

Let Me In

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Let Me In

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Summary

“I said I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine.”

“Why does it matter how I sound?” Ilya spins back around, frustration spilling over. “Why is there always something? Tone, face, body language. Maybe I’m just fucking tired, Shane. Maybe I don’t have the energy to be ‘okay’ correctly.”

Shane swallows. “I’m not asking you to be okay.”

“It feels like it,” Ilya scoffs. “It feels like if I don’t say the right words, if I don’t say them the right way, you’ll keep pushing until you get something out of me.”

—

Ilya’s mother’s birthday sends Ilya down a rough episode, in which Shane tries understanding him.

Notes

Some angst I’m not okay guys.

No idea where in the time line this takes place. After the cottage, before marriage, I guess. And well, Shane is aware of Ilya’s depression.

<3

Chapter 1

October 5th.

Ilya wakes up already exhausted. The kind of tired that has nothing to do with sleep and everything to do with carrying something heavy for too long. The date is there the second he checks his phone, burned into the lock screen calendar like a quiet accusation. *Mama's birthday.*

He closes his eyes and lies there longer than he should, staring at the darkness behind his eyelids, bargaining with himself. Just get through it. Just one day. He's done this before. He can do it again. Shane's gone all day shooting some advertisement, so Ilya has all the time in the world to lay there in his own misery.

By evening, the apartment feels too small. Every sound grates on him, the hum of the fridge, the distant traffic, even his own breathing. He drifts from room to room without purpose, restless and hollow, until he ends up by the window, phone in his hand.

The photo on his phone is open before he realizes it. His mother's smile is gentle, familiar, devastating. She's holding him close, like she could keep the whole world away if she wanted to. His chest tightens painfully.

You should be here, he thinks. *I should be with you.*

His fingers curl around the phone. He wants to throw it. He wants to disappear into it. He locks the screen instead, jaw clenched so tight it aches.

He hears the door open.

"Ilya?" Shane's voice floats down the hall, warm and familiar. Safe.

Ilya straightens immediately, like a reflex. He wipes his face even though there are no tears. Not yet.

“In here,” he calls back.

There’s some rustling sound from the kitchen. The fridge door opens, and Ilya curses to himself remembering the dinner Shane made for him last night. Which he didn’t eat last night, or today.

Shane walks into the living room already mid-smile, keys still in his hand.

It dies the second his eyes land on Ilya.

“Oh,” Shane says. The word slips out before he can stop it. “Hey.”

Ilya’s jaw tightens. He looks away and out the window, the glass cold beneath his palm.

“Hey,” he says. “How was filming?”

Shane drops his bag by the door, slower than necessary. “Fine. Same shit.” He watches Ilya for a beat too long. “You okay?”

Ilya exhales hard. “Yes.”

Shane doesn’t move. “You didn’t even turn around.”

“I don’t need to turn around to answer you.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Then say what you mean.”

Shane steps closer anyway, his voice dropping. “You’ve been off. You barely texted today. You didn’t eat dinner.”

“I wasn’t hungry.”

“You’re never hungry anymore.”

Ilya turns, irritation flashing hot and sudden. “Fucking hell, can you stop keeping a tab on my behavior?”

Shane winces. “I’m not—”

“You are,” Ilya snaps. “Every sound, every look, every ‘are you okay?’ like you’re just waiting for me to crack.”

“I’m just worried about you.”

“I don’t need you to be.”

That lands wrong. Shane’s jaw tightens, hurt flickering across his face before he reins it in. “You don’t get to decide that.”

Ilya laughs, sharp and humorless. “Wow. Okay. That’s new.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Shane says quickly. “I just—when you shut down like this, when you won’t even look at me—”

“I am looking at you,” Ilya cuts in, even though he isn’t.

Shane’s voice softens, which somehow makes it worse. “You’re not. You haven’t been. Not really.”

Something in Ilya twists, tight and painful. He turns back to the window, hands curling into fists at his sides. “Can we not do this tonight?”

Shane frowns. “Do what?”

“This whole thing,” Ilya says, gesturing vaguely between them. “The concern. The voice. The way you look at me like I am about to fall apart if you blink wrong.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Ilya—”

“I said I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine.”

“Why does it matter how I sound?” Ilya spins back around, frustration spilling over. “Why is there always something? Tone, face, body language. Maybe I’m just fucking tired, Shane. Maybe I don’t have the energy to be ‘okay’ correctly.”

