**you're a shooting star i see**

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# you're a shooting star i see

by stargazinghollanov

Summary

a college AU where Ilya and Shane, co-captains of their D1 hockey team, miss their final shot at playoffs. With their senior year slipping away from under them, their friends decide it's the perfect opportunity to finally go on an unforgettable spring break together. Ilya could have never imagined this single decision would change his life.
--
or Ilya is pining after his best friend Shane

# Chapter 1: Duluth

**Duluth, Minnesota**

**Sunday - 8PM**

“So, remind me again. What am I supposed to do?” Shane asked, holding the dart in his had as if he never held a dart before.

Ilya groaned dramatically as he stepped beside him. “Oh my God, Hollander. You take the dart, throw it at the map, and wherever it lands...boom. Spring Break. It is easy.”

It was a quiet Sunday night in Duluth, Minnesota. The Night Shift - the slightly sticky and well loved dive bar directly off campus - was nearly empty. Beyond the bartender and the lonely regular in the corner, only five college seniors clustered around the dartboard.

This was all Rose’s fault. She’d seen some post online of someone who *definitely* had more money than the five of them, trusting the fate of the cosmos and the power of the dart to choose their next getaway. The influencer, of course, had a map of the entire world and her dart landed on some island nestled in the Bahamas. The five friends had a map of the United States, knowing very well that they were limited to driving to their destination.

It took some (a lot) of convincing, but after never reaching a solid agreement as to where they should go, the group finally agreed and surrendered to the damn darts destiny.

Naturally, they began to argue about who was going to throw the dart. Ilya tried to play the playoffs guilt card, Rose argued that it was her idea, Shane didn’t give a fuck, Jackie tried to say she had the best aim, and Hayden argued that he once got a bullseye playing darts with his dad.

It wasn’t until Hayden reached in his coat pocket, and for whatever fucking reason, realized he had a D20 dice when they all decided to roll for the highest number. Shane found himself dubbed the chosen one.

“Oh! You should close your eyes!” Jackie laughed. “Maybe spin in a circle, too!”

“Oh God, please no.” Rose whined. “With our luck, he’ll land us in the middle of the Pacific ocean.”

“Hey, I’ll have you know that I won our school's shot accuracy challenge!” Shane sassed back, hands on his hips for dramatic effect.

“By one second,” Ilya reminded him, sending a wink Shane’s way. Hayden raised his eyebrow at Shane when he caught him blushing. “Just throw the fucking dart, Hollander.”

So he did.

Their Spring Break destination was set for Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

The group felt instant relief that Shane didn't destine them to some small town in the middle of nowhere, but also rising panic as they realized Myrtle Beach was a popular spring break destination and they needed to leave in t minus 3 days with no housing accommodations set. Rose, thankfully, volunteered to get that all figured out. Where would they be without Rose?

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**Duluth, Minnesota**

**Tuesday - 10:30 PM**

"I think I'm going to tell Jackie I love her on the trip," Hayden stated, marching into the living room he shared with Shane and Ilya. The three of them met on their college hockey team and instantly hit it off. After living in the dorms their freshman year and the Hockey House their sophomore and junior year, the three of them decided to get an off-campus apartment together as seniors. They wanted to have a little more separation from the guys in the Hockey House after noticing patterns of late night party fights finding their way onto the ice on game days.

"How romantic," Ilya replied, eyes not leaving the TV. "Will you do it on the beach?"

"Maybe," Hayden sat down on the couch next to Shane. "I was looking online and saw there was a ferris wheel or something on the boardwalk. I was thinking that she and I could go on it and maybe I can tell her then."

"Is she afraid of heights?" Ilya asked, eyes breaking away from the hockey game on the screen, raising his eyebrow as he looked over to Hayden.

"Oh. Good question." Hayden seemed to be thinking hard and Shane noticed.

"I can just ask Rose," Shane offered, pulling out his phone. Ilya took a deep breath, he didn't understand why every time Shane talked about Rose, his heart felt like it was free falling into his stomach. They were all friends, for fucks sake, Ilya liked Rose, but he had a feeling Shane liked Rose in a way Ilya didn't.

"Ohhh, Rose" Hayden teased, elbowing Shane in his ribs. "How's that going? You ready to admit you like her?"

"No. God, no." Shane laughed a little too quickly. "I don't like her like that. We're just friends, you know that."

Ilya happened to glance over and the wrong (or maybe the right) time. Shane's eyes flickered towards him, as quick as a heartbeat, but gone before Ilya could process what it meant. He told himself it was probably nothing, and turned back to the TV. He silently willed the glow of the TV to hide his blushing cheeks. Afterall, he is Russian, and Russians do not blush.

"Whatever you say," Hayden exhaled, slapping his hand on Shane's shoulder. "Anyways, let me know what you find out. I'm going to go pack."

"You still haven't packed?" Shane asked, slight disbelief in his voice. "We leave in the morning!"

"I have not packed either," Ilya stated, taking a sip of his beer.

"Oh my god, you guys have to pack!"

"Relax, Hollander. It is easy. Couple bathing suits, couple shirts, underwear. That is all I need."

A smile crept on Shane's face as he shook his head slowly. "Unbelieveable" he laughed under his breath. "Don't ask me for help packing tomorrow morning."

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**Duluth, Minnesota**

**Wednesday - 9:45 AM**

"Hollander, I need help packing!" Ilya busted into Shane's room, flicking on the light. "My alarm did not go off in time and I cannot find my perfect shirt."

Shane groaned and flew an arm over his face. "This is exactly why I told you to pack last night," he complained. "And what the fuck do you mean by your perfect shirt?"

"I have already packed everything else, I just need the shirt. You know! The red one, with the flowers or whatever. Very good for the beach." He explained, marching over to Shane's closet and throwing the doors open.

"I have no idea what you're doing, but I can promise you I don't have your shirt." Shane's eyes finally adjusted to the light as he sat up in bed, seeing a shirtless Ilya tearing apart his closet in front of him.

Ilya sighed in frustration, turning to face Shane. Shane, who was also shirtless, was tapping away on his phone. Ilya paused, his stupid heart rate speeding up. God, he needed to find a way to control that.

“Then I will just have to wear boring shirt on the beach,” He stated, feeling defeated. Shane stood up, walking over the Ilya and placing a hand on his shoulder.

“I’m sure you’ll still look great in a boring shirt.”

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**Duluth, Minnesota**

**Wednesday - 12PM**

“Okay, assholes!” Rose stated, shutting the trunk of their rental SUV as she packed her final bag. She dusted off her hands and clambered into the car, where the four expectant faces waited for her speech to resume. “I’m going to go over the plan again since you all have peas for brains,” she stated, lovingly of course.

“Ouch,” Jackie clunched her chest, acting like she was morally wounded by Rose’s words. “And I thought we were friends.”

“Best friends, but that doesn’t change the fact you have the memory of a squirrel.” Rose smiled. Jackie shrugged in agreement.

Rose pulled out her phone, presumably to open the itinerary she had made. “Anyways, we have a late start, but that’s okay. Tonight we are stopping in Chicago, we should be there right before 8PM.”

The group nodded in understanding as they settled into their seats. Hayden volunteered to drive the first leg, and Jackie, unsurprisingly, called shotgun before anyone could blink. Rose had quickly claimed the entire back row as if it was her birthright, leaving Ilya and Shane to be in the Captain's chair in the middle row.

“Thank god my dad got suckered into a timeshare a few years ago, because that turned out to be a blessing. The company has a hotel in Chicago, so we were able to get 3 rooms for free.”

“Three?” Shane asked, head whipping to Rose. “Who’s sharing?”

Ilya felt dread come over him as he waited for an answer. It was obvious Hayden and Jackie would be sharing, they were basically married despite only being together for a few months. But would Ilya be the one left alone? It wasn’t that he had a problem *being* alone, but that would mean Shane and Rose would...?

“Hayden and Jackie, You and Ilya. I get a room for myself. I booked this whole trip, so it’s my reward. Plus, I know you hockey players snore and I need my beauty sleep.”

Relief washed over Ilya so fast, it felt like he was floating. Then the confusion hit, snapping him back to reality. Why was he getting so worried about this?

He pushed all his thoughts to the back of his mind and listened as Rose explained the rest of the itinerary.

“Tonight: Chicago bars. Tomorrow Morning? Tourist traps, brunch, maybe some sight seeing, then we roll out. Shane takes the wheel for that leg.” She pointed her phone to Shane like it was a weapon. Shane put his hands up.

“Aye Aye, Captain.” He responded.

“Nashville by Thursday afternoon, because duh, we *have* to hit Broadway at least once in our college careers!”

Everyone cheered briefly, then allowed Rose to carry on.

“We have the airbnb for that night. I believe you all sent me your portion of the cost...Anyways we all get our own bed, even the old married couple in the front can sleep separately if they so choose.”

Hayden kept his eyes on the road, but squeezed Jackie's hand. They would most definitely not be needing the 5th bed.

“Anyways, we bar hop Thursday night, find some hangover cures Friday morning, then Ilya is behind the wheel taking us on the final stretch to Myrtle.”

Everyone “whooped” in response. It was impressive how much Rose could pull all of this together in such a short time. Ilya admired how organized Rose was. She really was the backbone of this whole group.

She then carried on to explain their plans for Myrtle.

“The nightmare timeshare turned out to be a blessing, because they have a resort in Myrtle. We copped a 3 bedroom condo. Same sleeping arrangements as Chicago; Jackie and Hayden in the master bedroom, Ilya and Shane in the bedroom with the 2 twin mattresses, and I will gladly be taking the third bedroom with the full sized bed.”

She then explained how they will stay from Friday night till Wednesday morning. Most of their days would be spent at the beach, with no real itinerary once they're there. When they leave on Wednesday, they have no planned stops on the way back, wanting to drive until they physically can’t and are forced to stop off at a hotel.

Ilya was excited, he truly did love his friends and he couldn’t wait to be sharing this time with them. But something in the back of his mind was causing his heart to beat in a way that almost made him dizzy. It was the ever looming thought of sharing a room with Shane for the next week, save the night in Nashville.

Though he refuses to admit it, Ilya knows that Shane means something to him, and he’s so scared that he won’t be strong enough to fight that feeling any longer. His face started heating

up at the sheer thought of it all.

He turned to look out the window. Russians do **not** blush.

# Chapter 2: Chicago

Ilya looked around the car and smiled to himself. His legs may be numb and his back may be sore, but he was *happy.* He was surrounded by the people he loved and the people who loved him back. When he had moved here for school, he never really thought he was capable of having this.

Back home, he was treated like shit. After his mother passed, his dad started to get more distant. The only time he ever talked to Ilya was to scold him for how he played during a game, even if he had played perfectly. His brother acted like the sheer existence of Ilya was an inconvenience. Needless to say, Ilya never felt appreciated until he moved to Duluth.

Now, he gets to play hockey for a D1 college team, has amazing friends, and has a promising future here in America. His coach tells him that a lot of scouts are interested in him. There's no doubt that he's going to get drafted in June. There's even a high probability he'll be one of the first ones. Well, him and Shane, of course.

Shane was probably his best friend out of all of them. They had met during their first team meeting, and they instantly clicked. Not only did they have incredible chemistry off the ice, but on the ice as well. They were unstoppable, constantly leading their team to the top. They managed to make the playoffs every year, however, it was a series of unfortunate injuries and mishaps this year that ultimately took away their spot in the playoffs for their seniors year. Needless to say, as Co-Captains, Shane and Ilya were devastated. They had worked their asses off to claim that victory for their team, but the dynamic duo was no match for the onslaught of broken legs and sprained wrists that cursed their team this year.

It was only after a few days of saulking that Rose decided she had enough and they were going to finally go on spring break together. It was something they always wanted to do but couldn't due to the boys' demanding hockey schedule. Ilya was truly thankful for that. It hurt enough knowing they got knocked out of the playoffs, but it hurt even more seeing how badly the whole situation hurt Shane.

It became quiet understanding amongst everybody that the playoffs would not be mentioned this entire trip. They needed to keep the vibes positive.

So that's why, sitting here in the car, it feels like a breath of fresh air. Rose and Jackie are singing their hearts out to a One Direction song, Hayden is using the steering wheel as a drum and he steals glances at Jackie, and Shane has a ridiculously wonderful smile plastered on his face as he looks out the window.

*He looks charming.* Ilya thought, a smile mimicking Shane's beginning to form.

Jackie tapped Hayden's arm, pointing to the large highway sign calling out the amenities at the next exit. "Can we pull off?" She asked, Hayden already merging the car safely to the right. "I really need to pee."

"We could use some more gas," he agreed, and made his way to the gas station.

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They pulled into the fanciest gas station Ilya has ever seen. The gas station itself had a portion for cars and an even bigger portion for trucks, and the building that separated the two was almost as big as a small grocery store.

Hayden, Jackie, Rose, and Ilya all started to unbuckle their seatbelts and file out of the car. Ilya noticed that Shane made no strides to follow suit. “Do you need anything, Hollander? Chips? A Ginger Ale?”

There was a flicker of pink across Shane’s cheeks, but it was gone before Ilya could register it. It had to be his imagination. Or the lighting. Probably.

“I can just go in with you, I should probably pee anyways.” Ilya nodded at Shane's response and climbed out of the car with Shane following just seconds behind him.

The bell of the gas station door sounded as they walked through. They were instantly greeted with the unmistakable smell of gas station hot dogs and floor cleaner and bright fluorescent lights. Shane and Ilya both drifted towards the snacks.

As they turned the corner, they were greeted with a bright red display housing University of Wisconsin merch. Anything from Foam Fingers to Shot Glasses was housed on this display. Shane's steps slowed.

Of course, they were in Madison Wisconsin. Aka where the University of Wisconsin is. The very school that knocked them out of their playoff chances.

Ilya noticed the way Shane looked at the display. He didn’t look angry, he just looked wounded. It’s a look Ilya grew all too familiar with after finding Shane alone in the team locker room after their final game of the season.

“Hey,” Ilya said, stepping next to Shane. “It wasn’t our fault, okay? We’re kick ass players and a kick ass team. It just so happened that our entire team was held together by athletic tape after all these injuries.”

Shane nodded, still not saying anything. Ilya hated the way Shane was hurting, and wished he could do something to help. He knew Shane needed a second to process everything, so he didn’t rush him.

“It’s just...” Shane started. “It’s our senior year. We should’ve made it.”

“I know,” Ilya sighed, turning to look at Shane. “We would have, too. But look at the bright side, we actually get to enjoy a spring break and not have to worry about playoffs or diets anymore.”

Shane let out a small laugh, then turned to face Ilya. They were now standing face to face, and the closeness twisted something in his chest.

Ilya turned his head to look for the chip aisle, wanting to hide the fact that the closeness between them was causing something in his chest to twist. ‘Come on,” he willed, and nodded in the direction of the snacks.

He walked away, and Shane followed.

They both scanned the snacks, as if they were on a mission. Well, to be fair, Ilya *was* on a mission. He hated to admit it, but he *loved* the cheddar Chex Mix but never let himself indulge in it during hockey season. It was his guilty pleasure. So when his eyes landed on the last bag left, he reached for it.

Only, Shane had reached for it, too.

“Oh,” Ilya said, moving his away from the bag of Chex Mix. “You can-”

“No,” Shane laughed, grabbing the bag and thrusting it towards Ilya. “I was grabbing them for you. I know they’re your favorite.”

Ilya had to fight demons to have a normal response, because Shane just has that effect on him. Shane makes Ilya crazy, and Ilya doesn’t know what to do about that.

But instead he settled for a smile, grabbing the chips from Shane. “Thank you.”

They walked through the gas station, grabbing more snacks and of course, a Ginger Ale and Coke, along the way. Ilya noticed how Shane was eyeing the candy bars, but walked away without ever picking one up.

That’s the thing about Ilya; he noticed a lot when it came to Shane.

Like how his face scrunches up when he sees something on his phone. Or how he puts his hand through his hair every time he is nervous to say something. He noticed how Shane's eyes light up when Diamonds by Rihanna comes on the radio and how quickly he tries to hide it. He notices when Shane is disciplining himself for losing a game when it wasn’t his fault.

Ilya didn’t say anything, though. Instead, he walked next to Shane as they approached the check out. Shane had grabbed his wallet faster than Ilya, paying for both of their snacks and drinks.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Ilya smiled, looking down towards Shane.

“It’s no worry,” Shane replied, slapping a hand on Ilya's shoulder.

“Take these to the car?” Ilya asked, handing Shane the bag of their goodies. “I’m going to run to the bathroom.” Shane nodded, taking the plastic bag from Ilya, and walked out the door.

Ilya waited until Shane was in the car, then detoured to the candy aisle. He grabbed a snickers bar, then made his way back to the check out.

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“Finally, Rosanov!” Hayden called. “Let’s get back on the road!”

“Sorry, sorry,” Ilya responded, buckling into his seat. Shane opened their bag and handed Ilya his Coke and Chex Mix. Wordlessly, Ilya handed the Snickers bar to Shane.

Shane froze, then looked up at Ilya.

“You deserve a win, Hollander.” Ilya answered, just quiet enough for the two of them to hear. Shane took the candy from Ilya, and finally, the hurt and sadness that had overcome Shane's face was being replaced by a genuine smile.

The butterflies looming in Ilya’s stomach were impossible to ignore now. Ilya pushed down the feeling, pretending he didn’t know exactly what it meant.

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**Chicago, Illinois**

**Wednesday - 7:45 PM**

“I am so excited to not be in a car!” Jackie cheered, slamming her door shut. “And I cannot believe I’m in Chicago!” Jackie ran over to Rose, embracing her as they squealed some nonsense about getting drunk tonight in the big city. Hayden looked at her fondly.

“I’m so gonna marry that woman,” Hayden said to the boys. They smiled.

“I call Best Man!” Shane teased, nudging his elbow in Hayden’s side. Shane nudged him back and the two of them broke into a fit of horseplay on the sidewalks of Chicago. Ilya couldn’t help but wonder if he had the same look on his face when he looked at Shane as when Hayden looked at Jackie.

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“Okay, everyone has their room keys?” Rose asked. She immediately stepped back into her ‘Mom of the Group’ role when it came to check in at the hotel. She got everything situated, handed everyone their keys, and even made sure to text the group chat with everyone’s room numbers just in case.

“Let’s get upstairs, settle in, get ready, then meet back down here at 9PM? From there we can head to the bar, club, whatever and go from there.” Rose looked tired and drained, despite not doing anything but sitting in the car all day. Ilya suspected she would be taking a nap when they got to their rooms.

The group all huddled into the elevator. Hayden and Jackie got off on floor 8, Rose on floor 11, and Ilya and Shane on floor 14.

They silently made their way to room 1410. Shane put the key card against the reader and unlocked the door. “Home sweet... oh.” he paused. It wasn’t until Ilya came into the room that he understood why Shane had paused.

There was only one queen sized bed, sitting there, in the middle of the room.

“Oh,” Ilya breathed. He didn’t know if he should laugh, cry, or jump for joy. Regardless of how much he’d love to share a bed with Shane, he had to keep his best friend in mind. The last thing he’d want to do is make him uncomfortable. “Maybe there was a mix up? We could ask the front desk for a cot or something,” Ilya suggested.

“I can uh...” Shane reached for his phone. “I can text Rose. Maybe she gave us the wrong room.”

Right. Rose.

Ilya had to remember that whatever this is that he’s feeling, call it jealousy or whatever, is temporary. It means nothing. Shane is allowed to text *their mutual friend, Rose* about a mix up with their hotel room.

It means nothing.

“Yeah,” Ilya answered, setting his bag on the luggage rack near the bed. “If you want.”

Shane muttered a response that Ilya didn’t quite catch, then made his way to the bathroom.

Ilya sat on the arm chair near the window and looked out. Frustration bubbled under his skin.. He knew he was lying to himself, and had known that for awhile, but that wasn’t the problem. It was the jealousy that was making him sick to his stomach.

Hayden has Jackie, and they’re perfect for each other. There is a lot of love in that relationship, and Ilya couldn’t be happier for them. That’s not where the jealousy comes from, though. It comes from Rose.

Rose was kind and sweet. She’s the type of person who lights up a room when she walks in. Of course she and Shane were close, they were the two most genuine people Ilya knew.

Hayden teases Shane about it constantly, and Shane always shoots it down when it's suggested that there’s something more going on there. And even though Ilya and Shane tell each other everything, what if there *was* something going on? And if there is, why can’t he be happy about it?

*Because you've been falling for Shane since the day you met.*

Ilya sighed. He hated the way his stomach turned into something sour every time he admitted that to himself.

Shane made him happy, and as much as Ilya would do anything to call Shane his, he knew his friendship with Shane was much more important than wherever these feelings were.

