

safe place to land

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safe place to land

by [glowingregards](#)

Summary

Shane doesn't fall apart loudly. He spirals, shuts down, missteps. Ilya pays attention. He stays. He helps Shane learn what it feels like to be noticed without being corrected.

or, 5 times Shane needs help regulating his autism, and Ilya is there for him + 1 time Shane is there for Ilya.

Notes

this is an edit: BRO I JUST SAW THIS FIC MADE IT ON THE JUMBOTRON ON MY TIKTOK TL????????? crazy thanks for all the love you guys rule

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

1.

Shane doesn't realize he's unraveling until he already is.

That's usually how it goes. There's no clear breaking point, just a gradual accumulation of wrongness. Too much noise, too many decisions, too many unfamiliar beds and schedules shifted by thirty minutes in ways that shouldn't matter but do. He's good at hockey because the rules are fixed and the ice is predictable, and his body knows exactly what it's supposed to do there.

Off the ice, everything is softer and louder at the same time.

He notices it first in the airport. The lights are too bright, the echo of rolling suitcases scraping against tile like nails on bone. He keeps his headphones on even after the music has stopped, just for the pressure of them. He counts steps. He keeps his shoulders tight and his jaw locked and tells himself he's fine because he always is.

Then there's the flight. The recycled air. The seat that presses wrong against his spine. The stranger beside him, who keeps shifting and brushing his elbow.

By the time he makes it to Ilya's apartment, his brain feels like it's vibrating just under his skull.

He doesn't say that, obviously. Shane is very good at not saying things.

Ilya opens the door and takes one look at him and doesn't comment on the way Shane's shoulders are up around his ears or how he hesitates on the threshold like the floor inside might be a different texture.

"You look like shit," Ilya says fondly.

Shane exhales something that might be a laugh. "I missed you, too."

Ilya steps aside, giving him space to come in at his own pace. That's a thing he does, the small, unremarkable accommodations that don't feel like accommodations at all. Shane doesn't have to explain why he always kicks his shoes off in the same order or why he goes straight to the window and opens it, even in winter, just to feel fresh air on his face.

Ilya just lets him.

They don't talk much at first. Ilya showers. Shane sits on the couch and stares at the wall, letting his thoughts line up again. The hoodie he's wearing feels wrong, too damp, fabric clinging unpleasantly to his arms after the rain outside. He tugs at the hem, trying to ignore it, but his skin won't stop buzzing.

When Ilya disappears into the bedroom, Shane wanders into the hallway, eyes skimming shelves and doorframes. He opens the wardrobe mostly without thinking, searching for something, anything, that feels neutral.

The jersey catches his hand because it's heavy. That's the thing. The weight of it. Thick fabric, solid, familiar in a way that doesn't require conscious processing. He pulls it on automatically, tugging it down over his hips, letting the sleeves swallow his hands.

Instant relief.

His chest loosens. His breathing evens out. The constant low-grade alarm in his head dims to a manageable hum.

Shane sinks back onto the couch, curling his legs up, the jersey draped around him like armor. He presses his palms flat against the fabric, grounding himself in the sensation. The smell is faint. A mix of detergent, ice, something that is unmistakably Ilya underneath, and it settles him further.

He doesn't look at the mirror. He doesn't turn around. He doesn't realize.

When Ilya comes back, towel around his neck, hair damp and curling, he stops so abruptly that Shane hears it; the shift in weight, the inhale that doesn't quite finish.

Shane's brain registers pause before it registers problem.

"You okay?" Shane asks, automatically scanning himself for something visibly wrong.

Ilya doesn't answer right away. He's staring. Not in the way that feels invasive or judging. Just... focused. Like he's watching tape, noticing details Shane never would have thought mattered.

"Hollander," Ilya says carefully. "Where did you get that?"

Shane glances down, confusion flickering across his face. "Your closet?"

Ilya laughs softly. "Yes. I know."

Shane frowns, tugging at the hem. His gaze slides to the sleeve, the stitching, the cut. Then it clicks.

"Oh."

The word lands heavy in his chest. He twists awkwardly, head starting to race, and sees the name on the back of the jersey. Rozanov. It's Ilya's World Junior Championship Russia jersey.

