Smoke Signals

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Smoke Signals

by Floriscope

Summary

Shane thinks of universes in which the plane never lands.

Or, an alternative continuation of the post plane scene. In which Ilya is nowhere to be found, and Shane is mourning the love that was kept silent,

Notes

Heads up before reading:

- Anya is adopted a bit earlier than in the books
- Shane was in Montreal when Ilya was on the plane
- I don't know how long it actually takes to fly from florida to montreal so let's pretend it's around 3 hours for the sake of the the story!

That's it! Enjoy this very short and yet very heavy dose of angst!

(Titles inspired by Phoebe Bridgers- Smoke Signals)

See the end of the work for more notes

Shane is pacing through his apartment. Ilya hasn't answered his texts since the landing. The tick is singular; the calls never reach the ringing stage. He knows the plane landed. He knows he is alive and breathing. Had anything happened, they would have called him. The news wouldn't be covering anything else but the tragedy. So he knows Ilya is breathing. It's just Shane can't seem to find enough air to grasp.

He calls again. *This number cannot be reached.*

Tears are slowly pooling down his face yet again. Every attempt to calm himself down with an excuse of something in between *his phone is out of battery,* and *the cellular network must be weak,* gets crossed over with another failed phone call.

One more phone call. If he doesn't pick up, I'll start calling the hospitals.

He presses the dial again, it's calling but not reaching him. Declining the call, he searches for the list of all the possible hospitals in Florida. Vehemently typing, hands shaking, the screen is too blurry, and he is pretty sure he misspelled all of the words, but that's the last of his worries right now.

Shane has heard of the phrase *Loud Silence* before, and has felt it a cosmic number of times in his life. Not always hated, sometimes welcomed, as long as it was comfortable, as long as it was bonding. Most of the time it was between him and Ilya. When Shane would be reading and Ilya would occasionally join him too. A failed attempt would be met with him watching Shane read instead. In silence, in solitude. He rarely ever caught his eyes on him. It happened only once. Thinking back, he wished he could have caught him many times more. A tool, another reason, another excuse to memorize his face. A way of collecting his memories of him that would reach the point of overflowing. Though there was an inkling in him that told him that no amount of memories collected would ever be or feel enough.

Now, the silence is too loud. But not the kind that he knew all along. But the kind that is so loud that he can't hear Anya's whimpers anymore, who can sense that something is not right. He can't hear the cars outside honking at each other in impatience. Or the TV that is running the news channel. He put it on in hopes or dread of getting something out of Ilya's silence.

Silence.

He can hear his heart thumping. Blood flows at a speed familiar to him, pumping it faster than usual. Shane wished it had slowed down. A bit. Maybe more than a bit.

The list is too long, but that is beyond his concern right now. So is the concern for their clandestine pact. Shane starts to slowly dial the number of the first hospital when he hears the keys to the entrance door being unlocked.

He drops the phone mid-way, legs are moving before his brain registers where he is even headed, Anya is rushing right after him.

Ilya is standing at the doorway by the time Shane reaches the corridor. Suitcase next to him, the collar of his jacket has a thin layer of snow, and so do his curls. Shane stares at him. Unmoving. Hundreds of thoughts are running through his mind. What should he say? What should he do? Yell at him for almost dying? Or for scaring him into thinking that he was already dead? Ask him if he is okay? Ask why the fuck is he not getting any of his calls or messages?

A pair of warm arms wrap around his waist. A hand snakes up to his hair, fingers finding their way to the familiar path that reminisces home. He can feel the rapid pace of his heartbeat. His nose is tickling the crevice of his neck, Ilya breathing him in. And as he does so, Shane feels how Ilya's heart rate is slowly returning to normal.

Shane slowly wraps his arms in return. Burying his face at the juncture between his Adam's apple and collarbone, nuzzling in an attempt to stop the tears from coming. But Shane isn't really sure if they ever stopped. He feels a hand rubbing on his back. Up and down. In an attempt to soothe.

