

Learning Curve

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Learning Curve

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Summary

“You’re wearing a hole in my floor,” he says. “Sit down.”
He expects pushback. A look. A quip.
Instead—
Shane stops."

or

Shane is anxious and overwhelmed, and has a meeting with Ilya near the beginning of their not-relationship, and it doesn't go as expected. Ilya is surprised to discover just how quickly and easily Shane goes under for him, when he isn't really trying, but is more than happy to care for him.

Chapter 1: The First Time

Ilya doesn't expect the evening to matter.

It's early, still awkward in the way first-not-first meetings are—too much familiarity to call it casual, not enough certainty to call it anything else. Shane shows up with that same contained energy he always has, coiled tight under his skin, eyes alert like he's already bracing for something.

"Hey," Ilya says, easy. "You made it."

Shane nods, drops his bag by the door a little harder than necessary. "Yeah."

That's it. No elaboration.

Ilya clocks the tension immediately. The pacing. The way Shane keeps his hands busy like stillness might be dangerous. Ilya's instinct, at this stage, is still blunt-force practicality.

"You're wearing a hole in my floor," he says. "Sit down."

He expects pushback. A look. A quip.

Instead—

Shane stops.

It's not dramatic. Just a pause that lasts half a beat longer than normal. Shane's gaze flicks to Ilya, unfocused, like the words took a second to land. Then he turns and sits.

Ilya blinks.

Shane settles on the couch, posture still tense but no longer moving. His hands rest on his thighs, fingers flexing once before going still. His breathing slows, not all the way, but enough that Ilya notices.

Huh.

Ilya stays where he is, suddenly very aware that whatever just happened was... something.

"You okay?" he asks, quieter than before.

Shane nods. "Yeah."

It's not defensive. It's not reflexive. It's like the word came from somewhere deeper.

Ilya feels a flicker of uncertainty. He hadn't meant to *do* anything. He'd just wanted Shane to stop pacing. But Shane looks—calmer. Less sharp around the edges.

So Ilya slows down.

He grabs a glass, fills it with water, sets it on the table within Shane's reach. "Drink."

Shane does. No comment. No hesitation.

Okay. That's new.

Ilya sits at the other end of the couch, careful not to crowd him. He doesn't talk. He lets the room be quiet, lets Shane's breathing set the pace. After a minute, Shane leans—barely—toward him, like gravity has shifted.

Ilya doesn't move.

He's suddenly very aware of his voice. Of his posture. Of how easily Shane seems to follow the smallest cues. It's surprising. A little unsettling. And—if he's honest—something he wants to handle right.

"Hey," Ilya says softly. "You don't have to do anything. Just... stay there."

Shane's shoulders drop another fraction.

Ilya exhales. Relief, maybe.

He stands, slowly. "I'm gonna make something to eat. You want some?"

Shane nods again. "Okay."

In the kitchen, Ilya keeps his movements deliberate, unhurried. He talks a little—nothing important. Just enough to anchor the space. When he brings the food back, he places it in front of Shane, presses a fork into his hand.

"Eat."

Shane does.

Ilya watches him, the way the tension continues to bleed out of him, the way his focus narrows to what's directly in front of him. There's a quiet trust there that Ilya didn't ask for and doesn't quite know what to do with—but he knows better than to rush it.

Later, when Shane leans fully against him, Ilya freezes for half a second before carefully settling an arm around his shoulders.

"Still okay?" he asks.

Shane hums. "Yeah. This is... good."

That settles something in Ilya's chest.

He stays exactly like that—steady, calm, paying attention—figuring it out one moment at a time. He doesn't label it. He doesn't plan ahead.

He just knows one thing for certain:

Whatever this is, he's going to be careful with it.

Ilya doesn't move right away when Shane starts to sag against him. He lets it happen, lets the weight settle, recalibrates his own balance so Shane doesn't have to.

The show murmurs on, forgotten. Shane's breathing evens out, long and deep, like he's finally remembered how. Ilya notices the exact moment the tension drains—Shane's fingers loosen in his shirt, his forehead presses more firmly into Ilya's chest, seeking something solid.

It surprises him. Not that Shane trusts him—there's already something unspoken between them—but how *complete* it is. How Shane stops holding himself up the second he doesn't have to.

"Hey," Ilya murmurs, low. "We should get you to bed."

There's no immediate response. Shane doesn't tense, doesn't pull away. He only exhales, slow and warm, like the word didn't quite register.

