

Empty Spaces

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Empty Spaces

by [NeverReallyOver](#)

Summary

During the 'easier' episodes Ilya can manage.

Usually he can gather enough strength to get out of bed, even if it's just to slouch around the cottage or outside. He'll eat whatever Shane puts in front of him. He'll put on a brave face when Yuna and Dave come over to visit. And then when the evening rolls around he's so exhausted he falls asleep around eight.

The 'heavy' episodes are harder.

Ilya will spend most of the day sleeping. He will eat small bites of whatever Shane gives him, sometimes nothing at all. Showering is out of the question. If it's a particular bad episode, he won't even leave the bed.

Shane is scared to leave Ilya alone during the 'heavy' episodes.

He knows Ilya wouldn't hurt himself on purpose. But he also knows that depression is very complex and sneaks up on their victims when they're most vulnerable.

Or, Ilya experiences a bad depression episode. Shane is there to catch him when he falls.

Notes

Hiii again,

Honestly, I don't know what happened.

This idea has been bothering me ever since I read the books and watched the series and I couldn't get it out of my head until I wrote it.

Like the tags mention, this story contains heavy content revolving around Ilya's depression. There will be NO suicide attempt, but Ilya's suicidal thoughts are definitely mentioned and clearly stated throughout the story.

If these subjects are triggering for you just please don't read it, take care of yourself.

Your health is more important than any story!

I also wanted to mention that I don't have diagnosed depression myself but I definitely do have experience on the subject. It's never my intention to hurt anyone with my writing so if any of my words are hurtful or incorrect, feel free to leave a comment!

With that being said, happy reading. <3

Edit: and again, no AI was used and I never will. Fuckkkkk AI :)

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

It's nine in the morning and Ilya is still in bed.

That's the first thing Shane notices when he returns from his run.

Anya is there to greet him when he steps inside, tail wagging and tongue lolling out of her mouth. He squats down to greet her and scratches behind her ears affectionately.

"Hi, baby." He says, "Where's your dad, huh?"

She takes off as if she understands, her paws tapping a way towards their bedroom. Shane rises to his full height and takes off his shoes, lines them up perfectly next to the door.

The fact that Ilya isn't there to greet him immediately settles something uncomfortable inside his chest.

Because the thing is; they have a routine.

Shane will get up at eight am to go for a run and return around nine. By the time he returns Ilya has usually rolled out of bed, still half-asleep but happy to share breakfast with Shane.

Some days Ilya likes to sleep in, especially after a busy day, but there's something that tells Shane today is not one of those days.

He can feel it.

Like darkness settling over the cottage, where it slowly makes its way inside until it reaches Ilya.

Shane has dealt with enough of Ilya's episodes to know exactly when another one is happening, and even now he can feel it in his bones.

He quietly makes his way towards their bedroom, making sure to lighten his steps in case Ilya is still sleeping. His heart stumps against his ribs in an uncomfortable manner, as if it tries to escape from the possible ache it's going to receive.

The bedroom is still dark when he enters, the only light coming from the hall when Shane pushes the door open further.

Anya already found her favourite spot on the bed, pressed tightly in the small space right behind Ilya's legs. Usually she isn't allowed on the bed and Shane cringes when he thinks about hair getting on their sheets, but he forces himself to let it go for now. There are more important matters.

Shane finds his way towards the bed where he takes a seat on the edge, careful not to jostle Ilya too much.

As expected, Ilya's not sleeping.

He's just laying there, curled up underneath the blankets, eyes tired where they're glued to the wall. The shadows underneath his eyes are a quiet reminder that he probably didn't sleep well last night, maybe even not at all. Shane curses himself for not noticing.

"Morning." Shane whispers. "I missed you when I came back from my run."

He knows to thread lightly on days like these. Sometimes Ilya can react with unexpected anger, deeply located grief forcing him to lash out in concealed pain. Other days he doesn't speak at all, depression pressing down onto his shoulders until he crumbles underneath the weight.

