if the silence takes you (then i hope it takes me too)

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by chagrinocturne

Summary

"Ilya, baby," he started, instinctively, in English. "Slow down a little, I-"
"Что?" he murmured, blinking at him, confused now. "Почему…?"

Or: Ilya is the one taking a hit on the ice. He's brought to the hospital, concussed. When he wakes, he can only speak Russian… and Shane has been studying.

Notes

my fics are always: someone is hurt/suffering. come here loved one. i will comfort you. let me run my fingers through your hair.
idk what this says about me. :)

i wrote this on my work pc. also the russian is a half my very basic knowledge half google translate. sorry if it's a little wonky!

fic title from soul meets body by death cab for cutie (the most beautiful song ever made)

See the end of the work for more notes

The hit happened fast. Easy to miss if you did as little as blinking.

One second, Ilya was gliding across the ice, chasing the puck like always - sharp and quick and a little reckless - and then *boom*. A violent slam into the boards from the rival defender and he was down.

Shane felt a lurch in his gut, his stomach turning over while trying to process. Ilya was down, and he wasn't getting up.

From the couch in his Montreal apartment, Shane just… stared at the screen. The broadcast kept going; the camera zoomed in, and suddenly there were Centaurs jerseys crowding around Ilya, voices rising, the referee whistling somewhere in the chaos.

Ilya wasn't moving. He looked like just a pile of black and red jersey on the ice, completely still and just *wrong* for someone always so full of life. Shane was terrified. The commentators were using words like "bad collision" and "medical staff," but Shane couldn't hear them anymore over the blood rushing in his ears. The TV screen was blurry all of a sudden.

He dialed his mom with shaking fingers.

"Is he okay? You were at the game, right? Mom, tell me he's okay." Shane was already pacing his living room, grabbing his jacket and car keys, his ribcage feeling two sizes too small. The panic was making it hard to breathe, lungs not filling. Was he already hyperventilating?

"I don't know yet, Shane. Dad and I are just waiting. They haven't told us which hospital yet. We're just… we're waiting for the call."

Waiting. Shane couldn't do waiting. He felt dizzy.

"That's not-" Shane dragged a hand through his hair, pacing around his living room: the repetitiveness of the movement somewhat soothing him. "That's not fast enough."

"Shane,"

"I'm coming."

He stood up so quick from the couch his head did a worrying spin, but he ignored it. He had more important things to do. "Shane, wait-"

Because suddenly he got it. The weight of it settling in his chest, heavy and suffocating. He finally understood the look Ilya had once given him while rewatching the game where Marlow had "rocked his world" - not in *that* way, but in the haunted way one could feel while watching the love of their life lie lifeless on the ice. Shane needed to touch him, to cradle his baby in his arms. He needed to feel his heartbeat under his palm.

"…Okay," his mom said. "Drive safe, sweetie."

Shane was in his car and merging onto the highway before he even realized he had forgotten his coat on the couch, cold air biting through his sheer shirt. He drove like a man possessed, the needle climbing well past the limit.

Usually, the passenger seat would be full of Ilya, long legs stretched out, cracking jokes about how Shane drove his stupid Jeep like a grandmother. He kept glacing at the empty space, expecting Ilya's hand reaching over to rest on his thigh, or lacing their fingers together. Blasting some questionable rap song. But today Ilya was laying in a hospital bed.

Probably. *Maybe. If it wasn't something worse. Maybe he is in surgery. Maybe he's-*

Every tragic headline Shane had ever read about hockey injuries started looping in his mind. Only the sudden *bzzzz* of his phone against the plastic cup holder pulled him out of the spiral – flinching so hard he nearly swerved the car. He swiped at the screen with trembling fingers, only managing to hit speaker on the third try.

"Shane? He's okay," his mom's familiar voice said, breathless but relieved. "He hasn't woken up yet, but the doctors say he's stable. He's going to be fine, baby."

"If he's fine, why isn't he waking up?" Shane choked out, his knuckles white on the steering wheel. "Mom, where are you? Which hospital? I'm on his forms. I'm the other person they're supposed to call."

"Ottawa General. Please, Shane, just drive safe. I promise you he's okay. He's actually mumbling in his sleep right now. All Russian, so I don't have a clue of what he's saying apart from your name. It's sweet."

