

twisted reality

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twisted reality

by [Tizniz](#)

Summary

“Do you want that problem to go away?”

Ilya smiles sadly, “It probably would make things easier, wouldn’t it?”

Shane doesn’t know how he keeps his expression neutral. He doesn’t know how the heartbreak doesn’t bloom vividly across his features. His entire chest feels as if it’s caving in on itself. He knew this moment was coming. He knew it was only a matter of time.

That doesn’t make it hurt any less.

Notes

Hello again :)

I started this story in January and probably finished it in February but then just...didn't edit or look at it again until today. No idea why.

Anyways. This one is heavy and angsty. So take care when reading. Tried to tag it accordingly but I honestly suck at tagging. One of my downfalls.

I hope you're all doing well. I personally went through a VERY rough couple of weeks and feel like I'm just clawing my way back to the surface. Thankfully, Spring is upon us and there's sunshine and nice weather. That should help.

I also don't know if I've said this but it's so common to state it and I guess I should make a blanket statement: none of this is AI. I do not use AI. Hell, I don't even know *how* to use AI writers. As Natasha Beddingfield once said, *these words are my own*. (If you don't understand that reference, please do not say so. I feel old enough as is.)

I don't normally ramble on that much in these notes so I'm going to shut up now and let you get to the story.

Okay bye.

Xx

TW: mention of disordered eating (canon compliant), sort of mention of self harm in the sense of Shane taking too hot shower (just mentioning to be safe), and just...Shane isn't in a good headspace.

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

“Do you want that problem to go away?”

Ilya smiles sadly, “It probably would make things easier, wouldn’t it?”

Shane doesn’t know how he keeps his expression neutral. He doesn’t know how the heartbreak doesn’t bloom vividly across his features. His entire chest feels as if it’s caving in on itself. He knew this moment was coming. He knew it was only a matter of time.

That doesn’t make it hurt any less.

“Okay.” Shane whispers and Ilya doesn’t say anything more, simply drops his eyes back to his phone, continuing to scroll on it. Shane stares at him, wills Ilya to look back up at him, tell him no, I don’t want you to go away, but Ilya doesn’t.

Shane’s world crumbles a little more.

Ilya wants him to go away.

Shane gasps awake, reaching for the opposite side of the bed only to be met with cool, untouched sheets. Because Ilya isn’t there.

Not because he had wanted the ‘problem’ to go away, but because he’s playing with Boston somewhere in the south and Shane is in Vancouver. Of course Ilya isn’t going to be here. Of course Shane is alone.

His heart races as the twisted memory replays in his dream. Shane tries to remind himself that that isn’t what happened. His mind is tired but he reaches clumsily for the real memory, the one where Ilya had said with such genuine honesty that he never wanted the problem to go away. Never wanted *Shane* to go away.

Because he loves Shane.

Or, he claims he does.

“Fuck,” Shane sits up, elbows digging into his thighs as he drops his head into his hands, running his fingers through his hair and tugging gently at the strands. *“Fuck.”*

Ilya loves him.

He does love Shane.

He said as much on their call last night, even though they’d only been able to talk for maybe five minutes.

So why is Shane struggling so much to believe it?

He shudders, a chill spreading across his exposed skin, sweat cooling with the blankets having pooled around his waist. Even though the dream had only twisted part of the memory, Shane can easily imagine Ilya telling him to bring him back to the airport. He can hear Ilya saying that he wants to leave. That he actually doesn't want to be here at the cabin any longer and is done with Shane. That instead, Ilya is going to marry Svetlana and live happily ever after with her in Boston.

Shane throws the blankets off of himself as he scrambles for the bathroom of his hotel room, barely making it to the toilet before the dinner he'd eaten earlier makes an abrupt reappearance.

He heaves until there's nothing left and then rests his forehead on the cool porcelain, body shivering and trembling.

