

you haven't come this far to fall off the earth

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/74294536) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/74294536>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , Any Ilya Rozanov's Dog
Additional Tags:	passive ideation , Depression , Ilya Rozanov-centric , Good Significant Other Shane Hollander , Mama Bear Yuna Hollander , Angst with a Happy Ending , Sad with a Happy Ending , Post-Canon , Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , References to Depression
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-11-17 Words: 7,039 Chapters: 1/1

you haven't come this far to fall off the earth

by [canadianwolfbird](#)

Summary

It's not that Ilya wants the darkness to win; it's just that sometimes he lets it.

Notes

Special thanks to [shanehollandertwentyfour](#) and [dntat](#), who not only betaed, but saved this fic from the metaphorical grave many times over. I appreciate you both more than I can even begin to say! Any errors leftover are my own.

As always, no diagnosis is a monolith. I've based Ilya's experiences in this fic on many of my own, but depression is a complex disorder with varying symptoms and severities. I've done my best to take care with the subject, but welcome any comments or feedback you may have. While there are no graphic descriptions or actions, passive ideation and intrusive thoughts both do play a big part in the story line. Take care of yourself while reading <3

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

*You gotta swim
And swim when it hurts
The whole world is watching
You haven't come this far
To fall off the Earth*
-Jack's Mannequin, "Swim (Music Box)"

It's not that Ilya wants the darkness to win; it's just that sometimes he lets it.

It's easier to do when Shane isn't home - it's the offseason, and this time Shane is away for Team Canada press obligations in Toronto. He's recently been named their captain and won't be back for a week. In his heart, Ilya is so, so proud of him.

Shane's absence isn't what triggers Ilya to let himself slip, however - absence comes with the territories of their individual careers, and he's long been used to either or both of them being pulled away for one hockey obligation or another. In reality, there's rarely any sort of tangible thing that Ilya can point to and say *this*. *This is what's making me feel this way*.

If there was, it would make his existence so much easier.

But now it's been twenty-four hours since Shane left, and Ilya is already tired of fighting the building intensity of the waves his thoughts form - waves that had started as ripples, merely lapping at the shoreline of his thoughts even before his husband went to fulfill his obligations.

So Ilya *doesn't* fight it. He strides out into the ocean and quietly slips under the water.

It's not always the first wave that hits him, but it's the most prevalent.

No one would miss you if you were gone.

He doesn't have plans or any serious intentions to leave - whatever leaving looked like. Ilya couldn't do that to Shane - or anyone else for that matter - not after...

She had an accident, Ilya. Your mother died because of an accident.

His father's lie still cuts him to the bone even over twenty years later. It *wasn't* an accident; his mother had been forced to a breaking point where she felt like she needed to leave Ilya's family - leave *him* - and ever since Ilya realized he was in love with Shane, he's lived with

the fear that whatever pushed his mother to leave him will also push him to leave the person he loves the most.

Ilya may not have plans or intentions, but he does have his mother's genes - the code for depression imprinted deep within his DNA. Nothing is going to change that, no matter how hard Ilya works and what would happen if he *just*...

No. No. No.

Logically, Ilya knows that he can't think that way, *shouldn't* think that way, but logic has never exactly been easy to grasp under the waves.

Another thought comes flickering into his mind, just behind the first.

Shane would be better off without you. If you weren't here - he wouldn't have to deal with such a mess.

This is his brain's next favorite lie to tell him. It loves to swirl around the lobes and bury its claws in deep, no matter how many times Shane has proven that even at Ilya's darkest, he won't be frightened away.

Ilya has confessed the thought that Shane would be better off without him *to* Shane on occasion, in different fits of weakness - though Galina has told him over and over again not to call it weakness.

It is incredibly strong of you to voice these thoughts out loud - you are not weak for doing so, Ilya. I know that is not the way in which we were raised, but I assure you, it is the bravest thing one can do to be vulnerable with the person you love and who loves you.

Every time Ilya has managed to express this thought out loud, Shane has told him that it's not true. That if Ilya leaves, or god forbid, *dies*, the Shane that Ilya knows would just simply cease to exist. But right now, Shane isn't here to remind him of that, and even if he was, Ilya doesn't know if he could make himself say the particular thoughts he's thinking so Shane *could* dispute them.

...no one would miss you...he'd be better off without you...

