

Together

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/65252503) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/65252503>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Anyu , Ilya Rozanov's Dog , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander , Wyatt Hayes , Zane Boodram
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Married Life , Established Relationship , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Headaches & Migraines , Injury , Depression , Anxiety , Supportive Spouses , Sweet , Love , Shane POV , Tenderness , Fluff , Nightmares , Light Angst , Anal Sex , Anal Fingering , Not Beta Read , Mentions of homophobia , Doomscrolling , 5+1 Things
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-05-04 Words: 12,019 Chapters: 6/6

Together

by [PeaceLilies](#)

Summary

Five Times Ilya comforted Shane + One Time Shane comforted Ilya

Notes

I've had this idea for a while but decided to finally put it down on paper. Just something sweet!

Hope you enjoy! 💖

Thanks to [bubbleomatic](#) for the assist with David and Yuna's chapter!

Also, a general note:

I'm sure many of you have heard by now about Ao3 being scraped for generative AI. I've locked my fics to prevent further issues but I'm leaving this one unlocked for fans of mine who are often guests. I'm sorry to have locked the fics, it's just the only defense we have against scraping. If you'd like an Ao3 account, feel free to reach out to me on socials or check out Ao3's [Invitation Requests](#)

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Shane has a nightmare

August - Ontario

Shane was crying.

Silently.

His heart felt like it was in his throat.

Everything was fuzzy around the edges and it was like his world was tilted slightly off its axis.

He was in Ilya's house, sitting on his couch, looking at the framed picture of them, at nineteen, that Ilya had given him for Christmas.

His tears landed on the glass in fat droplets, obscuring Ilya's laughing face.

Shane ached with a yawning emptiness. An Ilya shaped blackhole that was sucking all the color and joy from the world.

It felt impossible to think that Shane could ever be happy again, that the world would be anything other than cold and lifeless.

Whatever happiness Shane had known, whatever peace and fulfillment and love he had ever had in this world, had died with Ilya.

The fact of it was like an ever increasing weight.

Every thought and reminder of Ilya's absence made Shane buckle just a little more under the pressure of his grief.

It felt insurmountable.

He didn't know how he had managed to get out of bed this morning, only to find himself here, crying over the last gift that Ilya had ever given him.

Shane had read the text messages Ilya had sent him over and over and over until he had them memorized.

Whatever happens, I am with you. Safe in your heart. I believe it. But he wasn't. He was fucking gone.

It was worse than Shane's worst nightmare. Something he had never considered before. It had never entered his mind. Flying was something they did all the time.

A plane crash.

A fucking *plane crash*.

The last time they had been in person, they had fought.

The misery and the guilt was enough to choke him.

He didn't know if he could do it. He didn't know if he could do hockey, if he could do *life* without Ilya.

The regret was enormous.

Every moment they had hidden their love from the world, every second they could have spent being open and loving each other, lost.

Shane would never get that time back.

He'd never be able to make up for how he had hurt Ilya. For how hard things had been for him this year.

He would never hold Ilya in his arms again. He would never kiss him or sleep next to him. He wouldn't wake up to watch Ilya sleep, touching his curls, his perpetually scruffy cheeks, pressing his thumb into the cleft of his chin.

He wouldn't be able to see those sparkling hazel eyes brighten as they looked at Shane, crinkling as he smiled.

He would never smell or touch Ilya again.

All he had now were memories... and those would fade with time.

No pictures.

No voice memos.

Nothing to earmark their relationship, to look back and reflect on and appreciate.

So much time wasted and they had never even gotten a chance.

Shane sobbed into his hand...

And woke up.

He startled himself awake, cheeks wet, breathing ragged. He sat up in bed shakily, sweating.

Shane reached out next to him, finding Ilya's skin under his touch. Shane bit his lip, resting his hand against the warm expanse of his back, feeling him breathe, the even rise and fall as his lungs expanded, contracted.

Thank god, thank god, thank god.

Tears spilled down Shane's cheeks anew in relief and gratitude.

It had just been a dream. He'd been dreaming. *Fuck.*

He shifted closer, spooning up against Ilya's back. He wrapped an arm around him, nuzzling the back of his head, kissing his neck, pulling him close. He felt Ilya shift, making a soft noise.

"I'm sorry," Shane murmured. "Go back to sleep..."

"What's wrong?" Ilya asked, in Russian, because he was still half-asleep. He always spoke Russian when he wasn't completely awake.

Ilya shifted, pulling slightly away from Shane to turn on his bedside lamp. Shane squinted against the harsh light and sniffled as Ilya turned toward him.

"What happened?" he asked, concerned, reaching out to cup Shane's face in his palm. Shane leaned into it, rubbing his face against Ilya's calloused hand, closing his eyes.

"I had a nightmare," he admitted. "About the plane..."

He felt his bottom lip tremble. Even just thinking about it, even knowing that Ilya was here, with him, safe and sound and alive...

"Sweetheart," Ilya soothed. "Shane. Is okay. Was only a dream."

Ilya shifted next to him and pulled Shane into his arms. Shane went eagerly, curling into Ilya's space, letting him hold him close, stroking his hair as Shane cried in his arms. He couldn't help it.

The dream had felt so real and visceral. The grief of it still lingered, making his heart ache.

"Shh. We are okay. I am okay," Ilya murmured.

Shane nodded, sniffing, unable to stop himself. He wrapped his arms around his husband and held him tight, wanting to feel the realness of him pressed close. He'd been such a mess hearing about what had happened back in January, the fear that had gripped him if things hadn't been okay. The idea of losing Ilya was unthinkable. It terrified Shane more than anything.

But he was here. Everything was fine. It was the summer. They were at the cottage. They'd just gotten back from their honeymoon. Camps would be starting soon.

Real, regular life. *Married* life.

Everything was okay.

Ilya just kept holding him, reassuring him, comforting him. He didn't tell Shane to get over it or stop crying or that he was being ridiculous.

He was just Ilya. Always knowing what to say and what to do when Shane needed it.

How Shane had gotten so lucky, he'd probably never know.

Eventually, he calmed down enough that Ilya left him in bed, wrapping him up in their comforter with a box of tissues, going downstairs to get him some water.

Anya had woken up and had jumped into bed. She came over to Shane, resting her head on his leg, and Shane didn't have the heart to tell her she couldn't be on the bed. He wiggled a hand out from under the comforter and pet her soft head.

If Ilya had died, they never would have gotten Anya, and that made Shane's eyes well up all over again.

Ilya came back with a glass of water and didn't even say anything about Shane letting the dog on the bed. He handed the glass to Shane and sat with him, one leg tucked up, the other stretched out.

"Okay?" he asked softly, brushing Shane's hair delicately behind his ear.

"Mostly," Shane replied, resting his head on Ilya's shoulder, turning his face to press it into his neck, breathing him in.

Ilya kissed his temple and nuzzled his hair.

"Everything is okay," he reassured, taking Shane's hand, tangling their fingers.

"Yeah," Shane breathed.

He finished his water and Ilya took the glass, setting it aside. He turned back to Shane, his expression soft but serious. Ilya reached up a hand, stroking his thumb tenderly along Shane's freckles, cupping his cheek, and leaned in to kiss him.

Ilya went slowly, just kissing Shane's lips. There was a little bit of tongue but the kiss itself was soft and sweet and adoring. Shane sighed into it, touching Ilya's face, his shoulders, resting his hands on his chest.

Ilya murmured reassurances and comfort and Shane let them settle over him like a soothing balm. His heart fluttered at Ilya's adoring attention, eased by the warmth and care of it.

