the lucky one

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the lucky one

by beetlesandstars

Summary

Tomorrow, he'll call Shane and apologise. He'll fix what he broke. He doesn't want Shane to be angry at him anymore.

He doesn’t remember swerving to avoid a merging truck.

He also doesn’t remember hitting the tree.

Or: Ilya gets into a car accident. Shane is there to pick up the pieces.

Notes

this is for the platonic love of my life kryptonian who inspires me every day. WHAT a writer. WHAT a friend. WHAT an incredible human being. i'm so lucky to know you. i love you, bud.

cw: ilya’s suicidal ideation plays a big part in why he gets into a car accident, but ultimately, he realises he does not want to die. his depression does play a huge role in the story though, so please take care of yourself and click out if you need to <3

title from bullion's 'we had a good time'.

enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

It shouldn't have gotten to Ilya, is the thing. It shouldn't have unmoored him. One text message should not have had the power to upend his entire day, to turn his mood into something sour and dangerous.

But it has. It did.

JANE: *We can't see each other next week.*

It wasn't a big deal. Shane and Ilya had cancelled on each other before, for perfectly valid reasons.

That was before Shane met Rose Landry, though.

Before, it had never ached. It had never burned. Never felt like rejection.

Tonight, it did. Enough so that he was dialing Shane's number before consciously deciding to do so.

"Hello?"

Ilya inhales once, closing his eyes. Even now, when he's hurt and upset, Shane's voice is a balm. "Jane."

A pause. Then, "Why are you calling me?"

Ilya tries to huff a laugh, but it comes out sounding strained. "Why?"

"Yeah," Shane says. "It's, like, two in the morning."

Ilya opens his eyes. A reactive mutt he may be, but he is not an angry man. Still, something in him shifts the same way tectonic plates do, chillingly imprecise in its rampage to *move.* It rocks him.

Tamping it all down, he says, "You were awake."

"Yeah, but–"

"Is Rose Landry there?" Ilya asks, clenching his fist around his phone. "Is she sleeping next to you? Did you text me in her bed?"

"Rozanov, that's–"

"I am just wondering!" Ilya exclaims, annoyance flaring. *Hurt* flaring. "You will be with her next week, yes? That is why we cannot meet?"

"What?" There's shuffling on the other line, like Shane's sitting up. Maybe he really is in bed. "No, I'm– no. Hayden needs me to watch the kids. What's gotten into you?"

“Nothing.” Ilya’s head is spinning. He feels nauseous. He feels lonely. He feels… like his mother, he thinks.

A silence falls between them. And then–

“You’re mad,” Shane accuses.

“I am not mad.”

“Oh, try *again,* Rozanov.”

Ilya’s eyes shutter, heart sinking.

“Good luck on game tomorrow,” Ilya snaps, hanging up. He exhales harshly, throat tight. “Fuck.”

Shane might not be in love with Rose Landry, might not ever fall in love with her, but she’s a safe option. A good option. She’s kind, and beautiful, smart and successful– everything Shane wants. Ilya’s been a constant, nagging blip on Shane Hollander’s radar. Someone to get under, and then get over. Ilya’s the one who’s kept Shane from moving on, he knows it. Knows his inability to let go, to put a stop to things, allowed Shane to keep indulging.

The real problem was that when Ilya wanted something, he wanted it enough to think he needed it.

This isn’t that. He’s pretty sure he *does* need Shane. It’s more than just sex to Ilya, more than fleeting, erotic moments interspersing the rest of their lives. It has been, for a long time. And even when he tried to put a lid on it, his devotion would seep through the cracks. The texting, the phone calls, the stolen glances. Cooking for Shane, inviting him into his home, inquiring so carefully about Shane possibly sleeping over so as to keep from spooking him. Giving someone – giving *Shane* – unfettered access to his home, to his kitchen and bedroom and body, was equivalent to throwing himself on the floor like some sort of unloved animal, belly-up and desperate.

Ilya did all that for second place. Worse still, he did it on purpose.

He’s so tired, is the thing. And he can’t sleep— not restfully, anyhow. When he closes his eyes, he’s so braced for the nightmares that even when they don’t come, he wakes up achy and outside his own body. The nightmares change, but one thing remains constant: the presence of his mother.