Ilya hesitates. He's not gentle by instinct. His first impulse is to jostle, tease, say something stupid just to get a reaction. Instead, he tries something else.

"Shane," he says again, steady. "Stand up."

It's not sharp. It's not demanding. It's just... there.

Shane moves.

Not fast. Not clumsy either. He straightens like the instruction slid neatly into place, feet finding the floor without him really looking. His eyes are open but unfocused, tracking Ilya more by presence than sight.

Ilya's stomach flips.

Huh, he thinks. That works.

He stays close as they walk down the hall, one hand hovering at Shane's back, not touching unless Shane drifts too far to one side. Shane follows without question, steps syncing automatically, like he's done this before—even though Ilya knows he hasn't.

In the bedroom, the light stays low. Ilya gestures to the bed. "Sit."

Shane does.

“Okay,” Ilya says, slower now, testing the edges of this. “Shoes off.”

Again, immediate. Calm. Shane bends, unties them with careful fingers, sets them neatly side by side like he always does. Some habits run deeper than exhaustion.

Ilya watches him like he’s handling something fragile he didn’t expect to be trusted with.

“You’re doing good,” he says without thinking.

Shane doesn’t answer—but his shoulders drop another fraction, the last tight line in his posture finally easing.

Ilya swallows. Adjusts.

“Lay down,” he says, softer. “I’ve got you.”

Shane stretches out on the bed, curling instinctively onto his side. Ilya pulls the blanket up, tucks it around him with more care than he’d ever admit to anyone. When he sits beside him, Shane rolls closer immediately, forehead pressing into Ilya’s ribs like it’s the most natural thing in the world.

There’s no apology. No embarrassment.

Just trust.

Shane’s hand curls lightly into Ilya’s shirt, fingers warm and slack. His breathing slows, then deepens, each exhale sinking heavier into the mattress. Within minutes, he’s asleep—fully, properly asleep—like his body finally believes it’s allowed to be.

Ilya stays still, listening, making sure nothing startles him back out of it.

It hits him then—not all at once, but steadily—that Shane didn’t *ask* for this. Didn’t negotiate it or explain it or try to stay in control.

He just... leaned.

Carefully, like it’s something he wants to get right, Ilya settles in and lets himself be the thing Shane sleeps against.

Morning comes slowly.

Shane wakes to warmth first—sheets, a solid presence at his back, an arm draped over his waist like it’s been there forever. For one disoriented second, he doesn’t question it.

Then memory trickles in.

The flight. The couch. The quiet. The way he followed without thinking.

Oh *god*.

Shane goes rigid.

He stares at the wall, heart racing now that his brain is fully online, cataloging everything with brutal clarity. He'd barely spoken. He'd *done what he was told*. He'd fallen asleep curled into—

He swallows.

Carefully, like any sudden movement might detonate the moment, Shane shifts just enough to check.

Ilya is awake.

Not staring. Not smirking outright. Just lying there on his side, propped slightly on one elbow, watching Shane with an expression that's far too gentle to be legal.

Shane's face goes nuclear.

"Oh my *god*," he mutters, voice hoarse. "I—Jesus. I'm so sorry. I don't—what the hell was that. I don't usually— I mean, I wasn't—"

He pushes himself upright, tangling briefly in the sheets, mortification rolling off him in waves. "I swear I wasn't trying to be—whatever that was. I was just tired. Really tired. I didn't mean to—"

"Shane." Ilya cuts in, voice warm, amused. Not sharp. Not teasing—yet. "Breathe."

That only makes it worse.

Shane drags a hand down his face. "You're not weirded out?"

Ilya snorts softly and rolls onto his back, hands folding behind his head like this is the most normal morning in the world. "Please. I have seen you scream at referees over a *toe offside*. This barely registers."

Shane huffs despite himself. Then immediately groans. "That's not helping."

Ilya turns his head, eyes bright now, the familiar spark back in place. "Okay, okay. I won't joke." A beat. Then, fondly, "Much."

Shane risks a glance. Ilya's expression has shifted—still playful, but careful too, like he's deliberately matching Shane's energy instead of steamrolling it.

"You didn't do anything wrong," Ilya says, more quietly. "You were exhausted. You came home. You slept. Very scandalous behavior."

Shane presses his lips together. “I just... don’t let people *do* that. Take over, I mean.”

“I noticed,” Ilya says easily. Then, softer, “I didn’t mind.”

