

For Worse, For Fever

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For Worse, For Fever

by [nj_1996](#)

Summary

Shane survives the world's worst flu and thinks the nightmare is over.
It is not.

Because now Ilya is sick.
And Ilya is *stubborn, delirious, chaotic*, and apparently capable of flirting with household lamps.

Shane promised he would take care of him.
He just did not realise it would involve grocery store emergencies, Russian melodrama, world's worst meals, and a fever so high it nearly stops his heart.

Notes

The long (not that long) awaited sequel! We do a little switcheroo and it's now Shane's turn to take care of his sick boyfriend.

Hope you enjoy just as much as the first one! The reaction to that has been genuinely overwhelming and mind-blowing. Thank you so, so, so much for all of the love! <3

Shane wakes slowly.

Not dramatically, not gasping for air, not on the brink of texting Ilya two hundred messages about imminent death. He simply wakes the way a human being does when his body is still deciding whether it has forgiven him for several days of misery. His eyelids feel a bit heavy, but nothing hurts in that stabbing, theatrical way it did before. His throat feels scratchy, but not as though it has been attacked by sandpaper. His limbs feel like overcooked spaghetti, but at least he can move them. All of this is progress.

He lies still for a moment, letting the soft winter light fill the edges of the room. His brain catches up slowly, taking inventory of the remaining symptoms. He is tired, slightly foggy, and he aches in that dull, post-fever way that makes him feel like a badly microwaved person, but he is undeniably alive.

Which feels miraculous.

He shifts a little. That is when he notices he is not lying on a pillow. He is lying on Ilya.

More specifically, on Ilya's chest, which is warm and broad and reassuring in the kind of primal way that makes Shane's heart squeeze. He presses his cheek against the fabric of his shirt and exhales. Everything smells faintly of detergent and Ilya's cologne and the clean cotton scent of sheets that were changed at three in the morning because Shane had sweated through the previous ones.

There is a hand in his hair.

Slow. Gentle. Lazy. The kind of touch someone uses when they have been awake long enough to settle into the rhythm of it.

Shane's brain registers the detail with a soft spark of emotion.

Ilya is awake.

He peels his eyes open, expecting to find that warm, fond, slightly amused expression Ilya gets whenever he is watching Shane sleep, the one that makes Shane feel like someone has cracked him open and replaced his insides with honey.

Instead, something is wrong.

It is small at first, hard to name. But Shane feels it like the faint pressure before a storm. Ilya's eyes are open, but the focus behind them is slightly hazy. His breathing is low and thick, not quite a cough but not quite normal either. There are tired shadows beneath his eyes that were not there yesterday. And his skin, when Shane lifts a hand to rest against the exposed part of his chest, feels too warm.

Shane frowns.

"You're awake," he murmurs, his voice rasping from disuse. "How long have you been up?"

“Just now,” Ilya replies.

Far too quickly.

Shane narrows his eyes. The lie is obvious. Then again, everything feels obvious to someone who spent the last forty-eight hours narrating the tragedy of his own influenza.

He lifts his head a little and the room shifts gently to the left. Ilya immediately brings a steadying hand to his back.

“Careful, solntse,” he says. His voice is gentle and low, but there is a raspy edge that pulls Shane fully into alertness.

Shane scrunches his brows. “Are you feeling alright?”

“I am fine,” Ilya says. He says it smoothly, firmly, and entirely unconvincingly.

Now that he is paying attention, Shane can hear it clearly. Ilya sounds tired in a way that does not fit his usual morning voice. There is a slight congestion in his breathing. His hand is too warm against Shane’s back. His eyes have a glassy sheen.

Shane places a palm on Ilya’s chest again, a soft frown burrowing its way between his eyebrows.

“You are too warm,” Shane says quietly.

“I am always warm,” Ilya replies, brushing it off. “You like it.”

Shane very much does, but that is beside the point.

“No,” he tries again, more firmly. “You are warmer than usual.”

“I am fine,” Ilya repeats. His jaw tightens ever so slightly. It is the same expression Shane uses when he is pretending his immune system is stronger than statistics.

Shane gives him a look. He has perfected this particular look. He used it yesterday when Ilya attempted to convince him that he was not actually dying when he very well might have been. He was feeling the worst he had ever felt in his entire life. Everything hurt, everything was too much, eve-

Before Shane can argue, Ilya leans up and kisses him. It is warm, slow, and unfair. Shane melts instantly. His body forgets how to be a body, his brain stops forming coherent objections, and his lungs fill with something tender and hot that has nothing to do with illness.

Ilya pulls back just slightly. “Good morning.”

Shane mumbles something that is supposed to be a greeting but is mostly a happy noise.

They stay close for a moment, foreheads almost touching, breath mixing in the quiet morning air. Shane could stay like this for hours.

But then his recovering brain clears just enough for him to focus on the slight redness under Ilya's eyes. The warmth in his cheeks. The faint sheen of sweat near his hairline.

He frowns again.

"You look tired," he says carefully.

"You had fever," Ilya replies. "I stayed awake many hours. It is nothing."

Shane winces at the memory. "You did not sleep at all, did you?"

"I slept, probably," Ilya lies again.

He is terrible at lying to Shane. It is almost sweet.

Instead of further protest, Shane tries to sit up properly. His muscles immediately complain. Ilya steadies him again, hands firm on his arms.

"You are not fully better," Ilya murmurs.

"I am better enough," Shane argues. "Perhaps eighty-five per cent. Possibly ninety."

"You were alive before," Ilya says flatly.

"Barely," Shane mutters. "It was touch and go."

A faint smile tugs at Ilya's mouth.

Then Ilya moves and stands up out of bed.

Too fast.

Shane sees the dizziness strike. It is subtle, but it is there. Ilya shifts his weight, sways nearly imperceptibly, and places a hand on the wall.

Shane's stomach drops.

"Oh my God," he says, voice sharp with realisation. "You are sick."

Ilya stiffens. "No."

"You are literally holding yourself up against the wall."

"It is very supportive wall."

Shane stares.

Ilya tries to straighten, jaw firming with sheer stubbornness, and steps away from the wall. For two seconds it looks believable.

Then he wobbles.

Shane shoots upright as fast as his still-tired body allows. "Ilya."

"I am fine," Ilya insists. But it sounds strained now, not confident. There is a new heaviness in his limbs.

Shane moves towards him, reaching out. "Come back to bed."

"No. You need food."

"You can barely stand."

"I can stand."