He had to face reality; After college, Shane and Ilya would be drafted to different teams and they would only see each other a few times a year.

There was no point. Ilya would lose Shane in a few months. The last thing he wanted to do was ruin what little time they had together and make things awkward. He just wants Shane to be happy. And if Rose Landry makes Shane Hollander happy, then Ilya needs to learn to be okay with that.

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"Rosanov," an all too familiar voice sounded, shaking Ilya awake. "Hey, I'm sorry to wake you."

Ilya didn't even realize he had fallen asleep. He opened his eyes and looked out the window; the Chicago skyline was beautiful, buildings lighting up the darkness outside. He then turned to Shane.

Shane was more beautiful than the skyline, Ilya decided.

"It's like, 8:30.." Shane trailed off. "I let you sleep a little bit, I know you were up late . But Rose will kill us if we're not downstairs and ready by 9."

Ilya rubbed his face to wake himself up. "Okay," he sighed, hauling himself out of the arm chair. "I will go shower, then we can head downstairs. Did the bed thing get solved?"

Shane looked curiously at Ilya, as if the gears were still turning in his brain. "The bed thing..." he trailed off. Then the obvious lightbulb moment hit. "Oh! No, it didn't." he answered, not making eye contact with Ilya.

"I can uh, sleep on the chair again?" Ilya offered, but Shane immediately protested.

"No, no.. we can... we can share, I think that's okay. I mean, if you're okay with it?"

Ilya laughed, then walked over to Shane. They were standing face to face, just like they had been in the gas station. Ilya smiled, then playfully tapped Shane's cheek with his palm.

"No need to get so flustered, Hollander," Ilya joked. "I know I am so sexy. Must make you nervous to share." Whatever tension was looming in the room broke, and both Ilya and Shane

stifled out a laugh.

“I think I can control myself,” Shane reassured, turning to grab his shirt for the night out of his luggage.

Ilya laughed softly in response then excused himself to go shower.

*Fuck, this is going to be a long week.*

# Chapter 3: Chicago

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Wednesday - 11:15 PM**

It didn't take long for the group to find a club near their hotel. The music was bumping so loud that they could hear it as soon as they walked out of the doors of their hotel lobby. The five of them approached Club Faultline with the hope of making it their first stop of many.

But it was now 2 hours later, Hayden and Jackie are all over each other on the dance floor and Ilya, Rose, and Shane are sat at a table immediately adjacent to the dance floor. Ilya was at least 6 shots and 3 drinks deep at this point. Rose has had even more, and Ilya lost track of Shane's alcohol intake.

"At least one of us needs to be sober," he had told Ilya earlier in the night. "I'm alternating drinks. Some with alcohol, some without."

Ilya told him, for what it was worth, that that was a stupid idea and he should just get drunk. Shane didn't listen.

So now the three of them were here, watching Hayden and Jackie feel each other up. If it wasn't for the fact that almost everyone on the dancefloor was doing the same with their partner, Ilya would've been embarrassed for them.

"Hayden is going to tell Jackie he loves her," Shane yelled over the music to Rose. Rose's expression stayed neutral.

"It's about time," she yelled back. 'She's been waiting for this for weeks now."

None of them could take their eyes off the couple as they swayed together to the music. Shane eventually excused himself from the table to grab another drink. Ilya silently wondered if this one would have alcohol.

"I want to be as in love as they are one day," Rose stated, her chin in her hands. "The way he looks at her is just, ugh." she paused, and Ilya laughed in response. "It's almost like how... nevermind."

Ilya lifted his eyebrow curiously at Rose, willing her to finish whatever she was saying.

"No, it's nothing." She insisted. "Anyways, how is your room? You guys settled in nicely?"

“It’s nice,” Ilya answered, raising his voice so he could hear her over the thumping of the music. “Shane texted you, yeah?”

Now it was Rose’s turn to look confused. “Texted me? About what? Shane hasn’t texted me today.” She yelled back. Before Ilya could ask her what the fuck she means by that, a song came over the radio that ilya recognized as one of Rose’s favorite songs. “Oh my GOD!” She squealed, and before he knew it Rose was pulling Ilya onto the dance floor.

Rose spotted Shane as she was dragging Ilya to dance, and grabbed him too. “Both of you! No Excuses! Dance with me!”

And so they did. Ilya, Shane, and Rose started dancing like maniacs, throwing themselves into the music as if it was a game they were trying to win. Eventually, Hayden and Jackie spotted them on the dance floor and the five of them danced like nobody was watching. They danced, laughed, and sang their hearts out on the dance floor. As they danced, they took turns going to the bar and ordering rounds of shots.  It wasn’t before long that all of them, including Shane, were drunk off their asses.

Ilya has never seen Shane this drunk before, and it honestly was something beautiful. The way the sweat bead his hairline and glistened across his face, the look of happiness and light that filled his eyes. The way Shane looked in this dark club, lights all around him. Shane looked beautiful. Truly, truly beautiful. And Ilya couldn’t tear his gaze away.

Maybe it was the alcohol.

Maybe it was being here with Shane

Or maybe it was the fact that Shane never texted Rose about the bed.

Whatever it was, happiness filled Ilya’s chest.

That was until a beautiful, glitter dusted woman made her way to Shane. Between his foggy brain and the bright strobing lights, Ilya couldn’t tell if Shane was enjoying her company, or if he should save him from this stranger.

It was almost as if Rose could read his mind as she approached the two on the dance floor.

“Excuse me, I know this is weird!” She yelled over the music at the stranger. “But I’m having a bit of a girl emergency!”

Ilya didn’t understand girl code. He was almost jealous that all Rose needed to say was she was having a ‘girl emergency’ and this complete stranger was willing to leave behind this *beautiful*  man and help her fellow sister out. Ilya filed it in the back of his mind that he should find a way to thank Rose tomorrow.

It was just then that the opening beats to Diamonds by Rihanna filled the club speakers. The look that came over Shane's face was more beautiful than any piece of art you'd find at the Louvre.

"Oh FUCK yes!" he yelled, grabbing Ilya's wrist and pulling him further into the dance floor. This wasn't really a club dancing song, but Shane found a way to make it work.

Ilya was watching Shane, laughing as the boy he's so fond of belts out the words to his favorite song. Hayden and Jackie found the pair and joined in on their mischief.

The four of them danced happily together, Rose eventually joining them again.

Shane grabbed Ilya's hands, threading their fingers together. The two of them, hand in hand and drunk off their asses, jumped together, shouting the words for the entire club to hear.

Ilya allowed himself to let go, to not overthink it and just enjoy this moment.

Ilya was happy.

--

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Thursday, 1:32 AM**

"Do you have him okay?" Rose asked as the elevator stopped on floor 8. "I can come up and help you get him settled in and I get these 2 to their room." She nodded in the direction of Hayden and Jackie, who were very obviously very drunk and half asleep.

Ilya, whose arm was wrapped around Shane's shoulder, declined the offer. "No worries," he replied. "I think I can get him myself."

Shane and alcohol rarely cross paths. Yes, Shane would indulge every now and then at parties at school, but Ilya has never seen Shane this wasted. After the Diamonds dance, Ilya had started drinking water. It was clear that Shane had no intentions of sobering up, and as much as he hated to admit it, Shane was kind of smart for suggesting one of them should be sober enough to get them back to their room.

The elevator brought them to floor 14 and Ilya carefully guided Shane to the hotel room. Shane was aware enough to keep himself upright with no assistance, but Ilya didn't want to let go of him. Not yet.

When they approached the room, Ilya unlocked it and brought Shane over to the bed. “You need water, yes?” Ilya asked, his Russian accent making a stronger appearance. That tends to happen when he’s had a few drinks.

Shane nodded, then fell backwards on the bed, a groan coming from his mouth. “Oh my god, I know I’m about to feel like absolute shit tomorrow,” he complained, using his arm to cover his eyes and shield him from the blinding hotel light.

Ilya laughed, poking him in his side to get his attention. “Here, drink” he said, thrusting the glass of water at Shane. Shane sat up, taking the water from Ilya.

“I don’t deserve you,” Shane muttered, bringing the glass to his lips. Ilya watched the way water dripped from his chin, Shane’s Adam's apple bobbing with every gulp.  Ilya took a sharp breath.

“What does that mean?” he asked, breaking the silence.

“You just, god I don’t know.” Shane paused, setting the glass down. Even though his words weren’t slurring anymore, Ilya could tell Shane was still drunk. “My I get all... I don’t know. I can’t think.”

Ilya laughed quietly, then said “Lets sleep, yes? Long drive tomorrow.”

--

The light of the Chicago skyline lit their room up in the most beautiful way. The glow highlighted Shane’s face perfectly, Ilya had to will himself to look away. He heard Shane stir next to him. Ilya wondered if Shane’s heart was beating just as fast as Ilya’s.

Probably not.

“Ilya?” shane whispered, so delicately that it grazed Ilya’s skin with goosebumps.

“Hmm?”

“I never told Rose about the bed,” Shane admitted. He and Ilya both stayed frozen, neither one of them daring to move a muscle.

Ilya took a deep breath. “I know.” Ilya was quick to figure that out after his brief conversation with Rose in the club, but he never figured out why. Did Shane forget? Did he think it was too much trouble just for one night? He didn’t dare to ask.

He didn’t need to, though, because Shane answered for him.

“I didn’t want to,” he admitted.

*Oh.*

Chapter End Notes

hiiiii

i hope you're enjoying the fic so far! i wanted to get the first 3 chapters out to the world, but please know i am actively working on chapters! I'm hoping to have thewhole thing finished by the time episode 6 comes out!

all my love!

c

# Chapter 4: Nashville

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Thursday - 9:00 AM**

I didn't want to.

I didn't want to.

I didn't want to.

*I didn't want to.*

Those 4 words kept replaying in Ilya's head. He fell asleep thinking about these words, and when he woke up and saw Shane sleeping next to him, the words came flooding back.

Ilya had to get up. He had to get up, find some coffee, and not let this consume his brain for the next however many days. Shane was drunk. It could've meant anything.

I didn't want to...bother Rose.

I didn't want to... be an inconvenience.

I didn't want to...change rooms because I liked the view.

*I didn't want to because I wanted to sleep next to you.*

God, Ilya needed his brain to shut up for once. This was going to be a long, long trip.

--

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Thursday - 10 AM**

The friends had regrouped in the dining room of the hotel. They loaded their plates up with anything and everything the hotel had to offer that could potentially cure their hangovers.

“I feel like death. I feel like I’ve been run over by a dumpster trunk and got flattened out. Death.” Jackie mumbled as she sat down at the table. “And we have to do this again tonight? In Nashville? God save us.”

There was a groan of agreement around the table. Ilya looked over at Shane, and the poor boy looked like he could hurl at any moment. “What if we skip sight seeing?” Ilya questioned. Shane looked a little less miserable after this suggestion.

‘Yes.” he deadpanned. “Please.”

Hayden laughed at Shane’s misery. “Dude, you went hard last night.”

“I know,” Shane groaned. “Judging by the fact I can’t remember half the night, I think it’s safe to assume I am never doing that again.”

Relief washed over Ilya. Shane doesn't remember half the night. Which means he most definitely does not remember telling Ilya he didn’t want to fix their bed problem, right? If Shane doesn’t remember, then Ilya can just forget all about it, obviously.

Ilya scoffed to himself. He wished it was that easy.

“I don’t think you’ve ever drank that much before,” Jackie said, digging in her purse for something. “Ah, here, take some.” She pulled out a bottle of Ibuprofen and handed 2 pills to Shane. “We’re gonna need our driver in tip top shape.”

Ilya butted in, “Nonsense. I will drive this leg. Shane can take the Myrtle leg.” The crew nodded in agreement, nobody was going to fight that. Ilya looked over to Shane, who said nothing but mouthed a quiet ‘thank you.’ in Ilya’s direction.

“So it’s settled then,” Rose clapped.

The group grimaced in pain at the sharp sound. Rose froze. “Oops, sorry,” She smiled sheepishly, then lowered her voice to make up for the previous noise she caused. “As I was saying, it’s settled then. Chicago dogs and The Bean are officially dead to us. Let’s pack our shit and get ready to giddy up.”

Ilya was almost offended at how energetic she was. The fact that she doesn’t have a hangover is beyond his understanding, but nonetheless, he admired her for it.

The group trudged along to the elevators with a silent mutual understanding that tonight was going to be a very *long* night.

--

“Okay, do you have everything?” Shane asked, one foot holding the door open as Ilya did one last frantic sweep of the room. “Final check.”

“I think so,” Ilya muttered, eyes scanning every surface of the room. Nightstand, dresser, floor. Not the bed, though. He wanted to keep his mind distracted from the fact he slept just inches from Shane in that very bed last night. “I think we are good to - oops.”

He moved too fast and his foot caught on Shane's, causing him to twist and crash into him. “I was not looking, sorry.”

He didn't dare to look up, because he knew he would be met with Shane’s gaze. He was already spiraling because of last night, he didn’t need another reason to fall further into his spiral.

Shane just laughed, patted him on the shoulder, then moved out of the way. A friendly touch, nothing more.

Ilya’s heart didn’t get the memo, though.

--

“Guess I’m shotgun,” Shane laughed as he and Ilya approached the car on the street. Hayden, Jackie, and Rose were already settled into the car. Jackie and Rose in the middle, Hayden in the back.

“Not true, you could always sit with Hayden in back,” Ilya joked, trying to use humor as an excuse to hide his excitement of being able to sit next to Shane all day again.

“I’d much rather sit up front with you,” Shane confessed, his steps quickening as they got closer to the car. Ilya didn’t respond because what are you supposed to say to that?

--

**Nashville, Tennessee**

**Thursday - 7 PM**

The drive to Nashville was painfully uneventful. Ilya was stuck listening to music as the entire car slept soundly for almost the entire drive, save for the time they stopped off for a late lunch and a gas tank refill.

Their airbnb was...fine. Nothing to write home about. Their shared bedroom had exposed brick along one wall, the smallest little window you could possibly imagine, and... two twin mattresses pushed up against opposite walls. Ilya was both relieved and disappointed to see the two tiny beds.

“Wow, luxury...” he laughed, setting his bag on the left most bed.

“Could be worse,” Shane sighed, tossing his stuff on the floor near bed on the right. There was a casual ring to his voice, almost too casual as if he was trying to disguise something else. Was it relief?

Ilya knew the room would have 2 beds, but he didn’t think they would be this far apart. He was hoping it would be something...closer. But, beggars cannot be choosers.

They both stared at the space between their beds for a second too long before Shane broke the silence. He stretched, his shirt riding a little too high, and said “Thank you so much for today,

dude.”

This caught Ilya off guard. He tore his eyes away from Shane’s torso before Shane could notice and looked up at his face. “For what?”

“For taking care of me last night,” he said, again with the too-casual-its-almost-fake tone. “And for driving all day. Man, we must’ve been the worst company.” Shane moved over to his bag, taking out a white t-shirt and jeans for tonight's bar hopping festivities. “I mean, we all slept and you had to sit in silence for what? Like 8 hours?”

“It wasn’t that bad.” Ilya assured.

That was a lie, though. It was the longest eight hours of his life and all he could do was sit there and think about those four fucking words Shane spoke last night.

Shane set down his clothes neatly on the bed, turning to look at Ilya. “Don’t downplay it, I know you like to talk. Being quiet for that long must have been miserable.” Shane walked closer to Ilya, a playful tone to his words.

“Oh, go fuck yourself, Hollander. I thought you were supposed to be thanking me.” Ilya laughed, matching Shane's playful tone.

Shane moved closer to Ilya, and Ilya was sure Shane could hear his heart beating out of his chest.

Shane gave Ilya a grin. “You’re right, “ he breathed. Ilya had to fight everything in him to not close his eyes and bask in this moment. He needed to remain calm.

But Shane was just so close to him.

“I feel like I owe you...like I need to repay you.”

Ilya’s heart sped up because in his hopeless romantic mind, this is the moment where Shane launches at Ilya and connects their lips. This is the moment where all the tension and the jealousy and everything fades away.

But of course, this isn’t a movie and Shane doesn’t do that. Instead, he puts a hand on Ilya’s shoulder and announces "I'm buying your drinks tonight, no excuses.”

And well, at least Ilya could get some free drinks out of this.

“Deal.”

Shane turned back to his clothes and Ilya looked back at the two small beds. And for a brief moment, he wished there was only one.

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**Nashville, Tennessee**

**Thursday - 8:45 PM**

“Yeeeee Hawwwww!” Hayden announced as they stepped out of their Uber. “Let’s get rowdy!” Everyone groaned in response.

“I’m seriously breaking up with you if you ever say that again,” Jackie muttered, walking past Hayden and towards Rose.

“Oh come on, we’re in Nashville! I get to yee-haw at least once!”

Hayden shrugged his shoulders in defeat as Ilya and Shane stepped up beside him.

“I think you’ve yee’d your last haw, buddy” Shane comforted, pushing Hayden to move along into the bar the girls had already entered.

Broadway was full of life already, even this early in the night. The crowds were plentiful and there was definitely no shortage of bachelorette parties. The energy was contagious, and Ilya was ready to embark on whatever adventure Nashville had in store for them tonight.

Inside the bar, the music was loud enough to send waves through Ilya’s body. It was crowded, almost too crowded, as the group made their way to the back of the bar.

“We have to go upstairs!” Rose yelled over the live music. “It will be less crowded and more fun!”

Shane urged Rose to lead the way to the back staircase. They were all getting shoved every which way. Hayden put a protective arm around Jackie as they worked their way through the crowd.

A larger man, almost double the size of Rose, stumbled into their path, nearly sloshing his drink all over her.

“Watch yourself, man!” Shane called out, putting a hand on Rose’s lower back to lead her through the crowd. Though it did make Ilya jealous to see the simple touch, it was also endearing to see how protective Shane was.

They reached the third floor of the bar and it was thankfully, way less crowded. There was no question about where they had to go first and they all made their way right up to the bar. It wasn’t long before drinks were being ordered, shots were being passed around, and their voices filled the air. This is exactly what Ilya needed. The stress of the long drive, the play offs, and being so strung up on Shane all faded into the lights of the night.

They eventually made their way to another bar, and as they entered the second floor, Rose immediately spotted a photobooth.

“Oh my god, this is perfect! Come on!” She yanked Jackie over towards her and all three of the boys followed. Any stranger who looked at them would be able to tell from their contagious smiles and glazed over eyes that all five of them were drunk, but none of them cared.

They all piled into the too small photobooth. They barely fit, but they made it work. Shane was pressed up against the side of the photobooth and Ilya was pressed right up next to him. Hayden managed to squeeze himself in and Jackie and Rose were practically on the floor. But it worked.

They took a series of photos, probably hogging the booth for way too long. The fits of laughter and joy Ilya was sure could be heard from miles away.

“I’m so happy,” Shane said suddenly. Nobody else heard, but Ilya did. Ilya looked over at Shane and his stomach was doing somersaults. Shane looked so...perfect. His smile was the fullest Ilya has seen since they lost the playoff game.

“Me too,” Ilya responded, and Shane looked over at him, that same smile still plastered on his face. The last flash went off, signaling a photo was taken. Ilya knew the look he was giving Shane. It was the same look Hayden gives Jackie, but at that moment, Ilya didn’t care that it would be in this photo forever, frozen in time for everyone to see.

As they all climbed out of the photobooth, they were met with the faces of some impatient bar goers who were waiting for their turn. Shane mumbled a quick sorry to the group and quickly snagged the photos that came out of the printer.  He pocketed them without a word and then they were on their way.

A few more drinks and a few more shots lead the group to the dance floor. The band on stage was playing some Carrie Underwood cover that Ilya only slightly recognized. Despite not liking country music, the five friends danced their hearts out for the second night in a row. The happiness Ilya felt in his chest was intoxicating. He couldn’t believe how lucky he was to have such a wonderful group of friends.

Rose grabbed Ilya’s hands and started jumping up and down to the beat, screaming the lyrics of some song Ilya has never heard before, and Ilya couldn’t help but jump with her. Jackie and Hayden joined along in the scream singing as Ilya just jumped and admired his friends.

Rose loosened the grip on Ilya’s hands and Ilya turned to grab Shane, who was dancing just next to him.

“Dance with me!” Ilya yelled over the music, and Shane happily agreed. The two of them swung and swayed like nobody was watching. The smile on Ilya’s face felt permanent, felt like it would never fade away as long as he was here. With Shane.

The music stopped after the song and the singer mumbled something about switching instruments. It was a good break for them to catch their breaths, get another drink. Just as Ilya was going to suggest heading to the bar, he saw a flicker of something sad in Shane’s eyes.

