i don't want that to be you

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i don't want that to be you

by Rozalov

Summary

it's FLU SEASON BABYYYYYY

or, ilya comes down with the flu. don't worry, shane does too. eventually

or, banging pots and pans together, yelling that ilya rozanov hasn't been taken care of in nearly two decades

Notes

set post long game, they are married and both on the Centaurs. i continue not to know how hockey practices or professional teams work, so everything relating to their job is a haphazard guess, sorry

See the end of the work for more notes

Shane's first clue, in retrospect, should have been that Ilya asked for a smoothie.

—---

Shane normally woke far earlier than Ilya, even now that they were on the same team. So it was odd that when he woke, Ilya wasn't in bed. The sheets were still a little warm, so he hadn't been gone long.

"Ilya?"

No answer.

Shane sat up, scrubbed a hand over his face, listened. No sounds from the en suite, no clattering pans from downstairs in the kitchen.

Shane peered over the bed. No Anya in her bed. Maybe she'd needed to go out? She did normally ask Ilya first, going to his side of the bed and nuzzling a hand if it was available, otherwise standing on her hind legs and whining or licking Ilya's ear.

Well, whatever. They had a morning practice, Ilya couldn't stay hiding long.

Shane was making a smoothie when Ilya came in through the sliding glass door with Anya. Anya immediately came over to pant up happily at Shane, and he reached down to pet her. His eyes were on Ilya, though, who was shivering a bit.

"Didn't want a coat?"

Ilya stuck his tongue out at Shane, though he seemed kind of… off. "Did not realize it would be so cold outside," he mumbled. He came over, kissed the side of Shane's mouth. "Is this

smoothie good or shit? Yesterday's was okay. I would not mind another."

Shane frowned at Ilya. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. Fine."

"You sound hoarse."

"I am not a horse, Hollander. This is not a barn even if you like to eat hay."

Shane ignored that. "I'm serious. Are you sick?"

"I am sick of you."

Shane gave up. "There's enough smoothie for you, too. It's mango. You'll like this one."

"Mango," Ilya said slowly, savoring it. "Yes. Thank you." He made like he was going to take a deep breath, then cut himself off and headed for the stairs.

"Where are you going?"

"To get changed. We have practice, yes? Soon?"

Shane's attention jacked back to hockey. "Yeah. Leave in like twenty minutes?"

Ilya nodded, then jogged up to their bedroom.

A minute later, a weird sound. Like a muffled cough.

Shane called up. “You okay?”

“Just swallowed some water wrong.”

Shane narrowed his eyes at the stairs, but let it slide.

Ilya put up no protest when Shane grabbed the keys to drive to practice. Shane had chugged his smoothie, but Ilya really was savoring it for it some reason. Shane couldn’t quite figure out what was going on there, but Ilya was being weird. Admittedly, it was Ilya, who was weird, but still. He put on a playlist, since Shane had ceded that battle a long time ago, then put his head against the window and fell asleep nearly instantly. Shane drove carefully. Well, more carefully than usual. He didn’t want to hit a pothole and bounce Ilya’s head off the glass.

Ilya woke up groggy when Shane parked, but he shook it off fairly easily. He did not shake off the frigid temperatures outside as easily. His hands were still shaking with cold by the time they had put all their gear on. Shane was quieter than usual, which nobody took offense at–it was Shane, after all–but it was because he was watching Ilya, who was also quieter than usual. No one minded that, either, because sometimes Ilya got like that, but Ilya was smiling at people enough that nobody seemed concerned.

Shane was kind of concerned. The unsteady hands, the weirdness this morning.

“Are you okay?” Shane asked quietly, once most of the others were on the ice.

“Am fine,” Ilya said. “Come. Let’s go show these assholes how to play hockey.”

So Shane followed him out onto the ice.

They did a slow lap, warming up, waiting for Wiebe. After a few minutes, he came out, and stood at the center of the rink, waving everyone over. They turned and skated to him.

"Jesus, Rozanov, you look like shit," Coach Wiebe said.

"Wow," Ilya rasped, and out here on the ice, trying to let his voice carry, it was on the verge of giving out. "You really know how to motivate your team, there."

By the time the sentence was over, everyone was staring at him.

"Yeah," Ilya said. "Yes, yes, I heard it. I am going." He pulled off his helmet. His hair was already dark with sweat, and they'd only been on the ice five minutes.

"Go see Terry," Wiebe said. "Hollander, how are you feeling?"

"Fine," Shane said, surprised. He supposed he shouldn't be. He did live with Ilya. "I'm fine."

Ilya headed off the ice, going to find the team doctor.

"Let me know if that changes," Wiebe said. "But for now, here's the play."

Practice was normally good. Shane liked repetition, liked knowing what he was doing, liked doing things he was good at. Liked clicking into place with the others. He liked when they broke apart for scrimmages and he got to play against Ilya again, watch for that sharp grin and check him into the boards.

This practice, he was off his game. He couldn't help checking the tunnel to the locker room and the offices, looking for Ilya.

“Is just a cold,” Ilya called hoarsely from the tunnel, after fifteen or twenty minutes. “I am going home now, because Terry is an over-reactor. Practice like your captain is not watching.”

Shane rolled his eyes, then realized that meant Ilya was driving. And not just driving, but driving Shane’s car. That left Shane stranded–he could get a ride from someone else, but still–and also left Ilya driving when he’d barely been able to stay awake on the way here.

“Coach,” Shane said, skating over. “I–I should maybe drive him back. It’ll only take like fifteen minutes, I’ll be right back–”

“Go, fine,” Wiebe said. “I don’t doubt you’ll stay after practice anyway.”

Shane nodded–it had been his plan regardless–and skated after Ilya, who was already gone.

“Shit,” Shane muttered, shedding things haphazardly as he chased after Ilya. He gathered everything up, only to find Ilya waiting, smirking, in the locker room.

“I can drive, you know,” Ilya rasped.

“Fuck off. Not my car. Not like that.”

“Ah, so is car you are worried about.”

“Did Terry really just say it was a cold?”

Ilya nodded. He’d changed already, back into street clothes, and, while he was wearing his normal sweatshirt under a far more fashionable peacoat than anything Shane owned, he had his hands shoved deep in his pockets like he was still cold, paler than normal. Shane was already sweating in the changing room.

“Give me just a minute, and we can go.”

“I really can drive myself,” Ilya said, almost like an offering. He was watching Shane with tired eyes. “Harris can drive you back after. Or Troy. Or–”

“I know they could. But this is easier.” He glanced over at Ilya, who had eased down to sit in his cubby, leaning his head back. He still had his eyes on Shane, though. “You really do look like shit.”

“Everyone really knows how to make me feel better soon,” Ilya muttered.

Shane rolled his eyes.

In the car, Ilya slumped down as far as his body would fit.

“How bad do you feel?”

“Whole body hurts,” Ilya mumbled. “Can't really swallow, so no funny business, yes? Feel like shit, to be honest.”

Shane chewed on his lip. “And it’s just a cold.”

Ilya closed his eyes, which let Shane notice the lavender circles under his eyes. How early had he woken? Had it really been Anya, or had he slept badly? “Yes, is just cold. Terry gave me a test. Not covid. Not flu. Just–” He coughed, coughed harder, then had to fight to sit up properly, coughing harshly into his elbow, away from Shane. When he could breathe, he rested his forehead against the window. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

Shane frowned slightly. It wasn't that Ilya never apologized, though with some people he did look like he would rather stick a skate in his eye. But there was a mood that Ilya sometimes

got in, where he seemed to think existing necessitated an apology. Shane never liked it, and he also couldn't quite figure out the trigger. Especially not now.

But he didn't bring it up. He didn't want to startle Ilya into withdrawing. Therapy had helped Ilya a lot, but he still wasn't exactly Mr. Overshare.

“You sound–”

“Like shit,” Ilya rasped. “I know. Everyone is saying this.”

Ilya’s cough did sound awful, dry and like it hurt, but Shane was almost more focused on Ilya’s English. It wasn’t that his accent had gotten more pronounced, but the turns of phrase were… odder than normal. Like he wasn’t quite processing at full capacity. “Do you want me to stay?” Shane asked, before he knew what was coming out of his mouth.

