say i'm invincible — it's all a lie

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say i'm invincible — it's all a lie

by Tizniz

Summary

Ilya had prepared for many things that night, but the last one he could ever possibly imagine was for Shane to pass out the second he walked through the door.

Notes

Hi.

If you follow me on Tumblr, you may recognize a bit of the beginning of this. Originally, this was a two-part drabble inspired by an ask from indigo2831. I then ended up making it into a whole ass story.
And then promptly abandoned it after finishing it months ago.

I basically took the hint of an eating disorder has in the books and went 'let's make it worse'. So if those type of stories are hard for you to read, please hit the back button or the X and carry on with your day. This one is not for you. That is okay. I still appreciate you stopping by.

Thanks for sticking by me while I slowly post my back order of stories while continuing to write more. I really do appreciate y'all reading and enjoying these words. Means a lot to me.

Also, I'm obviously taking heavy liberty with medical accuracies and policies. But it's fanfic so whatever. Do what I want.

(title is from *Refuge* by Dermot Kennedy and I highly recommend the song, the album, and the artist overall.)

TW: Eating disorder.

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya had prepared for many things that night, but the last one he could ever possibly imagine was for Shane to pass out the second he walked through the door.

The sound of Shane's body hitting the floor, the loud *thud*, will surely haunt Ilya's dreams for years. That sound is what gets him moving, his body surging forward, too late to catch Shane's, but still desperate to reach him.

"Shane?" Ilya cries, voice shaking as much as his hands are, cradling Shane's head gently between them, "Shane, sweetheart, open your eyes. Please open your eyes." He's begging, throat tight, tears already on his cheeks, but Shane's eyes don't open. He's so pale. So limp. His freckles are stark against his skin and this is maybe the only time Ilya hates how much they stand out.

Ilya had known something was off. Even the moment they woke up together, tangled in Shane's sheets in Montreal after a night spent together where things hadn't quite been as energetic as usual, there'd been something *wrong*. But Ilya had believed Shane when he said he was just tired. That he hadn't been sleeping well. Ilya had believed those words and let Shane go to practice and then out with the team without pushing more.

And now the love of his life was unconscious, pale, and limp on the floor, head resting in Ilya's lap.

"Shane!"

Ilya's phone is god knows where. He'd tossed it aside and sprung up from the couch when Shane had said he was on his way up. The excitement at greeting Shane at the door, welcoming him home with a kiss and an embrace and maybe a little more had overtaken all the other thoughts. But Ilya needs a phone now. He needs to call someone because Shane isn't waking up and Ilya doesn't know what to do.

Thankfully Shane's phone *is* on him since he hadn't gotten more than a step inside before collapsing. Ilya finds the phone in the pocket of Shane's hoodie, unlocking it with ease that would normally make him giddy with love but he's numb to now. Why does knowing Shane's passcode matter when Shane *isn't waking up?*

Keeping one hand pressed to Shane's cheek, Ilya's other hand shakes and nearly fumbles the phone as he dials three numbers: 9-1-1.

What happens next is a blur. Ilya somehow gets out the words that he needs an ambulance and Shane's address. English is slipping further and further away from his comprehension, but he's clinging on with the tips of his fingernails because Shane needs him.

The phone clatters to the ground as Ilya curls over Shane and it's as if he blinks and the door is opening, paramedics rushing in. Someone pulls Ilya away from Shane and a sound rips its way out of Ilya's throat but the person is stronger than Ilya right now. He's stuck watching

from a distance as the paramedics work on Shane. Ilya has to watch helplessly as nothing works to get Shane to wake up.

Ilya blinks again and he's in the back of an ambulance, clutching one of Shane's hands, a paramedic on his other side continuing to check Shane's vitals and attempting to wake him up.

Then they're in the hospital and Ilya is separated from Shane as he's whisked away behind doors Ilya isn't allowed through.