Ilya closes his eyes when Shane's fingers find home in his curls, gently scratching his head in hopes it offers some comfort.

"Sorry." He answers, voice so thin and sad it slices straight through Shane's heart.

"Don't apologize. I just wanted to come see how you were doing."

Ilya swallows, the sound noticeable in the otherwise quiet room. It stays quiet for another heartbeat, before- "Tired."

A simple word with such heavy meaning.

Shane understands all too well what it means. 'Tired' usually isn't just 'tired' when it comes to Ilya. It's the kind of tired that means Ilya can't get out of bed. The kind that took him by surprise during the night, creeping up on him and taking over his soul without permission. The kind of tired that borderlines of dangerous when it especially grows too heavy to carry.

It's the kind of 'tired' that won't go away after a good night sleep.

"That's okay." Shane offers, even when it so clearly *isn't* okay. Because Ilya doesn't deserve to feel like this, like the weight of the world is his to carry. But Shane means it when he says that's it's okay to feel like that, because Ilya's depression is a part of him and this behaviour comes with it. That could never be wrong to him.

They sit for a while, Shane working his fingers through Ilya's curls while Ilya simply exists, visibly exhausted by things nobody else can see or feel.

A quick glance at the alarm on the nightstand signals Shane his routine is getting all wonky. By now he should be done showering. It prickles uncomfortably at the back of his neck, tries to urge him to *move it*, but he stays exactly where he is.

Ilya matters more to him than his routine.

He stays still when Ilya opens his eyes and reaches out to take Shane's hand from his head, cold fingers finding Shane's warmer ones. His heart almost rips to shreds when Ilya presses a kiss against his knuckles, lips dry where they brush the skin.

"Sorry." Ilya offers, again, just as quiet as before.

Shane immediately shakes his head, tears burning behind his eyes. He hates to see his fiancé like this, hates to hear the vulnerable layer of it. As if he did something wrong.

"Don't be. You did nothing wrong. *ya tebya lyublyu.*"

I love you.

He hopes the words in Ilya's native tongue will offer some reassurance. It does in the form of a weak smile, but it doesn't reach Ilya's eyes.

"*ya tozhe tebya lyublyu.*" Ilya's voice is soft but the words mean the same to Shane.

I love you, too.

Shane kisses Ilya's hand in return, gently moving his thumb over the skin. To realise that in a few weeks time there will be a wedding ring around Ilya's finger makes his heart skip a beat. He loves Ilya so much it often feels like it will pour straight out of his body.

"I'm going to take a shower, you're welcome to join me." Shane offers, "But no pressure, okay? You can just sleep some more if that's what you want."

He already knows the answer but he likes to offer Ilya a choice whenever he feels like this. In a way he hopes it will convince him that despite feeling like he's drowning, there is always something for him to choose. He doesn't have to give in to the heavy feeling inside his chest, but Shane understands when choosing different is too difficult.

Before he leaves he kisses Ilya's head and tucks the blankets tighter around his shoulders, the need to take care of his fiancé almost overwhelming.

He walks out of their bedroom with a heavy heart and leaves the door open in case Ilya wants to join him, despite knowing the truth behind it all.

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Ilya is still in bed by the time Shane returns from his shower.

This time he actually *is* asleep, breath steady and deep where Shane listens to him from the open doorway. Nonetheless he quietly shuffles closer, a primal instinct forcing him to check and make sure.

Ilya doesn't stir when Shane traces the frown between his eyebrows, years and years of grief and unspoken pain etched deep into his face. It already took so much from him at a very early age and even now, older, and wiser, it refuses to let go of Ilya. Shane hates the way it makes him look so much older than he is.

Shane urges Anya off the bed, guiding her towards the hallway and closing the door behind them. Not all the way though, he makes sure to leave the door open ajar so he can hopefully hear when Ilya wakes up.

The kitchen is quiet when Shane enters. Colder. Lonelier.

