

The same number of stars everywhere

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The same number of stars everywhere

by [GlitterCity](#)

Summary

“Ilya?” Shane said in that same dreamy, loopy voice as that morning. Ilya exhaled in a rush.

“Shane,” he said, and wanted to sag against the glass with relief. “What happened? Is something wrong?”

“Not! Any moooooooooore.”

Ilya swallowed. Shane hadn’t gotten any quieter in the past seven hours.

“Why are you calling me? You need to be resting,” he said, and it sounded softer than he’d meant it to.

“I forgot to tell you something. *Important.*”

“You should not be telling me anything, you should be—”

“My cottage has *really* good water pressure,” Shane announced.

Ilya stared out the window while a small plane taxied past.

“*What?*”

Shane's cottage has a lot of amenities, and he needs to tell Ilya about all of them.

Notes

There's now a [podfic](#) available! [Jennisaisquoi](#) recorded this as part of the [Heated Rivalry ICE Out fundraiser](#), which is raising money for immigrant rights in the US; the event is over for now but you can still [donate to the nonprofits it's supporting!](#)

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

March, 2017 - Montreal

Shane's hand was warm and dry, and his fingers curled around Ilya's like it was old habit. As if they weren't in a hospital room where someone could walk in at any second.

"You know," he said, squinting against the sunlight from the window and talking too loud. "I had a whole plan to ask you something."

Shane was flying high and smiling like nothing hurt. Ilya couldn't bear it.

"Maybe it's better if you just rest now."

"I was gonna ask you—" Shane said, and Jesus, they could probably hear him in Ottawa.

"—*Hollander*—"

"Willlllll you cometomycottagehissummer? **DON'T** go to Russia. Come to my *house*, we'll have so much *fun*, issooo private. No one will know."

"Hollander. You know I can't do that." He couldn't even think about it.

Shane went on like he hadn't heard, eyes lit topaz in the sun. "We could have a week, or even two? We'd be *completely* alone. *T o g e t h e r.*"

"Maybe. Maybe." *Stop*, he meant, and then the doorknob turned. Ilya dropped Shane's hand like it burned.

"Oh, *no*," Shane muttered as the nurse came in, looking at them suspiciously. Ilya wanted to bolt and not stop running until he was out of the hospital. He wanted to stay and stroke Shane's hair until he fell back asleep.

"Uh oh!" she said, and gave him a funny look. "You're not gonna smother him with a pillow, are you, Mr. Rozanov?"

When Ilya's plane landed in Vancouver, he had sixteen missed calls from Jane and thought, for a moment, that maybe he was hallucinating. Sleep deprivation did that, right?

He wasn't even off the plane yet when call number seventeen started buzzing in his hand. Ilya felt frayed at both ends. He felt like his brain had been scraped out with a spoon, like he'd been on planes for a solid month, like he wanted to sleep for the next year. He was surrounded by teammates. He silenced the call, shoved the phone in his pocket, and tried not to worry.

When call number eighteen came though, something occurred to Ilya: Shane probably didn't have his phone. He hadn't earlier, and you weren't supposed to look at screens if you had a concussion. Right?

Fuck. Who the fuck was calling him, then? Who did they think Lily was? Did someone know? Did everyone know?

Ilya knew one thing: there was no way he could answer it, because if whoever was calling didn't know already, they would the second they heard his voice. He let another call go by. He should turn his phone off. He didn't.

Or: what if something had happened? What if someone *knew*—for fuck's sake, they'd probably heard Shane practically scream COME TO MY COTTAGE SO WE CAN HAVE LOTS OF SEX—and they were calling him with bad news?

He swore in Russian when the phone rang again. Marlow gave him a look that was some surprise but mostly pity, said, "Go ahead, we'll wait," and nodded at an empty nook in Vancouver's private terminal with two chairs and a huge window looking out on a runway. He looked like shit. Ilya tried not to hate him.

"Thank you," he said instead, and headed off to stand in front of the window and stare down at the name on his phone, afraid of what was on the other end.

Ilya hit the *answer* button, held the phone to his ear, and said nothing. It was the best solution he could think of.

On the other end, there was a long pause, and then: "Ilya?" in that same dreamy, loopy voice he'd heard that morning. Ilya exhaled in a rush.

"Shane," he said, and wanted to sag against the glass with relief. "What happened? Is something wrong?"

"Not! Any mooo^{oooo}ore."

Ilya swallowed. Shane hadn't gotten any quieter in the past seven hours.

