

you can ebb and I can flow (and we'll take it slow)

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by [foxjournals](#)

Summary

Shane hears him, loud and clear, but it's like his words are suddenly shallow and hollow, coming in bits and pieces as they funnel through one ear and out the other, and he swears he's listening, swears he's trying to hang onto every word out of his boyfriend's mouth, but that white hot static is louder than ever. His brain feels fuzzy and his eyes blur and whether it's from unshed tears he hasn't noticed yet or for another reason completely, he isn't sure.

He isn't sure how he got from point A to point B, but all he knows is suddenly he can't breathe.

Suddenly, he's six feet under, water encasing his lungs as they shrivel and expand into nothing.

Or: Shane and Ilya get into a fight, and the only way out is through panicking

Or: Shane uses a safeword in the middle of an argument

Notes

This work is a remix (or lowkey just a straight copy depending on how you look at it lol) of one of my firstprince fics I wrote two years ago, which was inspired by a tumblr post I saw way back when that had the prompt "au where character A safewords out of an argument with character B."

As I said in my notes in my firstprince version of this story - it doesn't feel entirely resolved, however I think it's one of those things that's just going to take time between them before it's ever really "okay". The conflict itself was mainly resolved and they can only, hopefully, go up from there!

This wasn't beta read and I wrote it off of zero sleep so ignore any spelling or grammar mistakes.

Honestly have no idea when this is set or what timeline it follows other than sometime during The Long Game. Timeline? Never heard of her, Ignore her.

Title from Grow as we go by Ben Platt

- Inspired by [Restricted Work] by [foxjournals](#)

Shane and Ilya's relationship as a whole was a plentitude of things.

It was a multitude of stolen quiet glances and bitten lips; a mosaic of tender yet harsh touches and sensual shovings. It was a push and pull, a magnet, a force not to be reckoned with.

When they were together, it was Sunday mornings, the promise of no practice or away games for either of them, the smell of early morning smoothies and coffee grounds twisting and twining into the kitchen air, the sun shining through the linen curtains and coating the marble island in an array of brilliance.

It was late afternoon lunches in a rather secluded park they discovered down the street from Ilya's house on one of their many morning walks with Anya; cans of ginger ale and coke tangled between fingers, bubbles slipping down their throats, eyes locked over the aluminum rim of their cans in a silent conversation of sorts.

It was soft fingers drilling hard punctuates into tense shoulders after a long week of practices and ice packs draped dutifully across headache-ridden temples after a particularly harsh game.

It was marks left to blossom on skin no one would get the fortune of seeing but them, a reminder for their own eyes. It was achy bones and quivers and trembles and *pleasure*. It was mapping out curves and ridges and crevices, charting them and pinning them and *ravishing* them.

When they were apart, it was phone calls from across an ocean, or even just a few hundred miles away, tears spilling over lashes and whispered out apologies and prayers and an abundance of yearning, longing, *missing*.

It was text messages left to be seen under a false title, one that has been in place for decades but still causes reminders of what they can't have, at least not yet.

It was hope clasped between fingertips and intimacy wrapped around carefully crafted syllables. It was promises and reminders and all things intricately wrapped in a sort of rapport you only find once, one you only find in the uniqueness of their situation.

Despite this, It was still like any other relationship, and with this, came the part that people tend to gloss over; the part people liked to either completely shield or completely flaunt.

It was venom laced words and growled out sentences.

It was mundane at times and harsh and cold at others.

It was locked doors and the silent treatment.

It was a bite and a snarl and a glare.

And despite this, it always blew over, always simmered down into soft apologies and gentle kisses over heated tear stained cheeks. It was delicate touches and subdued exhales. It was

laughter and smiles. It was always *fixed*.

Realistically, Shane knew that this would be just another one of those fixings, just another one of those arguments that blew over into tender grazes and interlocked legs; ‘knew, that in the grand scheme of things, this would be just another growth spurt of many in their relationship.

Logically, Shane knew this.

Mentally? Mentally Shane was fucked. Utterly, and truly, fucked.

They both have tomorrow off, some obligatory endorsement signing they’ve both “coincidentally” (not so coincidentally if their PR managers have anything to say about it) been assigned to do.

They officially have less than 24 hours till Shane has to drive back home, and instead of soaking up these last few hours, they’re here instead.

Here, being Ilya’s kitchen where they’ve now been neck and neck for at least an hour now, harsh rebuttals and remarks flying every which way across the dimly lit marble island.

Ilya looks positively *angry*, and Shane can’t pinpoint the last time Ilya has looked at him, let alone *anyone* (besides maybe that referee who didn’t call an illegal check at one of their last games), with this much indignation as of late.

Shane can’t really remember who started it, can’t remember who cast out the first hook wrapped with blind raging bait, but it doesn’t matter now, because someone took the first bite.

It didn’t matter when Shane had slammed down his cold dinner plate. It didn’t matter when Ilya had shot up out of his chair to follow Shane hot on his heels into the kitchen. *It didn’t matter*, not really, not when Shane’s head was beginning to fill with white hot static.

A feeling Shane has come to know since the tender age of seven, a feeling he’s welcomed over and over for years to come.

Memories flash behind his eyelids like a film reel. His first ever hockey team. The first time he thought that maybe his mother cared more about his budding potential career (trust him, he knows that’s far from the truth now, but at the fresh age of 13 it was a harsh thing to come across), than him as her son. The looks other entitled kids who looked nothing like him would send his way at away games. The feeling of failure that still to this day encases his entire body like cloyed honey when he takes a loss harder than he should. His first ever press appearance; his first ever anxiety attack in turn. The silence after Ilya’s lips had found refuge on his own for the first (and not the last) time. The silence following Shane’s departure after Ilya had dared to utter his name for the first (and not the last) time, Shane softly following in suit like a prayer. Leaving that bar one night long ago with tears threatening to make themselves known, his car in front of him with no destination in mind and Ilya plastered on some girl behind him. His parents finding out not only about Ilya as a whole, but just how much Ilya meant to their son.

