strange days are here again

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strange days are here again

by hollanov_1410

Summary

Ilya rubbed at his face with both hands, trying to knead the heaviness away. It didn’t budge.

Probably just caught something from the kids, he thought to himself. Some kind of virus.

Except he'd been feeling like this for weeks now. Maybe longer. It was hard to tell. The days blurred when you were tired, and he’d been tired for longer than he wanted to admit.

Maybe it was something still lingering in his system. That happened sometimes, right? Viruses could hang around. He'd read that somewhere. Post-viral fatigue.

Yeah. That was probably it.

Some dormant virus still working its way out of him.

Or,

Ilya and Shane are married with kids, living the life they fought for. But Ilya's depression is rearing its ugly head again.

Notes

this follows the same Hollanov dads universe from my other fics in Our House, but they're all standalones so you definitely don't need to read any of them to read this one!! some general background that might add a little context:

- takes place abt 14 years post-TLG
- their kids are niko (12), max (9), and mila (3)
- they're both retired, but shane works as a skill development coach for the centaurs

thank you for reading! xx

See the end of the work for more notes

The sun creeping through the blinds woke Ilya. Not gently, but enough to drag him out of a sleep that hadn't been restful to begin with.

He cracked his eyes open and stared at the ceiling. There it was again. That pressure was right behind them. It *had* been happening more and more lately when he woke up; not quite a headache. More like someone had stuffed his skull with cotton overnight.

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Except he'd been feeling like this for weeks now. Maybe longer. It was hard to tell. The days blurred when you were tired, and he'd been tired for longer than he wanted to admit.

Maybe it was something still lingering in his system. That happened sometimes, right? Viruses could hang around. He'd read that somewhere. Post-viral fatigue.

Yeah. That was probably it.

Some dormant virus still working its way out of him.

Ilya groaned softly and rolled toward the other side of the bed. Empty. The sheets were cool to the touch. Shane had been up for a while already.

Ilya pushed himself upright with effort. Even that small motion felt exhausting, like his limbs were made of lead. He stretched half-heartedly, then swung his legs over the edge of the bed and forced himself to stand.

The floor felt unsteady under his feet for a second before his balance caught up.

He shuffled to the bathroom, flipped on the light, and immediately regretted it. Too bright. He squinted against it and turned the faucet on, cupping cold water in his hands and splashing it onto his face until the shock of it made him suck in a sharp breath.

Better. Slightly.

He dried his face roughly with a towel and opened the medicine cabinet.

His hand reached automatically for the orange pill bottle on the top shelf, muscle memory taking over before his brain fully caught up. He grabbed it, shook it once to pop one out into his palm.

Nothing came out.

He blinked down at the empty bottle. Shook it again, harder this time. Still nothing. He tilted it toward the light streaming through the bathroom window, peering inside like that would somehow make pills materialize.

Stupid. He knew that was stupid even as he was doing it.

He sighed and set the empty bottle back on the shelf with more force than necessary. The plastic made a hollow clacking sound against the metal shelf. He'd call today for a refill. Should've done it weeks ago. Should've just listened to Shane and set up the auto-refill like Shane kept gently suggesting.

It had been on auto-refill for years, actually. But then he'd had to manually request it last month for some reason—insurance thing, maybe?—and had never gotten around to setting the auto-refill back up.

He'd do it today. Right after breakfast. Right after he got the kids to school.

He closed the cabinet and stared at his reflection for a long moment.

He looked tired.

When had he started looking this tired?

It was a dreary Winter day, which wasn't anything out of the ordinary for February in Ottawa.

It had just been Ilya and Mila for the morning, after he'd dropped the boys off at school. Which Ilya loved. He always loved being at home with the kids and could play with them all day. He missed when Niko and Max were her age.

Today, they'd built a blanket fort in the living room. Finger-painted at the kitchen table, getting more paint on themselves than the paper. Set up an elaborate tea party for about twenty-five of her favorite stuffed animals, complete with plastic cups of apple juice and goldfish crackers on tiny plates.

All before 10 AM.

And Ilya had been present for it. Mostly. As present as he could manage right now.

Mila had been chattering the whole time, narrating her play, asking him to do voices for the stuffed animals. And he'd done them. Made her laugh with his ridiculous squeaky bunny voice and his deep grumbly bear voice. Watched her giggle until she had hiccups.

It should have filled him up. Usually it did.

Ilya looked outside through the kitchen window. The snow had stopped falling, but everything was still white. Thick blankets of it covering the yard, the street, the neighbors' roofs. Definitely still cold—probably well below freezing.

"Mila," he said, turning away from the window. "Do you want to go on a walk?"

He didn't even need to wait for an answer. Mila was always down for anything that involved being outdoors, no matter the weather. She looked up from her coloring book at the kitchen table, her face lighting up immediately. "Yeah!"

Ilya smiled. Leaned down and kissed her nose. "Let's go then, *solnyshko*."

Once Mila was bundled up in her many layers, pink puffy coat and beanie topping it off, looking like a small marshmallow with legs, they headed out. Ilya grabbed the stroller from the garage just in case. She was three, and her stamina was unpredictable. Some days she could walk for an hour. Some days she made it ten minutes before demanding to be carried.

The cold hit him the second they stepped outside. Sharp. Biting. It burned his lungs with each breath, made his eyes water immediately.

He didn't mind it. The shock of it felt like something, at least.

He squeezed Mila's hand and looked down at her. She was already hopping in place, her little boots crunching in the hardened snow on their front steps, excited just to be outside.

He crouched down and readjusted her scarf with his free hand, making sure it covered her mouth and nose properly. Tugged her beanie down a little lower over her ears. "Are you warm enough, sweetheart?"

She nodded enthusiastically, grinning up at him. That big, wide smile. His smile. His mother's smile.

That used to melt his heart every time he saw it. Still should, probably.

But lately—ever since he'd been feeling off these past few weeks—he got a weird pang in his chest when he saw it sometimes. Sharp and uncomfortable.

He wasn't really sure why.

They started walking, Mila's small mittened hand in his, the empty stroller rolling along beside them. Just around the block, he told himself. A quick loop to get some fresh air, tire her out a bit before lunch and her nap.

But when they reached the end of the block, he kept going.

Mila was chattering beside him the whole time, her voice muffled by her scarf. Pointing at icicles hanging from a neighbor's roof, asking him questions about why some icicles were long and some were short and could you eat them and did he think they tasted like candy?

He answered on autopilot. "Because the roof melts at different speeds. No, don't eat them, they're dirty. No, *solnyshko*, they taste like water."

