

break me down (then put me back together)

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by [subbyjeongguk](#)

Summary

shane and ilya try bdsm for the first time after their cottage getaway, and it doesn't exactly go as shane had thought it would.

(google didn't tell him he would sub-drop on their first try).

canon universe hollanov, post-cottage and episode 6, subdrop!shane, dom!ilya

Notes

hi everyone! here i present you with bdsm-curious hollanov and little shane experiencing his first sub drop from some light bdsm with orgasm denial/edging and dom/sub power exchange! from all the alleged shane sub drops in the show, i wanted to put my own spin on it with some more detail. this idea mostly came from hudson's interpretation of shane as constantly in control of his life and in hockey, which results in him wanting to relinquish that control and let someone else take the reigns in bed! (very good interview if you haven't watched it).

bdsm is sexy and fun and all of those things, but it should be consensual and safe! and discussed! which is what i wanted to portray here, especially the very real amounts of hesitation and fear and anxiety that may come along with that, especially not knowing much about it.

PLEASE READ: for context, this all takes place directly after episode six and the cottage, but before the long game book, so this is canon-universe hollanov. also, towards the end, ilya calls shane "solnyshko" which in russian is a term of endearment and translates in this case, directly to "little sun", which i thought was so fitting and beautiful for this :')

please, leave a kudos and comment to let me know your thoughts/if you enjoyed this! i am absolutely loving writing them lately, so there will be more as i already have a second part written! i also love reading and responding to you guys c:

as always, happy reading! xoxo (this is now part of the series "shane & ilya vs bdsm!" with multiple parts!)

After their cottage getaway, life did not snap back into place so much as it eased.

Nothing dramatic happened, which was surprising considering the last couple of months they had together. There was no new crisis, no sudden confessions, or moments that demanded them to drop everything. What they got instead was time, but also the unsettling realization that they didn't quite know what to do with it yet.

Shane woke up at Ilya's place more often than not, especially now during the off season. Sometimes he remembered falling asleep there; sometimes he didn't. Either way, he woke to the same things, like the low hum of the Boston city outside and the faint smell of coffee already brewing. He always heard when Ilya was moving around (even when he tried to be quiet).

It was strange how easy it became for them to just be boyfriends.

Shane noticed that he breathed differently there, like his shoulders didn't live up around his ears anymore. When Ilya told him to sit, or eat, or sleep, something in him didn't bristle the way it used to with other people.

That last part unsettled him if he thought about it too long.

Tonight was quiet. It was one of those evenings that stretched lazily with nothing important to do. They were on the couch, knees touching and an old movie playing in the background that neither of them were really watching. Shane's feet were propped in Ilya's lap with Ilya's hand resting warm and solid around Shane's ankle like it belonged there.

"You are fidgeting," Ilya said after a while.

Shane blinked. "I am literally not moving."

"You moved three times."

"Those were micro-adjustments."

Ilya hummed skeptically. His thumb pressed firmly into the tendon just above Shane's heel. Shane's foot stilled instantly, the tension bleeding out of him.

"There," Ilya said, faintly pleased. "Now you are not moving."

Shane stared at the ceiling. "Did you just do that on purpose?"

"Yes."

"...rude."

Ilya's mouth quirked. "Effective."

Shane should've probably thought more about why that worked so well, but he chose not to for his own sanity. He let his eyes drift close instead, his body going loose in a way that felt like he had earned it.

That thing Ilya did for him, noticing him without scrutinizing him, correcting him without criticizing him, was new for Shane. Or maybe it wasn't, and Shane had just never let himself have it before.

"You know," Shane said, voice slow, "you're kind of terrifying."

Ilya snorted. "You say this like it is surprise."

"No, I mean—" Shane gestured vaguely. "You're sneaky about it. You don't raise your voice, not too often anyway. You don't make a big deal. You just tell people things, and they actually listen."

"Because I am usually right."

"That is *not* why," Shane said. "That is why *you* think."

Ilya considered this with his eyes still on the screen. "And why do you think, then?"

Shane shrugged. "Because you sound like you expect to be obeyed."

The words landed heavier than he wanted them to. Ilya's thumb stilled at Shane's ankle just for a second. When he spoke again, his voice was carefully neutral.

"Do you not like that?"

Shane opened his eyes. The ceiling suddenly felt very far away and the space around him felt suffocating.

"I didn't say that."

"No," Ilya agreed. "You did not."

They sat with it, this *thing* they've brushed up against, for a few heartbeats too long. Shane's brain kicked into overdrive, cataloging exits and rehearsing reassurances, completely preparing to laugh it off and change the subject.

Before he could, Ilya spoke again.

"You listen to me," he said, quieter now. "More than you listen to most people."

"That's because you're... reasonable," Shane offered weakly.

Ilya turned his head, finally looking at him. There was no teasing there, no judgment. Just curiosity.

"Mm," he said. "Maybe. Or maybe you like not having to decide."

Shane audibly swallowed. It was uncomfortable how close that got to something true.

“I decide things all day,” Shane said. “That doesn’t mean I want someone else doing it for me.”

“I did not say want,” Ilya replied gently. “I said *like*.”

That change in want, to something he actually *liked*, mattered more than Shane expected it to.

They wouldn't jump straight to sex or kinks or anything so blunt, because honestly that was not how either of them worked. Instead, they orbited the idea, carefully and anxiously, like they were both extremely hyperaware that this was something that could do serious damage if they touched it wrong.

It came up again later, folded into banter and disguised as jokes.

Ilya told Shane to sit still while he finished cooking. Shane did, automatically, then froze.

“You see?” Ilya said lightly, glancing over his shoulder. “Very obedient.”

Shane groaned. “Do *not* call me that.”

“But you are,” Ilya said, smiling now. “Look at you.”

Shane flipped him off, but he didn't make any moves to stand up.

—

That night, lying in bed, Shane stared into the dark while Ilya’s breathing evened out beside him. His mind kept circling the same thoughts over and over, like a tongue worrying at a sore tooth. He thought about how safe he felt here, about how much effort it took everywhere else off and on the ice, to stay upright and functional and just at least in control. He thought about the way something in him settled when Ilya’s voice dropped and when he gave him instructions instead of asking him questions.

It scared him, not because it felt wrong, but because it felt right in a way he didn’t have language for yet.

In the morning, Ilya made the coffee too strong and handed Shane a mug without asking how he took it. Shane drank it anyway and did not complain.

“You trust me,” Ilya said, watching him over the rim of his own cup.

Shane squinted at him. “With coffee? Absolutely not. This isn’t great.”

“With more than coffee,” Ilya replied.

They didn’t talk about dominant or submissive or anything else of the sort explicitly until days later, when the tension had had time to ferment into a huge elephant in the room, waiting to be addressed.

They were cleaning up after dinner and Shane's sleeves were rolled up, hands in soapy water. Ilya dried beside him, close enough that their shoulders brush.

"You ever think about giving up control?" Ilya asked casually.

Shane snorted. "I literally do that every time I come over here."