Ilya lays on his back in their bed. Above him, the fan blades spin and spin. He watches them for seconds, minutes, hours - he's entirely unsure. Anya lies next to him, snoring steadily, and not for the first time, Ilya wishes he could be her - nothing to care about except her daily walk and getting fed. His only intrusive thoughts would involve squirrels, cats, and a favorite chew toy - instead of the next refrain that plays in his mind.

Just let go. You can let go.

He can't, *won't*. But that doesn't mean the waves don't tell him to.

The thoughts drift around and around and around in Ilya's mind, one after the other, until they don't even sound like words anymore to him - just a constant drone of static and pressure and *noise*.

...no one would...better off without...just let go...

Occasionally through the static, Ilya thinks he can hear his mother speaking to him, calling from the other side, and Ilya knows that if he was going to give in to anything that the thoughts were asking of him, it would be so that he could hopefully see her again. *Ya lyublyu tebya, moy sladkiy mal'chik.*

I love you, my sweet boy.

And maybe Ilya doesn't want to die, but he does wonder what it would be like if he could just cease to exist, even if temporarily. It has to be better than being stuck here - exhausted, but unable to sleep, his eyes still locked on the fan blades turning above him.

There's no earthly reason Ilya's body should be so tired from just laying in bed, watching the fucking ceiling fan of all things, and still, here he is, head pounding and body aching and just *wishing* he could go to sleep so he could get some sort of reprieve from the noise.

But his body is never so kind, at least not right away, and so on and on the thoughts roll through his brain, one by one...

...better off without...let go...no one would...

...just let go...no one would miss you...better off without you...

...no one would...Shane would be better off... just. let. go. ...

...until finally, *mercifully*, Ilya falls asleep.

Shane had asked Ilya before he left if he *should* go, and Ilya had very nearly asked him not to.

He had wanted to - the whorls of the familiar spirals were there working in Ilya's mind and he was sitting on the razor thin edge between apathy and desperation. *Stay, stay, stay.*

In the end, Ilya couldn't make himself say the words to keep Shane there.

It didn't matter how long they had been together. Ilya asking Shane to sacrifice something this important so he could what? Lay there with Ilya while he sat there and let his worst thoughts run on a loop? Ilya wouldn't ask that of Shane - Shane could be in Toronto while Ilya's mind wreaked its havoc. If he was lucky, Ilya's thoughts would pass before Shane came home, and his husband would be none the wiser.

So Ilya had done what he had become so practiced in doing - he smiled, shook his head, and told Shane to please go to Toronto - he'd be here when he got back.

Ilya had seen the flicker of hesitation on Shane's face even as Ilya insisted he go; he sometimes wondered if Shane had developed a sixth sense about his depression across their time together when Shane's face looked the way it did now. But Shane, ever trusting, nodded, gave Ilya a kiss goodbye, and did as Ilya had asked him to do.

Please reach out if you need me. I love you.

It was Shane's one request on his way out the door. Ilya had just nodded in response, murmuring a soft *ya tebya lyublyu* as Shane went.

Shane asked him to do this if he needed to. Ilya *could* reach out. But no, he doesn't need to be in the way of Shane's big moment. Not right now.

...better off without you...let go...she had an accident...love you, sweet boy...no one would miss you...

It's never really mattered to Ilya the number of times he's been told that he's not a bother, not a burden, not an imposition. It's never really mattered who told him that, either. Shane's exact words had been to reach out if Ilya needed him, and yet, Ilya *still* can't bring himself to do it.

And now his thoughts aren't passing like Ilya had hoped they might - if anything, they're gripping him tighter as he remains in bed, struggling to do anything but just lay there and persevere. It's not that he doesn't try to send a signal that he's not okay - he's spent what feels like hours typing out countless messages to Shane, all different versions of the same thoughts.

Can you come home? I miss you. I love you. I need you here. Please come home. Why do they need you so long? I love you. Come. Home.

Each text he types out feels like its own little failure to Ilya - if he was going to do anything, it should have been asking Shane to stay in the first place.

So Ilya types and deletes, types and deletes, types and deletes, unable to press send on any of the words that he knows would bring Shane back to him.

He does it until his phone dies and by then, it's almost a relief that Ilya *can't* keep playing the game of texting or not texting Shane.

Tossing his phone down the bed, Ilya pulls his pillow over his head and lets out a silent scream of desperation.

...let go...let go...let go...

Ilya has been going through the motions to take care of Anya while Shane is gone - he knows he may be shit at functioning for himself, but he's not going to let Anya suffer because of it. It's been the only sort routine he's had in the last four (*no, three? no, four.*) days.

