

on every planet

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by [luminvies](#)

Summary

“Ilya,” Shane says, the words stumbling out of him like a person limping toward the light, “I’m afraid that I’m in love with you.”

Ilya feels a foreign cold wash over him, more frigid than anything he has experienced in his home country, shuttering around his heart, which wobbles on a fragmented tempo. “No,” he says, shaking his head, even though he wants to believe it. “No, you aren’t. You can’t be.”

“I’m sorry,” says Shane, and it makes Ilya wish that he were dead.

“Please say anything but that,” Ilya says thickly.

Shane drunkenly confesses to Ilya. It's only on the second time around that he's able to accept it.

Notes

if you say the name "shane hollander" three times in the mirror i will appear behind you in the glass

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

There are very few circumstances that would result in a plethora of professional hockey players to gather in one space for a suit-and-tie event in a sleek and expensive rental space, abound with alcohol and pretentious small bites such as caviar tartlets and lobster finger sandwiches, but here Ilya is with the rest of his team, two champagnes deep and blisteringly aware of Shane Hollander sitting in the corner near the bar, where he has been for the past hour or so.

It is not that Ilya hates these kinds of gatherings—he rather likes them, actually. He is fond of the wet, dark nights spent drinking himself into an even better mood, making small talk with the women that his teammates bring as plus ones. They are all very beautiful. Plus, he knows he looks good in a suit, especially the one he had tailored from Italy in the off-season that he had been a little eager to show off. It has crisp shoulders and a neat collar, and it tidies him up without doing too much to dampen the roguish reputation he's taken pains to maintain.

Being part of a team like this is one of the reasons why he loves the sport so much. He normally likes being buddy-buddy with his teammates, bumping fists, sometimes even brawling with players on other teams. Everybody knows everybody, after all. It's not normal for him to feel as though he's crawling out of his skin—the last time had been when Shane won rookie of the year, and even then, he hadn't particularly wanted to be completely alone.

This time, like all others, is Shane's fault.

Ilya hasn't seen the other since he invited him to his penthouse and Shane walked out on him, obviously scared. Barely over a month has slipped through the nebulous web of time, and already Shane is catching allegations and rumors of dating actor Rose Landry. Ilya drinks deeply from the glass in his hand, wishing it were the quality vodka he can get in Russia instead of the cheap shit they keep behind the bar for shots and mixed drinks.

Cheap. That's about all he feels right now. His only consolation is that Shane had not brought his supposed girlfriend here with him tonight, but as far as Ilya can tell from the short glances he snatches in the corner, he doesn't seem to be making good company for anybody, let alone a woman. He nearly scoffs into his cold glass at the idea of that, of Shane with a woman and enjoying it, not when Ilya has seen the man lose his mind over his cock.

Ilya probably isn't great company right now, either. His time in Russia—and by extension, the time he's spent with his family—have taught him how to take his alcohol stunningly sober until he hits his very high limit, and he'll approach nowhere near that tonight, nor would it be a good look. He doesn't even know if he can achieve a happy enough high to fool his teammates.

While outfitting the tuxedo he had gotten from Italy, shrugging it on in the mirror in his very nice hotel room, combing a hand through his hair, he had known he would see Shane here tonight. It would have taken the grace of god and such a thin margin of luck that he would rather put his money into the lottery to not see the other. But Ilya didn't think Shane would make himself so conspicuous by ostracizing himself. Everybody knows the first rule of social appearances is pretending to listen to somebody talk for the entire night so you don't *appear* alone. Or remove yourself from the premises entirely, as Ilya is prone to doing.

There's no roof to escape to at this venue, which leaves Ilya grimacing with his glass in his hand, surrounded by all of his teammates with women clinging to their arms. If things were any different, maybe he would have seated himself beside Shane by now, even despite his obvious solitude, if only to pretend they could be more than anything but rivals in front of others. Maybe some heads would turn, some people would talk. Ilya would enjoy that, even if Shane wouldn't.

It's no matter. It doesn't matter that Ilya can't keep up the pretense in front of his teammates here tonight, or that the person he actually cares to talk to the most hasn't spoken to him in over a month because he apparently likes women now. It doesn't matter that the vodka in his glass is shit and can't hold water to what he drinks in Russia and that vodka is the only good thing to come out of Russia to begin with, including himself. It doesn't matter that it's too goddamn warm in this room to wear a suit and shirt, but he paid too exorbitant an amount for this jacket to not wear it, and besides, there's nobody else he'd be interested in undoing the buttons of his shirt for in this room aside from the obvious.

