

don't know which way to go

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/79976646) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/79976646>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , David Hollander & Shane Hollander & Yuna Hollander
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Sickfic , Sick Shane Hollander , Soft Ilya Rozanov , Panic Attacks , Anxious Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , (and he gets one!) , Overwhelmed Shane Hollander , i need to wrap him in a blanket and protect him from the world so he can Relax for once , the cottage , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-21 Words: 7,852 Chapters: 1/1

don't know which way to go

by [ad_castra](#)

Summary

Twelve hours, Shane reminds himself. Twelve hours, and then he can come home and sleep for as long as he needs with nobody to disturb him.

He can do this.

Or, Shane gets sick and thinks he can hide it. Ilya sees right through him.

Notes

Hollanov has sunk its claws into my skin and infected every part of me like some violent body-consuming virus from an apocalyptic universe. HELP ME.

There's no set time period for this aside from post-first cottage visit but pre-being outed, this is set somewhere in the middle. I wrote the bulk of this at 3am on a work night so timestamps were the last thing on my mind haha.

Big shoutout to my wonderful gf and to my friend Fifi for reading over this and helping me make it Acceptable <33 Title is from when the levee breaks by led zep. I hope you enjoy!

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

It starts with a headache.

Scratch that. It starts when Shane steadfastly ignores the pain in his bones from the second he wakes up, alarm blaring at 07:00 and alerting him to the day ahead. He is not in full sickness territory yet, but something is definitely wrong. Moving hurts, and sitting up sends a wave of nausea over him.

Instinctively, he calls for his mother, before remembering he stupidly retreated to the quiet safety of his cottage for this week and is completely alone. At the time, it had seemed like a good idea to give himself six days of peace amid one day of chaos, but now that the *thought* of moving has him retching against the back of his hand, he fears it was a very stupid decision.

He narrowly avoids being sick, but that doesn't make the feeling go away. He wishes he could cancel his plans and curl back up in bed, but he has a busy day ahead of him, namely the Rolex sponsorship his mom fought for and *finally* won. It took her months to sort out, so although his body yearns for sleep, Shane drags himself out of bed and sets about getting ready.

He sluggishly puts on the button-up shirt and freshly ironed pants he'd left out last night. His hands shake as he fastens the buttons.

He doesn't want to go.

He doesn't want to go.

He misses his pyjamas, the warm comfort of his bed, the weighted blanket boxing him in. He misses being asleep and not feeling gradual pain seeping through his body.

But 07:10 quickly approaches, and the cab will arrive at 07:45. He doesn't have a choice.

Shane puts both feet on each step as he slowly retreats downstairs, white-knuckle gripping the bannister to keep himself upright. He shuffles into the kitchen, socks sliding smoothly across wood, and grabs his concoction of fruit from the fridge.

Opening the tupperware lid is a mammoth task despite his usual strength. It pops after a few tries, and he dumps it into the blender without reevaluating if what he prepared last night is actually what he is in the mood for now.

If his phone alarm irritated him, the *schhhh* of the blender summons the telltale signs of a headache. Dull pounding on the right side of his skull, like someone starts tapping a stone against it and steadily upgrades to launching a brick directly at him. It fucking *hurts*. He struggles to hold the jug when he pours the liquid into his flask, his vision unfocused.

One sip. Two. Instead of alleviating the pain, it's as though it only increases tenfold. He really isn't in the mood for this smoothie, but he needs energy. Shane squeezes his eyes shut and takes three more sips, then a deep breath.

07:25. He was meant to do some light exercise before getting dressed, and the realisation that he forgot weighs heavy on his chest. Or maybe that's just another symptom, a red flag that he *is* sick and maybe he should not force himself to power through.

Everything is backwards now. He does not have time to change into his gym gear and then back again. 25 minutes into his day and he is already off track.

Great.

Shane finishes the smoothie and dumps the flask in the sink, vowing to wash it as soon as he returns home tonight (at 19:45, God, *twelve hours* from now). At the doorway, he shoves his feet into his sneakers, worried that bending down to untie and retie the laces will permanently alter his vision sideways. He slept for ten hours but feels like it was only ten minutes, each movement lethargic and slow.

A belated cough finally breaks past his throat. No, *no*, he is *not* sick. Not today, not when he has so much to do and so many people relying on him.

He swallows down his worry, and another cough that threatens to escape. With the extra time he'd allocated for exercise, Shane instead raids his kitchen cabinets until he locates a packet of painkillers. Popping two out, he chugs them down with a glass of water.

He refills the glass and drinks another, overcome with a sudden bout of heat. How is it suddenly so warm in the middle of winter?

07:43. His phone buzzes, signalling the cab's arrival.

Shane ditches the glass next to his flask, briefly chastising himself for not just using the same one instead of giving himself extra work for later. He grabs his wallet, his phone, and his pre-packed duffel, and hurries outside.

Locking the door takes him right up to 07:45, his hand too shaky to get the key in the lock first try. Luckily, the driver is patient, he does not complain when Shane finally calmbars into the car and sinks against the backrest. A weight lifts from his shoulders, the ache almost gone now that he can rest for a minute.