“I’m going to go to the balcony!” Shane yelled over the crowd. Rose, Hayden, and Jackie looked at Ilya with a confused look on their faces. Ilya shrugged, he didn’t know what caused the change in mood either.

Despite the confusion, Ilya wasted no time following Shane into the cold Nashville night. As he worked his way through the crowd, trying to make sure he didn't lose Shane, he caught a

glimpse of the TV on the wall. It was playing one of the College Hockey playoff games.

It all started to make sense.

Ilya found Shane looking over the railing, the lights of Broadway filling the sky. He didn't say anything as he approached Shane. He just stepped in next to him and leaned over the railing. He knew Shane would say something eventually.

The carefree, happy version of Shane that Ilya was lucky enough to witness just moments before was replaced with a more hurt, wounded Shane out in the glow of Nashville's beauty.

Shane took a deep breath. "Ilya," he said, finally breaking the silence.

Ilya looked at him, but stayed silent. He urged Shane to continue.

"I feel like everything is ending," he admitted. The music had started back up again and the humming of the guitar was muffled as the sound poured into the night.

"What do you mean?" Ilya questioned. The sudden mood change wasn't surprising to Ilya. Seeing the playoffs on the bar TV hurt him too, but he's also very good at hiding his emotions. Shane? Not so much.

"Everything is... it's ending. Hockey. College. Playoffs." He shook his head and Ilya held his breath. "My whole life, I knew what was happening next. I was able to prepare for it and set my goals and now? Now what am I supposed to do? Hockey is over. It's Our senior year and we fucked it up. We can't go back, not now anyways."

Shane took a deep breath, trying to collect himself. "And now," he started again. "Now I don't even know who I am anymore if I'm not leading us to something."

Ilya's heart broke at Shane's confession. He knew what Shane was feeling, how it felt like everything was leading up to these final moments of their senior year and it was just taken away without warning. He knew how the unknowingness of the future was scary. He knew that no amount of "What if's" would be able to shield them from the reality that the future is unknown.

Ilya swallowed. "It's scary," he answered. "It's scary because we didn't get a say in our playoff standing, and we sure as hell don't get a say in if we're going to be drafted or not."

Shane nodded, and Ilya's chest tightened.

"But, just because we didn't get the trophy, doesn't mean we failed. Look at us, Hollander. We're star hockey players. We're in fucking Nashville with a group of amazing friends. We were co captains of a D1 team. You're Shane fucking Hollander, and you're incredible. You don't need a trophy to prove that."

Shane looked up from the skyline and over to Ilya, his eyes catching the lights of the city. Ilya could have sworn time had stopped in that very minute.

“I...Thank you. I don’t know what I’d do without you,” Shane smiled, and Ilya could’ve sworn his eyes were brimming with tears. “Promise me that, even if we get drafted to rival cities, you’ll still be my friend.”

Ilya smiled, never breaking eye contact with the boy who had stolen his heart.

“I promise,” he responded.

A warm silence fell between them as they stood there under the stars. The music grew louder as the door for the roof opened. Rose called out their names, breaking them out of whatever spell Ilya felt like they were under.

“Come on,” Ilya smiled, holding out his hand to Shane. “The night is not over.”

Jackie and Hayden cheered when they saw Ilya and Shane approaching. “No empty hands allowed!” Jackie called out. “Let’s get you two a drink!”

The night continued on and Shane’s happy demeanor never faded after the conversation on the roof. Ilya ordered another drink and watched from the bar as Shane, Hayden, and Jackie failed miserably at trying to learn a line dance from a nearby bachelorette party.

“So what was that all about?’ Rose asked as she approached Ilya. “Is he okay?”

Ilya nodded, his eyes glued to the site of his friends. “Was nothing. Just saw the hockey game and got upset.”

“Well, I don’t know what you said to him, but it worked.” Rose smiled, looking over at Shane, Hayden, and Jackie. “He gets in his head a lot. Sometimes he needs that reminder that it’s not the end of the world.”

Ilya turned to face Rose. “Does he talk to you about that stuff a lot?” he asked, curiosity getting the best of him.

“Not really,” she shook her head, taking a sip of her drink. “He probably confides in you the most, ya know.”

“You think?”

“I know.” She answered confidently. “I’m glad he has you.”

--

It was approaching hour 5 of their Nashville bender, and the group finally decided to call it a night.

The alcohol was wearing off and the lack of sleep was starting to set in. There was some convincing that had to happen to get Rose to agree to leave, but the promise of listening to High School Musical in the uber on the way back to the airbnb sold her.

“I don’t understand how she has so much energy,” Ilya said watching as Jackie and Hayden lead her outside of the bar. “She is like uhhh.... The little rodent thing.”

“A squirrel?” Shane asked, a hint of amusement behind his voice. “Getting tired, Rosanov? English getting hard?”

“Fuck off, Hollander.”

Shane flashed a smile at Ilya and walked forward, taking over for Jackie in their attempt to get Rose out of the bar.

“Damn she’s feisty when she’s drunk,” Jackie laughed as Ilya caught up to her. “Ya know, I’m glad we were finally able to do this.”

“Me too,” Ilya replied, smiling over at Jackie.

“I know I’m not supposed to mention the playoffs or anything, but as much as that sucks, it is kind of nice that we get to have one last hurrah together.”

Ilya made a sound that sounded like an agreement. He may not know what tomorrow brings, or how many more nights like this he would have with his friends. But right now, everything was perfect.

And there was nothing that could break this feeling from Ilya.

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**Nashville, Tennessee**

**Friday - 2:30 AM**

“Okay, Rose..” Hayden grunted, lifting Rose off the couch. “Come on, you have to sleep in your room.”

Ilya, Shane, and Jackie all stood back and watched with amusement as Hayden tried to wrangle Rose. She had crashed the moment she sat down in the uber. The day was finally catching up to her, and what was once a drunk and energetic Rose turned into a drunk and not wanting to move Rose.

“This is pitiful,” Jackie sighed, watching as her boyfriend failed to lift her best friend off the couch for the third time. “I’m going to bed. Do you guys think you can help him?”

“Oh, can we not let him struggle a little longer?” Ilya asked, fake pouting as Jackie turned towards her bedroom. “It is funny, is it not?”

Shane playfully smacked Ilya’s chest and willed him to come help. It was with the power of the three of them that they were able to make their way to a bedroom.

However, in their tired state, they failed to remember the layout of the house, and stumbled her into Shane and Ilya's room.

"Fuck it," Hayden said, moving her towards the bed on the right side of the room. Shane's bed. "She's sleeping here."

"That's fine by me," Shane replied, letting out a huff as they got Rose onto the bed. "I'll just go sleep in her bed."

Ilya tried his best to hide the look of disappointment on his face, but had to remind himself that he still has five full days of sleeping in the same room as Shane when they get to Myrtle Beach.

"I will go get her water. Maybe some medicine, too" Ilya announced, turning on his heels to exit.

"I'm going the fuck to bed," Hayden replied. "Later losers"

"Goodnight, Pike." Shane called out, his voice trailing behind Ilya's. They both walked in comfortable silence into the kitchen. They worked effortlessly as a team, Ilya rummaging through the cabinets to find some medicine while Shane poured 3 glasses of water.

"I'll help you bring these to the bedroom," Shane said, grabbing two of the glasses and leaving the third for Ilya to grab.

"Yes, thank you."

When they walked in the room, Shane had to hold himself back from laughing. There was Rose, spread out on this tiny twin mattress, snoring like a ship horn.

"Oh, god." Ilya groaned. "I cannot sleep in the same room as her. She sounds like a hippo."

Shane burst out laughing, having to set the cups down on the nightstand to avoid spilling them everywhere.

"And she says we snore," Shane laughed. Ilya finally broke. His face turned red as he laughed along with Shane. "You can sleep with me," Shane offered as their laughter settled down. Incredibly nonchalantly, too.

Ilya froze, his expression trying to hide the obvious butterflies that filled his stomach.

"Okay," was all he said. And before he knew it, he was holding 2 cups of water and following Shane into the private bedroom with one full sized bed.

*This was fine. Everything is fine.* Ilya told himself. He tried to steady his hands. Why was he so nervous? He slept in the same bed as Shane last night and everything was fine. What's different about this time?

"I cannot believe Rose snores like that," Shane laughed, shutting the door behind them. "It's no wonder she wanted to have her own bedroom this entire trip."

Ilya laughed in agreement, setting the cups down on the nightstand beside the bed.

“She is a foghorn,” Ilya stated, a tired smile taking over his face. Shane collapsed onto the bed, a tired huff leaving his body. Ilya sat on the edge of the bed, taking his time as he removed his shoes. He was trying to collect himself, to not overthink everything that is happening in this moment.

“Thank you again for today,” Shane said sincerely, turning to look at Ilya. “For stepping up, for driving.” He paused. “For talking some sense into me on the roof.”

“It was nothing,” Ilya assured, face brightening as memories of the roof came flooding back. “It was the least I could do, Hollander.”

Shane looked at Ilya, sincerity riddled all over his face. “I’m glad we did this, ya know?” Shane admitted. “It’s been a nice break from reality.”

Ilya couldn’t help but wonder what was going on in Shane’s head. Yes, he had been bummed since the playoffs, but there was something telling Ilya that Shane was in his head for much more than that.

“Is everything okay?”  Ilya decided to ask. It was evident by the look on Shane’s face that he wasn’t expecting a question like that.

But, thankfully, Ilya didn’t need to explain, because Shane already knew why Ilya was asking that.

“I’m sorry I’ve been, I don’t know, a bit of a downer?” Shane apologized, eyes refusing to meet Ilya’s. “Like yes, the playoffs thing is eating me alive. But I’m also just...I don’t know, trying to figure some other stuff out.”

A look of confusion took over Ilya’s face and he looked at Shane. Shane looked so small, his barrier broken and his guard was down. “What are you trying to figure out?”

“Nothing,” Shane answered a little too quickly. “It’s stupid.”

“It is not stupid,” Ilya fought, but Shane wasn’t going to give in.

“It’s whatever, “ Shane smiled, finally looking up at Ilya. “I promise I’ll stop being a downer. Now, get in bed before you fall asleep sitting up.” Shane laughed, grabbing one of the throw pillows and throwing it towards Ilya.

“Hollander! How dare you!” Ilya gasped, fake hurt in his voice. He grabbed the pillow and threw it back at Shane.

“Hey! Not fair!” Shane called back, blocking Ilya’s hit. They laughed together, letting themselves go for just a little bit.

The two of them wordlessly climbed into bed, leaving enough room between them that Ilya wouldn’t freak out. Shane reached over to the nightstand and turned off the lamp. Silence fell over the pair.

“I feel like... maybe with Hockey being done for now...I finally get to be me.” Shane whispered, so quietly that Ilya almost missed it. “Whoever that may be.” He added.

There was a beat.

“Well, I like whoever you are.” Ilya said, his eyes tracing the outlines of Shane’s profile. Shane stayed still, eyes focused on the ceiling. A smile faintly showing itself in the shadows of the night.

“Goodnight, Ilya.” Shane replied.

And Ilya doesn’t know what changed, but he allowed himself to have this moment. To be completely lost in it and embrace it, rather than running away from it.

He’ll let himself have this moment for now, just until the morning hits.

Chapter End Notes

holy long chapter lol.

i hope you enjoy! i tried to keep all of their night in nashville in one chapter.

see you soon! xx :)

# Chapter 5: Nashville

**Nashville, Tennessee**

**Friday, 9:45 AM**

Ilya was thankful that he and Shane had been smart enough to close the blinds on the window of their shared room, because now, even with the sun just barely creeping in through the small cracks, Ilya could feel a pounding headache. Consequences from the night before.

He had to prepare himself to open his eyes and face reality, but when he did, the sight he saw in front of him, or rather *on top* of him, was something he'd imagine only in his dreams.

There was Shane, arm draped peacefully over Ilya's chest. In any other instance, Ilya would be freaking out. His heart would be racing a million times a minute and panic would bubble in his chest from being this close to Shane. But, to his surprise, he felt none of that panic. Instead, he felt comfortable, he felt at home.

Lying here, practically cuddled up with Shane, felt like home.

Ilya wanted to bask in this moment for as long as he could, so he didn't dare move. He didn't want Shane to wake up, see his mistake, and take it away from Ilya just yet.

So he lay there in silence, studying the way Shane's back would rise and fall with every steady breath as he slept.

Flashbacks from the night before replayed in Ilya's head. Shane was so vulnerable, he was hurting. Ilya wished there was more he could do to help Shane with whatever it is going on in his head. He really, truly, cared about him.

He just wanted him to be okay.

The moment was over sooner than Ilya would have liked as he noticed Shane stirring in his sleep. There was no doubt Shane was about to wake up and end Ilya's dream. In a rash decision to try and save himself and Shane from any embarrassment, Ilya shut his eyes. He didn't want Shane to know he was awake and he surely didn't want Shane to know how much he loved having him so close.

Ilya heard a faint "oh," come from Shane's mouth, signaling he was awake and *definitely* saw the position they were in. Any moment now, Shane would remove his arm and they can pretend like nothing ever happened.

Only, he didn't...

Instead, his arm stayed there. And then, gently, Ilya could feel Shane's fingers trace delicate shapes along Ilya's chest. So faintly, so careful, as if he were afraid the moment would break if he touched too firmly.

Ilya's heart began to race, and he was sure Shane would be able to feel it. His inner dialogue was fighting with himself, trying to come up with a rational next step.

*Do I open my eyes? Do I pretend to wake up?*

*Do I sit here and wait?*

Only, his battles were soon conquered when a loud clanging from the Kitchen jolted both Shane and Ilya.

Shane sat up in an instant, arm leaving Ilya's chest as if it wasn't just burning into his skin seconds before. Ilya followed, both of their hearts racing. (Though Ilya would assume for different reasons).

"Oops," they heard Hayden say, muffled through the door of their bedroom. Shane rolled his eyes

"Christ," he laughed, hand flying to his hair. He took a moment to look around the room, and Ilya couldn't take his eyes off of him. "We slept in our clothes," he stated, as if Ilya couldn't tell.

"Mmm yes," Ilya replied, forcing himself to look away. "We were tired, long night of wrestling the fog horn."

Shane didn't say anything, but simply smiled as he removed himself from the bed. No mention of their closeness. No mention of their sleeping arrangement. No mention of anything.

Ilya forced the expression on his face to remain neutral, giving no indication of his disappointment. He reached over to grab his phone on the end table. "Oh shit," he said. "It's almost 10. Rose is going to freak."

"Well," Shane reached for his bag, rummaging through it. "I guess we should get ready then. Do you mind if I hop in the shower first? I feel disgusting."

Ilya just gestured Shane towards the bathroom, giving him a wordless approval. He needed the space before all the thoughts swirling around in his brain consumed him.

And coffee.

He needed coffee.

Ilya made his way into the kitchen of the airbnb where he found Hayden rummaging through the cabinets.

"Oh shit, sorry, did I wake you?" Hayden asked, looking just as dead as Ilya felt.

“It’s fine,” Ilya smiled, meandering his way to the coffee maker. “What are you doing out here anyways?”

“I need coffee,” Hayden mumbled, now digging through the cabinet under the sink. “The damn thing needs a coffee filter and I can’t find one.” Hayden gestured towards the coffee maker on the counter, Ilya raised an eyebrow.

The coffee filters were quite literally sitting *next* to the coffee maker. Ilya was looking at them, eyes moving between Hayden and the filters. He let out a chuckle.

“Oh my god, Pike.” He said, grabbing the filters and throwing them at Hayden's head. “Use your big stupid brain.”

Hayden paused, mouth slightly open in offended silence, before taking the filters and moving on like nothing happened. He didn’t say a word, just started the coffee-making process with wounded dignity.

“Hey uhh,” Hayden started. “Thanks again for helping last night. I didn’t think Rose would be that hard to handle when I volunteered to bring her inside from the Uber.”

Ilya smiled at the memory, taking two mugs out of the kitchen cupboard in front of him. “It was no worry.”

“Sorry we had to dump her in your room. Did that end up being okay?”

“She is a foghorn when she snores,” Ilya replied, chuckling a little. “She was too loud, so Shane and I shared the bed in her room.”

This made Hayden pause. He put the spoon down and turned slowly to face Ilya. “You two shared a bed?”

Ilya raised his eyebrows, confused why Hayden was so shocked by this revelation.

“Yes?” he answered before adding “We shared a bed in Chicago, too. It is not a big deal.”

“You guys shared a bed in Chicago?” Hayden asked, his voice laced with shock. Ilya was truly having a hard time understanding what the big deal was. “I thought Rose got you each your own bed?”

“There was a mix up at the hotel,” Ilya explained. “We didn’t end up saying anything because it was only going to be for one night. Shane did not want to cause any issues or make it a big deal.”

Hayden scoffed, his face riddled with disbelief as he continued to dig into the canister of coffee grounds. “That’s...surprising.”

“What? Why is it surprising?” Ilya questioned, trying his best to sound casual. His brain started working on overdrive again, filling his mind with what that could possibly mean.

“It’s nothing,” Hayden shrugged, returning to look at the pot of coffee.

Then there was a pause, and Hayden turned back around to face Ilya.

“It’s just...” he started up again. “When Shane and I would share rooms when we’d travel for hockey, there was this one time in Michigan where they messed up the reservation and gave us a single King sized bed.”

He moved to grab the mugs Ilya had taken out, placing them closer to the coffee machine.

“You know how Coach likes us all to stay on the same floor, right? Well there weren’t any more rooms on that floor, so we couldn’t switch.”

Hayden casually leaned against the counter, folding his arms in front of him. Ilya could tell his mind was trying to piece *something* together, but he didn’t know what. Ilya waited in silence.

“Shane insisted we get a rollaway cot. He ended up sleeping on the cot and I had the whole king bed to myself. Not that I was complaining, but..I don’t know. I guess it’s just surprising that he was so chill with it for two nights with you.”

Ilya blinked. He didn’t know what Hayden was or wasn't insinuating, but all he did know is the butterflies were swarming in his chest. He tried to dismiss it, tried to tell himself that it’s just because the situations were so different. But after his and Shane’s heart to heart last night, and waking up this morning...Hayden’s words felt like a spark of hope.

--

Ilya made his way back to his shared bedroom, where the door was ajar, signaling Shane was done with the shower and Ilya was free to come inside.

Ilya paused for a moment, leaning against the door frame as he watched Shane fiddle with his wallet across the room.

“Did you lose something?” Ilya asked, curious as to why Shane was looking so intently at his wallet. Shane jumped slightly in surprise, slamming shut his wallet and shoving it in his pocket.

“What? Oh...uh no. I have everything” Shane stuttered out, not making eye contact with Ilya. “I’m all ready, so shower and bathroom are all yours.”

Ilya paused a second, looking Shane up and down.

*God* Shane looked so good. With his stupid wet hair and his stupid beautiful eyes and his beautifully stupid freckles. Ilya wanted nothing more than to just *be Shane’s.*

Shane looked puzzled, probably noticing that it took Ilya a second to reply.

“What? Is there something wrong?”

Ilya forced himself to snap out of it, focusing back on Shane’s face and saying the first excuse he could come up with:

“Your outfit is boring.”

*Jesus Christ, really?*

“Oh go fuck yourself, Rosanov.” Shane smiled, throwing up his middle finger before turning back to finish packing his bag.

“You would like that, wouldn’t you?”

“In your dreams,” Shane quickly replied. Ilya appreciated the quick wit they had with each other, never really taking any of this banter to heart. Shane turned around. “But seriously, what is wrong with my outfit?”

Ilya had to come up with something, *anything,* as an excuse.

“Is all one color. Grey. Boring. Blah” He was nervous and his brain suddenly forgot how to form complete sentences in english, he hoped Shane didn’t notice.

“We’re going to be driving all day! Who cares what I wear?” Shane poked back, a smile never leaving his face.

“You will care when we pull off to get food and everyone is judging you for your grey outfit,” Ilya joked, sending a wink towards Shane.

Shane blushed.

He *blushed.*

And Ilya was about to have a panic attack.

“Here, wear this,” Ilya offered, and before he knew what he was doing, he was rummaging through his bag and pulled out a blue hoodie. He threw it to Shane without another word, then walked into the bathroom to take a shower (and calm himself down).

--

Ilya about face planted on the floor when he walked into the living room of the airbnb and saw Shane sitting there with his hoodie on.

It was in that exact moment that Ilya realized that he -- without a doubt -- was truly, wholeheartedly, completely and royally *fucked.*

--

**Somewhere between Nashville and Myrtle Beach**

**Friday - 5:30 PM**

“Holy fuck, how do we still have 5 hours to go?” Hayden cried out, groggy from the nap he just took.

“Not my fault that you fuckers took to long to get your asses out the door,” Rose replied back, never looking up from her phone.