All these memories all correlate to the one feeling Shane can't stand, the one feeling that has managed to wrap its slender hands around his neck and constrict the airflow to for *years*, time and time again.

A feeling that whispers out words of aggression and lies that Shane can't help but distinguish as the truth.

A feeling that Shane has swallowed down and buried under loads of faux assertiveness masked for actual tentativeness in what an old counselor of his called his *imposter syndrome*.

A feeling that blinds Shane and his senses, a feeling that takes over no matter how hard he tries to shove it back into its place.

So when Ilya runs his hands through his hair for the nth time and ignores Shane (despite Ilya being the one to *follow him* into the kitchen first), well Shane can't help but let the feeling take course as it coats his insides and paints his organs until he can feel the toxins enter his blood stream.

"You aren't listening to me Ilya." Shane says rather calmly, an ounce of irritation bleeding into his words as he watches through his peripheral vision as Ilya rounds the corner of the island to come stand next to where Shane is angrily scrubbing at the rather clean looking dishes. Ilya must immediately recognize it as one of his nervous tics, because Shane can just barely see Ilya lift his hand towards the sink, before they immediately fall back to his side. Shane wants him to take his soapy hands into his own and will the tremble in them to cease.

He bites the inside of his cheek instead.

"All I have done is listen! I have taken your apologies and shoved them far away to make space for the next one. Forgive me if I find it hard to believe when you really mean it." Ilya spits, and the harsh bitter tone from the cut up English falling from his lips only makes Shane scrub harder once again at a spot on the porcelain china that's since long been clean.

Shane knows, is the thing.

Shane *knows* that tonight was his fault. He *knows* that what Ilya is saying isn't far from the truth.

But that doesn't mean it doesn't still sting, 'doesn't mean he doesn't feel that all too familiar sense of failure wash over him like a tidal wave.

The thing is, Shane has been drowning, for months now actually.

Shane has been in this industry long enough to know what happens when you trip up just once. He *knows* what happens to players who don't take care of themselves, not in the ways that matter at least. Shane knows what it means to have to keep up with the hustle of it all, even if it is all a perfectly painted picture and damn if Shane didn't know a damn well painted facade, and well, he had certainly created a masterpiece.

So no, Shane wasn't a stranger to what would happen if he fell back into old habits.

But he didn't expect to flounder this time around, 'didn't expect to have his lungs immediately fill with water at the first drop, 'didn't expect to get thrown into the deep end to drown and then be told to learn how to swim in turn.

Between becoming more harsh and disciplined on his eating habits, to locking himself away from human interaction to watch old game footage and study every single angle to see where he could get better, faster, stronger, to silent anxiety attacks in bathrooms at bars Hayden has somehow managed to drag him out to, to *missing* Ilya like a limb cut off; Shane is *flailing*. He is flailing, lanky limbs rising above the surface before getting pulled under again, lungs engulfed with water, and no one is there to take witness to his imminent final breath.

And the shitty part, the part that drives Shane up the wall; this is no different than it's ever been. He's *used* to the long hours and the anxiety that simmers just below the surface. He's *used* to the overflowing inbox of ambassador applications and the grating reporters. He's *used* to the no sleep and the disordered appetite. So why this is different - why it's more intense than it's ever been- why he's struggling to stay above the surface? He has no idea, and it's making everything worse.

And because of this, because of all the treading water he's done, because of all the tired and achy limbs and choked breaths, he's fallen behind.

On *more than* just practices and passes during games and emails and calls from his parents and simple *self care*.

On Ilya too.

On important dates and dinners and simply making the drive out to see his boyfriend.

Tonight was no different.

Shane had planned on staying at the rink with Hayden and JJ for no more than an hour after his final practice of the week got out to make a few corrections on some plays he had missed. He had (stupidly) turned off his ringer to save himself from distractions, laced his skates up one more time, and he, Hayden, and JJ got to work.

Hayden and JJ left the rink awhile ago with promises that Shane also leave shortly. Shane had just nodded and kept on fixing his routine, going through his head and replaying all the mistakes he had made during tonight's practice.

When he finally came to, it was well past midnight and he had ten missed calls from Ilya.

Shane hadn't been this in his head since he was first drafted for the Voyageurs.

So yes, Shane knows that he is at fault here, and he knows that Ilya is right, but that doesn't stop the burn that's ablaze inside him; doesn't stop the hurt from welling up.

Because yeah, Ilya doesn't *know*, he doesn't know that Shane is suffocating, 'doesn't know that it's taking everything in Shane to stay afloat as is, and yeah he realizes that's also his fault, but.

But.

“I don’t know what more you want from me.” Shane admits rather pitifully, and it feels like there’s an undercurrent to his words, something deeper than the surface level phrase it’s disguised as, but either way it must be the wrong thing to say because Ilya (gently, because even in anger, Ilya would never purposefully hurt Shane) grips Shane’s biceps and forces him to face him head on, and all Shane can do is watch as the plate he was holding falls into the soapy water as he’s whirled around to finally face Ilya.

“I *want* for you to think about someone other than yourself.” Ilya spits, unadulterated venom lacing his tone and curling around his words.

Shane can’t help the wince that rolls through him, and if Ilya notices it, he makes no sign of it.

“*ебамь* Shane, you cannot bother showing up to dinner *you* planned, to date *you* marked on our calendar. You cannot bother giving me a *call*. And that is not the main issue! The issue is that this is now the *third* time this *month*. ” Ilya continues, wringing his hands on the dish rag next to him before throwing it against the counter, Shane watching the movement with careful eyes.

“Ilya if you would just –”

“You know what part made me the most mad?” Ilya interrupts, and Shane goes quiet, ‘doesn’t think Ilya actually wants him to answer. “I thought, there is no way Shane will miss this, no way he will miss the dinner that *he* planned. No way he will ignore the blood, sweat, and tears that have gone into the last few months of me being here in Ottawa on shitty team, away from Sveta, away from boyfriend, away from it *all*. And yet...”

And isn’t that a slap to the face?

