shchi

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by maraudersmqry

Summary

Ilya has the flu and is in denial that he could ever be sick. Cue Shane cooking him the soup Irina would prepare for Ilya when he was ill as a child.

Notes

Shchi — Russian-style cabbage soup

episode four had me fucked up but ive read the books, i know these tricks, so here is shane taking care of ilya (o_ _)ノ彡☆

comments and kudos are greatly appreciated ♡(>ᴗ•)

The day started out normally for Shane as it always did in the Summer of Ottawa. Even though he didn't have to wake up as early as game season required, Shane still enjoyed partaking in his morning yoga and run. As of two years ago, feeding and walking Anya became part of that task. His routine was something that shouldn't be messed with, but was one of many things Ilya loved to provoke.

Sometimes his husband woke up early enough to halt Shane in bed with a sensual blow job that left the Canadian reeling or to 'assist' in stretching. Other times Ilya woke up by the time Shane was making breakfast, showered and dressed already. There was a perfect middle ground, though, where Ilya would wake up after Shane had already fed Anya and done his morning yoga and would accompany his husband and their dog on a jog. Those were Shane's favorite mornings because Ilya would join in on cooking breakfast with him.

That morning hadn't been the case.

In fact, by the time Shane had laid out breakfast for them, freshly showered after his run with Anya, he knew something was wrong when Ilya *still* hadn't woken up, and Shane's stomach was growling.

Anya whimpered, lifting her head from the toy she was viciously chewing.

Shane's leg was bouncing up and down as he played with the fork in his hand, running his tongue over his lips as his eyes darted to the room where Ilya was sleeping. He glanced down at the plates full of eggs, sausage, toast, jam (Ilya's favorite brand), yogurt, and fruit. Shane had forgone his restrictive diet about a year ago and was enjoying all things food again with Ilya.

That was, he was *supposed* to be sharing this breakfast with him.

"Where is he, huh?" Shane abruptly asked Anya, standing from the small table that looked out into the backyard.

The breakfast table was perfectly located to view the beautiful scenery that overlooked part of the lake that wound near Shane's cottage. When the sun was at an agreeable angle, which Shane learned was in the morning, it cast a halo into the cottage. It was the best location to enjoy a hearty breakfast with your hot husband and adorable dog. Except that his husband wasn't there, so it wasn't being put to good use.

Their dog barely acknowledged him, too busy with a toy Harris and Troy had bought for her birthday. They didn't know her exact birthday since she was abandoned on the Drover property, but decided the day Ilya took her in was good as any.

"Ilya?" Shane called out as he made his way to the room.

When he entered their bedroom, the first thing Shane noticed was the several blankets discarded onto the floor. His eyes trailed to the bed, a sheen of sweat coating Ilya's exposed body. A thin sheet covered his lower half, but his back, arms, and half of his face were fully visible. His hair was damp and clinging to the edge of his neck, curls darkening in a way they only did when wet.

Ilya's pale lips were cracked open as he breathed through them raggedly, eyes scrunched together as if he were in distress. There was a wheezing to him, as if there was a weight slathered across his lungs. One of his hands had a loose grip around the corner of his pillow.

"Baby?" Shane called out, knowing that if he used the pet name, Ilya would have no choice but to reply.

He remembered the first time he called Ilya the endearment, so unwound from his multiple orgasms and so—*so*—desperate to get off one more time, had begged Ilya with a sob and a "Please, baby!". Ever since then, Ilya had been the one begging for Shane to keep saying it. It would be a lie if Shane said he wasn't embarrassed by repeating the word, feeling like a high school couple that couldn't keep their hands off each other. At least the second part was true, Shane internally admonished.

It was why he reserved the nickname for special moments—like when he really wanted something. Sometimes that something was Ilya's attention.

A half-hearted groan came out of Ilya, one barely there as if the user was in too much pain to make a sound.

Shane cursed under his breath and rushed to the bed with a concerned look. He placed his hand on Ilya's forehead, pushing his curls out of the way. More sweat was gathered underneath Ilya's fringe, encasing Shane's hand in a grimey warmth.

Shane didn't even think about how disgusting the piled sweat smeared against him. Ilya was fucking *burning.* He was running a fever, at the least.

