

my heart has changed

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my heart has changed

by [amongtheshadows](#)

Summary

“You don’t have to.” Ilya whispers.

“What?”

“Love me. You don’t have to. To say it, you can move on, you can find someone better, you don’t have to.” he says. “I am. . . not good.” he settles on after trying to find the right words in his mind.

Alternate ending to episode 4

Notes

more of this beautiful relationship!

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

Can we talk?

It illuminated his screen and he stared at it for a long moment, like he had when he was first learning English and letters seemed to jumble together into nonsense. *Can we talk?* Seemed like the most nonsensical thing he could have read anyway.

You are not busy?

It's petty and he knows it. He'd seen the way Shane was holding the actress at the club at the way her body fit against his. She was beautiful, he couldn't even blame him. But he knew Shane. He knew that he'd run out of his house, his clothes still on, and that seeing him with her at the club after that felt like getting shot in the chest.

Maybe that would feel better than whatever this was.

No. Come over

Treesomes are not really my thing

Liar

So it is a threesome?

No, it's just me but I don't believe you anyway

Ilya had to huff a laugh under his breath at that, frustrated even as he downed the rest of his drink and made his way to leave.

Then several minutes later -

On the way

The car he'd called was silent as he stared out the window. Light flashed by as people were out partying, but Ilya couldn't hear anything but the sound of his own heartbeat racing through his ears.

He was sure they wouldn't fuck, not after what had happened. He didn't even know why Shane had called him over in the first place.

He hated to admit it but he was like a dog on a leash with this man. For all the dominance he'd reigned over him, for all the times that his brown eyes looking up at him made him flash with heat, the power Shane held over him was like nothing else he'd felt. He knew he looked stupid, running back to him as soon as he'd asked, but at this point he didn't care.

Maybe Shane would yell at him, call him a pervert for watching him hold her close and roll her body against his own. Maybe he'd punch him in the face and tell him to fuck off.

At least if he punched him he'd be able to feel his hands one more time.

Ilya closed his eyes as they pulled up outside the building and let it out slowly as he opened the door and started walking around the back of the building. He knew the route well, and he was good at timing it so that when he turned the corner and was closer to the back door he could pull out his phone and text Shane so that he'd be there without Ilya waiting around for too long.

He pulled out his phone but when he did, he looked up to see Shane already there in the door. He'd changed into sweatpants and his favorite blue hoodie and Ilya stopped in his tracks at the sight.

He looked around on instinct, but no one was near so late at night, and Shane didn't flinch as he continued to walk towards him, skepticism written all over his face. Shane just nodded in towards the door and Ilya followed - the invisible leash between them pulling him up the stairs in silence, only being broken when the door slammed shut behind them.

He didn't speak, barely even breathed as he followed Shane back up to his home. Content to watch the swing of his hips and steady steps he took, he felt lucky just to be allowed to be this close to him again. Shane opened the door to his floor and Ilya followed, watching him as he opened his front door and left it open, letting Ilya watch him throw his keys into a bowl by the door as he pushed the door shut behind him with his foot.

"No after party?" he finally asked, the asshole part of his brain taking over and needing to break the silence.

Shane shakes his head and moves into the kitchen to lean against the kitchen island, putting the width of it between him and Shane.

"Want something to drink?"

"I am okay." he shakes his head and looks out the window before looking back and locking eyes with Shane.

"Right. Yea, thanks for coming, I just, I um, wanted to talk to you."

"Hmm." Ilya nodded, not knowing what to say next, or why he was even here in the first place.

They are silent for a moment, probably only about ten seconds but it hung in their air for what felt like a lifetime before Shane mutters something under his breath and shakes his head.

“I um, I didn’t want to leave your house.” he finally says, moving his eyes up to look at Ilya. For the first time he got a good look at his face under the kitchen lights. His eyes looked tired, and he looked defeated and exhausted in a way that Ilya didn’t know it was possible for Shane Hollander to look like.

“Could have fooled me.” he nods and comes to stand on the other side of the island from his place at the window. “But it’s fine, you were busy.”

“I wasn’t.” Shane said, shaking his head and chewing on his lower lip. “Listen, I’m - I’m sorry for running. You didn’t do anything wrong.” he says earnestly.

“Did not seem like it.” Ilya replies, trying desperately to figure out why Shane had invited him in the first place.