Ilya turned to stare at him. “Are you okay?”

“What? Yeah, I’m fine.”

“Shane Hollander does not *skip* practice.”

Shane flipped him off with one hand, then pulled into their driveway. “It’s not skipping. I would tell Coach Wiebe. I’m just saying, I could stay.”

“And do what?” Ilya got out, keeping a hand on the door a moment longer than necessary, and headed inside. He fumbled with the keys.

Shane reached around him and took the keys, then unlocked the door. Anya came skidding up, happy but clearly confused. Ilya bent to pet her, then swore under his breath and pressed a palm against the wall.

Shane touched his back, lightly. “You okay?”

“Yes, yes. Just–head rush. Bent down too quickly.” Ilya squeezed his eyes shut, then slowly stood back up. He pulled his hand from the wall. “Well. I am home. Safe and sound. You can go back to practice now.”

Part of Shane itched to do that. It was a smaller part, though. “Are you going to be okay?”

“What, alone? Practice is only a couple hours. I am not going to die.”

That wasn’t what Shane was worried about. Well, mostly. “I don’t think you’ll die. Just–if no one’s around to take care of you, then–”

Ilya coughed on a surprised laugh. “Take care of me. I do not need anyone taking care of me.”

This struck Shane as… unlike Ilya. Ilya was whiny and annoying and loved attention. Actually, all of this was odd. Why had Ilya gone to practice at all? Why wasn’t he leaping at the chance to make Shane miss practice?

“Ilya,” Shane said slowly. “Are you okay?”

“We have established that I’m mostly fine.”

“First of all, we have not established that. But I meant, like. Mentally.”

Ilya stilled. Then he shivered slightly and took off his coat. He tossed it on the coat rack, then shoved his hands in his sweatshirt pocket and went further into the house. “I’m fine. It’s–I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Hollander.”

“If you’re still sick tomorrow,” Shane said. “I’m not going in. I’m staying here.”

“Fine,” Ilya said. “Will not matter, because I will not be sick tomorrow. A nap will cure me. But whatever makes you feel better.”

Shane really, really doubted that Ilya would be fine tomorrow.

“I don’t want to be the one responsible for you to not go,” Ilya continued. “You’ll be annoyed, and–”

“I won’t be annoyed at you.”

He huffed. “I didn’t say at me. But you will be annoyed you’re not at practice. Is true, you know it is true.”

Practice.

Holy shit.

“Ilya,” Shane said, for once not thinking of hockey. He was thinking that Ilya was out of practice. “Ilya, when was the last time you let someone take care of you?”

Ilya was halfway up the stairs. He turned around. His shoulders were tight, but Shane was pretty good at reading Ilya at this point, and he was pretty sure he wasn’t angry. He was just

cold, and trying not to shiver. Shane went to the stairs, and Ilya started up again. Shane followed.

"No one needs to," Ilya said.

"That's not what I asked. Was it–was it since your dad died? Since Russia?"

Ilya snorted, then looked back at Shane. "Sorry. I forget you never… you did not meet my family. No. My brother never gave a shit, and my father–well. If I was sick, I had to stay home from hockey. Which meant I was, officially, never sick. One time, I–what is word–fainted on the ice. Had a bad fever, had ignored it so I did not have to stay home. But was okay, coach gave me enough drugs that I could play. Actually, that was the year I met you. The year we beat you in international youth tournament."

Shane ignored that last bit. "Ilya. What the fuck."

"Shto?"

"Did you dad refuse to let you stay home? Or did–"

"No, no, was my choice." Ilya kicked off his slides and crawled into bed, not bothering to change. He patted the spot next to him and Anya jumped up, immediately snuggled into Ilya's stomach. Shane didn't reprimand her. Or Ilya. Not this time. "I did not want to be home. What was my family going to do? They could not fix me, and I–" He coughed again. "I felt worse, at home. And when my father came home from work, would just yell at me about whatever I had fucked up about lately. Or would just go in his office so he would not get sick."

"Your dad didn't even stay with you?"

"To do what?" Ilya asked again. He shivered suddenly. "Shane. You are not making sense. He had job. Important job. Had to work." He rearranged some of the pillows. "You should go.

Do not want to get you more sick."

"I'm not sick."

"Yet." He smirked up at Shane, though the effect was a little lessened by the fact that he was barely keeping his eyes open.

"If I'm not staying, I can call my mom," Shane said. "She can come over–"

"What? No. I am grown man, Hollander, I can–can take–" He coughed, harsh, and slid a little further down, yanking the covers up to his chin, curling up a little. "I can take care of myself," he said. "I have been doing it a long time."

That was what made Shane want to call his mom. Or fuck it, call off practice too and stay. "Sure, but–"

"I do not want to get your mom sick," Ilya mumbled. His eyes were already closed. He really must have felt like shit, to give in to all of this so quickly instead of taking the day off to lounge around or start up CoD. Shane wondered if he had admitted how bad he felt to Terry, if he'd said something that made Terry send him home if it really was just a cold. Or if Terry was just hoping that rest would help Ilya recover faster.

"Oh, but you'll get the whole team sick?"

"Not whole team," Ilya rasped. "I was going to stay apart from everyone."

"Not me, though."

"Shane." Ilya dragged his eyes open to give him a look that was both amused and slightly feverish. "We sleep in same bed. I think you are maybe a lost cause."

“Shit,” Shane muttered. He probably should stay back. But he felt fine. Besides, his diet–while not as strict as it used to be–was still a fuck ton better than Ilya’s. Maybe he wouldn’t get it.

“Go to practice,” Ilya mumbled. “I do not want you standing there thinking all day. Makes me tired.”

“Fine,” Shane said. “But if you’re still sick tomorrow–”

“I already agreed,” Ilya said, then muffled a cough under the sheets. He sounded awful, and didn’t reemerge. “You can take care of me tomorrow if you have to.”

Shane rolled his eyes. Then he went over and kissed the top of the blankets. “I’ll see you later.”

“Whatever.”

“I love you.”

Ilya mumbled it back in Russian. He sounded half asleep already.

Shane called his mom on his way back to practice.

—---

When Ilya woke, it was to the sounds of someone down in the kitchen. He shifted to sit up, groaned at the way that pulled at his aching body. His head throbbed, which was new. He checked the clock. It was too early for it to be Shane. Which meant it was… who?

Ilya made a sound that was a little bit too close to a whimper at the thought of getting out of bed, but he did manage. Why was their house fucking freezing? He yanked the duvet free, wrapped it around himself, and went to the stairs. If he was going to get burgled, the duvet probably wouldn't help, but at least he'd be a little warmer.

But it wasn't a burglar. When he stumbled into the kitchen, it was Yuna, pulling out a container of soup. "Hi, Ilya," she said. "Shane said you were sick, so I brought you chicken noodle."

Ilya bit his lip. His chest hurt, and he was fairly certain it wasn't just his aching lungs. "I– thank you," he rasped. "I told him not to call you."

"Are you hungry?" she asked, ignoring that last part. Like mother, like son. Ilya fought a fond smile. "I can warm it up now or later."

"You don't have to do that–"

"I'm already here."

"I don't want you to catch this. I'm fine, really. I–" His voice caught, and he turned away as he coughed, lifting the collar of his shirt over his mouth to keep the germs from her, trying to keep the harsh sound of his cough quiet. Habit, to not make a big deal out of illness, to not remind people he wasn't at his best. He felt slightly lightheaded when it was over, though, and Yuna was suddenly right in front of him. He took a startled, dizzy step back.

But she was there on purpose, apparently, because she lifted a hand to press against his forehead. "Oh, sweetie," she said. "You're really warm."

"Is okay," he mumbled, because what else was he supposed to say? Fuck, he was exhausted.

“Do you want to sleep on the couch or up in your bed?”

“What?”

“You just said you were exhausted. And you look it. And honestly, you sound awful.”

Fuck, he’d said that out loud. “I–”

“Ilya,” she said, stern. “I’m not going anywhere. Pick a place to settle in, and I’ll grab an extra blanket for you, and I’ll warm up the soup. Okay? Just get some rest.”