They parted and Ilya kissed Shane's cheeks, the tip of his nose, between his brows.

He pulled away and Shane let him go as he got Anya all settled back into bed and then crawled back under the covers with Shane.

“Come here,” Ilya murmured, pulling Shane into his arms.

Shane went easily, tucking himself against Ilya’s chest, resting his hand on his pec, feeling his heart beat, steady and sure and familiar.

Ilya kissed the top of his head and Shane closed his eyes, taking a few deep breaths, tangling his legs with Ilya’s.

“I love you so much,” Shane murmured. “I will never, ever take that or you for granted...”

“I know,” Ilya murmured back. “I love you, too. Very much.”

Shane closed his eyes as Ilya squeezed him, letting himself be grounded and settled in Ilya’s arms. He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly.

Everything was okay.

It had just been a dream.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Shane's first game back in Montreal

November - Montreal

Shane had been feeling a bit fragile all morning.

It was their first game against the Voyageurs, on their home ice, and Shane was feeling all mixed up about it.

He'd asked Ilya if they could room together, going against their usual "rule" of sharing rooms on the road with other teammates. They'd made that decision over the summer, Shane wanting to be professional on the road, which Ilya had (mostly) agreed to.

But he was feeling kind of, well, *needy*.

Shane didn't like to ask these things of Ilya. Not that he thought Ilya minded. He was just always taking care of Shane. And he didn't think he'd be able to sleep without Ilya there to ground him.

He didn't even want to have sex. He just wanted to have Ilya close. To be reassured.

The season so far had been some of the most fun Shane had ever had playing hockey but it wasn't without its difficulties.

Some growing pains in his and Ilya's relationship, though largely only positive. There were so many new things they were discovering and experiencing together now that they were married and actually living together.

It was wonderful, if challenging at times, but they were managing.

Shane loved how he had been received in Ottawa. How happy the city was to have their hometown boy back home. How they all seemed to love his and Ilya's relationship. Even playing for his childhood team seemed magical in its own ways.

But he knew that the first game against Montreal was going to be strange.

He'd woken up that morning feeling off. Ilya had been so sweet and gentle and patient with him when they'd been at home and Shane had wanted to cry just from that. He didn't make Shane feel any different when they were around their team at practice or on the plane; Shane was just one of the guys and Ilya was his Captain.

Behind closed doors, Ilya was warmly affectionate, giving Shane space if he wanted it, though mostly Shane wanted to be close.

He was going to get lunch with J.J. and Hayden and Ilya was staying behind. The get together was just for the three of them but Shane had asked Ilya to be on standby, just in case.

Ilya had said he'd be hanging out with "The Adults" as he referred to his alternate captains and would be around if Shane needed him.

"You sure I look okay?" Shane asked him for the fourth or fifth time.

Ilya looked at him fondly, adjusting the collar of his shirt, brushing his hands over the shoulders of his jacket, big hands resting on Shane's upper arms.

"Ehn," he said. "Is okay."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Asshole."

Ilya chuckled, kissing Shane's forehead, and pulling him close. Shane went, closing his eyes.

"You look good."

"Thanks."

"Is just Hayden and J.J. They won't care."

"I know," Shane sighed.

Ilya hummed, smoothing his hand up and down Shane's back.

"I love you," Shane murmured.

"I love you, too. Have fun, okay? They are your friends."

"I know. I will."

"Good."

Shane leaned away, looking into Ilya's face, feeling bolstered.

"I will see you when you are back," he said and Shane nodded.

"Yeah."

Ilya smiled and kissed him softly and Shane was on his way.

Lunch was fine and fun.

It was nice seeing J.J. and Hayden, though it was weird not seeing them almost every day as he had gotten used to over the last eleven seasons.

There had been a lot of transition for Shane and while he was glad it was happening, change was still hard.

He missed his friends, though he was making new ones. Ottawa had been his first home and it was still familiar, but he missed Montreal.

After lunch, Shane got back to the hotel, where Ilya came back from hanging out in Zane Boodram's room to cuddle with Shane for a nap before they had to gear up for the game.

Shane felt comforted with Ilya spooned against him as they slept, their fingers tangled.

He felt better after napping and going to the arena was fine and kind of fun with the team, all joking around and laughing together.

The social media manager, Austin, told Shane that he was on media duty, which made sense. He was sure people were eager to hear what he had to say about playing against his old team. He was kind of dreading that.

All the guys were very nice to Shane, patting his back or his shoulder reassuringly as they got off the bus, doing their walk-ins.

It was weird being back and going through to the guest locker room but everyone kept things light.

They blasted catchy pop music and Shane was distracted by watching Ilya dance and sing along to the music, looking happy and having fun. It wasn't quite enough to get him completely out of his head but it did make him smile.

Warmups on the ice were strange and so was the opening of the game. He was caught off-guard when the Voyageurs did a tribute to him. He hadn't known that that would happen and it was so disconcerting.

But he supposed that it made sense. He had done a lot for the franchise before they'd screwed him over, so the least they could do was thank him for the three Stanley Cups he'd helped them win.

It was still emotional but he managed to hold it together. He had a game to win.

Shane didn't know how the team would be; if they would come after him, if they would snub him, or if things would be normal.

He got through the first half of the first period and finally felt like he could dial in, but it was still disorienting.

He managed a few assists during the game. Pretty good but certainly not his best. He hadn't made a fool of himself though, which was a relief.

By the end of the game, Shane was exhausted.

He peeled off his gear, not really celebrating the win, and he knew Ilya had noticed.

“Are you okay?” he asked softly, one big hand wrapped carefully around Shane’s bicep, long fingers loosely gripping. Ilya was dressed in nothing but his compression gear and Shane would have been distracted by that on any normal day but he was too in his head at the moment.

“Fine,” he replied.

Ilya gave him a look that suggested he knew that Shane wasn’t fine and they would be discussing it later. He released Shane and Shane finished getting undressed, heading to the showers.

He was one of the only guys in there and he turned on one shower head, standing under the warm spray, letting it wash over him, and trying not to cry.

He just felt so overwhelmed.

He knew he was in a much better place. He knew that his life was ten times better than it had been. But after eleven seasons...?

Should he even be upset?

Ilya left Boston, in a heartbeat, after eight seasons, and Shane knew he hadn’t felt like this.

He gave up everything to be with you. Didn’t even bat an eye. You just moved to a different city. Get over yourself.

Shane squeezed his eyes shut.

“There you are, Hollander!” Evan Dykstra said, coming into the showers along with Nick Chouinard and Wyatt Hayes.

Shane turned and looked at them, offering a smile, but sure that it had fallen flat.

“Awesome job racking up those apples!” Nick added.

“Thanks.”

The shower filled with happy chatter as other guys filed in. Shane only half paid attention, washing off as quickly as possible, and left to get changed.

“Shane,” said Austin. “If you wouldn’t mind giving us a few words.”

“Sure,” Shane replied.

He answered everyone’s questions to the best of his ability, being honest about how odd it felt being back, but grateful for Ottawa’s support, and Montreal’s appreciation. He side-stepped a question about how he was feeling in regards to rumors about disagreements with management when he and Ilya were outed.

He thanked the reporters and sat back on his bench on his stall, running a hand through his wet hair.

A shadow fell over him and he looked up to see Ilya. His curls were damp and brushed back from his face and he was dressed, ready to go.

“Let’s go, Hollander,” he said.

“Yeah,” Shane sighed. “Okay.”

They got back to the hotel and Shane went right up to their room, leaving Ilya downstairs with the other guys who had found some tables in the hotel bar.

Shane wasn’t in the mood to socialize.