Another block. Then another.

His legs felt heavy, but the movement helped. Better than sitting on the couch staring at his phone, trying to work up the energy to decide what to make for lunch.

"Papa, look!" Mila tugged on his coat, pointing at a dog across the street.

"Da," he said. "Very fluffy dog. Good eye."

They kept walking.

Somewhere around the fourth block, Mila started to slow down. Her chatter quieted.

Ilya noticed immediately. He stopped and crouched down beside her, cupping her rosy cheeks with his gloved hands. "Getting sleepy, *malyshka*?"

She nodded, her eyes already heavy-lidded.

"Okay. Come on." He lifted her up and settled her into the stroller, tucking the thick fleece blanket around her legs and up to her chest. She didn't protest. Just curled into it immediately, her pink cheeks standing out against the blanket.

He should turn back now. Head home. Put her down for a proper nap in her bed.

But he didn't.

Mila's eyes were drooping. Within five minutes, she was completely out, her head tilted to the side against the stroller's padding, her breath coming out in tiny white puffs in the cold air.

She always slept so well in the stroller. Slept well in the cold in general. The motion, the fresh air—it knocked her out every time. She'd probably sleep for hours if he let her.

Ilya kept going.

He wasn't sure when he started jogging. It wasn't a conscious decision. His legs just started moving faster on their own, pushing the stroller ahead of him with steady, rhythmic movements. The wheels crunched over patches of salt and ice on the sidewalk.

The burn in his lungs got worse. Good. He focused on that. On the ache building in his thighs. On the cold air slicing through his jacket and down his throat with each breath.

He didn't know where he was going. Didn't recognize this street anymore. They'd gone miles, probably. Too far.

His vision blurred slightly. He blinked hard. Wiped at his face with the back of his glove. Only for his vision to blur again seconds later. Worse this time.

Probably just the wind.

By the time they got home, Ilya was drenched in sweat and breathing hard.

He carried Mila into the house, her body limp and heavy with sleep in his arms. He took her straight to her room, laying her gently on the bed before stripping her out of her winter layers —the puffy coat, the snow pants, the boots that always seemed to get stuck. She didn't even stir. Just stayed boneless and warm as he wrestled her into her fleece pajamas and tucked her under her big, fluffy duvet.

Ilya sat on the edge of her bed, watching her breathe. Small chest rising and falling. Her dark hair spread across the pillow, still damp at the temples from being bundled up in her wool beanie.

He leaned down and kissed her forehead. Then just stayed there, watching. He reached out after a moment to readjust the duvet, tucking it higher around her shoulders. Brushed a strand of hair back from her face.

His own eyelids felt heavy. They'd felt like that all day. All week.

He should get up. Start thinking about lunch. Put that next load of laundry in that he kept putting off today.

Instead, he carefully laid down beside Mila on her toddler bed. His feet hung off the end, and his shoulder pressed against the wall. But she instinctively curled into him the moment he settled, and he wrapped his arm around her as she did.

He let exhaustion take over. Just for a few minutes, he told himself.

He was asleep in seconds.

Ilya woke up to his phone ringing.

He jerked up, blinking at the bright stickers on Mila's headboard. She was still dead to the world beside him, tangled in the covers and drooling. Just like how he sleeps.

He looked at his phone. It was the boy's school.

His heart instantly dropped.

Oh fuck.

It was Wednesday. Early dismissal day.

He shot out of bed and answered the phone in the hallway, his voice rough with sleep. "This is Ilya."

"Hi Mr. Hollander-Rozanov, this is the front office at—"

"I know, I know, I'm so sorry," he sputtered out, already moving. "I—I fell asleep. I'm leaving right now. Ten minutes. I'll be there in ten minutes. No, nine."

After he hung up, he scooped Mila out of the covers—still in her fleece pajamas, still completely limp with sleep. She made a little protesting noise but didn't fully wake up. He didn't even bother with her shoes. Just grabbed her puffy coat from the hook by the door, wrapped it around her like a blanket.

Keys. Where were his keys. He just had them, where did he dump them. Did he leave them in the—

Kitchen counter. Right.

He grabbed them, bolted to the SUV and wrestled Mila into her car seat—she was really waking up now, and not happy about it—and peeled out of the driveway faster than he probably should have.

When they rolled up to the school, Niko and Max were standing on the curb with their backpacks, the only kids left. The afternoon supervisor was with them, looking mildly concerned.

Ilya threw the car into park and jumped out. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he said immediately as the boys climbed into the car. "I lost track of time."

"It's fine, Papa," Niko said, though his voice had that careful quality that meant he'd been worried.

"You okay?" Max asked, buckling himself in. "You look kind of...hit-by-a-bus-ey"

"Da, da. Just fell asleep. Long day." Ilya waved a hand, trying to sound casual. He caught the supervisor's eye through the window and gave her an apologetic smile before getting back in the car.

As he pulled away, the realization hit him like a second wave of panic: he hadn't fed Mila lunch. Just gave her a three-mile jog in below-freezing weather and a three-hour nap, apparently.

"Who wants McDonalds?" he asked, putting on the turn signal.

All three erupted in agreement.

Ilya had texted Shane that they'd picked up fast food. He would've seen the wrappers in the trash anyway. He didn't mention the school pickup situation though.

That had been a few hours ago now. The kids were all settled in the living room, some cartoon playing on the TV that Ilya wasn't really tracking. He was sprawled on the end of the couch beside Max. Thinking about dinner.

Or trying to, at least.

Simple things were starting to feel overwhelming for him. Like what to make for dinner tonight. Could be chicken parmesan. Maybe spaghetti. Easy enough.

But he'd need to go to the store to pick up more breadcrumbs if he made chicken parm. And more of the angel hair pasta if he made spaghetti—the only kind Mila was eating right now, the specific brand with the yellow label because she'd decided the other one "tasted wrong."

He could do that, though. It was just one store run. He could drive to the store for one ingredient, make one dinner.

So why had it been 45 minutes since he first thought about this, and he hadn't moved an inch.

And why, for all 45 of those minutes, had he been reminding himself he needed to get up and go to the store.

"Papa," Max whined from beside him. "What's for dinner?"

Ilya blinked at him. "Was thinking takeout." A lie, but he wasn't going to tell them he's been trying to will himself to get up and drive to the store 10 minutes away for nearly an hour.

Max's face lit up. "Can we do pizza?"

Ilya winced. He was certain Shane would kill him if he found out he fed their children McDonald's *and* pizza in one day.