Get up. Let Anya out. Fill Anya's water and food bowls. Eat something small and drink a little water while she's outside. Let Anya back in. Go back to bed. Repeat, twice or three times daily.

His mind and body doesn't allow for much else beyond this minimal functioning. There's a million things he knows he could be doing, should be doing, but can't make himself, primarily among them, finding his phone that's tangled somewhere in the bedsheets and getting it charged.

Much as Ilya knows he needs to complete this extra task the most, he just...can't. In theory, Shane is going to be checking on him in between interviews and photo shoots and the sponsored Olympic celebrations, and Ilya knows he should be there when his husband calls or texts. He should be there to laugh and commiserate and cheer on his husband from afar.

But that's just it, isn't it? Ilya thinks. *Shane's far away and insanely busy - he's not actually going to have time to check in. Not for a while, anyway.*

So really, what does it matter that his phone is still dead and tucked somewhere in his bedsheets?

Shane will still be in Toronto and Ilya will still be in that bed, and nothing, absolutely nothing will change.

...just let go...better off without you...she had an accident, Ilya...wouldn't miss you...I love you, my sweet boy...

Ilya's not sure what time it is when he hears someone come in the front door - he can vaguely make out sunlight peeking through the curtains from across the room, but that doesn't exactly mean anything to him.

Maybe he should be freaked out by whoever is entering his and Shane's home, but there are only a small handful of people that have that kind of access, and none of them trouble Ilya enough to rouse him.

When Anya also stays put, Ilya knows he really doesn't need to worry about the noise at the front door and who it could be. She'd move if there was trouble. He runs his fingers through Anya's fur - if she's not going to move - he can at least use her presence to keep himself

steady enough to do what he's about to do. He shifts a little and closes his eyes - maybe whoever this is will see him laying here looking like he's sleeping and just...*leave*.

"Ilya?" Yuna Hollander's voice calls from the hallway, and now it makes more sense why Anya didn't get up. She must have smelled Yuna, and unbothered by the familiar presence of Shane's mother, stayed with Ilya.

There's some soft rustling in the kitchen, the refrigerator door opening and closing, followed by the sound of Yuna's light footsteps coming down the hallway.

Seconds later, there's a slight dip of the mattress next to him and a tender brush of fingers against his forehead. The touch is comforting in only a way that a mother's is, and Ilya *almost* feels guilty for not being "awake." Normally, he loves the time that he gets with Yuna - she's always treated him like a son, and exactly like Shane, has been steadfast in supporting him in his ups and downs.

Ilya can feel Anya shift, her tail wagging as she gets up to greet the woman now sitting on Ilya's bed. There's a soft snuffling sound from Anya, followed by Yuna's voice. "Hi there, lovely. Are you taking good care of Ilya?" Another snuffle, accompanied by the soft sound of Anya licking kisses onto Yuna. "Yes, I'm sure you are - that's a good girl."

Ilya's heart twists - and fuck, if he doesn't almost break this farce and let Yuna know he is awake. He could do that, he knows. He could open his eyes and tell her every single thought looping through his mind and it wouldn't scare Yuna away any more than it would Shane - Yuna is as unflappable as she is kind.

But talking requires energy - energy Ilya already knows he doesn't have, so instead of confiding in Yuna, he keeps lying there, and just hopes it's enough to fool her.

"Ilya, honey?" Yuna turns her attention back to Ilya when Anya has finished her greeting. "Are you awake?" Yuna's question is as gentle as her touch; she's not pushing or forcing Ilya to move or acknowledge her - just a gentle affirmation that she's there if he does.

There's a long moment of silence, and Ilya almost breaks again with the uncertainty of if he's tricked her. Maybe he hasn't, hardly anything has gotten past Yuna Hollander in the time Ilya has known her - but if he just stays here still with his eyes closed long enough, Ilya hopes that any minute, Yuna is going to let him think he's gotten away with it.

To his great relief, she does.

Yuna hesitates ever so slightly before her weight lifts from the bed, and Ilya can hear her footsteps retreating back to the hallway, stopping just outside the bedroom door. A few seconds pass, and Yuna's voice drifts into the room. "Shane, yes, he's here...he's sleeping right now." A pause. "No, I didn't want to push..." Yuna trails off, and Ilya can feel her looking at him from the doorway while she listens to her son on the other side of the line. "You know as well as I do that he would never ask you to come home, love...but..." Another pause. "Okay, sweetheart, I'll talk to you soon."

