

maybe not fine

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maybe not fine

by [Rozalov](#)

Summary

5 times Ilya has a nightmare, and 1 time he wakes up Shane (on purpose)

Notes

set over a few years, starting when they're 30-32 ish? I'm not going back through and checking dates, I don't care

i do not know how posting on ao3 works ngl, so bear with me: there will be 6 chapters, they're all done, i just don't know what's happening

Chapter 1

1.

Shane's head hit the ice and Ilya woke up, heart pounding and covered in cold sweat. He took a shaky breath, then rolled over and propped himself up on one elbow. Shane was there, quiet, still, and for a moment, Ilya's heartbeat roared so loudly in his ears that he thought he might pass out. Shane had been quiet, still, when he was knocked out. He—

Ilya reached for him carefully. Ran the backs of his fingers over Shane's cheek. Ilya's hands were cold, but Shane was warm, and he turned his head without waking, seeking Ilya's touch. That was enough. Shane was alive. He was okay.

Ilya was less okay. His breathing was ratcheting tighter, and tighter, and he didn't want to wake up Shane. They had practice in the morning. They didn't both need to lose sleep over a stupid bad dream.

Grabbing a sweatshirt from his nightstand, Ilya slid out of bed and padded downstairs. Anya lifted her head, then followed, so he brought her with him outside, onto the porch. Once she'd snuffled around out on the lawn, she trotted back, and Ilya crouched next to the wall, pulling his secret pack of cigarettes from under a loose board. He lit up, and pressed his back against the wall, and let his head fall back. His free hand went to Anya, petting her head, rubbing her ears, as he stared at the stars and smoked. Mostly, he didn't smoke, not anymore. But the nightmares sometimes shook him so badly.

The accident had shaken him so badly.

He'd spent the night of the accident pacing his hotel room, on edge, unable to focus, wondering what the fuck was wrong with him. It had been bad enough that Wilson, his roommate for the night, had spoken up. "Listen, that was rough to watch," he'd said. "And you've been through it lately—"

Ilya's head had snapped up at that. "What does that mean?"

Wilson had stared at him. "Didn't your dad just die?"

"Hollander isn't *dead*."

"Well, yeah, no, he was responsive and everything when they left—no, listen, I was just gonna offer you melatonin. No offense, but you kind of played like shit after Hollander got hit, and since it's not like you and him are bros, I just figured—"

"What the fuck is melatonin?"

"Oh. Right. Yeah. Uh. You know. It helps you sleep, but it's not like a drug drug. My girlfriend got me to start using them when I can't sleep because of the timezone shit. You just... look like you could use one tonight."

Ilya still hadn't known what he'd meant, so he'd pulled out his phone and googled it and hated himself for still needing things translated, hated English, hated that they might release more information about Shane and maybe he wouldn't know what they were saying because they were words he didn't know. And then he hadn't really been able to figure out what melatonin was and why it wasn't a "drug drug" or if it would show up on a test--surely not, because otherwise Wilson wouldn't use them, but still--and he'd felt sick at the thought of being like his brother even if Alexei preferred coke and ecstasy and whatever else. Now, Ilya was quite aware of melatonin because Shane used it sometimes, but the one time Ilya had tried it he had been sluggish in the morning and felt like he could have gotten caught in a bad dream and he hadn't liked the sensation at all. Back then, he just hadn't been able to parse the English of it all. "No," he'd said. "No, I don't need anything, I'm fine. Am fine. I just--I'm going to go have a cigarette, don't fucking tell anyone. I mostly quit." And Wilson had put up his hands in surrender so Ilya had grabbed a sweatshirt and his cigarettes and his lighter, just like now, in the present, and gone outside.

Except back then, he'd found a lonely spot behind a dumpster and he'd chainsmoked until he was lightheaded and then he'd called Svetlana, because he couldn't tell her about Shane but he could talk to *someone* and he could do it in Russian and not worry about stupid fucking English.

His plan had been terrible, though, because Svetlana was Svetlana, and she had watched the game. "Holy shit," she'd said immediately, albeit in Russian. "That was a crazy hit Hollander took."