"Oh-shit," Shane says, sitting up too fast. The relief drains out of him all at once, replaced by hot, sharp panic. "I didn't— I swear I didn't know. I just grabbed it. I can change—" He's already half-standing, hands shaking as he reaches for the hem.

"Shane," Ilya says, voice firm now.

Shane freezes, breath hitching. He hates this part. The moment where he's misstepped socially and doesn't know how badly yet. His brain starts running worst-case scenarios

automatically, stacking them one on top of the other.

It looks like a statement. It looks intentional. It looks territorial.

“I’m sorry,” he says quickly, words tumbling over each other. “I wasn’t trying to— I know how it looks, I just— I needed something dry, and it felt—” He trails off, realizing how ridiculous he sounds.

Ilya crosses the room in three long strides and gently catches Shane’s wrist. Not restraining. Just grounding. Warm skin, solid grip.

“You are spiraling,” he says mildly.

Shane huffs a breathless laugh that doesn’t feel like one. “I’m aware.”

“You did not know,” Ilya says again. “Yes?”

Shane nods. “No idea.”

Ilya studies him, really studies him this time. The tension in his shoulders. The way his fingers are still fisted in the fabric, like letting go would be painful.

“You like the pressure,” Ilya says slowly. It’s not an accusation. Not even a question. Just an observation.

Shane swallows. “It helps,” he admits quietly.

Something in Ilya’s expression shifts, softens, then settles. “Then keep it.”

Shane blinks. “What?”

Ilya shrugs, reaching out to straighten the collar without thinking, smoothing it where it sits wrong on Shane’s shoulder. “You needed it. That is enough reason.”

Shane hesitates, anxiety flaring again. “But... it’s yours—”

“I know whose jersey it is, Hollander,” Ilya says dryly.

A reluctant smile tugs at Shane’s mouth. “You sure?”

Ilya’s eyes flick up, sharp and fond. “Promise.”

Shane sinks back into the couch slowly, relief seeping back in. The jersey feels different now. It’s named, meaningful, but not in a bad way. If anything, it feels safer, like he’s been given permission to exist as he is.

They sit together quietly after that. Ilya scrolls on his phone. Shane leans, resting his head in Ilya’s lap without thinking. Ilya doesn’t comment. He just moves his hand to run his fingers through Shane’s hair.

When Shane's phone buzzes with a text from his coach, Ilya notices how Shane stiffens, how his breathing changes.

"Too much?" Ilya asks softly.

Shane nods. "Travel week. Everything's loud."

Ilya hums, setting his phone down and pressing his palm flat against Shane's chest. Steady pressure, exactly where Shane needs it. Shane exhales.

He doesn't have to explain. He doesn't have to justify. He just is. And Ilya is there. Watching. Learning. Staying.

2.

Media days are worse than traveling.

Shane figures this out about ten minutes in, when the lights start to feel like they're pressing against the inside of his skull and the air in the room takes on that faint, electric hum that means there are too many people talking at once. It's not loud exactly, just layered. Voices overlapping, camera shutters clicking in uneven bursts, the scrape of chairs on the floor every time someone shifts their weight.

He sits where he's told. He folds his hands together so they won't fidget. He keeps his face neutral, attentive, and polite. This is a skill. He's practiced it.

Across the table, Ilya looks irritatingly at ease. One arm slung over the back of his chair, posture loose, expression open and amused, like this is all faintly entertaining rather than something to endure. Shane tries not to watch him too closely because it makes it harder to focus on the questions being fired at them in no particular order.

"Shane, can you talk about the rivalry this season?"

He answers carefully. Short sentences. Safe phrasing. He keeps his voice even, modulated, the way he's learned works best.

Another question. Then another.

By the time the reporter on the far right leans forward and says, "Ilya, how does it feel knowing Shane's always been the more consistent player between you two?" Shane's brain lags half a beat behind. The question isn't for him. He knows that. But his name is in it, and his attention is already fraying at the edges, and the room feels like it's tilting just slightly off-axis. So he answers.'

"I think consistency comes from preparation," Shane says, earnest, straightforward. "I try to focus on my process and—"

There's a pause. It's not long. Barely a second. But it lands like a dropped plate.