He collapses into a chair, staring unblinking at the doors. He doesn't have a phone or wallet. He's in sweats and a tank top, random shoes that he thinks actually belong to Shane on his feet. He doesn't have possession of his heart. There's a hollow spot in his chest where it should be, but it's been taken away behind doors that Ilya isn't allowed through.

Ilya doesn't know how much time passes before a kind looking nurse comes out, speaking Shane's name. He's on his feet in an instant, rushing over to her, "Me. I am here for Shane. Is he okay?"

If the nurse recognizes him, she doesn't give any indication. "The doctor asked me to grab you and bring you to Shane's room. We have him settled and you can sit with him while the doctor talks to you."

"He is not awake." It's more of a statement than a question, but the flicker of sadness in the nurse's eyes tells Ilya that that's true. He sets his jaw and nods, following the nurse down the hallway.

Walking into Shane's room this time is very different from the last time. Mostly because Shane isn't awake and smiling dopily at Ilya, calling out his name in that adorable way that Ilya thinks of when he needs a moment of warmth on a cold day.

No, Shane is still unconscious, laid up in the bed with wires and an IV hooked up to him. His skin is still pale and Ilya notices the dark purple smudges under Shane's eyes for the first time. He looks so small.

Ilya's heart breaks.

The nurse is forgotten as Ilya moves closer, sinking into the chair positioned beside Shane. He reaches for Shane's hand, curling his fingers around the too still hand.

He's just sleeping. Ilya tells himself, well aware that it's a horrible lie.

"The doctor will be in in just a moment." The nurse says before slipping away. Ilya doesn't look away from Shane. Just sits there and stares at Shane's face.

He's not quite peaceful looking, not like when he's asleep. Ilya loves how soft and free Shane looks when he's sleeping. It's something only he really gets to see. But now it looks like there's tension coursing through Shane's body, even though it's limp and unconscious.

Ilya wants to take away all of the discomfort.

"Mr. Rozanov?"

Ilya blinks and turns his head, finding that a doctor has stepped in at some point. This is when Ilya should pull his hand away, try and pretend he and Shane are nothing, but he can't. He won't. And he doesn't care. Shane can yell at him when he wakes up.

"Hi," The doctor offers a small smile, but her eyes don't give any of that fake placating sympathy that most have. Immediately, Ilya likes her. "My name is Dr. Castello. I'm going to be looking after Shane."

"Ilya." He croaks, clearing his throat, "Please. Call me Ilya."

The doctor nods and steps further in, "Can I ask you some questions, Ilya? To help us better understand what brought Shane in today?"

"Yes." Ilya nods, "But…will he wake up?"

"Hopefully soon, yes." Dr. Castello replies, "I have to run a few tests and check things over - do you know if he hit his head when he fell?"

"I…" Ilya shakes his head, "I do not know. All happened so fast."

"Okay. That's alright. We'll do a scan to make sure."

"Thank you."

"Of course." She adjusts the clipboard in her hands, "Shane is a hockey player for his profession," Ilya appreciates that she's not talking like she didn't already know this. They're in Montreal. Ilya has no doubt that this doctor knows exactly who both of them are. "Has he taken any recent hits that I should be aware of?"

This Ilya can answer confidently. "No. Nothing of concern. He took a body check to the boards a week ago. Bruised his shoulder but nothing worse. Doctor checked."

"Good," She scribbles some notes down. "He had a nasty hit back in 2017 too." She winces in sympathy, "But we're long past that causing any long term issues, especially if nothing has happened since then."

"No."

"Has he been sleeping okay?"

"Yes."

"Exercising has been normal?" She pauses, "Well, normal for a professional hockey player."

“Yes. Well. Mostly.” Ilya sighs and looks back at Shane, “He goes too hard, at times, because he thinks he must. But there has not been extra stress - we are not at playoffs yet.”

“Hmm.” Dr. Castello jots down some more notes, “And his eating?”

Ilya flinches at that, which draws a questioning noise from the doctor. “He has…in past. He has had…when stressed, he controls eating. Limits. But he works with…” Ilya waves his free hand, the word slipping him in his distraught state.