Ilya was blearily blinking now that a hand was infringing on his space, trailing dazedly from Shane's wrist to his face. At closer inspection, Shane could see exactly how pale Ilya was. The Russian man always had a light tan, as if he spent his days in the sun rather than on a hockey rink. But now, any life was zapped from the man's body.

"Shit, Ilya. I think you've got the flu."

The grip that Ilya had on the pillow dissipated, his hand wrapping firmly around the wrist connected to the hand Shane was using to check his temperature. He didn't do anything with the clasp he had on Shane, simply content to keep his hold there.

"Hm?" Ilya asked, then immediately regretted it once pain shot throughout his head.

Shane nodded, "Yeah."

He inspected Ilya a little more closely, biting his lip in worry. And guilt.

Ilya didn't like to see that look on his face. Through his pain, he spoke, "What you had the week before? Yes?"

"I told you not to kiss me. Now you're sick." Shane muttered.

Ilya shook his head as if that was impossible. “Not sick.”

The shorter man got the thermometer out of their conjoined bathroom. Ilya whined when he had pulled away, but stopped when it served no purpose. Shane had just gotten over the flu as of yesterday, so every item to treat the damn virus was nearby.

As Shane was taking the other man's temperature via ear, his brows furrowed in a deep worry that mirrored Ilya's the week prior.

Ilya found his voice again. "Was worth it. You are pouty and cute when sick."

Shane bit back a chastise, a heckler but not a big enough one to scold someone while they were sick.

“Thanks,” he managed sarcastically instead.

The thermometer beeped, the temperature displayed in big, unavoidable numbers.

Thirty-eight point five Celsius.

“Fuck,” Shane didn’t bother to hide the curse. That was a pretty bad temp.

“What? Is not bad.” Ilya decided before he knew anything.

“Nah. You’re definitely sick.” Shane sat the thermometer on the bedside table, hoping that Anya hadn’t gotten to the food he left out.

“Mm,” Ilya looked like he had difficulty speaking. “Not true.” He settled on after a few moments. “See, I get up.”

He tried and struggled to get out of bed. Shane watched him, baffled. He didn’t think he had ever seen Ilya sick. Injured from a game, maybe. A few sniffles from a lingering cold. But sick, *sick*?

“I guess there’s still room for first times.” Shane thought out loud.

Ilya attempted to squint at him, as if he knew what he was trying to get at.

After some difficulty. Ilya managed to get in a sitting position on the bed, slightly swaying.

“See? Not sick…”

His words trailed off into a sneeze.

“I bet your head is killing you,” Shane sympathized, kissing Ilya’s temple.

The other man leaned into it, a small smile spreading across his face as he took it in.

“No. No is fine.”

Shane let out a sort of huff-laugh. One that was filled with doubt. “Speaking from experience, you are totally not fucking fine. I know your head is killing you and despite the sweat, I bet you’re freezing.”

Shane’s voice was so gentle next to Ilya’s ear, not wanting to be the cause of any pain. He knew Ilya like the back of his hand, or he should say Ilya’s cock, since he definitely knew it a

lot better. Anyways, he knew how stubborn and ridiculous Ilya could be when it came to people caring for him.

Ilya couldn't clench his teeth together, so his lips were firmly pressed in place. The silence spoke what it needed to.

Shane trailed encouraging, featherlight kisses from Ilya's temple to his exposed shoulder. "I'm going to go start you a cold bath so your temp can calm down, okay? I'll get you some pills, too. One's that'll get rid of the headache."

Ilya opened his mouth as if he were about to protest.

Shane interrupted him before he could begin. He honestly didn't want to hear his nasally husband swear up and down that he was fine.

"I'm not asking, Ilya. You're sick whether you like it or not. So I *will* be taking care of you whether you like it or not."

"Not sick," Ilya attempted to protest for the last time.

Shane pulled out his final weapon. He knew it was a dirty and underhanded move, especially with Ilya in such poor condition. There was no other way to convince his husband otherwise.

"*Please*, baby."

Ilya always gave in to his begging one way or another.

Ilya and Shane had a large bathtub in their attached bathroom, big enough for four people if they really wanted. The downside, it took for-fucking-*ever* to get a substantial amount of water in it. Shane decided to use the bathtub in the next room over, a space that only fit for

one person. Filling the bathtub was faster when you didn't have to wait for the water to get hot or the ample area to fill up.

Ilya was scowling at him through his haze, shivering with his arms wrapped around himself. He looked like a wet, grouchy cat. Shane wouldn't mind getting a cat.