Shane realizes too late that the question wasn't directed at him, that the reporter's eyebrows are raised not in interest but in mild confusion, that a few people in the room have gone very still.

He floods his chest. He stops talking mid-sentence, mouth snapping shut. His heart starts to race, each beat louder than the last, like it's echoing off the inside of his ribs.

Wrong turn. You took the wrong turn.

Before he can scramble for a correction, before the panic can fully take hold, Ilya leans forward.

"Well," Ilya says smoothly, flashing a grin at the reporter, "he is correct. I hate it."

A ripple of laughter moves through the room. Not sharp or mocking, easy, released tension kind of laughter.

Ilya continues, seamlessly, like this was always his answer to give. "Hollander is very boring player. Always doing right thing. Very annoying when you try to be dramatic."

More laughter. The reporter nods, scribbling something down, the moment smoothed over so efficiently it's almost unreal.

Ilya doesn't look at Shane, not yet. He angles his body slightly, just enough that when the camera shifts, he's suddenly between Shane and the brightest lights, blocking the worst of it without making a show of it.

The questions move on. Shane answers when spoken to. He nods at the right moments. He even manages a small smile when someone makes a joke at his expense that he understands just a beat too late.

But inside, everything is spiraling.

He replays the moment over and over, each iteration worse than the last. The pause. The looks. The way his voice cut off too abruptly. The certainty that he's done something wrong, even if no one seems outwardly upset.

When it's finally over, Shane stands up too quickly, chair legs screeching against the floor. He mutters an apology to no one in particular and slips out of the room before anyone can stop him.

The hallway is cooler. Quieter. The lights are still too bright, but at least they're not closing in on him from every angle.

He leans his forehead against the wall and exhales shakily.

Get it together, he tells himself. It's fine. You fixed it. Ilya fixed it.

That thought twists uncomfortably in his chest. A few seconds later, footsteps approach, unhurried, familiar.

“Hollander,” Ilya says, voice low. “You running away from fans? Because I fully support this choice.”

Shane laughs despite himself, then immediately feels guilty for it. “I messed up.”

Ilya stops beside him, not crowding, just close enough to be solid. “You did not.”

Shane shakes his head, staring at the carpet. “I answered a question that wasn’t for me. I cut you off. I...”

“You answered honestly,” Ilya hums. “That is not crime.”

“It was awkward,” Shane insists. His hands clenched so tightly that he could feel his nails pressing into his palms. “There was that pause. Everyone noticed.”

Ilya smiles thoughtfully, taking Shane’s wrist and gently prying his fingers open. “Yes. And then I talked.”

“That’s not the point,” Shane says, frustration creeping into his voice, not at Ilya, but at himself. “You shouldn’t have had to.”

Ilya turns to face him fully now. He tilts his head slightly, studying Shane with that same focused attention he brings to game tape and face-offs and patterns no one else seems to notice. “I wanted to,” he says.

Shane looks up, startled.

“I am good at talking,” Ilya continues lightly. “You are good at playing hockey. We all have our strengths.”

“That’s not...” Shane stops, breath hitching. He rubs a hand over his face, overwhelmed by the tangle of thoughts crowding his head. “I just— when I realize I’ve missed something, it feels like everything after that is wrong too.”

Ilya’s expression softens. He reaches out and presses his palm briefly, firmly, against Shane’s upper arm. It’s a grounding, steady pressure. “You did nothing wrong.”

Shane hesitates. The words don’t slot into place immediately. They hover, unsteady, like they might tip over if he puts too much weight on them. “I answered too soon,” he says quietly.

“You answered because you thought you were meant to,” Ilya replies, rubbing small circles into Shane’s arm with his thumb. “That is not bad thing.”

Shane swallows. The buzzing in his head starts to ease, just a little.

“You didn’t look stupid,” Ilya adds, as if reading his mind. “If anything, you looked... like you care.”

Shane lets out a breath he didn’t realize he’d been holding. His shoulders drop a fraction. “I hate this part,” he admits. “The guessing. Not knowing if I’ve... crossed something.”

“I know,” Ilya says simply.

They stand there for a moment, the noise of the building muted around them. Then Ilya nudges Shane’s shoulder lightly with his own.

“Come on,” he says. “Let us escape before they decide to ask more philosophical questions.” Shane almost smiles.

