

I Was Sick of Me

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I Was Sick of Me

by [Sweettree](#)

Summary

You are a traitor, you lied to all of them.

To have teammates question him?

To have years of loyalty erased in a single night?

You are a fucking liar.

Something twisted violently inside his chest.

The first sob escaped before he realized he was crying.

His vision blurred instantly.

"No."

His hands began shaking.

"No."

The container slipped.

He caught it.

Stared at it.

The stupid fucking chicken.

The stupid fucking rice.

The stupid fucking vegetables.

Or a canon divergence after Shane trips.

It was for nothing.

Notes

This came to me as I was laying in my bed. I felt almost possessed. What I do is lay there and imagine it. I essentially write and watch this story play out as a movie in my mind. I mumble lines to really convey to myself the emotional energy behind it so it can be translated back internally. At the end the story had come together perfectly with dialog, placing, and description. I knew what they were wearing and how they looked when they were talking. I visualize all of it so I can write it. Weird? Maybe but its how I write things like this.

Chapter 1

The game had ended less than an hour ago. The mistake had happened in less than a second. A tangle of skates. A stumble. An opportunity. Ilya had taken it because of course he had. Because he was Ilya. Because it was the playoffs.

Because that's what hockey players did.

And now half the league apparently believed Shane had handed him the game.

The same teammates who had celebrated with him. The same organization he'd sacrificed for. The same fans he'd devoted years of his life to.

He climbed into his car and shut the door.

The silence rang in his ears.

For several moments he sat motionless with his hands on the steering wheel.

His phone lit up once more.

Mom.

He answered immediately.

"Hi."

Her voice was soft.

"Hey baby."

The single phrase nearly broke him.

"How are you doing?"

Shane laughed weakly. "I'm great."

"You sound terrible."

For several seconds neither spoke.

Then Yuna sighed. "Shane."

His throat tightened. "I don't know what to do."

"Oh, sweetheart."

His eyes burned.

He pressed a hand over them.

"It wasn't even my fault."

"I know."

"They think I threw the game."

The first tear slipped free.

Then another.

"I worked so hard." His voice broke completely.

"I gave them everything.."

For a few moments he cried.

Not loudly. That was never something Shane did in public.

Just small, wounded sounds escaping him while Yuna listened.

Eventually his breathing steadied.

The tears slowed.

The pain remained.

Then something strange happened.

It simply...

Stopped.

Like someone had reached into his head and flipped a switch.

The grief vanished.

The panic vanished.

The humiliation vanished.

His face relaxed.

His thoughts disappeared.

Yuna was still talking.

He listened without processing any of it.

"Honey?"

"Yeah."

"You okay?"

"Yeah."

His voice sounded distant.

Even to himself.

"Do you want me and dad to come over?"

"No."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

Another pause. "Call me if you need anything."

"I will."

After hanging up he stared through the windshield.

Nothing moved inside him.

Nothing at all.

A few minutes later he started the car.

And drove home.

The house was dark.

Exactly as he'd left it.

Shane locked the door behind him.

Dropped his keys in their usual spot on the mahogany shelving unit he and Ilya got after the broke the original because Ilya insisted on sitting Shane on it while attacking his face during a particularly long stretch of separation.

Removed his shoes and placed them next to the god awful orange slides Ilya had left last time he was there.

Walked upstairs to the bed he and Ilya had shared so many times.

Showered next to Ilya's curl shampoo.

Changed into Ilya's shirt and a pair of pajama pants.

Every action unfolded automatically.

No awareness beyond the next movement.

When he finished he went downstairs.

The kitchen lights came on.

The counters gleamed.

Everything sat exactly where it belonged.

Orderly and predictable.

Unlike hockey.

Unlike people.

His phone began buzzing again.

Bzzt

He ignored it.

Bzzt

Bzzt

Bzzt

Bzzt

The constant vibration echoed across the countertop.

He looked at it.

The screen glowed with notifications.

The world demanding access to him.

Shane stared for several seconds.

Then calmly picked up the phone.

Walked to the garbage can.

Dropped it inside.

The buzzing became muffled beneath discarded paper towels and food packaging.

Problem solved.

He returned to the counter.

Opened the refrigerator.

Removed several meal-prep containers.

Perfectly portioned carefully measured food.

