear on Shane's face, because Ilya clarified. "I don't want to look at you right now. I don't want to talk to you. Go home."

Wait. *Oh god*. Ilya's answer really was no, wasn't it? He simply wasn't brave enough to admit it. Hockey was the only consistent thing that had ever been there for Ilya. Despite the years of history between them, he could easily replace Shane with one of the thousands of women or hundreds of men he'd been with before—and during—their time together.

Shane felt abruptly bitter. He ignored the rage on Ilya's face because he wanted his fucking answer, damn it. It was only fair.

Say it, he thought. Say you'd pick hockey over me, and then we can stop pretending I'm wrong about this whole thing.

"Would you *choose* me?"

Ilya's reaction came so suddenly that Shane didn't have time to process it. His face screwed up as he took one, two, and then three steps in Shane's direction. Shane had no choice but to back up until he was up against the living room wall. Then, more forcefully than he would have expected, Ilya's hand was flat against his chest, pinning him in place. He gasped from the contact and the surprise; his breath was coming in quick pants, a jolting, primal flash of adrenaline at being physically cornered.

Well. This *also* hadn't happened before.

Shane took stock of his situation. Ilya's other arm was caging him in, the pressure on his collarbone was firm. His stomach lurched when he came to the realization: if Ilya didn't let him out, there was no way he'd be able to push his way past him.

Never before had being pinned by Ilya felt anything less than comforting.

Shane hadn't ever been intimidated by Ilya's size. Partially because he knew Ilya would never use it against him, and partially because Shane wasn't some delicate flower himself. Yes, Ilya would use his strength to toss Shane around and his weight to hold him down. Sure, Shane loved it when Ilya stood over him at his full height and gazed like he was deciding precisely where he was going to sink in his teeth. But that was different. That was play. They both liked it that way.

This wasn't like that at all. This wasn't the roughhousing they'd get into when they played a game against each other, either. The way Ilya was looming over him now felt aggressive and almost bordered on dangerous. His fingertips were digging into Shane's chest with uncomfortable pressure. Ilya looked like he was on the brink of coming apart entirely.

Even if he knew there wasn't a chance in hell that Ilya would ever hurt him, Shane didn't like this. He wasn't scared, but he was certainly *aware*. Aware of the weight pushing him into the wall. Aware of the way Ilya's upper lip was curled in pure rage. Aware of the flame in his eyes, usually so sparkling and warm and *homey*, now wide and almost sizing Shane up.

Ilya's eyes flickered over his own hand, and Shane saw a small flash of surprise when Ilya realized what he was doing. He moved his hand so it was next to Shane's head on the wall instead. Both of his arms were now caging in, and the rage on Ilya's face didn't waver.

It was an expression Shane had never seen before. Not even close. The intensity almost made him want to look away, but Shane refused. If Ilya wanted to play this game, Shane would play just as hard. His breathing picked up, but he kept his eyes sharp and locked with Ilya's. Shane's shoulder ached slightly from being pressed into, but he damn sure wouldn't be admitting it or conceding anything to Ilya right now.

A few seconds passed, silent and heavy and terrible. It felt longer. It felt like an eternity.

Whatever temporary fit had overtaken Ilya broke. He blinked and relaxed his mouth. Shane watched as he exhaled slowly and forced the tension out of his muscles—calming himself down seemed to take an active effort. Even once the anger was gone, the energy continued to seep from Ilya's body. Rage faded into exhaustion. His eyes softened and lost focus. He looked sad. No, not just sad; sad and a bit tired. His shoulders, which had been pulled back, rounded forward. He let one arm fall to his side.

Ilya looked miserable, if Shane was honest with himself. Was this their future? Oscillating between fury and anguish? They'd been walking on eggshells around each other for what felt like months.

Maybe at some point in the three and a half years they'd been together, they'd forgotten how to make each other happy.

Ilya looked down, somewhere below Shane's neck. *I don't want to look at you right now.* When he finally spoke, it was the quietest, most heartbroken voice Shane had ever heard. "I already chose you, Hollander."

