

Unravel

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by Anonymous

Summary

Shane made it nearly all the way through their two weeks together without a panic attack.

Nearly.

Notes

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

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Nearly.

He was with Ilya when it hit, luxuriating in a long afternoon spent together on the same couch. Ilya was intent on his phone, earbuds in, possibly listening to music and scrolling through social media but probably reading a book in English with the audiobook playing at the same time. Shane hadn't realized how much leisure time Ilya spent studying English until their trip together.

It fed his own resolve to learn Russian, and made him feel a little guilty that he hadn't started already. He was researching his options, reading reviews of different apps and programs, wondering if he would do better with the structure of a remote course through a university or if he'd be able to keep up with it during the season, when he realized he couldn't breathe.

You're okay, he told himself, fighting the urge to curl in on himself, trying to breathe evenly and ease the tightness building in his chest, but of course it didn't work. His watch beeped at him, informing him that his heart rate was unusually elevated. *No shit*.

Get out, you have to go, you have to go, GET OUT—

Shane kicked his way free from the comfortable tangle their feet had found in the middle of the couch and lurched to his feet, blinking the spots from his eyes and trying to ignore the way his thoughts were starting to race. "Bathroom," he muttered to Ilya, hoping he got the volume right, unable to look at him to see if he was surprised, if he had pulled his earbuds free to ask Shane what he was doing.

Shane didn't want him to see this. He didn't want anyone to see this, not even his parents, not ever, and if he didn't go now he would give in to the strong urge to hide his face against Ilya's neck until it was over.

He made it to his bedroom, stumbling into the ensuite and shutting the door too hard and sliding down the adjacent wall until he was curled up in the corner beside the hinges of the door, thighs to chest, trying to hold himself together.

There was almost something relieving about escaping during a panic attack, at least in the moment after he was able to close a door between himself and anyone who could see. His attacks didn't often strike in public, but when they did he was good at finding someplace quiet to ride it out. If he noticed fast enough, he could find a bathroom or an alley or a quiet hallway before anyone could see him shake or hear him gasp, and when the worst of it hit he was free to tremble and hyperventilate in privacy until it had passed.

His chest was screaming, lungs airless and heart pounding against his ribs, blood rushing in his ears. His hands and feet were numb, making it hard to tell where any part of his body was in relation to any other part or to the ground. That unmoored feeling terrified him as always, feeding the lightheadedness that came from the hyperventilation.

He tried desperately to remember where he was. Time passed. He never knew how long. When he was a kid, according to his parents, it would be fifteen minutes or so from when he would start to gasp and when he could string words together again. He could never decide if it felt like hours, or if time simply ceased to exist as a concept his brain could parse. As an adult, it usually didn't matter. He usually didn't have Ilya Rozanov his couch.

Except today, he did.

Ilya pounded on the door. Shane couldn't hear it, couldn't hear anything except his own blood rushing in his ears, but the shock of it against his shoulder shook him out of the breathing exercise he hadn't been having any luck with anyways and sent a fresh wave of terror through him. He must have made some sound in response, or maybe it was just Ilya's infuriating perceptiveness, because he was suddenly being squeezed between the wall and the opening door, and then Ilya was there.

He said something, but Shane couldn't make his mind settle long enough to comprehend it. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to say something, anything, but even if he had the breath he wouldn't have had the words. He shook his head and kept shaking it, finding the rhythmic motion comforting.

Ilya said something else and brought his hands up to grasp Shane's arms, and the warmth of them was almost shocking. He had come close enough that Shane could feel the presence of his body, and he couldn't remember anymore why he shouldn't lean against Ilya, so he let his head thump against Ilya's chest. Shane grabbed the front of Ilya's shirt, clumsy but desperate for him not to move away, and let himself stop fighting.

The storm passed, as it always did.

Shane realized Ilya was talking to him quietly, more of a comforting rumble in his chest against Shane's cheek than a sound in his ear. Shane let himself be soothed while his heart slowed and his chest eased. After a few minutes, he realized that he couldn't understand him not because of lingering panic still stopping up his ears, but because Ilya was speaking Russian.