“I know I was a dick, and it was rude, and I left you hanging, but I realized something. I realized it then and I realized it again tonight.” he nods and Ilya prepares himself for the inevitable. “I think that I feel, for you, much stronger than I anticipated ever feeling.”

Ilya can feel himself stop breathing at the words.

“I see. Is too much, I understand.” he nods, mentally kicking himself for even buying the stupid ginger ale in the first place. For saying his name, for giving him his clothes to wear so he could see the way his shirts looked on him. It was too much, too personal, an overstep into that whatever the fuck they were and he -

“That was the nicest thing that anyone has done for me in a long, *long* time.” Shane exhales shakily, holding Ilya's eyes even as his own become glassy. Ilya wants to run, to hold him, to tell him it’s okay and that he’s allowed to just have nice things. That he can just sit quietly on the couch with Shane and it would still be better than anything else in the world.

“Oh.” is all that comes out instead. “So do you want me to make you another tuna sandwich? Is that why you invited me here?” he asks, but there’s no fire to it, it’s a genuine question.

“No.” Shane shakes his head but doesn’t leave his eyes.

“Is your girl not nice to you?” he asks, and it’s supposed to sound like a joke but all it does is add to how hurt he sounds.

“I don’t have a girl.” Shane shakes his head. “It didn’t - she’s a friend now. It didn’t work.”

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why did it not work?”

Shane exhales and tilts his head. “I think you know why.”

“I don’t think I know anything right now, Sh- Hollander.” he curses himself for the slip and winces. “I don’t know what you’re thinking. I can’t read your mind. I thought that you would punch me, that is why you invited me here.”

“You thought I would punch you and you came?” he asks.

“Of course I did.”

“You have no sense of self preservation.” Shane jokes but Ilya can’t take the suspense and the change of tone.

“When it comes to you, no. No I don’t.” he shrugs and ignores the way his chest aches at the realization that Shane really didn’t know how much he meant to him. How much time they’d spent together but still so far apart. “I just wanted you to stay.”

Something in Shane seems to break at that and his gaze goes tender as he watches Ilya from across the room. Even with oceans between them, he'd never felt further away from him that he did in that moment.

"I wanted to stay."

"But you left. You were not busy, but you left."

"I am a coward. I am." he says when Ilya starts to shake his head at the negative self-talk. "All I've ever wanted was just to be able to be close to someone. That's it. I wanted to feel held and seen and cared for, and somehow the universe or whatever brought me to you. And you did that. You were nice to me. You listen to me. You make me know myself more than I ever have before." he said passionately, tapping the counter top with his hand as he spoke. "I didn't know I could feel like that, Ilya. I didn't know what I was feeling."

Ilya is more lost than ever, but content to just hear the sound of Shane's voice so close to him again. "And what do you feel?" he asks, hating the way his voice trembles on the last word.

A breath of silence hangs between them that seems to stretch on for eternity.

"I. . ." Shane pauses and swallows thickly, staring up at the ceiling like a prayer before looking back at him with an intense determination. "I love you."

Ilya's heart stops.

"I love you, and I'm sorry. For leaving, for being so cagey, for not being very casual at all; but it's true, and you're here now and I tried to move on. I tried to see if it was possible for me to be with someone else, and I fucking hated it. I hated that it wasn't you and I hated that you might be doing the same thing too. And, and, I know I'm a hypocrite, and I'm uptight, and I'm boring, but I love you and no matter how hard I try not to, I can't."

“Well I’m sorry for the inconvenience.” Ilya barely breathes out, still frozen in place and heart hammering in his chest like he’s about to explode.

Shane huffs out a laugh that couldn’t be less funny and rolls his eyes before running a hand over his face. “Of course you think this is a joke.” he groans and Ilya sees that he wipes the space under his eyes with his fingers.

“Not a joke, just not something I thought could be. . . probable.” he lands on, still trying to still the pounding in his chest.

“None of this was probable, but that doesn’t make it not inevitable.” Shane replies, and he’s right.

The moment their lips had touched for the first time, years ago, something in Ilya knew he was done for. That Shane would be the person that haunted his mind for the rest of his life and that everything about who they each were as people made it inevitable that they would be it for each other. That they would come together like puzzle pieces and ruin each other for any hope of anything else no matter how impossible it was for that to happen. He was happy to live in pain without Shane if it meant he still got to have the memories of having him for brief moments in time.

Ilya just didn’t know he would love it so much.

“You don’t have to.” Ilya whispers.