He's used to a kitchen filled with laughter when they make breakfast together. A kitchen filled with love, one where Ilya usually makes them breakfast and Shane clings to his back being no help at all.

Shane fills Anya's bowl with food and her other bowl with fresh water, makes sure she has everything she needs before he allows himself a minute.

These kind of days always ask a lot of him.

He loves Ilya with his whole being and he wouldn't trade what they have for anything in the entire world, but Ilya's depression also triggers Shane's anxiety. At days like these he can't help but feel scared he's handling it completely wrong and he'll make things worse. By now he knows what to do and also what not to do when Ilya crumbles underneath his depression, but a part of him is constantly on edge. Always scared of messing up. Always anxious about not being good enough.

Shane takes a deep, controlled breath, wipes the wetness from his eyes, and gets to work.

He puts two slices of bread into the toaster for Ilya with the knowledge there's a chance he isn't hungry and doesn't want to eat. Meanwhile he makes his own smoothie, the one he always drinks after a workout and fits right into his diet.

When the slices of toast pop up he makes one with scrambled egg and the other with jam, another decision he wants to offer Ilya. Usually he likes both but maybe the eggs are a little too optimistic.

Hopefully, the jam will do the trick.

Ilya is still asleep by the time Shane re-enters the bedroom. He hasn't moved a finger, body still curled up in its previous position where Shane left him. Another sign he isn't feeling well because usually Ilya is quite a restless sleeper. Shane can't remember how many times he got kicked in the shin.

Carefully he places the plate with the toast on the nightstand before he crawls on the bed, folding his body around Ilya's. His lover doesn't stir at first so Shane presses closer and peppers kisses over Ilya's cheek until he can feel him slowly wake up. He can feel it in the twitch of Ilya's hands, the way his breath stutters before continuing, the movement in his cheek where Shane's lips are pressed.

"I made you some breakfast." Shane keeps his voice soft.

Ilya doesn't open his eyes and a deep sigh falls from his chest. "Not hungry."

Exactly what Shane expected.

Frustration threatens to bubble to the surface but he quickly pushes it down. It's not Ilya's fault, he understands this is much more than 'just being tired' and 'just not hungry'. The frustration is more pointed towards the situation itself and the fact that Ilya is burdened with such a cruel fate.

Still he pushes through. He wants to be strong for Ilya, wants to show him that he's not alone.

"I know, but it's toast with the jam you like. Y'know, the apricot one."

That seems to catch Ilya's attention. He opens his eyes, still heavy with sleep and deeper pain, and turns his head to look at Shane. "From the store your mother always goes?"

"Yeah. From the jar I have to stash away because otherwise you'll eat the whole fucking thing in one day."

The comment earns him a laugh from Ilya, one too weak and too watery but it's a *laugh* nonetheless and Shane couldn't be more grateful.

He kisses Ilya's temple when he sighs, slowly untangling from the blankets so they can sit up. Eating in bed is a hard 'no' in Shane's world, the idea of crumbs and God knows what else making its way between their sheets makes him violently nauseous. But on days like these, when simply breathing is too much a task for Ilya, he forces himself to let go a bit.

With Ilya sitting up and the lamp on the nightstand illuminating the room, Shane has the opportunity to get a proper look at his fiancé while he slowly works his way through the toast.

Ilya looks tired.

His whole demeanour oozes exhaustion, from the dull glaze over his eyes to the slump of his shoulders. Maybe if Shane will look hard enough he'll be able to see the awful, dark figure looming over Ilya, where it presses its claws into Ilya's head and fills it with lies. Because that's the biggest struggle of all; seeing Ilya struggle with the knowledge he can't physically do anything to stop it.

Shane shuffles closer and throws a leg over Ilya's, cuddling up to his side without disturbing him eating.

"Did you not sleep okay?" He asks, softly tracing Ilya's stomach over his shirt.

Ilya shrugs. "Not really. Had a bad dream but I don't know about what."

Shane kisses Ilya's bare shoulder. "You should have woken me up."

"No. You need rest, you had a long day yesterday."

