

tipping point

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by [ultravioletdaydream](#)

Summary

Shane said he would be home by midnight. Ilya only had to hold on for a couple more hours. He thought, fleetingly, that he wasn't sure how the day had spiraled so enormously out of his control. One goddamn day alone and he was at the edge of the abyss. Everything hurt.

Or:

Ilya navigates the expanse of his mental illness over the course of one bad day.

Notes

this story takes place post-the long game based on canon elements of the heated rivalry tv show, heated rivalry book, and the long game.

please take care of yourself <3

It had been dark for several hours already, but the clock on the stove only read 9:57. *Fucking Ottawa winters*. Ilya swirled his glass of vodka on the counter. He tried to focus on the sound of the clinking ice. Shane said he would be home by midnight. Ilya only had to hold on for a couple more hours. He thought, fleetingly, that he wasn't sure how the day had spiraled so enormously out of his control. One goddamn day alone and he was at the edge of the abyss. Everything hurt.

He checked the clock again – 9:59. He wouldn't text Shane. He could let his husband enjoy an evening at dinner with Rose. It had been months since the pair had had a chance to catch up. Ilya wouldn't fuck this up. He wouldn't ruin Shane's day the way he'd ruined his own.

12 hours earlier

Ilya was making breakfast like he did every Saturday. Shane liked to have the same thing every weekend: Sourdough with apricot jam, two fried eggs, and two pieces of chicken sausage. So Ilya made it for them, each weekend, like clockwork. He enjoyed being a part of Shane's routine, a part of Shane's comfort.

Ilya was surprised that Shane wasn't awake by the time he finished cooking. He usually enjoyed the sight of his shirtless husband sitting on the counter while Ilya finished making the meal. Ilya set their plates on the counter, then padded through the hall to their bedroom. As he turned the handle, something shifted in his periphery.

He opened the door to find his mother, lying in bed, her arm flung awkwardly over the side of mattress. Ilya's breath caught in his throat. He registered dimly that he was somehow back home in Russia. As he approached his mother, his stomach sank like lead. Her eyes were glassy and vacant. Her skin looked paler than it ever had. Was that vomit in her hair? Ilya touched her hand – it was cold. His ears started ringing. He squeezed his eyes shut. Not again. He couldn't lose her again.

Ilya sat up in bed with a gasp, his chest heaving to get enough oxygen. His sudden movement jostled Shane awake; he must've been sleeping on Ilya's shoulder. *It was a dream*. The same dream that had been haunting him for 20 years.

"Hey, Ilya, it's okay, it's not real. You're here with me, I'm here, it's okay," Shane said soothingly as he wrapped a hand around Ilya's arm. Shane knew about the dreams; always knew just what to do to help.

"Lie back down, take a deep breath," Shane instructed.

Ilya followed Shane's directions robotically, bringing his hands up to press the heels of his palms against his eyes. Colors swam on the back of his eyelids. *Stupid fucking dream.* He hated this feeling of weakness that accompanied something that wasn't even real.

Ilya sat back up in bed. "Need to shower," he said bluntly.

He made his way to the bathroom and turned the water up as hot as it would go. Shane followed behind him, staying quiet, like he was worried Ilya would spook. Ilya stepped into the shower and bit the inside of his cheek as he stood under the water's spray. Here, with his eyes closed and the hot water stinging his skin, Ilya started to feel himself returning to reality. He heard Shane brushing his teeth, then felt a woosh of cool air as he opened the shower door.

"Jesus Christ," Shane cursed under his breath as the hot water splashed his skin. He reached around Ilya to adjust the temperature to something that didn't resemble actual lava. Shane rested his forehead between Ilya's shoulder blades, and set his hands on Ilya's hips. Ilya allowed himself to relax into Shane's touch. He reached back to brush his knuckles against Shane's thigh in a way he hoped was reassuring.

They stood there like that for a moment, just existing together. Despite their fifteen years together, Ilya never got sick of moments like these. Of having someone understand him on a molecular level.