"I know, I know." Shane soothed, taking handfuls of water and slathering it on his chest and back. "You hate me now, but you won't in ten minutes," he justified.

"Don't hate you, moy lyubimyy." Ilya whined, as if it were the biggest grievance of all.

He grabbed Shane's hand and adoringly set it on his cheek, leaning into the touch much like a cat would.

Shane cupped Ilya's cheek, following his lover's request by applying light pressure to reassure Ilya of his presence. Of his love. Ilya rarely acted on his emotions so fast and so adoringly when it came to himself, so to see Ilya guide his hand where he wanted it—Shane was happy to indulge in the consolation.

His thumb rubbed the curve of Ilya's cheekbone, feeling the smooth skin of his freshly shaven face against his fingertips. Ilya had grown a light scruff over the few days Shane had been out with the flu, only to shave it off immediately once Shane was no longer hysterical.

"I know Ilya. I was only teasing," Shane still kept his tone light, not wanting it to echo off the sparse bathroom.

He had given Ilya medicine as soon as he submerged into the cold water, wanting his husband's pain to evaporate along with the fever.

They stayed there like that for a few moments, Ilya shivering with his hands clinging to the arm that offered him comfort. Shane's hand remained in its position, thumb rubbing soft circles into his cheekbone.

Shane was straining to maintain the position, half of his body pulled over subconsciously by Ilya. He wasn't a hockey player who exercised every day for no reason, though, so he could stay like that as long as Ilya needed. He dotted more delicate kisses along his forehead and neck, glad to feel the physical body temperature reducing little by little.

Ilya was practically purring by that point, head tilting to the side until his wet mop of curls soaked into Shane's shoulder.

Shane adored when Ilya got like that: melty and soft for love and affection *from* Shane. Ilya adored his attention, and Shane felt foolish for ever once thinking that it would be impossible. There was no imbalance in their love, in their devotion. Never for a second.

He persuaded Ilya back into their bedroom with the promise to cuddle, picking out loose clothes since they'd be under the blanket. Ilya would need to be able to bury under the covers or throw them off of him, depending on how hot he was.

Afterwards, he trailed downstairs to grab ginger ale and crackers, not wanting to risk heavier foods yet. He stumbled when he turned around after closing the pantry, Anya somehow managing to sneak up on him from behind. He nearly stepped on her paw, but stopped just in time.

"Sorry, girl." He apologized anyway. "You scared me,"

She wagged her tail at him.

"Guess another quiet week with us. Isn't that right?" He scratched her favorite spot behind her ear. She followed him towards the room. "I'll be sure to give you lots of treats for being our good girl."

"Lots of treats?" Ilya parroted, voice almost raw.

“This’ll be her second week cooped up in the house. You should have seen her this morning! I was out there for an extra forty-five minutes because she refused to come inside.”

Shane retold the story with faux anger. The truth was, he hadn’t really tried to bring Anya inside. After calling her name twice and getting no response, Shane decided she deserved extra time outdoors after the past week. The flu really did him in. Ilya refused to leave his side unless Anya had to use the bathroom or when playing for their scheduled thirty minutes. It was difficult for a dog who went on walks or whatever the morning entailed with Shane for an hour each day.

“She *is* very good dog.” Ilya agreed.

He was propped up against a few pillows with blankets pulled to his shoulders. His body shook every other second despite the heat that was damaging ecosystems outside. Anya jumped and settled between his outstretched legs, burying her nose into the crevice of Ilya’s knee.

Shane couldn’t stop himself as he pulled his phone out from his pocket, snapping a few photos that would definitely become a wallpaper or widget in the near future. It was a sight to behold, but not a rare one. The only thing out of place about the photo was the clear exhaustion that lined Ilya’s features.

Instead of the worked-out, hockey-honed look that Ilya wore so sexily, it was a look drained of energy.

Shane held up the hand now holding the crackers and ginger ale, shaking it slightly as if it were a prize to behold.

“Where is my drink?” Ilya had the audacity to ask. “You have ginger ale. And me?” His English was getting choppier the longer he ruminated with the flu.

“Ginger ale is *your* drink while you’re sick.” Shane clarified, opening the can and getting two crackers. “Do you think you can eat this?”