“I’m not hungry,” he said, and swore at himself again. He didn’t want to upset her. He didn’t want to refuse her probably delicious soup. He should have said that more diplomatically. He just–he really wasn’t hungry. He did not feel good. The floor was tipping under him ever so slightly.

“Okay,” Yuna said. “I’ll skip the soup, and look around for what Shane has for cough syrup. I’m sure he has paracetamol somewhere, too. You find somewhere to lay down.”

The couch was closer. He borderline collapsed onto it, dragging the duvet with him. Anya jumped right up, propping her chin on his hip, and Ilya couldn’t stop shivering. His teeth were nearly chattering.

But then Yuna was there, brushing his hair off his forehead, and setting a glass of water by his head, and tucking another blanket over him and Anya. He tried to say thank you, he really did, though he could only think of it in Russian, but sleep was already dragging him back under.

—---

When Shane got back from practice, he went into the house as quietly as possible. His mom had texted, saying that Ilya was asleep so she was going to run a couple errands and be back in the afternoon. He put his dirty clothes in the wash and left his duffel in the closet where it belonged, then went out to the living room.

Ilya was on the couch, still knocked out, Anya behind his knees. Ilya had bought this couch because it was literally eight feet long and he could stretch out on it, but currently there was not a lot of stretching going on: he was wrapped in a blanket and curled up, looking so small and sick and sad that Shane was having trouble processing this was *his* Ilya. The sweaty curls and the pale face, Ilya's lips slightly parted as he breathed shallowly through his mouth. There was at least a pillow under his head. There was a damp washcloth on his forehead and another on his neck.

Anya perked up a bit. Shane heard the car in the driveway. He went to go meet his mom in the entryway so they could talk quietly and not risk waking Ilya.

"Do you know what's with the washcloth on his neck?" Shane asked.

Yuna frowned. "What?"

"He's got one on his forehead, which made sense, I figured you did that–"

Yuna shook her head. "I offered earlier, but he didn't want it."

"Jesus," Shane muttered. Ilya coughed in his sleep and Shane and Yuna both looked in his direction. Oh, shit. The second washcloth. Maybe Ilya was hoping that the coolness would help soothe his sore throat. "He just doesn't want anyone to help."

"When was the last time someone took care of him?" Yuna asked Shane, a little judgily, like Shane was the one who was responsible. Which, yeah, he was now, but he'd literally never seen Ilya sick before. "He's looked spooked the entire time I've been here, like he had no idea what I was doing. I gave him some paracetamol earlier and I'm not gonna lie, Shane, I think he was on the verge of tears. Partially, that was probably the fever, which went back down a little bit, but what on earth?"

Shane rubbed the back of his neck. “I asked him that this morning. I don’t know if anyone has. In like… a long time.”

Yuna crossed her arms. “I know it’s been a while since he was in Russia with his family, but–”

“I don’t think they were really a factor.”

Yuna stared at him, then shifted to look back at Ilya. “So not since his mother died,” she said softly. “And he was what, thirteen? Twelve?”

“Twelve.”

“No one since? Not a single girlfriend? Boyfriend?”

“I don’t think he ever had anything long term. I mean, he has Svetlana, but I don’t think–I don’t think he would’ve called her even if he was sick. When I mentioned staying home today, he acted like that was the dumbest thing he’d ever heard.” Shane had been sick alone, too, he’d come down with random bugs on the road and been isolated away from the team. But he’d always been able to call his parents. Sometimes one of them would drive up to Montreal, be waiting for him when he got back. And if he did get something *bad*, pneumonia from broken ribs or a nasty flu or whatever, he *knew* he could call and they would come, and there would be someone with a cool cloth or a thermometer or willing to go get more electrolytes and Nyquil. Even just someone to fetch a blanket from across the room when his body ached. Injuries, too, and those were more frequent–he always knew where he could go and who would be there and that he wouldn't have to worry. That he had people who loved him.

And Ilya didn’t. If Ilya had been the one to get the concussion, what would he have done? Who would have checked him out of the hospital, even? Who would have stayed with him and made sure he was okay?

“Poor thing,” Yuna said. “Shane, sometimes he breaks my heart.”

Yeah. Shane knew the feeling.

—---

The next morning, Ilya was still asleep when Shane woke. And this time, Shane woke to Ilya’s raspy breathing, and his fever-damp temples, and his hands icy where they pressed against Shane’s skin.

Fuck.

Shane slid carefully out of bed, trying not to wake Ilya. He found Anya not in her bed but sleeping peacefully on the floor, on Ilya’s side of the room, basically half under the bed. He nudged her, then waved her out of the room. She followed, though she glanced back at Ilya like she was wondering if she shouldn’t stay.

He followed her outside, then called Coach Wiebe. He told him that Ilya was still sick, and that he was staying back, too. He lied just a tiny bit and said his throat was kind of sore, and that he didn’t want to get any of the others sick, wanted to minimize germ exposure. Wiebe just told him to feel better, and to pass the message on to Ilya.

Once Shane brought Anya back inside and set her up with breakfast, he grabbed a glass of water and went back upstairs.

Ilya was still asleep. Shane had planned on getting back in bed, but at that moment, Ilya coughed. And then coughed harder. And then coughed hard enough he woke up, ducking under the covers to muffle the sound.

That was kind of gross. Shane was going to need to change the sheets. He probably should anyway.

Well, now Ilya was awake.

Shane went and sat on Ilya's side of the bed. He put the glass of water on the nightstand.

"Hey," he said quietly.

"Hey," Ilya whispered. He rolled–slowly, weirdly, like it hurt to move–onto his other side, so he could slip a hand into Shane's pocket. Normally, he would make a second move, and Shane's body anticipated it, but this time that was it. Like Ilya just wanted to be touching Shane at all. His hand was trembling slightly. Ilya didn't bother opening his eyes. There was no fucking way this was just a cold. "When are you going to practice?"

"I'm not going."

Now Ilya opened his eyes. "Hollander–"

"You agreed," Shane reminded him. "Yesterday. That if you were still sick today, I could stay and take care of you."

"Yes," Ilya mumbled. "But I thought you would maybe be sick, too, so would not matter. But you are not. Clearly. So you can go."

"I'm not going."

"You will be upset–"

"Ilya. I literally don't care. I'm staying. I already told Wiebe."

There was a pause as Ilya tried to think through another argument. Then he just mumbled, “Well. If you already told Wiebe.”

Finally. Ilya ceding. Shane rarely saw the day.

Ilya shivered.

Shane tried to get to his feet, but Ilya caught the edge of his pocket. “Don’t go,” Ilya mumbled. “You said you weren’t going.”

“I’m just getting another blanket. And to see what meds my mom brought for you.”

“She brought Nyquil and… something else. I don’t remember.” Ilya still hadn’t let go of his pants pocket. “But don’t go.”

“It’ll literally be thirty seconds–”

“Shane,” he mumbled. “Please?”

So Shane got back into bed.

—---

By lunch time, though, Shane was starving. Ilya was asleep again, fairly deeply unlike the restlessness of last night, so Shane slipped out of the bed and downstairs to consider lunch.

Half an hour later, Ilya came into the kitchen with the duvet wrapped tightly around his shoulders. Despite the fact he was still a 6’ 3” wall of solid muscle, the poofy duvet managed

to make him look small. This was helped by the way Ilya also had it over his head like a hood. Or like a babushka.

"What are you making?" Ilya rasped. Shane was just standing in front of the fridge, contemplating, so Ilya had no hesitation in coming over and standing behind him, resting his forehead on Shane's shoulder.

"I ate already. I was looking for something to drink. Do you want any of the soup Mom brought?"

Ilya shivered against Shane's back, despite the duvet. He opened the blanket and pulled Shane in.

Shane immediately pulled back away. Ilya was sweaty, germy, and about four thousand degrees. When Shane closed the fridge door and turned around, it was to see Ilya shifting back, eyes on the floor, almost–his mouth twitched to one side. Like Ilya was embarrassed. Or even, worse, maybe ashamed. Scared to be seen wanting.

"Come here," Shane said softly, and pulled Ilya to him. This time, though, he made sure Ilya was still wrapped in the duvet. "Is that a no to the soup?"

Ilya nodded against Shane's shoulder. Shane could still feel him shivering under the duvet.

"Okay, is that a 'yes it's a no' or a 'yes, I do want soup?'"