"No," Ilya said. "I mean really."

Shane stilled. The water ran over his hands, getting hotter and hotter, completely unnoticed.

"Define 'really,'" he said.

Ilya hesitated, just a fraction. "Trusting someone else with it. On purpose."

The kitchen felt smaller suddenly. It felt like it has suddenly become more intimate, and the air got so thick a knife couldn't even begin to slice it open, even slightly.

"I don't know," Shane says honestly. "I don't know what that would even look like."

Ilya nodded, like that was the answer he expected. "We could learn."

Shane laughed, shaky. "You make it sound like a hobby."

"Everything is hobby," Ilya said. "If you are bad at it long enough, no?"

That got a real laugh out of Shane, his tension easing just a fraction.

They didn't decide anything that night either aside from just acknowledging the shape of the want between them and giving it space to breathe. What neither of them realized yet was how much weight Shane would put behind that submission when it would finally happen. They had no idea how deeply he would give himself over and how hard the come-down would be once his adrenaline faded and left him hollow and aching for reassurance and caring that he didn't know he'd need.

For now, all they knew was something had shifted.

—

Shane woke up in the middle of the night with the kind of awareness that felt physical.

He wasn't necessarily panicking, but he had a low hum under his skin, like his body had decided to stay awake even if his brain hadn't caught up yet. The room was dark with the city muffled beyond the windows. Ilya was asleep beside him, turned slightly onto his side, one arm flung out like he expected Shane to still be there when he reached for him in the morning.

Shane laid very still.

He'd been doing that a lot lately, like cataloging his sensations, noticing things he used to not even realize he would do. He noticed the weight of Ilya's presence, how much space he took up in a room. His own thoughts kept circling the same things, no matter how many times he'd told himself he was overthinking.

The conversation from earlier drifted back, completely uninvited. It wasn't the same words exactly, but the tone was there. It was the way Ilya had said them, like he was calm, and not even embarrassed at all. It was like the idea itself wasn't dangerous to him, but it was something delicate.

"Trusting someone else with it. On purpose."

Shane exhaled slowly and turned onto his back, staring up at the ceiling. His chest felt tight, but not in a bad way. It was more like standing on the edge of something tall and trying to decide whether the view was beautiful or terrifying, or both at once.

He told himself that he didn't need to do this right now. He knew it was late, that he was tired, and that nothing had actually been decided yet.

His hand moved anyway, reaching for his phone on the nightstand with practiced silence from doing this way too many times before. The screen lit up the room in soft blue-white. Ilya didn't stir, thankfully.

Shane hesitated, thumb hovering. He felt pretty fucking ridiculous right then, like a teenager sneaking around, even though there was nothing secret about it. Ilya hadn't forbidden anything. He hadn't even asked for this at all. Still, Shane angled the phone closer to his chest, like privacy was something he needed to earn.

He typed slowly.

bdsM first time

He deleted it almost immediately, but he tried again.

what does being a submissive mean

That one actually stayed in the search bar when he hit enter.

The results were overwhelming. There were an insane amount of articles, forums, even glossaries. There were words he half-recognized and others that felt loaded just reading them. Shane scrolled, pulse ticking up with every unfamiliar term he came across. He expected something darker or something harsher. What he found instead was... language? There was just a lot of careful and intentional language about things like consent frameworks and emphasis on communication, safety, aftercare.

Aftercare. Shane frowned slightly and clicked on a link.

He read about emotional vulnerability, about adrenaline and endorphins, about something called a "drop" that could happen hours or days later. He read about how submission wasn't weakness necessarily, but it was trust that was given deliberately to a dominant partner. He

read further about how needing reassurance afterward wasn't embarrassing or about being a failure, it was simply biology and something that just happened sometimes.

His throat tightened.

He scrolled more slowly then, absorbing everything instead of skimming it like he really wanted to do. He recognized himself in places he didn't expect to, like in the descriptions of letting go, of being guided, of finding relief in structure and direction. It was the way some people talked about how deeply it could hit them not during, but after having done a scene with someone.

That part scared him, suddenly.

Shane pressed the heel of his hand into his sternum to ground himself. He felt almost *too* seen by a collection of anonymous paragraphs written by strangers. He felt too exposed by the idea that this wasn't just curiosity and that there was a reason this has lodged itself so firmly in his chest. He clicked into a forum thread, something about "first-time subs and nerves." The tone was gentle, encouraging, which was comforting. There was nothing overtly intimidating about it and he didn't feel any sort of pressure, really. There were just people admitting they were scared too, just like he was.

Shane swallowed hard.

He imagined Ilya's voice, his steady, accented voice, telling him to breathe. To *sit*. To *trust him*. The image sent a small, involuntary shiver down his spine, feeling comfort and some fear too. What scared him most wasn't the idea of giving up control.

It was the idea of how much he might give.

Shane locked his phone and let it fall back against the mattress, staring into the dark again. His thoughts felt louder now, but clearer too, like something had finally been named. Beside him, Ilya shifted in his sleep, murmuring something unintelligible in Russian before settling again. His arm draped over Shane's waist without waking, warm and possessive in the most unconscious way.

Shane closed his eyes. He didn't know if he was ready for this. He was afraid because he didn't know what he would need, or how to ask for it, or whether he would recognize the moment it became too much for him.

What he did know was that if he were going to try, there was no one he'd trust more than this man, asleep beside him, who held without gripping and noticed without demanding.

That thought was comforting and terrifying for him, but at least he was accepting it.

Shane laid awake a long time after that, listening to Ilya breathe and feeling the slow, steady weight of possibility settle in around him.

—

The next morning did not announce itself as different.

That was really the problem.

Shane woke to the same pale light leaking through the curtains, the same muted city sounds, the same solid warmth beside him. For a few disorienting seconds, he almost forgot the night before, like his phone's glow and the words that felt like they were written directly into his chest.

Then Ilya shifted, arm tightening briefly around Shane's waist, and the memory settled back in with a vengeance..

Shane laid there longer than usual, staring at the wall. He felt fine, technically. He wasn't panicked, but he was thoughtful in a way that made everything else feel slightly out of focus, like he was walking around with a layer of glass between him and the world.

Eventually, he slipped out of bed without waking Ilya and padded into the kitchen.

He made the coffee badly. There were too much grounds and a shitty, uneven pour. He drank it anyway, leaning against the counter, scrolling aimlessly through his phone without actually reading anything. His mind kept drifting back to the same phrases and the same realizations.

When Ilya appeared, hair mussed, T-shirt wrinkled, Shane didn't notice at first. He only realized he was there when a hand settled at his lower back, firm and grounding.

"You are up early," Ilya said, voice rough with sleep.

Shane startled slightly, then relaxed. "Couldn't sleep."

"Mmm." Ilya pressed a kiss to the side of his head, unhurried. "You never sleep well when you think too much."

Shane huffed. "That's not true."

"It is very true," Ilya replies. "You even frown in your sleep."

"I do *not*."

"You do." A pause. "It is ugly."

Shane snorted despite himself. "Fuck you."