“What?”

“Love me. You don’t have to. To say it, you can move on, you can find someone better, you don’t have to.” he says. “I am. . . not good.” he settles on after trying to find the right words in his mind.

Shane's face turns from anger to something somewhat softer and he leans forward on his elbows on the island like an invitation for Ilya to keep talking.

"I'm not," he assures. "I don't. . . know how to, I don't know the right way to do this. I don't think that I am bad person, but I don't think that I am good. To be with." he finalizes with a nod before continuing. "I think that because I love you I want you to be with someone who knows how to do that better." he nods and ignores the way Shane becomes blurry in his vision.

He didn't have a warm family like Shane did. He wasn't sure how to talk about feelings the right way or how to be someone that his parents would like or be someone that he would be proud to be with in front of the world. Shane deserved someone who could be all of the things he was supposed to have and more and Ilya couldn't even offer to bring him back to his home. He hoped for the opposite - that Shane would never have to meet his family. Never have to see the fucked up bubble that they kept him in under thier thumb or the way they spoke to him or took advantage of him, much to his shame.

Shane didn't need to deal with him like that.

"Ilya -"

"I don't have anything to give you. I have money, yes; but you have more. I don't have family, I don't have. . ." he gestures around himself as he tries to put what he's thinking into words. "I don't have life to give you. I'm not your best option."

"Ilya -" Shane whispers as he starts to make his way around the island. Ilya stays in place, ready for Shane to walk by him and open the door and gesture out as if to say *thanks for coming but I don't need this emotional trainwreck in my house.*

"I'm not good, Hollander." he stresses again, looking at Shane, needing him desperately to understand. To know that he loved him but that he wanted to protect him from himself and for him to have the life that The Great Shane Hollander had always been destined for. "You don't have to love me."

“But you love me?” Shand asks quietly, stopping an arms length away from where Ilya stood.

He’d been so invested in trying to explain his thoughts he hadn’t even realized he’d said it, but. . .

“Yes. Of course, yes.” he exhales and shakes his head like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “But you don’t have to love me.”

“Ilya. . . that's not an option.” Shane sighs and shakes his head, eyes becoming glassy once again.

“You don’t need me, and my messy brain. My messy life, you should be happy,”

“I’m happy when I’m with you, Ilya.” he replies as he takes another step closer.

“It’s too much, you don’t have to,” he coughs out a sob and tries to take a deep breath but it won’t pick up in his lungs. “You don’t. . .” He can’t finish his sentence because suddenly Shane is there, and his arms are around his waist and he’s pulling Ilya to rest his head on the shoulder of his sweatshirt where it’s soft and smells like Shane in a way that makes his head dizzy. He didn’t move a muscle, but tears were free flowing over his cheeks and down his chin.

“I do.” Shane says after a moment, and nods against his head. “I do, because I don’t think I’ve ever actually been me without you.” he kissed his forehead, just like he had done the first night, and Ilya wanted to die at the hope that was springing in his heart. “And I love you with all of that, Ilya. I see you, okay. I know you. I know you and I love you.” he adds and it feels like getting kicked in the chest. Ilya brings his hands up to rest on Shane’s shoulders, but can’t help the way they grip into the muscle like he’s hanging on for dear life.

“We can’t, it won’t, we can’t do this, it can't happen, why would we do this to ourselves?” he stumbles over his words, feeling out of control and off center from the emotional wave he was riding that he didn’t expect from today. He looks up at Shane desperately and his eyes are just as fucked up as his are.

“Ilya - ”

“It hurts, Shane.” he confesses. Out of his mouth before he can control it.

“What does?”

“Not having you.” he sighs and drops his forehead to the top of Shane’s shoulder again. He stays there for a moment, knowing Shane is gearing up to say something, he can tell by the way his jaw clicks and he hums before speaking. One of his large hands comes up Ilya’s back to his jaw, never losing contact with him, and lifts his face up to look him in his eyes.

“You have me, Ilya. Just you. Only you. If you. . . want me.” he pauses and kisses his forehead again. “I don’t know what’s going to happen next. I don’t know what we do from here, or what anyone will think, or when we need to tell people, but I don’t care. I just want you.” he whispers, close to Ilya like it’s just for him to hear. His chin wobbles as he finishes speaking and Ilya can’t not reach out and run a thumb over the crease below his lower lip - he loves it. He missed it. Missed being able to touch it, kiss it.