He flopped down on his and Ilya’s bed, face first, splaying out on the mattress.

He wasn’t sure how long he was there for but it wasn’t very long before he heard Ilya come into the room. Shane didn’t move.

He felt the bed shift as Ilya lay next to him.

“Ow,” he murmured, as some joint or other cracked. He sighed, resting a hand on Shane’s back. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Shane said into the mattress.

“Are you okay?” Ilya asked.

Shane turned his head to look at his husband, feeling sad and pathetic.

“No,” he replied honestly.

Ilya hummed, laying down next to him, his head resting on his bicep.

“Tell me.”

Shane shrugged. “Not much to say. It was hard being here tonight. I wasn’t expecting the tribute. Everything was just... weird.”

Ilya nodded in understanding.

“I fucking gave that team everything,” Shane said, feeling himself getting choked up, eyes blurry. “I know I’m better off here and being with you but...”

“Shane,” Ilya sighed, shifting closer to pull Shane against him.

Shane squeezed his eyes closed, crying frustrated tears. He was full of mixed emotions. He missed the city and his old routine. He was mad at how he had been treated.

He knew that things were better in Ottawa, with Ilya. But he couldn't help how being back made him feel.

When he was done, Ilya gently wiped his cheeks, his expression fond and warm.

"Is okay to be upset. Is hard being back. An adjustment."

"Yeah," Shane sighed, blowing his nose as Ilya passed him some tissues. "I'm sorry. I don't want you to think I'm unhappy..."

"I know." Ilya rested his hand on Shane's thigh, just above his knee, thumb stroking back and forth soothingly.

Shane huffed, closing his eyes and taking a few deep breaths.

"Come downstairs," Ilya said after a few moments. "Just be with us. It will help."

Shane nodded. "Yeah. Probably."

He went to the bathroom and washed his face, though his eyes were still red rimmed and puffy. Ilya wrapped an arm around his shoulder and Shane held the hand that was dangling, closing his eyes as Ilya kissed the side of his head.

They arrived in the bar and all the guys cheered, which made Shane smile. It was nice to be wanted here... to be appreciated.

He stuck like glue to Ilya's side, appreciating the way Ilya would rest his hand at the small of Shane's back every so often, a grounding, comforting gesture.

Shane stuck to water while Ilya drank a beer. It wasn't anything crazy. Just the guys hanging out, celebrating their win.

Ilya rounded everyone up at a decent hour, reminding them that they had a plane to catch in the morning. Pretty much everyone went to bed after that, besides some of the rookies.

"Better?" Ilya asked as they snuggled together in the middle of the king sized bed in their hotel room.

"Yeah," Shane sighed, kissing Ilya's neck lightly. "Much. Thank you."

"Always," Ilya murmured back, kissing into Shane's hair.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Shane is doomscrolling

January - Ottawa

Shane was doom scrolling.

He knew he shouldn't be but once he had started, he couldn't stop.

He usually steered clear of social media, only utilizing his Instagram to repost things from the team or his and Ilya's camps or Scott Hunter's queer hockey alliance or the very rare personal post, usually about Ilya.

He didn't have a Twitter account or a Tumblr or anything like that, so he wasn't sure what was up with the link that Rose had texted him.

Rose: this is SO CUTE!

The link was to a Tumblr page that was a gifset of all of Shane and Ilya's post-win ritual. Shane skating to Ilya, hugging him and tapping his chest protector as Ilya kissed the top of his helmet.

The caption was sweet: *our favorite queers doing their post-win routine.*

Majority of the comments, as they tended to be, were positive. But there were some in there that were just plain mean.

Some people called the poster out but Shane couldn't look away from the cruel comments.

He clicked on the account for one person who had posted multiple times. He probably shouldn't have, given that the blog he found was a massive homophobic hate account.

It felt like watching a train wreck; all these horrible, awful things being spewed about himself, Ilya, Troy, Scott, but he couldn't look away. He kept going, his stomach twisting in knots.

He was so engrossed in his reading that he didn't even notice that Ilya had walked into the room until he called Shane's name and rested a hand on his knee.

"Hollander," Ilya said as Shane looked up at him. He tilted his head, reading whatever it was on Shane's face. "What happened?"

Shane blinked at Ilya, then at his phone, then back up at his husband.

“I don’t—” he said, holding his phone out to Ilya.

Ilya took it, reading and scrolling.

“Why are you reading these?” he asked, not glancing away.

“I don’t know,” Shane replied honestly. “I just... Rose sent me a link to something cute and I got sucked into reading the negative comments...”

“Hmm,” Ilya replied, closing out of the link, and handing Shane’s phone back to him. “Is nonsense. People are hateful because they are miserable and have nothing better to do.”

“I know...”

Ilya looked at Shane and Shane looked back. Sometimes he wished he had just as much conviction as Ilya did. He knew that Ilya was right. Shane was proud to be out. He was proud to be with Ilya. He would have given up his hockey career for him, full stop, no questions asked.

He could mourn hockey and still have it in his life. He wouldn’t be able to grieve losing Ilya, in any capacity.

Shane didn’t want to hide. He didn’t want to go back into the closet. He didn’t want his and Ilya’s relationship to be their dirty little secret.

But fuck... it still balled him over that people hated them just because they loved each other.

It was so small-minded and stupid, but it plucked at some of Shane’s own internalized homophobia.

He had been working on it and he was getting better. But shit like this just got him down sometimes.

Ilya seemed to make a decision about something because he turned on his heel and went upstairs.

Shane exchanged a look with Anya and looked back at the stairs as Ilya came back down.

His arms were full, balancing a large photo album in one hand and a box in the other.

“What’re you doing?” Shane asked as Ilya came to the couch with the album and the box, setting them on the coffee table.

“Palate cleanser,” Ilya explained, sitting next to Shane. He picked up the photo album, holding it so that they could both look at it.

A few weeks ago, Jackie had let them know that they would be getting a package in the mail.

Said package was a gorgeous photo album compiled of photos that family and friends had taken at their wedding.

They hadn't hired a photographer, which Shane sort of regretted, so they had had to rely on their loved ones to show them pictures of their day.

Apparently, Jackie had reached out to *everyone* and people had sent her hundreds of photos. She'd said it had been difficult to pick which ones would go in the album but she'd managed it.

The front cover was gray, a similar shade to the suit Shane had worn on their wedding day, and written in burgundy lettering was *Shane & Ilya July 2021*.

Ilya opened the cover. The first picture was of the epic kiss Ilya had given Shane after they'd said their vows. Shane didn't know who had taken it, but it was a great shot, very dynamic; Ilya dipping Shane backwards as they kissed, both of them holding onto each other, eyes closed.

The next page was of them at the altar, hands raised after Ilya had announced they were married. Shane wasn't sure he'd ever seen his own face so happy. He was smiling wide, all crinkled up, cheeks pink.

Most of the photos were candid. Pictures of Shane and Ilya cutting their cake, pictures of them dancing together and laughing, pictures of them with Anya, with the Pike kids, with their friends.

Majority of the pictures were just them, looking so in love and so happy.

It was a testament to their friends' perspectives, to the moments they had caught, wanting to enshrine Shane and Ilya's love in a memory. A snapshot in time that captured their joy and affection.

The pictures made Shane's eyes sting as he looked at them. Knowing that their nearest and dearest loved their love and also being able to see what they saw; two people who were deeply in love and finally able to show it.

Shane rested his head on Ilya's shoulder as he turned the pages of the album.

"This is my favorite," Ilya said. The picture was of just them, caught in profile. They had champagne flutes in their hands, arms around one another, Shane's head on Ilya's shoulder, Ilya's cheek on Shane's head.