"No soup."

"Do you want something else?"

Ilya shook his head.

Shane had never once found a use for his anxiety. It was annoying and it cost him time and energy and even when it was right, it pissed him off.

Until today.

Shane pulled Ilya to the couch. He turned on the TV, found one of those baking shows, and sat, pulling Ilya down with him. Ilya slumped down instantly, curling up with his head in Shane's lap. Perfect. Time to go in for the kill.

"Ilya."

Ilya mumbled something, but it was in Russian and too low for Shane to catch.

"You have to tell me if you need something."

"Don't need anything," Ilya rasped. He snuggled in closer, eyes on the TV but barely open, definitely not focused.

"If you don't say you need anything, but you clearly do, then I worry. And I mean, I–the anxiety gets worse."

Ilya looked up at that. He narrowed his eyes at Shane, trying to think through the fever. "Are you…." He muffled a cough into his sweatshirt, turning away, like he was trying to keep quiet. When he could breathe mostly steadily, he settled back onto Shane's chest. "Are you weaponizing your anxiety?"

"Who taught you weaponizing?"

"I'm very smart, Hollander. My English is very good. I know basically every word by now."

“Alright.”

“Are you?”

“What?”

“Are you weaponizing?”

Shane shrugged. “Maybe.”

Ilya muffled another cough into his sleeve. “But is also true.”

“Yeah,” Shane said, quietly. “It is. You’re stressing me out, Rozanov.”

Ilya kept looking at him. Shane looked back. God, his husband was good-looking. Even now flushed, eyes bright with fever and not a little cold medicine, gold-brown curls an absolute mess that Ilya would pout about if he looked in a mirror, Ilya was a portrait of something gorgeous.

Maybe Shane was just stupid in love.

“I don’t want to stress you out,” Ilya mumbled. He let his head drop to Shane’s chest.

“Then tell me what you need. Tell me what you *want*. I’m right here, Ilya. I’m not leaving. I want to do what I can to help you.” He ran a hand up and down Ilya’s back, even though it was sweaty. Maybe he could convince Ilya to shower, too. He could go in with him, sit Ilya on the bench, lather him in suds, run his fingers through Ilya’s hair. He was pretty sure Ilya had a headache–he was squinting the way he did when the sun was too bright and he didn’t

know where his sunglasses were–and maybe a little head massage would help. The warmth and the steam would probably help Ilya's cough.

Well. He could start some of that now. He smoothed his fingers across Ilya's damp temple and Ilya relaxed against him. "I love you," Shane said quietly. He added Ilya's little Slavic quirk. "Yes?"

"Yes," Ilya murmured. "You love me. I love you, too."

"And you would take care of me if I was sick."

"Am going to have to, when you catch this."

"Yeah, sure." Shane saw another opportunity. "What would you do if I was sick?"

"Sleep in the trophy room so I don't get sick, too. Can't have our two star players out at same t–time–" Ilya coughed, harsh, ruining the flat delivery of his sarcasm. Shane squeezed his shoulder as he dragged in a shuddery breath, then went back to rubbing Ilya's temple.

"Sure," Shane said.

"What I thought you were going to do," Ilya mumbled. "When you knew I was sick. I wouldn't have been mad."

No. But Ilya would have been alone, and Shane knew how much Ilya hated sleeping alone.

"I would bring you medicine," Ilya said. "And soup. And I would put you in the shower because you would be gross and you hate being gross. And I would… I don't know. What do you like when you're sick? Would make your evil smoothies for you. Oh. I would call your mom. She would know. She would tell me how to take care of her second favorite son."

God, Shane wished he could call someone who knew Ilya like this, ask how to take care of him. “Would you worry, if I was coughing all over and I had a fever of 39 and I said I was fine?”

“Is not 39. And I wouldn’t worry. I would just tell you that you are stupid and to lay down.”

Shane waited.

“I would worry,” Ilya admitted. “But only a little bit.”

“Sure.”

“I don’t want you to worry,” Ilya mumbled again.

“Glad we’re on the same page,” Shane said. “So. What do you want? Right now, what do you want?”

Ilya was quiet long enough that Shane thought he’d fallen asleep. But no. His eyes were still open. Unfocused, but open.

Then, “Just stay,” Ilya murmured. His hand tightened in Shane’s shirt and his eyes finally slid closed, like he was giving in. “Just stay.”

Shane stroked a hand through Ilya’s curls. “Okay,” he whispered. He pressed a kiss to the top of Ilya’s head. “I’m not going anywhere.”

—---

Terry was in a meeting that afternoon, but Harris and Troy dropped off two more tests on Troy's way home from practice that day. Shane was right. The first one had been a false negative. Ilya had the same flu strain half the city had. Shane still felt fine, but he wasn't holding his breath for that to stay true. Especially considering how badly Ilya was doing. The fever refused to stay down, regardless of whatever meds Shane convinced Ilya to take–which honestly resembled when Ilya had to convince Anya to take antibiotics–and the cough had only gotten worse ("Yes, yes, should never have smoked, I know. What do you want me to do about this now.") Ilya only got out of bed to go to the bathroom, to move downstairs to the couch ("Need a change of view, Shane."), and to come back up to bed in the evening. And every time he got to his feet, Shane watched like a hawk, because he was sort of convinced that Ilya was going to pass out.

Day four–visible day four, anyway, Shane was convinced Ilya had felt bad a day or two before, there was no way he'd gone down that quickly with no warning, especially now that he knew how much Ilya hated to admit being sick, which did indeed mean that there was a good chance Ilya had been mildly feverish in their last game, which explained some things–Ilya tried to convince Shane to go to the game that night. Shane had already lied to Wiebe and said he was still under the weather, and Terry had signed them out.

"Not fair to team," Ilya mumbled. His voice was worse than ever. Shane was honestly surprised Ilya could still talk at all. But it would probably take a psychotic force of nature to shut Ilya up. "For both of us to be gone. And you're fine. You should go."

"Ilya. You look like you're going to black out every time you stand up. I'm not leaving."

Ilya's breathing was ratcheting up. His eyes were on Shane, and he was shivering again. Shane stroked his thumb across Ilya's forehead, then grabbed the damp cloth he'd brought with him and dragged it gently across Ilya's forehead, then the back of his neck. Ilya shuddered, curled into the blankets, couldn't stop shaking. Shit. Shit. "I am letting them down," he whispered. "They're going to–they're going to blame me, for you missing the game, too. I don't–Shane. You need to go to the game."

"They'll be fine." Shane put the cloth away. He would put it in warm water next time, hope that it did the job anyway. "Ilya–"

Ilya gave a wracking cough, tried to muffle it, failed his way into gasping. He was still breathing too fast, even once he got the cough under control. "You need to go," he whispered

again. “I don’t–Shane, I don’t–”

“What?” Shane had been sitting on the edge of the bed, but now he lay down so he was on the same level as Ilya. “Ilya,” he said, quiet, gentle. “What is going on?”

“I don’t want you to resent me.” Ilya’s teeth chattered. His eyes weren’t just glassy with fever but almost glossy with tears. “I’ve–I’ve pushed you and pushed you, and the team is–the team deserves better, and I–heart, I don’t want–”

Shane pulled Ilya to his chest. Ilya went, unresisting, burning up. Fuck. He hated that he could never quite figure out how to lure Ilya back out of a depressive phase, and this was maybe worse, Ilya not even fighting, the fever burning down all his defenses. All Shane wanted was to give him the world, convince Ilya he deserved it. He did not ever want to see Ilya trapped in fear like this. “Shhh,” Shane whispered. He was going to have to call his mom later, figure out how to bring the fever down for real, how to deal with a borderline delirious sick person. “Ilya. Ilya. I’m not going to resent you.”

Ilya tucked his forehead against Shane’s shoulder. Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya, keeping him close. “Everyone else has,” Ilya whispered.

Shane’s heart was cracking in his chest. “No,” he murmured. He stroked a thumb across Ilya’s neck. “No one is–”

“My father. My brother.” Something damp hit Shane’s bicep. Shit. Shit, that was a tear. Ilya was crying. “I think my mother, too. At the end. Some of my teammates in Boston. Wiebe, probably, I–I could have pulled this team together as soon as Troy got here and I didn’t, because I was distracted and fucking sad and–” He hauled in a raspy breath. “I don’t want that to be you. I don’t want you to–you need to go to the game. Please.”