“I want you more than anything.” he shakes his head and looks at Shane.

“I want *you* more than anything.” Shane echoes and kisses his cheekbone, his temple, his forehead, and tightens his arms around his waist and starts rubbing his back in wide and gentle sweeps. “Please try with me, Ilya. We can’t go on like this.” he shudders and kisses the shell of his ear.

Ilya pulls back slightly to look in his eyes and sees them holding his own, alight with something that looks a lot like hope. Something in it makes him shudder and feel something start to bloom in his chest. Maybe when he retired, and his father was dead, and he was able to get the last of his things from Moscow. . . Why should they suffer in the meantime?

He nods and brings his hands up slowly, as if to not scare Shane, but he sighs when his palms cup his cheeks and his thumbs run under his eyes, pushing away the tears that clung there.

“We don’t try.” he shakes his head and Shane’s breath catches in his throat. “We be together. We don’t have to try to love each other, we have been doing it the whole time.” he adds and Shane exhales sharply and nods his head, new tears falling out of his eyes and onto his skin. “I love you.” he adds and a small sob escapes Shane.

“I love you too. Fuck, I love you so much.” he adds and hugs Ilya tighter until his nose is tucked between his neck and the silk of the shirt he was wearing. It was Ilya’s turn then to shush him warmly and run his hands over his back and squeeze the muscles at the base of his neck, feeling him deflate and relax against him. “I hated tonight.” he whispers.

“Me too. Never again though, yes?” he whispers, hopeful, and Shane nods against his neck.

“No. Never. Just you.” he lifts his head and holds the sides of Ilya’s neck in his hands. “Just you.” he repeats, staring at his mouth, leaning in to press a chaste kiss to his mouth, just to feel the closeness of him near.

They part but bring their foreheads in together, letting their hearts settle and come to terms with everything that had just been said.

“We’re doing this?” Shane asked. Ilya knew his brain was sorting through everything. That he was processing the change and wasn’t asking because he didn’t believe Ilya, but because he needed to be sure. Needing the last checkbox on the list of things to be checked off to be together was handled before his heart could rest easy knowing that Ilya was his and his alone.

“Yes. I am yours. We will do this.” he nods and Shane sighs and brings their mouths back together with slightly more heat, just enough to make it celebratory. Ilya melts into him and feels half of his heart calm knowing that he had Shane again, for good, for real. The other half was doing laps and jumping in joy that Shane loved him. That his Shane loved him too, and that he wanted to be with him. Something that seemed so improbable hours ago now seemed so natural and correct as his mind settled with the fact that they were together.

“I would do anything for you.” Ilya sighs when they part.

“Anything?”

“Anything.”

“Stay tonight.”

“Done.” he nods definitively. Shane seems happy with his response.

“And tomorrow, when you leave I want you to text me when you land in Boston.”

“Done.” he nods again, ignoring the pinch in his chest at the thought of leaving.

“And when you get home I want you to call me. And I want us to make this work. I don’t know how, yet, but we can. I know it. We have to.” Shane adds and his eyes well up. “We have to because I can’t lose you.”

“Fuck, Hollander.” he cries and presses his forehead to his. “I love you.”

“I love you so fucking much.” Shane replies.

And then, with the tilt of his head their lips are pressing together with heat for the first time since Ilya had him in his lap in his own home. Their cheeks are wet and there’s snot on Shane's upper lip, but it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter that they both still have so much to talk about, so much to clarify and map out and plan, they’re back together again for the first time Ilya feels like he can breathe.

Kissing Shane, Ilya decides at that moment (as if he didn’t already know), is his favorite thing in the world. His hands are always on Ilya, unwavering and holding onto him like he needs it to live. The soft skin of his face feels like a balm to any anxiety or pain that Ilya is

holding onto and he's gentle when he pulls at his lips, not that he treats him like a blushing virgin, but he always seems to track the exact pressure and swipe of his tongue in response to Ilya's mouth that has him moaning uncontrollably. He fits with Ilya like they were made to be together and in his heart of hearts he knows without a doubt that they are.

Ilya's blood feels like it is on fire the second that Shane fully presses his body into him and he knows that no one else on planet earth will be able to make him feel this way. He threads his fingers through his hair and Shane melts into him with a groan and he knows what to do.

Quickly, he guides Shane's arms around his neck and reaches down to pick him up by the back of his muscular thighs until they're squeezing around his waist and he's carrying him though the house and upstairs. Shane goes lax in his arm but moves to kiss and bite at the side of his neck.