"Not pizza, *malysh*," Ilya said. "Something healthier."

"Nuggets!" Mila piped up from her spot on the floor, where she had been stacking blocks. The kids meal she had eaten was clearly still on her mind.

Ilya managed a small, tired smile. "That is the opposite of healthy, *malyshka*."

Now his head was spinning with menus he didn't want to read and choices he didn't want to make. Every option felt like a mountain he didn't have the gear to climb.

"Could do Thai," Niko suggested without looking away from the TV.

Thai. Right. They had a favorite spot. It was close. They delivered.

"Thai," Ilya repeated. "Yeah. Let's do that. Good idea."

Shane came home right as the food arrived.

Dinner was loud in the way it always was. Normal chaos. The kind that usually felt comfortable.

Tonight it just felt exhausting.

Later that night, Shane handled bath time and bedtime while Ilya cleaned up the kitchen. Which just meant throwing away the takeout containers, putting away what little leftovers there were, and wiping down the counter. Minimal effort. He could manage that much. So he put in a load of laundry, too. To carry more of his slack. Just had to put a timer on, so he wouldn't forget to rotate the load.

Ilya went into their bedroom and stripped out of his clothes. Sweatpants and hoodie from this morning, both wrinkled and smelling faintly of sweat. He pulled on an old pair of sleep shorts and reached for a t-shirt from his drawer.

Shane came in just as Ilya was pulling the shirt over his head. He went to their walk-in closet and grabbed his own pajamas off the shelf.

"How was your day?" Shane asked as he tugged a pair of sweats on.

That question was becoming hard for Ilya to answer, he was beginning to notice. He didn't want to lie to Shane. But he didn't have the words to describe what he was feeling right now. Or what he wasn't feeling, more accurately.

He wished whatever bug he'd caught from the kids would just finally pass already.

"It was fine,"Ilya said, stretching a smile he hoped reached his eyes. "How was yours?"

"It was good," Shane murmured, pulling the drawstring tight on his sweats. "Spent a lot of time on edge work with a few of the rookies." He paused, tilting his head slightly. That familiar crease formed between his brows. "Were the kids giving you trouble today?"

"No," Ilya answered immediately. Fuck, was he looking off? "They were perfect."

And they were. And Ilya wanted to leave it at that. As much as he loved Shane and the many questions he had, he didn't like how his body felt so coiled when he had to elaborate anything further than just fine. Or how his heart was picking up speed.

Shane nodded slowly, but the crease didn't go away. He was still studying Ilya's face. "It took a while to get Mila down tonight," he said carefully. "She wasn't tired at bedtime."

Ilya could feel himself shift under Shane's gaze. "Yes," he said, trying to sound casual. "She took a longer nap today than usual."

Because she'd passed out cold during their walk-turned-jog, he thought to himself. And then he'd slept with her in her bed for nearly three hours while he was supposed to be picking up

the boys from school.

"I am sorry," Ilya added. "I should have woken her up earlier."

Shane was quiet for a moment, still looking at him. "It's okay," he said finally. "I'm just...making sure you're okay."

"I'm fine," Ilya said automatically. "Just tired."

He could see Shane processing that. Could tell he was gearing up for another question. Or maybe a whole round of questions. Because his husband cared about him and wanted to know more.

And Ilya couldn't do that right now. Couldn't put words to the fog in his head or the heaviness in his chest or the fact that he'd forgotten to pick up his own children from school today because he was so exhausted he fell asleep at noon in his toddler's princess bed.

With each second that passed, Ilya was feeling himself brace for another question.

After another beat, Ilya made his decision. He dropped to his knees in front of Shane. He reached out, his fingers hooking into the soft fabric of Shane's sweats, pulling him closer until he could press his face against the waistband, right above the drawstring.

"Ilya…"

Ilya looked up, his chin resting against Shane's stomach. Shane was staring down at him, that stubborn crease still buried between his eyebrows.

"I have missed you," Ilya said. That part was also true. He did like this—how he could tell Shane things that *were* the truth. It made the other part, the not-telling-him-what-he-was-feeling part, feel less like lying.

He ran his thumbs over the soft stretch of skin above Shane's hips, over those faint silver lines of stretch marks that he'd traced a thousand times. The ones he loved. He leaned in and kissed right below Shane's belly button, slow and deliberate, then looked back up.

Shane's lips were parted slightly now. His breathing had changed. And he was angling his hips forward, just a little—subconscious or not.

He looked so pretty like this, Ilya thought. Even after a long day. Especially after a long day.

"I missed you too," Shane whispered.

Ilya pressed a few kisses down Shane's lower stomach, then hooked his fingers into the waistband of Shane's sweats. Shane didn't stop him. Lifted his hips slightly instead, instinctively making it easier.

Ilya tugged the sweats down. Shane was already half-hard, the shape of him pressing against the soft cotton of his boxers. Twitching once as the cooler air hit him.

Ilya felt his own cock throb instantly.

He pressed his lips to the tip of Shane's cock through the fabric. It was barely any pressure, but enough to make Shane inhale sharply. Enough to make a warm rush spill through Ilya's veins, his own body tightening, his cock pushing hard against the front of his pants.

Shane's hips shifted in a tiny, involuntary motion, like his body was trying to meet Ilya's mouth through the fabric.

That was all it took.

Ilya curled his fingers into Shane's waistband and tugged down the boxer briefs, dragging them slowly over his hips, not breaking eye contact with the hardening weight in front of him. The fabric caught for half a second on the swell of Shane's cock before slipping free and bouncing up with a soft recoil.

For a moment, Ilya just looked.

The thick, rosy length of him. The heavy, slow rise of his breath. The faint tremble in his sturdy thighs. A bead of precum was already gathered at the tip. Already leaking like a faucet.

He felt his mouth water, felt something low in his stomach clench. He reached out and wrapped a hand around the base, and heard the little whimper Shane let out.

Ilya loved that he could pull that sound out of him without even trying.

Ilya kissed the tip, tasting some of the precum, and looked back up at Shane. He was flushed.

He went forward and took him into his mouth in one slow, greedy slide. Tongue flattening underneath, letting the weight settle deep on the muscle, and lips sealing around the base of the head. Shane groaned and dove his hand straight into Ilya's curls.

"Oh, fuck," he breathed out.

Ilya's eyes fluttered shut. He hollowed his cheeks, drawing him in deeper, the heat of Shane's skin the only thing that felt solid in the world. He began working his mouth in steady pulls. Drawing sharp little whimpers from Shane. He tightened the seal of his lips, swallowing around him, letting the heavy sounds of his mouth fill the space between them.