Shane had no appetite when he had the flu, stomach lurching up anything that tried to digest. He wouldn't force Ilya to eat anything *yet*.

"Mm. Not sick." Ilya said as he took the offerings. "But is *our* drink."

Shane shook his head. "Nope. Absolutely not. I'll stick with my protein shakes and water. You are strictly on a ginger ale and Gatorade diet. So."

"So." Ilya repeated in a grumbling manner.

"Let me know if you're about to be sick."

"I thought I am sick?"

"No, like. Sick as in like puke. Let me know if you're about to puke."

"Ah." Ilya frowned. "Impossible. Will not happen."

He took the crackers and shoved them both into his mouth for show, biting harshly against the dry saltines. Except, the more he chewed, the more wrong it felt. Ilya could practically eat anything—he *loved* food—but the very thought of swallowing what was in his mouth at the moment felt impossible.

Shane yelped as Ilya suddenly grabbed a startled Anya and removed her from his lap, darting out of the bed. He ran into the bathroom after his husband, cringing as he heard the wretching sounds Ilya unleashed into the puking bucket. His generous frame practically wrapped around the thankfully clean pail.

When it was Shane who was (what it felt like slowly dying) sick, Ilya cleaned the bucket after every time Shane threw up. Because Shane hated puke. He hated the sound of it, the smell, and the action of it. But what he hated the most was hearing someone else throw up.

“Oh—um.” Shane stuttered standing next to him, feeling the back of his neck prickle.

“Is fine. You go.” Ilya managed before directing his attention to dry heaving.

Shane felt tears gather behind his eyes. Ilya sounded so helpless. So hurt. And all Shane could do was watch him. It was so rare to see Ilya vulnerable to the point where it showed physically, let alone audibly. He had a good mask of indifference, tone cool as he told people the opposite of his true feelings.

Shane felt like an asshole, and despite the risk of himself puking, he didn't have to be. So he lowered himself next to Ilya and rubbed his back soothingly.

“I’m not going anywhere, Ilya. I’m right here.” Shane spoke sweet nothings into Ilya’s ear.

Eventually it was over. Anya had attempted to check in on Ilya, her whining sounds of distress and snuffling nose appearing under the gap of the door.

“Is okay! Papa is okay, sobachka.” Ilya exclaimed as Shane helped him stand up from the ground.

“C’mon. Come rinse your mouth and brush your teeth.” Shane guided Ilya to their porcelain counter, handing his husband a disposable miniature cup filled with water and his toothbrush ready to be used. "I'm so glad that is over."

The bathroom had two sinks next to each other, a feature Shane adored simply from the way toothpaste would sit on Ilya’s side. He left globs of toothpaste in the sink. Shane was glad it wasn’t *his* sink. Yeah, he did clean up Ilya’s mess anyway. But he literally couldn’t go on about his day knowing the sink next to his was a mess!

“Spasibo. Ya lyublyu tebya, moya lyubimaya.” *Thank you. I love you, my darling.*

“You’re welcome, and I love you too.” Shane replied back in English.

His Russian was fluent enough where he could hold a conversation in the language, even joining Ilya once a month in his therapy. But he liked to tease.

“Say in Russian,” Ilya said after he swished his mouth with water, beginning to brush his teeth. His eyes were looking at Shane expectantly from the mirror.

“Ya lyublyu tebya,” Shane flowed smoothly, kissing the sensitive spot behind Ilya’s ear.

Ilya shuddered and leaned into the touch.

Over the next few days, it was the same routine. Shane had an alarm on his phone for the hours he had to give Ilya his medicine, never missing a beat. The younger man repeatedly tried denying he was sick, but wouldn’t deny the pills Shane would give him to control his fever and nausea. Ilya had managed to eat a few crackers, but beyond that was on a diet of ginger ale and Gatorade.

Ilya was taking the sickness worse than Shane had. He complained of muscle soreness and pounding headaches, but his fever was slowly going away. Shane wished there was more he could do for him, but for now, it was just a matter of assuring he was cared for.

Three days later, Ilya even went on a ten-minute walk with him and Anya. Shane had reluctantly agreed to Ilya tagging along after his husband spouted the benefits of sunlight, fresh air, and moving his stiff joints—all cures for sickness. After, he was curled up on the couch with their dog as a movie played.