"Sveta, I--" His voice had cracked.

"Woah," she'd said. "Hey. Was it that stressful? I saw you looked freaked on the ice. Are you okay?"

And at that, he'd kind of choked. "I don't--I don't know. I don't know what happened, I--did I really play like shit the rest of the game?" He remembered being pushed back by a ref, feeling like he couldn't breathe, unable to even move his skates, his head terrifyingly empty. And then Shane had been taken away and they'd resumed the game and Ilya hadn't been able to focus at all. It had been a blur, to be honest. Ilya might have flinched at every puck drop.

"Well," she said. That was a yes. "Oh, and with your dad--that must have been--"

"Will people stop bringing that up?" he'd snapped. "It has nothing to do with this."

"Are you sure?"

I wish it could be different. I wish he could know me.

I want Shane to know me. All of me. I wish the whole fucking world was different. I wish I didn't have to hide. I wish I could tell you. I wish Shane and I had more time.

Shane was fine. He would be fine. Except Ilya really hadn't been able to breathe.

“Hey,” Svetlana said over the phone. “Talk to me. It’s okay. I know it’s not the same, you barely know Hollander—”

Ilya had coughed on a drag.

“--but it must have been a shock regardless. It’s okay.”

And Ilya had shut down. “It’s—never mind. It’s okay. I’m okay. I’m sorry for calling, I’m fine.”

“You don’t have to apologize for calling.”

“Ah, but this is not us,” he said. He should have added a laugh. He hadn’t. He hadn’t been able to do anything other than a monotone. “Though maybe. It is hockey.”

“You can always call me about hockey,” she said, and Ilya had heard the smirk in her voice. Then she added, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yes. Yes. Maybe it was just that it was so close to—to my father. Timewise. Anyway. I should go. Thank you. Sorry.”

“Alright. Let me know when you’re back in Boston.”

He’d hung up. He’d smoked another cigarette and obsessively refreshed his feed to see if there was any news on Shane. And then—still nothing, nothing in the news, nothing in his head, nothing nothing nothing—he’d gone back inside and ignored Wilson and climbed into bed and pretended to go sleep and instead just stared at the wall and occasionally checked his phone again. Eventually, he’d fallen asleep with it in his hand, only to jolt awake every so often, feeling sick and terrified and like he couldn’t stop falling.

Now, Shane upstairs and safe and perfectly well, Ilya stared at the stars and pet Anya and smoked the cigarette until the very last bit of ash fell off. He pressed the back of his wrist to his forehead, closed his eyes. Shane was okay. Shane had recovered. Shane was okay. And next time one of them got hurt, Ilya hoped to god it was him, because he wasn’t sure he could do that again. It was selfish, to wish that worry on Shane instead, but Ilya was pretty sure he wasn’t strong enough. Not like this. And he’d never claimed to be selfless.

“Okay,” he murmured to Anya, and switched to Russian. She was starting to only know some commands in Russian, which amused Ilya and annoyed Shane when he didn’t realize at first. “Let’s go back inside, yes?”

Inside, he brushed his teeth, trying to get rid of the cigarette smell before Shane noticed, and climbed back into bed. Shane flinched when Ilya touched his wrist, trying to ground himself, and Ilya realized that his fingers were freezing, and he was shivering, and it had been cold as fuck outside. He hadn’t really noticed.

He didn’t want to wake Shane. So he changed into one of Shane’s sweatshirts instead, and crawled back into bed, and hoped that the smell of Shane all around him would keep him from sinking back into that stupid fucking nightmare again.

He didn't sleep *well*, but he didn't dream of anything, either.

Chapter 2

2.

Her wrist was so slender. A diamond bracelet, and limp fingers, and Ilya had wondered how long she had been asleep, why she wasn't moving when he said, "Mama?" quietly, in case she had another one of her headaches. And then he'd gone farther into her room, which he wasn't really supposed to do, but she was supposed to bring him to hockey and Papa wouldn't be pleased if she forgot, and Ilya couldn't get there on his own. Alexei had gone off to Pyotr's house, and—

"Mama?" he asked again, and touched her hand gently to wake her up. Except she didn't wake up. And her hand was so cold. And then he'd realized her eyes were open.