He wishes his father had been different. Wishes his father was alive, and different, and present. He wishes Alexei was kinder. Wishes he could give Svetlana the kind of love she deserves. He wishes, and wishes, and wishes, and is reminded each morning he wakes up heaving and shaking that he is as childish as his father used to say he is.

The thing is, Ilya’s father never fell out of love with his mother. He just never learned how to love Ilya.

Ilya wonders if anyone truly loves him. If anyone would wonder where he was, if he stopped answering his phone.

A sudden wave of cold sweeps through him. He knows what this is, knows how he starts thinking right before he crashes. He knows this is– depression, or whatever. He doesn't actually want to disappear. Doesn't actually want to die.

Right?

Swallowing, Ilya carefully side-steps that line of thinking and unlocks his phone again, thumb hovering over Shane's number.

He has no right to call him again. He just *yelled* at him. But he needs to– apologise. Hear his voice. Anything.

Exhaling shakily, he presses *call,* fumbling as he raises his phone to his ear.

Please, Ilya thinks. *Please answer me. Please pick up.*

The phone rings and rings, until finally, it goes to voice mail.

Okay. Okay, it's fine. It's alright. Ilya will go for a drive and listen to bad pop music and calm down. He's alone, but he's always been alone. It's not a bad thing.

Tossing his phone on the couch, he stumbles around the couch and grabs his car keys off the bureau.

He doesn't lock the door after him. Doesn't remember getting into his car, nor speeding out of the driveway. He does, however, remember his lungs ceasing, his face growing wet, knuckles going white around the steering wheel.

God, he's so fucking *weak.* Everything his father ever said about him– it's all true. Nothing is happening right now, nothing bad is happening – petty argument with Shane Hollander aside – and Ilya is falling apart.

His foot presses down on the gas pedal, the streetlights blurring on either side of him.

He thinks of his career. He thinks of the time Scott Hunter accidentally let it slip that he used to take anti-depressants. Logically, Ilya knows he is not the only person on earth who feels like this, who feels irredeemable simply for having been born. For having dragged his family down. For having trapped-

Irina. His mother. He did trap her, by being born. He trapped her with Grigori, who was never kind even when he had mercy. And Irina was not weak. She fought and fought, but she had Ilya's father hovering over her. She could not silence her own mind when there was an angry man in the house.

There is no angry man in Ilya's house. There is just a very, very sad one.

This world has humbled him, he thinks numbly. This world in which his father does not exist anymore.

A spark. A tiny flicker of hope: Shane.

There are good people in this world, who do still exist. Good people who get scared sometimes, who are stuck navigating impossible circumstances, who choose to keep Ilya in their lives even when it complicates them.

They should not have to wake up to a world that Ilya has departed with absolutely no notice. He should not be driving. He should not be alone, when his mind is clouded like this.

His foot hovers over the brakes, and he blinks once, twice, eyes no longer burning. A ragged laugh escapes him, chest loosening incrementally.

Tomorrow, he decides. Tomorrow he'll look into therapists, and maybe call Svetlana. He can do that. Maybe he'll try calling Shane again.

No, he *will* call Shane, he decides. Tomorrow, he'll call Shane and apologise. He'll fix what he broke. He doesn't want Shane to be angry at him anymore.

He doesn't remember swerving to avoid a merging truck.

He also doesn't remember hitting the tree.

"Sir? Sir, can you hear me?"

A loud, ringing noise.

Ilya tries to open his eyes. Can't.

His mouth is open, he thinks. It's full of blood. Or spit. His teeth, singing with the impact of– something, rattle when he rasps, "Shane?"

"Diaz, he's responsive! Sir, can you open your eyes for me?"

Ilya opens his eyes.

It could have been a lot worse, the doctors tell him. He's got the concussion of a lifetime, severe whiplash, and fractured bones he didn't even know he had in his right hand. The left side of his body, including his face, is so bruised it looks like someone dipped half of him in ink.

His car, predictably, did not make it.

As it turned out, when Ilya had swerved to avoid the truck, another vehicle had slammed into the side of his car. This propelled him into a tree at a sideways angle, cushioning him ever-so-slightly. Enough to keep him alive.

And, fuck, is he glad to be alive.