"You tilted like a dying houseplant."

"I do not tilt."

"That was tilting."

"It was leaning."

"It was tilting."

"It was not."

Shane softens his voice. "Ilya. Please."

That lands. Shane sees him crumble a little. Not visibly, not dramatically, but in that subtle way Ilya does when he is holding himself together out of sheer force of will. He looks away, shoulders dropping slightly.

Shane waits.

He thinks Ilya might surrender.

Then Ilya mutters something distinctly Russian that Shane does not have the vocabulary for and starts walking towards the kitchen.

He misjudges the doorway entirely and bumps his shoulder into it, groaning in pain for a second.

Shane drags a hand down his face. "Right. Sure. Completely healthy behaviour."

Ilya pretends this did not happen and continues.

Shane sighs, pushes himself slowly out of bed, and follows with a single weary thought: The flu did not manage to take him down, but worry just possibly might.

Shane tells himself that following Ilya to the kitchen is the sensible thing to do. He is the one who has just survived a truly catastrophic and surely possibly terminal flu. He should probably sit down, drink water, and remain in bed for the next several hours.

Instead, he is trailing after Ilya like a worried mother hen who has recently discovered her offspring is clinically incapable of admitting he is unwell.

Ilya walks in a straight line for a total of three steps before placing a hand on the fridge door as though it is the only thing keeping the universe in place. He is pretending to examine the magnets on the door, but Shane can see the little tremble in his fingers. It spikes panic in him immediately.

“Ilya,” Shane says slowly. “You do not look fine.”

“I am fine,” Ilya insists again. He sounds irritated, but in the way that people sound irritated when they are trying not to fall over.

Shane crosses his arms. “You literally walked into a doorframe.”

“I misjudged distance.”

“You misjudged the existence of the door.”

“It moved,” Ilya says, as though this is a completely rational statement.

Shane stares at him. “The door did not move.”

Ilya ignores him. He opens the fridge and stares at the contents with the deep concentration of a man who can barely remember what food is. Then he selects eggs. He drops them on the counter with a thud that does not bode well.

“I will cook,” Ilya announces.

Shane has a sudden vision of raw eggs splattered across the floor, Ilya slipping, a concussion, perhaps a small kitchen fire. The thought alone gives him hives.

“You are not cooking,” Shane says, moving closer. “You should be in bed. With me.”

“You need food.”

“I will make food.”

“You are sick.”

“I am recovering.”

“You had fever of thirty-nine just before.”

“Yes, but my brain works, which is more than I can say for you right now.”

Ilya lifts his chin as if offended. That tiny defensive motion is always incredibly obvious on him. Shane steps between him and the stove.

“I’m cooking,” Shane says firmly.

Ilya looks at him as if this is a betrayal of trust, but Shane does not budge.

Five minutes later, he is standing in front of the stove, whisking eggs, suddenly realising he has never really cooked in front of someone he actively wants to impress. The pressure immediately ruins everything. His hands shake slightly. The spatula is uncooperative. The pan hisses in a way that feels judgemental. He tries to make his usual quick scramble, but somewhere in the process he forgets the difference between stirring and crushing.

The result is not encouraging.

He looks over his shoulder. Ilya is leaning against the countertop, arms crossed in a semblance of casualness that is entirely undermined by the faint pallor in his cheeks and the way he keeps blinking too slowly.

Shane turns back to the stove. He tries to salvage the situation, but the eggs are rapidly becoming a rubbery mass that looks like it has committed a minor crime.

He plates them anyway. He has no alternative.

Ilya sits at the table. Shane places the plate in front of him with the grim resignation of a man presenting evidence that will convict him.

Ilya looks down. His expression goes soft.

“You cooked for me,” he says.

Shane bristles. “Yes. I did. Do not comment on the eggs.”

“I love the eggs,” Ilya says.

“They look like insulation foam.”

“I love this foam.”

Shane narrows his eyes. “You cannot protect my feelings and lie to me at the same time.”

“They are perfect,” Ilya says again.

Shane drops into the seat opposite him and rests his forehead on the table. “Ilya, you are delirious.”

“I am appreciating your effort,” Ilya says mildly.

“You are too nice to me.”

“I am always nice to you.”

“That is untrue,” Shane mutters. “You yelled at me last week when I forgot my gloves at the rink.”

“You forgot your gloves,” Ilya says. “It was minus ten outside.”

“Yes, but that is not the point.”

Ilya smiles faintly. Then he lifts his fork, scoops up a piece of egg, and places it in his mouth.

He pauses.

Shane leans forward. “Be honest.”

Ilya swallows. “It is delightful.”

“You swallowed it like it was gravel.”

“I like gravel.”

“Ilya, that is in no way reassuring,” Shane groans into his hands.

While Shane is busy trying to work out where exactly the eggs went wrong, he hears something that turns his blood cold.

A cough.

Not a big one. Not a heavy one.

A quiet, forced cough that someone does when they are trying very hard to pretend they did not need to cough in the first place.

Shane’s head lifts immediately.

Ilya clears his throat as if nothing happened. “It is fine,” he says quickly.

Shane’s entire body goes rigid. “You coughed.”

“No.”

“You did.”

“I cleared my throat.”

“Because you coughed.”

“No.”

Shane places both hands flat on the table. “Ilya.”

“I am fine.”

“You are clearly not fine. You are sweating.”

Ilya wipes his forehead. “It is warm in here.”

“It is not warm.”

“It is warm to me.”

“That is called a fever.”

“No.”

“You are flushed.”

“I am Russian.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Russian men are warm.”

Shane stares at him. “That is not science.”

Ilya stands suddenly, far too quickly. He catches himself on the table with a quiet grunt. Shane is out of his chair in an instant.

“Right,” Shane says, grabbing his arm. “That’s it. Bed.”

“I am making tea,” Ilya says faintly.

“You are absolutely not making tea.”

“You need tea.”

“You need to stop dying in my kitchen.”

“I am not dying.”

“You can barely remain standing.”

Ilya grumbles something in Russian under his breath. Shane cannot understand it but he does not need to. He can recognise a protest when he hears one.

Shane softens his grip on Ilya’s arm. “Let me take care of you,” he murmurs.

Ilya looks at him, expression flickering between pride and surrender. Shane can see the moment the exhaustion wins.

He sighs. Not dramatically, not reluctantly, but with the weary resignation of someone who knows he has been caught.

“Maybe,” Ilya mutters, “I need to sit for a moment.”