"Get out of here," Papa snapped, when he found Ilya shaking his mother, crying, nearly screaming. "I will not tell you again."

Ilya woke up, motionless. After a moment, he opened his eyes, slowly, and stared at the wall. The windows were dark. It wasn't time to get up yet, no alarm had gone off. Shane was behind him, still asleep.

Ilya closed his eyes again. He wasn't going back to sleep. But he didn't want to face the world yet, either.

But he didn't want to think about his mother, either. Not like that.

Ilya sat up. He leaned back against the headboard, legs stretched out in front of him. He'd thrown his sweater over the lamp last night, when Shane had borderline tackled him into bed, and he'd left it there specifically to piss off Shane's sense of order. He was glad now, though, because it was within reach, and he dragged it back over his head. He was cold.

It had been a cold winter. It was always a cold winter in Moscow, but that one had been bad.

Ilya's eyes drifted to the window again. It was winter now. Actually. It was around the time his mother had died. The first week of March. His father had been the second week of March, years later.

They were buried side by side. Ilya hadn't wanted to, but those had been the arrangements, from back when his father had made his will, and he hadn't wanted to fight. He had been so tired. He had had to make so many other calls, so many other decisions, and Alexei had been useless, and—

Where was Alexei now? Ilya sometimes checked online, to see if Alexei had done something dramatic enough to be in the papers. Or he asked Svetlana if she had heard anything. But he hadn't asked recently. Hadn't thought about Alexei. It exhausted him, to think about Alexei, but the not thinking sometimes pulled him down, too. Guilt, or grief, or something. Nearly twenty years since his mother died. Nearly five since his father. Since he'd cut off Alexei.

Ilya's eyes prickled, but he just stared at the ceiling. His eyes stayed dry.

“Hey.”

Ilya looked over. Shane had woken, and the window had brightened, and Ilya was pretty sure he had just lost an hour to staring at the ceiling. Ilya had to clear his throat to speak, but he managed a “Hey” back and reached over to touch Shane's face.

“What are you doing?” Shane asked sleepily.

“What?”

“Have you been awake long?”

“Oh. Sorry. Yes, could not sleep.” Ilya pulled out a smile. He wasn't supposed to do that. He wasn't supposed to lie about his feelings, he was supposed to share with Shane, but right now he just fucking couldn't. He didn't even know what he was feeling, except for this ringing, empty dark in him. So he did what he used to do and he fainted, needing the dopamine, needing to feel anchored in his body the way sex let him be. He gave Shane a hungry look and leaned down, licked a stripe up Shane's arm. “Was too hungry for this.”

“Oh my God, Ilya—oh—my *god*, Ilya, you—*fuck*—”

Chapter 3

3.

The crowd had gone silent. Or at least, when Shane hit the ice, Ilya hadn't heard anything else. He had maybe gone deaf. It had just been Shane, on the ice. Cliff, turning back, in slow motion, realizing Shane wasn't getting up. Everything, slow motion. And Shane motionless. Ilya hadn't been able to move. Ilya had been looking at Shane's still gloves, and how utterly motionless he was, and it was not natural to be that still, and—and if he'd been able to move, if he'd been able to skate over and pulled off Shane's gloves and touch his hand, would it have been cold? How long did it take to go cold?

Get out of here. I will not tell you again.

Get back to your bench, Rozanov—

Ilya flinched awake, and nearly slapped a hand over his own mouth, trying to choke down the sob or the scream or whatever awful sound would come out if he let it. He twisted in the bed, hauling in a breath, but Shane was—well, Shane was sleeping, but still, too still, and Ilya's head was a mess, and—

Ilya brushed hair off Shane's forehead and Shane rolled onto his back, his lips parting as he huffed a sigh and didn't wake. He was alive. He was alive, and he could move, and he was fine, he was fine, he was—

Ilya nearly fell off the mattress in his haste to get out of bed, and he nearly tripped over Anya in his haste to get downstairs, and he nearly slammed the downstairs bathroom door in his haste to lock himself in so that he could haul in air. He couldn't breathe. He was trying, he really was, he was gasping, huge, harsh gasps that made his lungs ache and did nothing to alleviate the sparkly little black dots that were cropping up in the corners of his vision. He pressed a hand to the wall and then slid down it, feeling absolutely fucking pathetic.