Prepared days ago in an effort to distract himself from-

He placed a pan on the stove.

Turned on the burner.

Reached for the oil.

Then froze.

The meal-prep container sat in his hands.

Cold plastic against his fingers.

Chicken.

Rice.

Vegetables.

His stomach turned.

Suddenly he remembered.

The diet.

God.

The fucking diet.

Weeks of it.

Months.

Every calorie measured.

Every craving ignored.

Every temptation denied.

He'd spent entire road trips fantasizing about cupcakes.

Dreaming about fresh bread.

Yearning for pasta.

For burgers.

For anything that wasn't optimized and portioned and planned.

He'd done it because he wanted every possible advantage.

Because he wanted to be better.

Faster.

Stronger.

Because championships mattered.

Because the team mattered.

Because being perfect mattered.

And for what?

For those assholes you could never impress.

His breathing changed.

The numbness cracked.

For what?

To get accused of throwing a playoff game?

To have fans call him a traitor?

You are a traitor, you lied to all of them.

To have teammates question him?

To have years of loyalty erased in a single night?

You are a fucking liar.

Something twisted violently inside his chest.

The first sob escaped before he realized he was crying.

His vision blurred instantly.

"No."

His hands began shaking.

"No."

The container slipped.

He caught it.

Stared at it.

The stupid fucking chicken.

The stupid fucking rice.

The stupid fucking *vegetables*.

It was for nothing.

With a wordless cry he hurled the container across the kitchen.

It exploded against the wall.

Rice sprayed everywhere.

Chicken bounced across the floor.

Sauce dripped down white paint.

Shane stared at the mess.

Breathing hard.

Then another sob tore from his throat and everything erupted.

He yanked open the refrigerator.

Food flew.

OUT.

Containers crashed.

USELESS.

Vegetables scattered across the floor.

IT'S ALL FUCKING USLESS NOW.

A bottle shattered.

Something sticky splashed his socks.

He didn't care.

Years of discipline evaporated.

USELESS.

Years of control vanished.

He grabbed whatever his hands touched and threw it.

The crash of breaking glass echoed through the house.

"Fuck!"

Another object flew.

"Fuck them!"

Something splattered against a cabinet.

"WHY!" His voice cracked.

"WHY CAN'T I DO IT!"

A carton burst against the wall.

"I give them everything and I still-I still can't..." Tears streamed down his face. "What is wrong with me..what can I do.."

"WHAT CAN I FUCKING DO?!"

But he knew what they wanted him to do.

They wanted him to die sad and alone. For him to kill them desire in him to be loved. Then they wanted him to unlove the one man who made him feel like nothing was wrong with him.

But there was something wrong him him.

He just thought if he was good enough they could forgive him and ignore it.

Ignore that he gets pleasure from having dick in his ass.

Ignore that he spoke with too flat of an affect.

Ignore that he did not like looking them in the eye all the time.

Ignore that he was a-

His chest hurt.

His lungs burned.

Still he kept throwing.

Kept screaming.

Kept breaking.

Because if he stopped he would have to feel everything.

And feeling everything might kill him.

Maybe that's what I need.

Eventually there was nothing left to throw.

The kitchen looked like a disaster zone.

Food everywhere.

Spilled liquids.

Ruined cabinets.

Shane stood in the center of it.

Sobbing.

Shaking.

Completely out of breath.

Then his gaze landed on the hallway.

The office.

His office.

Without thinking he stumbled toward it.

The room was a shrine, essentially.

Team photos.

Signed jerseys.

Awards.

Framed newspaper clippings.

Achievements.

Proof of everything he'd given.

Proof of everything he'd sacrificed.

For a long moment he stared.

Then he ripped the first frame off the wall.

The glass shattered on impact.

Another followed.

Then another.

Photos scattered.

Awards toppled.

A framed jersey crashed to the floor.

The destruction felt terrible.

The destruction felt *wonderful*.

He couldn't tell the difference anymore.

USELESS.

Tears dripped from his chin as he tore down years of memories.

Every picture felt like a lie.

USELESS.

Every accomplishment felt hollow.

USELESS.

Every trophy seemed ridiculous.

What was the point?

What had any of it accomplished?

Eventually he grabbed a glass award from a shelf.