Ilya’s right, Shane had planned this dinner, had planned this date. He had *plans*. He wanted to spoil Ilya, show him his hard work and dedication to Shane and this relationship didn’t go unnoticed; show him he was *proud* of him and how far they’ve come.

He had found the recipe of some old Russian dish that Ilya had mentioned in passing being a favorite of his from childhood, and had practiced making it the weekend before. He had planned on sending Ilya and Anya to the park and starting dinner, ‘had planned on Ilya coming back home to a candlelit dinner, had planned on meeting him in the doorway with kisses and praise and *pride*.

He had planned on taking Ilya’s hand and leading him up the stairs and showing him *just* how proud of him he was. Had planned on giving himself to Ilya, letting him press him into the mattress with the intent of Ilya leaving fingerprinted bruises on him; a reminder for days to come of how insanely honored he was to call himself *Ilya’s*. He had hid a box in the cupboard below the staircase, a gift he’s been waiting on giving Ilya till he was settled and ready, a gift he had planned on giving him tonight.

He had a *plan*, and because he was too caught up in trying to swim forward, on trying to fix all his wrongs as of late, he completely lost sight of the buoy planted right in front of him.

So, yes, Ilya is right, and Shane feels like a horrible partner and he *knows* what should be said; what should be *done*.

Shane knows this is the part where he apologizes, a real adequate apology, but he is nothing if not the outcome of brutal disputes over the years, and he is nothing if not his own defendant.

So just like he's had to do on the ice, he bares his teeth and sinks his claws in, and ignores the inadequate apologies that he has become fluent in lately in turn for defending his honor.

Maybe now isn't the time, but maybe *now* is when he admits he's not sure how much longer he can stay above the rising waterline, so tries one more time.

"Ilya, if you would just *listen* baby—"

"Enough listening! I tried! When will you listen to *me*? When will you take our relationship seriously??" Ilya interrupts incredulously, furrowing his brow as he looks back up at Shane. "It feels like I am the only one who wants this relationship to work Shane, and it's beginning to weigh me down!"

Shane lets the words creep down his throat and squeeze his esophagus, letting them catch the breath that tries to make its way up his throat, all excuses and defenses dying on his tongue like something that never was.

Shane gets where Ilya is coming from, understands it completely, but that doesn't stop the anger from rising up his throat like bile. Doesn't stop the words from warping into something unsaid.

"Is that what you really think?" Shane asks quietly, stepping back like he's been burned as he tilts his chin up; a defense mechanism he's picked up from *Ilya* of all people, a way to save face in a moment of utter defeat.

"I do not know what *to* think, Shane. I have been looking in my brain for weeks now. I have tried, what do you call it - where I go in your shoes?"

"Putting yourself in my shoes." Shane mumbles, trying to help his boyfriend out all the while trying to remember they're mid fight.

"*Da*, I have tried putting myself in your shoes. I have tried talking to people —"

"You've been talking to our friends and family about us?? About what a horrible boyfriend I am??" Shane interrupts, disbelief lacing his tone, the prior thought of helping completely flying out the window at the mention of other people.

"That is not what I said, do not twist what I am saying." Ilya breathes out calmly, turning back towards the sink, but making no movement to actually do anything besides stare into the suds.

“I didn’t have to, it was practically implied!!” Shane exclaims, pushing forward to get a better glimpse at Ilya’s hidden face.

“Hollander. I did not *say* that. But I did not know what to do, or who to go to, I was at a loss, and they were wanting to *listen* when I –”

Shane isn’t quite sure what makes him snap, isn’t sure when the final rubber band was placed around his fast beating heart, but all he can think about are his friends and his family having to hear about how horribly Shane is failing; can only think about the conclusions they must’ve come up with.

The only thing on the forefront of his mind is Ilya and their family theorizing all the ways Shane has been fucking up.

So it’s really no wonder Shane bites the bullet instead of his tongue.

“Oh God forbid no one listens to you and bows down to you for all five seconds *Rozanov*. What a travesty that must be!” Shane shouts, a hysterical laugh bubbling up from an ugly part of his chest, and he regrets it the second it falls from his lips; feels gross and mean the second it shatters the air between them.

Ilya stares at him for a second, before completely ignoring him, mumbling something in Russian that Shane can’t quite catch under his breath as he waltzes away from the sink over to the garage door instead and suddenly, suddenly Shane is on high alert.

“So you’re leaving now? Running away when things get hard, just like you always do!?” Shane asks quizzical, just on the edge of frantic as he stares at Ilya from across the island, and Shane knows everything falling from his lips isn’t even half the truth, but he feels dizzy and anxious and downright scared so it’s really no surprise. This must be the final straw for Ilya because before Shane knows it, he’s whirling around and sending daggers Shane’s way.

“*Christ*, Shane. Stop with these crazy conclusions and listen to yourself for one minute! If you do not want to listen to me, then you can listen to how stupid you sound.” Ilya spits, gesturing wildly with his hands as he stares at Shane. “You have one track mind, sometimes, and it’s one of many things I love about you, but other times you cannot be bothered to direct it onto anyone else but yourself!” Ilya cries, and Shane can hear as the anger seeps out of every syllable like wine that’ll inevitably stain the pristine space between them, can hear Ilya’s English break up more and more the angrier he gets.

Shane hears him, loud and clear, but it’s like his words are suddenly shallow and hollow, coming in bits and pieces as they funnel through one ear and out the other, and he swears he’s listening, swears he’s trying to hang onto every word out of his boyfriend’s mouth, but that white hot static is louder than ever. His brain feels fuzzy and his eyes blur and whether it’s from unshed tears he hasn’t noticed yet or for another reason completely, he isn’t sure.

He isn’t sure how he got from point A to point B, but all he knows is suddenly he can’t *breathe*. Suddenly, he’s six feet under, water encasing his lungs as they shrivel and expand into nothing.

