you and I and no one else

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by quantumoddity

Summary

Shane Hollander finds that he cannot sleep and he isn't the only one.

But this isn't going to be like all the other nights he spends in Ilya Rozanov's bed.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Shane was used to waking up and having no idea where he was.

Just for a couple of seconds of course. His sluggish brain would eventually come online and remind him *you're safe, you're okay.* Shane would remember that he was at hockey camp with other boys snoring in the beds just beside him or in his ojisan's little house with the sea whispering outside the window or in a modest hotel room with his teammates just a thin wall away. Whatever the answer was, Shane would remember that, while he might not be home, he was safe. It just took a couple of seconds.

But those couple of seconds were fucking terrifying.

This time the answer his brain eventually provided was *hotel room, Las Vegas, NHL Awards last night.* Shane repeated it to himself over and over, staring at the blank ceiling until those facts were enough to slow his racing heart and ease his ragged breathing.

He supposed the bright colours splashed across the blankets should have given him a clue, he'd been to a lot of cities but few chose a colour palette quite as eye watering as Vegas. The slight headache and the sandpaper mouth were another clue. Shane wasn't a big drinker as a rule but he always felt so awkward at the awards, so many people he had to make small talk with, so many suited strangers who saw his sport as a business and him as something closer to cattle than a person. A little more free champagne than usual made it less mind numbing to give the same answer ten times over.

Shane kicked away the soft sheets, groaning his way into a sitting position. There was no point in pretending he could go back to sleep, headache or not, he knew himself too well for that. Once his body was awake, it would go until he exhausted it, until he could run dry of the nervous, slightly manic energy that had made his mom put a hockey stick in his hands to begin with.

He fumbled around on the bedside table, eventually managing to stab his phone screen and bring it to life. Shane barely suppressed a groan when he saw how early it was, just past three in the morning. He'd squirmed free of the awards afterparty pretty early but he'd still only managed a couple hours of sleep, something he was sure he'd feel tomorrow at practice. No part of his brain chimed in to remind him that it was a voluntary practice and he didn't explicitly have to be there. That was irrelevant.

The notifications waiting below that disappointing digital clock did make Shane feel a little better. Congratulations had rushed in while he slept, effusive texts from both his parents that reminded him to call them as soon as it became a more reasonable hour, one from his agent that was already talking about opportunities in a brisk, business like way Shane was too tired to deal with right now, a scattershot from his teammates that reminded him every victory wasn't just for himself, it was for them too. However awkward he might have felt up on that podium last night, the trophy heavy in his slightly sweaty hands, it was good for the Voyageurs. Shane didn't do any of this alone.

He scrolled a little more, looking for one name in particular, however much he told himself he wasn't. Why would Ilya have messaged him? They'd already agreed a hotel full of

sponsors and officials and their fellow players was far too risky, they weren't going to spend the night together. And, as that was the only reason they ever reached out to each other, Ilya had no reason to congratulate him or tease him over his speech or ask how he was doing. That wasn't how they did things and hoping for anything else was beyond stupid.

Shane knew that, but he couldn't stop his heart from squeezing painfully when that impossible thing wasn't there. And he had no one to blame but himself.

Running in the desert, even the desert at night, sounded like something no Canadian would survive so Shane pulled on some of the workout gear that always lived at the bottom of his travel bag and tried to remember the way down to the gym through this labyrinthine hotel. If he couldn't sleep, a few miles on the treadmill would have him feeling more like himself, shaking off the cloying taste of old champagne on his tongue and the lingering feeling of all those eyes on him.

The hallway carpet felt so ridiculously plush under his sneakers that Shane felt bad walking on it. He passed identical door after identical door, the repetition quickly becoming maddening, to the point where he had to keep his eyes down.

Each room was like its own organ in an enormous body, breathing with its own soft life. He heard soft conversation, maybe the whispers of people getting ready for a way too early flight, maybe a parent trying to calm a child who couldn't sleep after a day of bright lights, sugar and excitement, maybe someone watching the weird TV you could only find in hotel rooms at three am. Mostly he heard snores, some the loud, rattling snores that could only be hockey players. Players who had more sense than him and were actually getting some sleep.

It was oddly comforting to get those quick snatches of other people's lives, a hallway full of little reminders that he wasn't alone. However scared he'd been when he woke up, however far Shane was from home, he was brushing up against hundreds of other stories running parallel to his own, all of them threads tangled in some disorganised sewing box. He'd never know any of these other people, he'd never follow the thread of their lives but they were there.

It was a nice thought, to be comforted by other people simply existing, to think that maybe his soft footsteps were comforting them too.

