

Pieces of You

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Pieces of You

by [ThePromptWasntThisLong_\(shredded_potato\)](#).

Summary

Ilya had grown up in a world where affection was currency, measured and withdrawn at will. Where love was earned through achievement, and failure was repaid with absence. Every triumph was a plea. Every mistake, a debt.

Ilya had learned early that tenderness could not be trusted.

And Shane, for all his easy warmth, had no idea what to do with that kind of wound. His first instinct was to fix it. To tell Ilya that he was loved, that he was safe, that he didn't have to be afraid. He learned soon enough that words meant nothing to someone who'd been punished by them all his life.

Notes

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

It was slow, simple, and inevitable.

The kind of understanding that seeps through the cracks without asking permission, that doesn't strike like lightning but seeps like water—quiet, steady, unrelenting. By the time Shane realized what it was, it had already soaked through him.

He had always thought of Ilya in terms of opposition—sharp edges, short tempers, controlled violence. Everything about him was intensity. He moved like a man perpetually caught between fight and flight. But there was something else underneath, something hollowed out. It took years for Shane to see it for what it was: not pride, not anger—fear.

Fear dressed as precision. Fear disguised as silence.

The realization didn't come from words. It arrived in the spaces between them. The way Ilya flinched from praise, the careful way he navigated every gesture of affection, as though the ground beneath his feet could collapse at any moment. He could face down the world's scrutiny on the ice, but the simplest kindness left him defenseless.

It felt like loving a man made of glass—every wrong angle a risk of splintering.

Shane noticed it first in the small things—how Ilya's smile faltered when someone told him he'd done well, how he'd tense when Shane touched the back of his neck, how he always apologized for things that didn't need apologies. And then came the silences after phone calls from home. The unreadable look in Ilya's eyes, the brief muttered Russian that carried more sorrow than meaning.

Sometimes Ilya would laugh during the day—the startling, true kind that cracked through his usual reserve—only to spend the night strangely quiet, like joy itself had left bruises. Shane learned then that Ilya experienced emotion in reverse. What should have been a release became a wound. What warmed others left him cold and wary, as if feeling too much only reminded him how little he'd been allowed to feel before.

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So he stayed. Quietly, consistently. Through the silences, through the tension that hovered in every shared breath. He stayed when Ilya withdrew, when he turned brittle with self-defense, when he hid behind sarcasm sharp enough to draw blood.

Sometimes Shane thought about leaving. The exhaustion of loving someone who couldn't let himself be loved was a weight that pulled him under more nights than he cared to admit. He would lie awake listening to Ilya breathe beside him and wonder how love could feel so much like loss.

But then Ilya would reach for him in sleep—half-conscious, fingers curling against Shane's wrist, his body seeking contact it would later deny. And that tiny act, that unconscious need, would anchor him again.

It was on one of those bleak nights that the wall cracked.

A phone call from Moscow. Ilya's voice like glass breaking in his throat. Shane found him afterward sitting on the floor of their apartment, knees drawn up, phone facedown beside him. His eyes were dry, but something in him had gone terribly still.

"He said," Ilya began, voice low, "he said it's embarrassing that I let them know. That I should have kept it quiet."

Shane sat down across from him, close enough that their knees almost touched. "He's wrong," he said.

Ilya shook his head. "He's right. I should have known better."

"Better than what?"

"Better than... to be like this."

The words landed like a bruise forming beneath skin. Ilya didn't look up. Shane could see the pulse in his throat, could see how tightly he held himself, the way someone holds the edges of a wound to stop it from bleeding.

Without thinking, Shane reached out. His hand hovered for a moment before resting against Ilya's cheek. The tremor that passed through Ilya wasn't from fear—it was recognition. Something inside him giving way after years of holding.

"I don't know how to do this," Ilya whispered.

"Then don't try to," Shane said. "Just let me be here."

It wasn't forgiveness. It wasn't healing. But that night, Ilya fell asleep with his face pressed against Shane's chest, and Shane lay awake listening to the quiet, to the small proof that staying sometimes meant more than saving.

After that, there were changes so small they could have been missed. Ilya's hands stopped trembling when Shane reached for them. His voice softened when he said Shane's name. He started showing up without needing to explain himself.

The past didn't loosen its grip easily. There were still nights when Ilya's breath hitched from dreams he couldn't speak of, nights when the ghosts of his father's voice dragged him back to

that boyhood kitchen where silence had been the only safety. On those nights, Shane would wake to find him sitting by the window, staring out into the dark like it might answer him.

He'd go to him then, wordless, and wrap his arms around him. Ilya would resist at first, then crumble, body shaking with quiet sobs that sounded like someone remembering how to feel. Shane never said *it's okay* because it wasn't. It would never be. What mattered was that they could sit in that not-okay together.

There were moments, fleeting as breath, where Shane saw what Ilya could have been if someone had loved him without conditions. It hurt almost more than the distance. It hurt to know there was a version of this man who might have laughed freely, who might have reached first, who might have said "I love you" without bracing for heartbreak.

But even as he grieved for that ghost, Shane loved the Ilya in front of him—the one who was learning, inch by brutal inch, how to stay. He loved him when he was brittle and when he was brave, when he was silent and when he stumbled through uncertainty. He loved him when Ilya pressed his face into Shane's neck and whispered apologies for things he hadn't done wrong, when he clung in the dark as if daylight would steal everything.

And gradually, impossibly, the distance began to close.

It wasn't redemption. It wasn't even peace. It was something smaller and more human—the way Ilya's head found Shane's shoulder without hesitation, the way he whispered "I love you" like a secret, like a prayer. The words never came easily; they tore out of him, raw and trembling, but they came.

The comfort was never grand. It was a palm on a spine, a thumb on a pulse, a breath shared between tired mouths. It was patience, it was consistency, it was refusing to treat healing as a race to be won. It was loving the parts of Ilya that had survived, even when they were jagged. And Shane understood, finally, that being the person who saw him—truly, *fully*—meant accepting the weight of that vision. It meant loving him through relapses, through bitter words, through the quiet ache of knowing that Ilya might never completely believe he was deserving of their life.

But some mornings, when the world was soft, Ilya would wake before dawn and simply look at him. Shane would feel the gaze before he opened his eyes—the warmth of it, the awe.

"You're still here," Ilya would whisper. Not a question. A marvel.

"I'm still here," Shane always answered.

In those moments, Shane understood what love really was. Not the clean certainty he'd believed in, but this messy, painful devotion to another person's brokenness, the choice to sit with the shattered pieces without trying to glue them back into a shape they were never meant to hold. The willingness to keep reaching, knowing some part of the other might never reach back.

He realized that loving Ilya would always hurt. That hurt was the point—it was proof that he was still trying, that Ilya was still fighting to believe in something better than what he'd been

taught.

But hurt could heal, it could fade. The way bruises do when the body finally trusts that it's safe. And Shane saw it in the way Ilya's smile began to reach his eyes.

It was slow, yes. Simple, no. Inevitable, absolutely.

Because once you've seen someone's wounds, you can't unsee them. And once you've loved them anyway, there's no going back to the kind of love that asks for less.

End Notes

i wanted pain today so here we are~ 😊

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