“There we go,” Shane says softly. “Progress.”

He guides Ilya back into the chair. Ilya sits heavily, like gravity has increased specifically for him. Shane drops to a crouch beside him, one hand on his knee, the other brushing lightly over the back of his hand.

“That was scary,” Shane says quietly.

“I am fine,” Ilya whispers.

“You are not. But I am here.”

Ilya closes his eyes for a moment. His breathing shudders, soft and uneven.

Shane squeezes his hand.

“Come to bed,” Shane says. “Please.”

Ilya opens his eyes again. They are unfocused and warm, but not with affection this time. With fever.

He gives the smallest nod.

Shane stands, helps him rise, and keeps an arm around his waist the whole way to the bedroom.

Halfway down the hall, Ilya mutters, “Your eggs were very good.”

Shane nearly laughs, relief flooding him. “You are a terrible liar.”

“I am excellent liar,” Ilya says slowly. “When I am not about to faint.”

Shane tightens his arm around him as they walk back into the bedroom. “Exactly my point.”

Shane manages to get Ilya back into the bedroom, though it feels less like guiding a sick boyfriend and more like escorting a large, overheated toddler who is deeply offended by the concept of gravity.

The moment they reach the bed, Ilya begins to sit down. Then, for reasons known only to whatever ancient, frostbitten force drives him, he changes course entirely and attempts to turn away.

Shane places both hands on his hips in disbelief. “For the love of... What are you doing?”

“I must tidy,” Ilya says.

He gestures weakly at the room with the solemnity of a man about to address a national crisis. “Things are messy.”

Shane follows the gesture.

The room is not messy.

The room is barely lived in. The duvet is slightly rumpled from where they crawled out of it and Shane did not have time yet to make it again. Two tissues sit on the bedside table. There is a sweatshirt Shane discarded on the floor at some point last night, but that hardly qualifies as chaos.

“Ilya, you’re hallucinating,” Shane says.

“I am perfectly okay,” Ilya replies, even as he sways a little on his feet.

“You cannot tidy,” Shane says, stepping forward. “You are burning up. You nearly collapsed in the kitchen.”

“I am not collapsing,” Ilya insists.

He stands very still, as though hoping the lack of movement will make his statement true. Then he adds, with a note of grave dignity, “I am stabilising my core.”

Shane stares. “You are not a building.”

Ilya ignores this crucial point.

Instead, he bends down to pick up the hoodie Shane dropped in the night. The movement throws him off balance and he immediately braces one hand against the wall again, jaw clenching in discomfort.

Shane’s heart skids sideways in panic.

He steps forward and grabs Ilya by the arm. “Enough. Into bed.”

Ilya straightens slowly, still holding the hoodie like it is evidence that will hold up in court. “The room is disordered,” he tries again. “It is unsettling.”

“You know what is unsettling?” Shane says, voice climbing with incredulous frustration. “You, standing upright. That is unsettling. You are about thirty seconds away from meeting the floor again.”

“I will not meet floor.”

“You nearly made out with it in the hallway.”

Ilya scowls. “That is dramatic.”

“Let me remind you,” Shane says, “that you are currently sweating through your t-shirt, staring at a perfectly clean room and telling me it is messy. Ilya, you are not well.”

Ilya opens his mouth.

Shane lifts a finger. "If you say 'I am fine', I swear to God..."

Ilya shuts his mouth.

He looks away.

And that, more than anything, tells Shane the truth. Ilya only avoids eye contact when something is wrong. He would rather maintain eye contact during the most embarrassing, intimate moments of their relationship than admit weakness.

Shane steps closer, gently pries the sweatshirt from Ilya's hands, and sets it back on the chair.

"Bed," Shane says again, softer now.

Ilya's shoulders sag a fraction. He starts to take a step towards the mattress.

He does not make it.

Halfway there, his legs falter. His foot catches on nothing. His breath hitches.

Shane reacts faster than thought.

He grabs Ilya around the waist, steadying him with both arms as Ilya lists sideways. Ilya tries to correct himself, but his coordination slips like water through fingers. His head comes to rest against Shane's shoulder, heavy and warm.

Shane's heart clenches painfully.

"Ilya," he whispers, voice hushed in a way it never is unless something frightens him. "You are scaring me."

"I am not," Ilya mutters, although the words lack conviction. His weight leans further into Shane. "I am only tired."

"You said earlier that you were stabilising your core," Shane reminds him.

Ilya says nothing.

"Which, for the record," Shane continues, "is the weirdest sentence you have ever said."

Still nothing.

Shane lifts a hand to cup the back of Ilya's neck, thumb brushing warm, feverish skin.

"Sweetheart," Shane whispers, "you are ill."

Ilya stiffens at the word in a way that reminds Shane painfully of himself two days ago. That stubborn refusal, that irrational anger at the very idea of needing help. It is strange seeing it from the outside, like watching someone else perform a dramatic script he unknowingly wrote.

“You took care of me,” Shane says gently, leaning his forehead against Ilya’s temple. “You stayed awake half the night. You changed the sheets at three in the morning. You held me when I cried over a headache. You let me breathe against your chest when I thought I would never feel normal again.”

Ilya’s eyes flutter shut.

“And now,” Shane continues softly, “it is your turn.” He swallows. “And I’m really sorry for giving you my flu.”

Ilya lets out a quiet sound, something caught between a protest and an exhale of surrender.

Shane holds him a little tighter. “I have you. Lean on me.”

After a moment, Ilya does.

It is small at first, barely a shift of weight. Then his body yields, muscles loosening with the kind of reluctant acceptance that makes Shane’s throat tighten. Shane guides him backward step by step until the back of Ilya’s knees touch the edge of the mattress.

“Sit,” Shane urges.

Ilya sits. He sinks into the bed so heavily that Shane has a moment of fresh alarm about how high his fever must be running.

Shane kneels on the floor in front of him.

Up close, the signs are unmistakable. Ilya’s cheeks are flushed, his eyes too bright, his lips dry. A faint tremor runs through him every few breaths. He tries to hide it by folding his hands together, but Shane sees everything now.

He reaches for Ilya’s face.

“I am alright,” Ilya says again, but even he sounds unconvinced.

Shane brushes his thumb across his cheek. “You are very much not alright, and I need you to stop saying that you are.”

Ilya’s breath catches. The smallest wince appears in the corner of his mouth. “I do not like this.”

“I know,” Shane murmurs. “But you will feel better if you rest.”