He stopped when Shane shifted against his chest, and Shane immediately missed it. "Sorry," he croaked, mouth dry and head pounding.

Ilya straightened in a familiar posture of outrage. "For what?"

Shane couldn't make his hands release his shirt, so Ilya didn't get far. Guilty as he felt, Shane was relieved that Ilya didn't pull away. "For..." he mumbled, unable to come up with words to describe what he meant, resenting Ilya for wanting him to describe what had just happened when Ilya had been more present than Shane. *Sorry for freaking out at nothing. Sorry I*

ruined your afternoon as well as mine because I didn't get away fast enough. Sorry for being a panicking mess when for once there's nothing to panic about.

"I'm okay," he managed to get out. "Just, just give me a second. You can—" *Go*. His jaw clamped around the word. *Please don't go*.

Ilya snorted. "Are you coming too?"

Shane needed to stay on the bathroom floor for a little while, actually. He couldn't feel his face or his hands, and he knew from experience if he tried to get up too fast at this point he might go right back down.

Step one was to unclench. Shane gritted his teeth, kept his eyes closed and forced his hands to release Ilya's shirt. As soon as he did, Ilya immediately moved away from Shane. The sudden loss pulled an embarrassing whimper from his lips.

"Don't worry," Ilya said, still in that low, crooning tone. "I'm not leaving. I'll sit next to you, okay?" He settled against the wall with his shoulder pressed against Shane's.

Shane took stock of his body. His heart was calming, his breath not quite back to normal but his lungs had finally remembered how to take in air. He was still trembling, but it was the fine shiver that came after an attack had eased instead of the frightening, uncontrollable shake that came during one. The feeling had returned to his hands, which ached from how tightly he had clutched Ilya's shirt. He extended his legs, easing them away from his chest and groaning at the way his knees complained at the change after having held so tight for so long.

The familiar press of Ilya's foot against his socked toe was more comforting than it should be.

Shane sighed and dropped his head against Ilya's shoulder, wishing that he could simply bury himself in Ilya's arms and sleep until he felt back to normal. But they were still on the bathroom floor, and Shane had to get up and eat something and drink some electrolytes and shower off the fear sweat and try to write record what had happened before he could let himself find refuge in their bed.

And explain things to Ilya. That would have to happen too.

It all seemed overwhelming. His post-panic-attack routine always felt daunting, but he knew the next day would be worse if he didn't.

Shane gave himself one minute, a slow count to sixty, then opened his eyes.

And immediately slammed them shut again, groaning bringing his hands up to cover his face as the overhead light sent a piercing pain through his head.

Ilya swore, getting to his feet and flipping the switch. "I'm sorry, I turned it on when I came in," he said, returning to the floor beside Shane. "It's off now."

Shane thought about taking another sixty seconds, but realized he was stalling. He squinted open his eyes behind his fingers, letting his hands drop when he found the bathroom lit only

by sunlight coming through the frosted window high on the wall.

Eyes open, check. Feeling in all extremities, check. Time to get up and explain himself to his boyfriend.

Ilya shot back to his feet when Shane went to his hands and knees, hovering as Shane pulled himself up with the vanity. “What do you need? Do you want water?”

Shane, cold and clammy with his sweat-soaked shirt against his back, mostly wanted a shower, but he knew better than to stand in the hot water before having something to eat. Saying as much to Ilya seemed too hard. He grunted and pulled the door to start the trek to the kitchen.

“Shane, tell me what you need please,” asked Ilya. Pleaded, really, and Shane did not want to have to explain himself. But he sounded so worried.

“Can you get me a Gatorade?” he asked, nodding at the fridge. “Purple.” He drank the blue sugar-free flavor as a rule, but kept a case of grape-flavored regular ones for just this purpose. Same with the peanut butter crackers, always in the cabinet closest to the fridge, in every house and apartment. He pulled the box down and hauled himself onto a stool by the island, resting his elbows on the counter and sighing.

Ilya opened the Gatorade for him, frowning as the bottle shook in Shane’s hand but staying silent, then pulled one of the little bags of crackers out of the box and dumped its contents onto a napkin.