Yuna then retreats back down the hallway, but Ilya only lets himself open his eyes once he hears the snick of the front door locking behind her. He's alone...again.

Yuna leaves, and eventually, Ilya gets up to let Anya out and fill her food bowl.

As he walks across the kitchen to retrieve the bowl, a note on the counter catches Ilya's eye. He reaches for it, pulling it towards him so it's flush against the edge of the granite. Yuna's elegant script stares up at him.

Ilya -

I stopped by, but you were sleeping.

I've left some soup in the fridge. Please eat when you get the chance.

-Yuna

An ache blooms in Ilya's chest, tears pricking in the corners of his eyes as he looks over to the refrigerator. Jesus, he's a mess...he's been married to Shane for years now, and Yuna cooking for them isn't exactly new, so why in the hell is he ready to cry over it?

His brain has an immediate answer: *because you're an absolute trainwreck of a human. You don't deserve any of the Hollanders.*

Stop it, Ilya. Galina's voice now. *You deserve as many good things as anyone else, and maybe even more with what you've been through. The Hollanders all love you - let them. Let. Them.*

Ilya wipes at the tears with one hand and reaches for his phone in his pocket with the other - he had found the phone at some point earlier that day - pulling it out to text Yuna. The least Ilya can do after ignoring her is thank her for the food - but he's met with a black screen. Right - it's dead. He may have found it, but still never charged it.

Later, Ilya thinks, putting his phone on the counter and moving to where they keep Anya's food. He'll thank Yuna later.

Ilya really has drifted off to sleep when suddenly, Anya bolting off the bed and barking excitedly startles him awake.

What in the...

There's no more sunlight coming in through the curtains, and Ilya still isn't really sure what day it is, so what is going on?

Ilya rubs his eyes and rolls over slowly, trying to figure out what in the world set Anya off - before he hears the sound of a bag being set on the floor and a familiar voice from the entryway. "Hey, sweet girl. Where's your papa, hmm?"

Shane.

A lump immediately forms in Ilya's throat as the realization hits him. Shane's *home*.

No, that's not right, Ilya thinks. He's not supposed to be home for three more days. Two more days? Three. Three more days and then Shane comes home.

Ilya props himself up on his elbow as Shane's figure comes into view. Anya is right behind him, trotting into the room and curling up on the rug at the end of the bed. A relieved exhale comes from the doorway, as if Yuna's confirmation wasn't enough - that Shane needed to see Ilya with his own eyes before really believing for himself that Ilya was okay, and if not okay, then *alive*.

"Hey..." Shane says softly, resting his temple against the door frame. "You're here."

Immediately, Ilya can feel knots coiling their way through his insides as he rubs at his eyes again. Maybe he's imagining this. Maybe he's reached the point where he's so out of it that he's conjured up Shane coming home. He's going to blink, and Shane won't be there.

When Ilya's vision comes fully into focus, however, it's not a ghost or a hallucination - Shane really is standing in the doorway, with tired eyes and body language that screams *weary*. His hair is mussed and his clothes are rumpled in the way that comes only from cramming your body into an airplane seat, but he's *there*.

"Shane...what...why did you come home?" Ilya's voice is raspy from days of barely being used.

It's not that Ilya's ungrateful for Shane being here - in fact, he feels quite the opposite. His reeling mind just wants to make sense of why his husband is standing there just on the threshold of their bedroom when he should be back in Toronto, shaking hands with the Olympic bigwigs and soaking up the glow that comes with an accomplishment like the one Shane has earned.

Shane moves from the doorway, shrugging out of Ilya's old and well-loved Centaurs hoodie that he always wears when he travels as he walks towards the bed. He lets the garment fall from his hands onto the mattress near Ilya's feet as he moves to sit in nearly the exact same spot that Yuna had been just hours before.

The muffled thump of Anya's tail on the floor starts as Shane walks past her, and Ilya can't help but smile at the noise. Guilt may be curling through Ilya's insides, but Anya's tail wagging says what he can't: welcome back.

"I came home...because you needed me." Shane says, like he didn't just leave in the middle of one of the most important moments of his hockey career to be here with Ilya. He's probably giving dozens of people the middle finger by leaving, and yet, here he is.

"I'm fine - you shouldn't have left Toronto." The first two words ring hollow, even to Ilya as he lets himself sink back down to the mattress. If he was *fine*, Shane wouldn't be here.