Surviving a near-fatal car crash does not lead Ilya to any revelations. It does not surprise him that his last thought had been of Shane, and of getting help. Being out for the rest of the season means he has time to parse through everything, and keep the promise he'd made to himself: finding a therapist.

First, though, he needs to focus on helping his body recover. His mind's health is his second priority, as of right now.

He borrows a kind nurse's phone to call his coach when he's readying to leave the hospital, exhausted from having recounted the previous night's events to the police. His coach picks up on the fourth ring and is – understandably – surprised to hear from him, swears for about a minute straight when Ilya tells him where he is and why, and seems shocked Ilya had no one else to call. Ilya focuses on not making his embarrassment apparent.

He grumbles about it when he's hung up, and the nurse apologetically explains that for *liability reasons* they can't let Ilya sign himself out after such a traumatic injury. The nurse does not find Ilya's comment about how injured his pride is very funny.

Once Ilya's been loaded into his coach's car, bandaged head and hand (pride woefully unbandaged), they drive in silence.

It's not until they pull into Ilya's driveway that his coach clears his throat, tactfully avoiding Ilya's gaze.

"You alright, kid?" he asks.

Ilya shrugs, then winces.

His coach laughs, a small, sad thing. "Sorry. Bad question. I meant… are you going to be alright? Do you have anyone who can, uh– stay with you?"

"Yes," Ilya lies. "I will call. My phone is inside. I could not remember number at the hospital."

"Ah." His coach looks relieved. "That'll do, Rozanov. C'mon, let me help you inside."

Together, they amble slowly up toward Ilya's house. Remembering he did not, in fact, lock it yesterday, he opens it with a bruised elbow. His coach raises an eyebrow at him, and Ilya resists the urge to shrug again.

"Friend probably came over," he explains. "She always forgets to lock."

His coach hums noncommittally.

Before he leaves, he props Ilya up on the couch and makes him a sandwich. He departs with a promise to check in over text in a couple of hours. Reminds him not to use his phone, and not to worry about logistics. Hockey can wait until his head's stopped spinning.

And with that, as usual, Ilya is all alone.

He can feel his phone digging into his back, where he had deposited it last night on the couch. It would be the right move, probably, to unearth it and get ahead of– everything. It would be better than doing damage control later. Because there *will* be a later. Soon enough, news of Ilya's accident will be everywhere, on front pages and Twitter hashtags and Instagram fucking prayer circles.

He squeezes his eyes shut against the burn, turning carefully on the couch to press his face into the cool pillow. For a long moment, he focuses hard on keeping his breathing steady, talking himself down without saying a word. Even thinking is exhausting.

Eventually, his eyelids grow heavy. He's tired again, but in spite of the last twenty-four hours, it doesn't feel as heavy as it usually does. His mind isn't cloudy, and his limbs aren't trembling. He doesn't feel cold.

Pain, Ilya muses, is man's greatest distraction from the heart.

He falls asleep curled up on the couch, facing the cushions and away from the world.

For a little while, he's glad to be alone.

When Ilya wakes up, it's almost dark outside. There's an incessant pounding in his skull, like his brain's making its best attempt at escaping his head. Ilya doesn't blame it. He would also flee if he could.

Groaning, Ilya slowly sits up. When his feet touch the floor, he shuts his eyes and hangs his head, breathing through the pain. His prescription painkillers are in the kitchen, which seems like a massive oversight now.

Bracing himself, Ilya stands. He wobbles dangerously, realises it would be deeply sad to accidentally brain himself on his own coffee table after having just survived a car crash, and rights himself.

The walk to the kitchen takes an eternity. He's so nauseous he worries he might genuinely throw up all over the floor, but manages not to. In the kitchen, he nibbles the sandwich his coach made him, takes his painkillers, and sips a glass of water. The entire time, he leans against the counter and stands very, very still. His eyes don't stray from the bottle of painkillers, the edges of a memory he doesn't have the energy to repress fading in and out of view.

Some goodbyes, he knows, take forever.

He remembers, after his mother died, how erratic his father had been. He had always been a cold man, but it was as if something human had been snuffed out in him when Irina died. Ilya's own grief did not take precedence; there was no room for it to breathe, for it to be felt. The pain grew into festering wounds, until Ilya learned how to shove it aside.