They had changed up the seating arrangement slightly. Ilya and Shane were still up front (Though Shane was driving and Ilya was playing passenger princess), but Jackie and Hayden now sat next to each other in the middle row while Rose took over the back seat again.

Jackie turned around to look at her. “Babe, I love you, but we were all ready by 11. Your ass slept in.” Rose looked slightly offended by this accusation, but didn’t fight it because she knew it was true.

For the most part, the drive had gone smoothly. Shane claimed he got the ‘best sleep of his life’ last night and has yet to complain about being tired or the length of the drive. Ilya was surprised by that, but chose to not comment on it.

“Maybe we play a game?” Hayden suggested, looking around the car for reactions from the other passengers. Ilya groaned.

“Oh my god, I do not want to play a stupid game,” he said, hitting his head against the head rest.

“No, I think that could be fun!” Rose chimed in, looking up from her phone for the first time in hours. “We could play truth or dare or something!”

Ilya immediately protested this. “How are we supposed to play boring truth or dare in a moving car? Will become truth or truth. That is not fun.”

“We could do Put a Finger Down or something?” Shane suggested quietly from beside Ilya. Ilya paused and looked at him. It seemed like Ilya was alone in this battle.

“Fine,” he gave in. “I will only play if Hayden agrees to not call me out like he did last time.” Ilya turned around to look at Hayden, who was already putting his hands up in defeat.

“Deal.”

After much deliberation of logistics, such as how the driver was going to participate given his hands were occupied by the steering wheel (“I’ll just keep track in my head” said Shane), the game was finally able to start.

“Okay, I’ll start!” Rose exclaimed, sitting herself more upright. “Okay, put a finger down if....you’ve fallen asleep somewhere you definitely should not have.”

“Class,” Jackie admitted, putting a finger down.

“Team Meeting,” Hayden said, shrugging his shoulders.

“As your team captains, I feel like you should not have told us that,” Shane joked, a smile spreading across his face. He then looked back at the road and said “But me too. I’m down to 9 fingers.” and the car erupted with laughter.

“My turn!” Jackie squealed. She was definitely way too into this game, but Ilya found this all somewhat endearing.

Jackie looked directly at Rose before saying “Okay, put a finger down if someone ever approached you at a bar and engaged you in conversation, and you had no idea who they were or what their name was, despite sitting next to each other in Econ 101 our freshman year. But it all worked out because you became best friends anyways.”

The car was filled with a chorus of “oooo” as everyone turned their attention to Rose.

“Hey! I said I was sorry!” Rose defended, laughing as she put a finger down.

The game continued for quite some time, and Ilya was happy they did this. He was able to learn a lot of random, little things about his friends. (Jackie eats Hayden’s left overs and blames it on Shane and Ilya all the time, Rose once cheated on a paper in school and got away with it, Hayden uses women's shampoo because he likes the way it makes his hair feel, Shane has an embarrassing pre-game hockey ritual that he refuses to tell anybody about).

Everything felt right. He was happy.

“Can we make this more interesting or something? I’m tired of the PG ones,” Jackie announced, pulling out her phone. “Here, let's just read off this list from Cosmo’s website.”

Ilya felt his stomach turn with nerves. He was (usually) an open book when it came to anything sexual, but he suddenly felt shy. Still, he didn’t protest.

“Okay! First one! Have you ever shared a bed with someone you weren’t dating?”

Okay. Very Specific. Jesus Christ.

If Ilya didn’t know better, he would’ve thought Hayden had planted these prompts on Jackie's phone. He knew Hayden would be staring him down, so he silently put his finger down and didn’t dare to speak.

“Five” Shane said beside him, signaling that he metaphorically put a finger down. Ilya prayed silently to whatever God’s were up there that nobody would press on about it.

“Well duh,” Rose said, breaking the non-existent tension that Ilya created in his mind. “We’ve all hooked up with people before.”

And right. Ilya let out a silent breath.

*Duh. Not everything has to be about Shane and Ilya. Hook ups are a thing. They definitely are and that's a normal thing people do and* -- Oh my god Ilya needs to stop spiraling.

Ilya looked over at Shane. He seemed completely fine, not a single ounce of worry showing. Ilya needed to calm down.

“Okay, next one!” Jackie called out, taking a second to scan the questions on her screen. “Oh! This is a good one! Put a finger down if you’ve ever gotten jealous even though you had no

right to be."

Ilya wanted to open the door and jump out of this car. He needed this game to be over.

Again, he wordlessly put a finger down and looked over at Shane. One of Shane's hands had moved off the steering wheel and onto the string of the hoodie Ilya gave him. Ilya couldn't help but notice that he was fiddling with the string nervously in his hand.

"Four," Shane gulped.

"Ilya, did I see that finger go down?" Hayden pressed, leaning forward to get a better view.

"Yes, I have 2 fingers now. One to jam into each of your eyeballs if you don't shut up," Ilya responded playfully, but there was no hiding the shakiness in his voice.

"Ilya Rosanov? Jealous?" Jackie gasped, leaning forward to match her boyfriend's posture. "Who is she? Or he? Who in the world has made Ilya Rosanov *jealous*?"

Ilya briefly looked at Shane before looking at the rest of the car.

"It is none of your business, read the next question." Ilya dismissed, hoping they could move on from this. "Please," he added.

Ilya looked up briefly, catching Rose's eyes. She had a look of concentration, almost like she was trying to read Ilya's mind. Her eyes then flickered towards Shane and Ilya froze.

Rose looked back at him, eyebrow cocking ever so slightly. Ilya turned away.

"Fine, debby downer." Jackie mumbled, scrolling to find the perfect next question. "Ohhhh juicy! Put a finger down if you have ever kissed or *wanted* to kiss someone in this car!"

Ilya was sure his heart had stopped. He didn't want to look away from the road in front of him, but he forced himself to. This is what he saw:

Shane was tightening his grip on the steering wheel.

Hayden and Jackie made a show of leaning into each other and kissing one another in front of everyone.

And Rose had her eyes laser focused on Ilya and his fingers, seeing if he would do something.

Ilya looked at Rose, then looked at Shane, then back to Rose. He subtly, so nobody else but her could see, put a finger down.

Rose, trying hard to make sure the others in the car didn't see, widened her eyes and mouthed "Him?"

Ilya nodded, because what does he have to lose? He then closed his fists, hoping nobody else saw the message he had sent to Rose.

Eventually, Jackie and Hayden broke apart. The car cheered for them, then Jackie interrupted. “Wait wait! I didn’t hear everyone's answers? What did everyone say?”

Ilya looked over to Shane, whose eyes had not left the road. His mouth opened, then shut, as if he was debating on saying something. Then Hayden pipped in.

“Ilya, did you put a finger down or not?” Just then, Ilya saw a billboard for a local diner just off the highway. He chose to ignore Hayden’s question and began the next prompt.

“Put a finger down if you want Hollander to get off at this exit so we can eat some fucking food.”

Everyone put their fingers down, and Shane was pulling off the highway.

--

The diner they pulled into look...just about as Ilya would expect. A bright read, flickering neon sign in the window, checkerboard pattern on the floor, and the smell of grease and fry oil haunting the place.

They were seated in a booth towards the back, the cracked vinyl making unique patterns across the booth. Ilya looked down at this menu, but his brain was too overloaded to make any decisions right now, let alone read a menu in english.

“I’m going to run to the bathroom,” Ilya mumbled, getting out of the booth. “Can you order me something?” He asked, directing his question to Shane.

“What do you want?” Shane asked, without hesitation.

“Whatever looks good.” His heart was still pounding from the damn game in the car. He just needed a moment alone to collect himself. He also really needed to pee.

Shane nodded without hesitation, and Ilya mumbled a quick “Thank you” at him before fleeing to the bathroom.

*“Oh my god, you are being pathetic”* he told himself. He braced his hands on the sink, watching the water run down the drain. “*It is just Shane. He is just your friend. Why are you being crazy?”*

Maybe it’s because of the flicker of hope Ilya felt this morning.

Maybe because Ilya noticed subtle differences in the way Shane is acting towards him.

Maybe its the heart to heart moments they’ve been having lately.

Or maybe it’s just the fact they’ve been attached at the hip for the past 2 days.

Whatever the answer was, Ilya knew he had to collect himself and start acting normal, or else Shane would figure out something was up. Ilya already knew he was probably going to lose

Shane once they get drafted to different teams, so the last thing he wanted to do was speed up that process and lose Shane before that even happened.

After a minute of deep breaths and cold water being splashed on his face, Ilya felt calm enough to rejoin the group. He slid into the booth, right next to Shane, and Shane looked at him excitedly.

“I ordered you a tuna melt,” he said, his eyes lighting up as if he just told Ilya the best news on earth. Ilya was melting.

“You did? I didn’t see it on the menu.”

“Yeah! And a coke! It was on the specials board” Shane replied. “I remember you said it’s your favorite comfort meal. I thought that would be nice.”

Ilya’s heart wanted to jump out of his chest. He was sure he was blushing and silently hoped the red of the neon light was masking it.

Shane turned back to his conversation with Jackie and Hayden, and Ilya looked across at Rose. She gave him an endearing smile, something that comforted Ilya. If all else fails, he was glad Rose knew. He feels a little less crazy knowing he has someone he can talk to about it.

In this very moment, everything felt perfect.

--

“Oh my god, yes!” Hayden practically moaned as their food was placed on the table. “I didn’t realize how starving I was.”

The group wasted no time digging into their meals as conversation continued to flow. Jackie was going on about some job she was applying to in the car. Something about it being fully remote so she wouldn’t have to worry about where she may land after college.

They talked about how her and Hayden would probably move in together, or at least to the same city, depending on where Hayden ends up getting drafted to. Ilya looked at them and smiled. He was so happy to see his friends were so in love. It truly was a beautiful thing to see.

He wished he had a plan about what he was doing after college. He heard rumblings of Boston, Detroit, and Ottawa all wanting to draft him, but he couldn’t be sure until draft day. Until then, he just had to sit tight and hope that this group of friends would survive the distance.

“Feeling better?” Shane asked Ilya, quietly so nobody else could hear.

“Yeah,” he answered. “Thank you for uh..” he gestured towards the half eaten sandwich in front of him, the words escaping him.

“Of course,” Shane beamed, the light from earlier never leaving his eyes. “I know you would’ve done the same for me.”

Ilya just smiled back at him, because *God*. Ilya would do anything for Shane.

—

After their meal, they all climbed back into the car to finish out their last and final stretch to Myrtle Beach. They had about 3 hours to go before they reached their final destination.

Shane pulled into a gas station to top them off before getting back on the highway. Jackie flung her credit card at him, insisting she pays for this tank of gas since it’s her turn. Shane happily accepted the credit card, then threw Ilya his wallet.

“Are we all trading money?” Ilya asked, eyebrows raised. “If so, I’d rather have Rose’s wallet.”

“No,” Shane laughed. “I was hoping you could run inside and get me an energy drink or something? I don’t know if I can last the final leg of this drive without one.”

“Which flavor?”

“Dealers choice. Think of it as paying me back for ordering you that tuna melt.”

Then he winked.

Without another word, Ilya took the wallet and high tailed it into the gas station. He immediately spotted the energy drinks and took way too long trying to decide which one Shane would like the best.

Finally, he settled on one that claimed it had some natural caffeine & probiotics bullshit. Ilya laughed to himself because Shane would *totally* get something like this.

When he approached the gas station clerk, he mindlessly opened Shane’s wallet, not bothering to look down.

The cashier scanned the energy drink and smiled up at Ilya. “That’s a cute pic,” she said, gesturing towards the wallet in Ilya’s hand. “That’ll be $3.23”

Ilya looked down and there it was.

Looking right up at Ilya was the picture the group had taken the night prior in the photobooth. Only Shane had folded it in such a way that the picture of Ilya and Shane looking at each other like *that* was the one being displayed.

I mean for fucks sake, Shane had it displayed in part of his wallet where a middle aged dad would have a picture of his wife and kids.

Which means that every time Shane opened his wallet, there would be a picture of them to greet him. Sure, Rose, Jackie, and Hayden were also in the picture, but there were admittedly

better pictures of them from that same photo strip. Hell, the three of them weren't even paying attention in this photo.

"Hun? Cash or card?" The cashier said, pulling Ilya back to reality.

"Oh, uh, sorry. Card."

In the short walk back to the car, memories from the past few days came rushing back to Ilya. He would be crazy if he said something didn't feel different with Shane.

Sure, he's had a crush on Shane for years now, but he was always able to manage it. But something has…shifted.

From the fleeting looks to the gentle touches.

The kind gestures to the heart to heart conversations.

The fucking photo in his wallet.

Maybe it wasn't just the close proximity to Shane that was causing Ilya to spiral like this, but the fact that it seems like some of the things Ilya feels for Shane doesn't feel like a crazy dream anymore.

That maybe it wasn't so one sided.

Then thoughts of the next year came crashing in. Different teams, different cities, different lives. And suddenly the potential regret of never knowing what they could've been hit him harder than he expected.

And in that moment, as he approached the car full of his friends, Ilya had decided he was going to do something about it.

Sometime on this trip, before the miles ran out and the future tore them apart, he was going to do something about it.

Maybe not now

Maybe not tomorrow

But *soon.*

Because the thought of never trying hurt more than the thought of never telling Shane the truth.

# Chapter 6: Myrtle Beach Day 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Myrtle Beach, South Carolina**

**Friday - 10:30 PM**

Everyone wordlessly filed into their condo for the week. It was an unspoken agreement that they would explore and situate themselves in the morning, but for now they all just wanted to get to their rooms and go to sleep.

Ilya was only a little disappointed when he walked into the room that was assigned to him and Shane to see that there were 2 queen beds, not one. There were no more excuses for them to sleep with one another, to be close and wake up in each other's arms.

Accidentally, of course.

If Shane noticed anything, he didn't say it. He just moved over to the right side of the room and dropped his stuff.

"I'm beat," he said, slumping down on his bed. "Would you judge me if I don't shower tonight? I don't think I can physically move from this spot."

Ilya chuckled at him, moving to set his stuff next to his bed. "I would not judge you, Hollander. All we did was sit in a car." Ilya unzipped his suit case, displaying all of his clothes. He knew that if he didn't unpack this now, he would never unpack it.

"Ugh, are you unpacking your suitcase?" Shane groaned, flipping on his side to get a better look at Ilya. "That's so smart. I should be doing that."

"I can do it for you, if you'd like.

Shane laughed at Ilya's offer, but got up anyway. Ilya knew Shane had a particular way he liked things, so he would've been surprised if he had taken him up on his offer.

The two of them worked in tandem as they hung up their clothes, put their toiletries in the shared bathroom, and got ready for bed.

"I think I will take a shower afterall," Shane eventually announced, his hands moving down to the hem of his sweatshirt.

Or rather, Ilya's sweatshirt.

"Thanks again for the sweatshirt," Shane smiled, taking it off and handing it to Ilya. "You're right, I would've been embarrassed in that diner if I showed up in a whole monochromatic look."

“Mono what?” Ilya asked. Maybe he was too tired to understand English right now, or maybe it was Shane standing shirtless in the room. Could be both.

Probably both.

“All one color,” Shane explained, still trying to hand off the sweatshirt. Ilya didn’t take it from him.”

“Looks better on you,” Ilya said, walking away from Shane and towards his bed. “Keep it.”

Shane didn’t argue with that.

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**Myrtle Beach**

**Saturday - 7:00 AM**

Ilya couldn’t sleep.

He kept having dreams of sitting in the room on draft day, waiting to be drafted. One by one, he’d watch all of his teammates get drafted, hug their families, and go on stage to shake their new coaches hands and start their new future.

But Ilya never gets called up, because he doesn’t get drafted.

It’s a recurring nightmare he’s had the past few months, but it’s become more frequent after their playoff loss. He tries to ignore the gut wrenching feeling when he wakes up, but it’s getting harder and harder.

*Boston, Detroit, and Ottawa have all said they want me*.

He has to remind himself of this every time. But this time, the reminder alone wasn’t helping him go back to sleep. He decided he’d take advantage of the quiet instead and slip out of the room and go for a run.

A run on the beach seems like a wonderful idea.

So, without waking Shane, Ilya silently thanked himself for unpacking everything yesterday and quietly changed into some running clothes. He slipped out of the room.

When he exited the condo, he spotted Rose stretching in the sun. She looked effortlessly beautiful and obviously had the same idea as Ilya.

“You couldn’t sleep either?” She asked, taking out one of her earbuds.

“No,” Ilya replied, moving towards her. “Bad dream.”

“Run with me?”

Ilya nodded, then they were off.

--

Rose kept a steady pace with Ilya the entire run. The crashing waves serve as the background noise of their morning. As they reached the boardwalk down the beach, they came to a stop to catch their breath.

“I’ve been dying to talk to you in private,” Rose admitted as she tried to steady her breathing. “What’s this about wanting to kiss Shane?”

Ilya knew he had two choices at this moment. He could lie and tell her he was joking, or he could just be honest with her. He contemplated both for a second. In reality, Ilya was bursting at the seams. It’d be nice to have someone to talk to about it.

“Yes,” he said. “I have wanted to for a long time.”

Silence fell over Rose as she looked over to the ocean. Ilya knew she was probably collecting her thoughts, trying to figure out what to say next.

“How long?” She asked. Ilya could not make out what the tone in her voice meant.

Still, he decided to lay it all on the line.

“Since we met,” he admitted, looking down to the sand. He watched as the waves rolled into the shore and under their feet.

“Since you met? Ilya!” She exclaimed, playfully swatting at him. “It’s been 4 years! I never would have even thought...”

“Yes, well... I used to be good at hiding it.” Ilya laughed, scratching behind his neck. He was a little embarrassed to be talking about this, but he knew it would be good for him.

“Used to?” Rose questioned, her steps lining up with Ilya as they walked down the beach. “If it wasn’t for that silly game in the car, I never would have noticed.”

That made Ilya feel a little relieved. Knowing someone as perceptive as Rose wasn’t picking up the signals Ilya felt like he was unintentionally throwing out there made him feel slightly better.

But then again, Rose wasn’t there for every interaction between him and Shane.

“I don’t know...” he started. “Maybe it’s the fact we have been so close these past 2 days, but I feel like I am being obvious.”

“I really don’t think you are,” she smiled reassuringly at him, and Ilya was beyond thankful for her in this moment. “What makes you think so?”

“A lot,” Ilya sighed. “Sharing beds, blushing, deep conversations. I feel like my face is getting all stupid.”

Rose laughed. “I promise your face is very normal around him. Maybe a little smiley, but not obvious.”

Ilya smiled, the tension he felt loosening up a little bit.

“I also feel like something...shifted.” Ilya admitted, not wanting to look at Rose. He already felt silly for *thinking* it, but he did want to hear Rose’s take on everything.

“Shifted? How?” She didn't sound surprised at all.

“It’s probably silly, but this whole trip. It’s only been 2 days, but something feels different. The way he’s acting around me... it’s sweet? Not that he wasn’t sweet to me before, but it’s stuff that I just don’t expect.”

He paused, but Rose waited.

“The tuna melt, the photo in the wallet...”

“The what?” Rose interrupted. “What photo?”

“He has a photo of us in his wallet. I guess technically it was all of us, but you guys were all blurry. It was that last photo we took in the photobooth.”

“You mean the one where he’s looking at you with major heart eyes?” She laughed. Ilya felt like she was finally starting to understand.

“See! I’m not crazy! But last time I checked, he’s straight. So maybe it’s silly of me to even think *anything* shifted. Or to make assumptions...”

They both stayed silent. Ilya tried to focus on the sound of the waves crashing rather than his thoughts swirling in his brain. Rose didn’t say anything.

“I’m scared to lose him.” Ilya sounded defeated, but he felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

“You won’t lose him.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“You two could be states apart, countries even, and Shane would still show up for you.”

“Even if I tell him how I’m feeling and he pushes me away?” Ilya questioned, his voice lowering.

“He wouldn’t do that,” Rose spoke softly. “But even if he did, he’d 100 percent still show up.”

--

“There you guys are!” Hayden exclaimed, getting off the couch. Hayden, Jackie, and Shane all looked well rested and ready for the day.

“We were thinking we could head to the store, fill this place up with groceries so we’re not spending our life savings on meals out every day,” Jackie explained, also getting up on the couch to stand next to Hayden by the front door. “Maybe Shane, Hayden and I could go, then you two could shower or whatever and figure out the game plan for this week.”

Rose frowned, raking her eyes over everyone. “Well I was hoping to go shopping, too.” She calmly explained, her eyes making her way over to Ilya. “Give me 5 to rinse and get ready? Then maybe I can head with you two and Shane and Ilya can stay here.”

Shane’s head whipped over to look at Rose, something unreadable in his expression. Ilya would give anything to be able to read Shane’s mind.