“Dietian? Nutritionist?”

“*Da*. First one.” Ilya nods, “He works with dietitian. On what is okay and works from him. He follows very close.” He swallows, “Do you think…?”

“I’m just gathering as much information as I can, Ilya.” She says softly, “I’m not making any assumptions right now. But his blood pressure is a bit high, and his heart rate has a tiny bit of an erratic rhythm. I’m going to have someone come in and take some blood samples from him. We’ll also get a scan done on his head, since we’re uncertain whether he hit it.”

“Okay.” Ilya says softly, thumb moving back and forth along the back of Shane’s hand. “Can…can I stay?”

“Absolutely.” Dr. Castello reassures him, “And we’re limiting the staff that comes in here. Those who *do* will respect your privacy – and not just because we signed an oath, but because you two deserve that as humans.”

“Thank you.” Ilya whispers, blinking away fresh tears. “Shane will freak out.”

“Then we definitely better not take away the one person who I think can calm him.” She comments, “Is there anyone else we can call, Ilya? Shane’s parents?”

He shakes his head, “Not yet. They are on vacation. And while they will want to know, I would like to have more information.”

“Alright. I’ll leave that up to you. I’ll be back in a bit when I have some test results.”

“Okay.”

The door opens and closes and Ilya is alone once more with Shane.

Nurses come in, sending him small smiles, working around him to take some blood.

Shane doesn’t wake.

Ilya tries to not cry.

He just wants Shane to open his eyes. Let Ilya know himself that he's okay. That this is all a very bad dream.

When they take Shane away briefly to go get a scan done on his head, Ilya slips into a bathroom and allows himself to fall apart.

It's short, brief, and has him on his knees as he covers his mouth, sobbing brokenly.

What had happened to his Shane? His beautiful, wonderful, oh so careful about his health, Shane?

When the nurses bring Shane back, Ilya is already in the room once more, face clear of any tears and expression blank. He's at Shane's side the moment his bed is set in place, holding onto Shane's hand.

And then he keeps waiting.

Ilya thinks it's been a couple of hours since Shane first walked through the door and promptly collapsed when the first signs of him stirring appear.

Having grown restless with sitting, Ilya had stood at some point, pacing the small room, but when he spots the movement, he moves closer to the bed, watching.

Shane's nose scrunches lightly, just as adorable as ever, before his eyes flutter, lashes brushing against his cheeks before opening to reveal big, brown eyes.

Ilya can't breathe, watching as Shane takes in their surroundings, confused panic making his mouth part slightly in a gasp. Ilya thinks there's wetness on his cheeks but he ignores it, focused entirely on Shane.

"Ilya?" Shane croaks, gaze locking onto the one familiar and certain thing in the room.

"Yes. I am here, *kotenok*." Ilya murmurs, reaching over to brush his fingers through the dark hair against Shane's forehead. It's getting long for Shane's standards but Ilya loves it. He pulls his hand back quickly though, fingers curling into his palm at his side.

"And here is…"

"Yes." Ilya nods once, jerky and short. "Hospital."

"Oh." Shane exhales, sinking back against the bed.

“You scared me.”

Shane blinks up at Ilya, his body heavy and his mind foggy, the simple but firm statement confusing him for a moment. "Huh?"

Ilya huffs out a small noise and drags a chair closer to the bed - the *hospital* bed that Shane has just woken up in and *what??* - rubbing at his cheeks, getting rid of the wetness there that Shane is pretending to not notice because he knows Ilya will hate it. But it’s there. Shane can see it. And if Ilya had been crying in a place where anyone could walk on…

"What happened?" Shane asks, head falling back against the pillows and rolling towards Ilya. It feels almost impossible to hold his head up right now. Exhaustion weighs heavily in his muscles and bones. His hand slides along the bed towards the edge, a silent invitation for one of Ilya's. The invitation is quickly accepted and fingers tangle together with his own. It eases some of the tightness in Shane’s chest. "Why am I in the hospital?"