A broken, wet sound tore out of Shane's throat – a sob that turned into a hysterical laugh. For a second, his vision blurred as his eyes filled up. "I'm coming. I'm almost there."

He ended the call, but his foot didn't budge from the accelerator.

Shane hauled the wheel over and killed the engine before the Jeep had even stopped rolling. He left it crooked, halfway on the curb. The motor was still rumbling but he didn't care. He had only one thing on his mind. He was already halfway to the rotating glass doors.

The hospital air hit him as he entered, smelling like bleach and anxiety. Hospitals were the type of place that made Shane's skin crawl, overwhelming and overstimulating. Lights way too bright and voices talking one over the other – but he barely noticed his sensory overload now.

For once, he didn't care about being recognized. He blew past the lobby, vaguely aware of phones being pointed at him and people whispering, trading frantic words with the receptionist who took pity on him and directed him towards the right room.

His mom had texted him about twenty minutes earlier. *Dad and I went to get some food. Room 281. Ilya still sleeping.*

He didn't pause to collect himself, or think to knock. He just burst through the door of room 281, ready to level anyone standing in his way. And there he was, his boyfriend, laying there motionless still.

Ilya looked wrong – too big for the small hospital bed, his broad shoulders looking unusually fragile under the cotton blankets. His head was wrapped in gauze, squashing his beautiful blond curls.

"Ilya," Shane gasped, his voice cracking as he stumbled towards the bed. He grabbed Ilya's hand, pressing it to his face. He finally let out all the air he'd been holding since the hit, his whole body deflating in relief. "Oh, sweetheart."

Ilya's eyes were glassy, clearly lost in whatever they'd been pumping into his IV, but a dazed smile broke across his face the second he realized it was Shane.

"Мой любимый," Ilya whispered, his voice raspy. *My love.*

The words landed warm, familiar, something he had heard a thousand times before. Something he knew. It settled deep in his chest, sweet and aching, purely *theirs*.

"I'm here," Shane whispered back. He leaned down, pressing his forehead against Ilya's and dropping a kiss on it, before he left his weight settle carefully against the mattress. Then, softer, because he could, because he had practiced this a hundred times under his breath. "Я здесь."

The change in Ilya was instant. His expression softened instantly, like something in him settled just from hearing the sound of his own language. His eyes locked on Shane, heavy-lidded but bright, offering that quiet, unguarded smile that almost no one else ever got to see.

"Shane…" Ilya's hand drifted up, searching. Shane stepped closer, careful, already reaching for him without thinking. Caressing his bruised cheek with his fingers, mimicking the way Ilya had comforted him all those months ago. "I'm right here, okay? You're okay-"

Ilya started talking then, but the sounds coming out of his mouth weren't the sharp, slightly accented English Shane was used to. Instead, a low, rapid-fire stream of Russian spilled out. Soft, a little slurred from the meds, but flowing out of him wth a desperate sort of ease.

"Ты приехал… я знал, что ты приедешь… ты всегда приходишь ко мне…" *You came... I knew you would come... you always come to me...*

He was staring at Shane with intense, overwhelming devotion. His fingers twitched, trying to reach Shane's face.

"Ilya, baby," he started, instinctively, in English. His own heart starting to race again. "Slow down a little, I-"

"Что?" Ilya blinked, brows furrowing in confusion. "Почему…?" *What? Why...?*

Shane swallowed hard, the English dying in his throat. He watched the flicker of panic in Ilya's dazed, clouded eyes. He looked even smaller then and so, so lost; Shane's need to

comfort him almost burned through his blood, an urge to fix.

His brain scrambled to keep up. He had spent months hunched over translation apps and whispering phrases to himself in his kitchen as he cooked, during practice, doing laundry. But this was different. This wasn't a textbook; this was Ilya's brain retreating to the only place that felt safe. Shane needed to step up and give him that. He needed to meet him there.

"Я здесь, моя любовь." Shane whispered. The Russian feeling heavy and a little clumsy, sounds unpracticed, but he forced them out anyway. "Тихо. Я рядом. Shhh." *I am here, my love. Quiet. I'm right here.*

The change was immediate. Ilya's entire body seemed to deflate, tension leaving his shoulders as the familiar sounds hit him. He didn't seem to care about the mangled grammar or the accent; he just cared that the person holding him was finally speaking the same language his concussed brain was trapped in.