“Not a bad idea,” Hayden answered. “Those two are the hardest to please when it comes to group activities.”

“I am right here,” Ilya chuckled, offering his input on the matter. “Though, you have a point.”

“Shane? Is that okay with you?” Jackie asked, looking over her shoulder at Shane, who was still sitting on the couch.

“Oh, yeah. Perfectly fine.”

--

The door to the condo shut, and the voices of Hayden, Jackie, and Rose got quieter and quieter as they made their way over to the car. Ilya fiddled nervously with the drawstring of his shorts.

Shane exhaled, opening his laptop up on the coffee table. He was wearing Ilya’s sweatshirt again, and Ilya wanted to die.

“Okay,” Shane breathed. “What the fuck are we going to do this week, Rosanov?”

Ilya laughed and dropped on the couch beside him, shoulders only inches a part. “No idea, but let's figure it out.”

“Well, a beach day or two is a given,” Shane said, his fingers typing into the search bar. “Ocean, sand, sunburns. What more could we possibly want?”

“Hayden will be burnt by noon,” Ilya said.

“Not if Jackie is there, I bet you she will be reapplying sunscreen every 10 minutes,” Shane added.

He paused, his eyes suddenly lighting up as his laptop screen populated with images of the boardwalk. “Oh! We should plan to go to the boardwalk on our last night here. Remember

how Hayden had that plan to tell Jackie he loves her on the ferris wheel? How romantic would it be to do it during sunset on the last night of vacation?"

Ilya smiled as he watched Shane talk. His hands were gesturing, trying to paint the picture for Ilya, but all Ilya could focus on was how lucky he is to know Shane. Shane is someone who cares so deeply for his friends and the people around him. Always so quietly sentimental (and a bit of a hopeless romantic, too).

Then, Ilya's mind started to betray him.

He imagined how it would be if *they* were the ones on the ferris wheel. The sun setting over the horizon, the sky painted with the most beautiful arrangement of colors. Shane, across from him, eyes glowing in the light of the sunset. He'd look at Shane, in all of his beauty, and tell him everything.

"That would be...beautiful," Ilya finally responded.

Shane smiled in response, satisfied with Ilya's answer, then turned back towards his laptop.

Ilya unlocked his phone and typed out ***"things to do near me."***

They sat there together and scrolled, Ilya on his phone and Shane on his laptop. Every once in a while, they would read out suggestions to each other. Most of the suggestions were awful.

"There's a thing called Alligator Adventure?" Shane said, pulling up the website. Ilya looked at him, eyebrows raised. He was trying to read Shane to see if this was a real idea or if he was just being funny.

"Tourist trap," Ilya responded, his face unmoved.

"But they have other animals like Falmingos and Capybaras!" Shane pointed out, showing Ilya the photos on his screen. Ilya could tell Shane was trying to hold back laughter as he scrolled through the photos. Ilya found it strangely endearing.

"What about parasailing?" Ilya had asked. He could have sworn Shane, for a split second, stiffened up at the suggestions.

"Hard pass," he responded.

"What? Are you afraid of heights?" Ilya grinned, teasingly elbowing Shane in the side. Shane scoffed.

"No."

"Then why?" It would be so fun! See the ocean, maybe some dolphins."

"Just not my thing," Shane shrugged, looking away from Ilya. Ilya took it as a signal to drop the subject. Curiosity was filling up in Ilya's mind, but he let it go.

Ideas were thrown back and forth -- Arcade, aquarium, mini golf, clubs. They had broken down their ideas by day, hoping if they stayed organized, the group wouldn't give them too much heartache for the ideas they suggested.

At one point, Shane leaned in closer to Ilya to see a photo of this Pirate Adventure dinner Ilya had found on his phone. Though Shane vetoed the idea right away, he didn't move. Instead, he stayed close to Ilya, and Ilya could swear time had stopped.

"There is one thing I want to do," Shane admitted, voice low. "Though, I guess you and Rose may have done it already."

"Whats that?" Ilya asked, matching the level of his voice. Ilya didn't dare to breathe.

"I'd love to see the sunrise on the beach, but..."

"Rose and I definitely did not wake up early enough to see the sunrise," Ilya chuckled, opening up the weather app to see what time sunrise usually was. "Yeah, says it rises around 6:48 AM. We went for our run around 7:30."

"Ah. I suppose the group won't wake up that early." Shane chuckled, keeping his eyes focused on the weather app on Ilya's phone.

Then, an idea popped into Ilya's head. Would he regret it? Maybe, but that didn't matter. All he knew was that he wanted Shane to be happy, and he would do anything to make sure that happened. How often do they have the opportunity to see the sunrise over the ocean?

"I would wake up with you and go," Ilya said, breaking the silence. He tried his best to keep his voice from sounding too shaky.

"You'd do that?" Shane asked, his eyes meeting Ilya's. "Just you and me?"

Ilya smiled. "Yes," he said. "Of course."

Ilya and Shane stayed there, smiles on their faces, and just looked at each other. Ilya was trying hard to read Shane's expression, to understand if Shane was feeling the same pull he was in this moment.

"Ilya?" Shane asked, his eyes not moving. There was that feeling again. The feeling that *something* has shifted between the two of them. Ilya didn't know what was about to happen, but he braced himself.

Then, the rattling of keys and the voices of their friends filled the air. They were back already. The sound jolted both of them, and suddenly they were feet apart. Ilya tried to hide the disappointment in his face as the front door swung open.

"We're back!!" Jackie cheered in a sing-song voice. "We also brought coffee!"

Those magical words reversed the frown on Ilya's face as he made his way to Jackie. She was holding out a cardboard drink carrier with two untouched coffees to Ilya.

“Ilya yours has two creams and two sugars. Shane, yours is black because you never have fun with your coffee,” Rose teased, setting a bunch of grocery bags on the counter.

“It’s perfect, thank you.”

Ilya and Shane began to help unload the groceries, making executive decisions as to where they should be putting everything. Once again, working perfectly together.

“Jesus, did you guys get enough?” Shane joked, watching as Hayden came through the door with even more bags. “We’re only here for a few days!”

--

Once the groceries were unpacked, coffee was drunk, and breakfast was consumed, Ilya and Shane went over their ideas for the week. After a lot of back and forth discussion, their loose itinerary was finally agreed upon.

**Saturday (Today):** Hang around the condo, pool & hottub day. The group didn’t want to do anything too exciting as they settled in. Dinner on the grill by the pool. End the night with games & staying in.

**Sunday:** Full beach day. Go back and clean up, then dinner, drinks, and dancing at the rooftop bar on the beach.

**Monday:** Local Shopping Mall, Mini Golf, Arcades, and all you can eat buffets (Ilya calls it Tourist Trap Day).

**Tuesday:** Last beach day, dinner and sunset at the Boardwalk.

**Wednesday:** Go home.

Rose had Jackie come and help her pick out a swimsuit to wear tonight, leaving the three boys on the couch. Hayden was scrolling mindlessly on his phone when Shane spoke up.

“Hayd,” he said, grabbing his attention. “We planned it so you could tell Jackie you love her in the most romantic way ever!” Shane's voice was only but a whisper, but the excitement was unmistakable.

“Oh...” Hayden began to say, but Shane interrupted.

“Imagine! Last day of vacation, sunset, ferris wheel. How perfect!” It really was adorable how excited Shane was getting over this whole concept. Unfortunately, the light behind Shane’s eyes dimmed quickly with Hayden’s response.

“Oh uh... we already told each other we love each other...back in Chicago, actually.”

Hayden then went on to explain how she had said it first, right before they met the group down in the lobby of the hotel. Thus why they were dancing all over each other that night.

If Ilya didn’t know better, he would have thought Hayden just told Shane he killed a puppy.

Nonetheless, Hayden thanked him for going through the effort anyways & that the night could still be a perfect way to end their trip. Shane just nodded and Hayden walked away to get ready.

--

**Myrtle Beach**

**Saturday - 1:30 PM**

Ilya was trying. He was trying *really* hard to not stare at Shane all day. For fucks sake, they've been doing hockey with each other for 4 years now. Ilya has seen Shane shirtless multiple times, but this time he just couldn't look away.

"You're staring," Rose quietly whispered from next to Ilya. "Maybe you are being obvious."

"Am not," Ilya shot back.

"Not what? Staring or being obvious? Because you're doing both."

The group of them had all managed to make their way to the pool at their condo resort. It wasn't as packed as they had expected, but there were still plenty of people around. Shane and Hayden were over by the lounge chairs being lectured by Jackie about applying sunscreen. They put up a fight, but Jackie still came out victorious as the two sprayed themselves with sunscreen.

"I think something almost happened," Ilya said, turning to Rose. They were sitting on the edge of the pool near the deep end, trying to stay away from all the kids doing cannonballs in the water.

Rose's head snapped towards him so fast that she very nearly lost her sunglasses in the pool. "What happened?"

"When we were talking about the things to do. I can not be sure, but I know it felt like we were going to...I don't know...kiss?" Ilya's voice was low. He was trying to not sound insane in front of his friend, but he couldn't get that moment out of his head.

"Did he lean in or something?" She asked, obviously very invested in this.

"Well, no, but.."

"Did he look at your lips?"

"No, we just stared at each other."

"Hmm" Rose responded, her shoulders lumping a little bit. "I'm not saying you're wrong, but it seems like a 'you had to be there moment.'"

Ilya nodded, it's very possible that it was all in his head. He feels like a lot of things have been in his head lately, he just needed to shake this feeling off.

As the afternoon went on, time seemed to soften around them. Music was playing quietly through someone's speakers, the sun moved its way through the sky and started its descent, and laughter filled the pool area. Ilya was overjoyed. He really felt at home with his friends, and couldn't be more thankful for this trip. Shane crisis included.

Pool games were played, sunscreen was applied, and eventually hunger took everyone over. Hayden and Jackie offered to get the grill going.

"Mom and Dad material," Rose joked, watching the couple exit the pool. Hayden turned around, giving Rose a smirk.

"Hey. you and Shane might give us a run for our money!"

Shane, who was standing right next to Ilya, stiffened at the comment. Instinctively, Ilya reached a comforting hand out and placed it on Shane's forearm under the water. Instantly, Shane relaxed under the touch.

"Never gonna happen, Pike!" Rose yelled back, attempting to splash Hayden from where she was in the pool. Shane just laughed, shaking his head as he turned away from Rose and Ilya.

Ilya's hand felt cold at the loss of Shane's warmth.

--

Jackie and Rose had volunteered to run back to the condo once they discovered they had forgotten to bring the paper plates for dinner. The guys were all lounging on the chairs waiting for their return.

"Roz, is anyone catching your eye here?' Hayden asked, out of the blue.

"What are you talking about?" Ilya questioned, eyes shooting over to Hayden.

"Oh come on! There are plenty of beautiful women -- and guys -- here. You're telling me you haven't seen anybody you;d like to get to know?" Hayden teased, playfully elbowing Ilya.

"Hayd, we've only been here for a day." Shane pointed out, saving Ilya. Ilya smiled at Shane, offering him a smile that said 'thank you.'

"We've been at the pool all day, though!" Hayden responded, this time turning his attention to Shane. "What about you, Hollander? Do any pretty ladies catch your eye?"

"Not really."

"No way! What about that lady who was giving you total heart eyes when we first got here? You cannot tell me nobody is doing it for you! "

For a brief second, Shane's eyes flickered over to Ilya.

"I'm picky," Shane offered. "Maybe I already know what I want."

Hayden scoffed. Ilya's stomach dropped.

Once the girls returned, the group immediately gravitated towards the food. Plates were loaded up and conversation fell into easy, comfortable noise. Stomachs were filled and eyes fell tired from a full day of sun, pool, and laughter. They stayed like that for a while, joking about memories they shared together and their plans for the future. By the time the sun finally set and the pool lights came on, nobody protested when Rose declared she was done for the night.

The group slowly made their way back to the condo and migrated towards their assigned rooms. Shane had made a comment about being tired, so Ilya had offered him the shower first.

It was obvious to Ilya that Shane was battling something in his mind. He had been quiet all evening, even during dinner. He'd chime into a story every once in a while, but otherwise only offered smiles and two word responses. Ilya wanted to know what was going on, but didn't want to press him.

--

The exchange of the shower happened and Ilya felt a thousand times better after being able to wash the chlorine off. He walked out of their shared bathroom, quietly in hopes he wouldn't wake Shane. It was only 10PM, but everyone had already gone to bed. He was surprised to see that Shane wasn't actually in bed, but rather on the balcony just off of their bedroom.

Ilya quietly approached him.

"Ilya?" Shane knew Ilya was behind him, but didn't turn around. He kept staring out into the ocean. Ilya quietly stepped next to him, resting his arms on the railing.

"What are you doing out here?" Ilya asked, and Shane merely pointed to a group of rowdy teenagers on the beach. It looked like they were fiddling around with fireworks. Ilya laughed.

The two of them watched in peaceful silence as the teenagers barked orders at each other. It was clear they've never done this before.

The silence was broken by Shane.

"Can I tell you something?"

Ilya swore his heart stopped. His mind is running with possibilities, but no answers. He nodded.

"I feel like I've been keeping something from you, something big, and that's not fair." Shane continued on to say.

*Oh God*. Ilya thought *Oh God oh God oh God.*

“What is it?” Ilya managed to say, trying to keep his voice as steady as possible. He looked over at Shane, whose face was glowing perfectly in the moonlight. The laughter and yelling of the teenagers below them faded away, and the only thing Ilya could focus on in this moment was Shane (and trying to not have a heart attack).

“I know you’ve noticed I’ve been close with Rose lately...”

*Rose? This is about Rose?*

“...and I know Hayden has obviously noticed too.” Shane's hands were wringing together nervously. Ilya wanted to reach out and calm him, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. His mind was filling with thoughts

*Why is he talking about Rose?*

*Oh my god, are they actually dating?*

*Did they have something going on this whole time and Rose didn’t say anything when I poured my heart out to her?*

*Did I have every reason to be jealous of her earlier this week?*

“Yes...” Ilya managed to say, trying to show Shane he was still listening. “Hayden thinks you are in love with her.”

“I’m not,” Shane laughed, his head falling. He exhaled through a laugh, shaking his head. “No, I just got close with her because she’s the only person who knows what I’m about to tell you.”

Ilya’s heart filled with relief, but also clear anticipation.

“I uh... this feels so weird.” Shane laughed, not making eye contact with Ilya.

Ilya stood there, a new wave of confidence taking over as he reached his hand out. He quietly placed it over Shane's hands, steadying them. “Take you time,” he said quietly.

Shane finally looked at Ilya again, this time, eyes brimming with tears.

“Hey,” Ilya said, moving his hand to wipe away the stray tear that escaped from the corner of Shane’s eye. “I am here, whatever it is.”

“I just feel silly,” Shane admitted quietly. “I don’t know why I felt like I had to hide this from you. I know you will accept me.”

Ilya stayed silent, giving him the space to continue.

“I just... I mean...” Ilya could almost see the gears turning in Shane's mind as he rubbed a hand over his face. “Fuck, all I’m trying to tell you is that I think...or I guess I know... that I’m gay.”

Ilya’s face softened immediately as he smiled at Shane.  He stepped forward and wrapped him in a hug. Sure, Ilya had suspected something had shifted with the two of them and there may be mutual feelings, but he didn’t *know* if Shane was actually...you know...gay.

“Hey,” Ilya whispered against Shane’s shoulder. “Thank you for telling me. I am so proud of you.”

Shane squeezed him tighter. “Thank you”

They stayed like that, wrapped in each other's arms, for longer than they meant to. Even when the teenagers on the beach finally got their fireworks to go off, they didn’t move. Ilya never wanted this moment to end, and judging from the way Shane held on to him, neither did he.

Chapter End Notes

Hoping to be 100% done by the new year!
enjoy my friends xx

# Chapter 7: Myrtle Beach Day 2

**Myrtle Beach**

**Sunday - 7:30 AM**

Sunlight filtered through the blinds of their bedroom. Ilya silently cursed to himself for not waking up earlier so he could take Shane to see the sunrise. As he stirred awake, he was acutely aware of the weight of Shane sleeping soundly beside him. No arms draped over Ilya's chest or impromptu cuddling this time, just Shane. Ilya's heart ached.

He smiled at the memory of last night. Shane had come out to him on the balcony, and afterwards, when they eventually found their way back inside, they settled on Ilya's bed and just *talked.*

They talked about their fears of how their sexuality would be perceived in the NHL and how Shane felt relief knowing he wouldn't have to face those fears alone. They talked about Shane's journey to discovering and becoming comfortable with his sexuality and how hiding it from himself and others affected him mentally. Eventually, the weight of the conversation eased and they began to talk about lighter topics; what they'll buy with their first NHL paycheck, what cities they hope to end up in, their dream homes and life.

It was a nice conversation. There was no pressure or expectations in the undertones of their words. They were just able to sit and exist with one another and just *talk.* Ilya felt at home.

He didn't remember the exact moment they fell asleep, but he did recall thinking he should offer to sleep in the other bed when he noticed Shane was getting sleepier and sleepier. Something in the back of his mind stopped him, though. Ilya was glad it did, because he decided there was nothing more beautiful in this world than a sleeping Shane Hollander glowing in the light of the morning sunrise.

Shane shifted beside him with a soft exhale. Ilya immediately forced himself to look away, fixing his eyes on a sliver of ocean he could see through a small opening in the blinds.

"Hey," Shane mumbled, his voice still heavy with sleep. Ilya turned slightly to meet his eyes.

"Hi." The silence was comfortable.

Shane smiled, eyes adjusting to the sunlight in their room. "Ya know," he whispered casually as he stretched his arms. "I always sleep better when we share a bed."

Ilya smiled, because how could he not? The one time this whole trip that they didn't share a bed, Ilya woke up from a nightmare.

"Me too," Ilya admitted.

The lazy confession, though minimal, felt heavy. It felt like Ilya was admitting everything to Shane at that moment.

Whether that was true, Shane didn't seem to notice though. Instead, Shane turned to grab his phone off the nightstand and the two of them fell back into the comfortable silence Ilya had learned to appreciate.

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**Myrtle Beach**

**9:30 AM**

"Hayden Pike, get your ass back over here and put on the damn sunscreen!"

The minute they got to the beach, Hayden wasted no time running towards the water. Jackie, of course, was not going to let that fly.

Rose, Shane, and Ilya laughed as they watched Jackie chase Hayden down, sunscreen in her hand. Hayden purposefully swerved around other beach goers, trying to make a scene.

"They're perfect for each other," Rose laughed as she pulled her beach towel out of her bag. "I seriously couldn't imagine anyone more suited for each of them."

Shane hummed in agreement, taking out his own beach towel and laying in between Rose and Ilya.

Their plan was to be at the beach all day. They had packed some food, snacks, and drinks to hold them over until it was time to leave for dinner and dancing. Ilya was excited to just do *nothing* and relax. Granted, it wasn't summer yet, so there was still a chill in the air, but nonetheless the beach was exactly where he wanted to be.

Eventually, Jackie and Hayden found their way back to the group, smelling an awful lot like sunscreen. Hayden smiled in defeat, but despite being attacked by his girlfriend, he still looked at her like she hung the sun, moon, and all the stars.

Ilya smiled at the two of them. "You guys are cute."

Jackie beamed, turning to give Hayden a kiss on the cheek.

The group then fell into a comfortable rhythm after that. Sunscreen was applied, music played softly through Rose's speaker, and conversations kept flowing.

Ilya fell onto his towel, flipping onto his stomach and moving his hat ever so slightly to block the sun from his eyes. The warmth of the sun and calming sounds of the ocean were enough to put anyone to sleep, so that's exactly what he did.

He had no sense of time or how much of it had passed when he was being softly shaken awake by an all too familiar voice.

“Hey,” Shane whispered, hand resting on Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya made a strangled noise in reply, too tired to think of a coherent response.

“Your back is turning red,” Shane continued.

“I will be fine.”

“No you won’t,” Shane laughed. Ilya could hear Shane move around and rummage through the bag right next to him. “Here.”

Before Ilya had time to protest, he felt Shane’s hands on his back, softly, carefully rubbing sunscreen into it. Shane’s touch was so delicate to the point where Ilya’s arms were covered in goosebumps.

Shane rubbed careful circles into Ilya's back, making sure to cover every inch. Ilya didn’t dare move, everything about this felt perfect. He’d be lying if he said it didn’t feel like Shane’s touch lingered for a moment longer than what was considered friendly.

But he’d also be lying if he said he wanted it to stop.

Eventually, though, it did. And the loss of Shane's touch felt colder than anything Ilya has ever experienced.

Time blurred after that.