Sympathy clenches his heart so tight it hurts. Despite probably feeling like shit, Ilya still puts Shane's needs before his own. It hurts to think about Ilya laying awake at night, confused and probably scared after a nightmare, with Shane right next to him.

Ilya places the plate back on the nightstand, toast with egg still intact but toast with jam fully gone, and sags back against the pillows. He's exhausted, Shane can see it very clear, but this is something he can't let go. He doesn't want Ilya to go back to sleep thinking he's alone in this.

He sits up and crawls straight into Ilya's lap. He cradles Ilya's face between his hands, stomps down on the anxiety flaming up inside his stomach when he notices the lack of excitement in Ilya's eyes. Of course he wasn't expecting sex but it's worrisome that Ilya shows no interest at all with Shane on top of him like this.

"Hollander-"

"No, listen to me for a minute. I have to say this, okay?"

Ilya sighs again, the sound rattling loose from its cage. He nods nonetheless, eyes tired where they try to focus on Shane.

"Next time you have a nightmare or you wake up feeling off, you wake me up. I don't care how late it is. I don't care what day I've had or if I have to get up really early. You wake me up and we will deal with it *together*, okay?"

Ilya looks away and clenches his jaw. He's on the brink of tears, Shane recognises the signs, but he tries to compose himself. To the outside world Ilya may seem like a stoic, cold-blooded Russian at times, but deep down he's someone that's extremely soft-hearted and who just wants to be seen.

"I don't want you to be tired." His voice cracks on the last word yet he manages to keep the tears at bay.

Shane shakes his head and gently pulls at Ilya's face until he looks back at him. Keeping eye-contact is still difficult for him and also now he has to fight every instinct to make sure he doesn't look away. He's scared that the truth won't come across as convincing without direct eye-contact.

"I don't *care* about that. I care about my fiancé laying awake right next to me while I'm sleeping, completely unaware he is feeling sad."

Ilya's bottom lip trembles and a tear drips over his cheek.

"Hey," Shane kisses Ilya, soft and sweet. "I want to help you but you'll have to help me a little bit. That includes waking me up after you've had a nightmare or if you just want to talk in the middle of the night. Okay?"

Ilya takes a shuddering breath.

"Okay."

**

Their short but intense conversation drained all the little remaining energy out of Ilya.

Shane leaves him to get some more sleep. He knows he should try to get Ilya out of bed, get him moving, but he senses the episode is a heavy one this time.

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Usually he can gather enough strength to get out of bed, even if it's just to slouch around the cottage or outside. He'll eat whatever Shane puts in front of him. He'll put on a brave face when Yuna and Dave come over to visit. And then when the evening rolls around he's so exhausted he falls asleep around eight.

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Shane is scared to leave Ilya alone during the 'heavy' episodes.

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While Ilya sleeps, Shane tries to keep himself busy.

Anya follows him around the cottage, obvious to what is happening around her. Shane cleans the living room and the kitchen until both rooms are spotless. He puts on the tv on low volume in hopes it will keep his mind occupied. To no avail. He answers some texts, scrolls through the list to screen what's most important right now.

By the time the clock reads one in the afternoon, he's ready to tear his hair out.

Anxiety makes it hard to breathe. His body keeps moving with the urge to help, fix, do something to make the terrible thoughts inside Ilya's head go away, but he knows that no matter what he does, *nothing* will fix it.

He's constantly on the verge of tears when he thinks about his partner just a few doors down, falling apart at the hands of an invisible force. There is nothing Shane hates more than seeing Ilya upset, no matter the initial cause.

After folding the blanket on their couch for the seventh time, Shane decides it's enough.

He makes his way towards the bedroom, head reeling with possibilities of how exactly he will get Ilya out of bed. Even if it's for five minutes. Maybe he can be pursued with the promise of those cheeseburgers he likes so much, the ones Shane only makes on special occasions. Or maybe they can just sit out by the dock, it's cold yet nice outside today-

Shane stops dead in the doorway of their bedroom.