As they walk down the hall together, Ilya stays half a step ahead, unconsciously positioning himself so Shane doesn't have to navigate the camera and staff alone.

Later, much later, when the adrenaline has faded and the memory has softened at the edges, Shane thinks back on this moment and realizes something important.

Not that Ilya saved him. But that Ilya saw him stumble, stepping in without making it a spectacle, and then stood beside him afterward until the world felt manageable again. And that, slowly, impossibly, Shane believed him when he said: You did nothing wrong.

3.

By the time Ilya notices, it’s already too late to stop.

Shane is sitting on the edge of the couch, shoes unlaced but still on, hands resting flat on his thighs like he put them there deliberately and then forgot why. His shoulders are sloped forward, spine curved inward, like gravity has suddenly doubled just for him.

He isn’t shaking. He isn’t pacing. He isn’t breathing too fast. He’s gone still.

That's how Ilya knows.

Most people expect something loud when things go wrong. Raised voices. Anger. Tears. They expect an explosion. Shane has never worked that way. When it’s too much, when the noise stacks too high, when the day stretches past his ability to hold it together, he doesn’t break outward.

He collapses inward.

Ilya clocks the signs the way he clocks plays on the ice: the unfocused stare, the delay between blink and breath, the way Shane’s jaw locks slightly, like words are backing up somewhere they can’t get through.

“Hey,” Ilya says gently, testing the air.

Shane doesn’t respond. Not because he doesn’t hear it. Because answering would take energy he doesn’t have.

Ilya doesn’t repeat himself. He moves quietly instead.

The apartment is still half-lit from earlier, overhead lights too bright, too sharp. Ilya reaches up and dims them without comment, plunging the room into a softer, warmer glow. He

doesn't ask if it's okay. He knows it is.

The city hums outside the window, feels too loud suddenly, so he closes the curtains. He kicks off his shoes. He moves like he's in someone else's space, which he is.

Shane's breathing is shallow but steady. In. Out. In. Out.

Ilya grabs the remote and scrolls until he finds the familiar shape of it: the same show Shane always watches when his brain needs something predictable. No surprises. No sudden volume spikes. Nothing that demands attention.

He sets it to low volume, barely above silence, and presses play.

Still no reaction. That's okay.

Ilya sits down on the couch, not touching Shane yet. Close enough that their knees almost brush, but not so close that it feels like pressure. He plants his feet firmly on the floor and leans back, giving Shane a solid, unmoving presence beside him.

He doesn't ask questions. He doesn't say it's okay or talk to me, or what do you need?

He just stays. Minutes pass. Maybe more. Time stretches in that strange, syrupy way it does when everything is slowed down.

Shane's eyes stay fixed on nothing.

Ilya watches the rise and fall of his chest, counts it unconsciously. Makes sure it stays even. Makes sure Shane stays here.

The shutdown deepens quietly. Shane's fingers curl slightly inward, his shoulders drawing in another fraction, like he's conserving heat. His thoughts are somewhere far away, tangled and heavy, every signal from the outside world dulled and distant.

He can feel Ilya next to him. That awareness exists somewhere at the edge of everything else. Steady, familiar, safe.

Eventually, something shifts. It's subtle. A small movement that would be easy to miss if you weren't looking for it.

Shane leans.

Not all at once. Just a few centimeters at first, like he's testing whether the gravity between them is real. His shoulder brushes Ilya's arm. He pauses there, breath hitching just slightly.

Ilya doesn't move. Doesn't flinch. Doesn't turn to look at him. Doesn't say a word. He stays exactly where he is.

After a few seconds, Shane leans again, this time more deliberately, the side of his head coming to rest against Ilya's shoulder. The contact is tentative, almost hesitant, like he's half-expecting it to be refused.

It isn't.

Ilya adjusts only enough to make it easier, shifting his arm so Shane's weight is better supported, angling his body to create a steadier surface. He doesn't wrap an arm around Shane yet. He lets Shane choose the amount of contact.

Shane exhales. Long. Heavy. That breath says more than words ever could. It says: I trust you.

Ilya feels it land in his chest like something sacred. They stay like that, the show murmuring quietly in the background, neither of them really watching. Shane's eyes drift closed at some point. His breathing evens out further, body slowly uncoiling now that it doesn't have to hold itself up alone.