Shane swallows. “I’m not asking you to be okay.”

“It feels like it,” Ilya scoffs. “It feels like if I don’t say the right words, if I don’t say them the right way, you’ll keep pushing until you get something out of me.”

He almost wishes his English was as restrained as it used to be. Then at least he wouldn’t have the words to express all his emotions, the emotions that’s hurting Shane.

“I just want the truth,” Shane mumbles, taking a step forward.

Ilya laughs again, brittle. “You think I am lying to you?”

“I think you’re hiding.”

“Well maybe I want to,” Ilya snaps. “Did you ever think about that?”

Shane steps closer even, tentative. “You don’t have to hide from me.”

“I do,” Ilya says immediately. The word is out before he can stop it. He freezes, breath hitching.

Shane’s eyes soften, and that, God, that’s the worst part. He looks like he’s on the verge of a break down, and Ilya hates that he’s the reason for it. Shane looks at him. “Why?”

Ilya’s chest feels too tight. He paces, running a hand through his hair. “Because when you look at me like that— like you’re trying to save me— I feel like a problem. Like something you have to fix.”

“That’s not—”

“And I hate it,” Ilya continues, voice rising. “I hate that I make you worry. I hate that my shit falls onto you and drags you down with me.”

“You’re not dragging me down.”

“You don’t get to decide that,” Ilya throws back, venomous.

“Why are you being like this?” Shane asks, voice cracking. “Is it me? Did I do something wrong?”

The question hits dead center.

“You didn’t do anything,” Ilya says, too fast. “Fuck, this isn’t about you.”

Shane flinches. “I didn’t say it was.”

“You’re acting like it is,” Ilya snaps. “Like everything I feel has to circle back to you somehow.”

“I just want to help.”

“I don’t need help,” Ilya says, pacing again. “I just want—” He cuts himself off, breath ragged. “I just want one fucking day where I don’t have to explain myself. Explain why I act or say the things I do.”

Shane reaches out anyway, fingers brushing Ilya’s arm. “Ilya, please—”

“Don’t,” Ilya says sharply, jerking away.

Shane’s hand falls, empty. His shoulders slump, like he’s been physically struck.

The sight makes something ache viciously in Ilya’s chest. All he wants is to turn back, to let Shane pull him in, to bury his face against him and breathe. Instead, he stands there, rigid and furious at himself.

Silence crashes down between them.

Shane looks down at the floor, jaw clenched, blinking hard. When he speaks again, his voice is quiet, wounded. “I wish you’d let me be there.”

Ilya’s throat burns. He remembers the rooftop, years ago, his voice sharp with anger, Shane standing there open and confused and hurt all at once. Even then, he’d wanted this. Shane’s understanding. His touch.

Even then, he’d been too afraid.

“I don’t know how,” Ilya says finally, barely audible.

Shane looks up at him, eyes shining. He doesn’t step closer this time.

The air between them feels thick, charged with everything they haven’t said and everything they’re too afraid to.

They stand there in silence. Ilya’s chest hurts. His head aches. He feels wrung out, like he’s been scraped hollow from the inside.

Shane is the first to move.

He rubs a hand over his face, shoulders slumping, the fight draining out of him. When he speaks, his voice is quiet, tired. Sad.

“Hey,” he says. “Come on.”

Ilya doesn’t look at him.

“It’s late,” Shane continues gently. “We should... let’s just go to bed.”

Not we need to talk. Not let’s fix this. Just go to bed. The simplicity of it makes something twist painfully in Ilya’s chest. Fuck, he really messed everything up.

“Okay,” Ilya murmurs.

They move through the apartment side by side without really touching. Shane turns off lights. Ilya trails behind, numb, every step heavy. The silence isn’t angry anymore, it’s fragile, like one wrong word could shatter it.

In the bedroom, Shane changes quietly, movements careful, like he’s trying not to spook him. Ilya sits on the edge of the bed longer than necessary, staring at the floor, hands clasped tightly in his lap.

He feels awful. For snapping. For pushing. For making Shane look at him like that, hurt and helpless and still trying.

He lies down eventually, turning onto his side, back to Shane. The distance feels unbearable even though it’s only inches. His chest tightens, breaths coming shallow now, uneven.