Anya whined outside the door. Ilya managed to reach up to the doorknob. He let her in, and she wiggled in between his legs, pressed her front paws to his chest, licked at his face. He nodded and hugged her to him.

Shane was fine.

Ilya shivered, once. He wanted to go back to bed—god, he was so fucking tired—but he didn't want to wake Shane. He didn't want to have to talk about this. He'd mentioned it to Galina—again—last time he'd had a nightmare about Shane. As usual, she was in favor of him talking to his husband about it. But it was only once or twice a year. No need to worry him.

Ilya was pretty sure he knew what Galina would say about that. Well, in a more roundabout way maybe, but it would boil down to: *are you sure that's not the scared part of you talking? The part that wants to isolate?*

He was maybe going to have to talk about the nightmares with Galina again. It wasn't that they were getting worse, necessarily. And they were still so few and far between. It wasn't like when he'd had that recurring dream about his mother, and wanting Shane to meet her. That had been different. This was—this was—

Well, Galina would know.

Ilya took a shaky breath. He checked the clock on the wall. Nearly two in the morning. He couldn't exactly call Galina now. But he couldn't go back to bed either, not like this, not with this shakiness in his chest.

Shane was very regimented. It was one of the things Ilya loved about him. The routine, the schedule, the stability. Even if, sometimes, Ilya also loved to tempt him out of that routine. Ilya, on the other hand, despite the routine he'd been roped into, sometimes could not stay scheduled for the life of him. The desire for a lazy day in bed, or the hunger to stay up too late. Galina said it wasn't self-sabotage. The occasional rebellious streak getting an outlet was okay. She seemed glad it was just that.

But it did mean that sometimes Ilya had energy or was bored when Shane wanted to be asleep, so everyone was glad that their home gym was far away from their bedroom. Which meant that, now, at two in the morning, Ilya could get on the exercise bike and press in his earbuds and listen to the Russian music Shane complained about, and ride. Ride, hard, until he was soaked in sweat and breathing hard and basically could not move his legs anymore. Then he stumbled his way into the downstairs bathroom, managed his secret trick of smoking a cigarette while he showered, and went back upstairs. He pulled on new sweatpants, and crawled back into bed.

He wrapped his arms around Shane. Shane mumbled, “what time is it?”

Ilya just murmured, “shh, not yet.”

Shane went instantly back to sleep.

Ilya buried his nose in Shane’s hair, and breathed, and steadied his heartbeat to Shane’s. And eventually, he fell back asleep.

Chapter 4

4.

Shane turned back to look at him. And he was smiling, he was giddy, and Ilya's responding grin was sharp. Ilya was coming for him, he would scoop the puck right from between Shane's legs and Shane would be infuriated and it would be perfect, it would—

Marlow was skating for Shane. And Shane wasn't looking. Ilya's throat locked up—he would have screamed if he was in the stands, a warning, but he couldn't, he was here on the ice and it was his teammate that collided with Shane, he could not blow their secret, Shane would kill him, but his mouth opened anyway, reflex, but he was only in time for Shane's helmet to hit the ice and all that Ilya managed was a strangled gasp and one hand lifting off his stick as if he could reach for Shane—

And then he was back, back on the other side of the rink, skating forward, Shane skating off with the puck. It was just a dream, it had just been a dream or something, deja vu. It wasn't real. Hollander would never look at him like that on the ice. He would never jeopardize a game like that, he would never put himself in danger just to look at Ilya. It wasn't Ilya's fault, because it wouldn't happen, because Shane would never—

And then Shane turned back, again, with those proud eyes and that catch-me-if-you-can smirk and Ilya looked up to see Marlow, again, and Ilya locked up, again, hating himself for not know what to do, for the way he only had time for his breath to punch out of him as Shane's helmet hit the ice and—

He was back, across the ice, and—

Ilya choked awake, his throat still locked with all the things he hadn't known how to say. He rolled to see Shane, sat up so he could reach for him, touch his face. Shane rolled toward him, mumbled his name, satisfying that animal terror in Ilya, but he couldn't breathe. He actually couldn't breathe. There were tears in his throat and his eyes were stinging and when he finally managed a breath, it was a harsh gasp that was far too loud.