“No,” Shane said, and tightened his arms around Ilya. “I’m going to stay here. With you. Because that’s where I should be. And that’s where I want to be. And fuck everyone else.” He couldn’t imagine leaving Ilya right now, like this.

Ilya’s shoulders hitched.

“Moya lyubov,” Shane whispered. “I’m staying with you.”

Ilya just cried. Shane held him close.

—---

After a while, Shane was pretty sure that Ilya was asleep. The raspy sounds of his crying jag had been replaced with shuddery little breaths, then just the small motions of breathing. Shane was scared to move, not wanting to wake him.

Anya got to her feet. Then there was the sound of the door opening downstairs, and Anya bounded down. Not barking, though, which meant someone she knew.

Oh, thank god.

Shane’s phone lit up. He reached for it carefully.

Mom: I’m here with a different batch of soup, to try to tempt him. How’s he doing?

Shane answered one-handed. *Not good. Can you come up here?*

A minute later, Yuna was in the doorway. “What’s going on?” she asked, hushed.

Shane combed his fingers through Ilya’s curls, trying telepathically to keep him asleep. “It’s the fever,” Shane whispered to his mom. “I can’t get it to come down, and it’s like–I don’t know, I think it’s making him feel–” Well. *Vulnerable* was the word Shane wanted to use, but Ilya would never admit to that. “He's just kind of emotional,” Shane said instead, which wasn't much better but would have to do. “It’s freaking him out. It’s freaking *me* out.”

Yuna nodded. “What have you been giving him?”

“That same cold and flu medicine.”

“Okay. I’ll make some tea for you guys–you drink it too, can’t hurt–and then I’ll go out and see if there’s a stronger one. And if he wakes up, try to get him in a bath. Not hot, but not cool enough he starts shivering. Okay?”

Shane nodded. “Thanks.”

“Of course, sweetheart.”

Ilya mumbled something as Yuna went back downstairs. Shane adjusted, tried to see Ilya’s expression to see if he’d woken or not, but Ilya had tucked his temple against Shane’s chest, angled his face down. Possibly so that Shane wouldn’t see him cry.

He didn’t say anything else. Shane hoped he was still asleep. He kept stroking his hair.

After a while, Yuna came back with the tea. “Here,” she whispered, putting two mugs on his nightstand. “I’ll be back in a bit. Do you want anything while I’m out?”

“Ice cream,” Shane whispered back. “Cookies and cream.”

“The dairy’s going to make his cough worse.”

“But at least he might eat something. And it’ll feel good on his throat.”

Yuna nodded at that. “Alright. Do *you* want anything?”

“Yeah, if there’s any sushi at the grocery store, could you grab some?”

She pretended to hit him. “Grocery store sushi? Really?”

“Well, I wasn’t gonna make you *make it*–”

Ilya made a soft, upset noise. Yuna and Shane both broke off, watching warily. Ilya just curled in closer to Shane, tightened the grip he had on Shane’s tank. He shuddered a little.

Yuna passed him the soft blanket from the foot of the bed without a word, and Shane tucked it around Ilya. He was worried about the flush on Ilya’s cheeks, but shivering would only make it worse, and exhaust him further.

I’ll be back, Yuna mouthed.

Thanks, Shane mouthed back.

—---

Half an hour later, Ilya mumbled something, then jerked awake. Shane put down the hockey biography he’d been reading, focus laser-like on Ilya again. “Hey,” he murmured. “How are you feeling?”

“Shi–” Ilya’s voice cracked and then gave out entirely. There it was. “Shitty,” he tried to say again, but it only came out as a hoarse whisper. “Fuck,” he whispered, then coughed so badly that Shane hauled him upright, trying to help. When it was over, he let his head drop to Shane’s shoulder. His forehead was clammy, and hot, and the back of his neck was damp with sweat. He’d gone pale rather than flushed again, and Shane had no idea if that was a bad sign or just a change.

“Alright,” Shane said. “I’m tired of this. You’re taking a bath.”

“I don’t–” Ilya tried to say. He shook his head.

“Yes. You’re gross.”

Ilya lifted his head just to pout at him. Oh, god, that made Shane feel better. At the very least, Ilya was well enough to be annoyed.

“I don’t care. Come on, it’ll make you feel better.”

Ilya gave him a look that said he doubted it.

“My mom is bringing ice cream,” Shane said. “But you’re only getting some if you take a bath. Or a shower. Your choice.”

Ice cream, Ilya repeated to himself. Then he mouthed, *what flavor?*

“Cookies and cream.”

Ilya tried to groan, but the sound tripped in his chest and he coughed again. At least this time he didn’t sound like he was about to choke.

“Here,” Shane said, handing over one of the mugs of tea. It was still warm, because he, smartly, had gotten ones of those electric mug warming plates. Ilya had made fun of him for it. Ilya also stole it for his coffee, routinely. “Drink this, while I go get the bathroom set up. Bath or shower?”

Ilya gave him another dry look–legitimately, Shane would take that look over the scared look Ilya had had earlier, any day–then whispered, “Shower.”

So Shane got the shower going. First he angled the showerhead so that hot water blasted onto the bench to warm it up, then he lowered the temperature to something that would hopefully still feel okay to Ilya but also cool off a bit of the fever. Then Shane stripped except for his boxers–he was kind of worried his mom would come back in the middle of this–and went back into the bedroom.

Ilya wolf-whistled.

Shane rolled his eyes, then pulled the blankets off Ilya, who tried to make a complaining sound but couldn’t quite manage it. Shane took the mug back–half gone, good–and waited as Ilya dragged himself out of the bed.

And Shane caught him when Ilya reached for him, suddenly, his color washing out further. “I’ve got you,” Shane murmured. Ilya’s breathing was harsh against his shoulder. “You just went too fast.”

Ilya blew a raspberry. He took another moment, but then he took a mostly-steady half step back. He went into the bathroom, though he kept his hand in Shane’s.

It was already nice and steamy. Ilya gave a hoarse cough as he breathed in. Shane pulled Ilya’s sweatshirt off, then his black tank, then pulled Ilya into the shower and had him sit on the bench. He pulled Ilya’s socks off, then Ilya’s sweatpants, and chucked them outside the shower. He’d pick them up after. He just hadn’t wanted Ilya’s clearly minimal energy going into shedding clothes while standing.

Ilya was under the water now, in just his boxers, and Shane was kneeling in front of him. Reaching for Shane, Ilya caught his chin, tipped it up. Shane expected a smart remark about how even like this, Ilya could get him on his knees, but instead Ilya just whispered, “You are too good to me.” His curls were going dark with water, unfurling, plastering to his pale face.

“You would do the same for me,” Shane countered.

“Not half so well.”

Shane sincerely doubted it. But he didn’t want to argue with Ilya, so he just shook his head and then got busy. He was gentle with the shampoo, and the curl-focused conditioner, running his fingers through Ilya’s hair and massaging carefully with the tips of his fingers, scratching at Ilya’s scalp with his nails until Ilya caught his wrist with a smirk and whispered, “No more of that unless you–” He cleared his throat. “--unless you plan on doing something else with those hands later. And I do not really have energy right now. Feels very nice, though.” So Shane had switched to soap and a washcloth–normally Ilya was a loofah man, but he’d twitched away from it today, maybe too rough–and carefully sudsed up every inch of him. He’d gotten a twitch from Ilya’s cock, too, both when he was on Ilya’s inner thighs and when he was on Ilya’s chest, but he just smirked at Ilya and carried on. Ilya at least seemed in better spirits than he had in days, his head tipped back against the wall, watching Shane work with dark, tired eyes that nevertheless had regained at least a little sparkle. And the redness around them had left. He no longer looked like he’d been crying.

He still didn’t look healthy, but at least he didn’t look sad anymore. It was the sadness that scared Shane more than anything.

“Alright,” Shane finally said. “You stay here. I’ll go get you new clothes.”

Ilya nodded slightly.