Wait. What?

Shane's eyes blew wide open from the impact of the statement. His understanding of their entire conversation, of the entire last three months, rearranged itself. Ilya took a step back, finally letting Shane go from the wall, but Shane still felt pinned to the spot.

I already chose you, Hollander.

Oh, god. Shane had fucked up. Shane had *really* fucked up. Because of *course* he'd already chosen Shane. Ilya didn't have to be here, in this boring city with its shitty NHL team. Ilya could've stayed in Boston. He could've stayed in his sexy penthouse and kept building the Bears into a dynasty. He could've been winning awards and Stanley Cups and breaking records and having the career he *deserved*. The one he'd more than earned through his hard

work, his dedication. Hockey had been the most important thing in his life. But, the second he *came* here, the second he left his life in Boston behind, he'd chosen Shane.

Ilya *had* all but given it up. In Shane's nearsighted mind it hadn't counted because...what? He happened to be signed to a team? A team that hadn't made the playoffs since before either of them had even been drafted?

Ilya picked Shane over hockey. He let his career and his potential go from a blaze of glory to little more than a flickering candle, because he loved Shane. Because he loved Shane and wanted to build a life with him, and that life required sacrifices. Of *course* he wished he was on a team that could make actual use of his talent, but he'd picked Ottawa. They could've been the worst team in the league or defending a title, and Ilya still would've signed with them, because that *wasn't the point*. The point was *Shane*.

The point was them getting to see each other as much as they could between their perfect, idyllic summers. The point was being able to steal as many hours together as possible during the season. The point was building a foundation for the life they hoped to share after retirement.

Deeply competitive and arrogant as he was, Ilya had consigned himself to mediocrity. When it came time to pick between the successful career of a champion or the domestic bliss of a partner, Ilya had picked the latter.

By comparison, Shane hadn't given up a fucking thing.

And he hadn't seen it. He hadn't seen it until he'd had it spelled out for him by the man who had basically given his whole life to Shane; by then—by now, it was too late. He'd already hurt Ilya, maybe irreparably. Maybe this would be the thing that finally broke them. Maybe Ilya, now knowing how undervalued he was by the man he loved, would end things. Maybe he would leave Ottawa and let his career have its second wind.

How many times had Ilya needed him in the last few months? How many times had Shane brushed him off? His desperation to be touched at Fabian's concert, all the late-night texts that Shane had written off as Ilya being horny, his anger at being unable to speak the truth in their documentary. Even the stupid fucking Boxing Day party. The pain of keeping this secret was breaking him, it was clear. Ilya had been aching for *months* and Shane had been too self-centered to see it. All their bickering the last few weeks—had it been Ilya's ham-fisted attempt at dealing with what he was feeling?

Belatedly, Shane realized he was terrified. He *saw* it now. He *saw* it, and he was so fucking sorry, and he wanted to change the plan. If waiting till after retirement wasn't working for Ilya anymore, they could talk. They could figure something out. Together. They could figure something out together. Shane couldn't lose him. He opened his mouth to tell him so, but Ilya shook his head before the words came out.

"Go home. Please."

Ilya turned away. Shane watched in silent horror as Ilya went upstairs. He wanted to grab his hand and kiss his fingers, wanted to follow him and hold him in their bed, wanted to get on

his knees and beg Ilya to understand.

He couldn't. He knew he couldn't. Ilya wanted space, he couldn't be more clear about that. Shane stayed against the wall; his quickening breath coming in shaking heaves. A few long moments later, he grabbed his bag from next to the door and his keys from the counter. Thank god he'd already packed. He wasn't sure what he'd do if he had to go upstairs and gather up his clothes from Ilya's bedroom. Looking Ilya in the eye would've felt impossible.

Shane's throat burned as he walked out to his car. He put on his seatbelt and pulled out of the driveway, Ilya's words echoing in his head.

End Notes

I hope I did this scene justice!

Thank you so much for reading! Every single kudos and comment is so so very appreciated :)

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