Ilya smiled faintly and reached for his own mug, taking a sip and grimacing. "You made coffee?"

"Yeah."

"This explains everything."

They fell into an easy rhythm after that, the breakfast half-made, dishes stacked but not washed, the television murmuring in the background. On the surface, it was normal,

comfortable even. But Shane felt like he was moving through it a half-step behind himself, responding rather than initiating anything first.

He didn't sprawl like usual, didn't joke as much. When Ilya brushed past him, Shane still leaned into the contact but he lingered there longer, like he was bracing himself.

Ilya noticed, of course he did.

He didn't comment right away, instead he waited, watched, and flew it away. It was only later, when Shane was sitting on the couch with his knees drawn up, staring at nothing in particular, that Ilya finally spoke.

"You are quiet today," he said mildly.

Shane shrugged. "Just tired."

"Mm." Ilya sat beside him, close but not crowding. "You said that last night too."

Shane's shoulders tensed, just slightly.

"Is that illegal now?" he asked, too quickly.

Ilya arched an eyebrow. "Only if you lie."

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it again. He rubbed his thumb along the seam of his sweatpants, grounding himself in the texture and the sensory stimulation.

"I'm not lying," he said after a moment. "I'm just... *processing*."

"Processing what?"

The question was gentle, neutral. It wasn't a demand by any means.

Shane exhaled. "Stuff."

Ilya hummed. "Very informative."

Shane shot him a look. "You're the one who said you don't dance around things."

"Yes," Ilya agreed. "But you do."

That shouldn't have felt as intimate as it did. Shane swallowed.

They sat there in silence, the weight of unspoken things pressing softly between them. Ilya didn't push, he never did. That, more than anything, was what made it harder.

"I was thinking about what we talked about," Shane said finally.

Ilya's attention sharpened immediately—not visibly, but Shane felt it like a shift in gravity. "Okay."

“And I might’ve... read some things.”

Ilya blinked. “Read?”

“Online,” Shane clarified, cheeks warming. “Just, some research. Nothing wild.”

A corner of Ilya’s mouth lifted. “You googled it.”

“I googled it,” Shane admitted.

Ilya considered this, then nodded. “That is reasonable.”

“It is?”

“Yes. You research everything.” A pause. “Except your own feelings.”

Shane groaned. “You’re impossible.”

“And yet,” Ilya said lightly, “you are still here.”

Shane smiled faintly, then sobers. “It kind of freaked me out.”

Ilya’s teasing faded instantly. “Why?”

Shane hesitated like he was searching for words that didn’t quite exist yet. “Because it wasn’t... what I expected. It wasn’t just—” He gestured vaguely. “The obvious stuff. There was a lot about trust. And aftercare. And how emotional it can be.”

Ilya nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“You say that like you already knew.”

“I know some things,” Ilya said. “Not all.”

Shane shifted, turning toward him. “There’s this *thing*—where people talk about how it can hit you later. Like, emotionally. Even if everything goes right.”

Ilya’s brow furrowed. “Later how?”

“Like... hours. Days.” Shane swallowed. “They call it a ‘drop’.”

The word hung between them. Ilya didn’t dismiss it and didn’t joke like he usually would. He just took it in, eyes intent right on Shane. It made him nervous when he looked at him like that.

“And you are worried this would happen to you,” he said.

Shane nodded. “I think so. Which is dumb, because nothing’s even happened yet.”

“It is not dumb,” Ilya said immediately. “It means you are thinking.”

Shane let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding. "Yeah. I guess so."

Ilya reached out, resting his hand over Shane's knee. He was warm and Shane fought back a smile. "We are not doing anything you are not ready for," he said. "And if we do, we do it carefully. Together. This 'drop' would not happen."

"I know," Shane said quietly.

But what he didn't say because he wasn't ready to say yet was that the idea of that care and submission was part of what drew him in so badly. It was the thought of being held after and not just during, which was what he truly wanted most of all.

Ilya squeezed his knee once, deliberately. "You do not have to figure everything out at once."

Shane leaned into the touch, just slightly. "You're really good at this whole... steady thing."

Ilya smiled, soft and fond. "Someone has to be."

They sat like that for a while longer, just letting things sit in the air above them. They knew this would change things between them, but they also knew that they had to be patient too.

—

It started small enough that Shane could pretend it was accidental.

He did it without thinking, at first it was just following Ilya's movements through the apartment, adjusting himself to fit into Ilya's space instead of the other way around. When Ilya paused, Shane paused too. When Ilya reached for something, Shane stepped back to give him room without being asked.

It wasn't submission yet, it was more like him following his instincts.

Ilya noticed anyway.

They were in the kitchen again because somehow that was where everything seemed to happen lately. Ilya was cooking and extremely focused, his sleeves rolled up. Shane leaned against the counter watching him and chiming in to offer commentary that was way more distracting than helping.

"Careful," Shane said as Ilya reached for a pan. "That handle's hot."

"I know," Ilya replied, not looking at him.

Shane still stepped closer, hand hovering near Ilya's wrist like he might intervene.

Ilya stopped.

"Shane," he said, calm but firm.

Shane froze. "Yeah?"

“Sit.”

The word was quiet and truthfully, he felt Ilya's words land like a weight had dropped.

Shane's mouth opened automatically, trying to joke, deflect, do *something*, but nothing came out. His body moved before his brain caught up as he turned and perched on the stool by the counter exactly where Ilya's gaze flicked for half a second before turning back to the stove.

The silence stretched longer and wider.

Shane became acutely aware of his posture. He was upright and still, with his hands resting uselessly in his lap. His heart was beating faster than it should have been for something so benign and harmless. Ilya finished what he was doing before he spoke again.

“You hover,” he said mildly. “It makes me nervous.”

“Oh.” Shane swallowed. “Sorry.”

“I did not ask you to apologize,” Ilya said. He paused before he spoke, “I asked you to *sit*.”

Something in Shane's chest tightened, and it definitely wasn't unpleasant, that's for sure.

“Right,” he murmured.

Ilya glanced over his shoulder then, just long enough to check him, to *really* check him. Shane held his gaze without quite meaning to, heat creeping up his neck at the intensity there.

“Good,” Ilya said, and turned back.

Good.

Shane had to look away.

He told himself firmly that this didn't mean anything and that it was just the domestic things that couples do, and that this kind of thing happened all the time. Except they didn't, not like this, anyway.

Later, Shane tested it again.

They were getting ready to leave to go to his parent's house for dinner with their shoes half-on and looking for misplaced keys. Shane was pacing and completely restless, his mind running ahead like it always did. Ilya watched him from the doorway, expression unreadable.

“You are spiraling,” Ilya said.

“I am not.”

“You have checked your phone five times.”

“That's normal.”

“For you?” Ilya asked, dry. “Yes. Unfortunately.”

Shane flipped him off affectionately. “We’re going to be late.”

“We are not.” Ilya stepped closer. “Come here.”

Shane did.