He really wanted Shane to fuck his mouth. To hold onto his hair and thrust into his mouth until Ilya's jaw ached and his throat was raw and his eyes watered and tears slipped down the sides of his nose. He wanted to look up at Shane as he used him to chase his own pleasure. He wanted to give that to Shane.

After a while, Ilya popped his mouth off with a sharp, wet sound. He looked up at Shane and slid two fingers into his mouth. Slowly, until his lips were almost brushing the web of his knuckles. He hollowed his cheeks around them, tongue curling, eyes locked on Shane's the entire time. He wanted him to see. Wanted him to feel it before he even touched him.

Shane's breath stuttered. His hand in Ilya's hair tightened like he didn't even realize he was doing it.

When Ilya pulled his fingers free, they were slick, shining. He didn't waste a second. He wrapped his mouth around Shane's cock again in one smooth, hungry motion—taking him deeper this time, lips sealing, tongue pressing along the underside—and let his wet fingers slide down between Shane's cheeks.

Shane let out a sharp, helpless sound the moment Ilya's fingers found his entrance.

"Oh—fuck—" Shane's voice cracked as Ilya circled the rim first, teasing pressure, then pushed his fingertips in just enough to make Shane's hips jerk forward. "Jesus, Il—"

Ilya groaned around him, the vibration making Shane's thighs tremble.

Shane's hand cupped Ilya's jaw, thumb stroking blindly along his cheekbone. His eyelids fluttered, heavy, pupils blown wide as he watched Ilya's mouth work him.

"Ilya—" Shane's hips rolled, shallow, uncontrolled thrusts that slid his cock over Ilya's tongue. "Feels so fucking good."

Ilya pressed his fingers in deeper—slow, deliberate—while sucking harder, drawing a choked groan from Shane's chest.

Shane was panting now, his hips starting to lose their steady rhythm as they stuttered into a more desperate pace. Ilya opened his throat and took him deeper, letting Shane fuck into his mouth, his fingers working Shane's hole in a slow, obscene rhythm that matched every stroke of his cock over Ilya's tongue.

He could barely breathe. Shane's cock was hitting the back of his throat, hard enough to make a wet, involuntary sound slip out. Ilya's eyes watered—hot tears gathering at the corners—but he stayed there, holding himself open.

He swallowed around him with every thrust, forcing his muscles to unclench, forcing himself down until his nose was brushing Shane's lower stomach. He fucking loved this. He loved the sound of Shane's breathless little whimpers and the way the grip on his hair tightened as Shane's speed picked up.

Feeling Shane's muscles clench tight around his fingers while his mouth was full was almost too much. Ilya's own cock was thrumming, rock-hard and leaking, the friction of his sweats against him becoming unbearable as he watched Shane start to unravel.

Shane tugged Ilya's hair back, and Ilya released Shane's cock with a wet pop, a string of saliva breaking off.

"Want you in me."

That was all Ilya wanted. Anything to make Shane happy.

He scrambled up to grab the condom and lube from the nightstand. By the time he got into the bed, Shane was already on his hands and knees. So eager.

Shane's back arched instinctively when Ilya stroked his hips, presenting himself in a way that made Ilya's throat go tight before anything even started.

His palms slid over the curve of Shane's ass, spreading him just enough to see the slick Ilya's fingers had left earlier. "Always so ready for me," he said hoarsely.

Shane shivered, pushing back once. "Only for you," he breathed.

Only for him. Ilya leaned in and started kissing around his hole. Then he took a beat to gather some spit in his mouth before pushing it past Shane's rim with his tongue, letting the slickness breach the tight ring of muscle.

Shane moaned low above him, the sound breaking open as his hand flew back into Ilya's hair. His fingers locked tight, dragging Ilya in closer, rolling his hips back against Ilya's mouth, pushing his tongue deeper.

Ilya groaned into him, the vibration making Shane gasp again. He gripped Shane's hips more firmly, thumbs spreading him wider. His fingers sank into the softness there. Some of the fat spilled between his fingers as he held on tighter.

He pointed his tongue and thrust it in deeper, pushing until he felt Shane clench around him, then soften, then clench again.

Ilya kept the rhythm until his own lungs burned, until his head went light from holding his breath against Shane's heat.

He finally slipped his tongue out, and Shane let out a desperate little sound at the loss.

Before Shane could even inhale again, Ilya slicked three fingers with lube, drizzling it thickly over his knuckles. He pressed them to Shane's entrance, and Shane sucked in a breath as the first push went in clean, the second even easier. Ilya curled his fingers up, slow and deliberate, stretching the last stubborn bit of tension until he felt Shane melt around him.

Shane didn't need much longer.

Ilya scissored his fingers, working deeper, feeling how pliant Shane was, how ready. Hearing the way Shane's voice kept breaking, unrestrained and raw.

After another few slow pumps, Ilya leaned forward and kissed the center of Shane's back.

"Ready?" he murmured against his skin.

"God, *yes*," Shane breathed, his voice a frantic wreck. "Just fuck me. Please."

Ilya didn't make him wait.

He rolled the condom on with practiced, trembling fingers, lined himself up, and pushed in with one long, controlled stroke. It was slow enough to feel Shane open around him inch by inch, deep enough that Shane's hands immediately clawed at the sheets and he let out a strangled gasp.

Ilya rested both hands on Shane's hips, head dropping forward as he adjusted to the tight, wet heat around him. He felt Shane clench, hard, once, which pulled a groan straight out of Ilya's chest.

He started to move.

Slow at first, a deep roll of hips that dragged every inch of him against every inch of Shane's insides. The friction made Ilya's vision blur at the edges.

Shane moaned, low and broken, like the sound was being torn out of him. "Oh—*God*, Ilya—"

Ilya's pace stayed measured, building little by little. He could feel Shane arching beneath him, desperate for more. So he gave him more—longer strokes, deeper thrusts, letting the force build with every movement.

Then he pulled almost all the way out and slammed back in.

Shane's breath shattered. His arms buckled and he jerked forward, a sob punched out of him. "Fuck—!"

Ilya's hips snapped forward again. This time harder. Shane cried out, his body trembling.

"Is okay?" Ilya panted.

"Yes," Shane gasped, snapping his hips back so sharply it threw Ilya off balance for a second. "Harder—harder—"

Ilya loved this. Loved how much this made sense. He loved making Shane feel good and watching as he took him. Like he was made for this. This always made sense. They fit together like puzzle pieces. They always had.