Ilya keeps his gaze forward, jaw clenched just enough to hold back the ache that always comes with moments like this. The mix of tenderness, helplessness, and fierce protectiveness.

He knows this isn't something he can fix. That isn't the point.

After a while, Shane's fingers twitch against his own leg. Then, slowly, they slide over until they brush Ilya's hand. He doesn't grasp it. Just rests there, knuckles touching.

Ilya turns his palm upward in response, offering without insisting. Shane's fingers curl into it.

That's the moment Ilya finally lets himself move properly, closing his hand around Shane's with gentle certainty. Not tight. Just enough to be felt. "Still here," he hums, barely audible.

Shane doesn't answer. But his grip tightens, just a fraction.

The shutdown doesn't end all at once. It never does. It fades gradually, like fog lifting inch by inch. Shane doesn't sit up. Doesn't open his eyes. He stays leaned into Ilya, tethered.

Eventually, quietly, he manages a single word. Rough. Soft. "Sorry."

Ilya exhales sharply, emotion flickering across his face. "Don't," he says immediately. "You don't have to apologize for this. Ever."

There's a pause. Then Shane nods once, small and tired, forehead pressing more firmly into Ilya's shoulder. They sit there until the episode ends. Until another begins. Until the room feels less heavy and the world feels slightly more reachable again.

Nothing dramatic happens. No declarations. No breakthroughs.

Just this: Shane leaning first. Ilya staying. And the quiet understanding between them that this, too, is love.

4.

They're supposed to be having a good afternoon.

That's what Shane tells himself as they walk through the city, late-season cold biting at his ears, streets busy in a way that feels chaotic rather than lively. It's an off day for Shane.

It starts small. A skipped breakfast because the hotel alarm didn't go off the way he expected it to. A schedule change that comes too fast, too loud, too early. A media obligation added last minute. By the time he's done and with Ilya, the air feels wrong. It's too thick, like it presses against his chest when he breathes.

The cafe they stop at by the rink is crowded, every table taken, voices overlapping in sharp bursts. The espresso machine shrieks. Someone laughs too loudly behind Shane's shoulder, sudden and piercing, and his body reacts before his brain can catch up, muscles tightening, jaw locking, breath going shallow.

He should eat. He knows that. The thought flickers through his mind, weak and easily drowned out. They stand in line too long. The menu board changes. The smell shifts. Something that might have been manageable an hour ago now feels wrong, completely wrong, like the window has slammed shut without warning.

"I don't want anything," Shane says abruptly when Ilya turns to him, eyebrows raised in a quiet question. "I'm not hungry."

Ilya pauses. "You sure?"

Shane nods too fast. "Yeah. Let's just go."

Ilya orders a coffee to go, and they leave. Shane tells himself it's fine. He tells himself he'll eat later, when it makes sense again, when his body isn't buzzing like a live wire.

But later never quite arrives.

They walk. They talk. They stop in a bookstore Shane usually loves, but today the lights feel harsh and the aisles too narrow. Someone brushes past him, and his shoulders snap up defensively.

When they're outside again, his head aches.

Hunger doesn't feel like hunger anymore. It's sharp and diffuse at the same time, spreading irritation through his chest, his arms, his throat. Every sound lands wrong. Every delay feels personal. Ilya's hand feels wrong in his. His skin is burning at the touch.

Ilya asks something harmless, Shane knows later, but he snaps. "I said I'm fine," his voice edged and tight, yanking his hand away from Ilya's. "Why do you keep asking?"

The words hang between them, ugly and heavier than Shane intended.

Ilya stills. Not angry. Just surprised. "Oh," he says quietly. "Okay."

Guilt hits Shane immediately, hot and nauseating, jaw clenched.

Great. Now you've done it.

They walk in silence after that. Shane trailing a pace behind Ilya. The city seems louder for it.

By the time they're back at Shane's house, he feels hollowed out. His hands shake faintly as he unlocks the door. His thoughts loop, cruel and absolute.

You missed it. You ruined the moment. You were mean. You don't get to fix it now.

He sits on the floor in front of the couch, staring at the carpet, chest tight.