Ilya pulled back. He slipped out of bed, mattress downstairs, wiping his eyes. His breath kept hitching, but by the time he was outside and slumped on the porch steps with a cigarette, he was at least no longer choking on tears. He just needed one cigarette. To settle his heartbeat. To center himself. To get a handle on his shaky emotions.

He rested his head against the railing. A loon called, in the distance, and Ilya closed his eyes.

Chapter 5

5.

Shane woke up.

He stared at the ceiling for a moment, wondering why the hell he felt so alert. It was March, so he had practice later, but he was pretty sure there wasn't a game today, and either way it was the middle of the night. He wasn't thirsty, he didn't have to go to the bathroom, the bed was warm and Ilya was still there—

"Shane," Ilya mumbled. And that was it. Shane knew that was it, what had woken him. Ilya had already said his name once.

Shane rolled over, facing his husband. Ilya had his back to him. While they did fall asleep tangled together a lot, it wasn't unusual for one of them to roll away, to get some air, to stretch. But Ilya was mumbling Shane's name again, and he wasn't awake. And it didn't sound like a sexy dream. Or even a nice dream. When Ilya rasped, "*Shane*," again, it sounded like Ilya was in distress.

Shane sat up. He gripped Ilya's shoulder. "Ilya," he said, and Ilya jerked awake, eyes snapping open in fear and immediately looking for Shane, locking onto him. "Shh," Shane said. "Hey, shhhh, it was just a nightmare—"

But Ilya was scrambling to his knees. He cupped Shane's face in his hands, searching Shane's face. "You are okay?" Ilya asked, voice tight. He rasped in a breath. "Shane. You are okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine—"

Ilya took a shaky breath and released Shane's face. His hands, though, were trembling. Kind of badly. Actually, all of Ilya was trembling. He pressed a shaking hand over his eyes.

“Hey,” Shane said, quiet, cautious. “What was that about?”

Ilya just shook his head. He seemed to be trying, deliberately, to even out his unsteady breathing.

Shane touched his shoulder gently. Ilya leaned into it, so Shane pulled him to him, let Ilya rest his forehead against Shane’s shoulder while he tried to calm down. He wished he could give Ilya something soft, something gentle. He would whisper sweet nothings, except that he was no good at that, and Shane very much doubted that he wanted *extra* nonsense English right now. But Shane’s Russian wasn’t good enough, and—

Wait. How had Shane not realized this before? He could tell Ilya whatever he wanted, and Ilya would have no idea what he was saying, if he just fucking spoke French. And Ilya could hear his voice, and maybe it would be calming. Maybe it would distract him from whatever had been in his head.

So Shane murmured, “I love you,” in French. And “I’m right here. I promise, I’m right here. I’m not leaving. I don’t know what the dream was about, but—”

Ilya turned his head slightly, so Shane could see one of his eyes now. “Are you—are you speaking French, or am I having a stroke?” Ilya asked.

“French,” Shane said, in English.

“Oh,” Ilya said. “Well that’s good.”

“I can shut up if—”

Ilya shook his head. “I liked it. Just. Wanted to make sure I wasn’t actually losing my mind. You don’t—you don’t speak French at home.”

“Well, normally I want you to know what the fuck I’m talking about.”

Ilya huffed a small laugh. Then he pulled away, sat up. He scrubbed a hand across his eyes, which were dry but rimmed in red. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Ilya jerked his face away slightly. Shane was going to take that as a no, but then Ilya said, like he was steeling himself, “It was you. Your accident. Your concussion.”

Shane’s heart stopped. “Oh, god, I’m sorry.”