"Because you collapsed." Ilya says, voice flat. It makes Shane flinch more than if he’d yelled. "You walked through door. And fell."

"Oh."

"Yes."

"I'm sorry."

That earns a small, wet laugh from Ilya. "You are such Canadian. Apologizing."

"Well. You said I scared you."

"I know you did not do it on purpose, Hollander."

"But...what happened?"

Ilya shrugs, reaching up to brush the hair from Shane's forehead again. Personally, Shane thinks he needs a haircut. Ilya had pouted and protested. So naturally Shane hasn't cut his hair. "Doctor does not know. Waiting for you to wake up and explain." Except the way he says it has Shane wondering if that’s true. His fingers pause where they’re playing with Shane’s hair, finger twitching against Shane's temple. "You were not okay. When you woke up this morning. I noticed."

"I mean," Shane scrunches his nose, trying to fight through the fog that is lingering in his head, "I felt a little tired, yeah, but..." He trails off, the words feeling wrong on his tongue.

If he actually thinks about it, he realizes that Ilya is right. He wasn't totally okay. But Shane had pushed it aside. Ignored it. Like he usually did. Because bad days were more common than good days at this point. That was his normal.

So he went to practice, where he'd been shaky and off balance. There'd been black spots in his vision a few times too. Hayden had even been watching him with a worried frown.

But these were…normal.

Not that anyone knew. Shane hadn't exactly been vocal about it because he was fine and he didn't want to get benched. He was just adjusting to his new diet. That was all.

Except, Shane doesn't remember walking into the apartment. He doesn't remember the moment he collapsed. Hell, he barely remembers the few hours before going home. They all feel like a blur.

And that has Shane pausing. Because maybe…maybe this all *isn't* normal.

"I think maybe something is wrong." He admits, softly, timidly, unable to meet Ilya's eyes, afraid of what the confession will mean. Afraid of what Shane will have to admit to.

Two fingers tuck themselves under Shane's chin, tilting it upwards. Not enough to force Shane to look Ilya in the eye, but enough that he isn't hidden away anymore.

"Then we will fix it." Ilya promises, leaning over to kiss Shane.

The doctor comes in not long after that. Introduces herself to Shane and does some basic checks to see how he's doing. She gives no indication about what could have brought him here but he suspects she already knows.

Part of Shane questions if he should ask Ilya to wait outside, let him talk to the doctor alone. But then Shane reminds himself that that's how he got into this situation in the first place. By not telling Ilya. Or anyone.

"So, Shane." Dr, Castello is sitting in the chair Ilya had occupied before, but he'd grown too restless and had been pacing the small room. "I think we need to have a talk."

Ilya pauses, eyes darting between Shane and the doctor, but Shane doesn't look at him. He keeps his eyes on the name stitched into the white coat: *Dr. Castello.* It's done in a nice sky blue, a simple script with a cursive hint to it. It suits her. Which is a weird thing to think, probably, but that's how Shane's mind works.

He nods. "Yes."

She makes a small noise, adjusts the grip on the file in her hand, the one that tells every secret Shane has been hiding and can't anymore. Ilya had told him they'd done bloodwork. They'll know the truth.

“Do you want to start?” Dr. Castello asks, gently, giving him a chance. But Shane shakes his head, curls his fingers into the blanket.

“Start what?” Ilya blurts out, accent thick on his words. An anxious tell of his. “What talk? I thought we did not know why Shane is here.”

“I’m sorry.” Shane whispers, vision blurring as tears burn his eyes.

“Sorry? Why sorry?” Ilya asks, tone turning desperate, “Shane…”

“Shane’s test results, and the answers to the questions you both gave me,” Dr. Castello says softly, gaze still on Shane, “indicate signs of a significant eating disorder.”

Ilya stares at Shane, waiting for him to say the doctor is wrong, that this isn’t true.

Except Shane isn’t looking at him. He’s staring down at his lap, avoiding the steady gaze of the doctor and the peering one of Ilya.

Eating disorder.

No. No, no, no.