All of his anger, all his grief, he had turned into motivation. While playing hockey, he was on top of the world. He could not be touched. For the first time since his mother died, he was praised for something, applauded for honing his instincts into something impressive, something formidable.

At home, though, he had been very quiet. His father was always away on business, but Ilya remembers a time he had come back and packed Irina's things into boxes. The boxes had disappeared by the time Ilya came home after school, and he had been unconsolable for a week.

He had cried so hard he had given himself a headache. Still sniffling, he had gone to the bathroom in search of ibuprofen, only to find the cabinet empty. There was not a single pill in sight. Ilya had blinked and blinked, realising suddenly that this, the missing pills, was his father's only acknowledgement that Irina had taken her own life. And an acknowledgement that his son might be prone to the same tendencies as her.

Sighing, Ilya shoves the memory away, refocusing his eyes on the wall instead. When he no longer thinks he might vomit, he walks stiffly back to the couch. This time, bravely, he grabs his phone before curling up.

And then he freezes.

At the top of the screen is a text from his coach. Below that, is Shane.

JANE: *Please tell me you're okay*
[6 missed calls]
Lily
Are you okay?
Please answer me
Please
[3 missed calls]
Call me back
Ilya
Ilya please be okay
Please
[9 missed calls]
Ilya

The texts were sent this morning, according to the timestamps. The last one, simply his name, was sent three hours ago.

Exhaling, Ilya swallows the swell of emotions bubbling up in his chest, and starts typing one-handedly.

LILY: *I am fine, Jane.*
Is not serious.

JANE: *Holy fuck*

Immediately, Ilya's phone lights up with a call. Shakily, Ilya declines it.

JANE: *Please pick up*
Ilya

LILY: *Not my name*

JANE: *Lily*
Please

LILY: *I am okay.*
Trying to sleep. Doctors said no screen.

A long moment passes. Ilya waits with bated breath.

JANE: *You better not be lying to me.*
I mean it.

LILY: *Why would I lie?*

Ilya watches the dots appear and disappear for a long minute, anticipation setting his shoulders straight.

JANE: *Ok.*
Text me when you wake up?

Swallowing around the burning lump in his throat, Ilya rubs roughly at his face. It stings.

LILY: 👍

Frustrated, Ilya thumbs out of his conversation thread with Shane and shoots his coach a text letting him know he's alive. Then, clenching his jaw, he heads to the bathroom to take a shower, bracing himself against the wall every couple of steps.

He grits his teeth against the constant, throbbing pain, and tells himself he can do this alone. He knows he can. It's just going to suck a little.

Ilya doesn't remember walking back to the couch after showering, nor falling asleep again. Evidently, though, he did both of those things.

His nose gives a ghostly throb when he buries his face in the hoodie he had pulled on. It smells like Shane. Mindlessly, he burrows further into it, abdominal muscles tensing at the pulse of pain the movement emits in his head.

It's so quiet in the house that he isn't sure what woke him. Slowly, he peels his eyes open to squint blearily at the ceiling.

And then: a hesitant knock.

Oh.

With great care, Ilya gets to his feet. Somehow, he's even more sore now than he was this morning. It feels like his bones are rearranging themselves, his legs protesting with every step he takes.

He had only caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror while he showered, and a glimpse had been enough. His left side really is bruised, splotchy and discoloured from an impressively hard impact. Whoever's on the other side of the door is in for an unpleasant surprise.

Holding his bandaged hand to his chest, he unlocks the deadbolt and cracks the door open.

At once, his heart trips over itself. The relief nearly bowls him over.

Shane.

Shane Hollander is standing on his doorstep, his hair sticking up in about a hundred different directions. He's wearing sweatpants and a plain black t-shirt, a tote bag full to the brim hanging off his shoulder. A frazzled, manic energy surrounds him, like he hasn't slept in a long, long time. It's devastating, just looking at him.

"Fuck," Shane breathes, eyes flying to Ilya's bruised face, and then to his bandaged hand. "Fuck, Ilya, what– what happened?"

Ilya opens his mouth, but he can't find the words. He doesn't understand. What is Shane doing here?

"Ilya," Shane says, voice breaking. He's blinking quickly, mouth wobbling.

Ilya opens his mouth again, and then all at once, the dam breaks.