Until Shane caught the soft sound of something completely unexpected, something that brought him to a halt like his brain had just stopped talking to his muscles because it was too locked on that sound.

A sound he knew. A voice he recognised, coming from the last door in the hallway just before the elevators.

At least Shane thought he recognised it. He'd never actually heard Ilya Rozanov cry before but he thought it would sound a hell of a lot like this.

It was such a small sound, heartbreakingly small. Ilya was such a big man, he took up as much space as he could, he dared people to look at him. But the choking sobs coming from behind that door were tiny, restrained, like they had given up on being heard a long time ago.

They were childlike, shuddering and stalling like an engine that couldn't get going, a desperate sound.

A sound that was as helpless as Shane felt, rooted to the carpet, trying to rationalise this world where Rozanov could cry. And figure out what the fuck he was going to do about it.

The small part of Shane that still believed this was about sex and nothing more told him to walk away. That was the only response that made sense, the only one that didn't take this nameless thing they had into some very dangerous territory. Pretend he hadn't heard anything, go down to the gym and run until the sound of the blood pulsing in his own ears drowned out those heaving sobs. If he had any sense, that was the only option.

But if Shane had any sense, he wouldn't be in this situation in the first place. If he had any sense, Ilya Rozanov would be nothing more than his on ice rival. If he had any sense, he wouldn't know the man's voice well enough to know that was him crying, even though the rest of the world thought such a thing was impossible, that the only expression his face could hold was a cocky smirk.

Shane had five years of evidence that he had absolutely no sense at all, not when it came to Ilya. So he knocked on the door, softly, making sure the sound didn't carry down the hall.

Immediately, the crying stopped, choked off like it had never been. Like even as he'd been sobbing, Ilya had been listening, ready to hide his own tears at the slightest sign that someone could hear him. Shane felt his heart ache, enough that he pulled his phone out of his pocket and sent a text.

It's me. You okay?

The reply came quickly and unsurprisingly.

Fuck off.

Ilya had more sense than Shane apparently. He had one more chance to make the easy decision, to give this up as a foolish attempt at pushing the boundaries of whatever this was. A reminder that he needed to stay within the zone lines of this game they played.

But Shane knew what Ilya was doing. He was trying to make him angry, snarling and snapping at him in an attempt to push him back. Trying to force a distance between them with a coarse word or a snide comment, the way he did with everything else.

As though getting under Shane's skin had ever done anything but draw him closer.

He knocked again, not louder but more insistent. A clear sign that he wasn't going to leave Ilya to whatever had him in its grip. Again, he didn't have to wait for a response as the door jerked open, showing him Ilya in just a pair of black boxer shorts. Nothing unfamiliar there, the surprise was his red rimmed eyes, the flush in his cheeks, the furious twist of his mouth.

"Can you not read, Hollander?" he hissed, his accent made twice as thick by the tears he'd unsuccessfully scrubbed from his cheeks and the fact that he was trying to keep his voice

low.

“I read it fine, I just didn’t listen,” Shane whispered back, folding his arms, “Ilya, I can’t just walk away.”

Ilya’s snarl was as fierce as the bear tattooed on his chest, not dulled at all by the fresh tears filming his eyes, “You want to have sex *now* ? Right now? For fuck’s sake…”

Shane felt his stomach drop to the ground floor. He stared at Ilya with a mix of horror and pain.

“You seriously think that’s what I’m here for?” he didn’t have to work to keep his voice down now, those words had struck him in the chest and stolen half his air, “Ilya…”

Shock was the bucket of cold water that guttered Ilya’s anger, leaving them both standing in the faintly hissing, damp silence. His jaw worked, his eyes flitted up and down Shane like he was seeing him for the first time, fidgety without the shield of their fury.

“Why else would you be here?”

Ilya’s voice had shrunk to a whisper that hid inside itself, the same way he cried. Like he didn’t want Shane to hear, like he didn’t actually want to know what the answer was. Shane couldn’t exactly blame him. Now he’d stepped out of bounds, a not insignificant part of him was terrified, searching for a way to take it all back and return to the tight, familiar box they’d been in for years now.

But he couldn’t. Not if that meant Ilya crying alone in his room and Shane pretending there was nothing he could do. If that was really what they had, it needed to change. However terrifying that might be.

“Because you sound like you need help,” Shane finally said, “And I want to give it to you.”

He met Ilya’s eyes, facing him down without flinching, the way they looked at each other across the ice when they were moments from the whistle blowing. That minute that always felt longer than it had any right to, where it felt like the rest of the world fell away and just left the two of them. The best in the game. The twin stars of the NHL. And in that minute, Shane could only ever feel relief that he wasn’t alone at the top.