He tells himself not to cry. It doesn't work.

The first tear slips out silently, then another. His shoulders start to shake before he can stop them, breath hitching in small, broken sounds he tries to swallow down.

"Ilya?" Shane whispers.

Ilya presses his face into the pillow, mortified. "I'm sorry," he chokes out. "I didn't mean—I'm sorry."

Shane doesn't hesitate.

He shifts closer, one hand sliding around Ilya's neck, turning him over so that they face one another. Ilya hugs him tight, laying his head on Shane's chest, arms wrapped tightly around his middle. Shane's hand comes up to cradle the back of his head, fingers threading softly through his hair.

"Hey," Shane murmurs. "Hey, it's okay."

"It's not," Ilya sobs quietly now, words spilling out between breaths. "I was so mean to you. I don't know why I do that. I don't want to hurt you."

"You're okay," Shane coaxes, voice shaky. He kisses Ilya's temple, then his hair.

Ilya clutches onto Shane like a lifeline, fingers digging into the softness of his skin. "I just—today was bad," he whispers. "It's really bad. I don't know what to do."

Shane tightens his hold, anchoring him. His hand strokes his back. "I'm here," he says softly. "I'm here."

Ilya cries harder at that, grief finally breaking through the anger and frustration he'd been holding all day. He cries for his mother, for the years that keep moving without her, for the way this day always pulls him apart.

Shane doesn't rush him. He rocks him gently, slow and steady, like he's reminding Ilya how to breathe. His hand moves in small circles against Ilya's back, grounding, warm.

"You're safe," Shane whispers. "I've got you."

Ilya buries his face against Shane, exhausted and shaking, but finally letting himself be held. The tears eventually slow, turning into soft, uneven breaths.

"I'm sorry," he murmurs again, voice hoarse. He looks up at Shane, his heart hurting impossibly more seeing the tears in Shane's eyes. "Can I.. hold you?"

Shane's breath catches. He smiles softly, voice thick with emotion. "Always. You never have to ask."

Ilya shifts, moving behind Shane, curling around him instinctively. His arms wrap around Shane's waist, chest pressing against his back. He inhales, letting the warmth of Shane's body ground him, the steady rise and fall of his breathing anchoring him in the moment.

"I—" Ilya starts, voice low, trembling. "I just... today's— Fuck."

Shane shifts slightly, tilting his head back toward Ilya. "Shhh," he murmurs softly, voice gentle but firm. "We'll talk tomorrow. Sleep now. Just sleep."

Ilya's heart tightens. He wants to say more, explain the anger, the grief, the guilt, but Shane's quiet insistence, the soft warmth against his chest, the slow, steady beat of his heart, makes him pause.

“Okay,” Ilya whispers, tightening his hold just slightly, pressing himself closer.

Shane relaxes fully into him, arms coming up to rest lightly over Ilya’s, finally letting himself be held. “You’re safe,” Shane murmurs. “I’m here. Nothing has to be fixed tonight.”

Ilya rocks him gently from behind, letting the tension drain out with each small movement. The tears have slowed, exhaustion taking over, but grief still lingers in quiet, dull ache against his ribs.

“I love you,” Shane whispers softly.

“I love you too,” Ilya murmurs, pressing a soft kiss to Shane’s shoulder.

Finally, Shane closes his eyes. Ilya holds him tight, slow and steady, letting sleep pull them both in. The world outside, the grief, the ache, the memory of his mother, still exists, but here, in the quiet dark, there is warmth. There is closeness. There is enough.

And for now, that is enough.

Chapter 2

October 6th.

Ilya wakes with a sharp intake of breath, heart already racing. For a moment, he lies still, staring at the ceiling, disoriented. Then he turns his head.

Empty.

The sheets on Shane's side are rumpled but cold, the pillow untouched for too long. Panic blooms instantly, ugly and familiar, clawing its way up his throat.

"No," Ilya whispers, sitting up too fast. "No, no—"

Last night crashes into him in fragments: his voice raised, Shane flinching, the way he'd pulled away before breaking completely. Regret coils tight in his chest.

You finally drove him away.

"I'm such a fucking idiot," he mutters, scrubbing at his face.

Then he hears it.

A soft, domestic sound, metal against metal, the quiet hiss of heat. And then the smell drifts in, warm and grounding: coffee, butter, toast.