All Shane can think about is what if this weren't happening right now. What if there is a reality somewhere out there in which Shane is calling each hospital, saying, *"Is Ilya Rozanov in your hospital?",* and on the third attempt, he gets a *"Yes, he is".* There is a universe in which Shane asks, *"Is he okay?"* And there are universes in which the answer is a *"No"*, and a *"Yes"*. But in the universe that Shane thinks of now, he meets with the former and resigns himself to an utter and infinite state of agony. Secretly begging for a universe in which he gets taken away with him.

He distantly hears Ilya whispering something to him. Faint words of "I am here", "I'm okay, moya lyubov", "I'm so sorry". Over and over and over again. So much so that he slowly started repeating those words to himself in silence, too. "He is here", "He is okay", "He is sorry". Except he had nothing to be sorry for. It was Shane who had things to say sorry to.

"No, no, stop saying you are sorry. You have nothing to be sorry for." He manages to get out these words in the very raspy state of his voice. He isn't sure if he is even uttering these words in proper structure. Everything is so hazy, and the only thing he knows is that Ilya is alive and nothing else should be any of his mere concern at this very moment. He slowly moves his head away from Ilya and looks at him. Before Shane can even register what he is doing, his hands reach towards Ilya's cheeks, carefully wiping away the remnants of his tears, gently whispering, "Don't be sorry. You've done nothing wrong, love." With each residue wiped away, Ilya shakes his head in disapproval.

"No, Shane, stop saying that. I scared you, and I couldn't even tell you I'm okay because I-" Shane stops him mid-way, cradling his head and bringing him closer to his chest. At a moment like this, a hard realization sinks into Shane that he isn't the only one who just experienced a near-death scenario. Shane might have had a different kind of death, a death that he would have to live with, while Ilya would have to die with the world never knowing how big Shane's love for him is. He would have died as Shane's secret. Ilya would never know what it would feel like to be loved openly, with no fear, no dread, with every step taken.

Ilya sobs, and Shane listens. He hears Ilya's attempts to explain himself, but each word gets cut off with a gasp for air, to which Shane responds with a kiss to his hair. Again, and again, and again. He slowly navigates them to the living room as he starts to feel Ilya's heart coming back to normal once again.

"Tell me what you need," Shane says to him as soon as they settle down on the couch. Ilya curled up around him, arms clutching around Shane's torso, head resting on his chest. He shakes his head, barely, eyes unable to meet Shane's.

"Hey," he says softly, a bare whisper. For a second, he thinks Ilya might not have heard him, but he slowly moves his gaze towards him. He always listens.

"I am sorry you had to go through that," Shane utters in a whisper; he doesn't have it in himself to be loud right now. Hand gently cradling Ilya's cheek, thumb softly rubbing at the apples, tracing away the dried-up tears, leaning in and kissing them away as a form of silent apology yet again. He kisses his eyelids, wet and salty. His nose, cold. His other cheek, equally hugged by the aftermath of fear. The corner of his lips, so familiar. A wave of uneasiness hits him right there and then. Tears fighting their way to be let out as the bare thought of not being able to do this, to feel, to taste any part of him again. He swallows them down, the needles in his throat thrusting deeper than before, but it's fine. He will endure it. Will carve them deeper if needed.

He maps those kisses with an affirmation. Each holds a separate connotation. Left cheek holds an *"I am so sorry"*, Left eyelid has an *"I love you"*, Right eyelid *"I am sorry for keeping you a secret"*, Right cheek *"You deserve to be loved loudly"*, The right corner of his lips *"I am sorry if I ever made you feel like you were worth less than that."* The left corner is *"I'm sorry, I love you."*. Each point is a star, creating a cluster as he continues to map them out while more tears keep spilling, so much so that at one point, every assigned confession gets spoken out loud. In a brief whisper, Ilya hears. He always listens.

Shane feels a thumb under his eyes. Tenderly wiping away something wet. "Don't cry," he hears Ilya whisper back. "You know I lose a piece of myself every time you cry."

"And I almost lost all of you," Shane says it before it's too late to take it back.

"Shane…"

"Sorry, I'm just so-"

"It's okay if you are angry, sweetheart."

Shane is angry. The anger strikes from so many directions that he isn't sure which one he is supposed to address first. The anger over Ilya's disappearance after the landing? The anger of putting so much thought and value into his career that almost cost the love of his life dying as a dirty little secret disposed of in the ground like dust? The anger of being selfish enough to be angry at his own fear and pseudo grief when the person he loves the most in this world just had a near-death experience?