He hoped Ilya felt it too. He hoped it was enough that he’d trust him now.

At last, after a long pause, Ilya stepped to one side, letting Shane into the shadows of his hotel room. He didn’t say anything, he didn’t even look at him as he walked past, just shut the door behind them the instant Shane’s heel crossed the threshold..

No one could wreck a hotel room as thoroughly or efficiently as Ilya Rosanov. He’d probably occupied this space no longer than Shane had occupied it’s twin further down the hall but somehow there were clothes scattered everywhere, a modest take out box tower on the desk, a gutted suitcase on the bed Ilya wasn’t sleeping in. And a crowd of beer bottles on the nightstand. Too many beer bottles.

Ilya folded his arms across his chest, gnawing on his lower lip like he still couldn't work out what to replace his anger with. It would almost be comical, if Shane hadn't heard him crying five minutes ago.

"Why do you want to help me?" Ilya finally blurted out, a piece of truth escaping in his confusion, taking advantage and bolting between his teeth.

Shane hoped the sadness on his face didn't look like pity. That wasn't what he felt for Ilya, he knew better than that. It just hurt, to hear it said out loud, to know for certain how few people had offered his lover sincere, free of charge concern.

"Ilya, if we can fuck with no strings attached, I can care about you without them too," he said softly, "I'm not asking for anything, I just…whatever we have, whatever you want to call it, wherever you want to draw the line…I'm here."

Maybe it was because everything else about them was so fucking complicated but Ilya looked so relieved at the simplicity of that. Shane was here. They didn't need to ask why, they didn't need to wonder what would happen next. One of them needed the other and, so, they were here. Just like always.

Ilya's shoulders dropped, his voice became rough, "I had a bad dream."

He said it like a confession, like it was something to be ashamed of. But Shane only nodded gently, eyes soft and understanding even if Ilya couldn't quite meet them yet. But he did look up when Shane held out a hand.

"It's okay," he offered, reaching into the space between them but waiting for Ilya to close the gap, "You want to try again?"

There was a flash of fear in Ilya's eyes, one he couldn't hide. But the rest was a bone deep exhaustion, one that spoke of more than just a single night of bad dreams. It spoke of a lifetime of them, an endless trail of times where Ilya had needed someone but had held himself back, had told himself he could do it alone, that he would do it alone no matter how much it hurt.

And here was Shane, the man he'd already broken so many rules for. What was one more?

Ilya took his hand, nodding mutely. Shane was beyond words too, all he could do was squeeze his fingers in a silent promise to not let go.

The NHL awards didn't skimp when booking hotel rooms for its biggest stars, the bed was more than enough for the two of them. Shane shook out the duvet, disrupting the tangle of Ilya's tossing and turning, making it into something fresh and cool and new. He cranked the AC, turned the pillows, drew the blinds to mute the blaring, hard candy lights from outside. All while Ilya hovered, a little staggered like he was watching Shane perform a magic trick and trying to figure out how it worked. And maybe he had waved some kind of wand, this had to be the longest Ilya Rozanov had ever been silent in his life.

Finally Shane drew him down onto the bed with a hopeful smile. He didn't pull him close, Ilya was the one who closed the gap, who pressed close the moment they were side by side, clinging to Shane like he was afraid of being swept away. They were more used to the opposite, Shane was smaller than Ilya- however little he liked it, however much Ilya exaggerated it- and it had always made more sense for him to be the one tucked up, curled in, surrounded by a strong pair of arms.

Shane was a little surprised to learn how easily the scales could tilt, how simple it was to shift just a little ways up the pillow and let Ilya's forehead rest in the cradle of his collar, how nice it was to have bronze curls tickling his nose, how his fingers traced up and down Ilya's broad back, navigating the familiar cartography of his muscles. He was surprised and then, quickly, he was guilty. Why had he never offered to hold Ilya before? Why had it always been him getting that reassurance and never giving it back?

Shane pulled him closer, just a little. As an apology.

It was strange at first, it had to be. This was as close as they'd ever been with this many clothes on, aside from a few tackles on the ice that were rougher than they needed to be. Neither were quite sure how this was supposed to feel. Ilya stayed tense, muscles locked until they shivered with it. It was as if he was on a frozen lake, refusing to believe it could hold his weight, ready to bolt at the sound of a crack.

Shane just stayed solid, keeping his breathing steady. And slowly, achingly slowly, like the stretch of a pulled muscle, he felt Ilya finally relax.

"You can talk about it, if you want," Shane breathed into the darkness, "Sometimes it helps."