The award crashed to the hardwood floor.

Shattering instantly.

The sound echoed through the room.

Shane froze.

The broken pieces glittered beneath the light.

For several moments he simply stared.

Then slowly he knelt.

His sobs had quieted.

Not because he felt better.

Because he was exhausted.

The shattered glass reflected fragments of his face.

I am a useless liar.

Carefully he began picking up pieces around the room.

One at a time.

Dropping them into the trash can.

His tears fell continuously.

Tiny drops splashing onto the broken shards.

When the floor was finally clean he sat back on his heels.

Years of achievement reduced to fragments.

Gone.

His chest tightened again.

But there was no energy left for another explosion.

Only emptiness.

Only exhaustion.

Only grief.

He wiped his eyes.

Stood.

And looked around the ruined office.

The walls appeared strangely bare.

The room felt larger.

Colder.

Lonelier.

His gaze drifted toward the desk.

The space underneath caught his attention.

Without really deciding to do it, he lowered himself to the floor.

Then crawled beneath it.

He curled onto his side.

Pulled his knees toward his chest.

Folded his arms against himself.

The metal surrounded him.

Pressed gently against his knees.

His feet.

His arm as it cradled his head.

The sensation was immediate.

Nothing could get him here.

It was dark and safe and quiet.

Like the desk was holding him together.

Like it could stop him from coming apart any further.

Like he didn't exist and therefore, neither did his problems.

Shane closed his eyes.

The compression eased something.

Not the sadness.

Not the betrayal.

Just the unbearable feeling of being too large for his own skin.

Too exposed.

Too vulnerable.

Under the desk he felt smaller.

The way he sometimes had as a child when emotions became too overwhelming.

He hadn't thought about that in years.

The realization drifted through him and disappeared.

His breathing slowed.

The tears stopped.

The office remained silent around him.

No phone buzzing.

No reporters.

No teammates.

No fans.

No expectations.

Just darkness beneath a metal desk.

His body gradually loosened.

The shaking faded.

The pressure in his chest eased.

His mind retreated somewhere distant where nothing could touch him.

The blankness returned like a heavy blanket settling over every sharp edge.

The grief remained somewhere outside it.

Waiting.

But for a little while he couldn't reach it.

And it couldn't reach him.

Shane lay curled beneath the desk as the ruined house sat around him.

Food drying on kitchen walls.

Broken memories scattered across office floors.

Glass resting in garbage bins.

Evidence of everything he could no longer contain.

Yet beneath the desk there was only stillness.

His face relaxed.

His breathing steadied.

His eyes remained closed.

And eventually he became so quiet that the house itself seemed to forget he was there.

The Centaurs' locker room was chaos.

Music blasted from a speaker Dykstra had balanced on top of a stall. Equipment lay everywhere. Players shouted over one another, laughing, celebrating, reliving every shift from the game that had just sent them one step closer to the championship.

Ilya should have been happy.

He should have been standing on a bench screaming with the rest of them.

Instead, he sat in front of his locker staring at his phone.

He had already checked it three times in the last ten minutes.

No message from Shane.

Which wasn't unusual.

Not after a playoff loss.

Still.

Something felt wrong.

"Ilya!"

Troy Barrett appeared beside him with two sports drinks.

"You look miserable my guy."

Ilya rolled his eyes.

Before Ilya could chirp back, his phone started ringing.

Yuna.

His stomach immediately dropped.

He answered on the first ring.

"Yuna?"

"Hi, Ilya."

Her voice sounded strained.

Every muscle in his body tightened.

"What's wrong?"

"Have you spoken to Shane?"

"No. He isn't answering."

Ilya sat up straighter.

"What?"

"We talked earlier."

Now David's voice joined the call.

"He sounded...upset."

Very upset, David didn't say.

But Ilya heard it anyway.

"We've been calling for almost an hour."

Then David. "We've texted."

"Nothing."

The locker room suddenly felt far too loud.

Ilya stood. "Maybe he fell asleep."

Even as he said it he didn't believe it.

Yuna didn't answer immediately and that terrified him.

Because Yuna was usually the calm one.

The rational one.

The one who could talk Shane down from anything.

"I don't think he fell asleep Honey..."

Ilya was already moving.

Crossing the locker room.