"Okay to play music?" The man asks, his accent thick. It's not too dissimilar to Ilya's, Shane thinks, except this one is a bit sharper, a bit more Germanic. Or maybe it's not similar at all, and he is just looking for scraps of familiar comfort wherever he can find it.

No, please, don't, Shane almost says, because he needs calm and quiet so he can psych himself up for the non-stop chaos awaiting him. But the driver waited the extra time while Shane fumbled the lock, and the A/C is on as though he somehow knows Shane is overheating... Shane can't be rude, not when he has been inside the vehicle for all of ten seconds.

"Yes," he says, voice straining. It hurts to talk. *Why* does it hurt to talk?

"Yes," the man repeats, an affirmation. "You tell me if want different."

Shane nods because speaking again might kill him. Jazz thrums through the speakers, the last thing Shane expected to hear, but it could be worse. The driver could have been obsessed with death metal or something. Shane will count his blessings wherever he can find them.

Closing his eyes, Shane leans his head back and breathes deeply, in through his nose and out through his mouth. To the man's credit, he drives very carefully, the ride as comfortable as it can be with Shane's body vibrating out of his skin.

Twelve hours, he reminds himself. Twelve hours, and then he can come home and sleep for as long as he needs, in the peace of his own safe-space with nobody to disturb him.

He can do this.

— — — — —

Shane can't do this.

So far, he survived breakfast with his parents in the cafe next door to the studio. He survived his mom's rundown of their ever-so-rigorous schedule, reminding him exactly when he is to meet with the marketing director and then the photographer and then and then and *then and then*. Shane loses track quickly, now that black spots are seeping into the corner of his vision and threatening to stay there.

His dad takes pity on him, sliding a ginger ale across the table and smiling softly at him. Maybe he senses something is amiss? Regardless, there is no escaping the fact that in a few moments, Shane will have to *stand up* and *walk across the street* and *meet all the crew* and somehow *pose in front of a camera* as if his entire skeleton isn't actively trying to burst out of the confines of his skin.

Okay, he *might* be sick. He might not survive this.

His lips part, almost confessing, and he knows (he *thinks*) his mom would understand and shut down the whole shoot with a single phone call if required. But... he can't bring himself to ask, not after how much work she put into getting him here. Weeks and weeks of preparation all for this big day. Nine and a half hours now, give or take, and it will be over anyways.

Mom worked so, so hard to secure this for you, Shane reminds himself. *You owe it to her to see this through*.

He bites his tongue. After paying the bill, he and his parents wander over to the studio. Shane's duffel bag is almost as heavy as his body feels; his dad would sometimes carry it for him as a kid, but he is stronger now. He should be able to handle this.

As soon as they safely cross the road, Shane squeezes his eyes shut, willing the black spots to dissipate before he goes inside.

They go inside.

The black spots do not dissipate.

The event is a whirlwind from start to end. Shane greets new people without hearing what words pass his lips, repeating names and pleasantries on autopilot as he manoeuvres through the introductions and briefings and whatever else he is not paying attention to. His only reprieve is when they sit him down for a few minutes to do some light makeup. The artist does not criticise him for his slouched posture, she just pats some light blusher on his cheeks, citing that he needs some color about him.

“Are you feeling okay, Mr. Hollander?” She is kind enough to ask, her smile genuine as she dabs some concealer over his undereye circles.

“Yeah,” Shane lies, clearing his throat so he can at least *sound* convincing. “I’m alright.”

“Okay. You tell me if that changes,” she says, and moves on to some finishing touches.

It changes the second he stands back up, but Shane keeps quiet. They guide him over to a table next to an older man, who shows him the array of products with an even more convoluted explanation on the specifics as he fastens one onto Shane’s wrist. The camera-woman observes, highlighting what sort of poses and what sort of angles she is looking for. Shane tries his best to make room for all of the information inside his overloaded brain, but by the time they lead him over to the platform, all he really knows is he needs to show his arm and probably not look like he is about to pass out. Any other instructions were white noise.

Needless to say, the shoot is not his best. The camera-woman barks lots of orders at him, not unkindly, but rather to keep him from constantly forgetting what he is meant to be doing. The man — Shane already cannot remember his name or his role, but he seems to be the most important guy here; he’s in a shirt and tie and is in charge of where Shane stands and what he models and when — is much less sympathetic. He keeps telling Shane to *bring some life into it, smile more, smoulder at the camera!* and whatever else goes in one of Shane’s ears and out the other.

He tries. Really, he tries. At the end, the camera-woman smiles as she flicks through her roll, and even the strict man comments a few times. *Oh, that’s a good one. Yeah, that’s the stuff. Fantastic, Paulina, this is the one.*

Maybe there is hope. Maybe this man will not hunt Yuna down and chew her out for bringing this disaster into his studio.

More pleasantries. Farewells, this time. The kind makeup artist returns with some facewipes and gently removes the product from Shane’s skin, but even after that he still does not feel clean. The extra layer had his cheeks flushed bright, and even after it’s gone a thin sheen of sweat still shows on his skin.