Eventually, they took turns washing each other's bodies and exchanging soft kisses. As it usually happened with the two of them, one thing led to another and they ended up back in bed, half dry and half hard.

They fucked lazily, Ilya on top of Shane, fingers intertwined. Ilya buried his face in Shane's neck and kissed his way up to that spot behind his ear.

"ты мой," Ilya whispered. "навсегда."

"Я твой, навсегда," Shane whispered back. Ilya had to admit Shane's accent was getting better.

Ilya was making breakfast like he did every Saturday. Sourdough with apricot jam, two fried eggs, and two pieces of chicken sausage. This time, Shane was sitting on the counter where he belonged, hair still damp from the shower. A slimy moment of *deja vu* slid over Ilya's shoulders as he set the plates on the counter.

Shane hopped down from where he was sitting and came around to the stool Ilya set his plate in front of. He pressed a kiss to Ilya's cheek and patted the stool next to him.

"Thank you for making my breakfast. I can imagine you get tired of the same old boring thing every weekend," Shane said.

The corner of Ilya's mouth twitched up at this. "No. When I'm feeling really wild, I just put a different jam on the toast," he responded.

A look of intense worry immediately crossed Shane's face, as he inspected his toast, midway to his mouth for his first bite. "This isn't apricot?"

Ilya chuckled. "Yours is apricot, sweetheart. I meant my toast. Today I have guava." Ilya took a bite of his own toast and took his seat next to Shane.

Shane rolled his eyes. His phone chimed with a text alert. He read it quickly and then returned his gaze to Ilya. "Rose is asking if you'll be joining us at the art gallery, or at dinner afterwards. Do you wanna come?"

Ilya was happy for Shane to have plans to hangout with Rose. She had become an important friend to him over the years. Ilya decided quickly that he'd stay home and let the two of them catch up one-on-one. "No. You go. I will hang back today," Ilya said.

"Are you sure? Rose would be happy if you came. Don't you want to help pick out the new artwork for the office?" Shane asked.

Ilya shrugged a shoulder. "You two go ahead. I don't think I have it in me to form deep opinions on abstract contemporary art today."

Shane seemed to accept this answer and turned back to his phone, sending off a reply to Rose. They enjoyed the rest of their breakfast in comfortable silence.

A couple of hours later, Ilya was leaning against the entryway table as Shane put on his shoes.

"I should be back by midnight. The appointment at the art gallery is at five, then we're just going to dinner and drinks at Ivy House," Shane said.

"Okay. All good," Ilya said as Shane stood from tying his sneakers. Ilya wrapped Shane in a tight hug, breathing in the scent of their shared grapefruit and mint shampoo in his hair.

"I will take Anya for walk. Maybe to dog park. Play some video games. Wait for you to get back," Ilya said.

Shane huffed a laugh against Ilya's chest. "Okay, Mr. Exciting. I'll see you soon," he said.

Ilya slid his hand up to Shane's jaw and pressed a kiss to his lips. "I love you," Ilya mumbled against Shane's mouth.

Shane pulled back slightly to meet Ilya's eyes. "I love you too, Ilya."

And then Shane was gone, and Ilya was alone.

He'd been trying his best to enjoy their morning together, but that stupid dream had really gotten under his skin. He shook his head as if it would help clear his mind. Maybe he needed to go for a run.

Ilya changed into an athletic outfit and made his way back to the front door. As he debated what album to play as he ran, his phone started to ring with a call from an unknown number. A Russian country code. *What the fuck?*

Ilya answered, and a voice he hadn't heard in half a decade spoke in Russian on the other end of the line.

"Hey motherfucker," Alexei said. "Long time no see."

"Alexei? What do you want?" Ilya asked. His chest was tight. The two brothers had only exchanged one other call since Ilya had left Russia and his life there behind after his father's death.

"Stacia left me," Alexei said simply.