Ilya closes his eyes. “I hate resting.”

“Which is ironic,” Shane says, “because you have spent the last two nights telling me to do exactly that.”

“That was different,” Ilya mutters.

“How,” Shane asks, “was it different.”

“I am stronger than you.”

Shane raises both eyebrows. “I am going to assume you’re only saying that incredibly incorrect statement due to your illness and not pull up the statistics I have to prove that you are not.”

Ilya tries to glare at him. Fails. He looks tired and sick and unfairly beautiful, which is rude under the circumstances. Like a giant, pouting, sad teddy bear that was simultaneously still the sexiest man Shane had ever seen.

“You need to lie down,” Shane whispers.

Ilya sighs. The fight goes out of him all at once, like a gust of wind leaving a sail. He looks at Shane, eyes soft and exhausted, and says in a voice that barely holds together, “Stay with me.”

Shane's chest feels far too small for his heart. “Of course.”

He helps Ilya lower himself into the bed, pulling the duvet up gently, smoothing it over Ilya’s shoulders. Ilya shifts, searching for a comfortable position that does not seem to exist. Shane tucks his curls back from his face, thumbs brushing over his temples.

Ilya murmurs something in Russian, something quiet and rasped and full of raw need. Shane does not understand the words, but he understands the tone.

Shane sits beside him, stroking his hair until the tension eases from Ilya’s jaw.

“Sleep,” he whispers.

Ilya’s breathing evens slightly, but his eyes stay open, glazed with fever and stubbornness.

“I will rest,” Ilya concedes, “but not for long.”

Shane settles in beside him, gently pressing Ilya’s hand to his own chest.

“You will rest as long as you need. I will make sure of it,” he says softly.

Ilya releases a shuddery breath.

Shane watches him, heart lodged somewhere uncomfortable beneath his ribs.

If this is only the beginning, he knows the real crash is coming.

He also knows he will not leave Ilya’s side when it does.

For the first few minutes, Shane thinks perhaps he has managed to convince Ilya to stay in bed. Ilya’s eyes are half closed, his breathing slow and heavy, fingers curled weakly around

Shane's shirt where Shane has settled beside him.

Shane keeps stroking his hair, letting the repetitive motion soothe them both. He can feel heat radiating from him like a furnace. When Shane leans in, his forehead almost touches Ilya's temple, and the warmth is practically shimmering off his skin.

He should take his temperature soon. He knows that. He knows what high fever looks like now, knows the subtle signs and the frightening ones and the ones that mean he is about to panic.

But Ilya seems to be drifting and Shane does not want to disturb him.

He just wants him to rest.

They stay there like that, curled together. Shane watches Ilya's eyelashes flutter slightly with each breath. His own body sinks into the mattress, warm and heavy but less fogged than before. He lets himself hope the worst might be mild. Maybe it will not spiral into a full collapse like it did for Shane. Maybe he will be fine if he sleeps for an hour.

That hopeful thought lasts roughly eleven seconds.

Because Ilya's breathing changes.

It becomes shallow. A bit too fast. His brow furrows. His grip tightens suddenly in Shane's shirt, not consciously, but in that instinctive way people reach for something when they are slipping.

Shane lifts himself slightly. "Ilya."

No answer.

"Ilya, love, look at me."

Ilya's eyes open a fraction. They are glassy and unfocused. He exhales sharply through his nose, as though annoyed at his own body. Then he tries to sit up.

Tries.

He pushes against the mattress and immediately his arm gives out. His whole body sways to the side with a lurch that makes Shane's stomach turn.

"Stop," Shane says quickly, catching him by the shoulders. "Ilya, stop trying to move."

"I am fine," Ilya murmurs, but it is barely a voice. It is a ghost of a voice. His eyes flutter again.

"You are absolutely not fine," Shane says. His own heart is pounding now, thudding in his throat. "You are dizzy and sick and please stop."

"No."

“Yes,” Shane insists, guiding him back against the pillows. Ilya fights it for all of two seconds before his body gives up and lets Shane position him fully.

Shane cups his face in both hands.

Up close, it is worse.

His cheeks are bright with fever. His pupils look strange. Sweat clings to his hairline. The tremor beneath Shane’s fingertips has worsened.

“Stay still,” Shane whispers. “Do not try to sit up again.”

“I should get water,” Ilya mutters.

“I will get water,” Shane says. “You stay here.”

“I must stand.”

“No, you must not.”

“I need to stand.”

“You need to stay alive.”

Ilya closes his eyes briefly, and that is when Shane sees it.

His breathing catches, then stutters, then resumes too fast.

Shane feels something in his chest pull tight and painful.

He has felt this before. Just days ago, he was just like this, seeing himself on camera when Ilya called him from Minnesota. He recognizes the symptoms, and he can see where they will lead.

This is not normal dizziness. This is the beginning of something much worse.

Shane moves quickly. He slides one arm behind Ilya’s shoulders, the other under his knees, intending only to shift him further onto the bed.

He does not expect Ilya to suddenly sag fully into him.

One moment Ilya is sitting upright again. The next he is a heavy, uncooperative weight collapsing entirely against Shane, head falling onto Shane’s shoulder, breath leaving him in a small involuntary sound.

Shane’s breath stops, his heart follows.

“Ilya,” he whispers, gripping him tightly. “Hey. Stay with me.”

He feels Ilya’s fingers clutch weakly at his shirt. Not strong enough to hold, simply reaching.

“Do not fall asleep,” Shane says, voice thin with fear. “Look at me.”

Ilya forces his eyes open again, but they barely focus. His lips part as though he is trying to say something, but no sound comes out.

Shane panics.

He shifts, guiding Ilya down onto the bed again, lowering him slowly, trying to keep his arms around him without jostling him. Ilya cooperates only in the sense that he is not resisting. Mostly he is simply heavy with exhaustion, his limbs limp, body overheating hard enough that Shane feels it through two layers of fabric.

The moment Ilya is lying flat, he shivers. Not a cold shiver. That deep, fever-driven shake that grips the whole body for a second like a wave.

Shane’s chest feels like it is collapsing in on itself.

He sits beside him, one hand on Ilya’s cheek, the other stroking his hair. “Stay with me,” he whispers. “You are alright. You are safe.”

Ilya swallows, a small, painful noise follows. “I am sorry.”

Shane goes still. “What are you apologising for?”

“I should not be like this,” Ilya says, barely audible. “I should not worry you.”

Shane’s heart shatters into a million tiny pieces.