Shane wants to call Ilya, ask him to reassure Shane that none of it is true, that Shane's mind is playing mean and cruel tricks. But it's late for Ilya, later than it already is for Shane, and he has a game tomorrow. Besides, he doesn't need Shane bothering him. No, Shane can handle this on his own. It's just a bad dream. And he probably ate something bad which is why he's flushing the toilet and brushing his teeth all over again.

Because none of it is true. Ilya wants him. He wants to stay with Shane. Ilya *loves* Shane.

Until you become too much of a problem. Shane's mind says as he climbs back into bed, wrapping the blankets tightly around him, *And then what?*

Shane closes his eyes and tries to shove that voice aside.

He doesn't sleep the rest of the night.

The dream haunts Shane for days. Starts to bleed into something bordering weeks.

Hayden has noticed the growing dark circles under Shane's eyes, has made subtle hints that Shane can talk to him. But Shane can't.

His mom has noticed too, frowning but not saying anything. She's scheduled less appearances though. And his dad seems even more chipper when he talks to Shane. It's sweet, except Shane can't talk to them either.

Ilya noticing is the worst. They had FaceTimed only two days after the first time the dream had happened and Shane thought he had pretended everything was okay well enough to get away with it. But Ilya questioned if everything was okay at the end of the call, a worried frown on his face. Shane had assured him that things were fine and he was just struggling to sleep well since they were on the road. It felt wrong, lying to Ilya, but Shane reasoned it was

true enough. And Ilya nodded, knowing how Shane sleeps best in his own bed, especially if Ilya is there.

Shane tried to avoid doing any video calls after that, but saying no to Ilya has always been near impossible, and so they had done another one, where Ilya had immediately noticed the exhaustion on Shane's features.

Not that Shane told him the truth. Because how is he supposed to tell Ilya the reason he's not sleeping is because each time he tries, all Shane sees and hears is Ilya calling him a problem and leaving.

It's easier if Shane stays quiet. The dreams will pass. Or, as Shane's mind produces in the middle of the night as he stares at the dark ceiling, they'll come true. Ilya will sign a new contract with Boston, marry Svetlana, and Shane will be on his own again.

Each night the dream feels as if it's becoming more and more of a possibility.

The message from *Lily* stares back at him. A time for when Ilya will be home. A time for when Shane should come over.

Shane has stared at it for so long that his phone has dimmed to lock three times now.

He hasn't responded or moved from where he's sitting on the end of his hotel bed.

He'd been assigned his own room, this trip to play against Boston, which Shane is grateful for because he doesn't know how to pretend in front of Hayden right now. He also doesn't want to be teased by Hayden about 'Boston Lily'.

Shane keeps staring at the text from Lily – Ilya. He doesn't respond. Doesn't move to call a taxi. Simply keeps sitting there.

Because...because Ilya doesn't actually want him there. Maybe for a quick fuck, blow off some steam after the game where honestly neither of them had played great. Montreal had won, 1-0, against Boston. Ilya had tried to chirp Shane each time they met at centre ice, but Shane wouldn't even look him in the eye, giving nothing back to the teasing words coming from Ilya. Those words had turned into ones of slight concern – as much as Ilya could show with a ref right there and them still hidden from the world – as he tried to get Shane to respond. React.

But Shane was focusing on hockey. That was it. Even though he played like crap. His mind was instead on how to fix himself. How to get rid of Ilya's problem for Ilya.

And maybe that's why Shane is sitting here, staring at a now dark phone screen.

Because Ilya said he wanted the problem to go away. That means Shane shouldn't go over.

His reflected face frowns back at him from his phone. No. Ilya...that was the dream. Ilya said *in the dream* that he wanted the problem to go away. That he wanted Shane to go away.

But in real life, Ilya had said...he had said...

Shane's frown deepens.

Which one was it?

Did Ilya want him to stay or go, in reality? The dream felt so real and it's been repeated so many times that Shane honestly doesn't remember which one is true. He can't remember which one actually happened.