"Why does your house have so many stairs?" Ilya groans when he sinks his teeth into the tendon on the side of his neck when they're halfway up the staircase.

"Are you saying I'm too heavy?" Shane asks as a joke, but Ilya knows there's a twinge of insecurity under it.

"No, you are perfect. I lift your weight at the gym so I can do this, I just want you under me as soon as possible and stairs are taking too long." he replies and flexes his fingers on his ass in appreciation as Shane huffs a small laugh and resumes kissing his neck.

When they finally make it to Shane's bedroom the lights are dim and Ilya drops him down on the bed where he bounces and looks up at him with his beautifully shining eyes. "You do?" he asks as props himself up on his elbows to watch him undo the buttons on his shirt.

"Of course. It is, how you say, motivating?" he smiles and shrugs his shirt off.

As soon as it's on the floor Shane is sitting up and tugging his sweatshirt off and blessedly has no shirt on underneath. Ilya reaches for his sweats, stopping to kiss the center of his chest and his stomach before pulling them off and throwing them somewhere behind them. Shane

is pawing at his belt when he's hovered over him and undoes it and helps him push his pants out of the way as fast as he can.

Ilya crawls over him when he's naked and hisses when their hard cocks are pressed together between their abs. The air feels lighter between them, less sad, less scared; but it also feels like the first time again. Like the beginning of something new.

"Want you to be close tonight." Shane groans when the skin of their cocks rubs together in the tight space between their abs. It feels warm and is so, so wet with the way Shane's cock leaks near constantly when they rub together like this. "Fuck, please Ilya can't wait."

"So pent up for me, yes?" he asked, not faring much better himself with the way Shane was grabbing and pulling at his ass to keep him closer and slide his length against his own.

"Just need you." he whimpers. "Please." he groans and it almost sounds like a cry, but Ilya decides they've done enough of that for one night.

"Shh, sh, sh, sh. I got you." he kisses his chin before hiking up his leg so that he can reach towards his hole and rub a finger along the rim. Shane shivers and nods. "You want me here, yes?" he asks.

"Yes. I . . . I showered when I got home." he moans as Ilya sucks a nipple into his mouth and groans around it.

"You planned to say 'I love you' and then fuck?" he asks with a smile when he lifts his head to share a warm grin with Shane. He leans over to the nightstand and grabs the lube where he knows Shane keeps it in the back of his drawer and flips it open before lying between his legs again.

"I had a feeling." he smiles and shudders when Ilya presses his hard cock into his legs and starts running a slick finger over his hole. "I missed you. Not the same without you." he moans as Ilya presses his first finger in. Shane is always so responsive, so ready for him the way he seems to suck in the finger and tilt his hips down on it like he was born to do it.

“Fuck, Shane.” he groans at the thought of Shane fingering himself when he was alone and missed Ilya. His own cock leaked onto Shane’s thigh as he started to thrust his finger into him and twist it to warm him up.

“Fuck, Rozy. . .” he moaned and threaded his fingers through his curls and tugged lightly at the root. Ilya echoed his moan and added another finger, watching Shane’s face at the intrusion, only to see his mouth fall open and his head nod, encouraging him.

“So, so, good for me. Best boy for me, my love.” he adds, feeling a new freedom and the expanded vocabulary he had to shower Shane with praise with knowing that he loved him.

Shane moans at the petname and thrusts back onto Ilya’s fingers. “Careful.” he whispers and kisses over his ribs.

Shane shakes his head and groans, “Need you.” he whines and Ilya can only smile against his skin and shake his head.

“Patience, don’t want to hurt you.” he adds, but starts to scissor his fingers to give him something more to be filled with.

Shane just nods and moans again, not fighting back, and Ilya continues to indulge in the way his body responds to his fingers. Shane’s pretty face was flushed down to his chest and it made his freckles stand out more. His chest heaved with deep breaths and his waist tightened and shifted as he moved with Ilya’s hand, finding a flow to meet him halfway.

When he was sure he was ready, Ilya added another finger without announcement. Shane’s body arched and Ilya bit at the skin of his stomach as he fucked them into him, twisting and turning to make sure the ridges of his fingers caught on his prostate and pulling the pretties moan out of his love.