He needs *air*.

“You did great,” the woman praises, as though she can sense Shane needs a pick-me-up.

He thinks he says thank you. He’s not sure if he does. He’s not really sure of anything, moving around in a daze as he gathers his things and shakes the strict man’s hand and slips

out of the room to find his parents before he collapses face-down on the floor.

His phone buzzes in his pocket as he traverses the hallway. He ignores it until it happens three more times in succession. Shane relents to the temptation and leans against the wall for support, pulling out his phone.

He unlocks it, greeted with the rare sight of Ilya Rozanov quadruple-texting.

Lily (14:03): *hello*

Lily (14:03): *how was photoshoot?*

Lily (14:04): *I can't wait to see >:)*

Lily (14:08): *we are still on for tonight, yes?*

Even rarer is Shane's sigh of despair at the thought of Ilya visiting. Normally, it would be the calm after the very vicious, stressful storm. Right now, however, Shane cannot think of anything worse than someone orbiting his space, talking to him and asking him questions and making him be productive and do things. He just wants to *rest*, is it too much to ask, can't he just—?

"Hi, honey!" His mom's voice sings through his racing thoughts, snapping him back to the present as she rushes over. He shoves his phone in his pocket just in time to be embraced by her bone-crushing hug, and *fuck* if that doesn't exacerbate his pain. "I heard it went really well, they had a lot of nice things to say about you!"

That's surprising. Shane clears his throat and tries to match her enthusiasm. "Y-yeah. Yeah, yeah, they were really nice. It was... good."

Yuna squeezes him again and squeaks happily, then pulls back and claps her hands together. The loud noise goes straight to Shane's head, searing pain reverberating through it. "Well! You must be starving. The table is booked for three, so if we start driving now we'll get there just before."

Anxiety roils in Shane's gut. He can't do this, he can't go for lunch with his family and then a bunch of strangers, he *can't*.

"Actually, mom..." he starts, but the words get locked in his throat. It doesn't matter what he does and doesn't want to do, he *has* to do this, for everyone's sake. She's so excited, this entire day has been planned for weeks, he *cannot* ruin this for everyone.

In his pocket, his phone starts vibrating again. Once. Twice. Three times. Four.

It's not a text message, it's a phone call.

"—uh, that sounds great." *Smooth save, Shane.* "Can I, can I take this call first and meet you outside? I'll be quick."

Kudos to Yuna and David, neither of them question it. Shane waits until they are both out of earshot before pulling his phone back out, just in case.

Sure enough, *Lily* flashes across the screen.

He answers, turning the volume down halfway before holding the phone to his ear.

“Hi?”

“My phone says you read my message but you did not reply,” Ilya drawls, amusement in his tone. “Not very nice. You should not ghost me.”

Shane lacks the energy to bother asking where the hell Ilya learned about ‘ghosting’. “Sorry,” he whispers. “Was talking to my mom.”

A mock-gasp. Shane can *hear* Ilya dramatically clutching his heart in faux hurt. “You ghost me for your mother!”

Any other time, Shane would laugh. Today, though, his patience wanes thin. “Why are you calling?” It comes out much harsher than he intends.

Ilya pauses. Guilt tugs at Shane’s heartstrings. There’s no more joking, no more humour, when Ilya asks, “To ask if we are still on for tonight?”

He sounds so hopeful. After snapping at him, Shane cannot find it in himself to say no. Hopefully he can squeeze in a quick nap before Ilya arrives, and that will rejuvenate him enough to be a good host.

“We are,” he says, despite his body’s non-stop, screaming tirade to let it rest. “But, uh, I need to push it back to 9pm. Is that okay?”

“Yes, that’s okay,” Ilya confirms without any questions, which is very unlike him. Maybe it’s because Shane snapped.

“I’m-I’m sorry for snapping, Ilya,” he rasps, throat gradually starting to sting. “I’m just...”

A soft sigh from the other end of the phone, warm and affectionate. “Don’t worry. My Jane has a very stressful day.”

“Yeah,” Shane’s voice cracks at the acknowledgement that this *is* stressful, at *Jane* indicating that although Ilya is apparently not alone, he still took the time to check in.

“Are you okay? You sound very tired.”

“Yeah,” Shane lies. He’s doing that a lot today. “Um, I need to go... my parents—”

“Okay. I see you tonight,” Ilya says. He makes a kiss sound through the phone that would normally have Shane cringing and scolding him, but today has tears welling up behind his eyes. “Be kind to yourself. Love you.”

“I love you.”

The line disconnects. Shane’s headache reappears instantly, worse than it was before.

He finds his footing and forces one step in front of the next, until he is inside his parents’ car and on their way to lunch. The journey is a brief, much-needed break before the rest of the day commences — more food, more people, more appearances to uphold.

Like during the morning cab ride, Shane closes his eyes. He can survive this day, and he can survive the journey back home, and then he can nap for an hour and survive Ilya’s visit.

He can *do this*.

— — — — —

Shane is late arriving home. A chain of events is to blame.