The thought of Ilya wanting him to go away hurts Shane, but it also...it makes *sense*. Because Shane is too much. He's annoying and neurotic and too careful. He can't love Ilya loud and proud like Ilya deserves. He keeps forcing Ilya to hide and pretend.

God, no wonder Ilya wants Shane to go away.

Shaking his head, Shane throws the phone onto the bed and rubs his hands across his face. He had showered quickly at the arena but he decides to have another one. Then he can just climb into bed and go to sleep.

Ilya probably sent the message to the wrong person anyways. They're in Boston. Svetlana lives here. That's who Ilya meant to invite over. They'll have fun. And Shane won't be a problem. He won't show up and interrupt. He won't make Ilya play nice or make him politely tell Shane he was wrong and to go back to his hotel.

Shane moves on autopilot as he strips and climbs into the shower, turning the water on almost as hot as it can go. He doesn't feel the water on his skin, even as he watches it turn into a glowing shade of red. The tears blur everything as he stands there, missing Ilya's touch on his skin.

But this is better. Because Shane is a problem and Ilya said he wanted the problem to go away. So Shane is helping. That should make Shane feel *good*. He's being helpful! Making it easier on Ilya!

The tears mix with the water. Shane stands under the water for a long time. The bathroom grows thick with steam. His skin is red enough to burn. He still doesn't feel it.

Eventually he turns the water off and dries himself off roughly, uncaring of the state of his skin. Then he pulls on some clean underwear and climbs into his bed. No, not *his* bed, but the hotel bed that is his for tonight. Alone.

He grabbed his phone before climbing into bed, plugging it in and resting it beside him. He taps at the screen, bringing it to life. Five minutes until the time Ilya had texted that Shane, or

whoever he actually meant to send the message to, should be there.

Svetlana is probably there by now. She wouldn't be weird like Shane and show up at the exact minute. Ilya wouldn't laugh at her for the neurotic tendency. They've probably already fucked once.

Shane slams his eyes shut as his stomach churns and bile threatens to rise up his throat.

No. No. He can't think about this. He won't.

He's a problem. He's fixing the problem. This is okay.

His phone buzzes. Shane opens his eyes, sees a text from *Lily*.

Lily: *Where are you?*

Shane stares at the screen until it goes black. Holds his breath until the count of eighty before accepting that no other message is coming.

Ilya realized he texted the wrong person. Again. He won't send a text to apologize for that. He'd brush Shane off if Shane mentioned it.

The problem for tonight is solved.

Shane checks his alarm, switches his phone onto Do Not Disturb, and closes his eyes.

He needs to sleep. They have an early flight tomorrow.

The missed calls and unanswered texts from *Lily* pile up as days pass. Shane swipes away every notification as it comes in, reminding himself that he's solving the problem Ilya has. He's making Ilya's problem go away.

The dream happens every night.

Shane thinks of it more as a memory than a dream now. Because surely this is what happened.

"Do you want that problem to go away?"

Ilya smiles sadly, "It probably would make things easier, wouldn't it?"

Yes. It would make things easier. Shane is making things easier.

Each morning he wakes up with that hollow sensation in his chest, where his heart should be, and he forces himself to go through the motions. He does his stretches, eats his diet approved food, goes to practice, nods at whatever his team and coach say to him, and then goes home and goes back to sleep where he's forced to relive that horrible moment over and over again.

Shane thought that with time, it wouldn't hurt as much. But each night feels like a fresh stab at his chest. He's half expecting there to be blood pooling on his skin from the knife that sticks into him each night.

He starts to fear going to sleep, because that means having to hear Ilya say that he wants Shane to go away all over again. Except it gets to the point where him being awake doesn't matter anymore. He hears Ilya's voice all the time. Especially when Shane messes up during a practice or game. Because he's not even a good enough hockey player for Ilya to want to play against anymore.

Shane is playing horribly. His coach has threatened to bench him a few times now but no matter what, Shane can't seem to do better.