He felt Shane clench around him as his pace quickened. "Oh, *God*, Ilya," Shane moaned.

Every time he bottomed out, it was a heavy, bruising thud of hip against hip that rattled his teeth and made Shane's breath hitch into a sharp, broken sob.

Ilya was glad Shane wanted to take him so hard right now. He needed that impact. He needed the blunt force of it to remind him he was real and alive and not always as sluggish and exhausted and virus-y as he'd been feeling.

"Ilya, *fuck*," Shane gasped, his back arching like a bowstring snapping.

Ilya didn't answer. He couldn't. He just hooked his hands under Shane's thighs, pulling him closer.

Shane's heels dug into the bed as he thrust his hips back to meet every one of Ilya's lunges. He was greedy, demanding the friction, demanding the weight. Each time Ilya tried to pull back for the next stroke, Shane followed him.

The rhythm shifted from a steady throb to something frantic and messy. The obscene sound of it filled the room—the slapping of thighs, the hitched, wet sounds Shane was making, the way the headboard groaned under the force of them.

Ilya watched the way Shane's muscles corded in his neck, the way his hands clawed at the sheets until his knuckles went white.

This was the only thing that felt real. His head might've been a complete fog lately, but this—Shane pushing back, the heat of him clenching around Ilya's length, the sheer friction of them trying to merge into one person—this always made sense.

Shane's head dropped, his forehead digging into the mattress as he gasped, "I'm—Ilya—oh fuck, I'm gonna—"

Ilya felt it. He'd felt the shift in Shane's body for a while now, that frantic, building pressure. He reached a hand around, his palm slick as he gripped Shane's cock, and slammed into him again. He hit him hard, the impact of his hips enough to shove Shane up the bed a few inches.

That did it.

Shane jerked violently, a broken cry ripping out of him as he came hard. His whole body seizing, cock spilling against the sheets. Each pulse of his orgasm rolled through him in heavy, rhythmic waves that dragged a groan from deep in Ilya's chest.

Shane collapsed forward on shaking arms, breath punching out of him in ragged exhalations.

Ilya, still buried deep and gripping him hard enough to leave bruises, continued fucking him through the aftershocks. As he felt Shane clench around him, it was enough to tip Ilya over.

As Ilya emptied into Shane, a choked sound tore out of him before he could swallow it. Not loud. Not even a full sob. Just a strangled catch in his throat.

He felt the back of his eyes burn first.

Then his vision blurred around the edges.

He blinked rapidly, desperate to force it back into place, trying to hold onto the grounding heat of Shane beneath him.

A hot tear slipped out, sliding across the bridge of his nose and down his cheek. And another one quickly followed.

He inhaled to try to steady himself, but the breath came out shaky, unsteady in a way he hoped Shane wouldn't hear over the sound of his own breathing.

The tears fell quietly, dripping onto Shane's damp skin as Ilya pressed his forehead hard against the back of Shane's shoulder blade. Pretending he was only catching his breath.

Shane, still boneless beneath him, reached an arm back and wrapped his hand around Ilya's forearm. A gentle squeeze. He probably thought the wetness on his back was just sweat.

They stayed like that for a while. Ilya trying desperately to make himself stop crying. He had no fucking idea why he even was, and he felt stupid about it. This wasn't one of those good post-sex cries. This felt different. Off. Aching.

After a few more minutes, Ilya kissed between Shane's shoulder blades. Then the cluster of freckles on his left shoulder. "So good, *moya lyubov*," he managed to say, his voice only shaking a little. "I'm gonna—" He cleared his throat. "I'm gonna go get a washcloth. Clean you up."

"Okay," Shane said, breathless, still not fully coherent. "Thank you."

"I love you." That was a truth he could say.

"Love you too," Shane murmured into the pillow.

Ilya pulled out carefully, quickly took off the condom and tied it, and rolled off the bed before Shane could turn over and see his face.

He made it to the bathroom and closed the door behind him with a soft click. Turned on the sink immediately, letting the water run loud. Then he leaned back against the door, covered his mouth with both hands, and let himself shake apart as quietly as he could manage.

Ilya had a dream about his mom later that week.

He can't remember the last time he dreamed about her. Or dreamed much at all.

She was at the lake at the cottage. All the kids were swimming around her, shrieking with laughter. Mila's little arms splashing. Niko doing cannonballs off the dock. Max was showing his mom how he could flip underwater And his mom was right there in the water with them, smiling. Her curls wet and pushed back from her face, water droplets catching the sunlight.

Shane was watching them from the dock with a pile of fluffy striped towels beside him. He had his sunglasses on and was smiling. Looking so relaxed.

Ilya couldn't look away. He tried to move forward, to join them, but his feet wouldn't work. His body wouldn't cooperate. But that was okay, maybe. He could just watch. They all looked so happy. His mom looked so beautiful.

He wanted to call out to her. Wanted to hear her voice. But his throat wouldn't work either. So he just stood there and watched his family. All together in the golden afternoon light.

Just as he was relaxing into it, he gasped awake, sitting straight up in bed. His heart was pounding so hard it hurt. His eyes struggled to adjust to the darkness of their bedroom.

It was enough to wake Shane up beside him. He jerked upright too, eyes wide and alert the way he always was when startled awake. "What? Ilya?"

Ilya blinked again. Nodded, though his throat felt tight. He rubbed his eyes. "Yes. Sorry. Didn't mean to wake you."

Shane frowned, fully awake now. He shifted to sit up against the headboard, reaching out to put his hand on the back of Ilya's neck. His thumb moved in slow circles there.

Ilya wasn't looking at him. He couldn't.

"Did you have a bad dream?" he murmured softly, his voice still a little rough from sleep.

Ilya's throat closed up completely. His heart was still hammering against his ribs, his breath coming too fast. He nodded. Then shook his head immediately after. "Not bad," he whispered.

Shane moved closer, both hands on him now. One still at his neck, the other coming up to his shoulder. "Was it your mom?"

Ilya felt his chin wobble. He felt like a child at how that instantly made him well up in tears again. He nodded jerkily, and the next thing he knew, Shane was pulling his head to his chest and cupping the back of his head.

Ilya buried his face in Shane's chest, letting his full weight collapse against him. Shane held him there, solid and warm, one hand running soothingly through his hair.

"I'm sorry," Shane whispered against the top of his head. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart."

Ilya couldn't speak. Just pressed his face harder into Shane's chest and tried to steady his breathing.

"She was with you and the kids," he finally managed to choke out. "At the cottage."