Shane heard Yuna downstairs as he found a new set of boxers, sweatpants, tank, and–Shane smirked–his Ottawa Hollander sweatshirt. He changed into new clothes for himself, then brought the clothes back to Ilya. He wasn’t sure Ilya would notice.

Ilya did not notice. Shane dried him off, then held out a steadying hand as Ilya changed. “You up for going downstairs?” Shane asked. “Or do you want me to bring the ice cream up here?”

Ilya shot him a look that Shane was interpreting as *As if you would let me eat in bed.* Shane kept his face neutral. He would’ve done whatever Ilya wanted, at that moment, to keep him from shaking apart like he had earlier. When the bright light of Ilya flickered, Shane was the one who did whatever he had to to bring that light back again. He knew it wasn’t about him,

he knew he wasn't even responsible for fixing it, but it didn't matter. He would do anything in his power to lift the darkness even a little bit. "I can get downstairs," Ilya whisper-rasped. "The shower cured me."

"Sure."

"I didn't think you were serious about the ice cream," Ilya continued.

"You think I would joke about ice cream to *you?*"

Ilya shrugged. Then he caught Shane's hand again and tugged him downstairs.

At the kitchen counter, Yuna handed over a bowl of ice cream with a smile, then handed Shane his grocery store sushi with a roll of her eyes. Shane pulled an Ilya and stuck his tongue out at her. She gave a surprised, soft smile.

"Thanks, Mom."

"Thank you," Ilya whispered. He pressed the spoon against the ice cream, then basically deep-throated the spoon, pressing the cold metal against his throat. Shane's jaw dropped. Ilya sighed in relief. At least Yuna wasn't looking, busy putting the ice cream back in the freezer.

As soon as Yuna turned around again, Ilya resumed eating ice cream like a normal person. Or at least, a normal 6' 3" goblin, hunched up and curled around the ice cream like someone was going to take it from him.

He shivered.

"Shoot," Yuna said. "We should've taken your temperature before the ice cream."

“So sad,” Ilya said, not seeming to regret this at all. He did shiver again, though. Shane hopped off the counter stool and fetched one of the blankets from the couch from earlier.

He hesitated next to Ilya. “Oh, but I don’t want to cover up the name.”

Ilya frowned, then looked down at himself. “What do you–” On the front of the sweatshirt was just the team logo, like Ilya’s. He craned to see the number on the sleeve. 24. “Oh, you fucker,” Ilya rasped. “This is worse number. This is not mine. This is–” He coughed into the sleeve. Shane had neglected to think this through, but he could always wash the thing. And this was worth it. “This–” His voice gave out again, and Ilya let his head thunk onto the counter.

“There, there,” Shane said, laughing. It was the first time he’d laughed in hours. “You’ll live.”

Ilya shook his head against the counter. Shane draped the blanket over him. Ilya pulled it tight around himself. But he also tugged the sleeves down, like he was huddling further into the sweatshirt itself. And Shane swore Ilya tucked his nose down into the collar for a moment.

“Here,” Yuna said, handing Shane a few different things from the pharmacy bag. Ilya watched with tired eyes, slowly, haphazardly eating more ice cream. He seemed to appreciate the cold spoon more than the actual ice cream, which kind of concerned Shane. But he seemed pleased either way.

Shane would take it.

Yuna walked Shane through what she'd gotten, and pushed a bag of cough drops over to Ilya, who gave a grateful smile. He popped one immediately, then blinked at his ice cream like he had not thought this through. Yuna measured out a dose of extra strength liquid medicine and pushed that over to Ilya as well. He knocked it back, then swallowed hard and coughed. “Not good,” he mumbled.

Shane left Ilya with Yuna for a couple minutes while he went to go change the sheets on the bed, which were approaching straight up disgusting.

“Yuna is taking Anya,” Ilya rasped when Shane returned. “Just for a couple days.”

“Oh, Mom, you don't have to do that, I can–”

Yuna gave him a look. “I offered, hon. And you've got your hands full with him.”

Ilya made a face.

“But I'll let you two get some sleep,” Yuna said. “I'm sure you both need it.”

“I will get Anya's food,” Ilya rasped, but Yuna just raised her eyebrows at him and he lifted his hands in surrender.

Once Yuna had left, they moved back upstairs. Ilya had left the blanket downstairs, but he didn't ditch Shane's sweatshirt. He crawled into the bed. “Oh,” he mumbled. “New sheets. This feels so nice. Spasibo.”

Shane hummed. “I thought so. Did you want a different shirt?”

Despite his reaction earlier, Ilya shot him a look like Shane was being ridiculous. “No. I am Hollander's husband, yes? Is my shirt, too.”

Shane tried not to smile too widely. “You seem like you're feeling a little better.”

“Yes. Ice cream cured me.”

Shane rolled his eyes and got into bed next to Ilya. “Okay.”

Ilya caught Shane's hand. He pressed a soft kiss to the inside of Shane's wrist. Shane melted a little. “Yes,” he rasped quietly. “I feel not like so much death. And I…” He glanced away. “Sorry. For earlier. For freaking out and crying on you. Should not have happened.”

Shane stayed still until Ilya looked back at him. His gaze was just a little dull, still kind of feverish, tired. More than that: again, embarrassed, or ashamed. “Don't apologize for that,” Shane murmured.

Ilya looked away again. Shane caught Ilya's chin, tipped it up. Normally it was the other way around, but Shane needed Ilya to look at him. “I'm serious,” Shane said. “And–I know you don’t really like talking about therapy, and that’s fine, but–do you maybe want to schedule an extra appointment?”

“For what? So I can tell her I’m sick? I don’t think I have an hour’s worth of talking in me right now. Throat hurts enough as it is.”

Shane gave him a look. “No. To talk about today. About what you said earlier, about not wanting me to resent you, and your family, and all of that.”

Ilya swallowed, hard. “Ah,” he whispered. “That.” He looked away again, and this time Shane let him. “Is maybe… a good idea.”

Shane nodded, then waited for Ilya to bring his eyes back to him. “And for the record, I love you,” Shane murmured. “Okay? And if it's hockey or keeping you safe, I'm choosing you.”

“I don’t want you to have to choose," Ilya whispered. “Not anymore. That is whole point of coming out. I want you to have everything.”

“You're my everything.”

Ilya reached for him, then caught himself. “I don't want to get you sick,” he mumbled.

So Shane pulled Ilya to him instead, made it his choice. He didn't want Ilya to have to choose anymore either, Shane's happiness or his. Shane could make it clear that either they were together, or they were both miserable.

He kissed the top of Ilya's head. “I hope you feel better tomorrow.”

“I doubt it,” Ilya mumbled. “I still feel like shit.”

“Do you want anything?”

He shook his head against Shane's chest. “Just sleep.” Then he lifted his head, looked at Shane with hazy eyes.

“What?”

“Actually,” Ilya mumbled. He rubbed at his knuckles. “Could you get me one of your–” He made a kind of obscene gesture, which Shane went red at. Ilya coughed on a laugh at Shane's expression. “Frozen,” he rasped. “The frozen thing. Not ice cream. You have them in lemon and strawberry.”

“Oh my god,” Shane said. “A popsicle.”

“Yes,” Ilya mumbled, letting his eyes close again. “A popsicle. My throat... really hurts.”

“Sure, yeah. Did you want lem–”

“Strawberry.”

Shane should've guessed.

He went and fetched the popsicle, then brought it and a bunch of napkins–from Ilya's amused look, too many napkins–to the bed. Then he put on one of Rose's movies while Ilya slurped on his popsicle. Shane had gotten a lemon one for himself, and he did his best not to look lewd. Ilya, on the other hand, noticed this, and proceeded to actually deep throat the popsicle in a manner that suggested it had nothing to do with his sore throat. Though when he was done embarrassing–and arousing–Shane, he did lick what was left of the popsicle and mumble, “That really was nice on my throat.”

Shane laughed.

When the popsicles were done, Ilya tried to put his head in Shane's lap, only to find out that Shane had indeed liked what Ilya was doing to the pop. It had mostly been Ilya's very serious expression that did it, his capacity for silliness while being sexually explicit, but Ilya just started laughing, which was really more of a wheeze. Once he caught his breath, he reached for Shane. “I could take care of that,” he rasped.