“Fuck, Ilya, I’m good, I’m going to cum. Please fuck me.” he sighs and Ilya places a kiss to the center of his chest, nodding. He grabs the lube again and coats his cock in it, hissing

when the glide of his hand nearly sends him over the edge as he takes in Shane's form and wet hole under him.

"Not going to last long." he moans when the tip of his cock first brushes over Shane's hole.

"Me too. Want it so bad, want you close." he whines and Ilya quickly maneuvers them so they're facing each other on the pillows and tosses Shane's leg over his hip so that he's lined up and they're warped in each other's arms.

"Okay?" he asks and Shane nods, eyes wide on his face.

He pushes in and it feels like his whole world clicks into place. It isn't just about getting him off and fucking Shane, he feels the way Shane welcomes him into his body and when he's fully inside he groans and looks to Shane's eyes to check that he's okay.

His eyes are glassy and he brings up a hand to hold Ilya's face in his palm and nods. "I love you. I love you so much." he moans and Ilya starts to move his hips to press as far inside him as possible.

"I love you. I love you. I love you." Ilya chants as he grinds his pelvis against Shane's ass; thrusting fast and hard, seeming like a terrible option, the space between thrusts when he pulls out causing too much space between them, even though he was still inside Shane's body and nestled in his arms.

He set a steady grind and Shane moaned against his mouth, heavy breathing against each other. Ilya groans, feeling himself slipping as Shane's continuous clenching and pulling on his cock feels like heaven. He breathes fast, trying to ground himself, and Shane must notice because before he can even process what he needs, Shane's hand on his face is splaying out and he's slipping a thumb into his mouth for him to suck on.

Ilya feels himself settle, the edge of anxiety slipping as Shane presses lightly on his tongue. His head is thrown back in pleasure as Ilya is spurred to press harder and faster into him.

They both moan and Ilya gropes and pulls at Shane's ass and holds him as close as possible.

Their cocks are leaking like mad between them and the added simulation makes them hiss in tandem. Shane swipes his thumb through the slick and drool that's collecting on Ilya's mouth and slowly removes his thumb and replaces it with his lips. His hand, slick with Ilya's spit, reaches down to hold himself.

"Fuck." Shane breaks away to curse. Ilya speeds his thrusts so they're consistent and deeper. Shane is clenching and twitching around him and he knows he's close when Shane leans back into to bite at his lower lip. "Gonna cum, want you to, Jesus, Ilya cum in me please, please, please -"

"Shh, it's okay. Fuck, want to see you cum for me, yes?" he nods and Shane nods back before resting his forehead against Ilya. He shudders and clenches down hard on Ilya's cock before coming with a cry between them. The pressure and tension pulls Ilya into orgasm and he melts against Shane when he cums deep inside him.

He feels it from his toes up through the top of his head, the physical and emotional release changing something in him as Shane starts to pet his hair, hold around him never faltering. Before he knows what's happening there's tears in his eyes again and he tilts his head down so Shane doesn't see.

"Hmm, no come here." he guides Ilya's face back to him, holding him tender in his palm again. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Nothing is wrong, everything is right, I - I love you." he shudders and watches Shane's own eyes go glassy. He smiles softly and kisses his forehead and then his lips.

"I love you too. I love you so much, Ilya." he says against his lips so that he feels them as well as hears them.

"I love you, Shane." he replies like a promise. Tears escape their eyes as they continue to grip onto each other and trade kisses and quiet 'I love you' promises between them.

Ilya holds Shane close afterward, one arm wrapped tight around his back, the other cradling the nape of his neck like it's instinct now, like muscle memory written into his bones. Shane is warm and solid against him, breathing slow and real, and it hits Ilya all at once - quiet and devastating - that this is his whole world pressed against his chest.

Not a metaphor, not dramatic, just a simple truth he can't escape anymore. He presses his mouth to Shane's hair, his temple, anywhere he can reach, and accepts it with a strange, aching calm: there is no version of his life that works without this. "You're it for me," he murmurs, voice rough but steady, holding him a little tighter. "I can't live without you, Shane. I don't want to."

Shane shifts in his arms at that, fingers pressing into Ilya's side like he's anchoring himself too. He lifts his head just enough to look at him, eyes soft and a little stunned, like he's been handed something fragile and precious all at once. "Hey," he breathes, brushing his thumb under Ilya's eye, voice unsteady but sure. "You don't have to give up everything for me."