Ilya understood immediately. Alexei's wife and her trust fund were what had kept Alexei's life in order. Without her, he'd need way more than he made on his law enforcement salary to keep up with his lifestyle of gambling and partying.

"No," Ilya said.

"No? No what? We haven't even had a conversation," Alexei replied.

"No, I'm not sending you any money," Ilya said. He tried to keep his voice even and his words succinct.

"Fuck you for thinking I am calling for money. What if I just want to reconnect with my baby brother after too many years apart?" Alexei asked.

Ilya didn't want to let himself hope. "Do you? Want to reconnect?" he asked.

"No, you fucking idiot. Of course I want money. I know how much they pay hockey stars over there. You can spare it. Don't pretend that you can't."

Ilya could spare it. Whatever number Alexei said, he could send it along and it would hardly be of notice to his bank account. Shane would understand.

"I had a dream about mother last night. A dream of finding her," Ilya surprised himself as the vulnerable words flew out of his mouth. He held his breath as he waited to see if his brother had any heart left under his cold exterior.

"A dream? What the fuck are you talking about? You've gotten too soft. Fucking faggot," Alexei replied.

Ilya pulled the phone away from his ear and blinked at the screen. He couldn't do this. Why had he answered? "Goodbye, Alexei," Ilya muttered, then hung up.

He threw his phone across the room, aiming for an armchair. It missed the chair and clattered against the floor. Anya sat up in her dog bed by the fireplace, her head tilted in concern. Ilya looked away. What the fuck was happening today?

Ilya left his phone and stepped outside into the crisp winter air. He could have worn more than a thin athletic sweatshirt, but he didn't have time to care. He had to run.

As his feet pounded on the pavement along his usual route, Ilya's mind raced. His mother was gone. His father was gone. His brother was soulless. He was alone. He didn't have a single person from the first seventeen years of his life left.

You have Shane. You have Yuna and David. You have Svetlana and the Centaurs, Ilya tried to remind himself.

It didn't work. In this moment it didn't matter who had stepped up to be his new family. All that mattered was the one who had abandoned him.

The cold stung Ilya's fingers, his nose, his lips as he ran. Every breath felt like an icy rip through his throat. He pushed himself to go faster. He ran like something was chasing him. Like if he slowed down, something bad would happen. Maybe it would.

Two miles away from home, Ilya's body couldn't take it anymore. He came to a stop at a bench in the park he had ended up in, and collapsed into the seat. He sat, breathing so hard he was almost hyperventilating. The sky was tinted gold as the last of the afternoon bled into the sky. He put his head in his hands, elbows digging into his knees hard. *What the fuck was going on today? FUCK.*

Ilya leaned back on the bench and stared up at the bare branches of the trees swaying in the wind. He watched his breath float above his face in silvery white clouds. It made him want a cigarette. He hadn't had a cigarette in... six years? He usually didn't miss it; he was usually glad for the way his body felt and performed better now that he'd kicked nicotine. But today? He really fucking wanted a cigarette.

Eventually, the cold got to him. Ilya jogged back home feeling no better than when he left. When he passed a convenience store along the way, he briefly entertained the idea of stopping to buy a pack of cigarettes. Too bad he'd left his phone and wallet at home.

When he got back to the house, Ilya flung himself on the living room floor with a groan. Anya scurried over to him and nudged his torso with her head. He needed to take her outside. He would in a minute. Ilya stared at the ceiling; it turned orange, then pink, then purple as the light from the sunset shone in through the windows. He laid there and thought about everything, about nothing, until the last of the sun's light was extinguished. Now he was alone and in the dark.

As if she could read his mind, Anya nudged Ilya's side with her nose again.

Get up off the fucking floor and take the dog outside. It's the least you can do.

Ilya rose from the floor, grabbed his phone, and led Anya out the back door. The dog sprinted into the backyard as Ilya lowered himself into a deck chair. He swiped open his phone to look for messages from Shane.

He noticed a new crack in his screen from when he'd thrown it across the room earlier. *Great, perfect.* Just what he needed. Ilya had one message from Shane, a photo of a large canvas swathed in watery shades of blue and green.