He doesn't know what to do. It isn't like he can fall out of love with Ilya. He knows this for a fact because he's been trying, to make it easier for them both. But it's impossible. He loves him too much.

And it's because of that love that he's trying to solve Ilya's problem.

After a shitty game played against Boston, Shane slinks back to his apartment to lick his wounds. Mostly that means standing under a scalding shower until his skin is red and threatening to blister from the heat before climbing out and drying off so he can hide away under the blankets in bed.

No one on his team tried to stop him when he left after the game quickly. They all know he played shit. They all know he knows he played shit. Shane didn't need a reminder.

It had been difficult, facing off against Ilya. The other man had been quiet though, not saying a single word to Shane when they met at centre ice. Wouldn't even look at Shane.

Maybe his plan was working then. Maybe Ilya has realized that Shane is giving him an out and he's taking it.

Good.

That should be good.

So why does Shane feel like scratching his skin off and breaking open his chest?

He presses his face into the pillow and tries to not scream or cry or both.

He thinks if he weren't so tired, he probably would.

Just as Shane is about to drift off, there's a thundering knock on his front door. Frowning, Shane props himself up in bed, looking in the direction of his bedroom door. Did he imagine that?

But no, there's the knocking once more.

Shane scrambles out of bed, throwing on a hoodie as he rushes down the stairs and to the door. He has no idea who could be here so late, but it must be urgent if they're making this much noise to get his attention.

He's barely opened the door before a familiar body is bullying his way in, expression as thunderous as the knocking that had been happening.

"Ilya?" Shane gapes, the door swinging closed as the knob slips away from his grip.
"What...?"

"You are ignoring me." Ilya declares, stalking further into the apartment. "I want to know why."

"I..." Shane swallows, follows after Ilya at a much more timid pace. "I wasn't...what are you...what?"

Ilya spins around, hazel eyes blazing with hurt and anger, "What did I do, Shane? I thought we were good! We said *I love you* and now you disappear!"

Shane winds his arms around himself, trying to make his body smaller. "You didn't do anything wrong."

It's me. I'm the problem. I'm fixing it though. I promise.

"Then why?" Ilya's voice shakes a fraction, "Why are you ignoring me?"

"Because I'm fixing things!"

The words seem to echo through the room as Shane turns around, pressing the heels of his palms into his eyesockets. "Fuck. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*."

"Hollander, what...what do you mean?" Ilya asks, "What are you fixing? I did not know anything was broken."

"It's not. You're not. You're fine. Perfect. Wonderful." Shane babbles, keeping his back to Ilya. "It's...It's *me*. I'm the problem. But I'm...I'm fixing it. Okay? I'm going to go away and it will fix the problem."

Ilya's footsteps are timid as he approaches Shane. Fingers curl gently around Shane's wrist, tugging his hands away from his face, "You are problem?"

"Yes." Shane says with a small snuffle, "You said so."

Ilya's face scrunches up in confusion, "When did I say this?"

Shane tugs his wrists out of the loose hold Ilya has on them, wrapping his arms around himself. "At the cottage." Ilya keeps looking at him in confusion. "You said you were going to marry Svetlana! And that I was a problem! And that me going away would make things easier! So I'm going away!"

Ilya's eyes grow wide, "Shane, no."

"Yes!" He snaps back, "You made yourself pretty clear!"

A rush of Russian words fall into the space between them, too quick for Shane to even try and pick apart with his incredibly limited vocabulary that he's barely started to learn, and then Ilya is reaching for him again. Shane stumbles backwards a few steps, dodging the touch, even as Ilya's heartbroken expression shatters him a little more.

"Shane, I did not...that is not what I said!"

"Yes. You did." Shane juts his chin out, even as his bottom lip wobbles, "I remember. You sat across from me—"

"And said I never want that problem to go away." Ilya cuts him off. "I said I never want problem to go away! Why would I want you to go away?!"