“Thanks,” Shane said, and dutifully started eating. Sip of too-sweet Gatorade, dry and tasteless cracker, repeat. By the time the crackers were gone, he was much steadier and the bottle was half empty. He screwed the cap back on and wondered if he could get in the shower before Ilya started asking questions.

“Does that happen often?”

No luck.

“Not really. A few times a month.”

“That... seems like often.” Ilya’s voice was even, not quite the soothing croon of earlier but carefully modulated and non-accusatory.

Shane sighed. “It’s less often than when I was little. It’s just... it’s something that happens,” he finished lamely.

“Was it, uh.” Ilya was searching for words. It wasn’t an uncommon thing for him to do, but usually he knew exactly what he wanted to say, just not in English. Hearing him sound so tentative, as if he didn’t know what was going to come out of his mouth, was new. “Did something happen? Today?”

Shane kept his eyes on the cap of his Gatorade bottle. “Nothing happened. There’s no, no cause. It was a panic attack. My body decided to panic, and I just had to deal with it.”

“Hmm.” Ilya leaned against the counter next to Shane, probably trying to catch his eye. Tough. Shane had to have this conversation, but if he looked Ilya in the eye he might start to cry, and he wasn’t going to make himself deal with that on top of everything else.

He wished Ilya was still holding him.

“Sometimes, though, something happens,” Ilya continued. “At your parents’.”

Shane did not have the words to explain the constant, low level of anxiety he usually lived with, the way it spiked sometimes when things went wrong but how that could be restrained with careful breathing and the grounding exercises he had been doing since he was a teenager. How other times he could be entirely relaxed, no worry in his mind, and his body would hurl itself into unstoppable terror anyway. “It’s different,” he managed wearily.

“Later?”

“Later,” Ilya agreed. “Right now, tell me what you need. Please.”

“This,” Shane said honestly. “Shower. A nap. And I have to—where’s my phone?”

Ilya went to get it from the floor next to the couch. “I thought about calling 911, but my phone was on the couch and I did not want to leave you to get it,” he commented.

Shane winced. “You didn’t need to call 911.”

“I’m glad you didn’t lock the door,” Ilya replied. “You weren’t talking to me.”

“I couldn’t hear you,” Shane admitted. “My parents were always really insistent about not locking the door, when I had a panic attack. They always wanted me to come find them, I just wanted to go hide somewhere. The compromise was I could go off on my own, but I couldn’t lock the door.” He opened the note where he kept track of his panic attacks, marking the date and location. “Do you know how long it lasted? Like, from when I left to when I could talk again?”

“Um,” Ilya said. “Let me see how far my book played.”

“Thanks,” Shane said, trying to think back to when he had first noticed it coming on. Had his lips gone numb, like the last time, before his breath stopped reaching his lungs?

“Do you want me to go somewhere else?” Ilya asked abruptly.

Shane froze.

“You said you want to be alone. Should I not be here?”

“Ilya, no,” Shane said, stumbling a little in his rush to keep Ilya exactly where he was.

“That’s not—listen, my parents just worry, and I hate them seeing me like that. It just makes it worse, trying to calm down for them.”

“Did I make it worse?” Ilya asked. “Don’t lie to make me feel better. I want to know how to make *you* feel better.”

Something squirmed in Shane's stomach. "You didn't make it worse."

"It was ten minutes, maybe, from when you ran away to when you came back," Ilya said heavily. "Another ten before we came out of the bathroom."

"That's pretty normal," Shane tried.

Ilya huffed.

"Maybe a little shorter, even. I'm usually guessing on the time."

Ilya made another unconvinced sound.

Shane sighed, wanting desperately to stop talking about his panic attacks so he could wash the sweat off and lie down. "Look, can we talk about it later?"

Ilya softened and got up. "Shower, nap," he echoed Shane's earlier words. "I'll go warm the water up for you?"

Shane closed his eyes, nodded, and heard him go.

The bathroom was steamy when he came in. Ilya had found the dimmer switch so the light was faint and yellow, and a fresh towel and clean pajamas were resting on the counter. Shane felt a little teary at the sight, and pulled off his shirt to hide his face.