Shane grabbed a pillow and put it in his lap instead. “No,” he said, and pulled Ilya back down. Ilya nuzzled in, maybe with a little more pressure than was necessary, maybe smirking a little, but he dropped it. And within five minutes, he'd dropped off, snoring slightly. Another five minutes, and so had Shane.

—---

Ilya woke to Shane next to him. He was glad, obviously, warmed by the thought of his husband in his bed, quiet and soft, but judging by the angle of the light through the window, it was late enough in the morning that Shane should have been getting restless, even if he did sleep in.

Ilya lifted his head slightly–god, he still ached everywhere, his throat harsh and full of needles apparently, the fever not fully gone even if he did feel a little clearer than before–and checked the time. Past ten. And Shane looked like he hadn't woken at all.

Then Ilya processed the damp threading through Shane's temples. And the slight flush across Shane's cheeks. And the thin, barely there catch in Shane's breathing.

Well.

Fuck.

Ilya really had been hoping Shane wouldn't catch it, even if that hope was futile and also would have whacked Ilya's ego about his body a little bit. He didn't *want* Shane to feel as shitty as he did.

But also. Now this meant–

Ilya leaned over and kissed Shane. Now he didn't have to worry about that.

Shane kissed back before he was even fully awake, though then he broke away, mumbling, “Morning breath, Jesus–” and then stared at Ilya. “Fuck,” he rasped.

“Yes,” Ilya said apologetically. He kissed the side of Shane's mouth again. “Am sorry, moya lyubov.”

“God, have you felt this bad the whole time?” Shane rasped.

“Don't worry,” Ilya said. “It gets worse. Now, would you like popsicle or mango smoothie for breakfast?”

Shane shook his head. “I can–”

“Now,” Ilya said, dangerously smooth. “Is my turn. I get to take care of you, yes? Goes both ways?”

“I mean, yeah, but I'm not that bad and you still look–”

“I am fine,” Ilya said. He wasn't, but he felt better than he had yesterday, and he was fairly certain that fetching things from the kitchen was not a strenuous task. Yesterday, or, fuck, the day before, yes, but not today. “You call Terry and Wiebe,” he told Shane. “I can get breakfast. So. Smoothie or popsicle?” He shook his head. “Smoothie. Will cure you. All healthy and whatever.” He sat up, and stars blinked in his vision, but he squeezed his eyes shut until they left and then got out of bed.

“You okay?”

“All good,” Ilya said. And he was. Mostly. He was mostly fine.

“Ilya–”

“Just give me a minute,” Ilya said, voice thin. He took a deep breath, and the darkness edging into his vision receded, and then he smiled at Shane. “See? All good. Just–not used to moving as slowly as you.”

“I fucking *beat* you at the last speed skate–”

Ilya laughed, and didn't cough, which he took as a win. He kept snickering as he went downstairs.

It was a good thing Ilya had watched Shane make smoothies about a thousand times, because otherwise he would've been lost as to what the hell Shane wanted in this. He managed,

though. Even though he had to sit a couple times in between getting ingredients, because it turned out standing for more than minute at a time was a little bit beyond his capabilities. And then he spaced out when he was blending the smoothie, so it might have gotten a little over-blended–was that a thing? Ilya wasn't sure–but he was pretty sure Shane wouldn't mind.

The stairs back up to Shane seemed… so long.

Ilya squeezed his eyes shut. He could do it. He was a professional fucking athlete, he could walk up one flight of stairs.

He poured the smoothie into two insulated cups–plastic, he wasn't going to tempt fate–and dumped the blender in the sink for later and brought the smoothies–one with a straw for Shane–up to the bedroom. He handed Shane his, put his own on his nightstand.

And then Ilya crawled directly back into bed, his head hitting the pillow before he was quite conscious of it.

“Smoothie making that hard, huh?”

Ilya flipped him off.

Shane pressed a hand to his face. “You okay? For real, Ilya.”

“Am fine. Just–” Ilya tried to sit up, tried to act normal, and sank back down. He didn't even open his eyes. “Am dizzy. Kind of floaty. Am okay, though. Don't worry about it.”

“What?” Shane didn't sound like he was drinking his smoothie. Maybe Ilya had made the worst smoothie on earth. He hadn't tried it before giving it to Shane. “You should maybe eat something. All you've had in like four days is saltines and ice cream. And one popsicle. I actually didn't know you could lose your appetite.”

Ilya stuck out his tongue. “Yes. Have not been hungry.” He swallowed. “I am just dehydrated, I think. From the sweating. But the smoothie will cure me.” He didn't really want the smoothie, but he didn't have a lot of options. It was that or ice cream, and the ice cream was downstairs. Which was, apparently, a journey beyond Ilya.

“If you can sit up.”

Ilya flipped him off again. But he managed to drag himself up. Sort of. He was really leaned back against the headboard and kind of curled onto his side and he really wasn't supporting any of his own weight, but he was at least upright enough that he could get his smoothie and keep it in his shaky hands and drink. He wished he'd gotten himself one of Shane's reusable straws.

“It's good,” Shane said.

Ilya made a noncommittal noise. He really did not care about this smoothie.

“I called Wiebe,” Shane said. “He's not, like, stoked, obviously, but he's not mad. He's sending Terry over later. He's kind of worried about you.”

“‘M fine.”

“Sure.”

Ilya sat up more. “Where is Anya?”

“My mom took her with her last night. You were literally the one who told me.”

Now he remembered. “Right. Yes.” He missed Anya's warmth and comfort, but it wasn't fair to keep her here, not when both he and Shane were now sick. Ilya got lightheaded going up stairs, he was in no position to bring Anya on her walks.

Besides. Now Shane was sick, which meant Ilya got to cuddle into him even more. Ilya gave up on his smoothie and did just that, slumping into Shane's lap.

“What do you want to do?” Ilya rasped. “Is your turn to pick.”

“We should probably review footage,” Shane said. “If we can't practice.”

Ilya patted Shane's knee. “Sure.”

“Are you actually okay with that?”

“Whatever you want,” Ilya said. “I am probably going to fall asleep again.”

Shane snorted, then coughed. Ilya got up on his elbows and reached for the cold and flu meds on his nightstand, then offered them to Shane. He sighed.

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By that evening, though, Ilya had slept another six hours, on and off. He still had that awful cough, but he could at least stand without looking like he was about to pass out. A vast improvement. Shane, on the other hand, felt worse. Head pounding, chest aching, unable to swallow without knives in his throat. Ilya had taken it upon himself to have a bowl of water on his nightstand so that, at any mild prompting, he could drape a damp washcloth over Shane’s forehead or the back of his neck or up the insides of his forearms, the delicate points of his ankles. Ilya was fairly creative in coming up with new places that felt good to cool down. At one point, when Shane assumed he was feverish and he had straight up gotten naked because everything felt gross and sweaty and too hot, Ilya had suggested a washcloth on his dick. Shane was not ever going to admit to how nice that had felt. Ilya had been joking when he suggested it, but Shane had seized the option, and Ilya had complied.

Terry had come by late afternoon, with a mask on (the dick washcloth had been addressed by then, and Shane had been wearing at least sweatpants). Terry had apologized for Ilya's false negative, but he'd looked at their med supply and asked if they were staying hydrated and he'd met Yuna, who'd stopped by again. He and Yuna had had a quick conversation about how the boys were, which Shane thought was unfair. He was a grown adult. On the other hand, well. He felt like shit and Ilya had been at least kind of out of it for nearly a week. He was glad someone else was there to think full sentence thoughts.

They both managed to have lunch, some of the soup Yuna had brought. Shane had a feeling it was going to be the last meal he wanted for a while, so he ate steadily, until he was on the verge of falling asleep into the bowl. Ilya had half a serving, then shook his head slightly and abandoned the soup. Yuna offered to stay–David was out of town at a conference–but neither Shane nor Ilya wanted to get her sick, and she was close enough by that if something happened, she could swing by quickly. Ilya thanked her again for being so kind. She told him it was nothing. He shook his head, told her it was not.

They went to bed early. They slept for fourteen hours.

The next morning, though, Ilya made smoothies, and this time he didn't even come close to blacking out. Not at any point in the process. And he sucked down the smoothie like it was his job, pleased to be kind of hungry again.