"Why are you calling me? You need to be resting," he said, and it sounded softer than he'd meant it to.

"I forgot to tell you something. *Important.*"

"You should not be telling me anything, you should be—"

"My cottage has *really* good water pressure," Shane announced.

Ilya stared out the window while a small plane taxied past.

"*What?*"

"I know, right? You'd think it would have *bad* water pressure, since it's so sel—sec—selec—" Shane paused for so long that Ilya was about to say something. "—since it's in the middle of *nowhere*, but it doesn't. It's got showers like a... fire hose."

He said *fire hose* like it was innuendo, but Ilya had no fucking idea what that meant. Was *fire hose* some sexy thing in English that he'd never heard? Hose, *maybe*, but—a shower like a fire hose?

“A fire hose for a shower does not sound very nice,” he finally said.

“No, nooooo, you're gonna be a convert. Imma convert you. It feels soooooo goood, and it gets your hair *so clean*. Like. The cleanest your hair has ev-errr been.”

Ilya could practically see him, eyes closed, head back against the pillow, the ugly bruises under his freckles. He wanted to laugh and he wanted to cry and he wanted to get right back on a fucking plane.

“Shane,” he started, voice low. “I am still in the airport, I need to—”

“And. It's really nice when you do dishes? Like. If you accidentally burn something onto a pan the sprayer thing can really—*ccccchhhht*—help get it *right* off. It's like a... a presh-er wash-er. Mmmm. Pressure washer.”

“Shane.”

“Do they *make* those? For *kitchens*? You think?”

“Shane, did you call me from your hospital bed to tell me how you do dishes?” He was thinking about it now, though, staring out at the airport and thinking about Shane, in front of a sink, scrubbing out pots and pans. Hair tousled. Barefoot, probably, cozy and domestic and —

“No, the dishes were a bonus. You're *welcome*.” He paused, and Ilya could hear him swallow. “I *mostly* wanted to tell you about how great the showers are. And, I got a *reeeeally* big hot water tank. Hot water for days. *Weeks*. It's sooo nice.”

The truth was, Ilya would have listened to Shane talk forever about all the things he couldn't have.

“Hollander—”

“—Noooo—”

He lowered his voice. “Shane. You need to get off the phone and *rest*, you have a concussion, you are not supposed to be looking at screens—”

“I'm not looking at the screen! The screen. Is touching my *face*. I can't even see it.”

“Will you please rest so you can get better? Please?”

Shane sighed a dramatic little sigh. “Oh-kayyy. But you heard about the water pressure, right?”

“Yes. There is a shower like a fire hose.” Ilya really needed to go.

“Okay. Good. Just—” Ilya heard a door open on Shane’s end of the line, and then Shane said, “*Ohfuck I gotta—*”

The line went dead. Ilya put his phone back in his pocket. He closed his eyes briefly, took a deep breath, and let it out.

Then he went to catch up with his teammates on the bus to the hotel, and forced himself not to think about Shane, standing in front of a sink, swearing at the dishes.

Ilya was brushing his teeth when his phone rang again. He didn’t have to look to know who it was.

“Be right back,” he called to Connors, and the door shut before he got an answer. He managed to wait until he was in the stairwell before he answered.

“You should be asleep.”

“*Yyyyyou* should be asleep.”

He was still on the pain meds. Ilya bit his lips together so he could keep a straight face.

“Anyway, I forgot to tell you something. It’s on a lake.”

Ilya pressed his back against a wall and slid down until he was sitting on the ugly, probably-gross carpet of the landing.

“Your cottage?”

“Yeah. It’s a *lake* cottage. Wa-ter-front. Prop-er-ty.”

“Congratulations, Hollander.”

“That’s all? You’re not even gonna make fun of me? No *meester real estate*?”

His Russian accent was appalling. Ilya couldn’t help but smile.

“I know there is a lake. You do yoga in front of it.”

Shane didn’t answer for so long Ilya thought the line had gone dead.

“Shane,” he started, still quiet. “It is past midnight, you need to be—”

“You watched my special!”

“Of course not.”

“Hmm.”

“Maybe. It was on, I did not turn it off.” It was technically true.

“I watched *yours*. You wear your seatbelt, right?”

Ilya’s dumb hockey player spotlight special had been mostly about his sports car collection. The vibe had been very different from Shane’s.

“Of course. I do not have a death wish.”

“Good. Maybe you can... *drive me around* in one sometime.”