“Do not apologise for being ill,” Shane says fiercely. “Ilya, look at me. I am here. I want to be here. You are not a burden. You could never be.”

Ilya’s eyes fill faintly at the edges, more from fever than emotion perhaps, but it hits Shane like a punch anyway.

“You took care of me,” Shane continues. “Let me take care of you.”

Ilya’s breaths come quicker. Shane presses a hand to his forehead. The heat is alarming.

He reaches for the water glass on the bedside table, lifts it, and brings it to Ilya’s lips.

“Small sip,” Shane murmurs. “Please. Just one.”

Ilya tries. Shane supports the back of his head, guiding him gently. Ilya swallows half a mouthful, then sags again, utterly drained.

Shane sets the glass aside. “Good. That was good.”

He glances at the thermometer on the table. His stomach twists hard, but he picks it up.

“Ilya,” he says softly. “I need to check your temperature.”

Ilya makes a soft sound of protest, but his eyes do not open.

Shane whispers, "I know. I am sorry. Just for a moment."

He slips the thermometer into place.

He strokes Ilya's hair and whispers quietly to him while they wait, the way Ilya whispered to him nights ago.

"You are safe. You are here with me. I am not going anywhere. You can lean on me. You do not have to fight this alone."

The thermometer beeps.

Shane looks.

His stomach drops.

38.6

Much too high.

He lets out a trembling breath, sets it aside with more force than necessary, and turns fully back to Ilya.

Ilya whispers something again, something barely formed. Shane leans down.

"What is it, love?"

"I feel strange," Ilya murmurs weakly. "Everything is heavy."

Shane swallows, voice soft but steady. "I know. I am here."

"I hate this," Ilya says, voice cracking.

"I know you do," Shane whispers, brushing sweat from his forehead. "Let me help you."

Ilya shivers again.

Shane climbs onto the bed beside him, pulling him gently into his arms, holding him carefully, positioning his head against Shane's shoulder so he does not strain.

Ilya melts into him at once, as though his muscles had been waiting to give in.

Shane wraps both arms around him and begins to sway slightly, instinctively, as though calming a trembling animal. His voice stays low, steady and soft, the way Ilya's had been for him.

"You are safe," he murmurs. "I am here. You can rest. I am not leaving you."

Ilya exhales shakily against his chest, his body gradually unclenching. His breathing stays too fast, but it finds a rhythm. His trembling slows, bit by bit.

Shane presses his cheek to the top of Ilya's head.

"Lean on me," he whispers. "Let me carry this part."

Ilya's fingers curl into Shane's shirt.

Shane holds him tighter, heart bruised with love and fear.

And he knows, as Ilya clings to him with feverish desperation, that this is only the beginning.

But he will not move.

He will not leave.

Because Ilya needs him.

And there is nowhere else Shane could possibly be.

By late afternoon, Shane has begun to understand a terrible truth.

Ilya, when feverish, is not simply stubborn.

He is inventively stubborn.

And, worse, he is quietly chaotic.

Shane discovers this while trying to rearrange the pillows behind Ilya's back. He turns around for ten seconds to refill the water bowl. When he turns back, Ilya is attempting to fold laundry.

Poorly.

He has taken one of Shane's clean jumpers and stuffed a single sock inside the neck hole.

Shane stops mid-step. "What are you doing?"

Ilya looks up with bleary seriousness. "In Russia this is efficient system. Maybe too advanced for Canada."

Shane blinks. "That is not a system. That is a crime."

"It is efficient," Ilya says, folding the jumper in half and trapping the sock inside like contraband.

Shane wrestles the jumper gently out of his hands. "You are meant to be resting. Why are you folding clothes?"

“They looked sad,” Ilya says.

Shane pinches the bridge of his nose. “Please stop talking.”

Ilya stares at him like Shane is the one saying things that make no sense. “Your socks are lonely. It is sad.”

Shane stares right back, wondering if it is medically possible to bruise a soul.

He tries to redirect. “Would you like some water.”

“Yes,” Ilya says with great dignity. He holds out his hand. Shane places the glass in it.

Ilya misses his mouth entirely and pours a little water onto his own lap.

Shane snatches the glass back before disaster escalates. “Right. That is enough independence for the day.”

Ilya scowls faintly at the ceiling. “I can wash my own face.”

“You absolutely cannot,” Shane says, already reaching for a cloth.

“I will wash it.”

“No.”

“I insist,” Ilya begins, then drags the damp cloth over his cheek with the aim of a tranquilised horse. Water drips onto his shirt.

Shane removes the cloth from his hand with the delicacy of someone disarming a grenade. “Enough.”

Ilya mutters something in Russian that Shane assumes is either a complaint or a poetic admission of suffering.

They move back to the bed. Ilya leans heavily on him, not fully aware that he is doing it, which only makes Shane more worried.

The fever is climbing slowly but steadily. Ilya’s cheeks are too red, his breathing still faster than normal, his eyes glazed in that familiar fever-fog.

He is not crashing.

Yet.

But he is circling that edge.

Shane tries to distract him with a small plan. “I am going to cook. Something other than eggs. For both our sakes.”

Ilya, eyes half-lidded, nods.

This is how Shane ends up standing in the kitchen staring at a saucepan like it has personally wronged him. He attempts soup. The result is not soup. It is a faintly suspicious broth that smells like herbs losing a fight.

He brings it to Ilya anyway, because he has no shame left.

Ilya takes one sip. His face does something ambiguous that could be gratitude or profound regret.

“It is very good,” Ilya lies.

“It absolutely is not.”

“I like it.”

“You do not.”

“I do.”

Shane crosses his arms. “What does it taste like.”

Ilya pauses. “Warm.”

“That is not a flavour.”

“It is comfort.”

Shane squints at him. “Are you being kind or delirious.”

“I do not know,” Ilya replies honestly.

Shane sits beside him, gently nudging the bowl away before Ilya accidentally spills it on his chest.

“Please just rest,” Shane says.

Ilya does try. He lies back, towel under his head, eyes fluttering. For a few minutes, he goes quiet, and Shane feels a small spark of relief.

Then Ilya lifts his hand vaguely toward the lamp.

“Shane,” he whispers.

“Yes.”

“Why are there two of you.”

Shane looks at the lamp. “That is a lamp.”

Ilya frowns at it. “Are you sure.”

“I am positive.”

“It looks like you.”

“It does not.”