"малыш…" Ilya breathed, his eyes fluttering shut for a moment as he dropped his forehead against Shane's chest. "Голова… всё так громко." *Baby… My head… everything is so loud.*

"Знаю. Я знаю, зайчик." Shane murmured. He used one of the pet names he'd heard Ilya use for him a dozen times, praying he wasn't butchering it. Ilya's eyes crinkled in a smile, and he knew he did something right. *I know. I know, bunny.*

Shane shifted, his fingers moving in a slow, rhythmic motion through Ilya's hair, trying to be the anchor Ilya clearly needed. He ignored the hot sting in his own eyes, focusing entirely on making his voice as steady as possible. He needed to be the one thing in that room that didn't feel like a chaotic blur.

"Закрой глаза. Просто слушай меня," Shane said, the words coming out slow and careful. "Ты в больнице. Тебе не нужно ничего делать." *Close your eyes. Just listen to me. You're in the hospital. You don't need to do anything.*

Ilya made a small, broken sound in the back of his throat, nuzzling deeper into the crook of Shane's neck. "Не уходи. Останься со мной.". *Don't go. Stay with me.*

"Всё хорошо. Никуда не уйду," Shane whispered. He leaned down so Ilya could feel the steady warmth of his breath against his temple. "Я здесь. Ты в безопасности. Обещаю." *It's okay. I am not going anywhere. I'm here. You're safe. I promise.*

Ilya's breathing hitched, then started to level out, eyes still glassy but finally tracking on Shane's face. Then, the air in the room seemed to shift again. His gaze drifted past Shane's shoulder for a moment, looking at the empty corner of the room as if expecting to find someone else there.

"Где…" he started, voice small now. "Где моя мама?" *Where is my mom?*

All the air left Shane's lungs and his heart shattered. Ilya was asking for his mom. He was so out of it, so vulnerable, that his brain had edited out the years of painful, constant grief.

Protecting him from the memory of Irina. He knows it well. Knows it in how “мама”, for Ilya, is something soft and distant and *gone*.

Ilya’s eyes were wide and searching. There was something so young there, something that didn’t belong to the confident, cocky man the rest of the world saw. He was looking up at Shane like he held all the answers in the universe, and Shane cursed himself for being so bad at this. He felt like a fraud.

Ilya was always the one who knew what to do. He was so good at taking care of Shane, he could read his meltdowns before they even started, perfectly attuned to every edge of Shane’s neurotic personality.

What could I even say? What could fill this void you have in your heart? I know I’m not enough. I can’t rewrite the past. But I will love you even harder, I will love you enough for all those years you’ve been alone.

Now the roles were reversed, and Shane felt stripped bare. But he looked at the bandage on Ilya’s head and the IV in his arm and the lost look in his beautiful blue eyes and he knew he had to do this. Ilya deserved the best version of him, even if Shane had to fake it until his own heart stopped shaking.

“Ты в безопасности,” Shane said, slow and steady. “Я с тобой. Я не уйду.” *You’re safe. I’m with you. I won’t leave.*

“Мама…” he murmured again, the word sounding even thinner this time. “Я… я не знаю…” *Mama… I... I don’t know...*

“I know,” Shane said, the words feeling like sandpaper in his throat. “Всё хорошо. Не надо думать сейчас.” *It’s all okay. You don’t need to think right now.*

Ilya’s fingers hooked weakly into Shane’s sleeve, tugging with a fragile desperation. His eyes, glassy and unfocused, searched all over Shane’s face, trying to find something that wasn’t there. “Мама…” he whispered, voice breaking, and then, more confused, with a sudden edge of hurt, “Она… она не хотела меня видеть?” *She didn’t want to see me?*

Shane’s chest caved in. He shook his head immediately, his palm coming up to cup Ilya’s cheek, thumb brushing under his eye as if he could physically wipe the thought out of Ilya’s head. “Нет, нет,” he said softly, voice steady even as his pulse quickened. “Конечно, хотела. Всегда хотела.” *No, no. Of course, she did. Always.*

Shane swallowed hard, leaning in until their foreheads were touching - his voice soft, creating a little bubble where the rest of the world didn’t matter.