Shane stares at him. Because, no. Ilya...Ilya said...

It probably would make things easier, wouldn't it?

Except, Shane can hear the other version that Ilya is talking about. The one where he tells Shane to stay. To never leave. The voices overlap. And Shane can't tell which one is real.

"No." His voice shakes, spreading into the rest of his body. "No...no, you said...I remember..." He scrunches his eyes closed. "You wanted me to go away."

"No, moya lyubov," Ilya whispers, "I did not."

"But...but I *remember*." Shane reaches up to tug at his hair, "I've been reliving the same fucking memory over and over every night!"

"Oh, sweetheart..." Ilya's words fall on an exhale, "That is dream. Very bad dream. Your mind is being mean."

“No. No, no, no.” Shane shakes his head, tugging on his head, “It was...it was *real*. I know... it was...it...”

The voices overlap in his head. The two memories fighting with each other.

Could he have it wrong? But he’d been seeing it every night in his dreams. The *memory* is what he’d been reliving.

Hadn’t it?

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice reaches him from a distance, “I’m going to touch you, okay?”

Maybe he whimpers or nods, he must give some indication that he’s heard Ilya, because familiar calloused fingers are on his arms, sliding up to his fingers, gently untangling them from his hair. Ilya grips tightly to Shane’s hands, preventing them from doing anymore damage.

“Open your eyes, my love.” Ilya murmurs and Shane does as instructed, body unable to deny such a simple command uttered so sweetly. “Can you look at me?”

Shane tries. His eyes flicker up to Ilya’s before dropping away. They settle on the mole on Ilya’s cheek. He gives his head a small shake.

“That is okay. Thank you for trying. Thank you for answering.” Ilya’s thumb is moving in small circles along the pulse point of Shane’s wrist. He focuses on that sensation. Uses it to ground himself. “Do you remember what happened?”

“I...no.” Shane whimpers, “I keep...you told me...you wanted me to go away...”

“No, moya lyubov, that is your mind. Remember what happened. What *really* happened.”

Shane’s breath hitches; he is remembering, isn’t he? He’s not...he can’t be *hallucinating* an entire memory! Ilya...Ilya told him...

“You said you had a problem.” Shane murmurs.

“*Da*.”

“And that...that you...” He trails off, chewing on his bottom lip.

“Remember, Shane. Remember what *actually* happened.”

“I do!” Shane tugs at the hold on his wrists but Ilya tightens his grip, “You told me I was a problem! That it would be easier if I left!”

“No!” Ilya snaps, giving Shane a sharp yank, causing him to stumble forwards into Ilya, those hands now cradling his cheeks, “I told you I never want that problem to go away. Never. You hear me?” Shane’s eyes flicker up to Ilya’s, taking in the fierceness of those hazel eyes he loves so much. God, he’s missed looking at Ilya. But it’s too much to keep eye

contact so he looks at Ilya's nose instead. Ilya won't be mad. He's never demanded Shane force eye contact when he can't. One of the many, many reasons Shane loves him. "Do you hear me, Shane?" Ilya repeats, squishing Shane's cheeks marginally.

"Yes."

"Do you *remember*?"

"I...it's h-hard." Shane admits, "They...I hear both...they...they're fighting."

"Who is fighting, Shane?"

"The memories." Tears slide down Shane's cheeks, trickling over Ilya's hands since he refuses to let go. "I can hear both."

"That is good." Ilya nods, "That means the real one is there, yes?"

"I...I don't know." Shane releases a shaking, shuddering breath. His chest aches. His mind is so scattered. He's so tired. "I don't know what's real, Ilya." He admits, terrified of the truth that has him nearly collapsing to the floor. "I don't *know*."

"Okay. Okay." Ilya presses closer, their foreheads resting together, his breath dancing across Shane's lips. "Then hear me now: I love you. I want you. I want forever with you. I never, ever want you to go away. These last few weeks, with you not being around, not answering me, it has been so hard. I have been so scared."