Suddenly, he's eleven again, listening to his mom yell extremities at one of the other hockey moms for some reason Shane suddenly can't remember. He's twelve, his duffel bag hanging loosely from his grip as he stares into his room after a game they lost that was his fault. He's sixteen and one of his teammates is talking about being so in love with someone you can't contain it and it feels like there's an undercurrent to his words, but all Shane can focus on is the fact that he doesn't see that being in the cards for him. He's twenty three and he's trying to stave off a panic attack in an award show bathroom.

Ilya either doesn't notice Shane's sudden inward spiral because of the words cascading from his mouth, or he simply doesn't care, and Shane knows the latter is far from, but his brain was never known for providing him with logicity in situations like this.

He's too much, and not enough, and not *good* enough, and why *should* Ilya listen to him when Shane hasn't given Ilya the time or day lately? Shane doesn't blame him.

"For weeks I have tried to stand over your dreams Shane, despite feeling like my own life makes no sense, and for *weeks* I have been met with none of the same back. All I ask for is just a little of what I give you back. Is too much to ask for?" Ilya barrels on, and Shane can't help but flinch at the words hurdling at him at full speed.

Too much to ask for. Too much to ask for. Too much to ask for. Is Shane too much to ask for?

"Ilya—" Shane warns, and Ilya either once again ignores him or Shane is speaking too small and too quiet, because Ilya just continues, and Shane can't hear much besides the static in his ears now, can't see past the blur coating his eyes.

He can vaguely see Ilya's mouth moving, 'can just register the low hum of his voice as it echoes across their cabinets, can just barely tell there's a few Russian words filtering in and out of his now completely broken up english.

His skin itches in a way that he knows won't be relieved by scratching, a thrum that races through every nerve ending, his fingertips the finish line as they numb over. He can feel the soft puncture of his nails as they dig into his palm, his knuckles white with the force, and he can already picture the purple and red crescent shape wounds that'll adorn his open palm in just a few short minutes.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Shane registers that he's on the cusp of a panic attack, if not already there. He knows what this is, knows the telltale signs, and yet despite this, it feels like he's completely lost and confused and *fading*.

He's fading, 'feels as his senses disappear from him entirely. He tries to take a shaky breath, but to no avail he's met with the harsh feeling of his lungs caving in instead of expanding out.

His vision is blurring at the edges as he tries to blink away the fog, and all his movements feel muddled and slow, distorted and delayed. The kitchen tilts and spins as Shane clutches at his chest, willing the panic to cease its dance, but it only intensifies, wrapping its icy tendrils around him like something vile and suffocating as it continues its waltz.

When Shane chances a look up, he can see Ilya's mouth still moving, can see his lips moving a mile a minute, but no words are registering. It's loud and quiet all at once, a cacophony of noise and silence fighting for reign.

Shane wishes he could hear Ilya, even if he were met with harsh rebuttals and cold statements, even if they were words in a language he only knew bits and pieces of, even if he knew he wouldn't like the words currently being spewed, he thinks the least he can do is file away every sentence being thrown his way like a game replay that needs debriefing.

This must not translate because Shane can't find a grounding point to save the life of him, 'can't focus on a singular word coming out of Ilya's mouth, and he claws at his chest once more to find just an infinitesimal shred or semblance of solace.

He tries to make a list in his head, tries to sort the jumble that twists and twines its way through the crevices of his brain, but he can't get past *One*.

"Ily—" Shane tries, *pleads*, pushing the words through his constricted throat, and he's not sure if any noise even manages to escape, and he thinks it must not because Ilya's mouth is *still moving*.

His mouth is still moving and Shane feels like he's underwater, his ears filled with cotton and his lungs filled with rose thorns, every breath feeling like a puncture wound to the organs that reside in his chest cavity and he can't *breathe* and he can't *see* and Ilya is still in front of him but not where Shane wants him to be and he can briefly register Anya whining near him or behind him and it's suddenly all too much too fast and —

"*Red!*" Shane screams, his voice hoarse and scratchy. "Red, red, Red, *red!*" He shouts before his knees buckle and he's sliding down against the island and pulling his knees up to chest, his hands taking refuge in his hair as he *tugs*.

Everything around him, finally, comes to a halting stop.

As everything slows down, he can just barely register the tears that are cascading down his cheeks and pooling onto his neck, 'can register the pitter patter of his heart as it attempts to slow its palpitations, 'can register the dull ache of his jaw and the acrid taste in his mouth and the *pounding* in his head.

He registers as Ilya quickly and quietly pads his way over to where Shane is on the floor, 'registers the tense quietude that fills the kitchen and replaces the screaming match just prior.

His joggers are a mirage of color as he burns holes into his lap, refusing to meet his boyfriend's gaze, not after what he just did.

Shane is a lot of things.

He's soft and reserved and yet so full of life it burns Ilya from the inside out sometimes.

Ilya looks at Shane sometimes, Shane who holds himself with this fire and zest, and Ilya can't help but want to drink him in, 'can't help but wonder if just the press of his lips is

enough to fill him with as much respect and carefulness that Shane seems to hold.

Shane is a lot of things, and Ilya has witnessed his fair share of breakdowns, has held Shane in his arms on multiple accounts, and yet – Ilya can't say he's ever seen his boyfriend this distraught before.

The thought and the sight in front of him startle him into silence and he's unsure what the next move is. This feels like uncharted territory and Ilya *hates* that more than he knows Shane does.

Shane, who likes things to play out as they should, Shane who likes to have a game plan for things, likes to know in exactly what direction something is going to go and what exactly his part in it is.

And yet, they've made it this far.

With how fast they jumped into their relationship, way back when Ilya had made the rash decision to ignore the voices in his head and meet Shane halfway in a tangle of limbs and the slotting of lips for the first time, all the way to Shane inviting him to the cabin, it was no surprise they didn't have time to delve into deeper *discussions*, if you will.

At the beginning, they had gotten used to secret rendezvous, gotten used to the quick work of hands and the fast pace of lips, and even with the exception of their slower, more sensual times, even now, they never had the time (or want, in all honesty) to delve into deeper aspects of their pleasure. What they had was perfect. It was known and precise.