“Она далеко сейчас,” he said, the lie bitter on his tongue. “Но она послала меня.” *She is far away. But she sent me.*

Ilya’s breathing faltered for a second, a small gasp in the quiet of the room.

“Потому что она знает,” Shane added, quieter now, “что я тебя очень люблю. Хорошо?”

Because she knows that I love you very much, okay?

For a long, agonizing second, Ilya just stared at him.

Then, the tension in his face mellowed out. The hurt softened into something smaller, something quieter. He lifted a trembling hand, his touch devastatingly sweet as he cupped Shane's cheek. A ghost of a smile was playing on his lips.

"…Хорошо," he whispered, settled. *Okay.*

Then, Ilya suddenly winced, breath catching as he hissed, his eyes squeezing shut. "Голова…" he groaned, voice strained, his hand twitching weakly towards his temple like he didn't really know where the pain was. *Head.*

Shane was moving before Ilya could even finish wincing. "Hey - hey, it's okay," he whispered, voice dropping to a soothing hum. His hand slid into Ilya's hair, navigating carefully around the sore spots and the bandages, fingers slow and steady. "Спи, ладно? Тебе нужно отдохнуть." *Sleep, okay? You need to rest.*

Ilya let out a long exhale. The tension wasn't fully gone but it seemed to dull at the edges. Shane scooted closer without thinking, resting his ear against Ilya's chest, listening to the uneven, heavy thud of Ilya's heart. It was the only sound that mattered. *His*.

Ilya's hand found his face after a moment. It was clumsy at first, fumbling, then softer, more certain. His fingers brushed over the bridge of Shane's nose, then his cheek, tracing lightly across the scatter of freckles there, like he was mapping something important, something he didn't want to forget.

A small, weary smile pulled at the corner of his mouth.

"Мой любимый…" he muttered, voice barely above a whisper. He paused then, carefully picking the right words through his clouded brain. "Ты… как созвездие. Много звёзд… на твоём лице…" *You... are like a constellation. Many stars... on your face...*

Shane was so, so full of love.

He lifted his head just enough to catch Ilya's gaze, eyes soft, something aching and full in his chest. He shifted his grip in Ilya's curls, warm and grounding, before he leaned in, pressing a gentle, lingering kiss to his dry lips.

"Then you're my universe," he whispered against his mouth. "моя вселенная."

Ilya's smile stayed as he drifted, softer now, eyelids growing heavy. Shane brushed his thumb along his cheekbone one last time, then settled back carefully, guiding him down, never fully breaking contact.

Where am I supposed to put all this love? It fills me and it destroys me. It's terrifying and it's the best thing I've ever felt. I look at you and I would cross oceans just to make you happy. I want to give you everything I have. It's so much, it overflows.

“Спи,” he says, again. “Я здесь.” *Sleep. I’m here.*

Ilya’s eyes slipped shut, the curl on his lips still lingering. Shane didn’t move; he watched the rhythmic rise and fall of Ilya’s chest, still frazzled from the events of the day. Scared that if he looked away for a moment, someone might take Ilya away from him.

He sat there for a long time with his hand anchored in Ilya’s hair. Every now and then, he brushed the back of his hand lightly against his temple, as if making sure the pain stayed gone.

He almost missed the sound. A soft thud coming from the door - barely anything, really. But Shane’s head snapped up instantly.

Every bit of softness vanished, protective instincts taking the wheel instead. His spine went rigid and he straightened up, gaze turning predatory. His hand stayed on Ilya, anchoring him, but his eyes locked onto the door.

Standing in the sliver of light from the hallway was Troy Barrett.

For a long, endless second, neither of them said a word. Troy looked like he stumbled into a warzone – clearly, he didn’t mean to interrupt, let alone be noticed. Surprisingly, he didn’t look nearly as shocked as Shane expected him to be. He looked weirdly calm about the fact he caught the Montreal Voyageurs captain whispering sweet nothing to his mortal rival.

Shane straightened his shoulders, careful not to jostle the sleeping man, but his body instinctively moved to shield Ilya from Troy’s view.

"If you say a word about this," Shane said, his voice dropping into a low edge, "you’re dead." He didn’t blink nor tried to scramble for an explanation – it was useless at that point - but he meant it with every fiber of his being.