Ilya moves around the living room quietly. Sets his keys down. Takes off his jacket. He doesn't say anything, and Shane almost wishes he would, the silence giving his thoughts too much room.

"I'm sorry," Shane says finally, the words scraping on the way out. "I didn't mean to—"

"I know," Ilya says immediately, messing with something on the counter, back turned to Shane.

Shane looks up, startled.

"I know you did not mean it," Ilya turns and meets his eyes, expression steady. "Why are you on the floor?"

Shane presses his palms into his eyes, grounding himself in the pressure. "I was... I was bad," he says, hating how childish it sounds, how much it feels true anyway. "I shouldn't have said that."

"You were overwhelmed," Ilya says gently. "Those are not same thing."

Shane shakes his head. "I don't deserve—" He stops himself, breath hitching.

Ilya's gaze sharpens, concern cutting through his calm. He crouches down in front of Shane, keeping his voice low. "What does your brain say you do not deserve?"

Shane swallows. His throat feels too tight to speak, but the meaning lands anyway.

"Oh," Ilya murmurs, understanding settling in. He doesn't argue immediately. He doesn't contradict Shane outright. He knows better than that. Instead, he says, "You do not earn food for being perfect."

Shane flinches.

"I know it feels like that," Ilya continues. "But eating is not reward. It is not something you lose because you had hard moment."

Shane stares at his hands. "I snapped at you."

"I can handle that," Ilya says softly, putting a gentle finger under Shane's chin to lift his head, catching his gaze. "I cannot handle you hurting yourself because of it." The words aren't sharp. They're worried. Protective.

Shane's breathing stutters. "I missed my chance," he whispers, refusing to meet Ilya's eyes. "It's too late now."

"There's no deadline," Ilya says. "We make new one." He stands to dim the lights without comment, lowering the intensity of the room. He turns the TV on to the Admirals game at low volume. Background noise to stop the lone buzzing in the room he knows Shane can hear.

Then he leaves the room for a short time, returning with a small plate. It's nothing dramatic or overwhelming. Just something safe and predictable that he knows Shane can manage. "He sets it down on the coffee table next to Shane. "No pressure," he says, echoing words Shane has come to recognize. "You do not have to eat now. Or finish it. Or even touch it yet." Shane's chest aches. "I was mean to you," he repeats, shorter this time.

Ilya sits on the couch behind him, close but not crowding. "You were overstimulated, hungry, and stuck in your head," he answers simply. "That does not make you bad. It makes you human."

Shane shifts, lying on his side in a fetal position. His shoulders shake once, then again. Ilya doesn't speak. He just shifts his foot closer, not touching, but still offering a solid presence at Shane's side.

After a few minutes, Shane lifts his head slightly, eyes locked on the plate. He reaches his hand out, hesitates, hovers, then retreats. "I can't," he says, panic creeping back into his voice.

"That's okay," Ilya replied immediately. "You tried. That counts." They sit in silence again. The Admirals score on the TV. The heater hums.

About ten minutes later, Shane drags himself off the floor, moving as if it's taking all of his effort. He brings himself onto the couch, resting his head in Ilya's lap. Ilya stills just a bit; he doesn't say anything, just starts to run his hand through Shane's hair, soothing and warm.

Minutes pass. Maybe more.

Ilya notices Shane shift again, picking his head up to reach out to the plate again. This time, he picks up the food and takes a small bite. Then another.

Ilya doesn't comment. He doesn't praise. He just continues to rake his fingers through Shane's hair.

When Shane finally exhales, long and shaky, it feels like something unclenches inside him. "I hate that my brain does this," he murmurs, rolling to look up at Ilya.

"I know," the Russian replies, leaning to press a kiss to the other's hair. "But I love you anyway. All of you. Even the hard days."

Shane closes his eyes, nudging Ilya's hand with his head. "I thought you'd be mad."

Ilya huffs softly. "I was worried. That is different."

Shane nods, exhausted but calmer now. The world feels quieter. Small. Manageable. “Thank you for being here.”

Ilya tightens his grip in Shane’s hair, just a little. “Always. Even when you don’t think you deserve it.”

5.

Shane doesn’t mean to say it.