"I'm sorry." Shane chokes on a sob that claws its way up his throat. "I'm so sorry."

"I know, moya lyubov. But is not your fault. Your mind has been very mean. Making you think things are real when they are not. But I am here, yes?" Ilya tips his chin forward, kissing Shane. And Shane grows desperate at the light kiss, whining as he tries to take more. Ilya gives in, pressing another longer, lingering kiss to his mouth. "I am here. I love you. Hear me?"

"I hear you." Shane gasps, fingers wrapped tightly around Ilya's wrists, "I love you too. Please. Don't go. Don't leave me."

"Never." Ilya swears, releasing Shane's face so he can gather Shane in his arms. And Shane goes easily, willingly, clinging to Ilya, burying his face into Ilya's collarbone as he cries.

Shane doesn't remember being moved from that spot in the entryway where he and Ilya had been to his bedroom, but he suddenly finds himself sitting on the end of the bed, blinking up at Ilya through cry-swollen eyes.

“We will talk more in morning.” Ilya says in that same tender tone he only uses with Shane, “For now, you need sleep.”

“A-and...you’re...” Shane hiccups softly, the words catching in his throat.

“I am staying.” Ilya confirms, cradling Shane’s face as he leans down, kissing him sweetly. Shane tries to not let it become desperate, but his fingers curl into the front of Ilya’s shirt, holding on tightly like he’ll fade away. Shane isn’t fully convinced he won’t. Apparently his mind is capable of creating entirely false memories, so he wouldn’t be surprised if he did suddenly wake up and discover this is a dream. “Is okay, Shane.” Ilya soothes when he breaks the kiss, Shane still clutching to his shirt. “I am staying. I promise. Let me get clothes off and then I get in bed.”

Reluctantly, Shane releases the hold he has on Ilya’s shirt, drawing his hands back, and he nods. Ilya doesn’t reach for his own clothes first though, instead he reaches for the hoodie Shane had pulled on.

“Arms up, sweetheart.” Shane does as instructed, body moving on autopilot. The hoodie is removed from his body and he shivers lightly at the air on his skin. Ilya frowns as he places the clothing on the bed beside Shane, fingers hovering over Shane’s chest. “Why is your skin so red?”

Blinking, Shane looks down, taking in the state of his skin. It’s still quite red and when he lifts a hand and presses a finger into the flushed flesh, it leaves a white spot in his fingers wake.

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice is tight, “What happened?”

“Uhm.” Shane watches the spot slowly fade away, the red replacing the whitened skin. “Shower.”

Ilya curses softly, all in Russian, and then he sighs. “You cannot shower that hot, *kotenok*.”

“Didn’t feel it.” Shane mumbles, pressing against the skin again. Ilya takes hold of his wrist and tugs his hand away. “Sorry.”

“No, I am one who is sorry. Let this go on too long.” Ilya squeezes his wrist and then releases it, “In bed, please.”

Shane nods and turns, crawling up the length of the bed. He can hear clothing rustling, and when he turns back around to climb under the blankets, Ilya is removing his pants, leaving his clothes in a pile at the end of the bed. Shane watches as Ilya rounds the bed and climbs under the blankets alongside him, opening his arms and inviting Shane closer.

“Are you sure...” Shane asks, hesitating. “You don’t...you can...”

“Shane.” Ilya’s silent command is clear and Shane practically collapses into Ilya’s chest, wanting to be close but feeling uncertain about everything. “I told you, I am staying. I *want* to stay. I love you.”

Fresh tears sting Shane's eyes so he closes them and presses closer to Ilya. "Okay."

"Please," Ilya whispers, "Say it back."

"I love you." Shane says, "I do. I love you, Ilya."

Ilya releases a breath, body slumping against the pillows, taking Shane with him. "Thank you."