They were both looking at something, expressions relaxed, at ease, comfortable.

It was a beautiful shot.

"I like it, too," Shane said quietly.

When they were done going through the album, Ilya picked up the box. Rose had made it for them. The top had a slit cut into it, so people could slide cards into it. Ilya opened the box and

pulled out a card.

He tugged the card out of the envelope and flipped it open.

“To Ilya and Shane,” he read. “I’m so glad that I get to be here to see the two of you share your love with all of us and the world. You’re both such special, wonderful people, and I feel so fortunate to have seen your love up close. I’ve wished for this day for you both for a long time and I know it happened in an unconventional way, but I’m so glad it happened. You deserve the world and each other. I love you both. Happy Wedding! Love, Rose.”

Shane swallowed, sniffing.

Ilya carefully placed the card back in its envelope and set it aside. He pulled out another card.

“Happy Wedding Day you two assholes! Lisa and I are so happy for you and we’re so glad that we got to be here to celebrate your special day. Looking forward to camps this summer and playing together this fall! Congratulations! Hazy and Lisa.”

Shane chuckled wetly.

Ilya kept going, reading through every card they had received with messages of support and congratulations and happiness.

By the time Ilya had finished, Shane was wiping his face on his sweatshirt.

Ilya rubbed his back gently and pulled him in close. Shane tucked against his side and sighed, sniffing.

“No matter what some random asshole says on the internet,” Ilya said. “Our friends are more important than some anonymous prick.”

“I know,” Shane sighed.

And he did.

He and Rose had talked about it ages ago. His parents, their friends, the people who mattered most to them accepted them. That was all that mattered. He didn’t need to get swept up in the negativity of some unhappy douchebag online.

He didn’t need to rent space to haters in his head.

“Thank you,” Shane sighed, turning his head to rub his face against Ilya’s shoulder.

“Of course,” Ilya replied, making sure all the cards were back in the box. “You are just being you.”

Shane huffed and Ilya kissed his temple.

“I love you anyway,” he chuckled.

Shane chuckled softly. “I love you, too.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Shane gets a concerning call from his mom

February - Raleigh

Shane stood in the hotel hallway and smiled as Ilya came out of the room he was sharing with Wyatt Hayes.

“Oh,” he said, surprised, smiling at Shane. “You did not have to wait for me.”

“I wanted to,” Shane replied, shrugging a little.

Ilya chuckled softly, leaning in to brush a kiss over Shane’s cheekbone. Shane felt his cheeks heat and he smiled shyly at his husband, heart doing a little flip as it always did whenever they shared some PDA.

They weren’t rooming together this road trip and had spent surprisingly little time together. It made sense, given that Ilya was busy with Captaincy duties, or hanging out late with the guys after Shane left to go to bed.

It was a little strange but not bad. They had found a comfortable rhythm and Shane had a room to himself while they were in Raleigh, so Ilya was going to bunk with him for the night, after the game, which Shane was very much looking forward to.

They went downstairs in the elevator, catching up, and walked through the lobby to wait for the rest of the team, the team buses having just arrived.

Coaches and staff were already gathered, so they wandered over, waiting.

More teammates filtered out of the hotel, everyone winding up in a little group, before they boarded the bus.

Shane sat next to Ilya, smiling as his husband playfully teased Luca. He checked his phone, finding it weird that his mom hadn’t texted him good luck. She was pretty good about reaching out before his games and it was odd he hadn’t heard from her.

“Did you hear from Mom by chance?” Shane asked Ilya softly once Ilya had settled back in his seat.

Ilya’s brows furrowed and he took out his phone. He shook his head.

“No. Nothing from Yuna.”

“Weird,” Shane said, worrying his bottom lip.

“I’m sure it is fine,” Ilya said. “They are busy, too, sometimes!”

Shane chuckled softly. “Yeah, that’s true.”

They arrived at the arena, heading into the locker room.

“Hollander!” Coach called as Shane was sliding into his gear. “Roz, you, too!”

Shane looked up, exchanging a curious glance with Ilya, before he approached coach, Ilya following suit.

Coach led them into a side room, closing the door.

“What’s going on?” Shane asked.

“I was told that your mother reached out to the staff because she wasn’t sure if you’d have your phone since we have a game tonight. Your father is in the hospital.”

Shane felt his stomach drop into his feet.

“I’m sorry. What?”

Ilya rested a hand on Shane’s back, standing close to his side.

Wiebe looked concerned, brows pinched. “He’s in the hospital. We don’t have any other information other than that. I’m sorry. I wanted you to know as soon as possible if you want to go and be with them.

“Yes, of course I do,” Shane said, his hands shaking.

“We’ll get you the soonest available flight.”

Shane looked at Ilya, feeling overwhelmed. Fear gripped him, thinking about all of the possible horrible things that could have happened to his dad, worrying about how his mom was managing, uncertainty about what he was going to do, if Ilya should come with him...

“You go,” Ilya said. “I will fly out after the game.”

He looked at Wiebe. “I’m sorry...”

“Hey. I get it. Family first. We’ll be hurting without you both but we’ll make do for however long you need.”

“Ilya...”

“Go,” Ilya said. “I’ll catch up.”

Shane nodded, feeling unsteady, leaving the room to change back into his suit.

Fuck. What if this was bad? What if it was a heart attack? A stroke? What if Dad had gotten hit by a bus or something?

Shane shakily got changed, his teammates murmuring around him.

“Everyone listen!” Ilya said.

Shane only vaguely heard Ilya let everyone know about their family emergency and asking everyone to keep things under wraps.

The guys offered condolences, saying that they were thinking of Shane and his parents before he left the locker room in a rush, meeting with one of their staffers who was going to take him to the airport for the soonest available flight out of Raleigh to Ottawa.

There were no direct flights but they’d found the quickest one. Three hours and forty-two minutes.

Shane tried calling Mom but she didn’t answer. He texted, letting her know that he was getting a flight out.

He felt terrible for leaving the team, for leaving Ilya, but he was even more concerned about what was going on with his parents. His mind had an unceasing line of horrible scenarios to feed him, each one worse than the last.

Shane’s leg bounced and his eyes stung as he waited at his gate. Still nothing from Mom.

This was bad. This was so, so bad.

What if Dad was dead?

What would Shane be walking into?

What was he going to do?

He tried to take a few breaths. No. He couldn’t think like that.

He texted Rose and Hayden, which helped a bit.

He finally boarded his flight and was on his way.

It was already all over social media that Shane had been scratched from the game due to a family emergency. Some speculation about why Ilya hadn’t left with him, which just made Shane angry.

He wished the media could just mind its own business and butt out.

The flight felt like sixteen hours.

It felt like it took forever for him to get to DC and then transfer from there to his flight to Ottawa.

Shane could hardly sit still as he sat in a cab that was driving him to the hospital, checking his phone for any word from Mom. He hadn't even looked at the score for the game.

He finally, finally got to the hospital, hastily paying his fare, and running up the steps of the hospital, through the doors. He went right to the front desk, where a nurse did a double take at seeing him.

She was really nice and gave him the floor and room number for his dad. She let him know that his dad was in surgery and his mom was probably in the waiting room. He thanked her and took the elevator up to the floor.

Shane found the OR waiting room and saw his mom right away. She looked up, startling at seeing him.

"Shane!" she said, standing up. "What are you doing here?!"

"They told me you called and that Dad was in the hospital. I came as soon as I could."

"Oh honey. You didn't have to. I'm so sorry! Everything is okay!"

"Well no one told me anything. I tried calling and texting."