Ilya hovered by the door as Shane put his clothes into the hamper and switched off the extractor fan, which was grating at his ears. His bathroom wouldn't start growing mold because he let himself have one shower with the only sound the soothing patter of water against tiles. Probably. He should keep it short, anyway, or risk falling asleep standing up.

Ilya hadn't left, and Shane gave into temptation. "Do you want to come in?"

Ilya's sweats hit the floor almost before he was done asking.

Shane found himself yawning as Ilya rubbed shampoo into his hair. Ilya was gentle with everything, but he was quick, teasing him into keeping his eyes open as he ran a washcloth down each limb. "Now close," he said, guiding him under the shower head to rinse out the conditioner from his hair, "but don't pass out yet."

"I'm not going to fall asleep in the shower," Shane said, even as his eyes felt heavier and heavier. He loved Ilya's hands in his hair.

Shane dried himself off and pulled on the pajamas Ilya had set out for him, sighing in relief at being clean and in soft clothes at last. He went into the bedroom ahead of Ilya and crawled under the covers, finally sinking into his pillow. They would get the pillows wet, and he'd

have to borrow dry ones from one of the guest rooms before they went to bed for the night, but he couldn't bring himself to care that much.

Ilya was taking a while to join him. Reluctantly, Shane unearthed one eye to find him lingering at the door leading back to the living room.

"Are you coming?" Shane asked, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice. He probably failed. He was so tired.

Ilya never wore pants to bed, but he didn't stop to pull off the sweats he had just donned. He crowded close to Shane, spooning behind him under the covers, and wrapped an arm around his chest. Shane yawned once more and turned to face him instead, scooting down in the bed to rest his head against Ilya's chest and tangle their legs together. He shut his eyes and counted his breaths with Ilya's heartbeat as he dropped into sleep.

Shane slept heavily for several hours. Ilya held him against his chest and worried.

He wasn't used to brooding, and he didn't like it. He was used to doing something whenever he found himself worrying. Find a puck to hit, an opponent to taunt, someone to fuck. There was no use letting himself wallow in what he couldn't change, so he didn't.

Only now, he was worrying, and the only thing he could do was lie still and hold Shane. He wanted to do it, of course. Lately he always wanted to touch Shane. The feeling of Shane's breath against his chest, his hair against his fingers, had become very precious to him, as much as he had tried to ignore it.

The panic attack had been scary. Watching Shane running for his room, moving jerkily and as if he couldn't control his limbs, hearing his breath gasping far too fast through the door, calling to him and getting no response. Ilya had been terrified. He had thought to call Shane's parents, except he didn't have their number. He would have called 911, but he couldn't tear himself away from the door long enough to retrieve his phone.

Shane was fine, sleeping peacefully in his arms. Later, they would talk. Shane should eat an actual meal, and Ilya would get him to drink the rest of the full-sugar Gatorade, make tell him what to do, what not to do. He would save David and Yuna Hollander's numbers to his phone. He would look up exactly what a panic attack even was, since apparently there was the kind that had Shane trembling in his bed when Ilya called him by his name, and the kind that sent Shane running away from a lazy afternoon on the couch with Ilya to hide away and hyperventilate alone.

But that was all for later. Now, Shane was safe and Ilya could listen to his soft, even breaths and give in to the impulse to hold him tightly so nothing could reach him.

“Shane.”

Shane cracked one eye open and scrunched his face up. It made Ilya want to tuck him back into his arms. But it was evening and Ilya’s stomach was growling, which meant Shane would be hungry too, and he had learned that Shane got very grumpy when his dinner was delayed.

“It’s nearly eight o’clock. We need to eat dinner.”

Shane let out a soft moan, and Ilya nearly broke. But no, he was a famous hockey star, and he wouldn’t be swayed just because his boyfriend looked too cozy to disturb.

Bravely resisting the way Shane’s freckles moved as he yawned, Ilya got out of the bed. “I am making tuna melts,” he announced. He knew Shane had bought the ingredients ahead of Ilya’s arrival, because Shane was as sentimental as Ilya was. “Drink this and come out to eat.” He handed over the half-empty Gatorade bottle from the nightstand and waited until Shane took it and made a less sleepy face.