Later in the afternoon, Rose had announced she was going in the water. Everyone was quick to agree with her, not wasting a second before jumping into the ocean.

Everyone but Shane, that is.

Ilya, though confused, didn’t want to push. Instead, he high tailed it towards the water, running past Jackie, Rose and Hayden as he dove face first into an oncoming wave.

Slowly, Shane made his way to the water and stood at the edge of the shore, watching everyone enjoy the water. Sand slipped between his toes with every crash of a wave, but he didn’t go any further.

“You coming in, dude?” Hayden yelled, trying to project his voice over the waves. “It’s a little salty, but it’s refreshing!”

“Nah, I’m good!” Shane called back, nervously kicking the water as it approached his feet. Ilya had just come up from underwater, eyes and face red from the salt. He watched as Shane's face would twist with anxiety every time a wave came crashing over by his friends. Ilya studied how Shane wouldn’t take his eyes off the water.

“We didn’t drive all the way here for you to stare into the ocean!” Rose laughed, obviously oblivious to the citation at hand.

Shane giggled nervously in response and uttered something nobody could quite hear.

As Ilya watched Shane's expressions, something clicked. His mind immediately went back to when they were planning the activities together. When Ilya had mentioned parasailing, Shane had laughed it off, claiming he wasn't afraid of heights but it just wasn't his thing.

*Maybe,* he thought, *that's because Shane is afraid of the ocean*.

"Shannnnnnnne" Jackie pleaded, marching her way through the water and closer to Shane. "Pleasseeee!"

Before Ilya knew it, he was making his way out of the water and towards Shane.

"No no, he said he did not want to," Ilya calmly said. Shane whipped his head over to him, obviously thankful for the excuse to get out of this mess. "Plus, I need a break from all this salty water and I do not want to sit on the beach alone."

Ilya gave Shane a small smile before walking past him and towards his towel. Shane followed quietly behind him.

"Thank you," he said when he got closer to Ilya. He looked almost embarrassed at the whole ordeal, almost like he was wishing for the sand to swallow him whole.

Ilya gave him a reassuring smile before putting the towel up to his hair to dry his curls. "You don't have to explain."

Shane nodded. "You're good at that."

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "At what?"

"Reading my mind," Shane sat down on his towel, eyes scanning the beach. "Knowing what I need."

All Ilya could do in response was smile as he took a seat next to Shane.

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**Myrtle Beach**

**8:30 PM**

When the group finally called it a day at the beach, they collected themselves and went back to the condo to shower, change, and get ready for the night.

And that's how they found themselves at a rooftop bar overlooking the ocean.

Jackie had found the place online and thought it would be a perfect way to end the night.

The music was pounding in Ilya's ears. Normally, he'd be all about this, but after being in the sun all day, his battery was drained. For the sake of the rest of the group, though, Ilya decided to power through.

He went to find a table in the club that they could use as their home base as everyone went up to the bar. Shane had said something about getting Ilya a drink, but the EDM blasting through the speakers made it hard to understand what he was saying, so Ilya just nodded.

String lights were hung between columns and beams, swaying slightly in the breeze coming from the ocean. Ilya was kicking himself because this bar was *perfect* but he was just feeling so *out of it.*

He wanted to stay back at the condo as the rest of the group went out, but he really didn't want to be the debby downer, so he put on a fake smile and went along. He took this rare moment he had by himself to just *exist.* He focused on the waves crashing on the shore, smiling at the memory of today.

"Let's fucking party, Rozanov!!" Ilya swears Hayden appeared out of thin air as he set down *way* too many shots for the five of them.

"What the fuck is this?" Ilya asked, motioning towards the ten shots sitting in front of him.

"My wonderful and hot girlfriend managed to convince a couple of drunk guys to buy our group a round of shots," Hayden smirked. "It was glorious."

Ilya clapped as he watched Jackie fake bow to her friends. Rose cheered her on, turning some heads of other bar goers, but they didn't seem to care.

Shane appeared next to Ilya, handing him a drink.

"Water" Shane mouthed.

"Thank you" Ilya mouthed back, hoping the look he was giving Shane showed how much he really appreciated it.

Eventually, it came time to take the shots. Ilya was dreading it, but gracefully lined his shots up in front of him anyway. Jackie made up some toast about how grateful she was for drunk guys at the bar, and the group cheered and tossed back the liquor.

Rose then followed. She toasted to the five of them being here together and enjoying every second of their vacation. The cheers from the group followed once again as they took their second (and hopefully last) shot.

As the night dragged on, it was getting harder and harder for Ilya to focus. He was amazed at the energy Rose, Jackie, and Hayden all had despite being out in the sun all day, too. Ilya knew that the three of them thrive off each other's energy, and for a slight moment he was a little jealous.

Shane, however, started to seem a little removed from the conversation as well. His responses were delayed and sometimes even a little lackluster. Eventually, though, he had excused himself to go to the bathroom.

As soon as Shane's seat was vacant, Hayden slid into it. "Dude," he slurred, putting an arm around Ilya's shoulders. "You and Shane are like, best friends."

Ilya laughed, amused by the way the alcohol was affecting Hayden.

“We are,” he agreed.

“I know you too are best friends, but I really hope you guys know that you’re some of my best friends too.” Hayden admitted. Ilya smiled genuinely at him. Hayden and Shane were closer than Hayden and Ilya, so the two of them never really had these types of conversations.

“You’re one of my best friends, too,” he responded. Hayden's smile widened.

“I’m going to miss you guys.”

“Me too.”

It’s been a minute since Ilya last thought about their lives after this trip. The gravity of it all, though, is weighing on him more and more as the trip comes closer to a close. He knew he was going to miss Shane, but he never considered how much he was going to miss Hayden, too.

The two of them fell into a light hearted conversation after that, and for a few minutes, Ilya let himself be distracted.

Rose eventually approached them, a little glint of worry on her face. “Where’s Shane?”

Ilya glanced down at his watch, noticing it’s been awhile since Shane had gone to the bathroom. Without thinking, Ilya stood from his seat. “Bathroom,” he stated, pushing his seat into the table. “I’ll go check on him.”

Ilya maneuvered his way through the crowd, trying to navigate his way to the bathrooms. The further he got from the crowd, the quieter the music got until eventually, he found himself in a secluded, quiet and cool hallway.

There was a glowing neon sign that read “gentlemens” illuminating in front of Ilya. Without a second to waste, he pushed the door open.

There he found Shane, hands braced on the counter. Ilya’s heart ached at the sight, but he snapped himself out of it.

“Shane?” He asked, quietly. Almost like he was scared that Shane would freak out if he spoke any louder.

Shane's eyes opened and softened at the sight of Ilya.

“Sorry to disappear,” Shane replied, giving Ilya a small half smile. Ilya could tell Shane was feeling out of it, too.

“No need to be sorry,” Ilya took a step closer to Shane. Without another word coming out of either of their mouths, Shane walked right into Ilya’s arms, resting his forehead on Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya was shocked at first, but quickly pushed away that feeling to comfort Shane.

“I just, I don’t know.” Shane said. “I’m tired and drained. Being in the sun all day was a lot.”

Ilya nodded in understanding because he knew *exactly* what Shane meant by that.

“And then the music and everything, it’s all just too much right now.”

Ilya slowly pulled Shane off of him so he could look at him. He wanted to make eye contact with Shane, show him that it’s *okay* and he’s not alone.

“It is the same for me,” Ilya admitted, eyes searching Shane’s face. “I didn’t even want to come out tonight but I didn’t want to ruin the night for everyone.”

Shane smiled with something that seemed like relief behind his eyes. He took a deep breath. “Can we get out of here? Say I don’t feel good or something.”

“Absolutely.”

—

**Myrtle Beach**

**10:00 PM**

Shane and Ilya told the others they were heading back and ordered themselves an uber. Shane made the others promise to call them if they needed any help getting home.

*“Other than those shots, I’ve been drinking water all night.” Rose told them, which eased the guilt they were both feeling for leaving their friends behind.*

The uber ride back to their condo was silent, save for the quiet tapping of Shane’s fingers to the beat of whatever song was playing.

When they arrived back at their condo, both of them filed into their room. Shane muttered something about taking a shower and closed himself into the bathroom.

Ilya was silently thankful that he had showered before going out that night, so he changed into his pajamas and clambered into his bed.

When Shane stepped out of the bathroom, Ilya held his breath. Shane looked so *good.* With his hair damp and eyes tired, Shane looked briefly at his empty bed, then at Ilya.

There was an unspoken question, and an unspoken answer.

Shane crossed the room and climbed into bed next to Ilya. Their shoulders were touch and the space between them was minimal and familiar.

“Thank you for leaving with me,” Shane spoke, breaking the silence. “I just couldn’t do it anymore.”

“It was beneficial for me too,” Ilya looked over at Shane, whose eyes were searching Ilya’s face for *something.*

“This whole trip has been… a lot.” Shane admitted. “In a good way. but just a lot. I’m glad we did it.”

Ilya hummed in agreement. All he could think about was how much he wanted to take the chance in this moment and lay it all on the line. How much he wanted to hold Shane’s face in his hands and pull him closer and…

“I’m really grateful for you,” Shane said and *fuck did he just look at Ilya’s lips?*

“I uh... me too,” Ilya replied, his brain short circuiting. Not a single coherent thought was able to be formed. Ilya forgot how to breathe.

“You’re my best friend,” Shane whispered.

Ilya tensed at the words

*Best Friend.*

*Friend.*

*Right.*

The reminder twisted something within him, leaving nothing but dread and guilt in its wake. Maybe being best friends *should* be the line. Maybe they shouldn’t be anything more. Ilya spent this entire vacation giving himself the courage to *want* to take that chance, but was he just kidding himself this whole time?

Shane must have noticed something shifted in Ilya. “Hey,” he said, eyebrow creasing as he tried to fight for Ilya’s eye contact. “Not to say... just... I’m trying to say you’re important to me.”

“Important,” Ilya repeated back, almost like he was hearing the word for the first time. He nodded to himself, a sad smile forming on his face “Yes, you are important to me, too.”

Shane propped himself on his elbow, then reached for Ilya. In a moment of quiet desperation, he softly and careful grabbed Ilya’s face, willing him to look at him. Ilya’s breath hitched.

When he met Shane’s eyes, Ilya was terrified to see that their faces were closer now. So close that Ilya could see every freckle on Shane’s face. Close enough to feel the pull between them.

Shane’s hand moved from Ilya’s cheek, finding it’s way to the back of his neck instead. Ilya's heart was going a million miles a minute when he realized what was happening.

Shane gave him a look, almost as if he was asking permission to do the very thing Ilya has wanted to do since the day they met.

Finally, their lips met in a soft and gentle kiss. It was tentative, barely there at first, almost like they were worried they were about to destroy the most fragile thing in their lives. Ilya moved his hand to Shane's face, acting as an invitation.

Ilya's thumb brushed against Shane's cheek, and without a moment to waste, he deepened the kiss. Shane's hands grasped the back of Ilya's head, fingers gliding through his hair, lips working at Ilya's mouth with a sense of desperation.

When they finally broke apart, needy and breathless, neither of them spoke. Their foreheads stayed pressed together, smiles taking over their faces.

"I've been wanting to do that for awhile," Shane admitted, repositioning himself to be laying on Ilya's chest. Ilya pulled him closer.

Ilya let out a quiet, shaky laugh. "You have no idea," he whispered.

The question of what this all means was looming in the back of Ilya's mind. But for now, he let himself just live in the moment and not worry about tomorrow.

Because right now, he has Shane in his arms.

And that's all he could ever ask for.

# Chapter 8: Myrtle Beach Day 3

**Myrtle Beach**

**Monday - 6:30 AM**

Ilya realized he was wrong.

Very wrong.

Yesterday, he had told himself that there was nothing more beautiful than the sight of Shane sleeping in the glow of the morning sun.

Today, though, he's willing to admit he's wrong.

Because as he sits here on the beach at 6:30 in the morning, watching the sky being painted with the most beautiful shades of red, pink, and orange, he sees Shane.

Shane had always been beautiful in Ilya's eyes, but seeing Shane in this light was breathtaking. His freckles were prominent and kissed by the sun, his hair was messy and hastily styled.

His eyes, *God his eyes,* were lit up in such a way that looked like he had seen Heaven itself.

He sat so close to Ilya, their shoulders brushing. Their kiss is constantly replaying in Ilya's mind.

*God he wanted to kiss Shane again.*

Coming out to the sunrise was Ilya's idea. He had woken Shane up and dragged him out of bed. "*You said you wanted to see the sunrise,"* he had said. Shane had put up no argument as he tugged on a hoodie and followed Ilya to the beach.

Now they're sitting on the sand in silence. Shane had reached for Ilya's hand, squeezing it as he rested his head on Ilya's shoulders.

"This is...perfect," Shane whispered.

Ilya smiled, turning his head slightly so he could lay a small kiss on Shane's temple. "Da," he agreed. "It is."

They sat there for a few moments longer, watching as the light reflected off the water. Shane took out his phone and opened the camera app.

"I never want to forget this," he said, snapping a quick photo of the horizon in front of them. He hesitated for a moment, before flipping the camera into selfie mode.

“What are you doing?” Ilya smirked, silently praying the colors of the sunrise were hiding his blushing cheeks.

“I want to remember this moment,” Shane smiled, raising his phone to a proper selfie angle. The two of them squeezed together, closer than they were before, and Shane snapped a photo.

They then took a few more photos, Ilya even got brave and placed another kiss on Shane’s temple for the last photo. The smile on Shane’s face was infectious, and Ilya hoped he’d never see it fade.

Shane clicked open his photo library to look at the photos. They scrolled through them, favoriting the ones they liked the best. He paused on the last photo, the one with Ilya kissing Shane’s head.

“I wish we could do this when we get home,” Shane’s smile faded as he spoke.

“We can,” Ilya offered, his hand slowly rubbing the side of Shane’s arm. “It may not be the ocean, but we could still do early morning walks or catch the sunset on the lake--”

“No,” Shane interrupted, shaking his head. “That’s not what I meant.”

Ilya’s stomach dropped as he felt Shane pull away. Suddenly the air felt cold.

“What uh...” Ilya gulped. “What do you mean?”

Shane paused, his eyes moving away from Ilya to look back at the ocean. The sun has almost completely risen, the colors slowly fading away around them. “I mean,” he looked back towards Ilya, but wouldn’t look him in the eyes. “This...” he said, gesturing between the two of them.

“What?” It came out barely above a whisper, Ilya’s voice cracking.

“Us.” Shane said flatly. “*Us*, Ilya. I wish there could be an *us* when we get home.”

Ilya knew he had never experienced heartbreak in his adult life, but he was pretty sure this is what it felt like. His heart shattered into a million pieces, and despite almost never crying, tears began to form.

“We can,” He pleaded, trying to reach for Shane’s hands. “Why couldn’t we?”

And finally, *finally,* Shane made eye contact with Ilya. His eyes were brimmed with tears, too. “Ilya...” he said.

“Don’t,” Ilya pleaded again. “Don’t do this.”

Shane pinched his tears away, a habit of his that usually endeared Ilya, but today it just fucking hurt. “You know it wouldn't work.”

“No, I don’t,” Ilya stated plainly. “But, I do know it wouldn’t work if we don’t try.”

Shane pulled his hands away. “We have careers,” he said, voice trying not to break. “We’ll be drafted to different teams, different cities. We could be across the fucking country or even in an entirely different country. Being gay in the NHL and dating someone who will potentially be playing on a rival team is just... It’s not... it’s not like it would be easy.”

Ilya looked down at his hands. He couldn't formulate the words he wanted to say. He couldn’t understand why Shane was giving up so *easily.*

Shane took Ilya’s silence as a sign to continue. “I just thought... I thought it would be nice to just have these few days with you. Have everything I’ve wanted for a few days before we have the check back in with reality. Have the thrill of almost fully having you.”

That made Ilya’s head snap up. “Is that all this is to you? What *I am* to you?” Ilya questioned, anger bubbling in his chest. “A quick fling? A thrill?”

“That’s not what I said,” The shock in Shane’s face from the sudden anger in Ilya was evident.

“Is what you meant, Hollander.” Ilya stood up, not wanting to do whatever *this* was anymore. A single tear breached the surface, falling down his cheek. “How could you tell me it is not possible? *You* kissed me. *You* laid on *my* chest. *I* have wanted this for *years* and now that we can finally have it, you take it away before we even get anywhere.”

Shane stood up too, tears were slowly falling down his face. “Ilya, I'm telling you I’m scared!”

“Then let yourself be scared!” Ilya’s voice was breaking, his energy depleting. “I’m scared too. Fucking terrified. But we won’t ever know if we don’t fight for it.”

Shane took a step back, bending down to grab the blanket they had on the sand. “I just... I don’t know how it could work. I don’t know how I wouldn't lose you.”

*“It already feels like I’m losing you,”* Ilya wanted to say. Instead he took a deep breath and whispered; “so you’d rather walk away from it? From this?”

“I’m sorry,” Shane said.

And then he turned around and walked away. Walked away from the beach, away from Ilya, and away from the possibility of ever having something.

Ilya stood there, alone. The tide was rolling in higher, almost crashing into his ankles as he watched Shane’s footsteps get washed away.

And for the first time since they arrived, Ilya felt hopeless.

--

When Ilya got back to the condo, he was immediately greeted by a confused Rose in the kitchen.

“There you are! What’s going on--”

Ilya walked past her, trying to make it to his bedroom before she saw the tears in his eyes. “I have to go shower.”

He made his way through the living room, where Shane was curled up scrolling through his phone. Ilya made sure he’d pay no mind to the man that broke his heart and walked right into the bedroom.

Ilya was positive Shane hadn’t said anything to Rose. He usually shuts himself out and stays quiet when he’s upset, which is probably what triggered Rose to realize something was wrong.

He didn’t know what to do. They have an entire day of group activities and he was just so *hurt.* The last thing he wanted to do was be near Shane right now, to be reminded of what just happened. He knew that was impossible, but maybe if he told Rose the situation, she could help?

Ilya stood motionless in the shower, the water pounding against his shoulders as he willed it to wash the memories of the morning away. Hot water was streaming down his face, blurring the lines between what was coming from the showerhead and what was coming from his eyes. His chest ached at the harsh outcome of what was supposed to be the perfect morning. He was upset at Shane for not wanting to try, for giving up before they even had the chance to fail, for walking away.

But he was also mad at himself. He was mad that he let himself care so much, and he was mad that he didn’t sympathize or try to comfort Shane when he said he was scared. But most of all, he was mad he *let* Shane walk away.

After what felt like hours, but was really only minutes, Ilya decided it was time to get his shit together, but on a ‘everything is okay’ face, and get ready for the day with his friends.

He wasn’t going to try and pretend like everything was okay, but he also wasn’t going to make it anybody else’s problem. He made his way back into the common area where everybody was ready to go.

“There you are, buddy,” Hayden smiled, getting up from the couch. “I thought you were drowning in the shower.”

“No, sorry.” Ilya tried to force a smile, but it didn’t quite make it up to his eyes. “I am just moving slowly. Tired.”

“I can tell, your eyes look heavy.” Rose budded in, her eyebrow raised up slightly, as if she was trying to get Ilya to spill whatever is weighing heavy on his mind. Shane looked up at Ilya for a brief moment, eyes meeting his. Ilya thought he was able to hide the fact that he just cried for the past 20 minutes in the shower, but the look of sorrow and pain on Shane’s face was confirmation enough that Ilya wasn’t as slick as he thought.

As quickly as the expression came over Shane, it vanished and was replaced with some sort of bullshit smile. “Okay!” he clapped, trying to get everyone’s attention. “Let’s head out!”

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**Myrtle Beach**

**Monday - 1:30 PM**

Ilya was disturbed.

When he told himself he wasn’t going to make his and Shane’s fight anybody else’s problem, he meant in a ‘not be actively miserable’ kind of way. But Shane? Shane was taking it to a whole new level.

The fake smile he had given to the group right before leaving the condo *never* left. It was plastered on his face like a tattoo, except Ilya could swear it was actually *growing.* On the uber ride on the way to brunch that morning, Shane, who almost never wants to interact with their driver, sat in the passenger seat and talked the driver's ear off. The two of them were talking so much, that it left no space for anyone else to bud into the conversation. Confused looks were exchanged between the friends, but nobody said anything.

When they got to the restaurant, Shane willingly sat by Ilya and even offered to split a pizza with him. Ilya had declined, but the act of them even sitting that close was enough to send Ilya into a quiet panic for the rest of the meal. Just like in the uber, Shane was lively and holding conversations with anybody who would listen, but other than the offer for Pizza, he never tried to talk to Ilya. Instead, he, Jackie, and Hayden talked about meal prepping, looking for apartments, and even weird online trends. Rose would put her two cents in every once in a while, but for the most part she just listened in awe.