Ilya reaches out with the determination of someone who believes he has uncovered a conspiracy. “It has your warmth.”

“It is literally made of metal.”

“I am sorry if I offended you,” Ilya murmurs, still looking at the lamp.

Shane puts a hand over his eyes. “Lord help me.”

He guides Ilya’s hand away and replaces it with his own. “I am here. Not the lamp.”

Ilya’s brow relaxes slightly. “Good.”

Gradually, the sun slips lower. The room grows dimmer. Ilya cycles through moments of quiet, tiny bursts of rest, and sudden confused statements that make Shane want to laugh and cry at the same time.

By evening, Shane manages to get him under the covers with a cool cloth across his forehead and a proper drink of water.

Ilya curls into him without prompting, head pressed beneath Shane’s chin, breath warm against his chest.

“Better,” Ilya murmurs, nearly asleep already.

Shane runs his fingers slowly through his damp hair. “Sleep. I am here.”

Ilya sighs, a soft, fragile sound. “Do not go.”

“I will not.”

Ilya’s body relaxes further at the promise, and for a while the apartment is quiet except for their breaths.

Shane lies awake, watching the faint rise and fall of Ilya’s chest. Every breath is a relief. Every breath is a worry.

He feels it in his bones.

This is not the worst of it.

Not yet.

He rests his chin lightly on Ilya’s head and whispers to the quiet room.

“Tomorrow will be worse, won’t it.”

Ilya does not answer. He is already lost to fever-sleep.

Shane tightens his arm around him.

He knows the answer anyway.

Shane wakes with the feeling he is late for something.

He blinks, disoriented, then looks down.

Ilya is still pressed against him, tucked beneath his chin, breath warm, body curled inward. His skin against Shane’s chest feels too hot. Hotter than last night. Hotter than it should be after hours of rest.

Shane’s stomach drops.

He reaches up and touches Ilya’s forehead with the back of his hand.

The heat shocks him.

“Oh no,” Shane whispers. “Oh no, no, no.”

Ilya stirs, eyes scrunching as though the act of waking physically hurts.

Shane shifts onto his side, bracing him gently. “Ilya. Sweetheart. Wake up.”

It takes a moment for Ilya’s eyes to open. When they do, they are hazy and unfocused, more fever-glass than yesterday. He squints at Shane as if his eyesight is struggling to catch up.

“You look like two people,” Ilya murmurs.

Shane resists the urge to cry. “There is only one of me.”

“I am not convinced.”

Shane places a steadying hand on the side of Ilya’s face. “How do you feel.”

Ilya frowns, as though the question requires significant concentration. “Warm.”

“Very warm,” Shane corrects. “Uncomfortably warm.”

“Sunshine,” Ilya mutters, staring at him like he has uncovered a profound truth.

Shane blinks. “Pardon.”

“You are sunshine,” Ilya says again, confident this time.

Shane looks at him in disbelief. "Ilya, you are clearly delirious. You have never called me sunshine in your life."

Ilya's brow creases. "I did not."

"You literally just did."

"You misheard."

"You said it twice."

"Impossible."

Shane takes a steady breath, forcing calm into his voice. "You are feverish and not thinking clearly."

"I am always thinking clearly," Ilya insists.

Then immediately asks, "Why is my hand so loud."

Shane pinches the bridge of his nose. "What do you mean loud."

"It is buzzing," Ilya says, staring at his own fingers as though they have betrayed him. "Tell it to stop."

Shane gently lowers Ilya's hand back to the bed. "Your hand is not buzzing."

"I can hear it."

"You cannot."

"I can."

"You absolutely cannot."

Ilya sighs heavily, as if Shane is being unreasonable.

Shane checks the water glass. Nearly empty. He checks the fever medicine bottle. Nearly gone. He checks the tissue box. A single tissue remains, crumpled and ominous.

Brilliant.

He lifts Ilya's hand again. "I am going to give you some water."

"I do not trust water," Ilya mumbles.

Shane stares. "Since when."

"Since now."

Shane presses the glass gently to his lips. "Please drink for me."

Ilya sips, reluctantly. A tiny swallow. But it goes down.

“Good,” Shane murmurs, brushing his thumb across his cheek. “Very good.”

Ilya leans into the touch as though the movement pains him. “My head hurts,” he mutters.

“I know,” Shane says softly. “You are alright.”

Ilya opens his mouth as though to speak again, but instead his eyes unfocus further. His body sways. Shane grabs him by the shoulders before he can slide sideways.

“Stay still,” Shane says quickly. “Do not sit up.”

Ilya murmurs something about needing to stand.

“No,” Shane says firmly. “Absolutely not. You are not standing. You are not walking. You are not even kneeling. You are staying right here.”

Ilya frowns. “I must be brave.”

“You can be brave lying down.”

“I do not think so.”

“I do,” Shane snaps.

Ilya gives him the most pitiful, overheated scowl Shane has ever seen.

And then the full realisation hits.

They have no supplies left.

None.

Not enough water.

No proper cold compress.

Barely enough medication to make a dent.

Shane swallows. “Ilya, I need to go out.”

“No.” Ilya’s hand shoots out blindly, grabbing fistfuls of Shane’s shirt. “Do not leave.”

“It will take fifteen minutes,” Shane says. “Twenty at most.”

“No.”

“Ilya.”

“I will perish,” Ilya says gravely.

“You will not perish.”

“I might.”

“You will not.”

“You cannot go.”

Shane strokes his knuckles across his hairline. “I have to. You need more medicine and more electrolytes and more tissues. If I stay, you get worse. If I go, you get better.”

Ilya looks deeply unconvinced. “But you will not be here.”

“It is a supermarket down the road, not a voyage across the Atlantic.”

Ilya tightens his grip. “You might die on the road.”

“It is a ten minute drive.”

“I will be very upset.”

Shane nearly folds in half at the sound of that. “I am not dying on the road.”

“You cannot promise that.”

“I can, actually.”

Ilya shakes his head weakly. “Do not go.”

Shane cups both sides of his face. “Look at me.”

It takes effort, but Ilya does.

“I am coming back,” Shane says quietly. “I would come back if the building caught fire. I would crawl back across the pavement if I had to. You are not losing me. Not for fifteen minutes. Not ever.”

Ilya’s eyes soften. Barely. But enough.

“Please trust me,” Shane adds.

Ilya lets out a small, exhausted breath. His hand trembles as he releases Shane’s shirt.

“Do not take long,” he whispers.

“I will be faster than humanly possible.”