“How about we go to bed?” Ilya speaks again, visibly aware of Shane spiraling in his head. Inability to pick the right words. The struggle of consoling himself or the man in front of him. “We sleep it off, and then we talk tomorrow, hm?”

Shane simply nods. He doesn’t think he has enough words in him anymore.

They get into bed, facing each other. Ilya cups his cheek, another silent apology is muttered, and Shane doesn’t have the time to deny it until Ilya leans in and kisses him. Long and deep. It hurts. The lips are whispering everything that the mind feels, and Shane listens. He takes it in, and he responds. They know. Not today. Tomorrow will come, and they will talk. Out loud. Filtered. Calculated. But this is raw. This is the part that can never be filtered down to a response that consists of preconditioned structures, frames, and borders.

Tomorrow will come, and Ilya will be in his arms. He will kiss him good morning and remind him he loves him.

But there also could have been a tomorrow where Shane wakes up to an empty bed, puts on a suit, and heads to the cemetery. To tell him he loves him, and not get anything in return.

That tomorrow will hunt him until the very minute Ilya opens his eyes tomorrow, while Shane hasn’t closed his for even a second.

Ilya wakes up to a familiar touch across his scalp, tracing down the road that has been drawn so many times. There’s almost an indent. The strands of his hair almost know how to curl around the fingers.

It is comfort. It is home.

“Sleep well?” He hears a faint voice. Close and yet so distant. For a second, he doubts he even heard it. For a second, he doubts he is even real.

In an attempt to open his eyes, he sees him. He is here. It must be real then. Shane is here. He is alive. The plane landed. The game got postponed. He came home. He is looking at it right now. “Mhm.” That's all he manages to let out.

“Good.”

Silence strikes yet again, and for the first time, neither knows how to handle it. Handle something that has surrounded them for over 10 years. Something they knew well. But now the air feels heavier, and the silence feels like a storm. A storm so prominent and large, at the obvious vicinity of every passing person. It is there, and yet nobody knows what to do about it, except welcome it, anticipate it, and embrace it.

“I’m so glad that you are here.” Shane breaks the silence again.

“Yeah. Me too.”

“Do you want something to eat? Coffee? Tea? You must be hungry. Maybe a shower? A bath? I can start it for-”

“Shane, it’s okay. I don’t need anything.” Ilya stops Shane’s obvious rambling. This is what he does when things feel heavy. “Just you,” Ilya says as he reaches to brush across the constellations on his face. He traces them down one by one. Remembering. Taking it in. In case he isn’t here tomorrow, he can map it out in his closed eyes and picture it. Even when dust is all there’s left of him. He will remember. He knows it. In his heart.

“I’m sorry for those texts. They must have scared you.”

“No, Ilya-”

“Please, let me say what I want to say. And then you can interrupt me all you want. Okay?” He says it with such tenderness, Shane could cry.

Shane just nods.

Ilya lets out a heavy sigh before he speaks, “I sent them because I thought I might not make it. And I would have never forgiven myself for dying and never reminding you once again how much you meant to me. You are my entire world, Shane. And leaving you was already something I was ready to punish myself forever, even in the afterlife. So the least I could do is send those texts. And in case of survival… I guess reminding you in any case wouldn’t have hurt.”

Shane lets out a wet chuckle at that.

“They postponed the game, and as soon as that was confirmed, I booked another ticket to Montreal. I was lucky that the plane was boarding in an hour, so I was quick.”

“How coul-”

“Before you ask, how could I have boarded another plane right after almost dying in the other one. I wasn’t thinking about that, Shane. All I knew was that I had to get home. To you. See you. Make sure you are okay. And I guess I forgot to turn my phone on from autopilot because everything was just happening so fast. As soon as I got off the flight, I took a cab and came here. So, I’m sorry for scaring you like that, love. Never again, I promise.”

Shane stays quiet. Ilya gently wipes away the silent tears that kept falling as he spoke. Letting Shane take it all in.

“I started calling the hospitals in Florida.”