So when Ilya had made his move to Ottawa, after a round that left them sweaty and breathless and *sated* in what could technically be considered *their* new bed, in their new *sheets*, a list of rules were derived.

They discussed their hard no's, discussed things they were into (Ilya reveled in the way Shane's cheeks were coated in a bright tint), and things they'd be willing to try. And with this, came safe words.

"Is important that we come up with system, something that will tell the other person if something feels wrong or uncomfortable. I want to try everything with you, but that comes with having a safe space." Ilya had said, lazily running his fingers up and down Shane's arm, and Shane had immediately agreed.

They both agreed on the stoplight system. Something easy enough to remember, and easy enough to use if need be.

And it *was* needed. Ilya has comforted Shane after a few rough goes, and Shane has done the same for Ilya; a gentle lull of whispered out praises and tender grazings as they came down.

So it's not that it was unusual for Ilya to hear, necessarily.

What *was* unusual, was the setting in which Shane had just used it.

What *was* unusual, was the way Shane had said it.

Shane is trembling on the floor, a few hiccups escaping from his parted lips and Ilya aches to touch him, to *do* something, but he isn't sure what's acceptable, isn't sure he's not the reason for this onslaught of emotion.

"Can I touch you?" Ilya asks softly, bending down to get level with Shane, putting his hand half way between himself and his boyfriend's trembling frame.

"D- don't." Shane says through a choked sob, flinching away from Ilya's hand.

And the way Ilya's hand wilts away like a flower in winter, deflating ever so slightly from Shane's doing, makes Shane's head hurt worse. But he swallows down the apology that sits heavily against his tongue, and focuses on his breathing instead.

Ilya nods his head, anxiously wiping his hands across his thighs as he sits on his haunches in front of Shane, desperate to touch but adamant on allowing Shane to take the time he needs, making sure he doesn't overwhelm him anymore than he already is.

He watches as the tight pull Shane has on his hair eases ever so slightly, watches with patience as Shane counts backwards from ten, his foot tapping quietly and softly against the wood floor, an exercise Ilya's therapist taught him who then taught Shane during some panic attack come and gone.

"That's it *moya lyubov*', you are good." Ilya says softly, shocked to find his voice even working all things considered. Shane doesn't flinch away from it this time around, so Ilya counts his blessings and moves on.

He eases off his heels and slides back, his back sliding down one of the opposite cabinets so he's facing Shane, close enough to reach out if dire, but still far enough away to give him space.

As he watches Shane come back to himself, he replays their conversation in his head, tries to pinpoint the part where Shane shut down and how he completely managed to miss it until it was too late.

There's a lot of faults Ilya has had to overcome when it's come to their relationship, a lot of insecurities that waft through the open air and sit heavily against his shoulders; things Shane and his family (Svetlana, Shane's parents) and his *therapist* have all tried to help him overcome, help him ease some of the weight away.

And he's gotten better, gotten better at tuning out the voices in his head and letting Shane and his therapist take some of the weight of said voices. He still has his days, but overall, he's become more open; more *free*, not as closed off or angry. As much as he can be at least. He knows, now at least, that healing isn't linear, it's a task not a practice.

The one thing he's always prided himself on when it came down to it though, the one thing Ilya has always had a knack for, was telling when something was wrong.

As much as Shane pretends to hate it, Ilya was good at calling him out on his bullshit, good at clocking when Shane was having a bad day or when a comment or play is going to run Shane

up a wall all night.

Reading Shane has become one of his favorite aspects when it comes down to the trust aspect of their relationship, and in turn, though it's taken time, Ilya trusts Shane to be able to do the same for him.

Because the thing is, Ilya has noticed Shane struggling just as much as he himself has been struggling. Granted, it's something recent he's discovered, but he's come across it nonetheless.

He's taken note of the sleepless nights and the non-existent appetite. He's forged the purple crescent shapes under his eyes to memory. He watches the tremble in Shane's hand and wills it to cease simply by sliding his own hand between the quiver when he's in vicinity and can, silently praying Shane gets the message. And when he isn't near, when he watches Shane's nervous tics or shaky limbs through a live broadcasting from his own bed, he shoots him texts or calls him when possible and even begrudgingly texts Hayden to keep an eye on him.

He steps in where he can.

He makes Shane lunch and stuffs snacks in his duffel when he drives back to Montreal and prays that Shane will see it and eat it. He drags him to bed and holds him till the shaking Shane thinks he doesn't notice subsides to evened out breathing. He reminds him how proud of him he is and how much love runs from the tips of his fingers straight to Shane's own.

And sometimes, it doesn't feel like enough.

Maybe it's because most days, Ilya can't even convince himself of these things sometimes.

Sometimes, Ilya wants nothing more than to sit Shane down and demand him to *breathe*.

But he knows his boyfriend.

And he feels a bit hypocritical when he can't even do that himself as of late.

Besides, just like Ilya himself, he knows how stubborn his boyfriend is; knows that demanding that of him won't help either of them.

So he's been waiting.

He waits until Shane comes to him. He steps in where he can. He takes careful consideration. He *loves* Shane with all that he is with all that he has in hopes that it's enough to slow him down, even just for a second.

So the fact he bulldozed right past the very obvious signs of Shane's panic attack, well.

Well.

Ilya isn't sure how long they sit there, but he's mulling over their conversation in his head when Shane finally speaks up.

“I’m sorry.” Shane whispers, and he keeps his head down, his eyes interlocked in his lap. A wounded disgruntled noise of sorts escapes Ilya’s lips without his permission, and his hand twitches in his lap where he so desperately aches to reach out and take Shane into his arms.

“Why do you apologize?” Ilya asks, and he has to imagine his legs are planted into the floor so he doesn’t get up from his spot and head over to Shane and collect him in his arms (though, Ilya thinks even if that were true, he would rip himself up from the dirt root by root if it meant getting to hold him).

“You know why.” Shane says, but this time he looks up through his lashes, and though there are no more tears dancing across his waterline, a few leftovers cling to his lashes like rain droplets that Ilya wants nothing more than to swipe his thumb gently across.