An awful, heaving sob rips from him. He sways, and Shane drops his bag to rush forward, arms hovering for a moment before he folds them around Ilya.

"I'm here," Shane says, mouth right beside Ilya's ear. He steps closer still, arms secure around Ilya. It's a gentle embrace. Shane's always been gentle with him. "It's okay. You're okay, Ilya."

With the way his breathing's coming in quick, short bursts, Ilya's inclined to disagree. Distantly, he thinks he might be having a heart attack. His face screws up, body going tight as he tries to swallow the next sob. It escapes him anyway.

Shane's hand slides into Ilya's hair, holding him close, cradling him. Softly, he says, "Breathe, baby."

Ilya gasps. He sobs again, face pressed to Shane's neck. He's shaking so hard he's worried he might topple Shane over.

"I– I can't," Ilya rasps. The panic warps, baring its teeth.

“You can,” Shane tells him, confident despite the tremor in his voice. “Just– just copy me, okay?”

Shane demonstrates, inhaling slowly before exhaling. He does it again and again, exaggerating for Ilya’s benefit.

Fumbling blindly, Ilya presses his undamaged hand to Shane’s chest. Beneath the thin shirt, he feels Shane’s heart hammering. This, for some reason, soothes him. Soothes him enough for the panic to recede, a wave retreating back into the ocean.

Shane breathes in again, and this time Ilya manages to copy him, breath stuttering out of him in a staccato rhythm.

“Good,” Shane murmurs, fingers scratching at Ilya’s scalp. He keeps breathing, and Ilya keeps copying him.

For a long time, they stand right there in Ilya’s hallway, holding each other. Ilya clings, a little afraid Shane might disappear if he lets go. Shane lets Ilya cling and holds him tenderly, heartbreakingly mindful of Ilya’s injuries.

Ilya wants to beg him to stay. To take Ilya with him, when he leaves. He feels like a little kid, too weak to hold on, too quiet to make himself known.

But Shane knows him. Shane is *here.* Shane showed up, despite their argument, despite Ilya’s off-putting texts.

When he no longer feels like he might fall right through the earth, Ilya pulls back. With wet eyes, he blinks at Shane.

Shane’s hand finds the unmarred side of Ilya’s face, thumb stroking over his cheekbone. “Ilya.”

God, the way Shane says his name, like his tongue cradles it before it slips out. Like he was made to say it, handling it reverently, like it’s precious. Always so careful with pronunciation.

Words still fleeing Ilya, he simply stares back. His eyes dart down to Shane’s mouth, and, taking his cues from Ilya like he has for so many years, Shane’s eyes find Ilya’s mouth.

“Ilya,” he says again, and Ilya’s done for.

He tips forward, mouth catching Shane’s. Instantly, Shane kisses back, hand still holding Ilya’s face. Sucking in a breath through his nose, Ilya tugs Shane inside, dragging the tote bag with them with his foot blindly. Shane shuts the door behind them by leaning against it, keeping Ilya close.

He’s so warm. Warm and steady, and Ilya doesn’t know if he deserves him. But he loves him. He loves him so much it hurts, sometimes. So much that he doesn’t know what to do with it, excess adoration spilling out of him when Shane so much as smiles.

It is not an impossibility, being with Shane. But it has felt like one. Especially to Shane. Ilya can respect it, can respect Shane's need for privacy, for upholding and maintaining the status quo.

But he's tired, too. Tired of drawing lines he doesn't want there, of keeping Shane at an arm's length because of some unspoken, undiscussed rule.

Here and now, for a little while, he won't pretend. He will want Shane loudly and show him his damage, show Shane exactly what and who he would be choosing if one day he decides he can.

He kisses him, desperation mounting, and Shane lets him. He lets him until Ilya's fingers skate up his back and pulls back just enough to cup Ilya's face with his hands, disconnecting their mouths slow enough to feel more like a pause, than a rejection.

"Hey," he says, gaze steady.

"Hello," Ilya says.

Eyes flickering between Ilya's, Shane swallows, nodding at the tote bag on the floor. "I brought you some creature comforts."

"Oh." Ilya looks at it, spots the blanket tucked inside, one he's pretty sure Shane's referred to as his own recovery blanket before. Halfway spilling out of it is candy, a carton of tea, and paracetamol.