"I call him."

"Please."

The call ended.

Immediately Ilya hit Shane's contact.

Ring.

Ring.

Ring.

Voicemail.

He called again.

Nothing.

Again.

Nothing.

Again.

Nothing.

His chest tightened.

Twenty seconds later he started texting.

Where are you?

Call me.

Baby.

Please answer.

Are you okay?

Shane.

Answer your phone.

I love you.

Please.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

The messages showed delivered.

No response.

No typing bubble.

No read receipt.

Nothing..

"Ilya."

He looked up.

Bood was standing nearby.

Concern replacing his earlier smile.

"What happened man?"

Ilya swallowed.

"Shane is not answering."

Zane frowned. "Maybe he's asleep...after that game I would be, the guy was a beast."

"His parents cannot reach him." The words came out too fast.

"They call me. Nobody can reach him." A knot formed in Ilya's stomach.

The kind that told him something was very wrong.

The kind he had felt in a much smaller stomach, many years ago.

He called again.

Twenty messages became twenty-five.

Still nothing.

His hands started shaking.

"Hey." Zane gently took the phone from him. "Look at me."

Ilya did.

"You don't know what's happening."

His voice cracked. "No, something is wrong."

Because Shane always answered eventually.

Always.

Even if it was only a single text.

Busy.

Later.

Love you.

Something.

There was always something.

This silence felt different.

"I need to get to him."

"You will."

"The bus."

The realization hit him again.

The team bus.

They'd traveled together.

His car wasn't here.

Neither was Shane.

Neither was anybody who could help.

For one horrible second he felt trapped.

Then he remembered.

Pike.

Immediately he called.

The phone rang twice.

"What's up Rozanov?"

"Can you go to Shane's house?"

Hayden's tone changed instantly.

"What happened to him?"

"I don't know." And hearing himself say it made everything worse.

"I don't know, Hayden..."

The silence on the other end stretched.

"We're going."

"Call me when you get there."

"We will."

The call ended.

Ilya stared at the screen.

The longest 43 minutes of his life began.

Hayden knew something was wrong the moment they pulled into the driveway.

The house was dark.

Not unusual, the guy loved mood lighting.

But Shane's car sat crooked.

One tire half over the edge of the driveway.

That wasn't Shane.

Shane parked perfectly.

Always.

Jackie noticed too.

Her expression immediately tightened. "Oh fuck...."

They hurried to the front door.

Hayden knocked.

No answer.

He tried the handle.

Unlocked.

The door swung open.

The smell hit first.

Jackie froze.

"What the fuck happened?"

Hayden stepped inside.

Then stopped. "Oh my God..."

The kitchen looked like a bomb had gone off.

Food covered the walls.

Broken glass glittered across the floor.

Cabinet doors hung open.

Containers lay shattered everywhere.

For several seconds neither moved.

The destruction was unbelievable.

This wasn't Shane.

Nothing about this was Shane.

Jackie grabbed Hayden's arm.

"I will never, I mean never forgive you for letting Shane walk out of that locker room Hayden Jeffery Pike. God, I could punch you right now."

"I know Jacks. I-I'm a fucking asshole." He said as he looked at the walls.

"Look."

The office.

Hayden's stomach dropped.

"Shane?" He called as he and his wife moved down the hallway and into the room.

No answer.

He moved through the wreckage.

"Shane!"

Still nothing.

Then Jackie gasped. "Hayden."

He turned.

She was staring beneath the desk.

And suddenly he saw him.

A shape curled into itself.

"Jesus."

Hayden rushed forward.

"Shane."

No response.

"Shane."

Nothing.

Then he finally noticed the tiny movement.

Breathing.

Thank God.

Relief hit so hard Hayden nearly sat down.

"Hey."

Still nothing.

"Buddy."

No answer.

Jackie crouched beside him trying to miss the tiny pieces of glass.

Gentler.

"Shane?"

A slight flinch.

That was all.

But it was something.

"We're here."

Nothing.

"We're not leaving." Jackie said calmly. She sounded so sweet and beautiful Hayden could have kissed her if she wasn't so fucking mad at him right then.

Still nothing from Shane.

Hayden immediately pulled out his phone to call Ilya.

"Hayden?" Ilya said from the other end.

"We found him."