It was again, an adorable sight, one that Shane snapped a few shots of unabashedly. He stood in front of them, turning his phone all types of angles as he clicked and clicked and clicked. Ilya wore a lazy smile, proud that he and his dog were being fawned over.

Shane was gathering ingredients to make himself a protein shake, humming a song he recognized from Ilya. His husband had never sung a Russian song so lovingly, as if the lyrics themselves were a gift or memory he held onto with all of his might. While Shane had been sick, Ilya was settled next to him singing or humming the same song until he would fallasleep.

The melody encased Shane. He hadn't noticed he was humming loud enough for Ilya to hear until the other man spoke.

"Mama?" Ilya called out, sounding desperate and in disbelief.

Shane stopped cutting the celery, eyes landing on the back of the couch. Where he stood in the kitchen offered a slight view of the living room, Ilya's light brown hair peaking over the top.

"Mama? Ty gotovish' sup?" Ilya called out again, this time sounding more eager.

Why does he think his mom is making soup? Shane internally asked himself.

He set the knife he was holding onto the cutting board next to the fruits and vegetables, trying not to trip over his feet as he rushed to the living room.

Ilya was snuggled under a blanket with Anya standing on the couch next to him, her snout nestled into Ilya's neck. Shane had been lenient on the 'no dogs on sofa' rule since he was sick, Ilya almost childlike in the comfort their dog offered.When Shane walked over, her panicked eyes shot to him and he realized that comfort wasn't the only reason she was up there. She jumped from the couch and circled around his legs, causing Shane's worry to spike.

“Ilya!” He couldn’t keep the worry out of his voice, not when he saw how Ilya could barely keep his eyes open.

He was pale, like the first time Shane had found him sprawled on the bed. Some of Ilya’s color had returned to him after their walk—light brain hair almost golden with some shine to his face. Now, that was all ripped away.

“Fuck, your temp is spiking.” Shane already knew what the problem was without even having to check.

Shane’s acquaintance with the flu at least a handful of times throughout his life let him know what was happening. Ilya was having his last spike of a fever, the worst one to come yet. After that, it would be steady sailing, the amount of medication lessened throughout the day until he didn’t need it anymore.

He’d be fine in less than three days.

Ilya looked at him strangely. As if he was seeing Shane but not fully.

“Shane,” he started. “Mama skoro zakonchit gotovit’ shchi?” *Is Mama almost done with shchi?*

“Shchi?” Shane asked, it was the only word he didn’t recognize.

Ilya let out a loopy laugh. “Da. Eto kapustnyy sup. Ya slyshal, kak ona napevala.” *Yes. It is a cabbage soup. I heard her humming.*

A weight settled on his chest at the realization. The song Ilya had sung for Shane when he was in the pits of *his* last fever was passed down from Ilya’s mother. From Irina. The one woman Shane wished he could talk to, if only once. He saw a few photos of her, but unfortunately, there weren’t many of her. There were no photographs from her childhood,

seldomphotos taken that included her throughout the years of her marriage. She had a short time on the earth, and the lackingnumber of photographs of Irina was only further proof.

Shane didn't know what to say, so he didn't say anything at all. He rubbed his hands together, heart tugging down the middle in opposite directions. He wanted to tell Ilya that his mom wasn't there. She had passed when he was twelve, and he knew that. Another part didn't have the courage to tell Ilya the truth. To watch as he found out all over again.

Instead, he asked, "How do you make shchi?"

Ilya rambled for ten minutes in broken English, switching between Russian when a word was too difficult to work around his mind. Shane kept asking questions to ensure Ilya would keep talking, anything to make him forget he ever thought his mom was there.

Ilya finally yawned and rubbed his face against the pillow. He settled down with Anya tucked by his legs, a dopey smile on his face. He was rubbing his hand against her fur, twirling the longer pieces.

"I love you," Ilya said with his eyes looking like mush. His smile was worship-like.

Shane would sometimes catch Ilya giving him the look he had right now, a simple glimpse in the mirror or a second when he saw it out of the corner of his eye. Shane never had the best words to describe it, because as soon as he caught a peek, Ilya's expression would fizzle into practiced coolness.

But as he looked at Ilya, there was no doubt that something greater than love rested beneath the surface.

Love, absolutely. But a version so intense it spoke across all levels of rationalism.

Shane kissed the mole on his cheek before he could fall deeper into his gaze. "I love you, too."