“Shane.” Ilya says, a warning of sorts, and Ilya just huffs and rolls his eyes gently.

“I just had to save word out of an argument. That’s pitiful.” Shane says, a self deprecating laugh bubbling out of him that’s quickly cut off by a choked sound in his throat as he looks away.

“No, is not. Not at all, Shane. You did what you must do. If that was the only way your body knew how to get out of stressful situation, then you did what you had to do. You took care of yourself, and I am proud of you.” Ilya says rather sternly, and he hopes Shane takes his words at face value, hope Shane understands just how big this was.

But because it’s Shane, Ilya is met with another self-effacing snort as Shane shakes his head, ready to fire back a remark, but Ilya is quick to cut him off before he gets the chance to.

“I am serious, Shane.” Ilya states, ducking his head down a bit in an attempt to catch Shane’s eyes. Shane just ducks his head farther down. “Hollander. Look at me, please?”

It takes him a second, an internal war clearly going on in his head, but the better part must win because he’s suddenly looking up at Ilya again, his teeth pulling in his bottom lip in the process, and it takes everything in Ilya not to reach across and smooth out the indent that’s sure to be left in its wake.

Ilya smiles sadly, and something in Shane breaks, a dam just completely falling to its demise as fresh tears ricochet down his cheeks, his bottom lip wobbling, and Ilya doesn’t even get a chance to say anything before Shane is scooting across the threshold and crashing in between Ilya’s legs and into his chest.

Ilya is quick to pull himself out of his previous stupor before he’s wrapping his arms around Shane’s shaking frame, his body wracking with quiet sobs.

“You’re okay, you are so good Shane, *так хорошо*. You are here. I am here.” Ilya whispers softly into Shane’s ear, pushing his hair off his forehead as best as he can as he softly rocks Shane and continues whispering noncommittal praises and sweet nothings into his ear, both in Russian and English.

When Shane's sobs finally subside and start stuttering out, and he's left with soft sniffles and big exhales, Ilya presses one last chaste kiss to Shane's temple, before speaking out into the kitchen.

"Can you stand?" Ilya asks softly, and Shane's entire body tenses. Ilya's heart cracks down the middle, but he's quick to swallow down the ache in his chest in favor of reassuring Shane. "I am not going anywhere, I think we should move to some place comfy is all, *da?*"

It takes Shane a second to compose himself, to which Ilya just runs his hands up and down Shane's arms while his boyfriend collects himself, before they're standing up off the floor. Ilya gives Shane one last once over, a sad smile plastering itself upon his face, before he's taking Shane by the hand and slowly guiding them to the living room.

"Couch or bed?" Ilya asks, turning to face Shane, both of his hands coming up to rest on either side of Shane's biceps.

Ilya watches as Shane looks up towards the stairs to the bedroom, back to the couch, before landing back on Ilya as he weighs his options. He tilts his head over to the suede couch in the living room and whispers out '*couch*' hoarsely. Ilya squeezes his arms once, before leading them over and sitting down against the cushions, pulling Shane down flush against his chest.

Only when Shane finally situates himself, his ear up against Ilya's chest and his legs pulled up underneath him, does Ilya begin talking again.

"What happened?" Ilya asks softly, continuing his descent down Shane's arms before they graze back upwards. Shane goes to open his mouth, but before he can, Ilya cuts him off quickly. "And do not think about apologizing."

Shane shuts his mouth, huffing quietly as he idly plays with the strings on Ilya's Ottawa hoodie.

"It just got to be a lot. I don't know what came over me. I didn't even mean to safe word. I'm just so...." Shane says, cutting himself off as the words die on his tongue.

A part of Shane, the part that thinks (*knows*) this all could've been avoided had he been not only honest with Ilya since the beginning, but himself too, 'thinks he should just rip off the bandaid, admit that he's drowning.

But another part, that more self sacrificial part, the insecure part even, wants to keep quiet, wants to stay above the rising waterline until he no longer can.

But that was the issue, wasn't it? He's long past staying above the surface, there is no more wading, no more treading water; his lungs have been slowly filling for quite some time now.

"So what, *lyubov*?" Ilya prompts, resting his chin atop Shane's head, and Shane breathes in Ilya's scent, forging every note to memory.

When Shane thinks back to his adolescence, even the years after, the first few moments away from home, he can't help but think of the loneliness.

Maybe he's always been drowning, maybe the forlornness that used to encase his lungs back then, has only grown, grown from a small and mundane current to something larger and more dangerous like a riptide fighting for control.

When Shane thinks back to the days where he found just a shred of relief, just a second of breath, his head above the surface, he can't help but correlate it with the feeling that seeps into his skin and burrows into his bone marrow; *lonely*. There was no one there to clap him on the back and witness the breath he finally managed to slip down his throat.

He *hated* that. He hated coming up for air after being pulled under for so long, only to have no one on the shore waving him in.

Maybe that was the issue, maybe that's why he continued to get swept under.

He had his mom, and his dad, and yeah, sometimes a teammate here and there, but were they ever really enough of a force to drag him out from under each wave? And that's not to say they weren't *enough*. Shane loves his parents more than words could ever express, and he's so beyond grateful for all that they've done for him, all that they *continue* to do for him.

They've stuck by him when no one else has. They've clapped him on the back and stood by in times of celebration. They've extinguished the fire under his ass time after time.

Realistically, Shane knows it's on him to tell people when he's struggling.

Realistically, Shane knows his family is well aware of all the times he's fallen behind.

He *knows* this.

But that doesn't make it any less hard to speak up. 'Doesn't make it any less embarrassing to admit defeat.

The idea of speaking the words, letting them spill from his mouth and contradict everything he's tried so hard at perfecting, well.

Well.

It feels a lot like failure.

Shane doesn't want to admit this to Ilya, especially knowing all that he knows about Ilya now; about his mom and his dad and his brother and hell, *Russia*. It feels wrong. It feels gross. It makes shame sit heavy on his gut, festering like a wound that'll either dissipate into billowed out smoke or fill his lungs with the swell of it, suffocating him from the inside out. He thinks, maybe he'd be okay with that.