The relief on the other end sounded painful.

"Спасибо, мама."

"He's under his desk."

Silence.

"What?"

"He won't answer."

Ilya stopped breathing.

Hayden could practically hear it.

"What do you mean he won't answer?"

"I mean he won't answer."

Jackie was still speaking softly.

Still getting no response.

"Can you get him out?"

Hayden looked at the narrow space.

The way Shane had folded himself into it.

The rigid posture.

The complete silence.

"I'll try."

It turned out to be a mistake.

"Shane."

Hayden crouched.

Reached carefully.

"Come on."

Nothing.

A hand touched Shane's shoulder.

Immediately everything changed.

The reaction was instantaneous.

Shane jerked violently.

Like he'd been electrocuted.

"No..."

The word came out small.

Hayden tried again.

"Come on, buddy." Hayden tried to yank him out with two hands on his shoulder.

Shane's entire body seized.

A sob tore from his chest.

Then suddenly he was shaking so hard Hayden pulled back in alarm.

"Okay."

Jackie immediately intervened.

"Back up."

Hayden let go.

The moment the pressure disappeared Shane brought his fists up to his face and began to bang on it in sickening thuds.

Sobs ripping through him.

"Go! 'MSorry okay!"

Jackie looked horrified.

Hayden felt sick.

The phone was still connected.

Still carrying every sound.

And then they heard Ilya.

"Ilya?"

No answer.

Only breathing.

Broken breathing.

The Uber felt impossibly slow.

Traffic lights were evil.

Every car in front of them was evil.

The entire city was evil.

Ilya sat forward so far he was practically in the driver's lap.

Beside him Zane remained calm.

Or at least pretended to.

"He's alive."

Ilya nodded.

Then shook his head.

Then nodded again.

His eyes were wet.

His hands wouldn't stop trembling.

Hayden's voice crackled through the phone.

"He got worse when I touched him."

Ilya closed his eyes.

Of course he did.

Shane hated being touched when overwhelmed.

Not by strangers.

Not unexpectedly.

Not when emotions got too big.

He should have told Hayden.

He should have—

No.

No.

That wasn't fair.

Nobody knew.

Nobody could have known.

"Ilya?"

Jackie's voice now.

"We think he can hear us."

The image destroyed him.

Shane curled beneath a desk.

Thinking nobody wanted him.

Thinking nobody loved him.

After everything.

After all these years.

"I need to talk to him."

"Okay."

Then:

"Shane?"

"I know you can hear me."

More sobbing.

"I love you Shane.."

The crying immediately intensified.

"Oh мой милый мальчик." Ilya's voice whisperd.

"I love you."

Ilya's voice cracked. "I love you so much."

A sound came from beneath the desk.

The first response.

"...sorry."

Everyone froze.

Jackie looked at Hayden.

Hayden looked at Jackie.

The phone nearly slipped from Ilya's hands.

"Shane?"

"...sorry."

Another sob. "Sorry."

"No."

Ilya was crying openly now.

"No, don't apologize."

But Shane kept going.

The same words.

Over and over.

Like a prayer.

Like a punishment.

"Sorry."

"Sorry."

"Sorry."

"Shane."

"Go away."

The words were muffled.

"Please."

His voice cracked.

"Go away."

"No."

"Leave me alone."

Another sob.

"I can't."

Then came a sharp sound.

Jackie frowned.

"What was that?"

Hayden immediately leaned closer.

"Shane."

A hand.

Against his own face.

"Hey."

Jackie moved closer. "Sweetheart, don't start again."

"Sorry."

Ilya made a sound that didn't even sound human.

"Please stop Shanyushka. Please."

"Sorry."

"Shane..."

"Sorry."

Hayden quickly switched the call to speaker.

Maybe hearing Ilya more clearly would help.

Instead Shane's distress exploded.

The crying became louder.

More frantic.

More desperate.

"No."

He grabbed his hair.

As if trying to keep himself together.

"Shane."

Ilya was openly sobbing now.

"I'm coming."

No response.

"I'm coming."

"Don't."

The word shattered him.

"I don't want you to see."

The entire Uber went silent.

Even the driver looked devastated.

Because everyone understood.

Shane thought he was broken.

And he didn't want Ilya seeing it.

"Baby."