He said it just to have the words hanging there in the soft darkness, just so Ilya knew he was listening, that this went beyond the physical. He really wasn't expecting an answer. He was trying to give, not receive.

But the answer came anyway, murmured softly against his collarbone so Shane felt it more than heard it.

"My family," Ilya whispered, "I dream of my family."

Shane frowned a little, not understanding, not expecting any answer at all, let alone that, "You had a nightmare about your family?"

Soft sheets whispered as Ilya nodded, voice dull and colourless, "My father, angry with me. Yelling at me. Hurting me. My mother is right there but there's glass in the way, she can't reach me. She can't hear me shouting for her."

All the breath was knocked from Shane in a single, terrible blow. He felt like he'd been given something sharp to hold, a piece of broken glass that had no safe edges, no way to keep it from biting into his palm and causing pain.

"Oh god, Ilya…"

He felt the other man tense, like he was expecting him to pull away, already bracing for the cold air that would rush in when Shane let go of him and backed away, unable to take it. Shane could tell Ilya thought he'd asked too much, he'd let too much truth slip into this new space that had opened up. That he'd rolled the dice just to see two single dots looking back at him.

Shane gripped that piece of glass, shifting his reality to accommodate its bite, holding tight until blood beaded in the gaps between his fingers. Because maybe it would cushion it for Ilya, just a little.

He held his lover tighter, one hand sliding up to cup the back of his head, tangling his fingers in the place where Ilya's curls got longer and thicker. Like he was daring anyone, anything, to separate them.

That tension collapsed, Ilya gripping him back in what had to be relief, a relief so deep and raw that there would be nail marks on Shane's arms in the morning. It was so unfamiliar to him, enough to be a little frightening, but he supposed he'd never been denied anything, not the way Ilya had.

After all, Shane thought of his home to comfort himself, to remind himself that he was safe in those stomach dropping, heart pounding fear. He would tell himself that his parents, the people who loved him with everything they had, were never far away, that no matter where in the world he was, that house on the lake would still be there.

How many nights had Ilya opened his eyes and known there was no safe place for him?

"Sometimes when I wake up and I don't remember where I am, I get really scared," Shane's voice cracked in the darkness, unable to hide the emotions gripping his chest, "It feels awful but…but then I get this little voice that reminds me I'm okay. That I'm safe. It tells me all the things I'm afraid of can't follow me out of my head. Maybe you could try listening out for that?"

Ilya swallowed, considering that, finally whispering sadly, "I don't think I have that. That little voice, I think…I think something is broken."

He sounded so defeated, an emotion Shane didn't think Ilya Rozanov was capable of feeling. But apparently you could consider yourself a god made specifically for the ice and still fully believe there was something wrong with you, something so broken that there was no point in hoping it could be fixed.

Shane set his jaw stubbornly, shifting just enough for him to take Ilya's face in his hands. His palms cradled the sharp, almost sculpted lines of him, making sure he couldn't look anywhere but Shane's eyes.

"Then I guess that's what I'm here for," he murmured, voice low, the words for no one but Ilya.

There was nothing to say after that. They had their answer.

Ilya's eyes fell shut, his forehead coming to rest on Shane's like he needed to be as close as possible. Their lips brushed in something like a kiss, a softer, trembling version of one. Shane just held him, a hand still stroking up and down his spine like his bones were an instrument he could play, watching in silent fascination as finally Ilya's breathing levelled and his shoulders dropped and he slipped under the surface, asleep.

Shane hoped his dreams were kinder this time. But, even if they weren't, he would be here to make sure he felt safe.

He fought his own unconsciousness for as long as he could, very aware that this moment had a firm expiration date, that once the sun came up Shane would have to go, find a way to get back to his own hotel room and make sure no one ever knew he'd been anywhere near Ilya's. He clung to this gentle closeness as long as he possibly could, savouring these slightly strange moments to map out every little detail of the other man's body, until he knew him better outside and in. Even if he was asleep, he hoped Ilya felt like something precious, something treasured.

Shane would have to leave in the morning but maybe next time this happened, Ilya would feel brave enough to pick up his phone and call him. Maybe this had been enough to convince him that there was someone in this world who would take his hand and tell him *you're safe, you're okay.*

Or maybe it hadn't. Maybe they only had these few hours before the sun came up, before the world's eye fixed on them again, maybe the anxieties would rush in again and they'd give this up as a terrible idea. Too close to something real. Too dangerous.

But, even so, Shane couldn't bring himself to regret these few hours.

Because these few hours were fucking beautiful.

End Notes

I hope you enjoy this! Each and every comment is hugely appreciated, I'm also on Tumblr over @mollymauk-teafleak if you want to talk hockey boys! <33

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