

Life Doesn't Have to Change

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Life Doesn't Have to Change

by [StuffandStuff18](#)

Summary

Shane is diagnosed with autism, and goes through the process of coming to terms with it, all while Ilya supports Shane in the ways that he needs.

Notes

Let me start by saying that I know this work is a large departure from what I normally do, but I felt like I needed to write words somewhere going through Shane's mental process of coming to terms with his autism diagnosis. I did a lot of research and reading through what autism could mean for different people, and I think this story helped me through the process of educating myself about it. I hope you all enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it. :)

The doctor's office was quieter than Shane had expected.

No ticking clock. No humming fluorescent light. Just the soft rustle of papers and the doctor's calm, even voice. Shane focused on the edge of the desk, the way the wood grain curved, grounding himself in something tangible.

"...based on your developmental history, sensory profile, and the assessments we completed," the doctor said, "you meet the criteria for autism spectrum disorder."

Shane nodded automatically. He'd practiced this reaction. Neutral. Accepting. Professional.

But something inside him loosened anyway.

Autistic.

It wasn't a shock. Not really. The words fit too well—like discovering the name of a song you'd been humming your whole life without realizing it had lyrics.

"You're high-masking," the doctor continued. "You've learned to compensate extremely well. That takes effort. A lot of it."

Effort. Shane swallowed.

"So I'm not just... bad at things," he said quietly.

The doctor smiled gently. "No. You've been doing more work than most people realize."

When Shane stepped out into the hallway, his head felt full and strangely light at the same time. He spotted Ilya immediately—slouched in a chair that was clearly too small for him, ankle hooked over one knee, phone forgotten in his hand.

Ilya looked up, eyes sharpening with focus the moment he saw Shane's face.

"Well?" he asked, standing.

Shane exhaled. "I'm autistic."

Ilya blinked once. Then nodded. "Okay."

That was it. No pause. No reevaluation.

Just okay.

They didn't talk much on the drive home. Ilya kept one hand on the steering wheel and the other resting on the center console, palm up. Shane rested his fingers there, the quiet contact grounding him as the city slid past.

At home, everything felt familiar in the best way. The soft creak of the floorboards. The faint smell of laundry detergent. Ilya kicked off his shoes by the door, crooked as always, and

Shane straightened them without thinking. The habit made him smile faintly now.

“I’m going to shower,” Ilya said. “You okay?”

Shane nodded. “Yeah. I think.”

Later, Shane lay in bed with a book open against his chest. He’d read the same paragraph four times without absorbing a word. His mind kept drifting, rearranging memories under this new lens.

The exhaustion after team dinners. The relief of routine. The way noise sometimes felt like it was pressing directly against his skull.

Was that why?

Ilya emerged from the bathroom in socked feet, hair damp, wearing one of Shane’s old T-shirts. He paused when he saw Shane staring at the ceiling instead of the page.

“You’re thinking very loudly,” Ilya said.

“I didn’t know I was doing that.”

“You do it with your face,” Ilya said, climbing onto the bed. He leaned back against the headboard, then tugged Shane gently until he rested against Ilya’s side. “What’s going on in there?”

Shane hesitated. Then: “I keep replaying things. Wondering how much of my life was just me trying to keep up.”

Ilya wrapped an arm around his shoulders, thumb tracing slow, absent-minded circles against Shane’s arm. “You kept up pretty well.”

“At a cost,” Shane said.

Ilya hummed thoughtfully. “Then maybe now you stop paying it.”

Shane turned his head. “What if this changes things?”

Ilya looked down at him, expression open and utterly sincere. “What if it explains things?”

That landed differently. Gentler.

They lay there for a while, quiet and warm. Ilya reached over and turned off the bedside lamp without being asked, plunging the room into soft lamplight from the hallway. He knew Shane didn’t like it too bright when he was overwhelmed.

“Can I ask you something?” Shane said.

“Always.”

“Do I bother you? When I need things a certain way?”

Ilya snorted softly. “You mean when you alphabetize the spice rack or need three days’ notice before social events?”

Shane winced. “Yes.”

Ilya kissed his temple. “No. I like knowing what makes you comfortable. And I like that you tell me.”

Shane closed his eyes, leaning fully into Ilya now. The steady rise and fall of Ilya’s chest anchored him.

“I think,” Shane said slowly, “that I’ve been really hard on myself.”

Ilya squeezed him. “You don’t have to be anymore.”

The book slipped forgotten onto the nightstand. Ilya tugged the blankets up around them, tucking Shane in with careful precision. Shane smiled at that—how Ilya had learned his preferences without ever making him feel demanding.