It should be the other way; Shane should be saying thank you, because Ilya is here. At least, Shane thinks he is. Ilya's skin is warm under Shane's cheek, he can hear the steady heartbeat in his ear, and he can feel fingers moving up and down his spine slowly. So surely, Ilya is here and this is real. Shane's imagination can't be this good.

But the cruel words echo in Shane's mind and he shudders, tucking himself closer, a low whine escaping the base of his throat.

"No," Ilya's words are spoken into his ear, "Ignore what your mind is saying. I am here. I love you. I want you to never go away."

Shane nods, keeping his eyes closed as he tries to relax.

Ilya is here. It's going to be okay.

Everything will be okay.

Shane doesn't dream that night.

It's the first time in *weeks* that he hasn't dreamed. That he hadn't been forced to relive that one moment that apparently he had never actually lived through.

He doesn't wake up feeling better though. He knows one night of a dreamless sleep is not enough for his body to magically recuperate. But waking up with Ilya wrapped around him, a reassuring presence that he doesn't want Shane gone, that does make Shane feel a bit better. Even if his body is heavy and his mind groggy.

"Morning." Ilya mumbles, obviously noticing that Shane's awake. "You sleep okay?"

"Yeah." Shane sighs, pressing in closer to Ilya. "Best I've slept in a long time."

"Good." There's a kiss dropped onto his hairline. "We eat breakfast and then we talk."

Shane's stomach churns uncomfortably, "Breakfast?"

“I will make you toast. Light. Easy. Okay?”

Swallowing, Shane nods. “Okay.”

He knows he needs to eat. He knows his eating has dipped dangerously in the weeks since that first dream. And he knows that Ilya will not rest until Shane eats something. He appreciates that Ilya isn't trying to force anything though; he's compromising, offering to meet Shane in the middle.

Showing that he loves Shane.

They stay in bed for another fifteen or so minutes before Ilya forces them up, the two shuffling into the bathroom and brushing their teeth. Once that morning task has been done, Ilya gathers Shane back into his arms and kisses him. Long, slow, lovingly. It makes something warm spread from the centre of Shane's chest, outwards into his limbs.

He hadn't realized how cold he's been these last few weeks but he's aware now. Ilya seems to have no problem with the way Shane keeps himself cuddled up at his side as they move around the kitchen.

Toast is made for Shane while Ilya cracks a few eggs and scrambles them for himself. There isn't much in Shane's fridge, but eggs are usually a safe staple in there, so Shane tries to squish the guilt at not having more for his boyfriend.

They eat side by side at the table, ankles hooked underneath, Ilya using his thumb to swipe away a crumb from the corner of Shane's mouth, smiling softly at him. They don't talk then, simply sitting and enjoying each other's presence.

Although as they finish and Ilya goes to clean up, Shane starts to wonder one thing.

“Don't you have to leave?” He asks, tugging at his fingers on one hand with the other. “Your team will be flying out if they haven't already.”

Ilya doesn't respond at first, finishing rinsing off their plates and placing them into the drying rack. “I told coach that I had an appointment. That I would be back in a few days.”

Shane frowns, “A few days?”

“Yes.” Ilya dries his hands on a towel and tosses it onto the counter, walking over to where Shane is still sitting. “I do not care about hockey as much as I care about you.” He stops in front of Shane, who's tilted his head back to look up at Ilya. “And you need me much more than my team needs me.”

“Ilya...”

Hands cup Shane's face, hazel eyes peer down at him, “I am not leaving, Shane. I am here because you need me. And I love you. And I want to make things better.” Shane's eyes blur with tears. Ilya leans down and kisses him softly. “Let's go to couch and talk there.”

“Okay.” Shane allows himself to be pulled up from the chair, Ilya’s fingers slotting into the empty space between his own, led over to the couch.

The two curl up together, Ilya’s arms wrapping around Shane, squeezing tightly until Shane’s body goes slack against Ilya’s, a long breath escaping him.