Shane's arms tightened around him. "I wish she could've met them," he said quietly. "I wish she could see the dad you became."

That made it worse. Or maybe better. Ilya wasn't sure. He just held onto Shane and let the tears fall.

In a way, it was a little relieving. Letting go like this. *This* was a valid reason to cry. Not like all the other times he's cried this past week, like when he was fucking jogging or after having sex. This at least made sense. This was an *acceptable* reason to cry.

This was tangible.

Ilya didn't get more than maybe five cumulative hours of sleep each night for the rest of the week. Not from nightmares this time. Just couldn't sleep at all. Insomnia had been keeping him awake for hours on end.

Which was frustrating, because he felt so fucking exhausted all the time.

Mila had daycare for half-days a couple times a week, and today was one of those days. So he'd be dropping both her and the boys off this morning. Then he'd be alone in the house until noon, when he had to pick her up again.

Maybe he could squeeze in a nap during those few hours. He'd remember to set a timer this time.

He was in the kitchen now, still in his sweats and an old hoodie he'd slept in, moving through the motions of breakfast in a fog. Scrambled eggs and toast. Even though his stomach was in knots and he'd been feeling nauseous all morning, and the last thing he wanted to do was eat anything.

But everyone in the family loved scrambled eggs. Especially his scrambled eggs. He could at least do this one thing right.

A few minutes passed before he heard footsteps behind him, just as he was putting bread in the toaster. Familiar footsteps. Shane's.

Ilya waited for the touch—the hand on his lower back, the kiss pressed to the back of his head, something. Shane always did that in the mornings when he came downstairs.

But the seconds stretched out. The air behind him stayed empty.

Ilya frowned and turned around.

Shane was standing in the doorway, already dressed for work. But he wasn't moving closer. He was just standing there. Looking at Ilya.

No, not looking. Studying.

And he was holding Ilya's orange pill bottle.

Oh. Fuck.

Every day this week, Ilya had said he was going to call to refill it. Every day when he reached out to grab the bottle in the morning from the medicine cabinet, and then once again realized it was empty.

And he still never did it.

"How long have you been out?" Shane asked, his voice tight.

Ilya diverted his attention back to the eggs in the pan. They were drying out, turning into rubbery little clumps. He used to be so good at making eggs, he thought to himself.

He thought about lying to Shane. Maybe saying it had only been a day, he just noticed. But the guilt of even saying that was making his head hurt more.

And the guilt of even thinking about lying to him was even worse.

"I'm going to refill it," he said. That wasn't a lie. He *was* going to. At some point.

Shane's jaw tightened. "Ilya. How long."

"A little while," he mumbled.

"What?"

"A little while," Ilya said, louder this time. He moved the spatula around for no reason.

Shane stepped closer, hovering. "A little while? What does that mean? More than a day?"

The smell of the eggs was suddenly nauseating. Ilya swallowed hard. "More than a day," he said slowly. "Since Wednesday."

"Wednesday?" Shane's voice went up. "*Wednesday*? That's six fucking days, Ilya."

"Like I said," Ilya said, grabbing a plate off the cupboard with more force than necessary. "A little while."

Shane set the bottle down on the counter with a soft, brittle clack.

"Ilya," he said, his voice dropping low. Dangerously calm. "Please tell me you haven't actually gone six days without your meds."

Ilya scraped the terrible, rubbery eggs onto the plate. "I told you. I'm going to refill them."

"You can't do that!" Shane's control snapped. He was shouting now. "Ilya, you can't fucking do that. You can go into withdrawal. You're probably already in withdrawal!"

"I am going to refill them," Ilya said once again, his own voice rising to match. "I'll call today. I'm not in withdrawal. I just forgot. I'll fix it."

"You forgot for six days?" Shane stepped forward sharply, blocking Ilya from moving past him. "Like how you 'forgot' to wake Mila from her nap on Tuesday? Or 'forgot' to pick up the boys from school?"

Ilya's whole body went rigid.

Shit. The boys must've told him about last Wednesday—the day he'd slept right through the pickup time when he was too busy napping in Mila's bed.

Not that Shane wouldn't have noticed the other things. All the other small failures stacking up this week.

He'd noticed when Ilya forgot to switch the laundry over, leaving the wet clothes to sour and wrinkle in the washing machine overnight. He'd noticed the stack of unopened mail piling up on the counter. He'd definitely noticed how Ilya has slept through his alarm more than once these past few weeks.

The room felt like it was closing in on him. "So now I am bad father."

"That is not what I said."

"Is what you are implying," Ilya snapped. "That I cannot take care of our kids because I forget pill."

"Ilya," Shane said, and there was panic in it. "I am saying if you're going through withdrawal, you can't even take care of *yourself* right now, let alone—"

"Oh yes, okay," Ilya barked, snatching his phone off the counter and jabbing at the screen, "I call doctor now. Hello! Yes! Please send an ambulance because my husband thinks I am crazy fucking man who cannot take care of children—"

"Ilya." Shane reached for his arm.

"—Maybe also tell them to send a social worker! To take my children away, because I am a danger to society—"

"If you were on heart medication," Shane shouted over him, his voice raw and desperate, "and stopped taking it for *six fucking days*, you'd be in the ER! Do you understand that? Is that fucking sinking in for you? This isn't about you being crazy, this is about you staying *alive*, Ilya!"

Ilya hadn't seen Shane this angry in a very long time. Maybe ever. Not like this. Not with his face flushed red and his hands shaking and his voice cracking on the word *alive*.

The smoke alarm blared.

Both of them froze. The eggs—no, the toast. Smoke was billowing from the toaster.

"*Fuck*," Shane hissed, already reaching up toward the smoke alarm on the ceiling.

Ilya felt like he might throw up. His ears were ringing. He couldn't really remember what he'd just said. His throat was raw and throbbing from shouting.

And he wanted to cry.

He yanked the plug on the toaster, grabbed the pan from the eggs, and dumped it in the sink with a clatter that made him flinch.

Movement caught his eye. He turned toward the hallway.

Niko, Max, and Mila were all standing there. Still in their pajamas. Niko was carrying Mila, one hand protectively on the back of her head. She had her ears covered with her small hands. Max's hands were over his ears too.

They were all staring.

Fuck. How long had they been there.

"Good morning," he said over the blaring sound of the alarm, trying to keep his tone light. "Good morning. Sorry. Sorry it is loud. Very, very loud."

Each shriek of the alarm felt like it was drilling directly into his skull, worsening the headache he woke up with. Had they heard the yelling? How loud had he been? Why couldn't he remember clearly?