Shane emerged just as Ilya was putting the melts on their plates. He settled the plates next to the glasses of cool water he had filled for them both at what had become each of their spots.

He wanted to get Shane to talk, but he was willing to wait. The conversation shouldn’t happen on an empty stomach, and it would go better if Ilya did not pester Shane into it. He also thought that Shane wouldn’t be able to leave matters as they were for long, and he was right.

Shane’s water glass was empty and his first tuna melt was nearly gone when he said, “I wasn’t lying. I didn’t want you to go.”

Ilya, pleased that he knew Shane so well, crunched into his second melt.

“With my parents...” Shane finished his last bite and took his time chewing. “They tried really hard, you know? I started having panic attacks when I was a kid, and they tried everything. Doctors, counseling, meds, routines, everything. It’s how I got so into hockey to begin with—the exercise was supposed to help. And it did, just. Nothing made it *stop*.”

He got up to bring the water pitcher from the fridge, topping both their glasses and taking a sip. “I used to feel really ashamed about it. They never blamed me, but they were doing so much, and I felt bad that I couldn’t just be normal. Like the other kids.

Ilya choked on his tuna melt. He had been very good about letting Shane talk, but couldn’t help it. Normal! Shane Hollander, trying to be like everyone else!

Shane shook his head. “I know, I know. But you have to admit that things would be easier if I was less...”

“It would break my heart,” Ilya said. Too honestly. But he couldn’t help it. He stared at Shane, who finally raised his gaze to meet his eyes, and blushed.

“I’m sorry you suffer,” said Ilya, which was too much, probably, too sincere. Ah, well. “But I do not want to change a single freckle.”

Shane’s blush deepened, going blotchy the way it did when Ilya was driving him wild in bed, but he didn’t look away. Ilya, unable to restrain himself, kissed him. He tasted the meal he had made for them on Shane’s lips and tried to pour all of the sincerity and affection he held into him.

Shane pulled back first. “With my parents,” he continued. Ilya made a face, but gestured him to continue. “They care, and they try so much, but there just isn’t *anything*. I feel like I’m failing them, even though I know they would never want me to feel like that. And it just makes me spiral harder. It’s the same when I think anyone can see me.”

He huffed a laugh. “I was at Hayden’s, once, just watching a movie with him and the girls, and...” he gestured vaguely toward his bedroom, and Ilya nodded. “I got out without anyone noticing. And I did lock the door then, actually, I didn’t want to scare Ruby and Jade. But I just... Even after it was over, I couldn’t calm down.” Both were finished with their food, and Ilya reached across the table to take Shane’s hand. Shane made a face, one of his mildly grossed out scrunches that was probably at the grease on both their fingers, but he didn’t pull away. “Hayden got Jackie to take the girls out, and he told me stupid jokes through the door until I could come out. It took about an hour.”

Much longer than ten minutes, Ilya noted, but he didn’t say. It wasn’t sportsmanlike to gloat when his opponent was as pathetic as Hayden Pike. And it wasn’t the point, anyway.

“I know Hayden would never judge me for it, but the thought of him seeing me like that...” Shane shook his head. “But. I didn’t feel ashamed, with you. I wanted you, I wanted you to... to hold me,” he admitted. “I ran because it was habit And because a smaller room feels better,” he added, “but I was so glad when you came in.”

Ilya kissed him again, very gently, and leaned his forehead against Shane’s shoulder. “I always want to come in,” he confessed. “I don’t like the idea of you being alone.”

Shane’s shoulder shrugged under him. “It always passes,” he said philosophically.

Ilya rolled his eyes and sat back up. “So Hayden is not good but not completely useless,” he said. “What about the rest of your team? Your coach, the staff?”

Shane looked away. “It’s in my medical file,” he said. “But it’s never happened on the ice. Or in the locker room. It’s like having hockey to focus on keeps everything clear. It’s not until I’m relaxed that I’ll have an attack.”