He didn’t even question it this time. He stopped in front of Ilya close enough that he could feel the heat of him, his presence made Shane’s nervous energy stutter. Ilya adjusted Shane’s collar with careful fingers by straightening it and smoothing it down.

“There,” he said. “Better.”

Shane exhaled, slow and shaky, without realizing he was holding his breath. Ilya’s eyes flickered, catching it.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Shane said quickly. “I’m good.”

Ilya studied him for a beat longer, then nodded. “Good. Stay.”

He turned to grab his coat. Shane stayed.

He stood there completely still and his heart pounding so hard he thought it would jump out of his chest. The words echoed in his head like they had been underlined, bolded, italicized, and everything else to make them stand out at him. When Ilya came back, he paused again, something satisfied and cautious passing over his face.

“You didn’t move,” he observed.

Shane shrugged, trying for casualness and missing by a mile. “You told me to stay.”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “I did.”

They locked eyes.

The air between them felt charged and insanely *alive*. Shane felt exposed in a way that made his skin hum, like he’d stepped into a spotlight for attention he secretly wanted.

That night after they got home from dinner, Shane couldn’t sleep again.

But this time, he didn’t reach for his phone. He laid there instead, replaying the moments from earlier, like the commands that weren’t framed as commands and the way his body responded before his mind. Beside him, Ilya was awake too. Shane could tell by the way his breathing hadn’t fully settled down and his eyelids fluttering every so often.

“I did not mean to push,” Ilya said quietly into the dark.

Shane turned onto his side. “You didn’t.”

A pause.

“You liked it,” Ilya said, not accusatory, more observational than anything else.

Shane’s throat tightened. He nodded, then realized Ilya couldn’t see him. “Yeah,” he admitted. “I think I did.”

Ilya rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling. “Then we slow down,” he said. “We do not rush. We do not pretend it is something it is not.”

“Okay,” Shane whispered.

“And you tell me,” Ilya continued, voice steady, “if it stops feeling good. Even if you do not know why.”

“I will.”

Ilya turned his head, looking at him fully now. “You promise?”

Shane met his gaze, serious. “I promise.”

Something eased in Ilya’s expression then, approval, maybe, or trust.

“Good,” he said again. Shane felt it settle into him like an anchor.

They didn’t touch after that because they didn’t even feel the need to. The tension was already doing the work for them, just waiting for the other person to snap first.

—

It happened on an afternoon that felt way too ordinary to deserve the weight it ended up carrying.

They were both home with no plans, the kind of day that stretched lazily without demanding anything of them. Shane was restless anyway. He kept drifting from room to room, starting tasks and abandoning them halfway through, his energy buzzing uncomfortably under his skin.

Ilya tracked it without comment.

Eventually, Shane ended up hovering in the doorway of the living room, watching Ilya read. One ankle was crossed over the opposite knee with the book balanced easily in his hand. He looked relaxed in a way Shane wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to master in his life time. He was just contained, like nothing inside him was spilling over the edges.

Shane cleared his throat.

Ilya didn’t look up. “Yes?”

Shane hesitated. His fingers curled, then uncurled at his sides.

“I—” He stopped, then tried again. “Can I ask you something kind of weird?”

Ilya finally lifted his gaze, putting all his attention on his boyfriend. “You may ask me anything.” That statement alone somehow made it harder.

Shane stepped fully into the room and then stopped a few feet away like there was an invisible line he didn't want to cross without permission.

“When you... tell me to do stuff,” he said, carefully casual, “like sitting, or *staying*—”

Ilya closed the book, slow and deliberate, and set it aside.

“Yes?”

Shane swallowed. His pulse was insanely loud in his ears. “Would it be—too much if I asked you to do that more? Sometimes?”

The silence that followed was dense, but not nearly as scary as he had anticipated. Ilya stood up.

He didn't crowd Shane. He just closed the distance enough that Shane became suddenly aware of his own posture, his breathing, and the way his shoulders had crept up toward his ears again. Ilya just always made him a bit nervous.

“You are asking me,” Ilya said slowly, “to give you instructions.”

Shane nodded. “I think so. Yeah.”

“Not all the time.”

“No.”

“And you want to be able to say no.”

“Yes.”

Ilya studied him for a long moment, his eyes sharp but kind oozing out of them. “And you want to know I am paying attention.”

Shane's breath stuttered and caught in his throat. “That too.”

“Okay,” Ilya said. He had said it so casually that Shane almost thought that was the end of the conversation.

“But,” he continued, “we do this properly.”

Shane nodded immediately. “Of course.”

Ilya tilted his head. “First rule.”

Shane's heart jumped. “There's already a rule?”

“Yes,” Ilya said. “A small one.”

He gestured, “Stand up straight.”

Shane obeyed instantly, spine snapping into alignment before he could second-guess himself.

Ilya’s eyes flickered with approval.

“Good,” he said. Then, calmly: “When I am speaking to you like this, you look at me.”

Shane did.

It was harder than he expected, honestly. Ilya’s gaze always felt so much heavier up close, impossible to hide from. Shane felt exposed in a way that made his skin prickle and his hair stand up straight.

“If you need to look away,” Ilya added, “you may. You just tell me why.”

Shane nodded. “Okay.”

“That is it,” Ilya said. “That is the rule.”

Shane blinked. “That’s... that’s *all*?”

“For now.” The words ‘for now’ curled low in Shane’s stomach.

They stayed like that for a few seconds longer than necessary with Shane standing straight and his eyes locked on Ilya’s, the space between them suddenly ridiculously electric.

Then Ilya stepped back.

“You can relax,” he said.

Shane did and he immediately felt the difference, like tension draining out of him all at once.

“Wow,” he muttered. “Okay.”

Ilya’s mouth curved faintly. “You feel it.”

“Yeah,” Shane admitted. “I really do.”

They didn’t push it further that day, and Shane felt that that was the strangest part, because the rule existed now just waiting to be tested.

And oh, was it tested.

That evening, Shane caught himself slouching on the couch while Ilya spoke. He felt the absence of being told what to do like an *itch* that just wouldn’t go away. Ilya noticed.

“Shane.”

Shane straightened immediately and looked up. Ilya paused mid-sentence, clearly surprised, and then something approving flickered across his face.

“Thank you,” he said simply, and continued talking like nothing happened.

Shane had to bite his lip to keep himself from smiling.

Later, as they got ready for bed, Ilya stopped him gently by the wrist.

“Eyes,” he says softly.

Shane looked up at him, his big eyes shining at the older man.

“You are doing well,” Ilya told him. “But if it ever feels like pressure instead of comfort, you tell me.”

“I will,” Shane said, steady and sincere. Ilya nodded, satisfied and released him.

That night, laid awake in the dark, Shane felt something new settle into place that replaced his fear. He was *excited*.

Stand up straight. Look at me.

It wasn't sexual, not yet anyway. And yet, it felt like the most intimate thing they had done so far, and Shane just couldn't help the arousal pooling in his stomach and the tent forming beneath the bedsheets.

—

Shane had been sitting on the couch with his legs pulled up as he was scrolling aimlessly through his phone when Ilya's voice cut through the silence.