Ilya shakes his head, pressing their foreheads together, breathing him in. "I am not giving up," he says quietly. "I am choosing." His hand slides up Shane's back, slow and reverent, like he's committing the shape of him to memory. "I have lived without many things. I know how to survive. But you. . ." His voice softens, resolute. "You are not something I can survive without. You are something I need."

Shane exhales, something between a laugh and a sob, and folds himself back into Ilya's chest, trusting, full-weight. "Okay," he whispers, like a promise. And Ilya holds him there, steady and unyielding, knowing with absolute certainty that whatever came next, whatever fear waited for them outside this room, he would meet it with Shane in his arms.

A shower comes later, when their legs are finally steady enough to carry them there.

It's quiet in the bathroom except for the rush of water and the low hum of the building settling around them. Shane reaches past Ilya to turn the knob, careful, like he's afraid sudden movements might spook him, might make this feel less real. Steam fills the space almost immediately, curling around the mirror, blurring the sharp edges of everything until it's just heat and water and the two of them pressed close.

They don't talk much at first.

Shane stands behind him, chest to Ilya's back, hands resting at his hips like he's anchoring himself. He washes Ilya's hair gently, methodically, fingers careful against his scalp, and Ilya lets his head tip back slightly, eyes closing as the water runs down his face. It's such a simple thing, but it makes something in his chest ache in a way that's almost unbearable.

This is what it feels like, he thinks. This is what people mean.

When they're clean and wrung out and a little wrinkly, Shane wraps a towel around him without being asked, tugging it snug around his shoulders and pressing a kiss to his cheek like it's the most natural thing in the world. Ilya laughs under his breath, startled by how easy it all feels now, how quickly his body has learned this version of them.

They move to the bedroom still damp, still flushed, climbing into bed like they're testing the weight of the moment. The sheets are cool against overheated skin. Shane lies on his side facing him, one arm draped over Ilya's waist, thumb tracing slow, absent circles there.

Neither of them sleeps.

Ilya stares at the wall for a long moment, listening to Shane's breathing, feeling the steady rise and fall of his chest against his own. His throat tightens out of nowhere, emotion catching him off guard the way it always does; hard, fast, without warning.

"Hey," Shane murmurs, sensing it instantly. "What's wrong?"

Ilya shakes his head, but his eyes burn anyway. He turns his face into Shane's shoulder, fingers curling into the fabric of his hoodie like he needs proof that it's real, that Shane is still here.

"I just. . ." His voice breaks, and he huffs out a wet, embarrassed laugh. "I didn't think... I didn't think I would get this. Not ever."

Shane tightens his hold on him immediately, hand sliding up and down his back in slow, grounding strokes. “You’ve got me,” he says quietly. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Ilya swallows hard. “I know. Thank you,” he whispers, tears slipping free despite himself. “For loving me. I know I am not easy. I know I am. . . a lot.”

Shane pulls back just enough to look at him, forehead pressing to Ilya’s. His eyes are soft, a little shiny, but steady. Certain.

“I know; and I love all of it, Ilya. Loving you is my favorite thing in the world,” he says, like it’s the simplest truth he knows. “It scares the hell out of me, yeah. I don’t know what this looks like tomorrow or next month or ten years from now. But I know I want to do it with you.”

Ilya lets out a shaky breath, something warm and fragile blooming in his chest. “You’re not afraid I’ll ruin it?”

Shane smiles, small and real, and kisses the corner of his mouth. “I’m afraid of a lot of things,” he admits. “But not that. And even if it gets hard, and it will, we’ll stick it out. Together. Okay?”

Ilya nods, pressing closer, fitting himself into the space Shane makes for him like he’s always belonged there. “Okay,” he whispers. “Together.”

Shane kisses his temple, his cheek, his forehead, lingering like he’s memorizing him. Then he tucks Ilya in tighter, chin resting on his hair, arm heavy and warm around his waist.

They lie there, tangled and wide-awake, nerves humming under the surface of everything, but there’s giddiness too, bright and impossible to ignore. The kind that makes Ilya smile into the dark just knowing Shane is here, that this is real, that they chose each other.

Eventually, somewhere between fear and hope, Shane’s breathing evens out.

Ilya stays awake a little longer, listening, holding on, letting himself believe that this, them, might finally be something he's allowed to keep.

End Notes

big kiss on the mouth for comments. thank you for taking the time to read my work. i hope it brought you at least a second of peace and/or disassociation in this crazy world we live in.

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