Everything is all so bleedingly obvious that Ilya almost can't believe nobody else can see it.

"Excuse me," Ilya says, flashing a smile. He's already in a circle, engrossed in conversation, so nobody hears him but the guy to his left. "Gotta piss."

He bows out quickly, dropping his glass on a nearby table and striding through the heavy crowd. The air is dense with a mixture of scented hair gel and strong cologne. Hockey players clean up nice when they have to. Photographers are milling around the space so they can eventually put pictures up for the charity event they're all gathered for, so Ilya just has to hope he doesn't get caught weaving through the crowd. He wonders if any of them got a shot of Shane Hollander looking sad and alone in the corner.

The first hallway is thick with people making chatter and lining up for the bathroom, so he steps through the throng in search of a less crowded room, making his way down the end of the velvet-carpeted hallway until the lights begin to dim and an *Employees Only* sign appears on a door. Disregarding the signage, Ilya pushes through and finds another, unoccupied restroom, which he steps into with cool relief.

It's quiet here besides the buzz of electricity filtering through the overhead lights and the faint sound of water rushing through pipes from time to time. Ilya props himself up, back to one of the white porcelain sinks, and pretends that the sharp scent of ammonia doesn't bother him. At least it is not so warm here, and nobody has come to bother him.

His luck lasts maybe five minutes before the creaking of the door alerts him to somebody's presence, and he hauls himself up, ready to glare the intruder into leaving until he realizes that it's Shane.

Shane realizes that it's Ilya at the same moment, his eyes going comically wide and his movements stuttering, one hand frozen on the door. For a second, they just stare at each other, and then Shane begins to back away.

"I didn't realize anybody was in here," he says, already turned.

“There is more than one stall, Hollander,” Ilya says sharply. “What? I won’t look.”

It’s a challenge; they both know it. Slowly, Shane lets the door close behind him, the small thud expelling a vast silence that seeps between the two of them. Like always, Shane is the first to break it, his dress shoe squeaking against the tiled floor when he steps forward. Ilya shifts farther along the wall to allow Shane the space he evidently needs.

“I’m not here to use the toilet,” Shane mutters. “I just—didn’t want to be in there anymore.”

Ilya agrees, but he’s not going to say it. He wishes he had a cigarette, but he left his box on the desk in his hotel room. He can picture it now, the glossy cardboard exterior, the ease of having something to fiddle with between his teeth. The way Shane would screw his nose up at the smell.

“Too many men?” says Ilya. “Does that scare you?”

Shane flinches in the middle of shuffling a little farther into the room, wobbling a little, and that’s when it crosses Ilya’s mind that the other might not be entirely sober. He probably wouldn’t have stayed in this cramped space with Ilya if he were. He would have the sense to leave the way he did from his penthouse that day.

Ilya fucking wants a cigarette. “Does Rose get jealous?”

“I don’t,” Shane says, faltering. “What?” Ilya almost feels bad for him. “You’re such an asshole, Rozanov.”

“Says you and everyone else,” Ilya says, uncrossing one long leg from the other. He draws himself up. “Is that all you see when you look at me?”

“You can’t do this to me when I’m like this,” Shane says, turning so that his face is in the shadow. All Ilya can see is the gentle slope of his chin, pointing down to his shoes. He’s wearing a nice tuxedo, too. It fits him well, cuffs nicely around his wrists. It makes him look sleek and refined, the polite, composed guy that everybody sees on their television screens. That makes Ilya feel even crazier—he wants to get under that jacket, get under his skin, see how he truly wells crimson.

The words catch up to him a second later. “Hollander, are you drunk?” He barks out a laugh of astonished surprise, the sound harsh even to his ears and clattering around the walls. Lifting off from the sink, he takes a few steps closer, and the way that Shane messily shoves away and turns, a lumbering mess, answers his question. “I thought you didn’t drink.” It’s why he’d bought all of that ginger ale, and now it’s just been sitting in his fridge uselessly. Such a waste with nobody there to drink it. He’d thought he could get Shane to drink at least two, three bottles.