Max lowered his hands from his ears slightly, looking between Ilya and the smoking kitchen. "What's happening?"

Ilya closed the distance between them quickly, kissing the top of Max's curls, reaching out to rub Mila's back where she was clinging to Niko. "Burnt toast," he said, hoping desperately that's all Max was asking about. "Don't worry. We will pick up breakfast on way to school, okay? Maybe Tim Hortons?"

Mila peeked out from Niko's shoulder. "Timbits?"

"*Da*, lots of Timbits," Ilya promised, his voice still too loud, too bright. "Whatever you want."

Behind him, Shane had finally gotten the smoke alarm to stop. The sudden silence felt almost worse.

Niko was looking at Ilya with those observant eyes of his. The ones that were Ilya's coloring, but Shane's in every other way.

"You guys were fighting," he said quietly. It wasn't a question.

Ilya opened his mouth. Closed it. His throat felt tight. "We had disagreement. About breakfast. Is fine now." He paused, forcing himself to meet Niko's eyes. "I'm sorry you heard that. It was nothing you did. None of you."

Shane came out of the kitchen then. He stopped when he saw them all standing there, frozen in the hallway.

Mila reached out for him immediately, twisting in Niko's arms. "Daddy."

Shane moved without hesitation. He lifted her from Niko, tucking her against his chest and pressing his face into her hair. Breathing her in. "Hi, baby," he murmured. "You're okay. Everything's okay."

Shane looked at Max and Niko. "Everything's okay," he repeated, his voice softening. "Can you guys get dressed for school? We're leaving in fifteen minutes."

"Are *you* guys okay?" Max asked, his voice small.

"Yes," Shane said quickly. "Yes, honey. I promise. Go on."

Niko hesitated, looking between them. Then he put his hand on Max's shoulder and steered him toward the stairs. "Come on."

They went, but slowly. Max kept looking back. Niko put his hand on the back of his head and turned it to face forward.

The hallway felt too quiet now. Too exposed.

Ilya stood there, still holding the spatula.

"I'll call the pharmacy," Shane said finally. His voice was flat. Carefully controlled. "I'll get your refill sorted. Today."

Ilya nodded. Couldn't quite meet his eyes, so he just looked at Mila instead, resting so peacefully in his arms. Shane was such a good dad. That's probably why Mila wanted him right now instead of Ilya. She could tell something was off with him, probably.

Withdrawing.

"I'm also going to be the one dropping the kids off today," Shane said, his voice leaving no room for argument.

Ilya's head snapped up, a frown pulling at his face. "I can take them, Shane."

Shane just stared back at him, intense and unmoving. "I need you to do something for me."

Ilya felt a pit in the bottom of his stomach. He hated that tone. It was the one Shane used when he was managing a crisis, and Ilya hated being the crisis. "What."

"I need you to rest," Shane said carefully. "Text me when you've laid down. Text me when you wake up. No errands. No pickups. I'm leaving work early to get them after school. You just...sleep."

Ilya felt like a fucking child. "Shane, you do not need to take off—"

"Ilya." Shane's voice was sharp. Then he seemed to catch himself, catching the look on Ilya's face, and his tone softened slightly. "Please."

He wanted to snap back, to tell Shane he didn't need a handler, but the electric zaps in his brain and the heavy, aching fatigue in his limbs told a different story.

He didn't have the energy to fight the person who was currently holding his life together.

"Okay," he said finally, the word coming out stiff. "I will text you."

Ilya did as he was told.

When Shane left with the kids, he dimmed the lights in the living room until it was all gray shadows and muted shapes. Stayed in his pajamas. Dragged the heavy wool blanket from the back of the couch over himself and collapsed into the cushions.

He'd sent the text: *Lying down now.*

Shane had responded immediately: *Good. Try to sleep. I love you.*

And Ilya tried. He really did. He was exhausted. His whole body ached like he'd run a marathon. His eyes burned from crying earlier. Sleep should have come easily.

But the house was too quiet.

Without the kids' chatter, without Shane moving around in the kitchen or upstairs, the silence started to grate. It pressed in on him from all sides, thick and suffocating.

He stared at the back of the sofa, watching dust motes dance in a thin sliver of light coming through the curtains. And felt that familiar cold hollow opening up in his chest again. The one that had been there for weeks now. Months, maybe.

The one he'd been trying so hard to ignore.

His throat tightened.

Then he started crying.

And it very quickly got worse.

These were not the quiet tears from earlier in the week. This was different. Heaving, gasping sobs that he couldn't control, couldn't swallow back down. His whole body shook with them. He pressed his face into the couch cushion, trying to muffle the sound even though there was no one home to hear him.

Every time he tried to catch a breath, the sobs got worse.

He didn't know how long he cried. Time felt strange, elastic. Could have been ten minutes. Could have been an hour.

He heard the front door unlock.

"Ilya?"

He froze, his breath catching mid-sob.

"It's me. I texted but—I decided to call off the whole day. Came home."

Ilya shot upright on the couch, his hands flying to his face to scrub away the dampness. But it was useless. His face was soaked, eyes swollen, nose running. His breath was still coming in short, panicked hitches that he couldn't catch or control.

Shane appeared in the doorway between the hall and living room.

Ilya watched his expression change in real time. The exhaustion from this morning was still etched into his face; he looked worn out, shoulders tight with tension. His hair was windblown and messy from the bitter air outside, a few stray snowflakes still melting on the shoulders of his dark coat.

But the moment he saw Ilya, everything shifted.

His eyes went wide. His whole body went rigid for half a second.

Then what Ilya could only describe as terror flooded his expression.

"Ilya," he breathed.

Ilya's whole face crumpled again. He felt it.

"Shane." It came out broken. Barely recognizable as his own voice.

Shane didn't even pause to put his keys away—they hit the hardwood floor with a metallic clatter that echoed through the quiet house. He crossed the room in three long strides and dropped onto the edge of the couch. His hands were already reaching, already pulling Ilya toward him before he'd even fully sat down.

"Come here," Shane said roughly, hauling Ilya into his arms. Blanket and all. "Come here, baby. I've got you."

Ilya went willingly, collapsing into Shane's chest like his strings had been cut. Shane wrapped both of his strong arms around him and squeezed tight—almost too tight, crushing him against his chest. His chin came down to rest on top of Ilya's head. One hand spread wide across Ilya's back, the other cupping the back of his head.

"I'm right here," Shane murmured, his voice a low rumble that Ilya could feel reverberating through his chest. "I'm right here, Ilya. Just let it out. Just let it all out."