Ilya shakes his head, steps back until he connects with the wall, leaning heavily against it, “No. Shane does not—no. I…he has…he is particular. About food, yes. He follows stupid diet, yes. But. But he is healthy. He is okay!”

“Ilya…” Shane whispers, closing his eyes tightly. He looks pained. His fingers are clutching tightly to the hospital blanket. Ilya wants the discomfort and pain to be from the scratchy hospital gown and blanket against Shane’s skin, but Ilya knows that isn’t what’s causing all this.

No. It’s the secret Shane has been hiding.

“You knew?!” Ilya snaps, “You knew something was wrong?!”

“I didnt…I mean…” Shane’s bottom lip wobbles. Tears slide down his cheeks. He keeps his eyes closed.

“I’d appreciate it if no one threw around any blame.” The doctor says gently, “That isn’t going to help right now.”

Ilya bites his tongue; he knows she’s right, but it *hurts*. Shane was keeping this from him. So well that Ilya didn’t notice. How the fuck did he not notice that Shane was developing an eating disorder? God, Ilya’s more furious with himself than anyone else.

Dr. Castello redirects her sole focus onto Shane, waiting until he takes a breath and opens his eyes, although they remain downcast. She doesn't try and force him to meet her eyes, so Ilya is grateful for that. No reason to make things even worse for Shane.

"We took some blood and ran some tests, Shane."

"I know." Shane whispers, "Ilya told me."

"So you know that it's told me quite a bit." He nods his head shallowly. "This isn't a new development, is it?" This time Ilya watches as Shane gives his head a small shake. "I appreciate you not denying it." She turns her head to look at Ilya, "Different levels of vitamins and other nutritional values help us figure out how long the body has been deprived of certain substances."

"And Shane's are low."

"Significantly so, yes." She confirms and Ilya has to lock his knees so he doesn't collapse to the floor.

"How bad?" Ilya's eyes flicker over to Shane, "How long?"

"I…" Shane's mouth opens and closes, "I don't know."

"May I ask a few more questions?" Dr. Castello starts, her tone calm, "They may be a bit uncomfortable, Shane, but they are important to answer."

"Okay." He whispers. Ilya wants to gather Shane in his arms and protect him from all of this. But the problem is that Shane needs protecting from himself.

"Have you ever consumed food and then forcibly thrown it up?"

Ilya nearly vomits at that question, staring Shane down intently, waiting for an answer.

It comes almost immediately as Shane shakes his head, "No. I'm not belumic."

"Thank you." The doctor notes some things down in the file. "You understand what being anorexic is too, then?"

"I do, and I'm not!" Shane insists, eyes big and wide as his chin lifts up, meeting the doctor's state for a second before falling to her shoulder. He doesn't look at Ilya. "I *am* eating! I'm not…I have to eat! I'm a professional hockey player. I can't…I can't *play* if I don't eat!"

"He does eat." Ilya says quietly, "I have seen it."

"Okay, good." Dr. Castello nods once more, "Ilya, this question is going to be directed at you: do you think Shane eats enough, considering his profession?"

Ilya closes his eyes, takes a breath, releases it slowly. Reminds himself that answering is not betraying Shane but is instead helping him. "No. He does not."

Shane's face shutters and crumbles. Ilya tries to not feel like he's betrayed Shane. Tries to not feel like he has been betrayed by Shane.

How did things get this bad?

Ilya realizes with a sudden start that he can't be here. He needs to leave. Before he does or says something that makes everything so much worse.

"I…" He swallows, glances briefly at Shane, then the doctor, "Excuse me."

Dr. Castello nods while Shane hunches further in himself. Ilya turns and slips out of the door, not stopping as he walks quickly down the hall, heading for the exit.

"Are you okay to continue?" Dr. Castello asks quietly, "Or would you like to wait for Ilya to return?"

Shane swallows, clenches and unclenches his fingers in the sheets. "He isn't coming back."

"You don't—"

"Let's keep going." He cuts her off gently, trying to ignore the now empty spot in his chest. "Please."