Shane was the one who only sipped at the smoothie slowly. It was cold on his throat, which was nice, but he still had to swallow, which spiked pain not only into his throat but into his ears. Fun. He was hoping that went away. Ilya's fever was low enough now to barely be low-grade, but Shane's had climbed in the night. He felt like shit.

"Do you want to watch more footage?" Ilya asked at one point.

Shane shook his head. Unlike Ilya, he'd lost his voice almost immediately. He didn't want to do anything. TV was going to be too bright. This fucking sucked.

Ilya muffled a cough into his sleeve. He was still wearing the Hollander sweatshirt. When he could breathe again, he rubbed a hand up and down Shane's arm, slowly. "What do you want, moya lyubov?" he murmured. He was still hoarse, but he could mostly speak without his voice dropping out now. "Do you want me to speak to you in Russian? Do you want me to

find your waves and whale sounds? I could make a whale sound. Well. Maybe not right now. Do you want a popsicle? Do you want me to read your boring hockey book to you? Is too many options? You want me to shut the fuck up?"

Shane had been right. Ilya was good at taking care of people, even if his bedside manner went back and forth between poking fun at Shane and being devastatingly sweet.

"I don't want to do anything," Shane whispered. His voice caught and he coughed, then gave a hoarse moan. "Everything feels like shit."

"I know," Ilya murmured. He stroked Shane's hair out of his face, ran the backs of his fingers over Shane's cheekbone. "I know. Everything hurts and you are tired and there is no good way to make it better."

Shane nodded miserably. He understood now why Ilya had been so vulnerable the other day. Feeling so bad felt *so bad*. He was used to bullying his body into doing whatever he demanded of it. His body always accepted the challenge. And now he could barely stand, and every time he asked his body to do something, it didn't even refuse, it just gave out. It scared him, a little.

"I'll only give you one choice, instead," Ilya murmured. "Same choice you gave me. Bath or shower?"

"They're too much work."

"Moya lyubov. You will not have to do anything. I will do it all. Felt so nice when you did it for me, you'll wish you could just stay there. Do you want to soak, or do you want everything washed away?"

The thought of sitting up, even in the shower, was honestly heinous. "Bath," Shane mumbled. "But just–if you just run the water, I can do the rest."

“I will fight you on this, Shane. And I will win, because you cannot even sit up. Besides. If I left you alone in there, you would probably drown.”

“Not alone,” Shane whispered, catching Ilya’s sleeve.

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane’s temple. “No. Not alone. But I do have to leave, just for a minute. To start bath.”

Shane nodded slightly.

Shane dozed off again while Ilya was gone, but he jerked awake when he heard Ilya’s raspy, breathless cough from the bathroom. He tried to push himself up, but just melted back into the mattress. Fuck. What if Ilya needed him? He couldn’t fucking sit up, and–

But then Ilya was coming back toward him, a tired smile on his face, only wearing boxers. “Sweetheart,” he said. “What are you doing?”

Shane lifted a hand, then let it drop. He had no idea.

“Is okay.” Ilya pulled Shane to him, and somehow it was a lot easier to sit up with Ilya’s support. “I would carry you, but I don’t want to risk dropping you. You are all floppy. And it would be very funny, but I think I would cough to death laughing.”

“Sure,” Shane whispered. “That’s the reason, and not because you straight up can’t pick me up right now.”

“I definitely could. Just don’t want to.”

Shane rolled his eyes. But he let Ilya pull him up to stand, and he let Ilya steady him as the world spun, and he let Ilya lead him carefully to the bathroom. Only half of the lights were on, and Ilya had added salts to the water, Shane could smell it from here. Ilya sat Shane on

the edge of the bath, and undressed him, but then Ilya pulled off his own boxers and got into the tub first. Then he pulled Shane into the silky water after him, settling Shane's back against his chest. Ilya turned his face away to cough again on the steam, but then he was focused on Shane, on stroking his hands across Shane's shoulders, down his arms, down his chest. He ran his fingers through Shane's hair so tenderly Shane thought he was maybe going to cry. The steam eased whatever was going on with Shane's ears, and Ilya had also made a mug of tea for each of them while he was getting the bath ready. After a while, Shane's voice came back a bit. He didn't really want to break the quiet, or do anything to risk Ilya ceasing to slowly rub oil across every inch of Shane's skin, but he had a question, and he wanted an answer.

"Ilya."

"Yes, moy kotenok."

"Why are you so quiet?"

"Not normally what you call me."

"Yeah. That's why I noticed. This week. While you've been sick." Shane wasn't quite fully awake, having melted into the water and Ilya. It made it hard to formulate his thoughts. "You've been trying to cough quietly, like I don't already know you're sick."

Ilya's hands had stilled on Shane's thighs. Shane felt Ilya swallow behind him.

"You're allowed to be sick," Shane mumbled. "We all know you are, me and Mom and Wiebe and everyone. You're allowed to like… not be well. It's okay. You don't have to be strong. You don't have to be quiet." He lifted his chin, tried to look back at Ilya, but his throat hurt too badly to move much, so he gave up. Instead, he rasped, "You don't have to hide."

Ilya was quiet so long that Shane opened his eyes and looked at the mirror over the sink. Ilya, behind him, eyes rimmed in red, was biting his lip, looking down at Shane in front of him.

Then he leaned down and kissed the top of Shane's head. Shane tangled his fingers with Ilya's, then lifted their hands to kiss the back of Ilya's. Ilya's breathing shuddered out against the back of Shane's neck.

Shane shivered.

“Time to get out, I think,” Ilya said. He helped ease Shane up, then let Shane stay in the water while he got up, got the towels, dried himself off and pulled on new sweatpants and Shane’s Hollander sweatshirt. Then he offered a steadying hand and Shane got out, only for Ilya to sit him back down immediately and gently, carefully dry him off. He handed over a whole new set of clothes for Shane. Including, shyly, one of Ilya’s Ottawa Rozanov sweatshirts, as if Shane didn’t routinely wear Ilya’s clothes. Though, now that he thought about it, never any of their branded stuff. Just like Ilya never wore Shane’s name, until now. He wondered if it was latent competition, or if it was more than that. If it was because Ilya was scared to let himself be claimed like that. If Ilya had thought that Shane wouldn’t like the presumption. Or if Ilya just hadn’t thought about it. Shane knew it had never crossed his own mind at all.

Shane started to speak, as if he had any idea what to say about that, but Ilya was already pulling him to his feet, leading him back into the bedroom. “Sit,” he said, pressing Shane to the reading chair in the corner. Ilya changed the sheets. And Ilya had been right, when he’d been so pleased by the new sheets the other day. The difference between sick sheets and new sheets was fucking luxurious, Shane decided, when Ilya let him crawl in.

“Is a habit,” Ilya said.

“What is?”

“To be quiet, when I… when I don’t feel well. People are used to me being loud, so they do not look for quiet person. Think I am not there. Is… defense mechanism, I think Galina called it. Did I get those words right?”

“Yes,” Shane whispered, wishing he hadn’t, wishing Ilya had never had to learn the term *defense mechanism*. Wishing for some impossible world.

“Sorry,” Ilya murmured. “Keeping you awake with this.”

“No. No, no, I asked, and I want to hear.” Shane struggled to sit up, couldn’t, but magically ended up with his head in Ilya’s lap anyway. “It just worried me, earlier.”

“Weaponizing,” Ilya lilted again, amused.

“Fuck off.”

“No.” Ilya carded his fingers through Shane’s hair. “Not ever.”

Shane found Ilya’s other hand and held it.

“Tomorrow,” Ilya said, “you will feel better. Not awesome, but better. I think you are going to skip the worst of it. Already, you are better than I was.”

“It’s because I take care of myself.”

“Ah, no, is because… not that.”

“You can’t come up with a better explanation, can you?”

“No. But only because I don’t care.”

“Sure.”

“Shane.”

“Yeah?”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“And I will take you in sickness and health,” Ilya whispered. “Thank you for that.”

Shane wrapped his arms around every part of Ilya he could reach. “I will always take care of you.”

Ilya kissed the top of his head. “I know.”

End Notes

edit: oh my GODDD thank you all for the lovely comments 😭😭😭

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