Shane: reminds me of us.

Ilya: It does?

Ilya didn't know if Shane would get back to him. He was probably at dinner by now. He felt comforted when his phone vibrated a few seconds later.

Shane: yeah, it reminds me of the cabin, of swimming in the lake, of freshly frozen ice. reminds me of the ocean in tampa, the color of your eyes.

Ilya: Reminds me of child's fingerpainting.

Shane didn't reply right away. That was fine. Ilya looked up from his phone as Anya made her way back to the deck. He reached a hand absentmindedly to his neck to fiddle with his necklace. For the first time in nearly two decades, his fingers didn't find the cool touch of metal. He thought briefly that there was somehow a mistake – a glitch in reality. He never took the necklace off. He scraped his fingers back and forth across his neck hoping his chain would magically appear. It wasn't there.

Ilya stormed back into the house and returned to the living room. The necklace wasn't on the floor. *Where the fuck could it be?* Did it fall off on his run? Ilya grabbed his wallet and coat and made his way back out the front door. He'd retrace his steps, he'd find it, it would be fine. *Retrace, find it, be fine.* Ilya repeated this ridiculous new mantra to himself as he made his way down the block, shining his phone flashlight on the edge of the sidewalk. He made it all the way back to the park bench. Nothing.

The feeling in his chest got tighter. No fucking way could he have lost this necklace. It was the only piece of his mother he had left. Hell, it was the only piece of his entire fucking life in Russia he had left. This could not be happening.

Ilya scraped his nails over the back of his neck again, digging into the skin harder than was strictly necessary. He couldn't believe himself. 20 years of wearing this fucking necklace; through hundreds of hockey games, showers, nights spent alone, nights spent with Shane... How could he have not noticed when it fell off? How could he have not felt the difference?

Ilya hated himself in this moment. Maybe he'd hated himself since the moment he woke up. Maybe since before he woke up.

He started his walk back home feeling like the weight of the world was on his shoulders. This time when he passed the convenience store, he stopped and bought the cigarettes.

By the time he made it back home, Ilya's mind was fully at war with itself. He made his way to the kitchen, tossed the pack of cigarettes on the counter, and poured himself two fingers of vodka over ice. He drank it in two big gulps, and poured another glass. He sat back on the same stool he'd eaten breakfast on this morning, and closed his eyes. He hated himself so much for buying cigarettes. He hated himself so much that he didn't care that he bought cigarettes. Shane would hate him too, if he smoked. Shane, he missed Shane. One fucking day apart from Shane and he crumbled to pieces.

When he opened his eyes, his gaze landed on an orange prescription bottle on the counter by the refrigerator. His medication. He realized, suddenly, that he'd forgot to take it this morning after his weird fucking dream. Was that why today was fucking sucking? Should he take it now? He knew you weren't really supposed to mix it with alcohol. Was it too late in the day? Did he deserve the help? Deserve to be fixed?

Ilya drank his second glass of vodka and poured a third.

Despite everything that had happened throughout the day, Ilya was able to realize that he was at a tipping point. He tried to take a deep breath. If he didn't bring himself back down to earth soon, this night wasn't going to end well.

He felt like a fool, but he decided to do a grounding exercise his therapist had taught him a couple of years ago. Five things he could see: his cracked phone screen, his glass of vodka, his pack of cigarettes, his dog curled up in her dog bed, and an old picture of him and Shane on the fridge.

Four things he could touch: the cool granite of the countertop, the soft technical fabric of his joggers, the familiar shape of his neckla- Ilya's hand froze on its way up to his neck. He always used the necklace in the exercise, but obviously, tonight, it wasn't there. *Fuck. This.* Ilya downed his third glass of vodka, and poured another.