Shane kisses his forehead, squeezes his hand, and gently settles him back into the pillows.

He tucks the blanket around him.

Pulls the curtains nearly closed.

Places the water glass beside him.

Touches his cheek one more time.

Ilya’s fingers curl faintly toward him in his sleep.

Shane swallows hard.

Then, finally, he tears himself away.

The apartment feels wrong without him. Cold. Too quiet. Too still.

At the pharmacy, Shane acts like a man fleeing a crime scene, grabbing things off shelves with a kind of frenzied desperation.

The moment he steps outside, his phone vibrates.

A text.

Ilya:

where are you

Shane sprints to the car.

Another text arrives.

Ilya:

the room is spinning again

His heart lurches.

Ilya:

i do not like it

Then:

Ilya:

come back please

Shane fumbles the keys.

Then the last one:

Ilya:

i miss you

Shane nearly drops his bag.

He types back quickly.

Shane:

I am on my way. Two minutes. Hold on.

Those two minutes feel like hours, but he makes it home in record time.

He bursts through the door, drops everything on the kitchen counter and rushes to the bedroom.

“Ilya.”

Ilya’s head turns weakly on the pillow. His eyes flicker open.

“You came back,” he whispers.

Shane sinks onto the bed beside him at once. “Of course I came back. I told you it was only a few minutes.”

Ilya’s body loosens, like tension unspooling from rope.

“I started to mourn you. It was too long,” Ilya mumbles. He moves closer slowly, snuggles in close. “You are warm.”

Shane presses their foreheads together. “And you are burning. I am not leaving again, I promise.”

Ilya breathes out slowly. His lashes flutter. His fingers find Shane’s shirt again.

And then he finally, mercifully, lets go of the fight against consciousness.

Shane pulls him closer, heart pounding.

The worst is coming soon.

He can feel it.

And he will be here for all of it.

Shane barely has time to breathe before the shift happens.

One moment Ilya is lying against him, overheated and exhausted, murmuring half formed words into Shane’s chest. His fingers clutch at Shane’s shirt without strength, but with clear intent.

The next moment, something in him changes.

It is not dramatic. There is no gasp, no sudden movement. It is simply the way his body goes stiff beneath Shane’s hands, the way his breath catches and refuses to settle.

Shane feels it before he sees it.

“Oh God,” he whispers. “Here we go.”

Ilya shifts, a tiny restless movement, and presses his forehead into Shane’s collarbone like he is trying to escape his own skin.

It is the heat. It is worse than minutes ago. Far worse. Fever like fire under his palm.

Shane sits up straighter, pulling Ilya with him, supporting his head carefully. "It is alright. You are alright. Stay with me."

Ilya tries to speak. A sound leaves him instead. Weak. Uncertain. Frightened.

Shane's stomach twists painfully. "I know. I know, love. I am here."

Another trembling breath. Then another.

Shane feels the tremor roll through his body, subtle at first, then stronger, a deep full body shiver that does not match the heat pouring off him.

This is the peak. He remembers this stage far too well from his own fever. The moment the body cannot decide between burning and shaking.

"Ilya," he murmurs, brushing sweaty curls back from his forehead. "Look at me."

It takes a moment. Ilya's eyes open halfway, unfocused, drifting past Shane before finally locking onto him with a dazed sort of desperation.

"Too hot," he rasps.

"I know."

"It is wrong."

"I know," Shane says again, stroking his cheek. "I am here."

Ilya's breath stutters, catching on something frightening inside his chest. He freezes for half a second, then grips Shane's arm blindly.

"Shane," he whispers. "I feel wrong."

A spike of panic hits Shane so sharply he almost loses his breath.

"I am right here," he says quickly. "Let it out. Whatever it is. I am right here."

Ilya tries again. "Everything feels heavy."

Shane moves closer, cradling the back of his head, guiding him gently until Ilya is resting against his chest again.

"You are safe," Shane murmurs. "Do not fight it. I have you."

Ilya shivers again, but this time it is violent enough that Shane tightens his hold, one arm around his back, the other keeping the cool cloth against his forehead.

His voice breaks a little. "It is alright. You are not alone."

Ilya inhales sharply, breath uneven, and suddenly Shane feels fingers curl desperately in his shirt.

He is scared.

And he is trying not to be.

The realisation hits Shane like a punch. He lowers his cheek to Ilya's head and speaks in the same tone Ilya used when Shane had been delirious.

"You are here with me. Just breathe. In. Out. Follow me."

He breathes for him, slow and steady, exaggerating each inhale and exhale until Ilya's panicked breathing starts to mirror it.

Not perfectly.

Not even well.

But enough.

Enough that Shane can feel the frantic shudder ease a fraction.

Ilya's voice comes out in a broken whisper. "I do not want to fall."

"You are not falling," Shane says softly. "I have you."

"You will let go," Ilya mutters, delirious.

"No," Shane says, pressing a firm kiss into his hair. "I will never let go."

Ilya's body jolts with another tremor, and Shane pulls him closer, rocking him instinctively.

"You are safe. You are safe. You are safe."

Ilya's breathing spikes again right before the worst part hits.

The fever peaks.

Shane feels it in the sudden blast of heat under his hand, the way Ilya gasps for air, the way his whole body tightens, then trembles harder than before.

"Ilya, listen to me," Shane says urgently. "This is the worst of it. It will pass. You have to stay with me."

Ilya tries to nod but cannot. His head drops against Shane's shoulder as he mutters something soft and incoherent in Russian.

Shane lets out an unsteady breath. "If that was an insult, I am going to ignore it. If it was a compliment, I accept. Keep breathing. You are doing well."

Ilya tries. Shane feels every shaky attempt against his chest.

Time seems to stretch on forever. For hours. Until finally something changes.

The tremors begin to slow.

The heat begins to shift.
Not vanish.
But change.
Lower. Less violent. Less consuming.

Shane keeps stroking his hair.

“There you go,” he whispers. “There you go, my love. That is it.”

Slowly, painfully slowly, Ilya’s breathing evens. His muscles loosen. His fists unclench from Shane’s shirt. His forehead grows just cool enough that Shane feels the change immediately against his skin.

Then, at last, Ilya exhales a long breath, his body sinking fully, heavily, trustingly into Shane’s arms.

Shane lets out a shaking breath of his own.

“It broke,” he whispers into Ilya’s hair. “It broke. You did it.”

Ilya does not answer. He is too spent even for that, drifting in a fever-dazed sleep against Shane’s chest.