"I left my phone at home," she said, shaking her head. "I have your father's."

"What happened?"

"He fell off a ladder," Mom explained, sitting them both down. "He was taking the Christmas lights down and slipped. He's okay, but he broke his arm pretty bad. They're doing surgery on it."

"Jesus," Shane breathed.

He didn't feel any more at ease but he was grateful to know what the deal was.

"He's okay though? No concussion or anything?"

Mom shook her head. "No, thank goodness. He fell more on his side. Bruised ribs."

Shane let out a heavy sigh. "Okay. Yeah. Makes sense."

He shook his head. He felt sick. He hadn't eaten and he had been so anxious this whole time. He'd left Ilya alone back in Raleigh with the team...

Mom rubbed his back. "I'm so sorry, Shane. I didn't mean to scare you."

"It's okay," Shane sighed. "I just reacted."

"I understand. I would have done the same."

Shane couldn't fully relax until Dad was out of surgery, but he texted Ilya to update him, and went down to the hospital cafeteria to get something to eat.

Dad ended up being in surgery for two hours. They were finally given the all-clear to see him in the recovery room. He was loopy from the anesthesia, in a sling, but was totally fine. The rush of relief Shane felt was enormous.

"Shane," Dad hummed as Shane hugged him gingerly. "What are you doing here?"

"You're in the hospital, Dad."

"So? It's fine! Just a scratch!"

"David," Mom sighed.

Dad was moved to a room for the night and the doctors said that he could be released tomorrow.

Ilya texted back, saying that he was on the plane, and would be taking off shortly.

Shane let his parents know, both of them saying that neither of them needed to come, and everything was fine. Shane assured them that it was most certainly not fine and what if it had been something more serious?

They were the only parents he had...

Ilya didn't get to the hospital until almost three in the morning.

Shane was up, unable to sleep. Mom was sleeping on the cot in the room. Dad was completely passed out in the hospital bed.

Shane looked up as someone stood in the doorway, casting a long shadow into the room.

"Ilya," he said, relief and gratitude and love rushing through him at seeing his husband.

"Hi," Ilya said, looking a little harried, his curls even more wild than usual.

Shane practically ran to him, hugging him tight, eyes stinging.

"I'm so glad you're here," Shane murmured.

"Of course," Ilya murmured back.

Shane just held on, tucking his face against Ilya's neck, breathing him in. He let Ilya's presence ground him.

Everything was going to be okay.

Shane's eyes stung as he pulled away, Ilya kissing him softly hello.

“Oh Ilya. You didn’t have to come. It’s okay,” said Mom, having woken up. Shane turned, Ilya’s arm still around him, Shane’s hand resting on his abdomen.

“Of course I would come,” Ilya replied, sliding his arm from around Shane so that he could hug Mom. “What happened?”

Mom told Ilya the whole story and they stayed in the room for another hour, before Mom finally shooed them out, telling them that they needed to sleep, and then get back to their team for the rest of their games.

They did leave, catching a cab home. Shane was exhausted and he was sure that Ilya was too, but he held Shane’s hand, allowing Shane to rest his head on his shoulder.

“I told Coach we would be here one more day,” Ilya said.

“Thank you.”

“Of course.”

Shane closed his eyes, turning himself into Ilya’s side. Ilya squeezed his hand.

They arrived home and trudged up to their house. They walked in, toeing off shoes, hanging up jackets. They went upstairs and started stripping off clothes.

Ilya went to the bathroom, turning on the shower, and Shane followed, wrapping his arms around his husband. Ilya hugged him back, holding him close.

“I was so scared,” Shane breathed, eyes welling. “I thought something terrible happened.”

“Is okay. Is scary.”

Shane closed his eyes. “I don’t know what I’ll do if I lose one of them now...”

Shane felt guilty getting emotional about this, talking about it with Ilya. Ilya had lost both of his parents, and while Shane knew there was no love lost with his father, Ilya still grieved for both of his parents, even if it was in different ways.

Ilya rubbed his back and hushed him gently. “Is okay right now. No catastrophizing.”

Shane took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I know. I’m trying...”

“You are too good at it.”

Shane huffed a wet laugh. “Yeah. That’s true.”

“Everyone is fine.”

“I know.”

Shane swallowed, a few tears streaming down his face, mostly in relief. Dad was okay, Mom was okay, Ilya was okay. The most important people to him were all fine.

“Come on,” Ilya hummed. “Inside.”

They stepped into the shower together and Ilya ushered Shane under the warm spray. He grabbed Shane’s shampoo, pouring some into his hands, lathering it, before sliding strong fingers into Shane’s hair.

Shane sighed and closed his eyes as Ilya washed his hair, massaging his strong fingers into Shane’s scalp.

Shane wondered, for the millionth time, how he had gotten so damn lucky. How he had found someone so supportive and loving.

Ilya was an incredible person, a wonderful partner. He was always there for Shane when he needed him, no questions asked, and always knew what Shane required.

There wasn’t anyone better suited or more perfect for Shane than Ilya and the gratitude he felt for him was overwhelming.

“Thank you for today,” Shane murmured after he rinsed shampoo from his hair. “Thank you for putting up with me...”

Ilya gave Shane a look, a sort of warm disapproval. “You do not need to thank me. I love you, you are my husband, part of the job, yes?”

“Yeah... but you should know that I appreciate you.”

Ilya kissed the tip of Shane’s nose and chuckled. “I know.”

And apparently, Ilya wasn’t finished.

He washed Shane down, head to toe, which was far more sensual than Shane had anticipated. He was exhausted from the stress of worrying and traveling, but watching Ilya on his knees, looking up at Shane with adoring eyes, touching him like he was something precious, was enough to turn Shane on.

Shane suspected this was Ilya’s plan, given the little smirk on his face as he noticed Shane’s dick getting hard.

But he finished his task first, telling Shane to rinse, before pressing teasing kisses to Shane’s abs, and one brief, parting kiss to the tip of Shane’s cock, before standing.

His curls had managed to stay mostly dry, the rest of him dripping. Shane fucking loved looking at Ilya, all the time, but *especially* when he was wet.

“Your turn?” Shane asked.

“If you like,” Ilya replied, with a little shrug.

Shane smiled a little. “Might as well take advantage of being home, right?”

Ilya chuckled. "Yes."

Shane took his time to wash Ilya, too, though he was far more distracted because they kept kissing, and Ilya pulled him close, hands wandering, sliding over his ass, before wrapping around his waist.

"Let me finish," Shane laughed and Ilya did, too, face pressed to Shane's neck.

Shane finished washing his husband, waiting for him to rinse off, before leaning in on his hands and knees to nuzzle and kiss at Ilya's cock.

He sucked under the head a little, before giving Ilya a parting lick and stood.

"Bed?" he asked.

Ilya nodded. "Bed."

They dried off and fell into bed together, a tangled pile of limbs.

Ilya opened Shane with careful fingers, his actions tender, and loving.

"My beloved," he murmured in Russian, stroking his thumb over Shane's cheekbone as his fingers twisted and curled and gently stretched apart. Shane knew he was tense but Ilya didn't rush him.

Shane closed his eyes, placing himself in Ilya's capable hands, like he always did.

When Ilya entered him, it was slow and patient and careful. Shane slid his hands up the ridges of Ilya's ribs, up his back, sliding an arm across his shoulders, his other hand in Ilya's curls, one leg wrapped around his thigh.

Ilya kissed him, fucking him with such maddening control, but Shane didn't mind it. He didn't Ilya pressing their foreheads together and looking into those hazel eyes while pleasure built inside him.

"I love you," Ilya sighed, still in Russian. "Stroke yourself."