“You know,” Ilya said, voice sleepy, “this doesn’t change who you are.”

Shane nodded. “I know.”

“But,” Ilya added, “if you want quieter mornings, fewer dinners out, more time to recharge —”

“I do,” Shane admitted.

“Then we do that,” Ilya said easily.

Shane felt something warm bloom in his chest. Not relief exactly. Something steadier.

He curled closer, fitting himself into the familiar shape of Ilya’s side. The diagnosis was still there, waiting to be unpacked. There would be conversations. Adjustments. Learning.

But right now, there was this: a quiet room, a patient partner, and the knowledge that he didn’t have to navigate this alone.

Shane closed his eyes.

For the first time in a long while, his thoughts softened enough to let him sleep.

Shane woke up slowly.

Not the abrupt, heart-pounding jolt he was used to, but the gradual kind—awareness seeping in piece by piece. The room was dim, curtains still drawn. Ilya’s arm was heavy and warm across his waist, anchoring him in place.

Shane lay there for a moment, cataloging sensations the way the doctor had suggested he try.

The weight of the blankets: good.
The hum of the city outside: distant, manageable.
The warmth of Ilya's body: grounding.

Normally, he would have slipped out of bed by now, careful not to disturb anything. Routine was important. But this morning, he stayed.

He realized—somewhere between one breath and the next—that he didn't actually want to move yet.

The thought felt... allowed.

When Ilya stirred, it was unhurried. He blinked a few times, then smiled lazily when he noticed Shane still there.

"Morning," he murmured, voice rough with sleep.

"Morning."

"You're still in bed," Ilya observed.

Shane hesitated. "Is that okay?"

Ilya frowned slightly. "Why wouldn't it be?"

Shane considered the question. Then answered honestly. "I usually get up because it feels expected."

Ilya shifted, propping himself up on one elbow. "By who?"

Shane opened his mouth. Closed it. Then let out a quiet huff of laughter. "I don't know."

Ilya's expression softened. "Then stay."

So Shane did.

Later, in the kitchen, Shane stood barefoot on the cool tile, staring into the refrigerator. Too many options. Too much light. He felt the familiar tightening behind his eyes.

"I don't want eggs," he said suddenly.

Ilya, halfway through grinding coffee, paused. "Okay."

"I know I usually do," Shane continued, a little breathless. "But the texture feels wrong today."

"Then no eggs," Ilya said easily. He glanced at the pantry. "Toast? Oatmeal? We have that yogurt you like."

Shane exhaled. "Toast. Just butter."

Ilya nodded and moved on without comment, without teasing, without asking Shane to justify it. The quiet acceptance made Shane's chest ache in the best way.

They ate at the counter, sunlight creeping slowly across the floor. Shane noticed how his shoulders weren't tight. How he wasn't monitoring himself—his posture, his expressions, his timing.

He didn't force eye contact. He didn't fill the silence.

And nothing bad happened.

Later still, Shane retreated to the living room, curling up in the corner of the couch with his noise-canceling headphones. He hesitated before putting them on, habit telling him he should explain.

"I'm just going to—" he started.

Ilya glanced over from his phone. "You don't have to tell me."

Shane paused. Then smiled faintly. "Right."

He settled in, letting the pressure of the cushions and the familiar instrumental playlist calm his thoughts. He rocked slightly, a motion he'd suppressed for years without realizing it.

When he looked up again, Ilya was watching him—not staring, not analyzing. Just... noticing.

"Is this okay?" Shane asked quietly.

Ilya crossed the room and crouched in front of him. "You look comfortable," he said. "That's more than okay."

Shane swallowed. "I didn't know how much effort it took to be... normal."

Ilya reached out, resting his hand over Shane's knee, grounding and warm. "You don't have to be normal here."

The words settled deep.

That evening, Shane folded laundry at his own pace, lining things up precisely instead of forcing himself to be "efficient." He stilled absent-mindedly while thinking, fingers tapping in a familiar pattern. When he caught himself, ready to stop, Ilya's voice floated in from the doorway.

"You know you don't need to hide," he said gently.

Shane nodded, letting himself continue.

In bed that night, Shane lay with his head on Ilya's chest, listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat. He felt tired—but not the bone-deep exhaustion he'd always associated with

existing.

This tired felt earned. Honest.

“I think,” Shane said slowly, “this is what it feels like to rest.”

Ilya kissed the top of his head. “You deserve that.”

Shane closed his eyes, body finally still, mind finally quiet.

For the first time, he wasn’t performing peace.

He was just living it.

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