The restaurant was busy. Wait times were long. They sent out the wrong type of salad, and his mom insisted on sending it back to remake for him, even though Shane knew it would add extra time onto this lunch *and* he probably wouldn’t be able to stomach most of the food. Everyone got along too well, so instead of parting ways after lunch, it turned into drinks and conversation.

With the excuse of his super-strict schedule, Shane had slipped away shortly after 6pm to organise his ride home and also get some fresh air and silence. Turns out, that small window of calm was very much needed, because as soon as he steps into his cab, Shane learns that this driver is much less considerate than the last. He is very chatty and apparently watches hockey, which means a million and one questions for Shane. It only adds to the thumping behind his skull. His voice gradually fades, each word scratchy and sore as he attempts to answer the man.

As a cherry on top, the traffic is bad. Abysmally so. Between the endless red lights and the driver's constant talking, Shane’s predicted 19:45 arrival turns into 20:50.

He has ten fucking minutes before Ilya gets here.

He can’t nap in ten minutes. He can’t even decompress in ten minutes!

He definitely has time to rinse the dishes and go upstairs to change into a more comfortable outfit, but Shane barely closes the door behind him before he staggers down the hallway and into the kitchen, his energy depleting at an alarming rate. His duffel bag falls at his feet, and only now does he spot the pills on the kitchen counter.

No wonder his headache is splitting, unmedicated for most of the day. If he’d remembered the pills, would he be more functional?

Hands trembling, Shane clumsily pops two pills and swallows them dry, too exhausted to get water. In a horrific, nausea-induced daze, he stumbles over to the dining table and into the chair, slumping over the table with a loud groan. Maybe a five minute nap here is better than nothing...?

His mind races at the speed of sound. Now that he thinks about it, he didn't make his bed this morning. Last night's clothes are strewn all around his bedroom. The dishes in the sink, his duffel discarded in the middle of the kitchen... the thought of Ilya witnessing him being so *not* put together should spur Shane into action, but one minute drags into two and he remains slouched over, forehead resting against the chilled wood as a light sheen of sweat breaks out over his skin like it did in the studio.

His body aches, breaths coming out irregular. He's too warm, but he has so, *so* much to do.

Moving proves impossible. He wishes the ground would swallow him up so he does not need to face Ilya arriving to Shane's barely-functional self and the chaos around his home. For a slight, blissful moment, Shane's mind starts to switch off, but then his phone, still tucked into his pocket, buzzes in rapid succession.

A car door slams in the distance, tyres rolling over grit as it pulls out of the driveway. Seconds later, a loud *rap-rap-rap* on the door, Ilya banging his fist against the wood with zero consideration of Shane's headache (granted, that's not fair — how could Ilya know? But at this rate any noise has Shane's temper waning).

Get up, his mind wills him. *Get up, answer the door, Ilya is outside.*

"Shane?" Sure enough, Ilya's voice calls out, muffled but unmistakably him. "Are you here?"

Another knock. More vibrations. Shane's phone rings on and off, his caller persistent. **Lily** appears and disappears over and over again, and it would just take a simple swipe of Shane's finger to answer, apologise, and woefully send Ilya home. But Shane struggles to muster what little energy he has left.

Texts flood in next.

Lily (21:07) *are you home?*

Lily (21:08) *cottage is the correct place?*

Lily (21:08) *I'm outside. very cold :(*

Lily (21:09) *where are you?*

Tears burn up behind Shane's eyes. He can't decide if he wants to yell for Ilya to fuck off, or to gather his strength and let him inside so he can never leave. His heart wants comfort, but his brain knows he cannot have it, he cannot selfishly demand Ilya to stay here and clean up after him and risk his own health now that Shane is, undoubtedly, *very* fucking ill.

Ilya finally stops knocking, as though he can sense Shane needs the peace. Keys jiggle in the lock, and for a split second Shane wonders how the hell Ilya knows how to pick it, until he remembers that he gave Ilya a set of keys a while back, after a flight delay had poor Ilya sitting on the steps for three hours in the middle of the night. It was a good idea at the time, giving him unlimited access, but now all Shane can see are negatives. Ilya is going to get sick. Ilya will see the mess and see Shane as a mess and never come back and —

Suddenly, it's all too much.

"Don't come in," Shane whines, but it's no use. His hoarse voice is barely audible, and Ilya slides the door open, welcoming an icy gust of wind until the door shuts behind him.

Ilya moves quietly, treading lightly as he shuffles his boots off and kicks them out of the way. In the distance Shane hears his coat rustle, no doubt discarded over the back of a chair. A loud thud signals his backpack being dumped somewhere on the floor. Normally, Ilya is under strict orders to put his shoes under the heater and his coat on the rack, everything in its rightful place; but Shane can't be bothered reminding him and Ilya seems more focused on locating him.

Soft footsteps pad along the hallway as Ilya embarks on his hunt for Shane. He thinks Ilya calls out for him a couple of times, but he's too busy wrangling with the agony in his bones to concentrate on specifics.

He slumps further over the table, entire upper body resting against it, mentally preparing for Ilya to find him.