Towards the end of the meal, though, she had texted Ilya. She knew both of them well enough at this point to know something was *not* right.

**Rose: Okay, what the fuck is going on?**

**Ilya: What do you mean?**

**Rose: I mean Shane is being weird. Right? Why is he talking so much? What happened?**

**Ilya: Long story**

**Rose: We got time. They’re all still blabbing on about whatever the fuck.**

**Ilya: We went for the sunrise on the beach. Ended poorly.**

**Rose: He was pretty sulky when he got back. Were you crying when you got back? It looked like you were.**

Ilya thought about lying for a minute. He didn't want to make this her problem, too, but if this trip has taught him anything it's that talking to Rose always makes things better.

**Ilya: Yes, I was.**

**Ilya: We kissed last night.**

Ilya heard Rose choke on her drink.

**Ilya: But this morning he said he does not want anything with me. It is long story.**

**Rose: that's...weird. And this is definitely not a texting conversation. Let's talk more about this later.**

**Ilya: OK.**

And so it was later, and the group was at an outdoor shopping mall center. Rose had been looking for an opportunity all afternoon to pull Ilya aside, but the timing never seemed to work out. Eventually, though, Shane, Hayden, and Jackie were laughing their asses off at a sunglasses booth. They were trying on different styles, taking photos, and giving the poor salesman a heart attack every time they picked up a new pair.

Ilya didn't want to say it was unlike Shane to do something like this, but it's definitely nothing he has seen before.

Rose saw this opportunity and called out to the group that she was taking Ilya to the knick knack store across the way. They got a thumbs up in response and before he knew it, Ilya was being dragged along the plaza.

"So," Rose let out a breath. "Tell me everything."

In that moment, Ilya could not have been more thankful for the sunglasses masking his eyes. He hasn't said any of this out loud yet, but the mere thought already has his eyes brimming with tears. He took a deep breath, giving himself a moment to collect himself.

"Last night, we came home early because we were both tired." Ilya started, then he told her everything. He told her how Shane had initiated the kiss, giving Ilya butterflies like he had never felt before. He told her about the sunrise, and how Shane had mentioned wanting to see the sunrise on the beach, so he thought he could make it special.

Then he told her that Shane didn't want to try anything with Ilya after the trip was over.

And how that had broken Ilya more than he ever could have guessed.

"Oh, Ilya..." Rose said, placing one hand on his shoulder as the other hand held a "I ❤️ MYRTLE BEACH" mug. "I just don't understand why he would say that, he's always..." she stopped herself.

Ilya didn't seem to notice, too caught up in his own thoughts. "He is scared, and I get that. I am scared, too. But I also want to fight for him."

“Do you think he’s acting weird so nobody notices how broken up he is?” Rose asked, her eyes scanning the other mugs on the shelf. Ilya chuckled a little as she picked up one covered in turtles.

“I don’t know. Maybe. Probably, yes.” Ilya responded, eyes landing on a mug that simply said ‘Shit Happens | Myrtle Beach’ with a dolphin jumping out of the water. He’ll never understand why people buy this stuff.

“I think that has to be it. I also think you guys should talk to each other again because--”

“Like my new shades?” Jackie walked up next to the duo, pointing at the stylish new sunglasses on her face. Rose’s face beamed as she looked at her best friend, gassing her up with compliments. She gave Ilya a quick ‘we’re not done with this’ look and walked off arm in arm with Jackie.

Hayden walked up next to Ilya, “Girls,” he said, letting out a soft chuckle. Hayden's arm then extended out in front of him, grabbing the very dolphin mug that Ilya was just judging moments before. “Oh shit, this mug is funny as fuck. I *have* to get it!”

Ilya let out a small chuckle, and finally, a real genuine smile spread across his face. Despite being in a rough patch right now with Shane, he was reminded once again of just how much he loves his friends.

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**Myrtle Beach**

**Monday - 4:00 PM**

After shopping, the group had found themselves at a pirate themed mini golf place just off the main road. It was obviously another tourist trap, and Ilya couldn’t hide his eye roll as they pulled into the parking lot. The uber had dropped them off, and Shane was quick to get out and make his way towards the entrance.

“Someone is in a hurry,” Hayden observed, placing a hand on Ilya’s shoulder as the two of them followed Shane inside. “Everything okay, man? Both of you are acting off.”

“Yes,” Ilya lied. “I just did not sleep well.”

Hayden gave Ilya a look, but didn’t press further and Ilya quietly thanked the God’s above as he moved to pick out his golf ball color. The universe, however, decided it wasn’t done playing tricks on Ilya as he and Shane both reached for the same Blue ball.

“Sorry,” was all Shane said, before grabbing the purple one instead. Ilya wanted to run into traffic.

Thankfully, as it turns out, Mini Golf is the perfect way to avoid people and feelings. Ilya was able to distract himself, trying his best to line up his ball for the perfect shot. He tried to ignore the sound of Shane and Rose just three feet away, laughing as if nothing has happened in the last 12 hours of their lives.

“Oh my god, hit the ball,” Jackie teased, waiting patiently next to Ilya with her club and ball in hand. “There is no way you can screw this up, just hit it left of the log.”

“Yes but I want a hole in one,” Ilya smirked, checking his position just once more before hitting the ball to the right of the log. The ball bounced off the wall and off the log before, miraculously, going right into the hole. “See? Just like that.” Ilya winked at Jackie.

“No fucking way,” Jackie smiled, mouth slightly agape at Ilyas golfing skills. “You’re already good at hockey, you’re not allowed to be good at golf too!”

“Jackie, Jackie...” Ilya teased, stepping away so Jackie could line up her shot. “I am good at everything.”

Jackie just scoffed as she placed her ball down, muttering something to herself about hitting the ball to the right instead. Ilya just smiled, moving his way over to retrieve his ball from the hole.

Shane was quiet after that.

The two of them danced around each other all afternoon, never staying near each other for more than a few seconds. It was like they were two magnets flipped the wrong way, repealing each other instead of bringing each other closer.

Rose and Jackie both noticed, but maybe it’s because he plays on a team with them, because Hayden seemed to notice the most.

Hayden fell into step with Ilya as Shane and the girls were a few feet ahead of them, walking towards the 7th hole.

“What the hell is going on?’ Hayden asked, voice low.

Ilya sighed, bouncing his club next to him as they trekked forward. “Nothing.”

“Bullshit,” Hayden laughed. “I tried talking to Shane and it’s like I’m talking to a wall. Something is obviously going on.”

“Don’t worry about it, we’re working it out,” Ilya reassured, but he wasn’t even sure if he believed that himself. Neither of them would talk to each other, so how much are they really working out?

Before Hayden could reply, a loud struck of thunder filled the sky and rain began falling mercilessly from the sky without warning.

“Run!” Rose yelled, and the group wasted no time following her lead. The rain was soaking through their clothes as they navigated their way towards the covered patio near the front. Other groups were swarming under the cover as well, causing everyone to be shoulder to shoulder.

Jackie wiggled her phone out of her purse, immediately pulling up the Uber app. “I’m calling an Uber, there is no way in hell we’re staying.”

The group nodded in agreement, watching as the sky released enough water to fill an ocean. Ilya turned his body slightly, giving the mom and her kids next to him more room. It wasn't until he looked up that he noticed he was face to face with Shane.

His hair was stuck to his forehead, water dripping down his face. His white shirt was soaked through, giving Ilya a very clear look at his well defined body. His eyes raked back over to Shane's face, and for a split second, their eyes met.

Then Shane looked away, something sad beneath his eyes.

Despite being only inches away from each other, the two of them never felt so far apart.

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**Myrtle Beach**

**Monday - 10:30 PM**

The rain was coming down at a steady pace now. It wasn't a downpour, but was heavy enough to keep the group inside. Jackie insisted that they play a game of Uno to pass the time, and there was no hesitation amongst the friends. Rose had opened up a bottle of wine, and the night had officially started.

Playing Uno was always an interesting time. It seems everyone grew up with different rules, different variations, and different understandings. They spent the first 20 minutes establishing ground rules; Yes you can stack +4 cards, no you cannot cannot jump in out of turn if you have a matching card (this rule was stupid in Ilya's eyes), and yes you have to play a card every round even if that means you *have* to draw a card until you can play.

Jackie grew up in a household that actually tracked the points, so by default she was nominated as the score keeper. There was no real prize other than bragging rights, but this group was competitive enough that bragging rights were more than satisfactory.

The first game went by quickly, with Hayden being crowned the winner. It was a lucky hand, and Ilya was convinced the deck wasn't shuffled properly. Eventually, though, the games started heating up.

They had gotten to a point in the night where all of them had won 2 games, Jackie gave up on keeping score (Hayden and Rose kept forgetting to add up their cards before throwing their piles back into the deck), and the stakes were high.

"Last game? This one is for all the marbles." Rose began dealing out the cards to everyone. Ilya rubbed his hands together in anticipation, making a show for his excitement. He felt easier, lighter even. After talking with Rose, he didn't feel like the entire world was crashing down on him. He knew he needed to talk to Shane, but for now he was living in the moment.

Shane was sitting next to him, and it seems his weird 'talk to everyone' facade was slowly drifting away and he was falling back into his 'normal' way of interacting. Everything felt

like it was falling back into place (if, of course, you ignore the whole ‘we can never be together’ conversation that has Shane and Ilya divided).

It didn’t take long for the game to quickly pick up the pace. Ilya had put down a blue 3, and Shane swore under his breath before drawing not one, not two, but 6 cards before he was finally able to pull something from the deck that he could play.

“Fucking finally,” he breathed, throwing a blue 6 out onto the discard pile.

“Tough luck,” Hayden said, before playing a blue +2 card. “Sorry babe,” he smirked, looking at Jackie.

“Apologize to Rose,” Jackie smiled back, placing another +2 on top of Hayden’s, this time it was yellow.

“Ohhhh, I’d be upset but...” Then Rose had placed a red +2 on top of Jackie's yellow one.

Ilya looked down at his hand, everyone laughing quietly as they waited for his move. He could be nice, and take the hit for Shane. Normally, he wouldn’t even think twice about this and he’d pull the 6 cards, knowing that Shane was more competitive than he was.

But then Ilya remembered the beach, he remembered that Shane was ignoring him all day. He remembered that he, right now, doesn’t owe Shane anything. So instead, he placed his green +2 card down on the pile, and the whole room was filled with “oohs”

“Fuck you, dude.” Was the only thing Shane said before grabbing 8 cards from the deck. Ilya felt a ping in his chest but he couldn’t decide if it was guilt from screwing Shane over or anger knowing that those were the first words Shane had said to Ilya in hours.

The game went on and on, and it seemed the hand that Ilya was dealt was testing him. Whether he meant to or not, card after card felt like he was screwing Shane over. If it wasn’t a plus 4, it was a reverse before Shane could even play. If it wasn’t a wild card calling out a color Shane didn’t have, it was Ilya placing a card that Shane couldn’t play on top of.

Eventually, the game turned tense. Everyone felt it, and once Jackie was crowned the winner, Shane stood abruptly in his chair.

“I’m going to go to bed,” he said, not looking anyone in the eyes. The group watched as he left the table. They’re all used to Shane being competitive, but he’s never been a sore loser. He’s never acted like *this*.

Rose looked at Ilya, motioning her head towards the pair's shared bedroom door. “Go,” she mouthed, and Ilya took a deep breath before getting up and wordlessly moving to their bedroom.

Once he opened the door, he found Shane standing over his suitcase on his bed.

“Shane, it is just a game.” Ilya closed the door behind him, hoping their friends weren't eavesdropping on their conversation.

“I know that, Rozanov.” Shane said grumpily, looking through his suitcase with vigor, acting like he had lost his most prized possession.

Hearing Shane call him Rozanov hurt a little, but he didn’t acknowledge it.

“Then why so angry?”

“Forgive me for being frustrated because *you* wouldn’t give me a fucking break in the game.” Shane raised his voice slightly, throwing a sweatshirt, *Ilya’s Sweatshirt,* on the ground in frustration.

“You have been ignoring me all day! It was the only way I could get you to acknowledge my existence!” Ilya fired back, taking a step closer to Shane. He tried to lower his voice so their friends couldn’t hear, but it was no use, because Shane was raising his.

“Fuck off, Rozanov.” Shane rolled his eyes, turning around to make his way towards the bathroom.

“Oh so you are just going to walk away?” Ilya called after him. “Just like you walked away from the game? Just like you walked away from me on the beach?”

Shane stilled his movements, freezing in place. “This is *not* the same as the beach, and you know that.” He didn’t turn around to face Ilya.

“I don’t know what I know anymore, Shane.” Ilya’s voice broke slightly, but he kept his demeanor, hoping Shane wouldn’t notice how broken this was making him.

“Yeah, well,” Shane started. He slowly turned around to meet Ilya’s gaze. “Well I know that I don’t want to talk about this right now. I’m drained from acting like everything is fine.”

“I didn’t ask you to do that,” Ilya murmured. “I didn’t ask you to put on this fake fucking show for everyone.”

“Yeah well I didn’t want our issues to be everyone else’s problem. Our vacation is already ruined, I didn’t want to ruin theirs, too,” Shane bit back. Immediately, though, Ilya saw the regret in his eyes.

Finally, a single tear found its way down Ilya’s cheek. Shane watched it fall, his hand moved up out of instinct, only to hold it back. Ilya would’ve given anything in that moment to have Shane wipe his tears away.

The rain outside grew louder, what once was a steady background noise was now an insistent downpour. The sound of the rain getting heavier and heavier mimicked the feeling in Ilya’s chest. He couldn’t take this anymore.

He drew in a shaky breath, knowing he needed to be honest with Shane in this moment, even if it hurt.

“I feel like I’m losing you,” Ilya confessed. “The very thing I was terrified about is happening and I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to fix it.”

Shane stayed silent, and Ilya just needed him to say *something. Anything.*

“I don’t want to lose you,” Shane whispered, pinching away his own tears. “But I don’t know how to keep you.”

# Chapter 9: Myrtle Beach: The Final Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Myrtle Beach**

**Monday - 11PM**

*I don't want to lose you, but I don't know how to keep you.*

Ilya has never had his body be torn limb for limb, but he was pretty certain *this* is what that would feel like.

But despite the pain and anger radiating though his body at this very moment, he held his ground. He reached out his hand, gently grabbing Shane's wrist. He was terrified he'd walk away again, and this time he was going to be sure that wouldn't happen.

"I have liked you for a long time," Ilya started.

"Ilya,"

"No listen," he took a deep breath. "I have liked you since probably the day I met you, but I cannot lose you. Not like this."

He knew going into this that having feelings for his best friend would make things complicated, but he'd much rather keep Shane in his life than lose him over it.

Shane looked at Ilya, trying to understand exactly what the Russian man in front of him was saying.

"If us being together, and I mean really together, is not something you want to do, then I would much rather have you in my life as my best friend than not have you in my life at all," Ilya confessed. There was a pain in his heart. He knew that it was going to hurt, that seeing Shane and not being able to have him despite the feelings being mutual would completely and utterly tear him apart.

But he loves Shane, so maybe letting go of that, of *them* being something greater, was the right thing to do.

Shane sighed, biting his lip as he looked down and their intertwined hands. "I do really like you. More than a friend, that is." He took a breath. "I just wish our future wasn't so complicated."

"Me too." Ilya brought Shane's hands up to his lips, softly kissing them.

“Just...friends then, yeah? And we can put this whole day behind us?”

Ilya nodded. He would do anything for Shane.

They stayed there for a little moment longer, foreheads pressed into each other. Ilya felt relieved that he won’t lose Shane, but he can’t help feeling a bit of emptiness too. He’s grieving what they almost had...what they could have if things were just *different.*

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**Myrtle Beach**

**Tuesday - 12 PM**

“I think I’m going to go in,” Shane said quietly, standing on the shoreline next to Ilya. “What’s the worst thing that could happen?” He paused for a second. “Actually, don’t answer that.”

“Are you sure?” Ilya questioned, eyebrows raising in disbelief. “You do not have to do this.”

“What 22 year old is scared of the ocean?” Shane asked, trying to laugh at himself.

“A lot, actually. It is okay to be scared of the ocean. It is a scary place.” The two of them watched as Hayden, Jackie, and Rose were jumping into waves and laughing at each other when they came up from under the water. It looked like a lot of fun to Ilya, but he didn’t want to leave Shane alone on the shore.

“No, I’m scared of too many things. Gotta face my fears eventually,” Shane breathed, taking a step into the water. Ilya could see Shane’s shoulders tense up immediately, so he placed a supportive hand on his back.

“I am right here with you, okay?” Ilya confirmed. Shane took a deep breath as he continued to step forward. Every time a wave came, he’d tense up a little more and pause, letting the wave pass. It wasn’t until they got waist deep that everyone else noticed him.

“Shane!” Jackie called, cheering him on.

“Fuck yes!” Hayden added, jumping in celebration.

Shane just laughed at them. “I’m not going much further than this!” The group boo’d but didn’t press Shane much further. Ilya assumed the group was able to figure out Shane's fear after their first day at the beach.

Shane lowered himself into the water, gradually submerging himself. Ilya smiled at the way he would move to avoid floating seaweed and other debris in the ocean. The water had been somewhat calm, waves never really reaching an unmanageable height.

“This isn’t so bad, if I don’t think about everything swimming around below us”

Ilya lowered himself in the water to match Shane’s height. “Yes, see? Not too bad.”

“Thanks for staying with me.” Shane's back was turned towards the group, letting the waves break on his back. He stood as a barrier for Ilya.

But, of course, having his back turned towards the waves also served as a disadvantage. Ilya looked past Shane and saw a decently large wave heading right towards them. Without thinking, Ilya pulled Shane over to him, wrapping him in his arms to protect him. “Close your eyes,” he rushed out , right before the wave came crashing on them.

Ilya half expected Shane to make a run for the shore after that, but instead, after the wave passed by and they opened their eyes, Shane started laughing.

Like, really laughing.

It was the most joyous sound Ilya had ever heard.

“That was fucking fun!” Shane laughed, and before Ilya knew it, Shane was running deeper in the ocean and towards his friends.

Ilya was so proud.

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After about thirty minutes of jumping into waves and rubbing their faces raw with salt water, the group retired back to the beach.

Ilya was half asleep on his towel, bucket hat covering his face from the harsh sun. Fighting those waves had been tiring, and he knew they had plans to go out tonight, so this time he was determined to actually have a fun night out.

Shane slightly nudged his knee with his foot, willing him to wake up.

“You see that too, right?” Shane asked, head pointing in the direction of Rose. She was down by the shoreline, Ilya remembers faintly hearing her say something about finding a seashell for her mom, but she wasn’t alone.

In front of her was a man, probably a whole foot taller than her, talking to Rose. His hair was so slicked back Ilya was sure he had to use a whole tub of gel to achieve that look. It was obvious by the way he was trying to subtly flex his muscles that he was flirting with her.

Ilya snorted. “That’s hilarious.”

“Oh my God,” Jackie laughed, peaking over her sunglasses. “I should go save her, right? That's like... girlcode.”

“She can hold her own,” Shane said in response, never taking his eyes off the scene in front of him. “Plus, I’d like to see how this plays out.”

‘She looks like she will murder him,” Ilya pointed out, a laugh escaping his lips.

“Shane, you should go save her!” Hayden laughed, nudging his friend with his elbow. ‘You’re so charming. Plus, you could lie and say you’re her boyfriend so he truly would back off.”

Shane just laughed in response, shaking his head. Before anyone could say anything else, Rose was stomping away from the man, leaving him bewildered at the shoreline. She had a smirk on her face, and the group waited in anticipation for her to come back and tell them all about what just happened.

As soon as she got within ear shot, the entire group fell into a fit of laughter.

“Hayden and Jackie were fighting over who was going to save you,” Ilya laughed, offering rose her towel.

“I can save myself,” Rose said, doing a quick superman stance as the group erupted into another spell of laughter. “And for the record, if another man calls me beautiful, I am going to throw myself into the ocean.”

“Hey Rose,” Ilya replied. “Has anyone told you that you look beautiful today?”

Rose rolled her eyes, playfully throwing her towel at Ilya. He guarded himself with his hands, head turning just in time to see Shane looking at Ilya with something beautiful behind his eyes.

“Shane, Ilya is about to steal your woman!” Hayden joked, causing Shen to roll his eyes.

“In your dreams, buddy.”

Rose took her towel back from Ilya, setting it down beside Jackie. The two of them fell into a flow state, talking and gossiping about what this beefcake of a man was trying to say to Rose. Hayden was listening in, interjecting every once in a while with “oh seriously?” and “men are gross, yuck.”