That makes Shane freeze.

“You didn’t... think less of me?” he asks, almost against his will.

Ilya looks at him like the question genuinely surprises him. “Why would I?”

“I don’t know,” Shane admits. “I like being in control. I like being responsible. And last night I was just—” He gestures vaguely, frustrated. “Gone.”

Ilya sits up then, fully, sheets pooling at his waist. He bumps Shane’s knee lightly with his own. Casual. Familiar. *Normal*.

“You’re allowed to be tired,” he says. “Even you.”

Shane lets out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding.

They sit there for a moment, the awkwardness slowly melting into something easier. Ilya reaches over and steals the blanket back around Shane’s shoulders when he notices him shiver, like it’s instinct now. Shane pretends not to notice. Pretends he doesn’t lean into it.

“So,” Ilya says, smirk returning. “Coffee first, or do you need five minutes to die of embarrassment?”

Shane groans and drops back onto the mattress. “I hate you.”

“No you don’t.”

Shane pauses. Then, quieter, “No. I don’t.”

Ilya’s smile softens—not triumphant, just pleased. He stands, stretching, entirely at ease. “Coffee. Then food. Then you can overthink this later if you want.”

Shane watches him go, chest warm in a way that has nothing to do with sleep.

When Ilya glances back from the doorway, he adds lightly, “And for the record? You slept like a rock. Didn’t snore. Very impressive.”

Shane throws a pillow at him.

Ilya laughs, catching it easily.

The day feels manageable again.

Chapter 2: The Second Time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's different this time in the way déjà vu is different—familiar, but sharper.

Shane doesn't stumble through the door. He doesn't snap, either. He's quieter than usual, eyes a little unfocused, movements too precise, like he's holding himself together with effort instead of habit.

Ilya clocks it immediately.

He'd missed it the first time. Chalked it up to travel, stress, Shane being Shane. This time, his body remembers before his brain does. The way Shane sets his bag down carefully. The way he stands there, waiting, like he's paused mid-instruction and doesn't know how to resume.

"Hey," Ilya says, neutral. Not soft yet. Just steady.

Shane looks at him—and something in his shoulders eases. Not much. Just enough.

"Long trip," Shane says. It's factual. Flat.

Ilya nods. "Yeah. I could tell."

That earns him a small, tired huff of a laugh. Shane exhales, like he's letting go of a fraction of the tension just by being seen.

Ilya doesn't overthink it.

"Shoes," he says, like last time.

Shane obeys immediately.

That's the part that still surprises him.

There's no hesitation this time, no irritation. Just compliance so smooth it almost feels like a reflex. Shane bends, kicks them off, straightens again—and waits.

Ilya feels something warm and protective settle in his chest.

"Good," he says, without thinking. Then, correcting himself only slightly, "Come sit."

Shane does.

He moves to the couch and sinks into it like gravity has suddenly increased. His hands rest in his lap, fingers loose, eyes following Ilya without tracking every movement like he usually would.

Ilya goes slower now. He remembers what worked.

Water first. He places the glass into Shane's hands instead of telling him to get it. Shane drinks automatically, shoulders slumping with each swallow, like his body recognizes the sequence.

"You okay?" Ilya asks—not because he expects an answer, but because it feels like a marker.

Shane nods. Doesn't speak.

That's new. And not alarming.

Ilya sits beside him, close but not crowding, thigh warm against Shane's leg. He keeps his voice even, low. "You can lean if you want."

Shane does so instantly, forehead brushing Ilya's shoulder, breath shuddering once before evening out.

Oh.

So that's faster.

Ilya swallows, steadies himself. He remembers: fewer words. Clear direction. No questions that require thinking.

"So mnoy vy v bezopasnosti," he murmurs quietly.

Shane's fingers curl into the fabric of his shirt.

The shift is subtle but unmistakable. Shane's body slackens, tension draining out of him like someone pulled a plug. His breathing deepens, eyes going soft and unfocused, blinking slow like he's underwater.

Ilya adjusts automatically now—one arm around Shane's shoulders, the other rubbing slow circles between his shoulder blades. He keeps talking, not much, just enough to anchor.

"You're safe," he murmurs. "You did good getting here."

Shane makes a quiet sound that might be agreement.

Dinner happens much like last time, but quicker. Ilya doesn't narrate as much—he doesn't need to. Shane follows him into the kitchen this time without being told, sits at the counter when guided there, eats when the plate is set in front of him.