"I ruined everything."

"No."

"I ruined everything."

"No Shane."

"I ruined everything."

The words wouldn't stop.

Like he couldn't hear them.

Like he was trapped inside his own head.

Zane wrapped an arm around Ilya's shoulders.

Grounding him.

Keeping him upright.

Because otherwise he might have collapsed.

Eventually Ilya couldn't do it anymore.

Couldn't listen.

Couldn't hear Shane crying.

Couldn't hear him apologizing for existing.

His hand shook as he lowered the phone.

"I can't."

Nobody blamed him.

Not even Hayden.

"We've got him."

The call ended.

And Ilya cried into his hands.

Several minutes later Zane's phone rang.

He answered.

"Harris?"

His expression darkened.

"Troy's with you?"

More silence.

"You've got to be kidding me."

Ilya looked up.

Immediately alarmed.

"What?"

Zane hesitated.

Tried to think of a way not to say it.

"The media."

Of course.

The fucking media.

"The replay is everywhere."

Ilya felt cold.

"Harris says people think Shane did it on purpose."

For a moment the world stopped.

Then rage replaced everything.

"What?"

"People are saying he threw the game."

"No."

The word came out deadly.

"No!"

"It's all over social media."

Troy's voice appeared through the speaker.

"They're tearing him apart. His own teammates are liking hate posts."

Ilya stared out the window.

Unable to breathe.

Unable to think.

Unable to process how cruel people could be.

Shane had given everything.

And now strangers who knew nothing about him were destroying him because they needed someone to blame.

The thought made him sick.

And suddenly he understood.

At least a little.

Understood what Shane must have seen.

What Shane must have read.

What Shane must have felt.

The accusations.

The betrayal.

The hatred.

All of it landing on top of a playoff loss.

Landing on top of years of pressure.

Years of secrecy.

Years of trying to be perfect.

Ilya pressed his hands against his face.

And cried again.

Not because Shane was too weak to handle it.

But because nobody should have had to carry that much alone.

The driver glanced into the rearview mirror.

Then quietly said:

"I can get there faster."

Ilya looked up.

"Please."

The driver nodded.

And pressed harder on the accelerator.

Streetlights blurred.

Buildings streaked past.

Every second felt unbearable.

Every minute felt impossible.

Shane was waiting.

Curled beneath a desk.

Convinced he was worthless.

Convinced nobody wanted him.

And Ilya needed to get there.

Needed to hold him.

Needed to tell him the truth.

That he wasn't a failure.

Wasn't broken.

Wasn't worthless.

That he was loved.

Desperately.

Completely.

Forever.

The city rushed by outside the windows.

And for the first time since Yuna's call, Ilya prayed.

Not for a championship.

Not for hockey.

Not for himself.

Just for enough time.

Enough time to reach Shane before the darkness inside him convinced him of something that wasn't true.

Enough time to get home.

Enough time to bring him back.

Chapter 2

The front door slammed open so hard it rattled the walls.

"Shane!" Ilya's voice echoed through the ruined house.

Hayden stood immediately.

The relief on his face was almost comical.

"Thank God."

Ilya barely looked at him.

Barely looked at Jackie.

Barely looked at anyone.

His gaze locked onto the office doorway.

Then the destruction inside.

His breath caught.

All of Shane's trophies and work, scattered on the floor.

It felt like walking into someone's chest and finding all the organs scattered across the floor.

"Oh, baby..."

The words escaped before he could stop them.

Under the desk, Shane flinched.

His shoulder hit the edge of the desk a bit.

Ilya dropped to his knees immediately.

Not close enough to touch.

He knew better.

"Hey..."

Nothing.

Shane didn't move.

Didn't open his eyes.

Didn't acknowledge him.

Only continued breathing in small shallow breaths.

"I came."

Silence from his fiancé.

"I told you I was coming. I am here.."

For a horrible second panic threatened to overwhelm him.

What if Shane couldn't hear him?

What if he was gone somewhere unreachable?

What if—

Then Shane whispered:

"...don't."

The voice shattered something inside him.

"Don't what?"

"Look at me."

Ilya closed his eyes.

There it was.

The shame.

The same shame he'd heard through the phone.

The same shame Shane had carried for years.

Like loving him was somehow something unforgivable.