The clock on the stove read 9:57. Ilya swirled his glass on the counter. He tried to focus on the sound of the clinking ice. Shane said he would be home by midnight; Ilya wouldn't text him. He could let his husband enjoy an evening out and chill the fuck out for two more hours. Ilya wouldn't fuck this up. He wouldn't ruin Shane's day the way he'd ruined his own. Ilya gulped his fourth glass of vodka, and poured another.

He decided to start looking for a lighter. He dug through the kitchen junk drawer – nothing. He checked the coffee table and the mantle in the living room – nothing. Ilya remembered a ridiculous barbecue lighter they kept in the garage. That would have to do. He found it easily and returned to the kitchen. Ilya felt uneasy, like he knew he had passed some point of no return. Like he should be afraid. He shoved the pack of cigarettes in his jacket pocket. He downed his glass of vodka, and poured another.

As he made his way out to the deck in the backyard, Ilya was dimly aware of the alcohol creeping into the edges of his mind. Before he could think too hard about it, he pulled a cigarette out of the pack in his pocket, put it between his lips, and lit it. He took a long drag, one that made him cough. As he leaned against the railing of the deck, Ilya smoked his cigarette like it was a fucking oxygen tank. Every breath was a drag. Every exhale was a cloud of smoke. He finished the first and lit another off of the butt. He was starting to feel dizzy from the nicotine. *Shane will be so fucking mad at me.* Ilya downed his glass of vodka, and realized he'd left the bottle inside.

By the end of his second cigarette, Ilya was starting to feel nauseous off of the nicotine buzz. He supposed that's what happened when you went from six years tobacco-free to chain smoking. He sat in the deck chair and pulled his knees up to his chest. Today had been a spectacular mess. And maybe the worst part? He hadn't been able to handle a single minute of it on his own. Five years in therapy and he felt like he was at square fucking one.

It's because you're lazy. It's because you don't fucking try hard enough. It's because you don't matter enough to try. What ever gave you the fucking idea that you mattered, Ilya? What ever gave you the impression that you could be fixed, that you could be happy – that you deserved any of this? You don't deserve Shane. You don't deserve this life together. You don't deserve to be alive.

Tears pricked at the corners of Ilya's eyes. His throat felt like sandpaper. He felt as if he couldn't get any lower, crash any harder than he was in this moment. He felt like he was going to be sick. No, he actually *was* going to be sick.

Just in time, Ilya launched from his chair and stumbled to the edge of the deck. He leaned over the railing and vomited into the shrubs. He realized, as he watched the disgusting puddle of clear vodka and bile form in the landscaping rock, that he hadn't eaten since breakfast. And that he was kind of drunk.

Ilya slid to the deck floor in an inelegant heap. His mind drifted into the place beyond its typical limits. He thought about the dream he'd had of his mother. He thought about the last summer she'd been alive, and the time they'd visited the zoo in Moscow. He thought about blonde hair and apple perfume and pretzels shaped like safari animals. He thought about the bottle of Vicodin left over from his last injury in the cabinet in the bathroom. He thought about going inside, and taking all of them, and finally being at peace. He thought about rejoining his mother.

Then Ilya thought about Shane coming home in an hour and finding him the same way Ilya had found his mother in his dream. Suddenly, he had to be sick again.

Ilya dry heaved onto the deck for several minutes, feeling absolutely disgusting, but a tiny bit closer to reality. Before he could question himself, Ilya dialed Shane's number. As the phone rang, he laid back on the deck and looked up at the stars in the night sky. Shane answered on the third ring. Ilya could hear Rose laughing in the background. Shane spoke with a smile in his voice. "Hi honey. What's up?"

Ilya second guessed himself again. Shane sounded happy. He sounded like he was having a great day. "Umm... I'm just wondering when you might come home?" Ilya asked.

Shane's tone slid from cheerful to concerned. "Probably in the next hour or so, we're just catching up. Is everything okay?"

Ilya's throat tightened. He counted to five before he replied, hoping to sound composed. "No," his voice cracked. Damn it. "Um... I need... Can you come back now?" Ilya was sure he sounded utterly pathetic.