"I love you Ilya...but you are *not* fine." Shane echoes Ilya's own thoughts - speaking how he always does: matter-of-factly, but there's something underneath the surface of his voice: fear. If Ilya didn't know Shane, he isn't certain he'd be able to catch the note of panic in the man's voice - but Ilya *does* know Shane. He can't help but feel a fresh pang of guilt, knowing he did this. *He* made Shane panic. "I haven't been able to get in touch with you for two days." And God, had it really been two days since they talked? All Ilya knows is...*shit*.

It was that dead phone, Ilya thinks. If I had just plugged that fucking phone in two days ago...Shane wouldn't be here. He wouldn't have had to panic or worry. He would be just fine back in Toronto.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

...better off without you...no mess to deal with...

"Besides, I just wasn't going to - *couldn't* - spend another minute away after I sent my mom over here to check on you and she told me she didn't think you were okay..." That's why Yuna was here. Of course Shane had called her to come over once he couldn't reach Ilya, and of course, Yuna had come.

"Once I talked to her, I got on the first plane I could and came home - because even if she had thought you were okay -" Shane pauses, hands kneading into the mattress. "I missed you and I missed Anya. I was already dreading the next three days kissing those executive's asses, so really, I needed to be home...and fuck Toronto if it meant I didn't get to be where I needed to be."

Ilya laughs before he can stop himself. Shane isn't trying to be funny, not really, but that's what makes his statement all the more endearing. It's Ilya's first laugh in days - and it feels *good*. "Is that what you said when you left, then? 'Fuck Toronto.'?"

Shane smiles, his brown eyes meeting Ilya's. "I wanted to. Maybe I could have made my point faster if I had." Shane reaches out, his palm cupping Ilya's cheek. His thumb brushes over the facial hair there and Ilya leans into the touch, closing his eyes and letting himself just feel *Shane*.

"What I told them, or rather, I had Farah tell them..." Shane lowers his voice, continuing the light ministrations over Ilya's skin. "Is that I had a family emergency that I needed to attend

to, and if that was a dealbreaker, then as much as it would be an honor to captain Team Canada, I was not going to be the person to do it.”

Shane’s words hit Ilya like a lightning bolt, and his thoughts shift so hard, it feels like Ilya has whiplash. A new chorus of blame begins.

He’s going to resent you later. He’s going to remember the time you couldn’t hold it together well enough for him to just do this, and he’s going to leave.

He’s going to leave.

He’s going to leave.

A quiet sob escapes him without warning, and Ilya flinches at the noise, taken aback by his inability to control his reaction to Shane’s statement. Ilya just needs these thoughts to *stop*, and maybe then he could keep himself together.

“Ilya...hey, it’s okay...” Shane says quietly, concern in his voice as his hand moves to stroke Ilya’s curls. The touch is just enough to interrupt the rhythm of his thoughts - to get Ilya’s brain to quit misfiring, at least momentarily. It’s a welcome reprieve because for approximately five seconds, Ilya’s not hating himself or thinking about dying or really, thinking anything. He’s living and he’s breathing and Shane is there to help him make sure both of those things *keep* happening.

“Listen to me, alright? I can feel you blaming yourself for me coming home, but I mean it when I say I’d do it a hundred different times on a hundred different days if it meant knowing I got to keep you safe.” Shane continues, and Ilya wonders what he often does - how does his husband always know just what to say?

Ilya’s hand moves up to hold Shane’s wrist, keeping it in place. He’s still, letting himself feel the light flutter of Shane’s pulse against his fingers. It’s an unwavering counterbalance to the wild cadence of Ilya’s own heartbeat - a wild cadence that, as he lays there and holds onto Shane, Ilya can feel regulating just the tiniest bit more with each passing second until finally, *finally* his heartbeat has slowed enough to match Shane’s.

With his free hand, Shane brushes the curls off Ilya’s forehead and dips down to press a kiss there. Shane’s lips are soft and warm, and Ilya sighs in content at the touch. The tendrils wrapped around his insides are starting to recede, even if slowly.

He’s here, he’s here, he’s here.

“I don’t know about you, but I could use a shower to get the plane off of me.” Shane murmurs after a moment, placing another kiss, this time to Ilya’s temple. “And if I am smelling right, you could use a shower to get the last four days off of you.”

His tone is jestful and anything but mean, and Ilya really can’t stop his laugh this time before leaning up to kiss the crook of Shane’s neck. “Ever perceptive you are.”