Ilya couldn't have stopped if he'd wanted to. His body shook with sobs he couldn't control, gasping and hiccupping and ugly. He buried his face in Shane's shoulder. The wool of his coat was rough against his cheek, cold from outside. He clutched at the fabric with both hands, twisting it in his fists like he was drowning and Shane was the only thing keeping him above water.

"I know," Shane was saying, over and over. "I know. I know, baby. I'm here."

Shane's hand moved in slow, steady circles on his back. His other hand carded through Ilya's hair, gentle despite how tightly he was holding him.

Ilya's breath kept catching on sobs, making his chest hitch violently. He couldn't get air in properly. Couldn't slow it down.

"Breathe," Shane coached softly, his lips pressed against Ilya's hair.

Ilya tried. Failed. Sobbed harder instead.

Shane just held him tighter. Started rocking them both slightly, a gentle back-and-forth motion like he did when the kids were inconsolable. His hand never stopped moving on Ilya's back.

"M'sorry," Ilya finally choked out against Shane's shoulder. The words came out garbled, thick with tears and snot.

"Shh." Shane made that soft shushing sound. Soothing. Rhythmic. "You don't need to apologize."

That made Ilya cry harder. Because God, what had he done to deserve Shane?

And Shane sounded so *sad*.

"I'm sorry," Shane said quietly, still rocking them both. His hand kept rubbing circles on Ilya's back, steady and grounding. "I'm sorry for what I said in the kitchen this morning. I was out of line. I shouldn't have yelled at you like that."

Ilya shook his head against Shane's shoulder, tried to say it wasn't Shane's fault, but all that came out was another broken sob.

"I was scared," Shane continued, his voice wavering slightly. "I *am* scared. But that's not an excuse. You're going through something and I—" He stopped. Breathed. "I should have handled it better."

Ilya's fingers tightened in Shane's coat. He wanted to tell Shane he didn't need to apologize. That Shane had every right to be angry. That Ilya had fucked up. That Ilya *was* fucked up, he had let things get this bad and had probably scared their children and definitely scared Shane and forgotten to take care of himself and—

But the words wouldn't come. Just more gasping breaths and the awful hiccuping sounds he couldn't stop making.

So Shane just held him. Kept rocking. Kept murmuring soft reassurances against his hair.

Eventually, the sobs started to quiet. Not gone, but less violent. Less to the point of nearly dry heaving. He could breathe a little more normally. His chest still hitched, but not as badly.

"You're going to be okay," Shane whispered. "We're going to get you help, okay? But right now, just be here with me."

Ilya nodded weakly. So weak he wasn't even sure if he really did it, but he hoped he had, he hoped Shane noticed. Pressed his face harder into Shane's shoulder and let himself be held.

Ilya hadn't been seeing his therapist, Galina, regularly anymore. They would check in every couple of months, but not for actual sessions. Had been that way for the past couple of years. But that's because he had been doing so well. *Really* well. He loved waking up every morning to his husband, who he could now love openly, and to their three kids. All of it had felt easy. And he had been seeing Galina for over ten years now. She understood there'd be some stages in his life where he'd need her more than others.

He thinks he needs her now.

Shane pulled back slightly, just enough to look at Ilya's face.

lya couldn't help but feel embarrassed. He knew he must look awful right now—could feel the wetness everywhere, the snot he couldn't quite control, how swollen and tender his eyes were. The drool at the corner of his mouth from crying so hard he'd forgotten how to swallow properly.

But Shane didn't flinch. Didn't look away. His hand just came up to cup Ilya's jaw, gentle and steady, his thumb brushing across his cheekbone to catch the fresh tears still falling. "I'm going to get you some water, okay?" Shane said softly. "Just stay right here."

Ilya nodded weakly.

Shane stood carefully. He pressed a kiss to the top of Ilya's head before heading to the kitchen.

Ilya sat there on the couch, wrapped in the blanket, trying to get his breathing under control. His whole body ached. His head was pounding—that dull throb behind his eyes that had been constant lately, but worse now after crying so hard. His throat felt raw and tight. His eyes burned, swollen and sensitive. Even his chest hurt, like all those sobs had bruised something inside him.

He heard the tap run in the kitchen. The clink of a glass.

Then Shane was back, kneeling on the floor in front of the couch. He held out the water glass with both hands, steady and patient.

"Here," he murmured. "Small sips."

Ilya took it with shaking hands. The cold water hurt going down his raw throat.

Shane stayed there on his knees, one hand resting on Ilya's thigh.

Ilya lowered the glass and looked at him. At Shane's red-rimmed eyes, the worry etched into every line of his face.

"I think," Ilya managed, his voice hoarse and barely there. "I think things are maybe bad again, Shane."

Shane's expression crumpled for just a second before he pulled it back together. His hand tightened on Ilya's thigh. "Okay," he said, his voice steady even though Ilya could see how hard he was working to keep it that way. "Okay. Thank you for telling me."

Ilya's chin wobbled again. "I'm sorry—"

"Don't apologize," Shane said firmly. "We're going to fix this. We're calling Galina first thing tomorrow. Getting you back in for regular sessions. And I—" He paused, took a breath. "I called the pharmacy. Your refill will be ready in a few hours. I'll pick it up."

Shane shifted, moving from his knees to sit beside Ilya on the couch. He pulled Ilya close without a word, guiding him until Ilya's head was resting in his lap. Then his fingers started moving through Ilya's curls, slow and methodical.

"And I set up the auto-refill," Shane continued quietly, his voice softer now. "So this doesn't happen again. No thinking required."

As Ilya lay there with his head in Shane's lap, Shane's fingers working through his hair in those steady, grounding movements, he felt his eyes burn again. There was so much he needed to say to Shane. So much he couldn't find the right words for. He wanted to tell him how grateful he was, how sorry, how desperately, completely in love with him he was in a way that felt impossible to articulate. It was too big, too consuming.

So he started with:

"Thank you."

End Notes

as a fellow antidepressant baddie, i stopped dreaming completely when i started taking them, so i was like ugh what if ilya dreams about his mama again when he stops taking them and its the first time hes seen her in his dreams in years :((and thats kind of where the idea for this fic came from lol

also for those who have been following this hollanov dad universe, i know this one doesn't focus as much on the kids! tbh when i first started thinking about this series, a lot of what i was picturing writing about was how their own issues and dynamics would play out once they were married with kids. more family fluff will come, i promise!!

thank you so much for reading!!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!