When he was sure Ilya was in a deep sleep, Shane trekked back to the kitchen, a recipe for shchi pulled up on his phone. After he made sure he had all the ingredients to start cooking, Shane got to work. He wasn't the best chef by any means, but a soup was simple enough.

Shane started a broth with beef bones (they really had everything) that would take about two hours to cook, so he busied himself by cutting the vegetables he'd be using ahead of time. The food he was messing with earlier sat forgotten on the other side of the counter, ripening beyond Shane's taste. Ilya would definitely eat a warm strawberry though. The way he preferred them.

He was halfway through simmering the vegetables, timed to finish along with the broth, when arms wrapped around his waist from behind.

Shane squeaked, yes, *squeaked*—almost dropping a dish in the sink. His heart raced in his chest, pounding like it wanted to escape his flesh. He put the cup down but kept his hands in the sink, not wanting to make a mess. Shane eased into the hold, tipping his body back to rest against Ilya.

Ilya placed his chin on his shoulder, pulling Shane closer to him.

"You are making shchi?" Ilya questioned, taking a deep breath into the air. "Smells delicious."

Shane cuddled the side of their faces together, content that Ilya wasn't burning up anymore. He had to sleep off the worst of his fever, but he was still sick. Shane would need to give him more ibuprofen soon.

"I'm glad you're feeling better," Shane kissed his temple, then resumed cleaning the dishes.

"Felt fine the entire time," Ilya grabbed a rag and started drying the dishes Shane washed, placing them in their correct spots.

Once that task was complete, Ilya pulled Shane back into his orbit. He kissed along Shane's neck, a hand running up from his neck to the back of his head. The grip there latched onto the small patches of hair it could, giving it a nice tug before moving on to other spots. Shane melted into the touch, tilting his head to give Ilya more access.

In his neck, Ilya asked, "How did you know? About shchi?"

Shane pulled away so he could look at Ilya and gave him an empathetic smile. "You thought your mom was cooking it. Earlier, I was humming in the kitchen and you thought…"

Ilya kept his gaze locked on Shane. When the older man was unable to finish his sentence, Ilya did for him. "I thought Mamochka was here?" His voice cracked at the title, having been so long since he used it.

Shane nodded while he bit his lip. He wanted to kiss Ilya, comfort his husband in the best way he knew how. He was also smart not to share direct contact with him and cross-contaminate. He wouldn't be getting sick again, thank you. Instead, Shane pulled Ilya into a crushing hug.

Ilya's arms rested over Shane's shoulders, caging Shane in between his clavicle and arm.

"I remember talking about… what you need to cook with." Ilya was breathing deeply into Shane's hair.

"Ingredients?"

"Yes. Stupid word, by the way."

That cracked a giggle from Shane. "Yeah, kinda is."

His reminder for Ilya's medicine went off like a beacon, causing Shane and Ilya to jump out of their skin.

"Alarm is stupid, too."

Ilya took the medicine anyway, folding himself onto Shane's back as a reward. Shane didn't mind it. He loved how clingy Ilya could be. Now that they were out and didn't have to publicly hide their relationship anymore, Ilya always made sure their hands were intertwined. If they were sitting side by side, Ilya had his arm over Shane. If they were cuddling in bed, Ilya was practically fused to his husband's skin.

After sex, especially, Ilya was near (or on) Shane like a hawk.

With that being said, Ilya was also the most forthcoming while he is cuddly.

"Ilya? Baby?"

Ilya groaned. "Oh no. What do you want?"

Shane huffed, "You make me sound horrible." He lightly scolded, no real heat behind the words.

Ilya nuzzled his nose on the top of Shane's head. "You are the worst."

The older man (by a month) swatted at Ilya's arms. "The worst? I took care of you all week!"

"Now we are even."

Shane couldn't say anything against that. Ilya had taken care of him the week prior, insisting to his parents that they didn't have to come over in aid. They did take Anya for a day, so Shane would stop feeling so guilty about cooping her up by association. Ilya would have missed her too much if they had done that this time, especially with how hard the flu hit him.

"She would cook shchi whenever I was sick." Ilya finally released. He knew what Shane was trying to get at and saw no point in keeping it from his husband.

"Every time," He said the last bit dejectedly, like there was more to the story than he was letting on.