“Shane,” he said softly, from across the room. “Sit up straight.”

Shane froze mid-scroll. He obeyed instinctively, his spine straightening and his shoulders rolling back. Immediately, his chest felt too tight with his pulse racing in a way that had nothing to do with the exercise.

Ilya's gaze flicked to him, almost too subtle that Shane had almost not caught it. He noticed the way Shane's hands fidgeted slightly on his knees and saw the faint shiver that ran through him, and the heat that rose in his neck. Shane's body was responding before his mind even fully registered the tension.

“Mm,” Ilya murmured under his breath, almost to himself. “Yes. That is... good.”

Shane blinked, self-conscious. “Uh... good?”

Ilya's lips quirked faintly, completely calm. “You do not realize, do you? How much attention you pay when instructed. How your body reacts.”

Shane felt heat creep up his chest and across his ears. “I—” He faltered, then shook his head. “I didn’t even *mean* to—”

Ilya didn’t interrupt. He just watched quietly, letting Shane feel the weight of being observed. He was taking in every subtle shift in his posture and every tightening of his muscles, and Shane knew somehow that he what he wanted was for Ilya to notice.

“You notice,” Ilya said finally, his voice low. “Even when I do not say much.”

Shane’s stomach clenched. “I do?”

“Yes,” Ilya replied. His thumb traced a line along the edge of the book he was holding deliberately and slowly, his eyes never leaving Shane once. “And it is... effective.”

Shane’s pulse spiked. That word—*effective*—echoed through him, and suddenly he was aware of the subtle ache of desire coiling tight in his chest. He couldn’t look away.

Ilya leaned back slightly, still studying him. “You will learn quickly,” he said. “Or maybe... too quickly.”

Shane swallowed. His mouth felt dry and he had heat pooled low in his stomach. He realized then that this was more than just curiosity and following a silly rule. His body responded to Ilya, to his words and to the sheer quiet authority in the room, and it scared him. But, it also thrilled him, and made him aware of himself in ways he hadn’t expected.

He shifted slightly, and Ilya’s eyes followed.

“You feel that?” Ilya asked softly. “Do you understand what that is?”

Shane shook his head, unable to put it into words. He could only nod slowly, completely addicted to the feeling of Ilya watching him.

After a few minutes of quiet, Shane shifted again to brush a stray lock of hair behind his ear. Ilya’s gaze followed him, and Shane felt it like a weight pressing in.

“Hold still,” Ilya said softly, his voice still an octave too low, almost.

Shane froze immediately. His back straightened with his hands tightening slightly in his lap. The words alone made his pulse spike, and he felt heat creep up his neck, curling down through his chest.

Ilya didn’t move closer because he didn’t need to. Shane’s body responded anyway, no matter what he did to him. Shane had a slight tremor in his fingers, his thighs tensing and his chest rising and falling rapidly. It was like his body couldn’t control itself.

“Mm,” Ilya murmured, almost to himself. “Yes. Exactly like that.”

Shane’s stomach clenched. “I—did I do it right?” he asked, his voice slightly breathless.

“You are doing exactly what I asked,” Ilya replied. “And your body... it tells me more than your words ever could.”

Shane’s heart hammered. The attention alone made his skin tingle. He shifted again, subconsciously, and felt the heat spiral lower, hitting him between his legs.

“Do not move,” Ilya said suddenly, commanding him, and the effect was immediate. Shane’s breath caught in his throat. His body obeyed instinctively, frozen in place.

Ilya leaned just slightly closer so Shane could feel the warmth radiating off him. There was no touching. He was just there, watching and focused on him.

Shane’s knees trembled slightly. He swallowed hard. “I... I didn’t mean to—”

“Shh,” Ilya interrupted softly, thumb brushing along Shane’s jaw lightly, a whisper of contact that made Shane’s body shiver. “You do not need to mean to. You respond. That is enough.”

Shane’s chest tightened, a low hum of tension and need pooling in his stomach. He wanted—he didn’t *know* what. He only knew he wanted more of this focus, all of this attention, Ilya telling him exactly what he wanted him to do.

Ilya’s eyes held his. “You feel it, don’t you?”

Shane nodded, breath catching. “Yes.”

“You are ready,” Ilya said, voice dropping another octave. “Do you want it?”

Shane’s response was immediate as he leaned forward, and before he could stop himself, their lips met. It was a soft and testing, just a brush of their lips at first. Shane’s hands twitched like he was almost reaching, but he held them in his lap, aware of the tension in the room and the arousal that had been building up all day in that living room.

The kiss deepened slightly, and Shane’s body reacted instantly. It's like his nerves were firing all over the place, his stomach tightening and his pulse racing. He wanted *more*. He wanted everything, but the sudden awareness of what was happening made him pull back slightly, his breath shaky.

“I... I need—” he started, whimpering slightly into the other man's mouth.

Ilya broke the kiss gently, his forehead resting against Shane’s. “What do you need, baby?” he asked softly.

Shane swallowed hard. “A... safe word. Something if it gets too much. I—I’m nervous, Ilya.”

Ilya nodded, his voice calm and grounding. “Of course. We use safe words. It should be easy. Say it, and everything stops. Do you want to choose one?”

Shane nodded, lips dry. “Red.”

“Red,” Ilya repeated. “Perfect. And afterward, you tell me what you need. Comfort. Hugs. Whatever you require.”

Shane’s pulse slowed slightly, the tension still there but now tempered with trust. “Okay,” he whispered.

“Good,” Ilya said, brushing his thumb lightly over Shane’s hand again. “We start slowly. Step by step. Always safe. Always together.”

Shane nodded again, his chest tight with relief. Between the kiss, being given orders, and Ilya's eyes on him that entire time, it had all escalated the tension and he panicked. Now he felt that the safe word and boundaries made it more possible for him to breathe.

For the first time, he understood that surrendering could feel dangerous, intoxicating, and safe all at once. And with Ilya, he wanted it more than he’d ever admitted to himself.

They didn’t touch again right away, and Shane felt disappointed, aching to be pressed against.

Their agreement existed now, both spoken and mutual and the space between them felt heavier. Shane stayed where he was on the couch with his spine straight without being told and his hands resting deliberately on his thighs like he was afraid to give himself away by accident.

Ilya watched him for a long moment.

“Come here,” he said finally.

Shane stood immediately, too quickly, then stopped himself halfway across the room, uncertainty flickering across his face.

“Walk,” Ilya corrected calmly. “Do not rush.”

Shane swallowed and forced himself to slow down with each of his steps painfully deliberate. By the time he reached Ilya, his chest felt tight again and his breath shallow. He wanted to do this right and he wanted to be good for him.

Ilya gestured toward the open space in front of him. “Stand.”

Shane did.

“Hands at your sides.”

He obeyed, fingers twitching once before going still.

Ilya circled him slowly but did not touch, as he was just close enough that Shane could feel him there. Shane could track him by sound and warmth alone. Every nerve in Shane’s body lit up, aware of his every single movement and of how much he wanted to turn his head, but wasn’t sure if he was allowed to.