Shane understood immediately. Of course he did. "I'm leaving now. I'll be home in fifteen minutes. Stay on the phone with me, Ilya."

Ilya nodded, then realized Shane couldn't see him. "Okay," Ilya said quietly. He sat up from where he was lying, briefly muted the call, and lit another cigarette. If he was going to spend his day fully down the rabbit hole, he might as well have one more.

Shane didn't try to get Ilya to talk. Ilya could hear the sound of the car door slamming, the crackling of Edmonton's hockey game being announced over the car radio, the clicking of the turn signal. They sat in silent anticipation on either end of the phone as Shane made his way home. Ilya finished his cigarette and flicked his butt off the deck. He was starting to feel scared for a different reason. How would Shane react when he saw what he'd done? What would he think of this giant fucking mess?

Ilya looked at the timer on the call. Eleven minutes had passed since Shane had picked up. Guiltily, Ilya pressed the end call button without saying a word. He left his phone on the deck and returned to the kitchen. His heart was fucking racing. He took a seat back on his stool and took a swig of vodka out of the bottle. Shane would be here any minute. Shane would be able to tell he was drunk. Shane would smell the cigarettes. Shane would know how weak he was. How completely undeserving of his love Ilya was. Ilya closed his eyes and buried his head in his arms on the counter.

Ilya heard the garage door open. He heard a car door slam. He heard Shane's keys in the lock, and then his quick steps into the living area. Shane called out to him. "Ilya? Where are you?" Ilya could hear the worry in Shane's voice.

Ilya sat up and cleared his throat to respond just as Shane crossed the threshold into the kitchen. In an instant, Shane had Ilya wrapped in his arms. Ilya flinched. He didn't deserve this. He tried to pull away, pushing at Shane's chest. Shane didn't let go. He held Ilya tighter, whispering against Ilya's shoulder.

"It's okay, Ilya. I'm here. What happened? I love you. Everything will be okay," Shane said.

Ilya couldn't take it. He slumped against Shane's chest and let out a broken sob. "I'm sorry. I fucked up. I'm sorry. I don't deserve you. I don't deserve to be alive."

Shane squeezed Ilya even tighter at his words, burying his face deep into Ilya's neck. "Ilya, honey, no. You have nothing to be sorry for. Whatever happened, it's okay. I love you, nothing could change that."

Ilya cried harder at Shane's words. Shane rubbed his back, fingers gliding up the nape of his neck and into his hair. They sat like that for a long time. Ilya cried until his head started to hurt. Shane did his best to soothe Ilya until the tears subsided. By the time Ilya was done, Shane's shirt was a mess of snot and tears. Ilya knew Shane must hate the feeling of the wet shirt clinging to his chest. Wordlessly, Ilya unbuttoned Shane's shirt and pushed it off of his shoulders. Shane smiled at the gesture, but it didn't reach his eyes.

Shane pulled Ilya out of his stool and down the hall to their bedroom. Ilya felt like a husk. Shane left him sitting on the edge of the bed and went into the bathroom. Ilya could hear Shane filling the tub. A wave of guilt passed over Ilya, but he was too worn out to feel anything more about it. A few minutes passed, and Shane returned to the bedroom. He wordlessly stripped Ilya's clothes, gasping when he noticed the angry red scratch marks at Ilya's neck. Shane must've sensed that Ilya didn't have the energy to explain, and didn't ask him any questions about his neck or the necklace he surely noticed was missing.

Shane guided Ilya to the bathroom, then stripped the rest of his own clothes. Shane stepped into the tub and pulled Ilya with him. They settled into the tub with Shane sitting against the back of the tub, Ilya tucked between his legs. Ilya sat stiffly as the soothing warm water enveloped his body. It smelled like lavender. Shane tugged at Ilya's shoulders to get him to lean back into Shane's chest. Ilya obeyed. Under all of the layers that were hurting right now, he felt a familiar sense of safety and gratitude for his husband.