Ilya almost rolled his eyes again, *of course Shane Hollander would stave off panic attacks by playing hockey*, but he could read between the lines. “So coach does not know,” he said, and Shane’s face told him he was right. “Doctor does, but he won’t say unless it affects hockey.”

“Pretty much,” Shane said. “Coach Theriault doesn’t really need to know. And he... doesn’t really *want* to know. About stuff like that.”

Ilya nodded, well aware of the most common attitude in the NHL toward matters of mental health. “Coaches care too little of their players, sometimes.”

Shane winced. “He, uh. He doesn’t want to know, but if he did know, I’m not really sure he... wouldn’t care,” he admitted. “But he wouldn’t really be pleased.”

Ilya scoffed. “Is that why you do not take medicine?” he asked, aware that he was overstepping. He hadn’t gone snooping, or not into anything that seemed deliberately hidden, but he thought he would have noticed if Shane was taking more than his fussy supplements on a daily basis.

Shane shook his head. “Not really. I tried a bunch of stuff when I was younger, like I said, but none of them worked as well as we hoped, and they all had side effects. It just didn’t seem worth it, when it might make things... uncomfortable.”

Ilya suppressed another scoff.

“I do have. Well, if you want to know. If we’re doing this, you probably should know,” Shane said awkwardly. “If I have a panic attack and it’s too long, if I can’t calm down afterward, I have a prescription. Ativan. I don’t like to take it, but sometimes it’s necessary.”

Ilya very carefully did not react. “What is too long?”

“Like... thirty minutes? Or if it’s been an hour and I still can’t...” he waved a hand. “It’s rare, like I said. But if it’s a bad one, it’s there. A tool. I keep it in the bedside table, or there’s a few in my doppel bag.”

Ilya nodded, committing it to memory. “And if it is not too long, if it is *normal*, you, what? Gatorade, crackers, shower, sleep?”

Shane nodded. “Pretty much. And I try to log it as soon as it’s over.”

Of course he does. Ilya suppressed another scoff, but it doesn’t work as well as the last time..

“So I can keep an eye on it! If they start happening more or get worse.”

Ilya tilted his head, conceding the point.

“There’s breathing exercises I can do, or grounding exercises, but that’s more for in the middle of an attack, and I can only really do them when I’m calming down anyway. So mostly that. Eat, drink, shower, sleep.”

“And hockey.”

Shane huffed a laugh through his nose.

Encouraged, Ilya kept going. “And a small room. No big lights.”

“I... yeah.”

“And boyfriend snuggles. The best remedy.”

There it was, Shane’s beautiful smile. Finally. “It seems so.” The smile faded, and Shane’s eyes dropped again. “Can we be done? This has been kind of an exhausting afternoon.”

“I want to learn your breathing exercises, later,” Ilya said. “And the dirt ones.”

“Grounding. And yeah, sure. It’s basically meditation,” Shane said, smirking at him.

“Later,” Ilya said again. “Do you want to go back to bed? You slept for hours, but you still look tired.”

Shane shook his head. “I won’t be able to sleep for a while,” he admitted. “Let’s put on a movie or something.”

“Yes. We can continue the boyfriend-snuggles remedy. Just not whatever horror movie Hayden made you watch.”

“It wasn’t Hayden’s fault,” Shane sighed, but Ilya could tell that he knew Ilya wasn’t serious. He stood and stacked Ilya’s plate on top of his own, and Ilya took it right back out of his hands.

“Find a movie,” he said firmly. “Something nice. I’ll load the dishes.”

Shane let him, which showed how exhausted he was, and had three blankets on the couch and the title page for something animated on the TV when Ilya came in carrying a Coke and a ginger ale.

“It’s the dubbed one, promise,” he said. “Have you watched any Studio Ghibli?”

Ilya looked dubiously at the screen. “I don’t think so.”

Shane smiled widely. “It’s my favorite. Come on.”

Ilya settled in next to Shane, pulling his back in against his chest, as a little girl lay on her back in a field and listened to a weather report.

End Notes

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(Take your meds, kids. And if you see any typos, let me know.)

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