That was definitely innuendo—well, an attempt, he was trying—and Ilya knew he should say *absolutely not* or *are you insane*, but then Shane might sound sad.

Ilya tilted his head against the wall and closed his eyes. “I don’t know. Maybe,” he lied.

“Yeee_{aahhhh}. So. It’s on a lake. There’s boats and *everything*. I’ve got *canoes*, I’ve got *kayaks*, the water’s so *nice*.”

“Kayaks?” Ilya asked, after a pause.

“MmmHMM.”

“What is a kayak?”

“It’s boat,” Shane said, like this was basic information.

“A boat. Like a yacht?”

Shane laughed, then made a pained noise.

“Don’t hurt yourself,” Ilya said.

“Kayaks are, like,” Shane started. “They’re not big. Regular size. Like people. They float? And they look like... bananas.”

It was the least helpful description he could have possibly given, and Ilya was pretty sure he knew less about kayaks than he had before. Boats shaped like bananas? Boston had boats shaped like swans in that one park. Maybe kayaks were similar.

“Do you pedal them?” he asked.

Shane laughed again, softer this time. “No, *boats*,” he said. “You don’t pedal boats. That’s *bicycles*.”

“There are boats you pedal! I think they are called pedal boats. Sometimes they look like birds.” Jesus, now *he* was doing a terrible job of describing boats.

Shane paused long enough for Ilya to regret everything he’d just said. “You mean paddle boats?”

“Yes! You have paddle boats on your lake?”

“No! I have kayaks, I *just* said that.” Ilya rolled his eyes at the empty stairwell. “Though you do, um... paddle. Kayaks. But they’re not *paddle boats*. That’s different.”

“So you have banana boats that you paddle, but they are not paddle boats.” Ilya didn’t know why he hadn’t hung up yet. Shane probably wouldn’t even remember their conversation.

“I also! Have jet skis.”

“You have jet skis but you told me about the banana boats first?” Jet skis *did* sound fun.

“I like the kayaks better!”

“Of course you do.”

“Yeah,” Shane said, and he sounded smug about it. “Cause I’m *boring*.”

“Yes. Now go to *sleep*.”

“Okay okay okay. Good luck in—uh, wherever you are. Winnipeg?”

“Vancouver. Winnipeg is next.” Ilya wished he weren’t in either.

“Right, I forgot,” Shane said, and Ilya could hear him swallow. “G’night Ilya. And don’t. Let. The bed bugs *bite*. They are bad.”

Ilya couldn’t keep the grin off his face. “Good night, Shane,” he said, then stared at the opposite wall and wondered if he was going to survive Shane Hollander.

Ilya Googled *kayaks* as soon as he was off the phone. He recognized them immediately, just hadn’t known the English word for them.

They looked absolutely nothing like bananas.

By some miracle, there were no missed calls when Ilya woke up the next morning. Maybe they’d taken him off the meds. Maybe Shane had seen reason. Ilya ignored the sliver of disappointment trying to work its way through his chest.

It lasted until halfway through team breakfast. Ilya didn’t even make an excuse this time, just stood and walked into the lobby.

“I know you are not supposed to be making phone calls,” he said by way of an answer. He turned down a hall and tried the doorknob to a conference room. Locked.

“It also! Has a fire pit,” Shane said. “So we could have a fire *outside*.”

The tiny hotel gym was unlocked and empty. Ilya stepped inside.

“Are you even supposed to have your phone right now?” He was pretty sure he knew the answer.

“NNNnnnnnope. I *STOLE* it.” He’d never heard Shane so pleased with himself. He had to stare at the towel rack for a moment.

“You stole it.”

“Yyyyyyep.”

“You are in the hospital, with a broken bone and a concussion, and you stole a phone.” Ilya couldn’t quite fit *phone thief* and *Shane Hollander* into the same thought.

“First,” Shane said. “Okay, *first*, it’s *my* phone. I don’t think I can even. You know. Technically, steal it. It’s *mine*.”

“Shane, I know you are not supposed to have it.”

“Well! My mom brought it in after you left becaaaaaause my aunt wanted to talk to me. And *then*. I said my head hurt and my vision got *blurry* all of a sudden, and while they were panicking I hid it. In. The. Sheets. ^{I was so sneaky.}”

Ilya was exhausted and stressed and worried and scared and probably ten other emotions he’d never even heard of, and he shouldn’t be talking to Shane Hollander on the phone in a hotel gym and he shouldn’t be picturing Shane Hollander panicking both his parents and probably several nurses just to get ahold of his phone, but some things were lost causes.