Ilya's gone.

White-hot, blinding panic seizes Shane's heart in a death grip.

He stumbles forward to the bed and rips the blankets aside, as if that will magically make Ilya appear. The enclosed bathroom is empty, not a trace of Ilya to be found. He's about to leave again when his eyes fall on the familiar yellow bottle that holds Ilya's medication. The cap has been flipped off and pills have scattered everywhere, a few even made it onto the ground.

Shane yells Ilya's name, hyperventilating, heart almost bursting straight out of his chest, tears falling before he even notices.

"Fuck." He chokes on his own breath and almost trips on his way out.

The living room is empty, just like the kitchen, the spare bedroom, even the garage. Shane yells Ilya's name until his throat starts to hurt, the edge of his vision starts to blur with panic.

He won't survive this.

He has always known how serious and deep Ilya's depression runs. He understands the risks, has always understood that there's a change that one day Ilya's depression will take the upper hand. Ilya has even admitted once that he has no active thoughts about hurting himself, of taking his own life, unless the thoughts inside his head would grow unbearable.

Shane is deadly afraid that today is the day those thoughts have won.

His hands shake so hard it takes a few tries before he is able to punch in '911' onto his phone. He stumbles along the large windows of the back of the house overlooking the lake, ready to press the call-button when his attention falls on a figure outside.

Ilya.

He's seated on the edge of the dock, back turned towards Shane. Despite the cold he's not wearing a shirt. Even his feet are dangling into the water.

Shane runs outside, almost breaks his neck when he slips on a slippery patch on the path, yells Ilya's name once again.

His fiancé visibly jumps and turns his head to look where the sound came from. Shane moves on autopilot down the path until he reaches the dock, only then realises he isn't wearing any shoes. Ilya moves as if he wants to stand, a worried frown on his face when he sees the state Shane is in. He opens his mouth, probably to ask what is wrong, but Shane interrupts him by throwing himself straight into Ilya's arms, almost toppling them both into the water.

"Where were you?!" Shane yells, the words barely noticeable through all the crying he is doing. He can't catch his breath, not even now when Ilya is right here, safe inside his arms.

Ilya cradles his head and pulls him closer, obviously confused. "I wanted to get fresh air. Why- Shane, what's wrong?"

Shane shakes his head, heartbroken. The dam inside has finally broke. His biggest fear almost happened and he can't seem to wrap his head around the fact that everything is okay, that no one is hurt, that Ilya didn't do anything irreversible.

"You can't just- I went to check on you and you were gone. I had no idea where you were and there were pills everywhere, Ilya, how do you think that made me feel?"

"Sorry." Ilya offers weakly. He pulls back to wipe away the tears from Shane's cheeks, thumbs tracing the freckles dusted over the bridge of his nose and his cheekbones.

The fact that he isn't trying to explain is an answer itself.

The world around them is quiet while they sit there. Shane gets a grip on himself slowly, Ilya's arms a steady presence around him. The wind is cold, across the lake a Loon calls out. Shane tries to pull Ilya as close as possible, tries to fold him inside where nothing will hurt him and he can take care of him for an infinite amount of time.

He realises that he might have found Ilya on time and that things would have been different if he had been a second too late.

When his cries have reduced to sniffles and his heartbeat has returned to a somewhat easier rhythm, Shane pulls back slowly. He feels like he almost fell off a cliff, balancing the very thin line between life or death.

In a way, to him, it actually is.

Because he doesn't know if he could survive in a world without Ilya in it.

Ilya presses kisses against Shane's face, from his temple to his cheeks, muttering Russian words that Shane doesn't understand. He sniffles and turns his head to catch Ilya's lips in a proper kiss. For a moment they kiss without any hurry, a kiss so soft it settles something ugly and painful deeply wedged between Shane's ribs.

Shane keeps his eyes closed for a second longer after they part. His voice comes out wet, betraying how he feels. "You scared me."