“Good,” Ilya murmured. “You are listening.”

Shane's jaw clenched slightly. "Can I—" He stopped himself, breath hitching.

Ilya stopped in front of him. "You may speak."

Shane exhaled. "Can I look at you?"

Ilya's mouth curved faintly. "Yes."

Shane lifted his gaze, meeting Ilya's eyes, and the intensity there made his knees feel incredibly weak. There was no heat in Ilya's expression yet, it was all control and attention so complete it felt intimate in a way Shane wasn't prepared for.

"You look different when you wait," Ilya said quietly. "Did you know that?"

Shane shook his head, unable to look away.

"Your body softens," Ilya continued. "But your attention sharpens. It is... very telling."

Shane's breath stuttered. There was heat curled low in his stomach, burning so much it almost hurt.

Ilya stepped closer, just inside Shane's personal space. Not touching, not yet.

"Do not move," he said.

Shane didn't.

The silence stretched and Shane felt every second of it. He wanted to lean forward so badly to close the distance and to do something. Instead, he stood still with his heart pounding and let the tension between them simply coil tighter and tighter.

Finally, Ilya lifted a hand and placed two fingers lightly under Shane's chin.

The contact was minimal, but the effect was not. Shane's breath caught immediately.

Ilya tilted his chin up just enough to study his face. "There," he said softly. "That reaction. That is what we watch for."

Shane nodded once, carefully. "Okay."

"You are doing well," Ilya told him. "But this is where we pause."

Shane blinked. "Pause?"

"Yes." Ilya lowered his hand, deliberately breaking contact. "Because your body is responding faster than your mind. And that can be overwhelming if we are not careful."

The words settled over Shane like a huge hand on his chest. He nodded, his relief mixing with frustration. He wanted Ilya so bad he didn't know what to do with himself.

"Sit," Ilya said.

Shane obeyed, his body sinking onto the couch. The release of all of that tension made him dizzy for a second.

Ilya sat beside him close, his presence allowing Shane to relax ever so slightly.

“You did well,” he said again. “But next time, I will add one more thing. Something small.”

Shane glanced at him. “What kind of thing?”

Ilya’s gaze flicked to Shane’s hands, then back to his face. “You will wait until I tell you that you may touch.”

Shane’s breath hitched before he could stop it. Ilya noticed.

A faint, knowing smile touched his mouth. “Yes,” he said quietly. “Exactly.”

They didn’t go any further that night, they didn’t need to.

The rule existed now, very clear and waiting to be tested. And Shane laid awake later with his heart still racing from before, knowing with that next time they did this, it would be harder.

And that he wanted it anyway.

—

The following week, on a rainy Wednesday, the air in the living room had changed. It wasn’t just quiet, it was *listening*. Shane was standing in the middle of the room and felt like his heart was going to beat out of his chest again at any given moment. Ilya was sat on the edge of the couch watching him, seeming much too calm for the situation. He hadn’t moved for several minutes, and the silence was becoming its own form of command, testing Shane’s resolve.

“Come here,” Ilya said finally, his voice low and even.

Shane took a step and then stopped himself. He wanted to force his movements to be deliberate and not so frantic and rushed. He wanted to enjoy this.

He crossed the few feet between them and stood before Ilya, close enough to feel the warmth radiating from his body. He kept his hands clasped behind his back, his last effort at a small and desperate act of self-control.

Ilya’s gaze was a like physical weight. Shane felt the older man tracing the line of his jaw, the frantic pulse in his throat, the way his chest rose and fell with each careful breath. “You are trembling,” Ilya observed.

Shane just couldn’t deny it. A shiver ran through him, he felt almost scared, but he was so excited too that he didn’t even care. “I’m... aware,” he managed, his voice barely a whisper.

“Good.” Ilya leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. The shift brought him closer into Shane’s personal space, but still he didn’t touch him. “*Kneel*.”

The word struck Shane with the force of a physical blow. His knees buckled instantly as he sank to the floor on the plush rug before he could fully process the command. The fibers were soft against his skin, a stark contrast to the hard and coiled tension in his gut. He looked up, finding Ilya's eyes immediately, the second rule instinctual now. *Look at me.*

"Beautiful," Ilya murmured, the word like a rough caress. "You see? Your body knows what it wants. It is your mind that is afraid."

Shane's throat worked, but it was like he couldn't argue because he was terrified. He was also more aroused than he had ever been in his life, his cock aching behind the confines of his jeans. He just wanted to touch himself, to touch Ilya, to do *something* to relieve the incredible pressure building inside him. He kept his hands locked behind his back, though.

Ilya stood, his movements fluid and like a predator hunting its prey. He circled Shane slowly, his shadow falling over him. "We will start with something simple. A test of trust." He stopped behind Shane, and the lack of visual input made every other sense flare to life. He could hear the soft rustle of Ilya's clothes, feel the subtle vibration of his footsteps through the floor.

Then, Ilya's hands were on his shoulders. The contact was firm and ridiculously possessive, and it sent a jolt straight through Shane's system, and his cock. He gasped, his head bowing forward for a second before he remembered the rule and forced it back up, even though Ilya was behind him.

"Stay still," Ilya commanded, his voice right beside Shane's ear.

His hands slid down Shane's arms, tracing the biceps, his thumbs pressing into the muscle. Shane's own arms twitched, both a desperate and useless attempt to reciprocate. He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment and then opened them, staring blindly at the wall across the room. Ilya's hands moved to his chest, flattening over his sternum and feeling the fast rhythm of his heart.

"So fast," Ilya noted, his lips brushing the shell of Shane's ear. "Are you scared, or excited?"

"Both," Shane choked out.

"Good." Ilya's fingers found the hem of Shane's shirt. He tugged it upward, and Shane instinctively lifted his arms, letting Ilya pull it over his head and toss it aside. The cool air on his overheated and burning skin made him shiver again. Ilya's hands returned, now mapping the planes of his bare back, his sides, and the slutty dip of his waist. Each touch was like he was claiming him right then and there. Shane's breathing grew ragged. It was like he was floating, held in place only by Ilya's voice and his hands.

"On the bed," Ilya said, stepping back.

The sudden loss of contact was jarring. Shane rose to his feet on unsteady legs and walked into the bedroom, his movements stiff with arousal and tension. He stood beside the bed, waiting.

“Lie down. On your back.”

Shane complied, his body stretching out on the cool sheets. He kept his hands at his sides and his fists clenched. Ilya followed, standing over him, his silhouette blocking the soft light from the living room. He looked down at Shane, his expression unreadable but his focus absolute.

“Unbutton your jeans,” Ilya instructed.

Shane’s fingers fumbled with the button, his hands shaking so badly it took him two tries. He managed the zipper, then lay still again, his jeans open, the fabric parted just enough to be tantalizing.

“Now,” Ilya said, his voice dropping to a near-growl, “you may touch yourself. But you will not come. Do you understand?”