Ilya shook his head. “Wasn’t your fault. Was just—worse, this time. I don’t know why.”

Shane stared at him. “This time?”

Ilya glanced at him, like he’d forgotten he hadn’t told Shane. “Oh. Yes. I have dreamed about it before. Normally, I wake up and just—I—I see you. And make sure you are okay. And everything is okay.”

“Okay, but Ilya—I mean, Jesus, you can wake me up. That’s okay.”

Ilya swallowed.

Shane reached for him again, brushed a curl off Ilya’s forehead. “I’m serious,” he murmured. “I don’t want you to have to deal with this by yourself. Okay?”

Ilya looked like he wanted to protest, but then he just nodded. He looked exhausted, circles under his eyes, his motions slow. How many times had he had this nightmare before? How many times had Shane slept next to him, unaware? He knew that Ilya didn't always sleep well, that sometimes he mumbled unhappily in his sleep, and Shane had tried to kiss that away, tried to chase the dreams away by holding Ilya without waking him. And sometimes he was pretty sure he succeeded, because Ilya would relax into him. But how many times had he not known?

Now, at least, Ilya gave in. He slumped to rest his head in Shane's lap. Shane stroked his hair, and Ilya shivered again, then settled. Shane stayed like that for a while, then eased back down to lay next to Ilya. He pulled Ilya to him, and murmured into his hair, "Wake me up next time. Okay? Promise?"

Ilya nodded against Shane's shoulder. "Okay," he whispered.

Chapter 6

+1

Shane was on the ice for so long. Wasn't he cold? He wasn't moving. Why wasn't he moving? There was something frantic, frenetic, under Ilya's skin, but he couldn't move either. He was supposed to do something. He wanted to do something. He wanted to help Shane. Shane looked so small, on the ice, and he still wasn't moving, why wasn't he fucking moving—

Ilya woke up shivering. Shane's arm was draped over his waist and for a moment, Ilya was transfixed by the sight of his dangling hand. But no. No, no, Shane was warm, Shane was alive, but then why was Ilya so cold, how did he know Shane was—

Ilya rolled over. He searched Shane's sleeping face even as he sat up, stroked a thumb across Shane's freckles. Shane's eyelashes trembled. He sighed. Ilya took a shaky breath. Shane was fine.

Ilya was about to get out of bed, go get a cigarette and sit outside, when he looked at Shane again.

Shane had asked. Ilya had promised.

Galina was always nudging Ilya to share how he felt with Shane, to allow Shane to support Ilya. She knew that Ilya sometimes had nightmares, that Shane's injury had scared the shit out of Ilya. The nightmares weren't frequent—at least, not frequent enough that Galina was worried about them—but Ilya was starting to suspect they had a trigger. Was starting to suspect that his body knew when his parents had died, even if he didn't always remember. Was starting to suspect that his body knew when Shane had been hurt, even if Ilya had done his best to never think about it again. Was starting to suspect that he, maybe, just maybe, had been mildly traumatized by some of the events in his life, like Galina had suggested. Ilya had been trying to be better. He had been trying to pick apart how that trauma had affected him. He had been trying not to just shove everything down. Mostly. Sometimes he still fell quite far from that goal. Sometimes he panicked and tried to shove everything away again, but it never *worked* anymore, just made him feel uneven and sharp-edged and brittle.

He swallowed, then turned to Shane again. Almost like he knew, though, Shane reached out with one hand, and frowned without opening his eyes when he didn't find Ilya.

Ilya reached down and slipped his fingers into Shane's. Shane smiled in his sleep. Ilya huffed out a soft laugh, then scrubbed the heel of his hands against his eyes and leaned down to kiss Shane's shoulder. He wanted to leave it at that. He wanted to just take comfort in Shane's steadiness. His heartbeat was already easing back from the pounding from when he woke, but when he thought about going back to sleep, potentially back to that nightmare, it started to ratchet back up, Ilya's breathing going uneven again. And the prospect of going downstairs to bike or smoke felt suddenly worse, because he would have to leave Shane.

“Shane,” he whispered.