Ilya looked over at Shane, who was biting his lip nervously. He had something on his mind.

“You okay?” Ilya asked, moving so he was holding himself up on his elbows. Shane took a deep breath.

“Yeah,” Shane replied, but he was staring off into the distance. Whatever he was thinking about was really eating at him, Ilya knew that much.

“What are you thinking?” Ilya asked, lowering his voice so he wouldn't draw attention to the two of them. “Can I help?”

Shane shook his head ‘no’ and his feet continued to bounce up and down in anticipation. Ilya was about to say something else, when Shane spoke up loud enough for the whole group to hear.

“Hey guys?” He said, catching their attention. All of them looked at Shane, whose face was now flushed.

“Everything okay, buddy?” Hayden asked, his voice immediately laced with concern. Shane was talking in a tone that said ‘this is serious.’ It was a tone that Ilya and Hayden usually only heard in the locker room.

“Yeah, just...” Shane took a deep breath, turning to look at Ilya then Rose. His eyes made his way back to Hayden and Jackie when he spoke up again. “Ilya and Rose already know but...” he paused.

*Holy shit?*

*Holy shit.*

Ilya sat up even further, adjusting himself so he could fully see and hear everything Shane was about to say.

“It’s only fair that you guys know too. It took some time for me to come to terms with it, and I would have told you sooner, but I had some things I needed to work out.” Shane was rambling now, something he was very good at doing when he was nervous.

“What are you saying?” Jackie asked, her voice was soft and calming. Shane smiled at that.

“I’m saying I’m gay,” he breathed out, looking up at the two of them. Instantly, they both smiled.

“That’s amazing,” Jackie said, getting up from her beach chair to hug Shane. “I’m so proud of you!”

Hayden followed suit, getting up to pull Shane into a big bear hug. “You’re amazing, buddy,” he said, patting Shane on the back as they hugged. “Sorry I kept trying to set you up with Rose.”

Shane laughed, telling Hayden he forgives him before they both settled back into their spots. Hayden and Jackie then fell into a fit of questions, asking Shane things like “when did you realize?” and “who’s the first boy you kissed?”

Shane happily answered their questions and successfully steered clear of answering anything that would allude to the situation with Ilya.

Ilya smiled at him, lovingly. He was so proud of Shane. Not just today, but everyday.

When Hayden and Jackie finally released Shane from their pseudo interview, Ilya grabbed his attention.

“I am so proud of you,” Ilya smiled, placing a hand on Shane’s upper arm. “You are so brave today.”

Shane smiled back, shoulder relaxing as if hearing Ilya say those words lifted the weight of the entire world off his shoulders.

“Thank you.”

Ilya pretended he didn't notice the look Jackie gave Rose.

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**Myrtle Beach**

**Tuesday - 6 PM**

The group all agreed that staying at the beach all day was *not* the move. Ilya and Shane had stated their case for not wanting to be drained again and actually wanting to enjoy their night, and it was a unanimous decision to leave after just a few hours.

They all went back to the condo, showered, and took a couple of hours to get ready for the night. Tonight was their last night here and they wanted to spend it on the boardwalk eating awful fried food, playing rigged carnival games, and riding structurally questionable rides. The perfect night, really.

They clambered into the Uber, everyone pitching their own ideas as to where they should start their evening. Hayden sat up front with the driver, turning around in his seat to plead his case for starting at the fried oreo stand, Rose and Jackie sat in the middle seats and gaining up on Hayden to tell him how awful of an idea that was. Shane sat next to Ilya in the far back of the car. This time, he wasn't too overly chatty with the driver and just listened to his friends bicker. Ilya felt content, happy that everything felt *almost* normal again.

As soon as they stepped foot onto the boardwalk, Jackie was pulling Rose in the direction of a Henna tattoo stand. They had made it their personal mission to get matching henna on the trip, so they took the first opportunity they found. Hayden stayed with Shane and Ilya.

"I spy a bar," Hayden said, motioning towards a small booth set up across the way. "Shall we, boys?"

It didn't take any convincing at all, so the three boys weaved their way through the crowd and straight to the man running the stand.

"Three Corona's," Hayden smiled, holding up the number 3 with his fingers.

"ID's please?" The man asked, studying the three of them like he was trying to figure something out.

The three boys happily handed over their ID's, and when they did, that's when it looked like something had clicked in this mans brain.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "You three play hockey for Duluth, right?"

Ilya was taken aback by this. He was used to maybe being recognized on campus, but in another state? That was unheard of.

"Yeah..." Hayden said, just as confused as Ilya felt.

“Sorry, that was weird.” The man laughed. “I was a student there, and graduated last year. I’d go to all of the hockey games. They were always so fun.”

The confusion immediately left Ilya’s face and was replaced with a smile. Shane’s shoulders relaxed.

“Really? That’s awesome!” Shane smiled, taking his ID back from the man. “We’d be nowhere without the fans.”

“Not true,” the guy smiled back. “You three are some of the best players on the team. And you two?” He motioned between Shane and Ilya. “You two have crazy good chemistry on the ice. It’s nice to know you’re friends off the ice, too.”

Hayden threw his arms around both Shane and Ilya's shoulders. “The best captains and the best friends around,” he beamed.

The conversation faded from there, the man behind the counter thanked them for being part of his favorite memories on campus and the boys took a picture with him.

The rush of being recognized by a stranger made Ilya feel...proud, maybe? In fact, the entire exchange made him forget about the playoffs loss. It was nice to know people still loved them and their team despite that.

“I *have* to go tell Jackie!” Hayden gushed, waving a quick bye to Ilya and Shane before running off towards the Henna stand.

“That was crazy,” Shane smiled. “Almost makes me feel unstoppable.”

Ilya looked at Shane. “You are always unstoppable.”

Shane just looked at Ilya, that same look he gave him on the beach making its way back to his face. Then, his eyes drifted to something behind Ilya.

“Oh come on! We *have* to go play that! I’m awesome at bags!” Before he knew it, Shane was speed walking in the direction of a beanbag toss game. There were 10 plastic bins screwed onto a plywood board that was sitting on an angle. The point of the game was to quite literally just toss the bags into the bins. Ilya smiled endearingly at Shane as Shane pulled out his wallet and grabbed five dollars to hand to the man running the booth.

“Do not mess up, I am counting on you.” Ilya joked.

Shane had great aim for the first two bags, then somehow managed to throw the third bag too short, completely missing all the bins. His fourth throw went way too far, and his fifth throw landed in the bin closest to him.

“These bags are all weighted differently!” Shane complained, trying to justify his loss. Ilya couldn’t help but smile at the boy who was taking this game way too seriously.

Shane threw Ilya his wallet, asking him to fish out another five dollars so he can try and win this god forsaken carnival game. Ilya shook his head and laughed, but took the wallet

nonetheless as Shane moved around to observe the bins and bags in front of him.

Ilya quickly pulled out five dollars and handed it to Shane. But, as he was closing the wallet, he came face to face with the picture again. *The* picture from Nashville, where he and Shane looked at each other like they hung the stars. Maybe Ilya is biased, but if he didn't know any better, he'd say the way they're looking at each other is the way people who have been madly in love with one another for years look at each other.

It looks like they're looking at their person, their soulmate.

Ilya is only snapped out of it when he hears Shane go "Here, for you."

Ilya looks up, and Shane is holding up the cheapest looking stuffed animal teddy bear Ilya has ever seen in his life, but Shane's smile was so wide that Ilya couldn't help but smile back.

"What's this?" He asked, taking the bear from Shane.

"An apology bear," Shane said sheepishly. "I'm sorry for how I acted on the beach and how I treated you yesterday."

Ilya smiled down at the bear, his thumbs pressing into the bear's belly.

"It's a bear, like for Russia?" Shane joked, poking the bear in the head. "Do you like it?'

Ilya looked up at Shane, then back to the bear. His eyes then drifted to the wallet Shane was putting back into his pocket, then up at the sky where the sun was setting.

"Come with me," Ilya said, grabbing Shane's wrist and pulling him towards the ferris wheel.

"Where are we going?" Shane called, laughter in his voice as he followed Ilya through the crowd.

Miraculously, the line wasn't too long for the ferris wheel at all. Once they got up to the front, Ilya pulled out a fist full of ride tickets and shoved them in the ride operator's hand.

"This is too many," the operator said with no feeling in his voice.

"That is fine. We go in this cart, yes?" Ilya said motioning towards the cart with its gate open, waiting for its next passenger.

"Uh, sure yeah." Once Ilya got the confirmation, he motioned for Shane to follow him into the cart. The door was shut by another ride operator, who then tapped the side of the cart, signaling for the wheel to spin.

Ilya and Shane were silent as the ferris wheel slowly made its way towards the top. They'd stop every now and then and Ilya assumed they were letting more people onto the ride.

"What are we doing?" Shane finally asked, breaking the silence.

Ilya was nervously playing with the bear in his hands, his leg bouncing up and down and he tried to formulate the words in his brain. He didn't look at Shane quite yet because he wasn't too sure he had an answer.

"Ilya?" Shane placed a hand on Ilya's bouncing leg. Finally, Ilya looked at him.

"The sunset is beautiful, yes?" Ilya said, his eyes looking right into Shane's.

"Very," Shane answered, his voice barely above a whisper.

"You told Hayden that confessing your love on a ferris wheel during sunset on our last night was romantic," Ilya blurted out, and Shane's eyes went wide. Ilya could feel the grip Shane had on his thigh tighten and Ilya took a deep breath.

"Ilya..." Shane seemed to only be able to say one word at a time, so Ilya jumped in again.

"Listen... My english may not be very good but it is important." Ilya set the bear aside and grabbed both of Shane's hands, holding them in his own. He softly rubbed circles with his thumb as he collected the words he wanted to say in his brain.

"Shane Hollander, I am in love with you." Ilya didn't break eye contact and he watched as Shane's eyes widened and a small gasp escaped his mouth. "I think maybe I have been since the day I met you."

"But," Ilya shushed him, asking him to let him finish. Shane only nodded.

The ferris wheel had completed its first full rotation, and Ilya knew he only had a few more rotations left before they were going to be let off the ride, so he had to get his shit together.

This was all impromptu, he wasn't planning on pouring his heart out to Shane, but he knew he needed to lay everything out on the table. Sure, they agreed to be friends earlier this morning, but that wasn't enough for Ilya.

There were still all these unspoken feelings Ilya hasn't shared, all these thoughts of the future and how much Ilya cares about him. Ilya wanted to keep Shane in his life forever, yes, but he needs Shane to know *everything* before they decide that they won't try to make a real relationship work.

And maybe this is unfair to Shane to lay it all out there with no warning, but Ilya has been holding it in for years and after this vacation, seeing that fucking photo again, and the Goddamn *bear*...Ilya couldn't hold it in any longer.

"You are the most important person in my life," Ilya started again. "And the last thing I want is to lose you, but I do not want to lie to you any more. I need you to know all of my feelings, I need you to fully understand why I was so heartbroken yesterday."

Ilya took a pause, then continued. "I know we said that we'd just stay friends, but," Ilya's voice was unsteady. "I tried, I really did. I told myself I could be okay with that, because at least I would still have you in my life."

The ferris wheel creaked slightly, softly swaying in the breeze. Ilya looked back down at their hands.

“But I can not lie to you. I am terrible liar,” he continued, hands gripping Shane's a little harder. “I have been pretending I am not in love with you for years. I pretend to be okay when I see you flirt with random people at the bar. I pretend to be okay when I thought you liked Rose. I pretend to be okay when my heart broke when I agreed on giving up any chance of us. But I cannot pretend anymore.”

He looked back up at Shane, whose eyes were glossy with tears. “I love you, Shane. I love you when you are happy and sad. I love you when we are playing on the ice and sitting at home. I love you when you are loud and when you are boring. I love you even when you walk away. I don’t know if I can ever stop loving you.”

Now it was Ilya’s turn for tears to gloss his eyes, but he refused to let them fall. He took a deep breath, blinking rapidly in hopes to stop the tears.

“I love you and I am so scared. I know we said we will not do this and we will just be friends, but I can not sit here and look at you and lie to you. I cannot pretend I only ever want to be your friend.” Ilya released one of Shane's hands, and moved his own towards Shane’s face, wiping away a tear that had fallen.

“I know our lives are about to change. I do not know where we will end up, or how we can make any of this work, but I do know you are scared. I’m scared too...fucking terrified, yes?” Ilya paused for another second, taking one last deep breath. “But I guess I am just hoping we can be scared together.”

Silence fell over them as their cart was reaching the top of the ferris wheel. Their cart shook slightly as the ferris wheel jolted to a stop. They started to let people out at the bottom. They didn’t have much more time.

“I am done now,” Ilya confirmed, hoping Shane would say something.

Shane looked over the edge, watching the sun set on the horizon as he pinched tears away. He still didn’t say anything, and Ilya’s chest grew tighter and tighter with every passing second.

“Shane?” Ilya tightened his grip on the hand he was still holding. Shane sniffled and turned to Ilya. That’s when Ilya saw just how much Shane had been crying. “Oh, Shane. I am so sorry.”

“Don’t” Shane smiled, shaking his head. “Do not apologize.” The ferris wheel kicked on again, moving Shane and Ilya’s cart closer to the very top before stopping. Shane spoke again.

“Ilya, everything about this scares the shit out of me,” he confessed, a small laugh leaving his lips. “The ‘what if’s’ and the unknown is terrifying, but... fuck.”

Shane took another second as the ferris wheel moved again, this time the pair were only one cart away from the top before stopping.

“Ilya, I am so in love with you,” Shane breathed out, his grip tightening. “I don’t know when I fell, but I fell hard. Being on this trip with you made me realize just how much I wanted to be with you, but I just got way too fucking scared.”

Ilya was sure he was crying now. Hearing Shane say those sacred words back has been something Ilya has only heard in his dreams. He wanted to pinch himself to make sure this truly was real life, that Shane was sitting here and confessing his love to Ilya.

“I freaked out on the beach because I caught myself thinking about being with you after this trip. I caught myself thinking about sharing our beds when we got home and being attached at the hip. I thought about taking our graduation photos together when we graduate next month and posting them on instagram for everyone to see. I thought about the look on Hayden's face when we tell him we’re together,” Shane took a deep breath, a small smile forming on his face as he thought through the scenarios.

“But then I started thinking about after graduation and hockey. I started thinking about how we’re both about to get drafted to rival teams, and how we’d never see each other. I thought about how the hockey world would treat us if they found out we’re dating. And I got scared, so scared that I pushed you away.”

Ilya nodded, because he understood. He was scared for all the same reasons. Shane spoke up again.

“I was a coward for running away. Because, fuck, Ilya, I’d be lying too if I said I didn’t want to try. I want to, I really want to because I am so in love with you, Ilya Rozanov. I’m so scared, and you have to be patient with me, but I am willing to try with you.”

The ferris wheel jolted once again, putting Shane and Ilya at the very top.

“I love you, Shane,” Ilya smiled through his tears, relief washing over him because *Shane wants to try.*

“I love you, Ilya,” Shane smiled, grabbing Ilya’s face and finally, *finally,* closing the distance between them.

Their first kiss was magical and unforgettable, but something about this kiss was *perfect.*

And maybe Shane was right, maybe confessing your love on a ferris wheel during sunset *was* the most romantic thing someone could do.

--

When they got off the ferris wheel, Shane and Ilya were quick to spot their three friends over at the fried oreo cart.

“Looks like Hayden won his battle,” Shane joked, grabbing Ilya’s hand as they made their way to them.

Ilya was proud of Shane. So fucking proud. Shane had faced a lot of fears today, and this newfound confidence was... well *sexy,* to say the least. Rose and Jackie immediately clocked

their hands being intertwined, an excited “I fucking knew it!” shriek coming from Jackie.

Rose smiled fondly, and Ilya knew she was happy to be relieved of any middle man drama between the two of them. Hayden, though, didn’t notice shit at first.

“There you two are! Come on, we *have* to try these!” Hayden gestured towards the cart. They were next in line and Ilya couldn’t help but laugh at the oblivious nature of his friend.

“Hayden, you’re going to give yourself a heart attack,” Ilya stated, eyebrow raised as he watched the man hand Hayden a pile of deep fried junk food covered in whipped cream and hot fudge.

“No no, I’ll be fine! I eat healthy all the-- What the *fuck?”* Hayden nearly dropped his plate when he *finally* saw Ilya and Shane’s hands intertwined.

Jackie and Rose had huge smiles plastered on their faces.

“What? Do I have something on my face/” Shane asked, nonchalantly as he used his free hand to pretend to wipe the corners of his mouth.

“What are you...are you two... what the fuck is happening?”

Ilya would have paid a million dollars to be able to replay the look on Hayden’s face over and over again. It was a priceless sight. It became even more priceless when Ilya lifted up Shane's hand and laid a sloppy kiss on the back of it.

“You two finally get your shit together?” Rose asked, her smirk reaching her eyes.

“What shit? What do you mean?” Hayden asked again, pleading for answers.

“I have to admit, Hayden,” Ilya started. He looked over at Shane to see Shane was already looking back at him. He was giving Ilya *that* look again, and Ilya knew now that it was love behind his eyes. “Confessing your love on a ferris wheel was definitely a good idea.”

“Wait, *love?*” Hayden gasped out. Rose and Jackie couldn’t hold their laughter any longer, and the two of them cracked. “Why are you laughing, is this a prank?”

“Not a prank,” Rose said sweetly,  placing a hand on Hayden's shoulders.

“I knew I felt something between you too,” Jackie smiled, moving towards the two boys holding hands. “I’m so happy for both of you.”

Ilya and Shane let go of each other's hands briefly to give Jackie a hug, followed by Rose.

“Nice Job,” Rose had whispered into Ilya’s ear. Ilya just smiled.

“This is beautiful and all,” Hayden interrupted, his food still untouched in his hand. “But I’d really love to know what is happening right now.”

“Come on,” Ilya grabbed Shane's hand, gesturing for the group to follow him to the nearby empty picnic table. “We will tell you everything.”

And they did. They laid it all out there and all of them listened with such fondness, enthusiastically asking them any question that came to mind. Rose made sure to tell Jackie and Hayden that she knew all along about their feelings for each other and how much it killed her to not just tell them.

Ilya was grateful that she let them work their shit out on their own.

“So that’s why you guys were acting weird yesterday?” Hayden asked, putting all the pieces of the puzzle together. “You guys had a fight?”

“I guess so, yes.” Ilya confirmed, his hand placed on Shane's thigh.

“But you worked it out?” Hayden questioned.

“Yes,” Shane replied.

‘And you two are in love? Like for real in love?” Jackie and Rose stopped asking questions about five minutes ago, but Hayden still needed time to process all of this. Ilya laughed but answered him anyway.

“Very much so, yes.”

Hayden looked between the two of them, eyes filled with fondness and admiration. “I cannot believe it, my two best friends are in love.” He clapped his hands together, a smile sweeping across his face. “I am so happy for the both of you, really, I am.”

Ilya didn’t realize how tense Shane was until that moment when he physically felt Shane relax under his touch. He knew Hayden would be okay with this, with them, but he realized Shane needed that extra confirmation.

The rest of the night was filled with games, fried food, and lots of laughter. Ilya could not have been happier to be sharing this moment with anybody else.

All of the ups and downs, heartache and heartbreaks lead to this. And Ilya could not be happier.

--

When they returned to their condo and said good night to their friends, Shane and Ilya made their way to their bedroom.

Ilya grabbed a blanket off the second bed and brought it out to the balcony where he and Shane sat in each other's arms, cuddled up as they watched the waves crash onto the beach below them.

Shane was playing with the bear he had won for Ilya, and Ilya smiled fondly at Shane.

“What will you name it?” Shane asked, moving the bear's arms playfully.

Ilya stopped and thought for a moment before answering. “Holly, I think.”

Shane laughed. “Holly?”

“Yes! The bear is so cute and reminds me of my beautiful boyfriend, Shane Hollander. He won me the bear, you know?”

Shane looked up at Ilya, and Ilya took a mental picture, hoping to never forget this moment.

“Holly it is.” Shane smiled.

Ilya just sat there, looking at Shane as Shane looked back at him. He would never, ever, get tired of this. He leaned down to give Shane a gentle, but soft and meaningful kiss.

“I love you,” Ilya whispered when they broke apart.

“I love you, too.” Shane replied.

Ilya knew the future held a lot of unknowns for the two of them, but they would face them together. The two of them together would be unstoppable.

And for the first time in a very long time, Ilya didn’t feel scared anymore.

Chapter End Notes

aghhh thank you all for coming on this journey with me!
i love these boys so much and this was so much fun to write!

all your kudos, comments, and bookmarks meant everything to me! thank you for all the lovely things you're saying!
until next time, friends!!!!

xxxx
- c

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