Troy’s hands went up instantly, his blue eyes blown wide in the dim room. "Hey- hey, Hollander, relax. I’m not-" He exhaled sharply, running a hand through his hair as he lowered his voice. "I’m not going to say anything."

Troy shifted his weight, looking around the bare hospital room, eyes not meeting Shane’s yet. “Ilya is a close friend. Probably my closest on the team.” He hesitated, looking at the floor before meeting Shane’s defensive glare again. "I… I came out to him. A while ago. He didn’t say much, but he let me understand I wasn’t the only one. And it was obvious he had a mysterious partner. For who it was... I had my suspicions."

That made Shane pause, the tension in his jaw loosening for just a second.

Troy gave a small, awkward shrug. "He didn’t make it a big deal. You know how he is.” He glanced toward the bed, where Ilya was still dead to the world, curled toward Shane as if gravitating toward the sun. "Your secret’s safe with me."

The silence that followed was heavy, filled only by the wheeze of the hospital vents and the far away chatter of the nurses. Shane studied him, weighing the honesty in Troy’s face – but

Ilya trusted this man. He trusted him with such a big part of himself, and that had to be enough. Slowly, the tension left Shane's shoulders.

"Okay," Shane finally conceded.

Troy nodded, accepting the truce. He lingered for a moment, his curiosity winning out over caution. "Why do you know Russian?" he asked softly.

Shane let out a shaky breath that was too tired to be a laugh - something raw and exhausted. He looked down at Ilya before answering.

"Learned it," he said simply.

When Troy pressed him on the *why*, Shane's fingers moved absentmindedly through Ilya's blonde curls, his touch slow and careful, as if he couldn't stop himself now that the world had eventually slowed down a bit.

"Because I wanted him to be able to talk," Shane said after a long silence. "Fully. Well, his English is almost perfect by now. That's… not what I mean."

His thumb traced the edge of Ilya's bruised cheekbone. "I want him to be able to express himself freely. English is hard for feelings sometimes, for him."

He looked at the way Ilya's face finally looked peaceful, pain smoothed out by sleep. "He gave up so much for me. For us. This felt like… a really small thing." Shane continued. "Moved countries, gave up his motherland. Kept us a secret because I am paranoid and anxious. Because I want to protect us. Because I'm the one who's really afraid."

Shane looks up, eyes stinging. "Compared to that, learning a couple thousand words feels very small."

Troy nodded slowly, watching how Shane's hand never stopped moving, never stopped comforting the sleeping man on the bed. His face changed, like something finally clicked. "Yeah," Troy whispered. "Doesn't look that small from here."

Shane didn't answer. He just glanced back down at Ilya, who moved in his sleep, a soft and unintelligible mumble in his native tongue slipping past his lips. Shane's expression warmed instantly, the hard edge he'd shown Troy nowhere to be found.

"Спи," he whispered under his breath, grazing his thumb lightly against Ilya's temple. *Sleep.*

Troy watched them for a heartbeat longer, then gave a quiet, knowing nod. "He's lucky," he said, stepping back towards the door.

Shane's lips pressed together. "No," he said, then added so softly it was almost to himself: "I am."

-

Ilya nudged the door open with his shoulder, letting his gear bag hit the floor with a heavy, familiar thud. His shoulders ached, his head still felt a little airy from morning skate, and his legs were in post-practice mode - twitching with adrenaline and exhaustion, but the first thing he looked for was Shane. It was always Shane.

Shane was staked out on the couch like he belonged there – and he did. He belonged everywhere Ilya was; sitting way too straight up on the couch, laptop open on some random match replay, hair sticking up in messy tufts. He looked up as Ilya walked in, lifting a hand in a lazy wave and gesturing for him to come closer.

“How was practice? Head okay?” Shane asked, his eyes already narrowing in the specific way that meant he was going to be fussed over. Ilya knew Shane would worry. It was his first day back on the ice since the hospital, and Shane had made him swear a blood oath he’d sit out the second he became “dizzy, lightheaded, or even if you’re tired. You sit down like a good boy, okay?” and Ilya had grinned, kissed him, and sealed the promise.

They migrated to the kitchen - Shane getting some healthy concoction of his out of the fridge while Ilya leaned back against the counter, still in his damp practice gear.