Eventually, Ilya enters the kitchen. His footsteps are feather-light, socks sliding across wooden floors as he slowly wanders in, stopping dead at the sight that greets him.

"Hi," Shane grits out.

The keys rattle when Ilya tosses them onto the counter. "Shane, what's wrong?" He hurries over, strong hands instantly resting on each of Shane's shoulders as he fruitlessly coaxes him into sitting up.

Shane remains firmly curled up, scowling pointedly at the wood.

"My love, are you okay? Why are you sitting like a shrimp's posture?"

Where to start? His bones, throbbing since this morning and feeling far too big for the body they inhabit; his head's endless pounding and the black spots overtaking his vision, sapping all concentration; the nausea preventing him from standing up and opening a fucking door; the coughing, the rattling inside his chest, God, Shane *hurts*, he can't stand up, he can't *move*

Shane does not realise he is crying until Ilya starts rubbing firm, soothing circles on his back. His other hand cups Shane's jaw, gently guiding his gaze up until their eyes lock. Ilya's eyebrows knit tightly together, eyes scanning every inch of Shane's face. His thumb caresses Shane's cheek, wiping away the tears that will not stop flowing.

"You're crying." Ilya's voice shakes, laced with concern, and it strikes Shane that Ilya looks completely out of his depth.

Fuck. Ilya expected dinner and sex and a calm, relaxing night. He was in no way prepared for this. Shane knew all day he was off his game but did not have the decency to even prewarn Ilya.

The shame and guilt crashes into him at once. He wriggles out of Ilya's hold and buries his head in his arms, aching body wracking with sobs that only worsen his pain. Despite his biggest stress for the past two hours being the lack of alone-time, he belatedly realises that he really, really does not want Ilya to leave.

"Don't-don't go," Shane begs out loud, words barely decipherable.

"I'm here," Ilya says softly. "Talk to me."

"I can't — s-so *stupid*,"

Ilya's hand returns to its spot on Shane's shoulder, a ground presence for Shane to latch on to. "What is stupid?"

"*This*," Shane sobs. "I, everything is wrong. I'm late, you're late, my head hurts, Ilya—"

"I'm not late." Ilya frowns. He presses the back of his hand against Shane's forehead and winces at the temperature. "You have fever," he announces. He studies Shane a little harder, eyes squinting. "And panic attack, I think. Bad combination."

Shane trembles, and he is not sure whether it's from the fever or the panic, but Ilya is definitely right that it is a bad combination. No wonder he is struggling to breathe.

Ilya's eyes dart around the kitchen, landing on the pill packet on the counter. Between that, the fever, and Shane's fading voice, it does not take much to figure out the truth. "You are sick," Ilya says, not a question but an observation.

Despite the mountain of evidence stacked against him, Shane shakes his head, which is an immediate, very dizzying mistake. He retches and hunches over in a vain attempt to stop himself throwing up, barely managing to escape it.

Ilya does not step back in disgust. He doesn't tell Shane to go to the bathroom and sort himself out. He stays, gentle touches and soft-spoken words as he kneels down to be closer to Shane's level, wide eyes gazing up at him with worry rather than lust. It's a strange, disconcerting angle. A fever dream, Shane briefly theorises. Makes sense.

Ilya gently wipes away his tears. "You are sick," he reaffirms, and glances towards the hallway. "I think you should lie down."

"N-no," Shane says through gritted teeth. The mere thought of moving has him crying harder.

"Okay, Shane, nevermind. Nevermind," Ilya reassures, his hand dropping down to clasp over Shane's own. He squeezes it gently. "Is okay, shh. We can stay here until you are ready."

Having learned from his first mistake, Shane does not shake his head again, but he does scowl in a way that he hopes conveys '*absolutely not*'. He clears his throat. "I-I need to make dinner—"

"No, you need to breathe," Ilya cuts him off, He murmurs soft reassurances and presses his lips to Shane's hand, soft comforts amidst the pain.

It's not enough. Shane is laser-focused on the important things. "What d'you want for dinner?" he tries again, his voice scratchy and raw.

"What do I... *Shane*." Ilya laughs softly in exasperation. "You are ridiculous."

Shane does not see what is so funny. He snuffles, frantically wiping his stinging eyes. "No, Ilya, I-I have so much to do, I need to..." he breaks off, squeezing his eyes shut as his headache's intensity picks up. Exhaustion crashes over him at once, a turbulent wave drowning him in the pressure of everything he is not strong enough to do, and the dam breaks.

Shane curls up into a ball, his shrimp's posture, apparently, except now he has Ilya to lean on and cry against. Rather than going it alone, Shane finds himself enveloped in a hug tight enough to secure him, but loose enough for him to escape if he truly wanted to.

It's exactly what he needs — someone to hold him without fully committing to it or trapping him.

"You are very stressed," Ilya notices, and he lightly kisses the top of Shane's head as he supports his weight. "Slow down, let yourself breathe. Is okay to sit here until it goes away." His words are filled with warm affection as he reverts to sweet nothings and reassurances, until Shane gets a handle on his emotions again.