Shane squeezed his hand, but didn't wake up.

He'd promised. And if Ilya was honest with himself, actually honest, the kind of honest he was supposed to be in therapy, there was nothing Ilya wanted more in that moment than for Shane to just look at him.

“Shane,” he murmured, just a tiny bit louder. “Shane, moya lyubov.”

“What?” Shane mumbled, groggy. His eyes flickered open, and then he caught sight of Ilya, sitting up, holding his hand.

“I—”

But Shane didn't give him a chance, which was good because Ilya wasn't sure he could verbalize it. Not in English, not without sounding stupid. Shane just sat up, instant, tense. “What happened? Is everything—”

“Yes,” Ilya said hastily. “Yes, everyone is fine. Everything is okay.” He hesitated. “Well. I—I am—I am maybe not fine.”

Ilya could see Shane put it together in his head. “Oh,” he said softly. His dark eyes searched Ilya's. “Did you have that nightmare again?”

Ilya swallowed again, then nodded. He didn't think he could speak even if he had something to say.

Shane pulled Ilya into his arms, shifting a little closer on the bed. Ilya just pressed his face to the crook of Shane's neck, breathing him in, pressing one hand flat against Shane's chest, feeling the steady heartbeat under warm skin. Then he gave into the semi-frantic crawling under his skin and yanked Shane into his lap so that he could keep his forehead to Shane's neck, could wrap his arms around him, could keep him safe and with Ilya. He was shaking, he knew that, but Shane just kept one hand on the back of Ilya's neck, the other smoothing down Ilya's spine. Ilya tried to steady his breathing, couldn't, felt himself kind of dissociate, detach, derealize. Therapy words. Distantly, he realized his heart was hammering in his chest.

But after a few minutes, Ilya was back in his body and Shane was holding him up more than Ilya was keeping him in his arms. “Come here,” Shane murmured, and pulled them back into the middle of the bed. Ilya tensed up again, but Shane just stroked his hands down Ilya's arms again, again, again. Rubbed the tips of his fingers into the base of Ilya's skull until Ilya went boneless against him. And he murmured in French until Ilya, exhausted, not realizing it was happening, fell back asleep.

This time when Ilya woke up, he was still wrapped in Shane's arms, his nose in Shane's shoulder, Shane's arm around Ilya's back and that hand tucked under Ilya's waist. He was warm. Shane was warm. Shane's heart beat steadily against Ilya's skin.

He took a slow, slightly shaky breath.

But it wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been. And now that Ilya knew the difference, knew how soft he felt now, and compared it to how he normally felt the morning after a nightmare—on edge and snappy and tense and maybe kind of a huge dick—he realized that maybe Shane could help. Had helped. And Shane was still asleep, still okay. Ilya hadn't ruined Shane's life by sharing a tiny bit of fear.

Maybe. Maybe Galina and Shane were right. Maybe Ilya could rely on someone else. It wasn't that he didn't trust Shane, of course he fucking did, he trusted Shane over anyone else in the world. He just—it was so hard. It was so fucking hard to trust him to be kind, because it meant admitting that Ilya simply did not believe he was worth it. Otherwise this would all be easy. Shane was perfect. Of course he would be kind.

Shane twitched, then his hand was cradling the back of Ilya's head. “Hey,” he mumbled, then pulled back enough to look down at Ilya. “How are you?”

“Actually, I am okay.” Ilya smiled, kind of small, but genuine. Soft. He was so fucking soft for Shane. “Because of you. Always because of you.”

Shane blushed. But he pressed a kiss to the corner of Ilya's mouth. “Well, good thing I'm here to stay.”

Here to stay.

Ilya borderline lunged. He kissed all over Shane's face, even as Shane yelped and tried to bat him off, and he pinned Shane down with one knee between his legs, and he cupped Shane's face in his hands. Shane was laughing, and Ilya was smiling, breathless, because it was like sunlight in his chest. Here to stay. Shane was okay, and he was here with Ilya, and he was here to stay.

Every time Ilya thought he was at max capacity for love, he was proven wrong. Every day, he loved Shane more.

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