Shane’s entire body clenched. “Yes,” he breathed, the word torn from him.

He slid his hand into his jeans, wrapping his fingers around his hard, leaking cock. The first touch was *electric*, a bolt of pure pleasure that made his back just arch off the bed. He stroked himself slowly, trying to maintain control, but his hips were already moving, chasing a friction he knew he wasn’t allowed to have yet.

Ilya watched him, his gaze intense and unwavering. “That’s it. Show me how much you want it, baby boy.”

Shane’s head fell back against the pillows, a low moan escaping his lips. He was lost in the sensation, in the heady power of being watched, of being told what to do by his dominant. The pressure had built at the base of his spine, a completely familiar but also terrifying tide. He could feel the orgasm approaching fast, and he didn’t want to stop it.

“Stop,” Ilya said.

The command cut through the haze of pleasure like ice. Shane’s hand froze, his whole body going rigid with the effort of holding his orgasm back. A desperate, broken sound came from his throat. He was *so* close. He trembled on the edge, like he was just a single, shuddering breath away from shattering right there on the bed.

“Please,” he whispered, the word a ragged plea. “Ilya, fuck, *please*, I-I can’t—”

“Not yet,” Ilya said, his voice mercilessly gentle. He moved onto the bed, kneeling over Shane. He reached down, his fingers wrapping around Shane’s wrist, pulling his hand from his jeans and pinning it to the mattress beside his head. “Look at me.”

Shane forced his eyes open, his vision blurry with unshed tears of frustration. Ilya’s face was inches from his, his dark eyes burning with a protective fire.

“Do you feel that?” Ilya’s voice was a low murmur, right against his ear lobe. “How your body wants to fight me? It wants to take, to rush. But you won’t. You will take what I give you.”

Shane could only whimper in response, his head turning to the side and his face pressing into the pillow. He was drowning in it, in the scent of Ilya's cologne and the raw, masculine scent of his own arousal. He could feel the sweat beading on his forehead, his muscles trembling with the strain of holding back.

"You are doing so well," Ilya murmured, his thumb stroking the inside of Shane's wrist. "So well for me."

Then he leaned down and kissed him. It wasn't gentle. It was a deep, possessive kiss that stole the air from Shane's lungs. Ilya's other hand came up to cup his jaw, holding him in place as he plundered his mouth. Shane kissed back with a desperate hunger, his free hand clutching at Ilya's shoulder, needing the anchor.

When Ilya finally pulled back with a string of saliva stretched between their lips, they were both breathing hard. "Now," he said, his voice thick. "You can come. But you will do it for me, only because I said you could."

He released Shane's wrist and moved his hand down, replacing Shane's on his cock. Ilya's grip was sure and his strokes were confident, like he knew exactly what to do to make Shane fall apart. He set a punishing rhythm, and Shane's body, already wound to the breaking point, responded instantly.

Ilya's grip was a *revelation*. Where Shane's own touch had been frantic and desperate, Ilya's was utterly controlled. His thumb swiped over the slick head on the first downstroke, and Shane's entire body arched off the bed, a sharp, broken cry tearing from his throat. Ilya's hand was larger and rougher, with the calluses on his palm catching on the sensitive skin in a way that sent sparks of pleasure-pain shooting up his spine.

The sounds he made were barely human, as his high and desperate whines were ones of pure submission. He felt the muscles in his thighs seize up, his toes curling so tightly they cramped, but he was too far gone to care. Every nerve ending was firing at once. It only took a few strokes before the tension snapped.

"Look at me," Ilya commanded, his voice a low growl that vibrated through Shane's chest. "I want to see you." Shane forced his eyes open, his vision blurring at the edges. All he could see was Ilya's face, his dark eyes burning with an intensity that was both terrifying and intoxicating. He was watching every flicker of pleasure, every twitch of Shane's lips, never tearing his eyes away not even once.

He was drinking him in.

A white-hot flash of pleasure tore through him, and he came with a hoarse cry, spilling over Ilya's hand and his own stomach. His vision went white. A guttural moan was ripped from his chest as his orgasm crashed over him, violent and all-consuming. His body seized, back bowing, as he pulsed in Ilya's grip, wave after wave of pleasure so intense it bordered on pain, stripping him down to nothing but raw nerve endings and desperate, shuddering breaths.

He could feel the hot, sticky mess cooling rapidly on his skin, a visceral reminder of how completely he had just come apart. The air felt cool against his overheated flesh, and for a dizzying second, he almost felt weightless.

“Mmmphh! *Nngh*—”, Shane choked out, just gurgled and broken sounds being heard beneath the sounds of wet, sloppy strokes that were covered in his come and Ilya’s harsh, labored breathing.

For a moment, the world was nothing but blissful, silent release. Shane floated in the aftermath, totally boneless and sated. Ilya was murmuring something in Russian, his voice a low, comforting rumble. He leaned down and pressed a soft kiss to Shane’s temple. Then, he brought his hand, still slick with Shane’s release, to his own lips, his eyes never leaving Shane’s as he deliberately licked his fingers clean. The possessive and obscene gesture made Shane’s spent cock twitch with a new jolt of arousal.

Ilya didn’t stop there. He shifted, his weight pressing Shane into the mattress, and used his clean hand to gently tilt Shane’s face to the side again. He kissed him then, deep and slow, letting Shane taste the salt and musk of himself on Ilya’s tongue. It wasn’t about arousal anymore; it was a final, undeniable kiss to prove that every part of Shane, even his pleasure, belonged to Ilya in that moment.

Then, just like that, the tide receded. And Shane panicked.

The warmth that had enveloped Shane began to leach away and it was replaced by a sudden, chilling emptiness. The pleasure that had felt so all-encompassing moments ago now felt distant and almost unreal. He had a profound sense of being alone, even with Ilya having been right there, washed over him. His limbs felt heavy, his mind slow and fuzzy. He could feel the stickiness of his release on his skin, and it wasn’t arousing anymore. It was just... messy and extremely humiliating.

Ilya must have felt the change in him. He shifted, his weight lifting slightly. “Shane?”

Shane couldn’t answer. He turned his head away, staring at the wall. A lump formed in his throat. He felt raw, exposed, and stupid. He had been so desperate, what had Ilya thought of him? The thought was a physical pain, sharp and twisting in his gut. He felt the sudden overwhelming urge to cover himself, to curl into a ball and just disappear. He felt tears prick at the back of his eyes and blinked them back furiously. Crying would be even *more* pathetic, and yet here he was, tears welled up in his eyes just as they were moments ago from Ilya’s hand on his cock.

“Shane,” Ilya said again, his voice softer now, laced with a concern that only made Shane feel worse. “Look at me.”

He couldn’t. He couldn’t let Ilya see him like this—shaken, hollowed out, and ashamed. The command that had been the hottest thing he’d heard in his life just moments before now felt like a disgusting accusation. He squeezed his eyes shut, a single tear escaping and tracing a cold path down his temple.

The silence stretched, thick and suffocating. Shane braced himself for questions, for Ilya to pull away, for the quiet judgment he was sure was coming.