His breath stutters.

Relief rushes through him so fast it leaves him lightheaded. He swings his legs out of bed and follows the scent down the hallway, barefoot, moving like he's afraid this will vanish if he goes too fast.

He stops in the kitchen doorway.

Shane stands at the counter, half-turned toward the stove, morning light spilling through the window and catching on him in a way that makes Ilya's chest ache. He's wearing a loose, faded T-shirt, one Ilya knows is soft from too many washes, and it hangs just right on his shoulders, slipping slightly down one arm. His hair is still sleep-mussed, falling into his eyes, his face bare and unguarded.

There's something devastatingly beautiful about him like this. Not polished. Not trying. Just real. The gentle line of his neck as he bends forward, the way his shoulders relax when he thinks no one is watching, the quiet care in the way he moves.

Ilya's stomach twists at the memory of last night.

Shane hums softly under his breath, unaware he's being watched, and the sound settles deep in Ilya's chest.

He steps forward and wraps his arms around Shane from behind, pressing his face between his shoulder blades.

Shane startles, then melts back instantly, like he'd been waiting for it.

"Morning," Shane murmurs, voice low and warm.

"I thought you were gone," Ilya admits quietly, arms tightening.

Shane reaches back, resting his hands over Ilya's. "I just got up early. You looked like you needed the sleep."

Ilya exhales against his back, nodding. "I panicked."

"I'm sorry," Shane says softly. "Come on. Let's eat on the couch, yeah?"

They carry the plates to the living room and settle onto the sofa. Ilya sinks back against the cushions, exhaustion heavy in his bones. Shane sits beside him at first, knees brushing.

They eat in silence for a few minutes. Ilya picks at his food, then finally swallows and speaks, voice quiet.

"Yesterday was my mom's birthday."

Shane's fork pauses midair. He looks at Ilya, eyes immediately softening. "Oh. Ilya... I didn't know."

"I didn't tell you," Ilya says, gaze fixed on the plate in his lap. "I woke up angry. At the world. At myself. And when you came home and looked at me like you were worried, I just — snapped."

Shane sets his plate aside, turning fully toward him. "I'm sorry I pushed. I could tell something was wrong and I didn't know how to not ask."

"You were not wrong to ask," Ilya says, voice tight. "I just didn't know how to answer without falling apart. And I didn't want you to worry."

Shane's eyes glisten. His shoulders slump, guilt settling visibly into him. "I hate that you felt like you had to protect me from that."

Ilya's chest aches at the sound of it. Without thinking, he shifts, setting his own plate aside and tugging Shane gently closer.

"Come here," Ilya murmurs.

Shane hesitates for half a second, then lets himself be pulled into Ilya's lap, turning sideways so his legs drape across Ilya's thighs. He curls in instinctively, forehead dropping to Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya wraps his arms around him immediately, one hand sliding up to cradle the back of Shane's head, fingers threading gently through his hair.

"It wasn't your fault," Ilya says softly, rocking him just a little. "I was hurting and I took it out on you. I'm sorry."

Shane's breath stutters. "I just want to be there for you," he says quietly. "Sometimes I don't know how without making it worse."

Ilya presses a kiss into his hair, slow and lingering. "Just like this," he murmurs. "Just stay."

Shane nods against his shoulder, arms coming up to wrap around Ilya's shoulders. He clings a little, like he needs reassurance just as much.

"I was scared you hated me last night," Shane admits, voice small.

The words hurt worse than any accusation.

"I could never," Ilya says immediately, tightening his hold. "I was scared too. That if I let you see all of it, you'd realize I'm too much."

Shane pulls back just enough to look at him. “You’re not too much. You’re hurting.”

Ilya swallows hard, eyes burning. “She would have loved you,” he whispers. “You’re gentle. You make things feel safe. I think she would have trusted you with me.”

Shane’s face crumples, tears slipping free. “I wish I could’ve met her.”

“I know,” Ilya says softly, wiping a tear from his cheek with his thumb. “Me too.”

They stay tangled together on the sofa, plates forgotten, grief and comfort wrapped up in the same quiet space. Ilya rocks him slowly, breathing him in, grounding them both.

“I love you,” Shane whispers, a promise.

”I love you.”

Nothing is fixed. The ache is still there.

But Shane is here. Warm and real in his arms.

And for now, that is enough.

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