Slowly Ilya sat down on the floor cross-legged.

Ignoring the glass, ignoring the ruined office.

Ignoring everything except the man beneath the desk.

"I am going to tell you something."

Nothing.

"You do not have to answer." He prayed his voice was calm.

"You do not even have to listen."

His voice shook.

"But I am saying it anyway."

Shane curled tighter.

As if bracing for impact.

"I don't care about the game."

A tiny tremor passed through Shane's shoulders.

"I don't care about social media."

Another tremor.

"I don't care about the playoffs." He leaned in a bit more.

"I care about you."

The room became very quiet.

Even Hayden stopped moving.

Because everyone understood this wasn't really about hockey anymore.

Hadn't been for a long time.

"I care if you eat."

Ilya swallowed. "I care if you sleep."

His eyes burned.

"I care if you answer your mother's phone calls."

A tiny laugh escaped Jackie despite herself.

It vanished almost immediately.

"I care if you yell at me for leaving towels on the floor." His voice was becoming harsh and desperate.

"I care if you steal all the blankets."

"I care if you pretend you don't like cuddling even though you absolutely do. No matter if it is waste of time."

A sound.

A broken exhale.

Ilya grabbed onto it immediately.

"You know what I thought when Hayden called me?"

"I thought maybe you were dead."

The honesty slipped out before he could stop it.

The room froze.

And beneath the desk Shane finally opened his eyes.

Ilya couldn't see them but he knew, he just knew.

"I thought maybe I lost you."

Shane started to turn his head but stopped after barely an inch of movement.

Because apparently even now he couldn't bear being seen.

"Ilya..." His voice cracked.

"I know."

"No."

The word came out harsher than intended.

"No, you don't."

Instant regret punched through Shane.

He softened immediately. "You don't know."

The tears returned.

"I don't care if you cost them every game for the rest of your career."

Shane shook his head.

"I don't."

Another shake.

"I don't care Shane."

The tears finally spilled. "I do."

The first real sentence he'd spoken.

"I know."

Shane covered his face. "I ruined everything."

"No."

"I did, i'm a fucking-god..i'm a useless liar."

"No."

"Ilya—"

"No." The force behind the word startled everyone.

Including Ilya.

He leaned forward.

Not touching.

But close enough now that Shane could see his shadow clearly.

"You made a mistake."

"It cost—"

"A mistake." His voice shook.

"You are only human Shane. My human..."

Shane looked like he'd been slapped.

Because somewhere inside him those two things had become the same.

A bad play.

A bad person.

A playoff loss.

A worthless man.

The distinction had vanished.

And Ilya could see it.

Could see exactly how much damage had been done.

Years of believing perfection was the price of acceptance.

Years of believing mistakes made people leave.

"Oh, sweetheart." Yuna's voice.

From the doorway.

Everyone turned.

She and David stood there.

They must have arrived only moments ago.

Neither had made a sound.

Now Yuna crossed the room slowly.

When Shane heard her his face crumpled.

"Mom..."

She is seeing everything I've done.

She is disgusted by me.

She is horrified by who she raised.

She has come to scold me for being too reckless.

For disappointing her and everyone else.

Dad can't even look at me probably.

I look so weak.

I'll never be as strong as she is.

I'm not good.

I'm not enough.

She hates me now.

There is no reason for her to love me and put up with me without hockey.

I am useless.

A sob ripped out of him.

Yuna dropped to the floor.

Just sitting beside the desk.

Tapping the side of it with her nail to soothe herself.

"I'm here."

"Mom..."

"I know baby..."

"I'm so-so s'rry."

Her expression shattered. "Oh baby."

"I'm s-please don't hate me.."

The apology kept coming.

Over and over.

For the game.

For the house.

For *everything*.

Every impossible thing he'd somehow decided was his fault.

Yuna listened to all of it.

Then finally interrupted.

"Shane."

And then Yuna said the simplest thing in the world.

"You are more important than hockey."

David let out a small sound from where he was standing in front of the desk.

"You are more important than a championship. You are more important than public opinion."

Shane's breathing hitched.

"And you are certainly more important than some idiots on the internet."

A tiny sound escaped Hayden.

Half laugh. Half sob.

Yuna ignored him.

Her eyes never left her son.