Shane bit his lip and did as he was told, watching Ilya's head tilt back as he picked up the pace.

It only took a few strokes before Shane was spilling between them, Ilya right on his heels. They were both surprisingly quiet, breathing harshly, Ilya leaning over Shane, before pressing his weight down on him.

Shane welcomed it, resting his clean hand on Ilya's back, and turning his face into his husband's curls.

"I needed that," Shane hummed.

"I know," Ilya replied fondly.

“I love you.”

“Mm.”

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s neck. They just breathed together, settling, until Ilya’s softened dick slipped out of Shane.

They cleaned up and then curled back into bed together, where Shane passed out as soon as Ilya pulled him close against his chest.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Shane has a migraine

April - Ottawa

Shane started feeling off during the third period of their game against Anaheim.

It was like he was dehydrated. There was an uncomfortable, intermittent throbbing at his temples that was annoying but not ruinous. He knew he was hydrated, he always was, and the adrenaline from being on the ice helped alleviate the bothersome pain.

But it would go away and then come back every time he was on the bench, no matter how much extra Gatorade or water he kept slugging.

It was easy to ignore when he was distracted by the game and he didn't pay much mind to it until they were in the locker room. They'd won the game, which was exciting as it always was.

Everyone was planning to go to Monk's to celebrate and Ilya was excited about it and Shane didn't want to bail just yet. He could power through. Ilya loved hanging out with the team and Shane loved watching him, seeing him happy and enjoying himself. Ilya was always in his element when he was socializing.

Shane took off his gear slowly and carefully, joking around with the guys, though maybe not as high energy as he normally might be.

As he was standing in the shower, the pounding in his temples just got worse.

It was probably because he was coming down off of all the skating and celebrating, his left side throbbing more than his right.

It wasn't too awful, nothing he couldn't work through. It was just discomfort and he wasn't a stranger to that.

He finished his shower, moving more gingerly than he might usually. That helped a little. He was careful to keep his head still, not moving it too quickly this way or that.

He was sliding into his jeans when someone tapped his elbow.

"Are you alright?" Ilya asked.

Shane turned his head carefully to look up at his husband. He was looking at Shane with a concerned expression, dark brows furrowed, hazel eyes tracking Shane's face.

"I'm fine," Shane lied. "Tired."

Ilya looked at him a few moments longer, assessing. He didn't seem convinced but he said, "okay."

Shane went back to getting dressed, sneaking a glimpse at Ilya, who was wearing a pair of briefs and picking his own jeans up to slide into them.

Shane's head throbbed uncomfortably.

Once most of the guys were dressed, they headed out to the bar. Ilya reminded some of the guys that were lingering to meet them there and wished a goodnight to the ones that needed to get home.

At the bar, Shane ordered a seltzer with lime and sat quietly as he listened to Bood, Wyatt, and Ilya talk, joking around. He laughed when appropriate but he was distracted by his worsening headache.

"You are sure you're okay?" Ilya asked softly as Wyatt and Bood when to get more beers. He slid his arm around Shane's shoulder and Shane hummed, resting his head briefly on Ilya's shoulder.

"I'm fine."

Ilya made a noise that suggested he wasn't buying what Shane was selling.

"We can go home."

"No," Shane replied, sitting up gingerly. "You love this."

"So?" Ilya asked. "Is not fun if you are not having fun."

"I'm okay."

Ilya narrowed his eyes at Shane, his lips pursing slightly. Despite the headache, Shane wanted to kiss that little pout.

Ilya didn't say anything else, letting his arm slide from Shane's shoulders as Wyatt and Bood returned, but he rested his hand on Shane's thigh and Shane slid his fingers between his husband's.

It wasn't so bad to manage while they were sitting down. Shane could kind of tune out, sip his seltzer, and be grounded by Ilya's hand.

But they got up to play a round of pool, Shane opting out, leaning against the wall and watching, slowly beginning to feel worse and worse.

He went to the bathroom just to splash some cold water on his face and massage his temples, which helped for a few moments, but didn't do much to truly alleviate the throbbing.

He felt *bad*.

Shane closed his eyes, taking a few deep breaths as he leaned over the sink.

Migraines were not unusual to him.

It was the gift that kept on giving after his concussion and while he didn't have them super frequently, whenever they hit, they hit hard.

His were pretty mild compared to some people's but he couldn't imagine things being worse than this. It fucking *sucked*.

His head was killing him and his whole body felt sluggish and weird. Like it didn't belong to him.

Shane opened his eyes, resolved, and slunk out of the bathroom.

Ilya was standing to one side of the pool table, leaning casually on his pool cue. Shane touched his fingers to his husband's back gently and Ilya turned to look at him. He was smiling but it fell immediately from his face.

"What's wrong?"

"I have a migraine," he said. "I need to go home."

"Shane," Ilya said softly, the concern back on his face. "We will leave."

"You can stay," Shane replied. "I'll take a cab, it's fine."

"No," Ilya replied. "We will go."

Ilya put his pool cue away.

"Sorry, boys," he said. "We need to leave."

"Everything okay?" Wyatt asked.

"Migraine," Shane replied.

Wyatt hissed. "Shit. Sorry, Hollander. That blows."

"Yeah," Bood added. "Feel better man."

"Thanks," Shane replied with a small smile.

Ilya had disappeared apparently but reappeared with their jackets.

He helped Shane into his, sliding into his own, calling a cab, before saying goodbye to everyone.

Shane waved, unable to muster up more than that.

They stood outside and Ilya pulled Shane close. Shane leaned into him, closing his eyes, eyes stinging.

“If you did not feel well,” Ilya murmured into his hair. “Then we would have just gone home. No big deal.”

“But I wanted you to have fun,” Shane sighed. “You love being out with the guys.”

“Is okay. We will have more time to do this.”

“I like it, too, though.”

Ilya chuckled, kissing into Shane’s hair. “So stubborn.”

“Yeah, well...”

Ilya sighed, squeezing Shane once more, before smoothing a hand down his back. “Our ride is here.”

They climbed into the car and headed home. Shane rested his head on Ilya’s shoulder, closing his eyes.

They got home and Anya came running, excited to see them. Shane gave her a few pets before Ilya took over to help calm her. They had a dog walker come by to make sure that she was taken out on home game days, so she didn’t need to be walked, which was nice.

Shane shuffled to the kitchen after kicking off his shoes and hanging up his jacket.

He poured himself a glass of water and pulled out a box of crackers. Ilya came into the kitchen with his migraine meds.

“Thanks,” Shane sighed, munching on a few crackers just so he could take the meds with something in his stomach.

Ilya rubbed his back and squeezed the back of his neck gently. “I am sorry you don’t feel well.”

“It’s fine,” Shane sighed. “Nothing you can do about it.”

Ilya hummed, kissing the side of his head.

Shane opened the bottle of medication, shook out two pills, and took them with the glass of water. He sighed. Now he just had to wait for them to kick in.

“Upstairs,” Ilya murmured, patting his ass, and Shane smiled a little, glancing at Ilya, before heading up to their bedroom.

He climbed the stairs slowly while Ilya pattered around in the kitchen.

Shane turned on his bedside lamp and slowly got changed. He did a shortened version of his dental routine, washed his face, and slid gingerly into bed. He lay very still.

He heard the jingle of Anya’s dog tags as she came up the stairs, the familiar tread of Ilya’s stride.

Shane peeked an eye open, watching Ilya get Anya settled in bed, before he started undressing.

He disappeared into the bathroom and came back out a few moments later with a damp cloth. He crawled into bed, sitting on his legs.