Shane changed their position so Ilya was leaning against the counter, brown eyes locked onto Ilya's hazel ones. He used his best puppy eyes. They were still working their way around communication, too many years spent chaining emotions and thoughts to the depths of their brains. With time, Ilya and Shane were getting better at telling each other things, even if it was uncomfortable to talk about.

The words from Ilya's mouth spilled out like a poorly put-together dam affected by a feather.

"Was the only one who cared for me," Ilya said.

There was more to the way he said it, brutalized with the acceptance that she would be the only person who ever cared.

"You mean more than when you were just sick." Shane didn't phrase it as a question. He knew the answer.

Ilya's dad was a dick. His older brother a miniature version that Irina could not save. It didn't take a genius to put two and two together.

"After," they didn't have to clarify *what* after. After Irina died. "When I got sick. Was horrible. No one made me soup or combed my hair. No one told me I was alright, or that they

loved me.”

Shane felt his heart break for Ilya. He was so fortunate to grow up with two parents who cherished their only child, pouring every ounce of energy and money into him. When he was sick there was always at least one parent by his side, putting up with his whines and ridiculous needs. Ilya didn’t have that. For twelve years, he had one parent subjected under his father, and depression, and once she died, he had no one. His father remarried a younger woman. His brother bullied him and took to drugs.

No wonder why Ilya fought to prove he wasn’t sick. Sick didn’t mean having a comforting hand by his side at all times. It meant loneliness. Isolation. Memories of what was no longer there.

“That’s horrible,” Shane clarified, running comforting hands along Ilya’s arms.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed.

He then looked around the kitchen and inhaled through his nose. Something cleared behind his hazel eyes. He cupped Shane’s jaw, gently kissing his forehead.

“But you are making shchi. Yes?”

“Yeah,” Shane said weakly. “I’m not sure how good it’ll be—“

“Sh. Will be good since you cooked it.” Ilya interrupted him, but Shane wasn’t upset with what he interrupted him with.

A compliment always easily shut him up.

“You think?” Shane asked hopefully.

Ilya looked like he wanted to kiss him. “Mhm,”

Shane glanced at Ilya’s lips, then at his eyes. Then to his lips again.

His lips were slowly forming into a smirk. Shane kind of hated how Ilya knew he was going to do it, since he had just given shit to the younger man about it being the reason why he was currently sick.

But Shane couldn’t stop himself from kissing Ilya. Not when he was looking at Shane so hopefully. It felt amazing, the exact kind of touch he needed after kissing cheeks, and necks, and foreheads all week. He missed Ilya’s cupid’s bow and the way it formed against him.

“Don’t even say it,” Shane commanded when he pulled back, but it didn’t stop the laugh that bubbled up from Ilya.

“Same time next week?”

“Fuck off. I’m not gonna get fucking sick.”

Another alarm resounded from his phone, pulling them out of the moment faster than a pin dropping.

“The food is ready. Take Anya out while I get this ready?” Shane turned off the heat, getting bowls out of the cabinet.

Ilya planted a soft peck on his lips, winking when he saw Shane’s warning look. “Already kissed, moy lyubimyy. Another will change nothing,”

Shane couldn’t reply because Anya came running into the kitchen, energy bouncing off her in waves.

“This will be good, I know it.” Ilya said while gesturing to the soup. “Thank you,"

Shane blew him a kiss and watched him walk into the backyard with Anya, bracing against the counter and sighing deeply once the door shut. It just took everything he had *not* to cry.

His husband, his perfect, considerate, Ilya Rozanov, deserved more out of life. He deserved a father who was proud of his achievements, a brother who supported his dreams, and a mother who didn't feel the need to end her life. Yet his dad couldn't even make him fucking soup when he was sick.

He mixed the broth and vegetables, stirring it with a wooden spoon that his mom had gifted them in a set for Christmas. After the food sat for a few minutes, Shane began to spoon the soup into separate bowls. There was still a lot left because, incidentally, Shane did not know how to portion ingredients, so he filled a container for his parents while he was at it.

He paused as the final corner of the lid clicked into place, realizing how deeply his family was integrated into his life. Ilya had no one.

Or, at least that used to be the case. Shane corrected himself. Ilya had them now, all three of Shane's small family. Not to forget the team that felt more like brothers rather than co-players.

As Ilya stepped back inside with Anya, his sweatpants hanging low on his hips, Shane made an internal promise to never let Ilya feel like he's alone again.

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