"You could retire tomorrow."

Tears slid down Shane's cheeks.

"You could never play another game."

"And I would still be proud of you. My miracle..my baby..how could I ever hate you when it's so easy to love you."

David dropped down and pressed his face against the metal of the desk just opposite of Shane.

"You are all we have ever wanted Shane. You are the best parts of the two of us and more. You are-are..you are our light. You are the best thing I have ever done just for existing. The day we stop loving you is the day you're gone. Because even after we are dead Shane..the love we have for you will be in every ounce of your being. You are the embodiment of our love and hopes and dreams...how could we hate that.

After several tense minutes, Shane whispered:

"I'm tired."

The relief that swept through the room was immediate.

"Okay.." Yuna said gently. "We are coming out of the desk now?"

Shane immediately returned to Shane.

Having to see it all.

Ilya saw it happen.

So before Shane could retreat again he spoke.

"You don't have to come out."

Yuna blinked.

"What?"

Ilya shrugged.

"We can negotiate."

A confused expression flickered across her face.

"One arm."

Ilya leaned in.

"One arm comes out from under the desk."

Shane let out a few shuttering breaths and then rolled over with his eyes still closed.

One arm emerged from beneath the desk.

Like testing whether the world was still safe.

Ilya looked at it. Then at Shane.

Then held out his own hand.

Not touching.

Whenever you're ready.

After a very long time.

Long enough for everyone to take the hint and disperse, heading into the house to clean it as much as possible.

Shane moved his hand the final few inches.

And let their fingers touch.

The contact was feather-light.

Barely there.

But Ilya nearly cried from relief.

They sat like that for a while.

Ilya stared as Shane's breathing calmed and his body relaxed.

At some point he fell asleep against the Ikea carpet.

Ilya did not move though.

He simply sat and watched.

The room grew dark.

He sat in that darkness until Yuna came in with David and a broom.

"You're still sitting there.." Yuna said while creasing her eyes the same way Shane did when he was worried.

Ilya did not look up. "He is sleeping.."

Yuna looked at with a bit of worry and frustration, then David gave her a small nod.

"Son, this is the last part of the house we need to clean. We got the kitchen and Hayd and Jacks went home. We ordered new groceries.. All that's left is this..." He said calmly.

Ilya nodded.

He and David carefully pulled Shane from under the desk.

He must have been exhausted because he barley stirred.

He did always crash after a bad meltdown.

Ilya managed to lift Shane into his arms.

He carefully navigated around the glass on the floor.

As he walked up the stairs Shane opened one red puffy eye.

"L'ya..." He said groggily.

"Shhh...we take a warm bath and get changed."

Shane did like that plan.

He insisted on undressing himself but did not to speak or even look at Ilya.

He finally walked into his bathroom to find Ilya sitting next to the bath.

He said nothing as he sat down in the hot steamy water.

Silence surrounded the room.

Nothing but Shane washing himself and Ilya watching.

Occasionally handing him his next product.

"Shanya.."

Shane brought his eyes up to Ilya's collarbones.

Closest he could get to eye contact.

"You are crying.." Ilya moved to wipe the tears falling from his eye's

Shane realized how hot his face felt.

The tears fell faster.

Then a sob.

Ilya used a wet cloth to squeeze water of his back to ground him.

"Breathe..breathe."

Shane took a few shaky breathes as he covered his face with his palms.

"What am I gonna do.." He sobbed.

Ilya remained silent.

"What am I gonna do with me?" Shane turned toward the other man.

Ilya lifted him out of the bath under his arms.

"You are going to love yourself..like I love you..like we love you." Ilya said as he wrapped Shane in a towel.

He took time tentatively drying him off and applying lotion as Shane calmed down.

Careful not to touch him unless really necessary.

Finally, Ilya laid Shane down into bed.

"The mess..." He said quietly as Ilya fixed his pillows.

"We have it.." Ilya brushed the hair from his face.

Shane began to tear up "M' so so sorry god.."

Ilya immediately shushed him "We love you..is nothing. Should see my house after team party."

Shane gave a small smile, though his eyes were still wet.

"Now I go and fill water, then we cuddle."

Shane looks up at him, silently begging him to stay.

"You are safe Shane, we have got you. I come right back..always"

And he did.

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