“What?” Shane asked when Ilya started laughing. He sounded genuinely bewildered.

“You are a *menace*.”

“Thank you.”

“That was not a compliment!”

“You’re *such* a bad liar,” Shane said, with a warmth that bled through the line all the way to Vancouver. Ilya would have winced if he’d had any defenses left.

“And you are high as a fucking kite,” he said instead.

“The fire pit’s really nice,” Shane said, like this had been the topic of conversation all along. “It’s all. You know. Warm. And cozy? You can sit in these, like, chairs around it and do *fire stuff*. And once you’ve done enough fire stuff,” he paused, and Ilya heard him swallow.

Ilya had his eyes closed, head back against a wall. Shane sounded rough, tired, ragged around the edges. He needed to *sleep*. He needed to get off his pain meds, and he needed to stop calling Ilya with impossible fairy tales of water pressure and kayaks and fire pits.

“There’s also, like, a billion stars out there,” Shane went on, his voice suddenly hushed.

“Maybe like. A hundred billion. I mean. There’s the same number of stars everywhere, I

guess, but you can see them alllllllll at the cottage. *All* of ‘em. I bet it’s way more stars than Moscow’s got.”

“Yes,” Ilya said, softly, after a moment. “Moscow does not have many stars.”

The line went quiet for a moment. Something beeped in the background, and Shane cleared his throat.

“And the fire pit’s, uh, state of the art. It’s got... state of the art *rocks*. State of the art *firewood*.”

“It has state of the art *rocks*. Really.”

“*Rrrrrrrreally*. And there’s no one else around, not anywhere. It’s beautiful. And *quiet*. And *private*. You’d like it.” He inhaled. “I’d like it better with you there.”

“Shane,” Ilya said, and he meant it as a warning, but there were no teeth in it.

Five seconds. Ilya could have five seconds, if he was careful, five seconds to give up and imagine what it might be like. Shane in the morning, wandering around his kitchen, hair sticking up everywhere. Coming into a room to find Shane sprawled on a couch, watching something on his phone. Paddling around the lake in the stupid fucking kayaks. A fire, sparks shooting into the night sky, Shane’s head on his shoulder.

The five seconds had been a mistake.

“And,” Shane was saying, now, and he sounded like warm blankets and sunlight. “You’re always so sad when you go to Russia. Don’t be *sad*, come to the *cottage*, you deserve to be *happy*.”

He couldn’t. It was simple, really: if Ilya went with Shane, he knew he’d never be able to come back. “I will think about it, okay?” he lied.

“*Really?*” Shane sounded like he’d just gotten a puppy.

“Yes, really,” Ilya said. As if he could do anything *but* think about it. “But I need you to stop calling me.”

“I know. But everything hurts and it hurts less when—oh. Uh. THANKS FOR CALLING, GRANDMA. IT WAS SO NICE TO TALK TO YOU.”

A horrible noise came over the line that, after a moment, Ilya realized was a kissing sound.

“Bye!”

Ilya played a shitty game in Vancouver and a less shitty game in Winnipeg before he heard from Shane again, phone buzzing once with a text while they waited in an airport.

Sorry for all the phone calls. I was a little out of it.

I noticed. You told me kayaks looked like bananas.

The ones at the cottage are yellow.

Ah. How are you feeling? I heard they let you out of the hospital.

Yeah, yesterday. I'm tired. A little better. Off the pain meds.

Good. You were very funny, though.

Did I say anything too weird? My memory is a little fuzzy.

No. We had a very normal talk about water pressure and kayaks.

Shit.

July, 2017 - Quebec

There were even more stars than Ilya had imagined.

End Notes

After-the-fact update: when I wrote and posted this, I didn't think to look up the Russian word for "kayak." I just assumed that English and Russian don't have that much in common*, and "kayak" is kind of a niche word, so it would be fair for Ilya not to recognize it.

I have since learned that the Russian word for "kayak" is: kayak. (But in Cyrillic.)

Thanks to Teoranna for informing me! I've learned something new.

And if, like me, you're wondering why Russian and English share the same word for a very specific kind of boat, it's because both languages (as well as lots of others) borrowed it from Inuktitut, one of the languages spoken by the Inuit.

*This may or may not be accurate. I don't know Russian at all. Sometimes I wonder if I know English.

Works inspired by this one

[The same number of stars everywhere \[Podfic\]](#) by [jennisaisquoi](#)

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