The doctor doesn't say anything for a moment but then adjusts herself in her seat, shuffles some papers, and releases a small breath. "Okay. We need to discuss this diet plan you've been on."

"Okay."

Shane answers all of the questions honestly. There's no point in trying to say anything otherwise.

But the answers he does give seem to concern the doctor, even though Shane explains that everything he's done has been normal for him.

Controlling his eating, controlling what he puts in his body, has been the one single thing that works and stays the same. He's never let loose those reins, he's never gone and binged a bunch of food like he's read about others doing.

Although he'd only read about those people because he himself had been tempted. Wondered what would happen if he just gave in and ate everything he'd been denying himself. What would be the worst to happen if he did it just once?

That had to lead to him looking it up, doing research on something like he always does, learning about these binging cycles people go on. Shane had told himself it would only be once when he was weak and ready to crave, but he knew it would happen again and again and again. He couldn't get into *that* habit. Because *that* was an eating disorder.

Shane didn't have an eating disorder. He was simply careful about what he ate. His body was a tool, something he needed for his job.

Yes, he's aware other athletes, like Ilya and Hayden, can eat whatever they want and be fine. But Shane is different. He's always been fucking different. He can't go and eat McDonald's every day and still remain fit, no matter if he worked out even harder. The others can simply process it better.

Shane has to work harder. Push himself further. Because he's different.

In more ways than one.

Everyone else is white, and straight (or bisexual but has slept around with enough women that they don't need to worry about also being into men), and don't have a million eyes watching their every fucking move, waiting for them to make one single slip up.

No. Shane has to be careful. He has to take care so he doesn't make that slip up.

Except, here he is. In the fucking hospital.

An exhausting half an hour later, Dr. Castello finally deems their conversation done.

Ilya hasn't returned.

Shane ignores how much that hurts.

"I'll let you rest," The doctor says as she stands, fidgeting with the folder in her hands. "But Shane…"

He doesn't look at her. Stares at a spot on the wall. "Hm?"

"I'm going to be honest with you." She sighs, "I'm putting in an official recommendation that you not be allowed to continue playing hockey." The world falls out from under him. "And I'm not going to release you from the hospital yet."

"What? No." Shane gapes at her. "I…I *have* to play. I *need* to play! You can't keep me here! I'll…I refuse help! I'm…I'm discharging myself."

Dr. Castello swallows tightly, "I'm sorry, Shane. But I can't let you go. You aren't healthy."

"I am! I'm fine!"

She shakes her head slowly, “You aren’t. This illness is more than just in the body, Shane. It’s also in the mind. And you need help.”

“You can’t fucking keep me!” He snaps, hands shaking as he curls his fingers tightly into his palms. There’s sharp jolts of pain in his palms from where his nails dig into his palms but he ignores them. “That isn’t allowed!”

“Yes. It is.” Dr. Castello tells him. “When we deem the patient unsafe to themselves.”

His mouth drops. Unsafe? To himself?

“We’ll talk some more when you’ve had time to think it over and calm down.” She takes a step back, “I’m sorry, Shane. I’m doing this to protect you.”

He snaps his mouth closed and glares at her, unable to say anything more. She sighs, resigned, and doesn’t say anything else either. Simply walks out of the room.

Shane’s expression drops instantly and he collapses forward, shattering into pieces.

Shane is genuinely surprised when Ilya finally returns, slipping through the door and into the room like he’s trying to go unnoticed.

He freezes when Shane’s eyes lock onto his, a variety of emotions crossing his face before settling into something neutral.

Shane looks away.

“You didn’t have to come back.”

“What?” Ilya questions, “Why would I not come back?”

Shrugging, Shane burrows further into the scratchy blankets he’s pulled tightly around himself. He wants *his* blankets. The soft cotton jersey material that is always comforting to him and doesn’t bother his skin. “Because this is more than you ever wanted to deal with. Because I’m a fuck up. Because I’m fucked up.”