And if Ilya’s heart couldn’t have fallen deeper than where it already was, it might as well have just hit the ground, of whatever space it was occupied by. Shattering in pieces.
“Shane…”

“I just didn’t know what to do anymore. You weren’t picking up my calls. Not answering my texts. Nothing from your team. Nothing on the news. I was so confused. A part of me kept thinking that if something had happened, if you were at the hospital, I would have gotten a call. I just assumed that I would have been your emergency phone number. I don’t know why.”

Ilya doesn't say anything. Waiting for Shane to say more.

"Only to realize that, why would you give us away like that. But the worst part of all of this is, even in death, I kept catching myself worrying about this…I don't even want to call it a secret cause it feels so dirty. And you aren't dirty. You are bright and loud, and so full of love, Ilya and for a second, I pictured you dying as my dirty little secret. I just-" a sob escapes his mouth in vain, shamefully turning away from Ilya. He can't stand seeing the look on his face right now. Disappointed. Disgust. Hatred. He wouldn't blame him if he had just stood up and left. He would understand, he would let him.

"Hey, no, Shane, look at me, sweetheart, look at me." Ilya reaches to cup his neck so he can face him. "I am not mad," he whispers, but Shane is too consumed by his own shame to even register what Ilya is saying. Tears keep streaming down his face. No signs of stopping.

"I can't…how can you even look at me? I just-"

"Shh, it's okay, let it out, let it out, baby. It's okay," Ilya cradles his head, bringing him to his chest. Chanting his last words like a mantra.

"I don't want to love you in silence anymore. I can't. It's not fair to you." Shane manages to utter in between catching his breath.

"I don't care about that, Shane. You know that. All I care is for your love. You, knowing I love you and you love me. I don't care about the rest of the world." Ilya lies through Shane's tears. He doesn't have it in himself to tell him the truth. The truth that Shane is worth loving loudly, too. The truth is that he wants to have him in his games when he doesn't play, or go to his games when he isn't playing, kiss him square on the mouth when they win through the tribunes. Run to him first and not the trophy. He wants to post pictures of Shane cuddled with Anya on the couch. He wants to go on dates. Run groceries together, and hold hands on their way back home. He wants it all. But now isn't the right time to let Shane's doubts become true.

"No, Ilya, you don't get it. I do. I care. I can't keep living in this constant state of fear. The fear of being caught, of never seeing you again. The regret of never loving you in comfort. I don't think I would have forgiven myself if you had died yesterday, Ilya. I wouldn't."

"Shane…"

"I don't expect us to go and make a press conference and tell everyone that I'm madly in love with you. Because this isn't us. But I also don't want to avoid your eyes when we are in the same room. I don't want to refrain from putting my hand on your waist at a public event. When I can see people blatantly trying to hit on you as I watch you from afar. I can't do it anymore."

"Okay."

"What?"

"Okay. Let's do it."

“Are you serious right now?”

“Very serious, my love.”

Shane finally looks at him. *Looks* at him. And he sees the Ilya he saw many years ago. When they were at the cottage. When they said those three words to each other for the first time. He sees the same boy Ilya was back then. And all Shane can do is lean in and kiss him on the mouth. Ferociously. Lovingly. With no fear. No doubt. No shame.

“I love you.”

“I know, my love.”

“I am sorry for all the times I ever made you feel otherwise.”

“You never did.”

“I did, I know it. You know it. Please, just let me say it.”

“Okay,” Ilya says it to avoid further argument, and not as a form of agreement. He never felt not loved by him. Never. Shane was anything but that. Ilya wished he knew that too.

“I’m so glad you are alive.” He whispers between his lips.

“I’m so glad that I have you. Forever. In my heart. No matter where I go.”

“Ilya…”

“I meant everything I said in those messages, Shane. You are the best part of me. Of this life. I can’t picture it otherwise. My heart is comprised of you and me. Of us.

“Wow, comprised.” He whispers, a small smile forming on his face.

“I’ve been reading. A way to shut my brain off.”

“Never shut it. I love it.”

Ilya leans in and kisses him again.

“And for your information, you are my emergency contact. Have been since the day of your accident.”

End Notes

Um, yeah! This was very self-indulgent. But let me know what you think!

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