Shane draws back, smiling down at Ilya. “Stay here a minute, okay?” Pulling himself up off the bed, Shane walks into the bathroom and Ilya can hear the start of the shower, followed by some soft rustling as Shane moves around.

Ilya swings his legs over the side of the bed, his muscles protesting as he does. His hands rest on the edge of the mattress as he lets his head hang, working up the energy so he can eventually stand. Anya is there to greet him, her wet nose pressing into his hand. “Hey girl,” Ilya coos, letting his hand drift over her head and behind her ears, scratching at the soft fur.

...better off without you...just let go...no one would miss you...

Ilya winces at the words slipping through his mind, his hand stilling against Anya’s head. “Fuck, just please, *stop*,” he whispers to whoever, whatever may be listening. “*Please*.”

“What was that?” Shane asks from behind Ilya. Ilya turns to see Shane walking out of the bathroom, bare-chested and his lower half covered only with a towel.

“Nothing,” Ilya shakes his head, pushing the thoughts down, down, down. He stands, giving Anya one more pat on the head and walking towards Shane. “Just thanking Anya. She probably deserves some extra treats after what she’s put up with.”

“You’d say that anyway, but in this case I’m sure it’s true” Shane says with a smile, kissing Ilya’s cheek as he approaches. “Come on, the shower should be ready.”

Nodding, Ilya pads behind Shane into the bathroom. The room is already filling with steam and Ilya takes a deep breath through his nose, the smell of the lavender candle Shane has lit permeating his senses. Ilya rubs his jaw as he lets the scent wash over him - fuck, he needs to shave - and stretches his neck.

Shane stands in front of Ilya, watching him carefully as he eases his neck back and forth. There’s no harshness in his husband’s gaze, but Ilya knows Shane is still scared. He’s watching every movement Ilya makes like a hawk, and probably will for the next few days.

Rightfully so, Ilya thinks. If the roles were flipped, he’d be doing the same to Shane.

Ilya can feel his body wavering, the pain of the last four days radiating throughout and making it hard for him to stay steady. His arms move to twine loosely around Shane’s bare waist, holding himself in place. Dropping his forehead so it’s resting against Shane’s, Ilya swallows hard before he speaks. “I’m sorry this happened. I didn’t mean...didn’t want it to get so bad.”

“I know you didn’t...” Shane says quietly. The words hang in the air, the tiniest of absolutions, and Ilya’s heart latches onto them. “Just please believe me when I say that I need you here, Ilya. I don’t...I don’t know what I would have done if something even more serious had happened because nothing matters more to me in this world than you.”

Ilya’s never been able to figure out how he deserves someone like Shane, but maybe he doesn’t need to, not right now. Right now, he can just be here, letting himself be comforted by his husband’s presence, and that can be enough.

"I believe you," Ilya murmurs, letting out a shaky breath. "I may not say it enough, but I stay for you. I would never, *never* leave you on purpose."

It seems to be enough for Shane. "I know," He says before leaning up and pressing a kiss to Ilya's lips. Almost immediately, he draws away, wrinkling his nose. "Oof, okay - the first order of business after the shower is brushing your teeth."

Ilya laughs at the expression on Shane's face, covering his own mouth. He gives a light wince when he blows into his hand, his depression breath filling his nostrils. "Sorry, *moya lyubov*. It will indeed. Let's get into that shower now, then the sooner I can kiss you."

Drawing back, Ilya moves to pull off his shirt, but he's surprised when he's stopped by Shane's hands covering his, halting his motion. "Hmm, you usually don't stop me from doing that," Ilya grins slyly. He may be depressed, but he's not dead.

"Ilya..." Shane's voice is just on the edge of stern, but his eyes twinkle as he looks up, meeting Ilya's. "Just...let me, okay? I came home to take care of you and I *want* to help you," Shane says. His hands move under the hem of Ilya's shirt, his palms warm against the skin of Ilya's sides. "Will you let me?"

The question is so earnest in its asking that Ilya wavers again, not from pain, but relief. He's so used to having to pull himself out of these episodes alone, even after he had confessed to Shane for the first time.

You're never going to scare me off, okay? And I'm never giving up on you, or us. So whatever you need, I'm right here.

What if you can't help?

Then I'll be standing by until I can.

And now here Shane is, literally standing in front of him, in what Ilya could only call the worst of it, and Shane's keeping to his word. He's not wavering, not leaving. He's asking Ilya to *let* him help.