“Shane—“

“They’re keeping me here.” He blurts out, cutting Ilya off before he can say anything more. Shane doesn’t know if he can handle listening to Ilya break up with him. It’ll be easier if Shane does it. “So. You don’t have to worry anymore. I’ve been passed onto someone else to deal with. You’re free to go.”

The silence is thick and heavy in the room. It's not fully quiet, considering they're still in a hospital.

God, sleeping is going to be horrendous. Shane likes a little sound, sure, but usually sounds he controls. Not a messy chaotic cacophony of sounds from a hospital.

This stay is going to be so much worse than he already figured it would be.

"Do you want me to go?" Ilya asks, voice careful and neutral.

Shane closes his eyes tightly at the rush of tears, "*I* want to go. But I can't. I'm fucking *trapped* here." He spits out. "You don't have to stay though. And you made it pretty clear that you didn't want to be here earlier."

"I…" Ilya stops. Releases a long breath. "I was hurt. And scared. And worried."

"And I'm none of those things?!" Shane snaps, eyes flying open to look at Ilya. The other man is pale, eyes big and wide, rimmed red from crying.

Somehow, he still looks absolutely beautiful.

Shane loves him so much.

"I don't know, Shane!" Ilya snaps back, "You haven't talked to me! You've kept this secret! You are in hospital, dammit! How did you let it get this bad?!"

The regret spreads across Ilya's face instantly but the blow has already landed.

"Shane—"

"I know I fucked up." Shane's voice is cold. "I know this is my fault. So don't worry. I relieve you of any obligations or duties. You're free to go. So. Leave."

"Shane, wait—"

"And for the record," He pushes forward, voice trembling, "I didn't…I wasn't…" He chokes on his words, "I was trying to be *good*. Trying to…to make…I just wanted things to be *good*. I wanted to be the best. For them. For me. For….you."

Ilya inhales sharply.

"I didn't want it to be like this. I didn't…want it to become…did you think I *liked* saying no to you when you offered food? Did you think I enjoyed getting winded after walking up a set of stairs? Did you think I didn't notice the little looks you and my mom shared when we had dinner? God, Ilya. I get it. Okay? I get that I messed up. I get that I'm broken and fucked up and am never going to be good enough! I'll never be able to even fucking *eat* right! But it's *fine*," Shane spits out the words, his heart racing in his chest, "because this isn't your problem anymore. Because I'm telling you to leave. Because…because…" Tears spill down his

cheeks. “We’re done. I’m done. With us.”

Ilya stares at him without speaking for a solid minute. And then he turns and walks a few steps back towards the doors. Shane barely muffles the broken sound that fights to escape him.

This is…this is what he wants. He said it. So it must be what he wants.

But the thought of Ilya actually walking out, leaving Shane, is possibly actually killing him.

The door doesn’t open though. Ilya stops, turns around once more, hazel eyes blazing with a new fire.

“No.”

“No?” Shane echoes, confused and still trying to keep himself together.

“No.” Ilya repeats, taking a firm step forward. “I am not leaving.”

“Ilya—”

“Shut *up*!” He snaps, hands balled into fists at his side, “I am not letting you spew out anymore ridiculous things! Because that is not my Shane talking! That is the illness talking!” His chin wobbles, the only sign that he’s struggling too. Shane doesn’t speak. “I am mad, yes, but mostly at myself. Because I did not notice. Because I missed all these signs.” Ilya looks genuinely heartbroken as he confesses that. “I am supposed to care for you, Shane.”

“Wait, Ilya—”

“I also left before because I was a little mad at you,” He barrels forward. “Because this…this is *not* you. But I know it is not your fault, Shane. I do not blame you. I know how illness can mess with brain. Make you think things that are not true.”

Shane gives a small nod at that. Ilya’s depression has done that many times.

“I am sorry I had to go away for a little bit. I am sorry I was selfish and could not stay in here before.” Ilya steps closer again. “But I want to give you everything. I want to focus on you. And so I had to take that moment.” He reaches out, fingers brushing against where Shane’s rest on the bed, “Because you deserve all of me, Shane. You deserve someone who will be there. You deserve…” Ilya releases a small breath, “You deserve better than me.”