“Come here,” he said softly.

Shane sat up carefully and Ilya folded his legs like a pretzel, grabbing a pillow, and putting it on his lap. Shane lay his head down on it and Ilya placed the wet cloth over his eyes. With careful fingers, he started massaging at the corner of Shane’s eyes.

The first time Shane had gotten a migraine around Ilya, he hadn’t known what to do. Shane had told him about his medication and that usually he just took it and lay in a dark, quiet room until the migraine was gone.

The second time, Ilya had come prepared. He’d done a bunch of research and reading up on migraines and what might help. It had meant so much to Shane that Ilya had done that for him, that he had prepared, wanting to take care of Shane. Which wasn’t a surprise... but Shane was always filled with such warmth and pleasure at knowing that Ilya loved him. It made his heart clench and his eyes sting just thinking about it.

He loved loving Ilya and being loved by him.

“Okay?” Ilya asked softly.

“Yeah,” Shane murmured back. “Thanks.”

“Shane,” Ilya huffed, his voice fond, gently wiping tears from Shane’s cheeks. Shane sniffed. “Do not make the migraine worse.”

“I can’t help it,” Shane replied wetly.

“Are you in more pain?”

“No,” Shane breathed. “You’re just the best.”

Ilya laughed softly, stroking Shane’s hair. “Sweetheart...”

Shane let himself cry a little, even if it maybe wasn't the best with his migraine, but it was fine. He was just feeling sensitive because he was in pain and Ilya always took such good care of him, no matter what the situation.

Sometimes Shane didn't feel deserving of it.

"I love you," Ilya hummed, continuing to stroke Shane's hair.

"I love you, too," he sniffled back.

Once he'd calmed down, Ilya went back to massaging the corner's of his eyes. Shane took some calming breaths, relaxing.

The massaging did help, alleviating some of the additional pressure while the meds slowly kicked in.

After finishing with Shane's eyes, Ilya slid his hands under Shane's head, to his neck, carefully pressing his fingers up at where Shane's neck and head met.

Ilya's hands were warm, the pressure gentle but firm. Shane loved Ilya's hands. They were big hands; broad, calloused palms with long, surprisingly elegant fingers. The backs were tracked with prominent veins that extended down from his forearms.

Ilya had always had nice hands and Shane loved everything about them. He loved holding them and kissing them and having them on him.

And they were working miracles tonight.

When Ilya finished, he gently slid a hand over Shane's hair.

"Turn over," he whispered, removing the cloth from Shane's eyes. Shane rolled to his front, settling his head down on the pillow, turned to the side. Ilya placed the cloth on the back of his neck once he was comfortable, rubbing his hands right at the base of Shane's neck.

He worked on his shoulders, too, getting them to relax a bit, going back and forth between Shane's neck and shoulders.

When he was done, Shane was a pile of goo in his lap, his migraine almost completely gone.

"How are you feeling?" Ilya asked.

"Sleepy," Shane slurred back.

Ilya chuckled. "Good. Sleep."

Shane hummed, shifting so that he was laying down on the mattress. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, opening his eyes to look at Ilya.

"I love you," Shane sighed. "Thank you."

“Of course,” Ilya replied, leaning in to kiss Shane’s forehead, then the tip of his nose, then his mouth. “I love you, too. Sleep.”

Shane hummed and closed his eyes.

He listened to Ilya slide out of bed, going back to the bathroom.

He must have drifted off, waking up again as Ilya spooned against him, kissing his shoulder.

Shane hummed and fell right back to sleep.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Today is hard

June - The Cottage - Ontario

Shane stood in the kitchen, leaning his hands against the sink as he looked out onto the lawn, to the lake just beyond.

It was a beautiful summer day. The sun was shining brightly, making the lake sparkle, and birds were chirping and twittering, flying back and forth between the trees on the property.

Anya was eating her breakfast and he could hear the way the tags on her collar bumped against the metal of her bowl.

He had coffee percolating, two mugs set on the counter at the ready.

Shane had left Ilya in bed. He'd had a fitful night's sleep the night before and probably needed the extra time. It wasn't common, but sometimes Shane woke up to him whimpering. Bad dreams, memories, from when he was young.

They'd talked about them before. Finding his mother's body. His father yelling at him.

Shane was glad the dreams weren't a common occurrence but he knew now how deeply they affected Ilya when he had them.

It was their time off. They had nothing on the agenda today. They could just laze around the cottage and relax and whatever Ilya needed from him, Shane was more than happy to give.

The coffee pot started to beep, shaking Shane from his thoughts. He poured coffee into both mugs. A splash of milk for himself, milk and sugar for Ilya.

"Come on, Anya," he said, mugs in hand. "Let's go wake up, Ilya."

Anya hopped next to Shane's feet, mouth open happily, before she trotted ahead of him, up the stairs.

In the bedroom, she'd gone to her own bed, which was pretty good progress. Shane had been working on getting her to go to her own bed first. She could come up on their bed when she was invited.

Shane walked around the bed and set the mugs down on Ilya's bedside table, sitting at the edge of the bed, right next to the lump under their comforter that was his husband.

He reached out a hand, resting it on the approximate place that Ilya's arms would be, and smoothed his hand up and down gently.

"I made you coffee," he murmured. "It's on your table if you want it. I took Anya out and fed her. I'm gonna make breakfast soon."

Ilya didn't move or reply. It was possible he was still sleeping, Shane wasn't sure. He wasn't going to rush him or poke at him.

He waited a few moments, before letting his hand slide down to Ilya's back, rubbing a few circles there, before retreating.

"I love you," he said tenderly, before shifting off the bed. He went to pick up his mug when a hand fisted itself into his t-shirt, and tugged him back into bed.

Shane smiled, chuckling softly, as Ilya pulled him under the covers with him. Shane wiggled around, humming as Ilya wrapped an arm around him, and pressed his whole face into Shane's chest. He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly.

Shane buried his face in Ilya's curls, wrapping an arm around him to hold him, giving him a squeeze.

"Good morning," Shane murmured.

"Good morning," Ilya murmured back, voice muffled from where it was pressed between Shane's pecs.

Shane smiled to himself, closing his eyes as he nuzzled Ilya's curls, the wild strands tickling his face. Shane loved when he was all sleep warm and pliant like this.

They lay like that for a bit, breathing each other in, before Ilya broke the silence.

"Today is hard," he sighed.

Shane's heart gave a painful little pang at those words. It was their code for Ilya feeling depressed.

He'd been doing well this year. The medication was helping, therapy was helping. Being married and playing on the same team helped. They got along well with their teammates and Ilya had been making time for friendships and life outside of hockey and their relationship.

He still had difficult days and that was okay. This would be okay, too. They knew how to manage things together and Shane was improving.

But it was still hard, in some ways.

He didn't want Ilya to feel sad or lonely. He didn't want him to hurt.

Depression was a complicated thing and it wasn't up to Shane to fix it. Shane's first instinct was always to fix, to offer solutions. He would pester, which only made things worse. Ilya, already withdrawn, would snap at him, and then withdraw further, which seemed to make everything else worse for everyone.

They'd gotten better at talking about it. At understanding it.

Ilya didn't want solutions, he just wanted to be touched. He wanted to be held and know that he was loved. Shane didn't even have to say it. He just needed to be there.

So he was here, petting Ilya's curls, and holding him, and listening to him breathe.

They were navigating this together and Shane refused to leave Ilya alone in the dark.

Ilya sighed and snuggled closer and Shane held him tighter, pressing kisses into his hair. Shane didn't offer platitudes or offer up options to "make things better." They just had to manage... and they would manage as a team.