They’re halfway through a conversation that doesn’t matter much, something about travel schedules, about which rink has the worst ice, about nothing at all, when it slips out, casual and unguarded.

“It’s easier if you’re on my right,” Shane says, shrugging like it’s trivia. “Crowds don’t feel as bad that way.”

He expects the moment to pass. Most things like that do. People nod, file it away as interesting but not actionable, and keep walking wherever they were already headed.

Ilya hums in acknowledgment. “Okay.” That’s it. Or so Shane thinks.

The next time they leave the rink together, Ilya automatically falls into step on Shane’s right. Shane notices immediately.

His brain lights up with it. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Except it isn’t wrong. It’s right. Exactly right. The pressure of Ilya’s presence where it’s supposed to be smooths something out in his chest before he even consciously registers why.

He almost says something. Almost asks. He doesn’t. They walk like that all the way to the car.

After that, it keeps happening.

Always on the right. Through airport terminals. Down hotel hallways. Across parking lots dusted with snow. Ilya doesn’t announce it. He doesn’t check in. He just adjusts his path instinctively, like it’s always been this way.

Shane tells himself it’s a coincidence. Then there’s the restaurant thing.

They’re on the road, exhausted and starving, standing on a sidewalk while teammates argue loudly about where to eat. Someone suggests a crowded place with flashing lights and loud music, and Shane’s stomach tightens on reflex.

Before he can figure out how to opt out politely, Ilya turns to him.

“What do you want?” he asks, easy and direct.

Shane blinks. “I—what?”

“You get to choose,” Ilya says, like it’s obvious. “I’m good with whatever.”

There’s no pressure in his voice. No impatience. Just expectation, quiet and steady.

Shane hesitates, then names a place he knows. It has a predictable menu, softer lighting, and booths instead of open seating.

“No problem,” Ilya says immediately, already steering them in that direction.

It happens again. And Again.

Ilya never frames it as accommodation. Never asks is this okay? Or do you need something else? He just defers, every time, like it’s natural that Shane sets the parameters.

Then there’s the walking. It starts by accident, at least, Shane thinks it does.

They’re moving through a hotel corridor late at night, the carpet muffling their footsteps. Shane falls into a familiar pattern, counting silently in his head. Four steps, breathe. Four steps, breathe. He’s so focused inward that he doesn’t realize Ilya has matched his pace until he hears it: the soft, synchronized rhythm of footfalls beside him.

Not dragging. Not rushing. Matching.

Shane’s chest tightens. Four Steps. Breathe. Ilya breathes at the same time.

They don’t talk about it. They never talk about it. But it keeps happening. On sidewalks, in hallways, in airports. Ilya adjusts without looking, his stride calibrating itself to Shane’s like muscle memory.

At some point, Shane realizes he’s no longer counting alone. The thought hits him slowly, then all at once. This isn’t accidental. It’s too consistent. Too careful.

One night, weeks later, Shane stops short in the middle of a hallway, the realization heavy in his chest.

Ilya halts immediately, turning back. “What’s up?”

Shane stares at him, searching his face. “You remember everything.”

Ilya’s expression shifts, something open and honest settling there. “Yeah.”

“You always walk on my right.”

“Makes sense,” Ilya shrugs.

“You always let me choose.”

“I like your choices.”

“You match my steps,” Shane says, voice quieter now.

Ilya doesn't deflect. Doesn't joke. "I pay attention," he says simply.

The words land harder than Shane expects. He swallows, throat tight. "You don't have to do all this."

"I know. I want to."

Silence stretches between them, thick and soft. This isn't just care. This is repetition. Intention. This is something practiced until it becomes sacred. Ritual.

Shane exhales, slow and unsteady, and steps forward again. Without hesitation, Ilya falls into place on his right. Four steps. Breathe. Together.

+ 1

Ilya doesn't get out of bed.

It's not dramatic. There's no alarm blaring unanswered, no frantic pacing, no sharp edges to the day. Everything is just heavy. Like gravity has decided to double overnight.

The room is dim, curtains still drawn. Late-morning light leaks in around the edges, soft and unconvincing. Ilya lies on his back, staring at the ceiling, arms resting uselessly at his sides. His phone is somewhere within reach, face-down and forgotten.

His body feels like it's been filled with sand.