“NO!” Shane grips tightly onto Ilya’s fingers, tugging him suddenly, causing Ilya to stumble forward, barely stopping himself from toppling onto the bed. But Shane only tugs again, “I want *you*. And you are…you are *so* good, Ilya. You’re too good. I hate that I’m putting you through this.”

“No,” Ilya shakes his head, one knee on the bed, the hand not currently stuck in a death grip with Shane’s reaching up to cradle Shane’s cheek, “I am choosing to be here, okay? I want to

be here. I want to help you."

Something inside of Shane cracks and he finds himself sobbing.

Ilya looks briefly stunned before he clambers onto the bed properly, wrapping Shane up in his arms, "Hey, hey, sweetheart, it is okay. You are okay. Shhh."

"No. No." Shane shakes his head, smearing tears and snot against Ilya's collar, "I'm…I'm *not* o-okay, Ilya. I'm not. And I w-want to be. I want to get b-better."

"Okay. Okay." Ilya's hand cradles the back of Shane's head, fingers threaded through his hair. "We will get you help. You will be okay. I've got you."

Ilya doesn't loosen his hold until he feels Shane's body go slack against his, and even then he holds on a little longer, until it's clear that Shane's already weakened body has been completely exhausted by this breakdown.

Honestly, Ilya thinks Shane needed to break. As much as it had hurt Ilya to see the man he love be in so much pain, this was a good release for Shane, who always held all the pieces of himself together so tightly. Falling apart from time to time helped.

At least, that's what Galina told Ilya. He thinks that it can apply to Shane as well.

Shane makes a small noise of discontent in his sleep when Ilya shifts in the bed, trying to get into a more comfortable position for a long term stay. Smiling to himself, Ilya ducks down and soothes his boyfriend with gentle Russian words that have Shane settling back down.

Maybe one day it won't be surprising how much Shane truly loves and wants Ilya, even in his sleep.

Hopefully today Shane realizes that the reverse is true too; that Ilya wants him, mess and all.

Although ideally, Ilya gets to have a healthier version of Shane that stays for a very long time. Because if Shane keeps going the way he is…

Ilya's quick to shake his head, not wanting to think about the what if's. Shane has already admitted that he's sick, has made it clear he *wants* to get better. And that is a very big step. Ilya can understand how difficult it is to admit that, how hard one has to fall in order to begin climbing back up.

"I am proud of you, *malysh*." Ilya whispers, combing his fingers through Shane's hair, his boyfriend's face smushed into Ilya's collarbone, arm and leg thrown over him like Ilya is

going to slip away while Shane is asleep. “So very proud.” Ilya adds, blinking away tears. A couple fall though, and he thinks that’s okay right now. There is no one to see him. “We will get through this. We will get you strong and healthy and happy again.”

Ilya doesn’t like that Shane hasn’t been happy, not to his full potential, too worried about being ‘good enough’, whatever that could mean. Ilya has never thought Shane anything but perfect.

“You are not alone.” Ilya kisses Shane’s head gently, “And I will make sure you know that. I will remind you each day if I must.” He presses his lips to Shane’s head once more, a lingering kiss as a few more tears fall down his cheeks.

“I love you, Shane. There are not enough words in English or Russian to explain how great my love for you is.” Ilya’s fingers, curled into a blanket that he knows is too scratchy for Shane (Ilya’s already made a list of items to bring Shane for his stay here, and one of those items will be the blanket from his bed), tighten their hold. “I will do my best to show you. Prove to you that you *are* deserving of all this love.”

Shane sighs in his sleep, body relaxed and at ease, so unlike the way he’d been tensed and poised for a fight before.

“We will get through this.” Ilya repeats his promise. “It will not be easy. But you will not be alone. I will be at your side entire time.”

Closing his eyes, Ilya rests his cheek against the top of Shane’s head and allows himself to rest as well.

take care of yourself.

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