Chest tightening, Ilya nods. Then he nods again. "Thank you."

Exhaling, Shane slips his hand down to the side of Ilya's neck. "Let me stay. I'll take care of you."

It is impossible to miss the sincerity written all over Shane's face. It's almost too much, too close to what Ilya's been craving, been dreaming of, for so long.

Hoarse and shaky, Ilya says, "Okay." Then, rallying, he asks, "What time is it?"

"Uh." Shane lifts his arm, glancing at his watch. He frowns. "Like, midnight. Shit, lets– bed. You've gotta rest."

"Okay," Ilya agrees. He does feel half-dead, body aching in places he didn't know it could ache. Abruptly, he blurts, "Did you miss me?"

Shane startles, eyes widening. "I– yeah. Of course I did." Swallowing, he adds, "I always miss you."

Ilya doesn't know what to do with that. He's always made himself an essential part of a group – whether that be his team or friends – so that, even if he is not missed, his absence is noted.

Knowing Shane misses him, maybe the same way Ilya misses him, feels somehow life-changing.

“I miss you too,” Ilya tells him. Shane gifts him a heartbreaking smile in return.

Together, they make their way into Ilya’s house. Shane oversees Ilya messily brushing his teeth, one-handed and uncomfortable. Shane’s hand twitches like he wants to take over, and Ilya almost tells him he could.

“I’ll get your meds,” Shane says quietly, hand brushing the small of Ilya’s back on his way out. When he returns, he watches Ilya swallow the pill in the bathroom mirror, giving him a thumbs-up when he’s sure it’s down. Ilya can’t help but smile at the sight.

It's so surreal. Shane being here. The car accident. Everything. Tactfully, Ilya decides not to think about it. His brain's bruised! Sue him.

When they make it to the bedroom, Shane’s arm holding most of Ilya’s weight, Shane insists on looking him over. He helps Ilya shuck the hoodie, eyes catching on it briefly like he’s clocked that it’s his own, before his hands skate carefully up Ilya’s sides. He asks him if his ribs are bruised, and Ilya tells him they are. Shane can’t quite keep his eyebrows from furrowing, though an attempt is made, Ilya knows.

By the time Shane determines he is healthy enough to sleep, the painkillers are kicking in. Sliding into bed, Ilya’s muscles relax. They relax further when Shane slips into bed beside him without him having to ask.

They lie side by side, both of them on their backs. Ilya thinks Shane might be one in a million. A bright light in an endless dark night.

“I don’t want to fight with you,” Shane says suddenly, voice wet. He’s still facing the ceiling. “Not again. Not ever. It fucking sucked.”

Quietly, Ilya says, “Yes.”

A beat. Then–

“What happened? When you– I turned my phone off. I missed your call. And then I woke up the next morning to– there were so many articles, and no one knew if you were alive or–”

“Shane.”

“You scared me,” Shane says, voice cracking. “I couldn’t– it was like the world stopped spinning. Like I woke up in a world you might not even– even be in anymore, and I didn’t feel it. I didn’t feel you die.”

“I did not die.”

“I know,” Shane laughs, hysterical and weak. “I know.”

“And I do not want to be dead,” Ilya says, a soft admittance permeating the darkness. “But sometimes…”

“Sometimes you do?” Shane finishes for him.

It doesn't feel so terrifying anymore, having the truth hanging between them. It feels right having Shane, his confidante, his lover, his friend, knowing the truth.

Wincing, he turns to face Shane. Shane turns too, eyes finding Ilya's immediately. He looks worried, and sad. Ilya wishes he could soothe him. It would be a kind favour to return.

"Yes," Ilya tells him. "I do not wish to feel this way. But I do. Sometimes. It's like… the colour, the noise, everything goes away. And I cannot find a way back. It is like drowning."

Shane's mouth wobbles. "Ilya."

"I know," Ilya says, eyes fluttering shut when Shane reaches out to thumb at the tear slipping down his nose. "It is scary. I am finding therapist. I know I need help."

"Good," Shane says, relief evident in his voice. "Good, that's– Ilya, that's amazing."

A small laugh slips out of Ilya. "Yes? Is amazing?"