He knows the script. He knows what he's supposed to do. Get up. Shower. Eat something. Move. He's done harder things than this. He's survived worse days than this. But today, the distance between knowing and doing feels impossible.

The bed creaks softly as someone sits down beside him. Shane doesn't speak right away. He never does, not in moments like this. He just settles, careful not to jostle, careful not to demand attention by accident. The mattress dips, a familiar weight, grounding.

Ilya turns his head slightly. Shane is already looking at him. Not worried. Not alarmed. Just there.

"Hey," Shane says quietly.

Ilya swallows. "Hey." His voice sounds wrong to his own ears. Flat. Distant.

Shane nods, like that's enough for now. He reaches out and rests his hand on Ilya's forearm, warm and solid, not gripping. Just contact. They sat like that for a minute. Two. Time moved strangely when you're stuck inside your own head.

"I'm not..." Ilya starts, then stops. Tries again. "I don't think I can do today."

Shane's thumb traces a slow, absent line along his arm. "Okay."

Ilya exhales, shaky. "I know I should. I just can't make myself move."

“That happens,” Shane says gently. “It doesn’t mean anything bad about you.”

Ilya closes his eyes. The words sink in slowly, like warmth seeping into cold hands. Shane shifts, sitting cross-legged on the bed now, still close. “Do you want company,” he asks, “or quiet?”

Ilya doesn’t answer immediately. He considers it carefully, the way Shane has taught him, what do I actually need, not what do I think I should say?

“Company,” he says finally. “But... low.”

Shane smiles, soft and small. “I can do low.”

He leans back against the headboard, close enough that their shoulders touch, and pulls the blanket up over Ilya’s chest when he notices it’s slipped. He doesn’t comment on the drawn curtains, the missed morning, the stillness. He just stays.

Minutes pass. Maybe more. Shane pulls out his phone and scrolls quietly, volume off. The presence is gentle, non-invasive. Exactly right.

“I feel stupid,” Ilya says suddenly.

Shane looks over. “Why?”

“Because nothing is actually wrong,” Ilya says. “There is no reason. I just woke up like this.”

Shane tilts his head. “That sounds like something being wrong.”

Ilya lets out a breath that’s half a laugh, half something more brittle. “You know what I mean.”

“I do,” Shane hums. “I still don’t think it’s stupid.” He reaches over and laces their fingers together, squeezing once. “Bad brain days don’t need permission.”

Ilya’s chest tightens. He turns his head toward Shane, burying part of his face into Shane’s shoulder without asking. Shane immediately adjusted, angling his body to support the weight, arm wrapping around Ilya’s back.

“Can I get you anything?”

Ilya hesitates. The instinct to say no flares automatically. To avoid being needy. To avoid talking. But this is Shane.

“Tea?” Ilya mumbles quietly.

“Coming up,” Shane says easily before sliding off the bed. Ilya listens to the sounds from the kitchen; kettle filling, cabinets opening, the low hum of the stove. The normalcy of it grounded him more than he expected.

When Shane returns, he sets the mug carefully on the nightstand, steam curling upward. He doesn’t push it into Ilya’s hands. He sets it where it’s available.

“You don’t have to drink it yet. It’ll still be there,” Shane says gently. “Do you want me to open the curtains a little?”

“Only a little.”

Shane does exactly that. A sliver of daylight spills in, pale and manageable. He climbed back into bed, closer this time, and Ilya turned instinctively, resting his head against Shane’s chest. Shane’s hand comes up to cradle the back of his head, fingers threading gently through his hair.

Ilya’s eyes sting. “What if this lasts?”

“Then I’m still here,” Shane says. No hesitation. “If all you do today is breathe and exist, that’s enough.”

Ilya swallows hard. “I hate feeling like this.”

“I know,” Shane pressed a kiss into his hair. “I don’t love it either, but I do love you.”

The words settle deep, steady, and sure. They lie there as the tea cools, as the light shifts almost imperceptibly. Shane hums softly at some point, a tune Ilya recognizes but can’t quite place. It doesn’t matter. Ilya’s breathing evens out. His body feels a fraction lighter. Not fixed. Not Healed. But held.

“Thank you,” he murmured.

“Always.”

End Notes

RAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

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