"I'm sorry, moiya lyubov. I did not mean to scare you."

"Then why did you go outside without telling me? And what's with the pills thrown around the bathroom like some fucking horror confetti?" Shane asks, can't help but grow agitated. He's not angry, not really, but he *is* scared. And a big part of him is afraid Ilya will lie to him.

Ilya looks away, eyes troubled.

He doesn't like it when Shane corners him like this. When Shane sees right through the walls he so carefully build.

Anxious sadness squeezes Shane's stomach and forces new tears to burn his eyes. The situation is slipping between his fingers and it feels like he can do nothing to stop it.

Here they are, with Shane holding the man he desperately loves while trying to keep them both from falling apart.

"Ilya-"

"Can we just- I don't want to talk." Ilya murmurs, avoiding Shane's eyes at all cost.

Shane shakes with it, body trembling as every possible feeling pours out of him. "Well though luck, Rozanov. We're going to talk whether you like it or not!"

Tension prickles the silence between them. For a horrible second Shane believes this conversation will get them nowhere. Ilya will get angry, Shane will push back, and at the end they will fall into a massive argument that makes things so much worse.

But then Ilya breaks.

His face crumbles down into a heartbreaking frown, eyes unbelievably sad. Suddenly he looks like the seventeen year old when they first met. He shakes his head as if the movement will force the tears away, a small habit he always does before bursting into tears. As on cue, the tears start dripping over his cheeks.

"I had another nightmare." Ilya admits, quiet as if spilling a secret.

Shane keeps quiet but pulls his fiancé close, kissing the wet skin of his cheek.

"I was going to take my pills, forgot this morning. The pills slipped, I dropped it." Ilya explains. "I saw myself in the mirror and felt so .. I don't know how to say it. Just, stupid."

"You're not stupid." Shane frowns and takes Ilya's hand in his. "You just have a rough day, that's not stupid."

Ilya's bottom lip wobbles dangerously. Another fresh wave of tears follows. "I don't want to feel like this. I feel like, like I'm letting you down."

Shane starts to protest but Ilya interrupts him, words tumbling from his mouth like he is finally allowed to let them go. It's a bit difficult to follow with how fast he talks, Russian accent thickened by tears and emotions, but Shane understands all too well.

"We are getting married in a few weeks and I feel like I'm not enough for you. I don't want you to deal with my shit all the time, all I do is sleep and- I need to do more. You don't deserve sad husband and I want to be better for you but I don't know how."

The wind brushes their bodies and Ilya shivers against Shane. He pulls him closer, tries to shield him from the worst.

"Ilya, listen to me."

Shane shifts them so they're face to face but still pressed together, legs and arms entwined until he has no idea where one begins and the other ends. Before he speaks up he cradles Ilya's head again and presses a fierce kiss against his mouth.

"You are *more* than enough for me, you hear me? There is nothing you can do to make me love you any less. You will *never* disappoint me, ever."

A shaky exhale falls from Ilya's lips. "But-"

"No, no 'buts'. Ilya, I fell in love with every single part of you. I knew about your depression when I proposed to you. I *knew* what that meant for the rest of our lives. I will hold your hand through every possible episode there is going to come. If you wake up and decide that all you can do is just sleep, than I will hold you until you feel like you can get up again. And I will

be there when the lies inside your head try to tell you that there is nothing left to live for. I will *always* be right there next to you."

He goes willingly when Ilya pulls him close for another kiss. It's too messy and too wet with tears and yet it's the most wonderful kiss they ever shared. Shane tries to kiss the words right into Ilya's system, quietly wills them inside where they can find home. Maybe the truth will outrun the lies buried deep inside Ilya's brain.

Ilya pulls back and sniffs, repeats how much he loves Shane in Russian.

Shane smiles at the man he loves unconditionally and returns the words just as easy.

**

The wedding

During their vows, Shane promises to love Ilya in sickness and in health.

He decides that those words have never been closer to the truth.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading and as always, kudos and comments make my heart very happy. <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!