Each instruction lands easily. Too easily, maybe—but Ilya knows better than to pull him out of it abruptly.

Afterward, it's the couch again. A blanket. A show Shane's seen before, volume low.

Shane curls into him without hesitation now, fitting himself into Ilya's side like he remembers the shape. His head settles against Ilya's chest, breath slow and even, eyes half-lidded.

Ilya counts his breaths again. Doesn't tell him.

He thinks—briefly—about how strange it is, that *this* of all things is what Shane trusts him with. Not strategy, not plans, not control—but the absence of it.

The thought settles, heavy and careful.

"You can rest," Ilya says softly. "I'll wake you when it's time."

Shane nods, barely perceptible.

He sinks fully then, weight warm and solid against Ilya's side, fingers still twisted in his shirt like an anchor.

Ilya stays exactly where he is.

Ilya notices the exact moment Shane tips a bit too far for the time they have.

It's subtle—his breathing stays slow, his body heavy and warm against Ilya's side—but his focus drifts completely. His eyes don't track the screen anymore. His fingers tighten once in Ilya's shirt and then go slack again, like he's let go of the last thread tying him to the room.

Ilya stills.

Okay, he thinks. Time to come back.

Not all at once.

He shifts just enough to make the movement noticeable but not jarring, thumb brushing slowly over Shane's wrist where it rests against his chest. Deliberate. Rhythmic. Something Shane can feel without needing to think about it.

"Shane," Ilya murmurs, voice low and close to his ear. Not a command. Not a question. Just a presence.

Shane hums faintly, brow creasing, like the sound has to travel a long way to reach him.

Good.

Ilya keeps his tone steady. "Stay with me a bit, yes?"

Shane's fingers curl again, instinctive, gripping fabric. His breathing hitches once before settling, slower but more aware.

Ilya continues, quietly narrating reality back into place. "You're on the couch. Blanket's still on you. I am right here."

Another small sound from Shane—this one more embarrassed than absent, like he's starting to realize where he is and how he got there.

Ilya smiles fondly to himself but keeps it out of his voice.

He presses a gentle kiss into Shane's hair, more grounding than affectionate. "Take a breath for me."

Shane does.

It's shaky, but it's intentional.

A few minutes later his eyes blink open, unfocused at first, then narrowing slightly as awareness creeps back in. Color floods his cheeks almost immediately.

"Oh," he mutters. Then, quieter, "I—sorry. I didn't mean to—"

He tries to pull back.

Doesn't get far.

Instead of sitting up, Shane turns his face into Ilya's chest, forehead pressing there like he can hide from his own embarrassment. One arm tightens around Ilya's waist, holding on like the couch might tilt if he lets go.

That's new.

Ilya adjusts without comment, one hand settling firm and warm between Shane's shoulder blades. "Hey," he says again, softer this time. "You're okay."

Shane groans faintly into his shirt. "This keeps happening."

"Mmh," Ilya agrees lightly, still smiling. But he's not teasing. Just acknowledging. "Seems that way."

"I'm not—" Shane exhales hard, voice muffled. "I'm not usually like this."

"I know," Ilya says easily. "You're usually very boring and uptight."

That earns him a weak huff of a laugh, breath ghosting warm against his chest. Shane doesn't move away.

Embarrassment rolls off him in waves now—he can feel it in the way Shane's shoulders curl inward, the way he clings instead of retreating. But underneath it, there's no panic. No bolt-

for-the-door instinct.

Just... hiding. Trusting.

Ilya rubs slow circles into his back, grounding him the way he remembers. “You don’t have to go anywhere,” he says quietly. “You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Shane nods once, forehead still pressed there. “Can I just—stay a minute?”

Ilya’s answer is immediate. “Yes. Of course.”

They sit like that for a while—Shane gradually coming back into himself, tension rebuilding in careful layers instead of snapping into place all at once. When he finally lifts his head, his eyes are clearer, embarrassment still there but tempered by warmth.

“Next time,” Shane mutters, “you should probably, I don’t know. Warn me.”

Ilya arches a brow. “Warn you that you are going to float away?”

Shane groans and tucks himself closer again, cheeks blazing. “You’re impossible.”

Ilya laughs softly, arm tightening around him just a fraction. “And yet.”

He lets Shane linger there until the last of the fog in his mind drains away, until his breathing is fully his own again and his grip loosens—not because he has to let go, but because he’s ready.