“There we go.” Ilya murmurs, clearly satisfied about the results. He presses another kiss to the top of Shane’s head. “Now, when you are ready, tell me what has been going on.”

Shane doesn’t say anything for nearly ten minutes. He tries a few times, but the words refuse to come out, sticking and clogging his throat. Ilya sits there patiently the entire time, hand rubbing up and down Shane’s spine slowly, his touch comforting.

It does allow Shane to also sort through everything in his mind though. He picks apart the dreams and differentiates them from the reality that trickles back into his memories.

He remembers now, how Ilya had stared at him with this intensity, stating that he never wanted his ‘problem’ to ever go away. He never wanted Shane to ever go away.

The complete opposite of the what Shane’s mind had conjured up.

Guilt tries to seep into Shane’s veins – he had been ignoring Ilya because of all of this, hurting both of them too – but he refuses to let it stick. He knows Ilya certainly won’t allow him to feel guilty either. It isn’t as if Shane had purposely decided that Ilya said these cruel things and had wanted to turn away from Shane. And there’s years of proof showing how Ilya would not do that. Proof of how much he loves Shane.

“I knew it was a dream the first time.” Shane whispers when the words finally cooperate, fingers curled into the soft fabric of Ilya’s shirt. “I woke up in Vancouver and I reached for you, but you weren’t there.” Ilya hums, acknowledging that he’s heard Shane, but letting him continue without interruption. “I hated how it made me feel but I was sitting there, telling myself that it wasn’t real. I was so tired though and my mind...” He shakes his head. “I don’t know if I was fully awake? Maybe that’s why it got so twisted?”

He sighs, relaxing further into Ilya’s embrace. The hollowness and chill that had taken up residence in his body for weeks is almost entirely gone. Replaced by the love and warmth of Ilya.

“Then it just...kept happening? I kept dreaming it over and over.” Shane relays, “I would be awake in the middle of the day and close my eyes and the moment was there behind my eyelids. It became so constant that it became real. I couldn’t remember anything different. I couldn’t remember what you had actually said.”

Ilya’s hand pauses in the middle of Shane’s back, palm pressing closer, but he’s still quiet.

“I was afraid to sleep.” Shane admits. “Because I didn’t want to relive it. And because I’d convinced myself it was real, I thought...I thought I was *helping*. In the dream, you told me

that the problem going away would make things *easier*.”

“No,” The word seems to escape Ilya without his permission, “Shane, no. You make things easier. Having you gone? Life would be too difficult.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It is okay. Not your fault.”

Shane takes a breath, and then keeps going. “I was miserable without you. I felt like a piece of me was missing. But I was so convinced that this is what you wanted. So I kept you away. Everything felt so out of control.”

“Which is why you have not been eating. Which is why you have too hot showers.”

Shane snuffles and nods. “I could control those.”

“Oh, sweetheart...”

Shane pushes himself up, Ilya loosening his hold and allowing him to do so, until Shane can look Ilya in the eyes, hating the tears shimmering over the hazel colour. “I’m sorry, Ilya. I’m so sorry. If I...I should have just *talked* to you. But I...I’m *sorry*.”

“I know, Shane.” Ilya lifts a hand, wiping away the tears on Shane’s cheeks. “I knew something was wrong. Because you do not ignore me. Not like this. And I watched you...you seemed to be fading. I did not like.”

“I don’t want to go away.” Shane rushes out, “I never want to go away. Even if I *am* a problem. Please, don’t make me leave.”

Ilya’s eyes widen and then Shane is being pulled back in, arms wrapped tightly around him, “I am *never* making you go. And never letting you leave. Because you are not problem, Shane. You are my everything.”

“I love you.” Shane sobs, clutching onto Ilya. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too. *Ya tebya lyublyu*.”

And somehow, it’s hearing Ilya say those three Russians words that has the last piece of Shane connected to the doubts that had formed dissipating, resting with the knowledge that he’ll be safe in Ilya’s arms.

End Notes

love you.

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