Shane holds him, arms protective and unmoving, rocking him gently even after the worst has passed.

He does not realise he is crying until a tear drips onto Ilya’s shoulder.

He presses his lips to the warm skin just below Ilya’s temple. “You are alright now. I have you. I have you.”

He stays like that for a long time.

Listening to Ilya breathe.
Feeling the fever ebb.
Letting the relief settle in slow, shaking waves.

For the first time in two days, he allows himself to hope the worst is truly over.

But he does not move.
He does not sleep.
He does not loosen his hold.

Not yet.

Not until Ilya wakes again.

When Shane finally dozes off, it is not intentional. His body simply gives up.

He wakes with a jolt some time later, heart racing, terrified he has missed something. He sits up too quickly, blinking the haze away, and immediately turns to Ilya.

Ilya is still there.

Still breathing.

Still warm, but properly warm now, not furnace hot.

His skin has lost the sharp, frightening flush.

Shane exhales so deeply he almost topples sideways.

He reaches out and brushes his fingers across Ilya's cheek.

For the first time in two days, the touch does not feel like pressing against a fire.

Ilya stirs. His eyes open slowly, eyelids heavy, pupils properly focused this time.

He blinks once.

Twice.

Then his gaze fixes on Shane.

And something in Shane unknots.

"Hi," Shane whispers.

Ilya studies him for a long moment. Then his brow furrows.

"You look awful," he murmurs.

Shane lets out an incredulous laugh. "You nearly died and that is what you lead with to the man who saved your life? Fashion notes?"

"You are pale," Ilya says, lifting a weak hand to Shane's cheek. "And your eyes are red."

"I wonder why," Shane mutters. "Maybe because someone decided to take a swan dive off a fever cliff."

Ilya's lips twitch. "You worry too much. I was fine."

"You nearly fainted onto my spine yesterday."

Ilya blinks. "Did I."

"Yes."

"Hm."

That is all. Just "hm." As though Shane has informed him of a mildly interesting fact about climate change.

Shane rubs his forehead. "How do you feel."

“Tired,” Ilya admits. “Head hurts. Muscles sore. But... clearer.”

Shane nods, eyes softening. “Your fever has come down a lot.”

Ilya shifts, and Shane is instantly there. For once, Ilya does not protest. He allows Shane to help him sit up, leaning back into the pillows with a look of absolute exhaustion.

Shane hands him the water glass.

Ilya drinks. A whole sip this time. Then another.

Shane feels absurdly proud.

He cannot help himself. He reaches out and cups Ilya’s cheek. “You scared me.”

Ilya turns his face into the touch. “I am here.”

“You had better stay here.”

Ilya raises an eyebrow, though the effect is weakened by the fact that his entire body looks like it would collapse if Shane breathed too hard. “Are you threatening me, Hollander?”

“Yes,” Shane says.

Ilya’s eyes soften. “You did not sleep.”

“Neither did you.”

“I was unconscious,” Ilya mutters.

“Yes, well, I was awake for that part.”

Ilya lets out a quiet sound of guilt. “I am sorry.”

Shane shakes his head immediately. “Do not start. You apologised to a lamp yesterday. I am not accepting apologies from you today.”

Ilya frowns. “Lamp.”

“Yes. You thought the lamp was me.”

“I did not.”

“You did. You said it had my warmth.”

Ilya stares at him. “That is lie. I would never insult you like that.”

“You did. You practically confessed your feelings to it.”

Ilya closes his eyes with a pained groan. “No.”

“Yes.”

He opens his eyes again, glaring weakly. “I want proof.”

“I should have filmed you,” Shane says. “Next time I will.”

Ilya mutters something Russian and mortified under his breath.

Shane grins despite himself. “There were other highlights. For example, you fully ran into the doorframe. You also attempted to fold laundry and created what I can only describe as a sock hostage situation.”

Ilya squints at him. “You are lying.”

“I wish I were.”

Ilya sighs, defeated, clearly unable to defend himself in his current state. He slides down slightly against the pillows, muscles giving out.

Shane catches him again, guiding him gently. “Easy. Let me.”

He helps Ilya recline more comfortably. Then, without thinking about it twice, Shane slips out of bed, grabs the blanket from the sofa, and returns.

Ilya watches him through half closed eyes. “What are you doing.”

“Building a nest,” Shane says.

Ilya blinks. “A nest.”

“Yes.”

“For... birds.”

“For sick Russians,” Shane corrects.

He piles the blanket, adjusts pillows, adds one more under Ilya’s arm, and steps back to admire the result.

Ilya stares at him like he is a miracle and an idiot in equal measure.

Shane crawls back onto the bed and settles beside him, pressing their sides together gently.

“Lean on me,” he murmurs.

Ilya does. Instantly. Naturally. Without a hint of pride.

His head comes to rest on Shane’s shoulder in that familiar way that means he is safe enough to be soft.

Shane wraps an arm around him.

They stay like that for a while, breathing together, the quiet warm between them. Ilya's fever-sore muscles relax. Shane's heartbeat finally slows.

Eventually, Ilya speaks again, voice gravel soft.

"Shane."

"Hmm."

"Thank you."

Shane closes his eyes. That one soft thank you hits harder than any grand declaration.

He presses a kiss to Ilya's temple. "Always."

Ilya makes a small sound of contentment, barely more than breath.

Shane strokes his hair lightly. "Want to go to the sofa. We can watch something mindless."

"What kind of mindless."

"The kind that does not require comprehension or depth. Something where people fall over a lot, perhaps."

Ilya considers this. "I like that."

Shane helps him up again, slow and gentle, keeping an arm around his waist as they walk the short distance to the sofa. He lowers Ilya onto the cushions, then covers him with two blankets for good measure.

Ilya immediately reaches out a hand, a quiet plea.

Shane takes it and sits beside him, letting Ilya rest his head on his thigh.

He puts on the most ridiculous programme he can find. Something that involves animals in poorly judged obstacle courses.

Ilya watches for approximately six seconds before falling asleep.

Shane runs his fingers through his hair, smiling softly.

The flat is warm. The day is quiet.

Ilya is safe.

Shane is exhausted in every sense, but full of that bright, aching relief that feels like coming home.

He bends down and presses a kiss to Ilya's forehead.

"You made it through," he whispers. "We both did."

He stays like that, watching the rise and fall of Ilya's chest, holding him in the soft glow of the living room, until sleep finally pulls him under as well.

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