Instead, the bed shifted as Ilya moved. He didn't leave. He settled himself more firmly beside Shane, allowing him enough space to breathe but still feel him there. Then, a warm, damp cloth gently wiped the mess from Shane's stomach. The gesture was so practical, so devoid of any sexual undertone, that it broke something open in Shane's chest. A ragged sob escaped him before he could swallow it down.

"Shh," Ilya murmured, his voice a low, steady rumble right beside Shane's ear. He tossed the cloth aside and then carefully, deliberately, maneuvered them both until Shane was lying with his head cradled against Ilya's chest, Ilya's arms wrapped securely around him. One hand stroked slowly up and down Shane's back, a repetitive motion. "It is okay. I am right here."

Shane buried his face in Ilya's shoulder, the fabric of his shirt damp with his tears. He felt small and so fucking stupid, the intense pleasure from moments ago feeling like a betrayal to himself. "I'm sorry," he choked out, the words muffled by Ilya's skin. "I don't... I don't *know* what's wrong."

"Nothing is wrong," Ilya said, his tone leaving no room for argument. He tightened his hold, pressing a firm kiss to Shane's hair. "This is the drop. You read about it. Remember?"

Shane did remember. Reading the words on a screen was nothing like this. This was a freefall in the dark, a hollow ache where the ecstasy used to be. "It feels... awful," he admitted, his voice cracking.

"I know," Ilya said, his hand never ceasing its slow, rhythmic stroking. "The adrenaline leaves and the endorphins crash. It makes you feel empty. It is chemical, *solnyshko*. It is biology, it is not you."

The pet name, spoken so softly, made Shane cling to him tighter. He wanted to believe it, he wanted to crawl inside Ilya and stay there. "I feel... stupid," he whispered. "For wanting it so much. For... for falling apart like this."

"You did not fall apart," Ilya corrected, his voice firm but kind. "You let go. There is a difference. And you were beautiful." He shifted slightly, tilting Shane's chin up with gentle fingers. Shane resisted for a second, then let his head be guided. Ilya's eyes were dark with concern, but there was no judgment, no disappointment. "You gave me a gift, Shane. Your trust. Do not be ashamed of what happens after."

He leaned in and kissed Shane, a soft, lingering kiss that had nothing to do with sex and everything to do with comfort. When he pulled back, he kept his forehead resting against Shane's.

"Talk to me," Ilya urged quietly. "What do you feel in your body right now?"

Shane took a shaky breath, trying to express what he was feeling. "Cold. Empty. My skin feels... too tight. Like I don't fit inside it anymore."

“Okay,” Ilya nodded. “We will fix that.” He shifted, pulling the duvet up and over them, tucking it around Shane’s shoulders until he was completely enveloped in warmth, trapped in Ilya’s embrace. “Better?”

The physical warmth helped, a little. “A little,” Shane admitted.

“Good.” Ilya’s hand moved from Shane’s back to his hair, his fingers combing through the strands, a slow, soothing massage. “You are here. You are safe. I have you.”

Shane closed his eyes, focusing on the steady beat of Ilya’s heart under his ear and the weight of the blanket, with the repetitive motion of Ilya’s hand in his hair. The frantic, shameful energy began to slowly recede, replaced by deep exhaustion. The ache was still there, but it was dulling and softening around the edges.

“I didn’t know it would be like that,” Shane whispered into the quiet.

“I know,” Ilya said. “But now you do. And now we know what you need afterward, especially if we go further and do more together. This is what you need, warmth, quiet, holding. To be reminded that you are not broken, you are just... sensitive.”

Shane huffed a weak, watery laugh. “Sensitive is *one* word for it.”

“It is the right word,” Ilya insisted. “It is why you feel things so deeply. It is why this is so powerful for you. It is not a flaw.”

Shane was quiet for a long moment, tracing the seam of Ilya’s shirt with a lazy finger. “My brain feels like scrambled eggs,” he mumbled into his chest.

“A good meal, then,” Ilya rumbled, a low vibration against Shane’s cheek. “High in protein.”

That startled a real, if breathless, laugh out of him. “Did you just make a joke?”

“I am a man of many talents,” Ilya said, his tone deadpan, but Shane could feel the smile in his voice. “Making you fall apart and making terrible jokes. I am a catch.”

Shane shifted, tilting his head back so he could see Ilya’s face. The intense focus from before had softened into something warm and more fond. “You’re ridiculous,” he said, but there was no heat in it at all. He felt loose and pliant, his limbs heavy with a bone-deep satisfaction. “I think you broke me.”

“Good,” Ilya said simply. He leaned down and kissed Shane’s forehead, a soft, lingering press. “Means I did it right. We will build you back stronger. Tomorrow. After you have slept for twelve hours.”

“*Twelve*?” Shane wrinkled his nose. “I don’t think I have that much sleep in me.”

“I will make you,” Ilya threatened, though it sounded more like a promise. He tightened his arm around Shane’s waist, pulling him impossibly closer. “No arguments. You will lie here, you will be warm, and you will let me take care of you. Those are the new rules.”

Shane felt a smile spread across his face, a genuine, easy thing that felt foreign after the emotional storm. He burrowed deeper into Ilya's side, tucking his head under Ilya's chin. "Okay," he whispered, his eyes already drifting shut. "Those are good rules."

Ilya's chest rumbled with a quiet, satisfied hum. "I am glad you approve," he murmured, his lips brushing against Shane's hair. "They are the only rules that matter right now." He paused, his fingers still tracing lazy patterns on Shane's back. "Besides, I think you have earned a reprieve from thinking. Just for tonight."

Shane made a soft and agreeable noise, too tired to form any sort of words anymore. The idea of not having to think, of simply existing in this warm, safe bubble, was the most tempting offer he'd ever heard. He let out a deep, contented sigh, his body finally, fully relaxing into Ilya's embrace. For the first time all night, his mind was completely quiet.

They laid there for a long time, the silence no longer empty but full of just *Ilya Ilya Ilya*. Shane's breathing evened out, the last of the tremors subsiding. He felt drained, but the hollow ache was being filled, piece by piece, by Ilya's unwavering attention. He felt cared for in a way that went far beyond anything just physical. He felt it in his heart.

Eventually, Shane tilted his head back, able to meet Ilya's eyes again. The vulnerability was still there, but the shame was gone. "You're really good at this," he murmured.

A faint, genuine smile touched Ilya's lips. "I am good at taking care of what is mine," he said simply. The possessive words, which might have scared him before, were now the most comforting thing Shane had ever heard from anyone before. He leaned up and kissed Ilya with a soft, slow press of his lips that were to show his pure gratitude.

When he settled back down, Ilya's arms tightened around him. "Rest now," Ilya commanded softly, the word now a blanket of safety. "I will be right here."

Shane closed his eyes, and for the first time since the tide had gone out, he believed him. He drifted off to sleep, held together in Ilya's arms, with the storm passed and the shore, for now, quiet.

End Notes

thank you for reading <3

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