They lay there for a while, Shane tangling their legs, before someone's stomach growled, and they both laughed.

"Was that you or me?" Shane murmured.

"I don't know," Ilya chuckled.

Even just that small chuckle felt like a victory. The things Shane wouldn't do for that laugh or that smile.

He kissed Ilya's forehead and leaned back, looking at his husband. Ilya looked tired but he smiled a little and Shane brushed his thumb over his scruffy cheek, his heart full. The love he had for this man was unfathomable and it grew by the day.

Shane had thought he loved Ilya as much as it was possible to love anyone but he loved him more and more each day. It was like coming out and getting married had unlocked so much more potential in their relationship.

They had worked so hard to protect what they had between them and now they got to see it grow and flourish.

Even on hard days... Ilya wasn't difficult to love.

"I'm going to make chocolate chip pancakes."

"Okay," Ilya replied.

They shuffled out from under the comforter and Shane handed Ilya his coffee. He took it, leaning in to kiss Shane's cheek, before taking a sip. They went downstairs and Shane started pulling ingredients out for pancakes.

Ilya went and sat on the deck with the dog and Shane watched him. He sat curled up on the loveseat they had out there, the dog tucked up against him. He was looking out at the lake, his expression shuttered.

For all of their time together, Ilya had been the sun that Shane had orbited around.

Everything about him, from his golden-brown curls and golden skin, to his bright smile, and infectious laugh, to his big personality, was warm and inviting. Ilya was magnetic. It was hard to not want to be around him, to enjoy his wit and snark, even if he could be a pain in the ass.

He was just so full of life. He was so vibrant and captivating.

But seeing all of that light snuffed out, even if only for a day or two, was hard. It felt wrong, in a way, that someone as brilliant and dazzling as Ilya, should have to deal with so much darkness.

Shane wished he could protect Ilya from it. He wished he had a time machine to go back and prevent so many bad things from happening. He wished he could say some kind of magic word or snap his fingers and make everything better.

The reality was that he couldn't do those things.

But he could make chocolate chip pancakes. He could hold Ilya in his arms and kiss him and make him feel so loved and so special and so precious because he *was* and he deserved to know it.

He was everything to Shane and Shane had every intention of making that clear, for the rest of their lives.

He would be the best at it because he was the best at most things and why wouldn't he want to be the best husband he could be?

It was what Ilya deserved.

So Shane made those chocolate chip pancakes and brought them outside. He moved Anya so that he could sit next to Ilya on the loveseat, his thigh pressed against Ilya's as they ate pancakes together in the sun on their back deck.

When they were finished eating, Ilya's alarm went off, and he quietly went inside to take his medication.

He came back out, curling up on the seat next to Shane again, tucking his face against Shane's neck.

Shane hummed and kissed his forehead, resting his cheek on top of Ilya's curls. They stayed there until flies started to swarm around their dirty plates and utensils, going back inside. Ilya went to the couch and Shane cleaned up, before joining him there.

They rearranged themselves so Shane was leaning against the arm of the couch, on a pillow, with Ilya on top of him, between his legs.

He might fall asleep, which Shane didn't mind. It would probably be good if he napped, especially if he hadn't slept well the night before.

Shane just played with his curls, wrapping them around his finger and releasing them. They were in no rush. No hurry.

Anya would need to go out again but Shane could take her out if need be, letting Ilya sleep, or have some time alone if that was what he wanted or needed.

Ilya did fall asleep, for maybe thirty minutes. It was sweet, watching him wake up, the way he'd rub his face against Shane's chest, and stretched out a little.

He gave Shane a little nuzzle and got up, wandering off. Shane didn't follow. He let him be, especially if he was needing some space. Sometimes Ilya preferred to have a cry by himself and would come back after, looking for comfort, and Shane would bundle him up in a blanket and hold him while they watched a *Fast & Furious* movie.

Shane took Anya out, just on the property, so he was close if Ilya needed him.

After running around outside for a bit, they headed back in, where Anya promptly passed out in her dog bed.

Shane cleaned up a little and was in the middle of washing his hands when Ilya came back downstairs, wrapping his arms around Shane from behind, face tucked back against his neck.

"Hey," Shane said, resting his cheek on Ilya's head.

"Hi," Ilya breathed back.

"I'm almost done."

"Take your time."

Shane dried his hands and turned in the circle of Ilya's arms to hold him properly, giving him a long, tight hug.

Ilya gave the best hugs and the best kisses. Shane loved being swallowed up by him but he also loved being able to hold him, too.

They leaned away and Shane cupped Ilya's face in his hands, just looking at him. His eyes were a little puffy, his nose a little red. Shane just smiled at him tenderly and kissed him warmly.

They hugged some more and then went back to the couch and Shane bundled Ilya up in a blanket, holding him nice and close.

“My little dumpling,” Shane murmured, in Russian. Ilya snorted but he snuggled closer so Shane knew he wasn’t too mad about being called a dumpling.

They put on an action movie that Rose was in, only sort of watching it. It was background noise as Shane played with Ilya’s hair and rubbed his back and gave him little kisses, feeling the way Ilya finally relaxed against him.

When the movie was over, they went up and took a shower together.

Shane washed Ilya from head to toe, taking his time, and wanting to give Ilya some extra, adoring attention. Sex wasn’t in the cards at the moment, which was fine. It was enough to just do this for Ilya because Shane wanted him to feel taken care of.

Ilya did seem to enjoy it, eyes closed and lips parted, as Shane washed his hair.

When they were done and changed into clean clothes, they went to walk Anya.

She was her sweet self, as always, and Shane watched as Ilya got her ready for her walk in her harness, clipping on her leash, letting Anya lick his face.

They walked along the road by the house, holding hands, and talking a little, but mostly walking in companionable quiet.

Shane lifted their hands, kissing the back of Ilya’s, and watched the way he smiled shyly in response, bumping up against Shane just a bit.

Shane chuckled softly and bumped him back.

They returned to the cottage, sliding shoes off, taking Anya out of her gear. They went to the kitchen and Shane started in on lunch, Ilya sitting at the counter, his head resting on his hands.

Shane made tuna melts because they were easy and Ilya liked them, with some chips, and dill pickles.

While the sandwiches warmed in the oven, Shane came around the island. Ilya sat up, wrapping his arms around Shane, chin hooked over his shoulder. Shane held him, smoothing his hand up and down his spine.

They ate together outside while Anya slept.

After eating, Ilya put his head in Shane’s lap.

It was rare for Ilya to do this, usually it was the other way around. Shane loved having his head in Ilya’s lap, Ilya’s long fingers stroking through his hair.

He rested one hand on Ilya’s chest, sliding the other through his curls. Ilya closed his eyes and reached up to rest his hand over Shane’s.

They stayed like that until dark clouds began to roll in. A summer storm. They cleaned off the table and went back inside. They cleaned the dishes together and went upstairs to change into their pajamas as thunder rumbled in the distance.

They were back on the couch, snuggling with the dog, a movie on as the storm raged outside.

Ilya was snuggled up against Shane, a blanket tossed over them, Anya curled up on the other end of the couch.

Shane didn't ask if Ilya was feeling better or if there was more that he needed. He just held him and snuck kisses into his curls or the little sliver of skin between his neck and shoulder.

Ilya eventually just rolled to his other side so he was facing Shane, tucking himself against him, and occasionally seeking out kisses, which was usually a good sign. Shane petted his hair and they just snuggled.

Tomorrow would be a new day and no matter what came, they would get through it together.

FIN

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

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Every kudo and comment is so greatly appreciated and treasured! Thank you for your support! <3

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