"Shut up," Shane smiles. "It is, Ilya. I… I didn't know. That you felt like this. And you've been– you've been dealing with it alone. Completely alone. I just…" he pauses, looking at Ilya like he might love him too. "I want to carry it for you. I wish I could carry it for you."

Mouth quirking, Ilya says, "You cannot." He takes a deep breath before adding, "You came here tonight. That is enough."

Shane's face crumples just a little, mouth tugging downwards like he's fighting to keep his composure. "I always want to be here. Just– wherever you are. I wish things were different."

Ilya swallows. "Maybe they can be."

For a long moment, Shane looks at him. Then, sure and steady, he says, "I love you."

The words hit Ilya like a fist to the gut.

He feels his face screw up, clenching his good hand against the wave of emotions washing over him. Stark relief, the most powerful and salient of them all. Hope, nestling softly in his chest, flickering like an old bulb.

Above it all, soaring like an eagle, is love.

Love has been a painful thing for Ilya to experience. He loved and continues to love his mother, someone he will never see again. He loved his father, once, in the way a child loves their parent, the way love can be an obligation more than devotion given freely. He loves Svetlana, but not enough or the right way. But this, curled up and hurting in his bed with the man he loves… the difference is undeniable.

Ilya has never loved anybody the way he loves Shane.

"I– Shane," Ilya cries, and Shane shuffles over immediately, carefully pulling Ilya to his chest. Mouth pressed over his heart, Ilya says, "I love you. I love you. Please stay. Stay with

me."

"I'm staying," Shane promises, fierce and low. His arms are the safest place to land, Ilya thinks. His chest is the softest. His embrace is the only thing in the world, sometimes, to make Ilya feel like he doesn't have to shoulder everything alone.

Because he's not alone. He does not have to be alone again.

"I will get help," he swears, and Shane gives him a squeeze.

"I'll be here," Shane says. "Every step of the way. Tomorrow, will you tell me how… how to be here for you? How I can help?"

"You do," Ilya says, half-nonsensically. "But I will. I will."

"Okay," Shane says quietly. "Thank you."

For a while, neither of them say anything. They're cocooned in a bubble of their own making, a warm and safe place. Here, they can hold each other. Here, they can luxuriate in the love they've both proclaimed without fear of scrutiny. The moment is entirely private, entirely their own. Here, they cannot be touched by anyone's gaze but each other's.

"I have nightmares," Ilya confesses, turning his head to press his ear to Shane's chest. He listens to the thump-thu-thump and closes his eyes. "I am living in the past, even when I am good. It makes it hard to… move. To live."

"I'm sorry," Shane tells him.

"Is okay," Ilya sighs. "But I am… how to say? Hot mess?"

"You're not," Shane says immediately. "You're struggling. That's okay, Ilya. Nobody wants to see you hurting. Anything you need, anything you want, to lessen the– the pain, you can have it."

Ilya nods, short and succinct, not trusting that he can find the right words.

"At the end of the day," Shane whispers, "I want to meet the future more than I want to live in the past. I want you to feel the same way."

"Yes," Ilya chokes out, mouth trembling. "I want also."

"Okay," Shane breathes. "That's good. We can work with that."

"Mr. Planner," Ilya says, exhausted but warm. Held. Loved.

"For you? Always."

Ilya huffs a laugh, sinking further into Shane's embrace. "I like us."

"I like us too," Shane says, smile in his voice. "I'm glad I'm a part of us."

“Yes,” Ilya says. “It would suck to be just uh.”

A beat. “What?”

“You know…” Ilya traces a pattern into Shane’s chest, bandaged hand pressed loosely between them. “Uh-sss.”

Another beat. Then, Shane snorts. “That’s– wow.”

Ilya grins. “Bad?”

“So bad,” Shane confirms.

“Uh-sss should sleep,” he says. He wonders if he’s glowing. He feels a little like he’s glowing.

“Yeah,” Shane agrees. “I love you.”

“I love you,” Ilya echoes. The words don’t feel foreign in his mouth, despite their newness.

He snuggles closer, and Shane tightens his hold around him, mindful of his injuries.

You are staying, Ilya thinks, happy and relieved.

Shane squeezes him again like he heard him.

End Notes

thank you so much for reading :D let me know what you thought in the comments!

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