Eventually, once Shane regulates his breathing, Ilya coaxes him to sit up fully. His arms curl around Shane and hold him close, so Shane can bury his head in Ilya's chest instead. Although he can't smell Ilya's usual scent of cologne and cigarettes and *Ilya*, he knows he's there. He can recognise the heartbeat, even if his sinuses fail him.

Shane calms himself down to the soothing rhythm of Ilya's breathing, the steady drum of his heart, the unwavering presence without any demand. Ilya does not force him to move, or demand he clean the house, or get frustrated that he can't handle his stress. Shane can't do something as simple as standing up, and Ilya is content to sit by and wait for him.

Ilya hums a tune Shane does not recognise, trailing his lips along Shane's arm until, for the first time in hours, the anxiety starts fading to the back of Shane's mind.

"Ilya," he whispers.

"Hm?"

"I feel calmer."

Shane feels Ilya smile against him. "Good. You are breathing calmer." This time, Ilya takes a different approach when proposing that Shane moves. "You lie down, and then I will tell you what I want for dinner, yes?"

Shane nods, equally as dizzying as when he had shook his head. But the thought of being able to please Ilya tides him over, and he manages to keep his lunch inside his stomach as

Ilya starts manoeuvring him. He supports Shane with ease, guiding him to his feet despite Shane's resistance.

"You're gunna get sick," Shane groans in protest, vision tilting every which way but normal as Ilya gets him upright.

"Don't care," Ilya says. "Walk with me, very slow."

Shane shuffles forward, shamelessly using Ilya as a crutch. How he managed to do a full shoot when he can now barely stand, Shane will never know. With Ilya's support, however, he manages to migrate from the kitchen to the living room in one piece, remaining vertical on shaky legs thanks to Ilya's strength in holding him up.

Rather unceremoniously, Shane stumbles forward and flops down onto the sofa, exhausted from the exertion. Instantly, the soft surface eases the agony in his body, and Shane vows to never leave.

He hears Ilya chuckle softly. Did he say that out loud?

Either way, Ilya seems to have no qualms about Shane staying here. He busies himself back and forth between the living room and elsewhere. Some distant thumping disturbs Shane whenever Ilya rummages through a cabinet or the fridge or wherever else he deems fit, but he soon returns with a bottle of water and some tissues. Shane can forgive the noise.

"Drink," Ilya commands, kneeling down in front of the sofa. Shane opens his mouth, allowing Ilya to press the bottle to his lips and tilt it forward. He manages five or six sips before he has to pull back. Ilya's too slow to rectify, some of the water spilling down Shane's chin and onto his shirt, but Shane can't bring himself to wipe it away.

His disgruntled groan gives away his annoyance, though. Ilya dabs at the stray drops around his chin, and then slides his thumb over the collar's button on Shane's shirt, unfastening it slowly.

"Off?" he asks. Shane nods eagerly; he's wanted this damn shirt off since 07:15 and nothing is more urgent than fulfilling that.

Shane never thought he'd see the day where Ilya undresses him painstakingly slowly, rather than tearing into his clothes so fast the buttons pop and the fabric tears because he is so eager to get underneath and lay claim to Shane's body. Every time this happens, it is rough and charged and for a shared, sole purpose. Now, though, each of Ilya's movements are slow and careful, with zero intent behind them aside from making Shane more comfortable, giving him a little more room to breathe.

Shane hates that he is too sick to properly enjoy this, because the tender care and the way Ilya lovingly caresses the skin along his collarbones has him fighting back tears.

Once the shirt is off, Ilya sits back on his heels, gazing up at Shane. "Where are your pyjamas?"

Shane coughs until his throat clears up enough to talk. “On my bed. Um, upstairs.” He only realises he coughed *on* Ilya after said man has already left to go fetch the pyjamas, so Shane is left to wallow in the guilt and disgust of doing so for the entire time it takes Ilya to return to the living room.

And, listen. Shane *knows* fevers and sickness can skew one’s perception of time, but he is ninety nine point nine percent sure it should not take upwards of twenty minutes to pick up two items of clothing and walk back downstairs. The distant thumps and shifting of furniture upstairs spikes Shane’s nerves — Ilya is taking *forever*.

If his throat was not determined to permanently silence him, Shane would call for Ilya to come back. But, seeing as his throat is his newest rival now that he and Ilya have sorted their own out, Shane has no choice but to sit in silence and wait until Ilya comes back.

When he does, he carries Shane’s t-shirt and sweatpants, as well as a fresh pair of boxers. Nothing else, no rational explanation for all of the banging.

“How’d it take you that long?” Shane rasps.

“You sound very awful,” Ilya says exactly what Shane is thinking. He tosses the clothes over to the couch, but reappears right by Shane’s side before Shane has mustered the energy to move his arm.

The thought of getting dressed...

Apparently Ilya can read thoughts now. “I can help you?” he asks, or orders, Shane isn’t sure. He’s pretty sure he can say no if he wants to, but he really, really, doesn’t want to say no. He cannot remember the last time he allowed someone to care for him and help him out when existing suddenly gets too much.