“Practice was okay, *moy lyubimyy*.” Ilya replied, watching Shane’s back. “I even sat down when I felt a little dizzy.” Shane spun around so fast he nearly dropped a container of meal prep. The admission Ilya had felt even a twinge of discomfort making his alarm bells set off. Ilya just laughed, holding up a hand to calm him. “Was nothing. Sat down and drank electrolytes and felt better. Relax.”

Ilya stepped into Shane’s space then, cornering him against the counter with a lazy, teasing grin, leaving just enough space for Shane to start squirming. He waited a beat before narrowing his eyes. “By the way… why did Troy say I’m ‘very lucky to have you’?” His voice dropped, mock-serious. “He looked like he was confessing murder.”

Shane snorted, a flush creeping up his neck. “Nothing much,” he said, shrugging. “We ran into each other at the hospital. Where he found out about us. And I told him I’d kill him if he opened his mouth.”

Ilya tilted his head slowly, studying the way Shane wouldn’t quite meet his eyes. He knew there was more. “…And?”

Shane shifted, cheeks turning a faint pink. “I… tried to talk to you.” He admitted. “Some words. In Russian. To help you feel better.”

Ilya’s eyes widened a little. He leaned in, playful but curious. “Oh yeah? Some words?” He tilted his head even further, teasing, giving Shane an affectionate nudge. “Because Troy told me you talked to me for half an hour. Why don’t you talk at home when I am not concussed and I can actually hear you?”

Shane stopped with his coffee cup halfway to his mouth. The blush spread all the way to the tips of his ears as they moved back towards the living room. “I am not good at it. I need more practice,” he grumbled.

Ilya didn't give him a chance to retreat. He dropped onto the couch beside him before Shane could protest, stretching across him, curling his legs in Shane's lap, hands brushing over Shane's arm. "You didn't have to learn, you know." he says softly, the teasing edge finally dropping out. "I'm good at English."

Shane's heart clenched. He didn't even realize he was doing it, but he leaned in, aching to be closer to Ilya. "Your English is perfect. It's not… I wanted to," he stuttered. "Ilya… I want you to be able to say what's on your mind without barriers. You told me more than once that you feel better talking about your feelings in Russian. And you've done so much for me, for us that this feels like the bare minimum."

Ilya's expression softened, the teasing leaving him, replaced by a quiet warmth. "Sweetheart. You learnt a whole new language for me. That is not small," he shifted, the couch creaking slightly under them as he tangled his limbs with Shane's, his knee sliding over Shane's thigh, trapping him there without even trying. A possessive, comforting weight. "You - you didn't have to. Really," he whispered, fingers brushing over Shane's hand.

Then, he pulled out his cutest pouty face. The face Shane could never refuse. "But… Скажи что-нибудь. Please?" *Say something.*

Shane bit his lip. He felt the heat crawling up his neck. Why was he embarrassed? This was just Ilya. He'd never make fun of him. He reached out, his hand finding its way to the other's nape, his fingers disappearing into the hair there just to have something to ground him.

"Я…" Shane started in clumsy Russian, searching, gears turning. Switching languages like this was still difficult. Then, quiet and deliberate. "Я рад, что ты в порядке." *I'm glad you're okay.*

Ilya smiles, looking at Shane so, so warmly – quietly in awe. "…You are glad I am okay," he repeats softly.

Shane gave a stiff little shrug, feeling self-conscious again. "Yeah, well. Obviously I-"

But Ilya didn't let him brush it off. His hand came up on Shane's cheek and tightened just slightly at his jaw, not enough to hurt, but firm enough to stop Shane from looking away.

"Ты сказал больше в больнице," Ilya added. "I know you did. I feel it." *You said more at the hospital.*

Shane went still. Because yeah, he did. He had bared his heart out and tried so hard to be enough for Ilya. And he wasn't sure Ilya wanted to talk about his mom. It had always been, and always will be, a sore spot. A permanent hole in Ilya's heart that he could never fill.

"Да, сказал." Shane got out. *Yes, I did.*

But Ilya was looking at him now; not teasing, not pushing - just waiting. Surprised that Shane was even speaking. Like this was the biggest gift he had ever received.

Shane swallowed. His fingers tightened again in Ilya's curls.

“...Мне нужно больше практики.” he muttered weakly. *I need more practice.*

Ilya smiles, soft and warm, his forehead thumping gently against Shane’s.