So no, he really doesn't want to tell Ilya. Not one bit, but.

But.

Maybe letting Ilya in, allowing Ilya to see this aspect of him, maybe by doing so, Shane can not only finally take a break himself, let someone else help carry this burden, but let Ilya

know he isn't alone in this either, let Ilya hold him as the waves crash against them both.

Because fuck if Shane doesn't love Ilya.

And fuck, if he doesn't want this to be his life forever; him and Ilya right here.

Loving him like he does and continuing to let it take root and grow. In ways that make him stupid and giddy and *happy*. In ways that Shane didn't think he'd ever get the honor of knowing or having. Ilya is like coming up for a breath of fresh air, and Shane is so tired of swallowing down water. He's just so –

“*Tired*. I'm so tired, Ilya.” Shane admits, whispering it like it was something sacred, and maybe it is. His words crack at the end, and Ilya freezes before he squeezes him harder, mending the cracks and splinters that adorn Shane piece by piece.

“I know Shane, I know. *Me too*.” Ilya whispers, rubbing his hands up and down Shane's arm, and Shane just freezes.

“What?” He whispers, stilling, and Ilya hopes he didn't say the wrong thing, but he bulldozes on anyway.

“You think I have not noticed? *Shane*, it has taken every bit of myself to not sit you down in chair and demand you not only *talk to me*, but take much needed *breath*.” Ilya exclaims, articulating every word as he gently shakes Shane so that maybe Shane will *get it*.

And get it he does, because the next thing Ilya knows, Shane breaks into tears once more, but it's not that that has him hiccuping out breaths, it's the ‘*me too*’ that is playing over and over like a broken record player in Shane's head.

Because first off, *what do you mean* Ilya has known about Shane's downward spiral? *What do you mean* Shane has been playing this part, keeping up with this never ending facade, for practically no reason? And beyond that, Shane just feels like a dick. Ilya just confirmed what Shane already knew to be true deep down; that Ilya has been struggling just as much, if not more. And here Shane is, blubbering about his own problems.

Here Shane is, putting more weight on Ilya's shoulders.

Logically, Shane realizes they're in the same boat here. They've both been hiding, both been putting on a mask day after day so the other doesn't question it, or worry, and for what? What good did that do when they both were keenly aware?

And that didn't stop either of them from saying anything, ‘didn't stop them from performing day after day, as best as they could at least.

A sob filled with anger and exhaust and *relief* rips through Shane.

And Ilya isn't any better off; ‘feels just as horrid as Shane.

Because Ilya *knew* just as much as Shane did. He knew that Shane was struggling too, and yeah, maybe he didn't know the extent, and maybe he thought he was better off letting Shane

take his own course, but as he sits here and holds his weeping boyfriend, he can't help but feel guilty and maybe even a little selfish.

Selfish for thinking that he was the only one struggling as of late, but guilty for also having an inkling, for lowkey knowing and still getting angry tonight.

Ilya knew, and he still let his anger and hurt get the better of him.

And yes, maybe Ilya was in the right just as much as Shane is, and maybe he was in the wrong *just as much as Shane was*, but that doesn't stop the culpability that runs through Ilya's blood.

"I am so sorry Shane. I am sorry." Ilya whispers out, scratching softly at Shane's scalp with one hand, his other squeezing Shane's calf as he squeezes his eyes shut and tries to keep his own tears at bay.

Shane makes a wounded noise and is quickly whirling around to face Ilya.

"Why are *you* apologizing??" Shane asks incredulously, looking Ilya head on, and the pair must look like a sight to take in; Shane curled up in Ilya's lap, all the while facing Ilya, tears streaming down both of their faces.

Shane's lips have been bitten raw, and Ilya wants nothing more than to take them in between his own and lick away the cracks and the wounds, speckles of blood and all, kiss them until the only feeling in them is his own soft lips rather than harsh punctuate teeth.

Ilya's curls are haywire, sticking up every which way, a few falling over his eyebrow and sticking pitifully to his forehead. Shane can't help himself when he reaches up and tucks a stray curl behind Ilya's ear.

"I have known you were... struggling and I have not said anything." Ilya whispers out, his bottom lip just barely wobbling with the admission. Shane searches his eyes for something, and what it is, Ilya can't tell.

"Why didn't you?" Shane whispers back, continuing his hunt as his eyes flit back and forth between Ilya's, taking in the cerulean he's constantly floating in.

"I do not know. I thought maybe you would come to me on your own, or that if I brought it up you would lie or...what is term for... mad grudge?"

"Resent?" Shane offers softly, letting Ilya piece together exactly what it is he wants to say.

"*Da, resent* me for accusing you. I do not know. It seems foolish, and I am sorry." Ilya states, a reverence strong enough to make that guilt that's been simmering in Shane's gut come back tenfold.

If Ilya can sit here and be honest and apologize, so can Shane. He owes that much to him.

"No." Shane says, furrowing his brows as he shakes his head in earnest, and Ilya's brows just furrow in suit. "No, don't apologize. It wasn't foolish. You were right, I probably would've

shrugged you off. I didn't want you to know. I didn't want *anyone* to know. And fuck, I'm sorry too Ilya. I'm so fucking sorry. I'm no better. I've also known *you* were struggling and I've stayed quiet." Shane stutters out, tears gathering on his waterline for the nth time tonight.

"Why did you not?" Ilya asks, bringing his hands up to rest on Shane's cheeks, shaking his head a bit in the process as he repeats Shane's own question from minutes prior.

"I don't really know, and I wish I had a better answer for you, but I don't. I think, maybe it was the same as you? Sort of? I think I thought that if I kept pushing you on it, you'd start pushing back, but it would be me you were pushing away. I don't know. It sounds stupid now that I say it out loud. I just, I knew you had your therapist now and I thought you'd come to me when you needed me." Shane explains, fiddling with Ilya's hoodie strings once more, looking anywhere but at Ilya.

He feels like an idiot as he says it all out loud.