And when Shane finally does sit up, he doesn’t rush off.

He stays.

Chapter End Notes

So mnoy vy v bezopasnosti -> You are safe with me

Chapter 3: Every Time After

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day grinds Shane down in inches.

It's not one thing. It never is. It's the noise, the constant awareness of being watched, the endless decisions stacked on top of each other like plates he's not allowed to drop. He's sharp, controlled, competent—everyone can see that. No one sees how tightly he's holding himself together.

By the time he gets through the airport and onto the plane, his jaw aches from clenching.

He texts Ilya, Lily, anyway.

Landing late. See you?

The reply comes almost immediately.

Of course. I'm home.

Something in Shane's chest loosens at that. Just a little. Enough to get him through the rest of the evening.

When he finally knocks on Ilya's door, it opens before his hand fully drops.

Ilya looks him over in one glance—takes in the rigid posture, the set of his shoulders, the way his eyes are already a little too far away.

“Hey,” Ilya says, calm and familiar.

Shane steps inside and lets the door close behind him. The apartment is quiet, warm, unchanged. Safe.

He exhales, long and shaky, like his body's been waiting for permission.

“Come here,” Ilya says—not sharp, not soft. Just sure.

Shane doesn't hesitate.

He crosses the space between them and lets Ilya's hands settle on his shoulders, grounding, solid. The world narrows almost immediately. The noise fades. His thoughts slow, like

someone's turned the volume knob down instead of cutting the sound entirely.

"Long day," Ilya murmurs.

Shane nods. Doesn't trust himself to speak.

"That's okay," Ilya says. "I have got you. Ty v bezopasnosti so mnoy, lyubimyy."

That's all it takes.

Shane leans forward, forehead pressing briefly into Ilya's shoulder, and then—carefully, willingly—lets go. The tension drains out of him in a familiar, welcome rush. His breathing deepens. His muscles slacken. The weight he's been carrying all day slips out of his hands and stays gone.

Ilya guides him without fuss—coat off, shoes kicked aside, hands warm and steady. He talks just enough to anchor him, voice low and even.

"You're here. You're safe. Sit."

Shane does.

The couch catches him, and so does Ilya, arm around his shoulders, familiar as muscle memory. Shane's head tips back against Ilya's chest, eyes unfocused now, body heavy and warm.

The sink comes easy these days.

There's no embarrassment in it anymore. No fear of being seen wrong. Just relief. Just rest.

Ilya stays with him through it, counting breaths out of habit now, hand moving in slow, grounding circles against Shane's back. He doesn't rush him down, and he doesn't pull him out. He lets Shane settle exactly where he needs to be.

Time passes. It always does.

Eventually, Ilya murmurs, "Hey. Stay with me a second."

Shane stirs. Blinks. Awareness returns gently, like coming up through warm water instead of breaking the surface. He shifts, burrowing closer instead of pulling away, face turning into Ilya's chest with a quiet, embarrassed huff.

"Sorry," he mumbles, more habit than need.

Ilya snorts softly. "For what?"

"For... that." Shane doesn't move. Doesn't try to.

Ilya tilts his head down, presses a kiss into Shane's hair. "You're allowed to rest," he says, like it's settled law. "Especially here."

Shane exhales, tension gone now, embarrassment softened into something almost fond. He curls closer, fingers hooking into Ilya's shirt like they always do.

"Stay?" he asks, quiet.

Ilya's arm tightens around him. "Always."

They sit there like that for a while longer—no rush, no need to fill the silence. The world can wait. It always does.

For now, Shane is exactly where he's meant to be.

And he lets himself sink, knowing—without doubt—that he'll be brought back when it's time.

It never scares him again.

Shane still carries the world most days. He's still sharp, responsible, relentlessly capable in public. None of that changes.

What changes is that when the weight gets too heavy, he knows where to put it.

Some nights, all it takes is Ilya's voice and a single, familiar instruction. Other nights, it's the warmth of his hands, the steady presence beside him, the certainty that he doesn't have to hold himself upright every second of every day.

There's no shame in it anymore. No confusion.

Just trust.

Shane sinks because he knows he'll be caught.
He rests because he knows he'll be brought back.

And Ilya—always there, always steady—doesn't need to be surprised by it anymore.

It's simply *theirs*.

Chapter End Notes

Ty v bezopasnosti so mnoy, lyubimyy. -> You are safe with me, my love.

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