So, Shane hums approva and sits pliantly as Ilya helps him put the t-shirt on, the soft fabric a soothing balm to all the pain inside of him. He leans back, a willow bending to Ilya’s touch. When Ilya starts unbuckling his belt, the raw vulnerability of being stripped naked without the premise of sex as motivation *should* bother Shane, but Ilya focuses so much on the task at hand that there is no room for anything else. No teasing touches or sultry compliments or begging with his wide pretty eyes to suck Shane’s cock — he just helps Shane wriggle out of his pants, then boxers, and switches them out for the fresh clothes.

Shane is fully clothed again in no time. Ilya was gentle and patient enough that it did not hurt.

“You’re crying again,” Ilya observes, a direct contradiction to what Shane is actually feeling now that the pain has temporarily numbed.

“Sorry,” Shane wipes his tears, feels like he is doing that a lot tonight. “I-I don’t know why.”

Ilya smiles softly, his pupils dilated and full of love. “Stop with sorry’s. Your body is tired but it can now rest for a while. How long has the sickness been?”

“All day,” Shane answers truthfully. “Got worse as the day went on.”

Ilya *tsks* and shuffles closer, slinging his arm over Shane's thighs and resting his head on Shane's stomach. "You should have told someone. You should not do work when feeling like this."

I didn't have a choice, Shane wants to say. *So much hinged on me being there. I couldn't bail at the last second.*

Instead, he sighs. "I know."

"World will not end if you take care of yourself first, Hollander," Ilya says, always reverting to surnames when he's being strict about things.

"Won't end for me," Shane mumbles. "Would piss off a lot of people, though."

"So? They would be more pissed off if you are sick all over the photoshoot. They can't put that on the magazine cover."

Shane closes his eyes, forcing back a laugh if only to prevent another coughing fit. Ilya is right — things could have been much, much worse had he not held himself together up until arriving home.

"Did your parents know?" Ilya asks, voice more measured than before, like this is a subject he must tentatively approach.

Shane shrugs, unsure why Ilya sees it as such. His parents knew in the sense that they noticed something was off and they were extra patient with him during the secret phone-call before the car journey and let him leave early after the lunch event; but they didn't know in the sense that Shane couldn't tell them the extent of how badly he was hurting, not when it risked the sponsorship, everything that his family put countless hours working towards.

Shane shakes his head, the nausea setting back in again.

Ilya sits up, resting his elbows on the edge of the couch and his chin in his palms as he watches Shane intently. "You did not tell your parents you are sick?"

One breath. Two. The pressure-whirlwind-stress-chaos from earlier weighs down on Shane again, staggering his breaths. "I couldn't. I—" he stops short, breathing through the rush of overstimulation. "Ilya, you don't get it, my mom spent so long arranging all this—"

"I am sure they care more about you being okay than about stupid photoshoot."

"Would they?" Shane's voice breaks on the second word, and Ilya's brows furrow.

"Yes," Ilya says immediately. Think about it some more. "Maybe. They should, but doesn't matter right now. *I* care, I always care, so when you are sick you tell me you are sick, and I will take care of you."

Shane melts, tears falling, not because of the fever but rather the serenity that comes with being seen after spending so long trying to hide. He snuffles, hastily rubbing his face and until it feels mostly dry again. Once his vision stops blurring he realises he's sprawled out on the

sofa while Ilya sits on the floor. *Jesus Christ*, Shane criticises himself, *all he has done since he got here is comfort you while you're a sobbing mess and this is how you repay him?*

He shifts, trying to move and rectify it, but a gentle pressure against his waist stops him.

Ilya holds him down, a firm hand rucked underneath Shane's shirt and splayed across his skin. "No. Don't move. What do you need?"

Despite the guilt, Shane stops trying to change positions. Moving hurts, his body is calm right now, and Ilya seems content to stay where he is.

"There is no reason to move," Ilya continues. "Bed is made. Dirty laundry is in the basket. I have water here and you are in pyjamas and I care for you very much."

Well. That would explain the ruckus upstairs and Ilya's prolonged absence.

Tonight is a very, very rapidly-paced crash course in not feeling guilt for taking the time to just *stop*, apparently.

"You fixed it?" *It* being a lot of things. Shane hopes Ilya gets it.

He does, as always. Ilya and his sixth sense for what Shane is thinking. When Shane bites back the panicked protests on the tip of his tongue — that Ilya didn't have to do that, he must have been so irritated, it's not fair that he's a guest and yet doing all of the work — Ilya adopts a sweet, lilting tone. "I care all the time about how my Shane is," he says. "When he does not feel good, it is my job to help fix that. And is *Shane's* job to lie on sofa and be very handsome and cute until he feels better, yes?"

Shane laughs through his nose. Ilya is insane.

"*Yes?*" Ilya persists, lightly prodding Shane's hip.

"Yes," Shane relents. He'd roll his eyes if he didn't think it would churn his guts outside of his body.