It is the bravest thing one can do to be vulnerable with the person you love and who loves you.

And so, that's what Ilya does - he takes a deep breath and nods in silent affirmation.

Please help me.

Shane presses a kiss to the scruff of Ilya's cheek before his hands slide up Ilya's sides to lift the ratty t-shirt off over Ilya's head. It feels good to be out of it - as if Ilya has shed a layer of dead skin. After tossing the shirt in the hamper next to their sink, Shane hooks his fingers into the sweats and underwear Ilya is wearing, working them down his hips and thighs until Ilya kicks them off, nudging them towards the hamper. He'll get them later.

“Let’s get inside,” Shane says, letting his towel drop away before he takes Ilya’s hand and leads him into the steam-filled shower.

Ilya closes his eyes as Shane gently pulls him in, the glass door clicking shut behind them. Shane guides Ilya, positioning him under the showerhead. The warm water glides over Ilya’s body, and almost instantaneously, he feels like a piece of himself has returned. He lets out a quiet sigh, running his hands over his face and through his hair. All the while, Shane holds him steady by the hips, placing soft kisses to his neck and shoulder that say *I missed you, I’ve got you, I love you.*

When Ilya has finished rinsing himself off, Shane maneuvers him so they’re sitting together on the built in bench. Shane remains quiet as he soaps up a washcloth and begins to work it gently over Ilya’s skin. More grit and grime and tear tracks slough away as Shane washes Ilya, methodical in his movements, just as he is everything else. Face, shoulders, arms, torso, hips, legs, feet; Ilya lets Shane manipulate his body, staying pliant and moving as Shane guides him. His husband’s touch is gentle, never too hard or too rough - like always, Shane knows just what Ilya needs.

After Shane has finished cleaning Ilya’s body, there’s a click of a bottle, a squirting sound, and then Shane’s hands are gently working shampoo through Ilya’s tangled hair. The press of Shane’s fingers to his scalp is as much relief as Ilya has gotten from the pounding of his head in days, and he can’t help but groan happily at the light pressure against his scalp. The aches of his body will go away, he knows, but until they do, he’s grateful to Shane for helping ease them for now.

“Feels amazing,” Ilya murmurs softly, his head dipping back to meet the soothing motion of Shane’s touch. “Thank you.” Ilya knows the words aren’t enough to convey what he really means. *I wouldn’t be here without you.*

Shane lets out a quiet hum in response, his fingers continuing to work. “This is as much for me as it is for you. If you thought I was going to fall asleep next to you like that, you had another thing coming,” He teases, reaching down and pressing a gentle poke into the spot on Ilya’s ribs where he knows Ilya is ticklish. Ilya jumps, a jolt of electricity coursing through his body as he laughs.

“You’re the worst,” Ilya says mirthfully, playfully jabbing his elbow back towards Shane, who dodges it with ease.

“You love me anyway.”

“Mmm, that I do.”

“Okay, now hush and close your eyes.” Shane’s fingers still, easing Ilya forward so he’s back under the spray of water to rinse out his hair. Ilya obeys, letting himself sit there momentarily, unable to keep from letting out another soft noise of relief as the last remnants of grime wash away down the drain. Once clean, Ilya draws back up, leaning against the wall and sweeping his hair off his face.

Shane's hand returns to his shoulder, squeezing lightly. "Just relax here for a bit. I'm going to get out and go change the sheets, then I'll come back and get you, okay?"

Ilya nods, chuckling a little to himself. "I'll be here."

Shane snorts playfully and then there's the click of the shower door opening and closing again. Ilya watches as just outside the shower door, Shane dries himself off before heading back into the bedroom.

Ilya scoffs to himself once Shane is out of the bathroom, reaching for the conditioner and applying a liberal amount to his palms before working it through his hair. Depressed or not, his curls were not going without hydration - they'd both be thankful for that later. After a moment, Ilya dips his head back down under the spray to rinse. There. Much better. He leans back against the wall of the shower behind him and opens his eyes again.

Water droplets race to the bottom of the glass, and Ilya watches them, silently betting to himself which ones will make it to the floor of the shower first. Outside the bathroom door, Ilya can faintly hear Shane moving around, the tapping of Anya's paws on the floor as she follows him. He loves how much she loves Shane, and even if he'd never admit it in a million years, Ilya knows Shane is her favorite - even if by only a hair.

Ilya sits quietly, the sound of the running shower droning in his head until...

...I love you, my sweet boy...she had an accident, Ilya...