"Shane." Ilya says softly, and the way he says it takes him back to the first time Shane ever said Ilya's name like it meant something, like it was a prayer of sorts, like it was something venerated. Ilya says it with such reverence and softness that Shane can't help but look up into his eyes. "I love you. We are stupid."

"Yeah maybe. And I love you too. So much." Shane says, leaning in to press a soft kiss against the corners of Ilya's mouth, before pulling away and just staring at his boyfriend. He wishes there were enough words to express just how much Ilya means to him; wishes there was a way he could make Ilya understand.

It hits him suddenly that he knows just how to do that.

"I'm sorry, I'll be right back." Shane says quickly, scrambling off of Ilya quickly as he can without braining himself on the coffee table behind him. He ignores the confusion in Ilya's eyes as he makes his way behind the couch to where the cupboard under the stairs is, quickly finding the neatly wrapped box he put under there before everything blew up.

He carries the box back around to where Ilya is sitting, ignoring the confusion on his boyfriend's face as he carefully sets the box down on Ilya's lap before he sits back on the coffee table directly across from him.

"What is this?" Ilya asks, carefully setting his hands on the side of the small box.

"I got you something. Consider it a late welcoming gift." Shane shrugs, avoiding eye contact as he rubs his suddenly clammy hands against his pants.

"Nothing will beat butt plug gift." Ilya says, wiggling his eyebrows as he ducks below and tries to meet Shane's gaze, and he revels in the way Shane's cheeks go pink at the memory.

"Just - just open it, please, before I change my mind you heathen."

“Fine, fine.” Ilya jokes, carefully pulling one end of the ribbon off the box until the bow comes undone. Once the ribbon is removed, Ilya grabs the top of the box carefully and sets both the top and the ribbon to the side. There’s a top layer of tissue paper that Ilya peels back before he’s met with –

“New Skate inserts?” Ilya questions dumbly. Instead of answering, Shane leans forward, grabs both of the skate tongues, and flips them over in Ilya’s hand.

And right there, in a faint blue embroidering at the top of the tongue inserts reads, *Ya tebya lyublyu*.

Ilya couldn’t even stop the onslaught of tears that waltz across his waterline if he wanted, doesn’t even try to stop their dance down his cheeks as he rubs his thumb softly over the embroidering.

“So when I’m not physically there with you on the ice, you always have a part of me there anyways.” Shane explains shyly, and the soft blush that coats his cheeks is enough to have Ilya choke back a sob.

“*Shane*.” Ilya chokes out, a hiccuped sob wracking his body as he gently pushes the box off his lap next to him, before practically throwing himself at Shane and forcing him back onto the couch with him.

Shane goes easily, lowering them back down against the couch as carefully as he can as he strokes Ilya’s back, Shane tucking his face tightly into the crook of Ilya’s neck as Ilya continues to cry.

“*Ya tebya lyublyu, Ya tebya lyublyu*.” Ilya whispers.

“I love you too, so much it scares me sometimes. I was an idiot for starting a fight tonight, especially on our one night together. I wasn’t mad at you, Ilya, I was mad at the situation and how badly you were struggling, and how embarrassed I was about my own struggles, and yeah maybe I was a bit upset, and I took it out on you and that wasn’t fair. Can you forgive me?” Shane rambles softly against Ilya’s hair, and Ilya pulls back as far as he can, his back pushed between the back of the couch and his front up against the front of Shane.

“I forgive you if you can forgive me.” Ilya states, sniffing loudly as he watches more tears pool in Shane’s eyes.

“I forgive you. I forgive you, Ilya. I’m sorry I’ve had my head so far up my own ass to see what a horrible boyfriend I’ve been.” Shane admits softly, looking away from Ilya’s downward cast.

“Hey. The only thing up your ass is my dick. Nothing else. Okay?” Ilya jokes, trying to ease the tension, and like always, like Ilya has always been able to do since they were seventeen years old, the tension bleeds from Shane’s shoulders with a shaky laugh and a soft shove to Ilya’s shoulder. “Serious though Shane, there are things *both* of us can work on. But that does not make us horrible partners. That makes us humans in normal human relationship.” Ilya

states matter of factly, suddenly serious, grabbing ahold of Shane's chin to make him look him in the eyes.

"Wow, therapy has really done a number on you, huh?" Shane says softly, his eyes flitting back and forth between Ilya's own.

"*Da*, you should try it sometime. I am new man. Ish."

Shane rolls his eyes affectionately, before leaning in to give Ilya a soft, slow kiss, before pulling back and looking at him once more.

"I think we should set up a system of sorts. To make this relationship work while we're away. Until we can be together all the time. Maybe even then." Shane states, chewing on his inner cheek as he thinks of what he wants to say.

"Like rules?" Ilya asks.

"Sure, sort of. I mean, yeah, basically. We never go to bed angry. We stop making assumptions, no matter how much we think we're helping. We be honest; with ourselves and with one another. We stop putting up a front in front of one another; let our masks fall in the safety of our homes, in *each other*." Shane says, absentmindedly drawing shapes onto the back of Ilya's hand, a small smile plastered onto his face.

He can feel the tilt of Ilya's own smile up against his collarbone.

"Okay." Ilya whispers, pressing a chaste kiss onto Shane's shoulder, over some scar from an adolescence he can't quite picture.

Shane can't help the smile that adorns his face.

That isn't the end of their talk. They still have things to figure out and things to work through, but Shane feels lighter, can feel himself slowly float up to the surface with Ilya's help, and though they're nowhere near at ease, they find it a little easier to breathe knowing they're no longer drowning alone.

That also isn't their last argument, far from it.

It's small things like who's turn it is to do the dishes when they are together or who has to get up and let Anya out. It's larger things like Ilya failing to remember to take care of himself when things get bad again, closing himself off, or Shane having to keep up with his own hockey career back home in Montreal. But they stick to their rules and they find each argument to be a little less harrowing, a little less daunting, and at the end of each one, they find solace in the enormity that is their relationship.

Because at the end of the day, it's the little things that make up their relationship.

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