And this should be the point where Ilya smiles smugly at him, jokes that he is finally listening, and things go back to normal. But the tranquil tenderness remains, a safety blanket in which Shane is rapidly growing accustomed to. Ilya peppers light kisses along his cheek, no concern for whether or not he will catch this sickness. "I love you," he whispers softly against the skin of Shane's neck. "You deserve to rest no matter what, but especially when sick. I will tell you until it burns into your brain."

"Okay," Shane whispers.

He hesitates.

The guilt still gnaws at him, relentless and all-consuming. He was miserable at breakfast and made the photoshoot difficult for everyone involved; he was rude to the cab driver who was just an excited fan with no malicious intent; he has had Ilya working overtime unprompted and unprepared from the second he stepped in the door and encountered Shane half-dead at

the kitchen table. All because he firmly ignored being sick, refused to tell people the truth, and dragged everyone down with him.

Shane inhales a shaky breath. “Ilya?”

“Shane.”

“I don’t think it’s burned in yet.”

Ilya’s hand cups Shane’s jaw. He closes the gap between them — this is the longest amount of time they have been alone together during which that terrible gap has persisted — and kisses him. It’s as soft and as loving as the rest of Ilya has been this evening, Shane’s personal bundle of comfort and safety embodied in a 6’3 hockey player. “It will,” Ilya says, assertive and confident as he pecks Shane’s lips. “I have special fire powers, I will make it stay there.”

“Shit power to have when your job is on the ice,” Shane jokes, and Ilya lights up and laughs loudly as though Shane is the funniest man on the planet. Ilya is very endearing, and very good for Shane’s confidence. If anyone can dismantle Shane’s self-deprecating anxieties and his refusal to let someone take care of him, of course it would be Ilya.

Ilya’s hand rests on Shane’s forehead. He’s definitely checking the fever, but he says he’s using his powers and Shane is calm enough to melt into the touch instead of shying away from it. He sighs contentedly at Ilya’s lips against his neck. It’s not sexual or with the usual intent to bite down and claim. It’s just a presence, proximity without barriers or reservations. A light series of kisses, breath fanning off Shane’s skin.

“You’re gonna get sick,” Shane reminds him.

Ilya grumbles in protest against Shane’s neck. “Russians do not get sick.”

“You’re an idiot,” Shane laughs, and is pleased to discover it doesn’t *hurt* to laugh, not right now. He did take medicine not too long ago, but it’s Ilya that soothes all the nausea and pain, helping him feel more comfortable and safe inside his own skin again. “You wanna come up here with me?” he finds himself asking, suddenly eager to snuggle up against Ilya now that it’s glaringly obvious he is not planning to go anywhere else.

Ilya nods against him, pushing himself upright. His hoodie strings hang limply, damp from being gnawed on whenever Ilya was no doubt secretly worrying over Shane’s condition.

The realisation does not bring guilt like it normally would.

Ilya cares about Shane and worries about him. Shane finds himself okay with knowing this.

With barely-concealed enthusiasm, Ilya slots himself onto the sofa next to Shane, struggling to find a position that can accommodate both of their bodies until he manages to settle underneath Shane, with Shane now on top of him and using him as a makeshift pillow. The shift is sudden and briefly nauseating as Shane’s vision spins, but he settles against the warmth of Ilya’s body immediately and can’t believe he ever contemplated telling him to go

home. It should be uncomfortable, but Ilya sinks back into the cushions and relaxes, and Shane instantly feels sleep's clutches fast approaching.

Ilya's hands rub up and down Shane's back. His fingers trace shapes into the fabric of his shirt, and Shane maps out what each of them are. *love. baby. Я люблю тебя.*

"Love you too," he whispers against the warmth of Ilya's chest, now upgraded to his #1 safe space instead of this cottage. "Thanks for taking care of me."

Ilya hums. "Do not thank me. Taking care of you is my favorite thing to do."

Warmth blooms in Shane's chest. For the first time today, his racing mind finally slows down, gradually coming to terms with the fact that he *is* sick and it's okay to let himself stop for a minute. There is no pressure here. He can fall asleep here if he wants to, and Ilya will hold him and make sure he does not roll onto the floor. Later, if they get hungry, Ilya will let him rest and sort out dinner himself. Shane suspects if he never locates the energy to drag himself upstairs tonight, Ilya will be more than happy to sleep right here on the sofa instead, with Shane resting on top of him for as long as he needs.

His eyes gradually fall shut, breath levelling out, his body a dead weight on Ilya's own.

Ilya traces the familiar patterns on a little loop. His heartbeat and soft breaths steadily lull Shane to sleep, shielded from his stress in this safety blanket of love and care.

"Goodnight, *solnyshko*," he whispers, tenderly kissing the top of Shane's head.

Shane hugs him tighter, burrowing against him as close as is physically possible. For the few seconds before sleep, there's no pain anymore, just Ilya's gentle touch and assurances, the best kind of medicine.

"G'night," Shane murmurs against Ilya's skin, and then he's gone, safe and protected in Ilya's arms.

End Notes

Ty for reading!! Tagging this was hard so if i missed anything please let me know. Comments n kudos appreciated as always and u can follow me on [twitter](#) :-)

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