They sat in the tub, in silence, for half an hour. Shane traced gentle patterns on Ilya's skin. Ilya lie against Shane's chest and tried to match the deep breaths his husband was taking. As the events of the day replayed in his mind, Ilya knew he had to say something.

"I am so sorry," Ilya said in a voice that sounded much smaller than his own.

"You don't have anything to be sorry for, Ilya. I'm here for you. Can you tell me what happened today?" Shane asked.

Ilya took a deep breath. "I had the dream about my mother. Alexei called after you left. He just wanted money. I went for a run in the cold. I lost my mother's necklace. I bought cigarettes. I realized I forgot to take my medication today. I got a little drunk. I smoked. I threw up on the deck. I ruined your night," Ilya spoke in stilted sentences. He couldn't meet Shane's eyes.

"Ilya, look at me," Shane said. Ilya reluctantly lifted his chin. "Alexei is a fucking bastard. I'm so sorry about your necklace. I don't care that you smoked a couple cigarettes. I'm so glad that you found the strength to ask for help."

Ilya's eyes slid shut. He could hardly take it, Shane's kindness and gentle words.

"We'll find the necklace. We'll clean up the mess. We'll block Alexei's number. We'll call your psychologist in the morning and get an appointment on the calendar. We will be okay, Ilya," Shane said.

It sounded so simple when Shane said it like that. It sounded believable, even. "I'm lucky to be loved by you. I don't know what I would do without you," Ilya said.

"We're lucky to be loved by each other," Shane said matter-of-factly. "Now let's go to bed, this bath water is getting fucking cold."

Ilya stepped out of the tub and allowed Shane to wrap him in one of their fluffy white bath towels. They headed back to the bedroom, where Ilya sat on the edge of the bed again. Shane went to the closet to get them each a clean pair of underwear. He returned and stooped to help Ilya slide his pair on. As Shane pulled the boxers up his thighs, Ilya was flooded with an intense sense of relief. Shane knelt at Ilya's feet, one hand resting on Ilya's knee. Shane looked up at Ilya's face, a soft smile at his lips.

"Close your eyes," Shane said. Ilya felt confused. *Was this a sex thing?*

"No, it's not a sex thing. Close your eyes, Ilya," Shane repeated. Ilya let out a small laugh at his husband's miraculous ability to read his mind. Ilya was overthinking whether or not it was okay to laugh after a day like today when he felt the cool touch of metal on his neck. Ilya's hand flew to his chest, and he felt the familiar shape of his crucifix pendant against his fingers.

"What the fuck? How the hell did you find it?" Ilya asked as he felt Shane hook the clasp behind his neck. Before answering, Shane kissed the skin below the delicate chain.

"It was on the floor of the closet. The chain was broken; it must've happened when you changed into your running clothes," Shane said. "I put it on the chain I used to wear my ring on, before we got married. You can switch it out for a new one if you want, my feelings won't be hurt."

Ilya shook his head emphatically. He pulled Shane into a tight embrace, lying back on the bed as he did so. Shane came with him easily, settling on top of Ilya's chest. "Is perfect. You are perfect, Shane Hollander. I do not know what I would do without you," Ilya said.

Shane returned his hands to Ilya's hair, soothingly running his fingers through Ilya's curls. Ilya didn't feel fixed. He didn't even feel sure that he was going to be okay. But he felt safe under the weight of Shane's body. He felt glad to have his mother's necklace back around his neck. He felt, even, a gentle return of trust in himself to make the right decisions to ask for help when he needed it.

Ilya and Shane rearranged themselves on the bed so that they could be buried under the duvet together. Opposite of most nights, Ilya curled around Shane's side and rested his head on Shane's chest. He was met with Shane's warm embrace and a kiss on the top of his head. Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's chest in return, and his eyes slid closed.

"Goodnight Ilya," Shane said. "Dream of something good tonight. Maybe Las Vegas, yeah?"

"And they say you're not funny," Ilya replied. "Goodnight, I love you."

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