Ilya shuts his eyes, pressing his temple into the steam-warmed tile wall. His fingers move to the ever-present cross around his neck. He squeezes it, the dull bite of the metal against his skin just enough to halt his father's voice. *Stop it, stop it, stop it.* Ilya thinks to himself, squeezing the cross harder and harder until the thoughts fade away..

He's not sure how long he sits under the water, but after a while, Ilya hears the sound of the shower being turned off - his eyes opening to meet Shane's. His husband is now wearing a pair of Ilya's old joggers that cover his feet and an old Voyageurs shirt with a hole in the collar.

This is Ilya's favorite side of Shane - the quiet, casual side that has spent many hours lazing in bed with Ilya or sitting on the dock of the cottage with fingers intertwined while they watched the water, or just sat with him in the locker room after a hard game. It's a side that Shane doesn't show to just anyone, and Ilya is grateful for every day he gets to see it. Tonight is no exception.

Shane extends his hand and helps pull Ilya to his feet and as he stands, drapes a large, fluffy towel around Ilya. Shane works the towel across Ilya's skin and hair, catching stray water droplets as they run down his torso and legs, making sure he's dry before wrapping the towel around Ilya's waist.

As promised, Ilya moves to the sink to brush his teeth, propping himself against the countertop, keeping his head down as he does. Shane stands beside him, his hip bolstered

against Ilya's and the light press of Shane's hand at the small of his back, tracing more unspoken words across Ilya's skin. *I missed you. I've got you, I love you.*

Rinsing his mouth out and setting his toothbrush down, Ilya rests both hands on the granite on either side of the sink, holding himself up. He turns his face up at the mirror, not having gotten a good look at himself in days.

There's no doubt that there are signs of his depression written there. His face is pale and gaunt under the facial hair that's grown in, and there are noticeable bags under his eyes. Even as he takes the sight of himself in, however, Ilya feels lighter. With Shane's help, he feels more human than he has since before his husband left; the basic tasks that felt impossible under the weight of Ilya's thoughts are infinitely easier with someone to guide him and hold him up.

"Come on, let's get you to bed. I think we both could use some sleep." Shane says after a moment, pressing a kiss to the top of the loon tattoo on Ilya's shoulder. Ilya shudders at the contact.

"No arguments here." Ilya lets his fingers lace through Shane's, led back to the bedroom by his husband. A fresh set of clothes has been set on the bed, Anya curled up next to them. Ilya reaches out to pet her, scratching the top of her head and grinning as she thumps her tail against the comforter.

Ilya strips himself of his towel, teasingly draping it over Anya before reaching for the clothes laid out for him and dressing himself. All the while, Shane keeps his watchful eye on Ilya, there if he's needed.

Ilya eases down to the mattress after he's settled into the first clean clothes he's worn in four days, crawling under the fresh sheets. Shane isn't far behind him, their bodies meeting in the middle of the bed, drawn together out of instinct. Ilya stretches his body out against Shane's, looping his arms around his husband's middle as their feet tangle together.

He's here. He's here. He's here.

"I love you," Ilya murmurs, pressing as close as he can against his husband. He lays his head on Shane's chest, the quiet pulse of Shane's heartbeat under Ilya's ear, comforting now as it was when he felt it fluttering at Shane's wrist earlier in the evening. As he closes his eyes, Ilya can feel Shane's fingers start to work through his damp curls. With each pass, Ilya's body eases more and more, melding into his husband's side. It won't be long before he falls asleep at this rate - but he has to get one more thing out before he lets himself give in. "Thank you for coming home."

"I love you too." Shane's words are punctuated by a gentle kiss to the top of Ilya's head in between strokes of his fingers. "I'll come home for you every time."

A warm sensation threads through Ilya's insides at the promise. As he lies there next to Shane, for the first time in four days, his mind is completely still; the only noise is Shane's soft voice lulling Ilya into a peaceful sleep.

“I love you...I love you...I love you...”

End Notes

So goes the first Hollanov fic I've managed to finish (again - I am so grateful for the people who lovingly kicked my butt across the finish line - you're the real ones!). This also happens to be the first fic I've properly written in over ten years, and the first one I've managed to post in even longer!

Comments and kudos welcome and much appreciated.

For an essay about experiencing passive ideation, check out [this post](#). It's one of the most relatable pieces I've read on the subject and have found it an invaluable resource when it comes to this particular symptom, especially when attempting to describe what they are.

Thanks for reading!

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