“Тогда практикуйся со мной,” he whispers. *Then practice with me.*

Shan didn’t pull back. He kept his hand in those curls, stroking and tugging softly. He pressed a kiss to Ilya’s cheek and felt the other almost purr in bliss, soaking up all the attention. “I’ll tell you this,” Shane whispered.

“Когда ты был в больнице… ты спрашивал про свою мама.” *When you were in the hospital… you asked for your mom.*

Ilya went rigid, guilt washing over his face. His eyes snapped open, breath catching in unexpected panic. For a long beat, he just stared at Shane, looking completely lost. “Я прости…” *I’m sorry…* “I did not want you to be burdened with this.”

“No,” Shane said, his voice firm, cutting through the apology. He brushed his thumb against Ilya’s cheek. “Not sorry,” he said firmly. “Never be sorry about this, Ilya.”

Shane swallowed. His gaze dropped for a second, his own nerves fraying. When he looked back up, he felt laid bare. “You didn’t know,” he added quietly. “You were… out of it. You were scared.” His fingers made circular movements into Ilya’s scalp, dropping little kisses on the other’s face. He needed the contact as much as Ilya did.

“And you kept asking for her,” Shane admitted, his voice low. “And I didn’t know what to do to comfort you. How to make it better. I probably overstepped.”

Ilya just looked at him and waited, wanting him to continue. Desperate.

“I told you she was far away right now,” he continued. “Что она далеко сейчас…”

Ilya’s breath caught. Shane kept going, his voice dropping, careful. He stumbled over a couple of syllables, but he didn’t stop, his heart full of love. He felt himself tremble with a quiet urgency of needing Ilya to *know*, to let him feel just how much he mattered. All the lengths he’d go to make him feel okay. “Но она послала меня.” *But she sent me.*

Ilya’s eyes started to shine.

“Потому что она знает…” Shane continued, his Russian slower, more careful now, like each word mattered too much to rush. *Because she knows,*

“…что я тебя очень люблю.” *That I love you so, so much.*

And that was what broke him. Ilya’s lip gave a pathetic little wobble, tears spilling over. He reached out frantically, hand fisting in the fabric of Shane’s shirt, clutching at him like he was a little kid trying to hide.

“You are perfect. Мой дорогой.” He swallowed hard, voice thick and broken. *My darling.* “Is true. She sent you to me. You are my miracle.”

Shane swallowed, heart hammering against his ribs. He pulled Ilya in, tucking him into the crook of his neck and pressing a soft kiss to his temple. “I didn’t need to be sent,” he whispered into Ilya’s skin, voice low. “I’d have come anyway. I would’ve found you.”

Ilya’s tears fell freely then, and he nuzzled closer, his face hidden against Shane’s collarbone. “She would’ve said that. She would have loved you so much.”

For a second, Shane couldn’t speak. His throat felt like it had closed shut, chest too full. He’d heard Ilya say these words before, but it never got easier. It never stopped hitting him square in the chest. So, he did the only thing he could. He pulled Ilya closer. A firm, grounding hold. Holding him in against his chest, one hand snaking on his back, between his ribs, feeling him breathe.

“I will practice more so we can talk freely. I haven’t done much.” Shane mumbled. *I I will practice until I can give you a piece of home that doesn’t destroy you.*

“You have,” Ilya replies, stubbornly. “You are always so good. So special,” he says, warmth and love seeping into every word. “Even when you make it sound small. My Shane.”

“Я тебя люблю,” *I love you*. Shane hums, brushing his lips on the top of Ilya’s head. “You have done so much more. I want to do everything for you. I want to give you everything,” he breathes.

“Я тоже,” Ilya said. *Me too*. He shifted his weight, pressing his face deeper into Shane’s shoulder. “But I did it for us. You did this for me. Only me.”

They stayed like that for a long while, hearts soft against one another. Just the sound of their breathing syncing up. Shane thought of an old saying. Thinking how beautiful it is to be understood. *To be loved is to be known*, someone once said. *And I have never felt known until you.*

Ilya pressed closer, whispering, his voice a vibration against Shane’s chest. “Ты мой.” *You’re mine*.

Shane smiled, closing his eyes, letting the weight of it all sink in. “навсегда.” *Forever.*

End Notes

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