“I don’t like to,” Shane snaps, leaning his weight heavily against the grimy wall. He’ll get his suit all dirty if he continues to drag himself along like that. His back is turned to Ilya, broad and dark. “It’s not good for my hockey.”

“Everything is about your hockey.”

“Not everything,” Shane says sharply, shooting him a hurt look over his shoulder, which Ilya feels land right into the wobbling, nebulous emotions already lurching around inside of him, an unwelcome disturbance.

Ilya swallows. Shane’s right, it’s not fair to push him when he doesn’t have all of his senses with him, but it has been almost two months. They’ve gone longer without seeing each other. He has never kept count of the passage of time like this in the past. Ilya likes the sight of Shane all dolled up almost as much as he likes to see him on the ice and almost as much as how he looks spread out on the mattress.

Ilya says, “I will leave you alone, then,” and almost immediately, Shane says, “Wait.”

He stops. “Do you need something from me?”

Shane turns around again so that he’s fully facing Ilya, tugging at his sleeves so that they don’t ride up. He catches a glimpse of a silver watch on his arm—new—and hates himself for wondering whether Rose got it for him. It looks expensive.

“I’m not going to kick you out because you were here first,” Shane says. “You should stay. There’s nowhere else to go. I was just surprised.”

“Nice of you, Hollander.”

Shane takes him in, his eyes dark. “It’s not like we can’t occupy a room together.”

Yes, he is right. But historically, their occupation of a room together usually comes in the form of other looked-down-upon practices, and it would be so easy to continue that now, when they’re almost certainly alone because nobody else but them would enter a party and want to escape the crowd to stand in a cramped space together.

Five steps separate Ilya from Shane, an inconceivable depth that holds a mountain of possibility.

“Not decently, no,” Ilya says. He gives the other a long look, eyebrows raised. “We can try. Is it small talk you want, Hollander? Did you bring a plus one tonight?”

“Oh, come on,” Shane says.

Ilya raises his hands, faking surprise. “What? I heard she is wearing your jersey at games. Is sweet, no? I ask as a friend. Are the rumors true? Is she your girlfriend? If she is, she would have appreciated an invite. Women, they are always like that. They are fun at parties.”

Whatever is burning inside of him is reflected in Shane’s eyes. “She’s busy tonight.”

So Shane did ask her to come along. “What a shame. Now you are stuck with me.”

“No, no, it’s not like that,” Shane says, wincing and shaking his head, eyes closed. “She didn’t ask to come when I mentioned it. She has to make an appearance somewhere else, but I don’t remember where right now. I could have gone with her. But I came here. Because you’re here.”

Shane must be an honest drunk. He's usually honest, but at least he reserves what doesn't need to be said so it doesn't put them in any danger. A sour sensation begins to curdle in Ilya's stomach.

"Let me guess," Ilya says, tilting his head to the side, "you want me to fuck you. You want me to suck your dick, or to suck mine. Are you glad we are in this room together, alone? Is that why you did not approach me this entire night?"

"I didn't come here for that," Shane says irritably. "I thought maybe you would sit next to me. But you didn't look at me." If only that were true. "I sat there for so long that the bartender kept serving me drinks. I think he felt sorry for me. And you didn't come." He says the last part plaintively, his chin tucked into his chest.

"I have teammates who enjoy my company," Ilya says. "I am a very fun guy."

"You didn't exactly look like the life of the party," Shane shoots back.

"Is a charity event," says Ilya. "I needed to put up an appearance for all of the cameras. They like telling funny stories. Is why I am here. I do not need them to say anything else about my mood or why there is no woman with me."

"And why isn't there?" Shane asks.

Ilya lifts an eyebrow. "You are very interested in women these days."

Shane scoffs. "Even when I don't ask, you're telling me about them, talking about them, saying how they are fun to dance with and fuck and drink with. All of these things I don't understand. So no, I don't understand why you didn't come with some model dripping off your arm tonight."

"I do not know anybody in this city," Ilya says, considering. "Back home in Boston, there is Svetlana, but she would get distracted talking about hockey to all the guys. Not so much fun. Maybe if we were in New York."

Ilya must be imagining the hurt in Shane's eyes because it makes no sense. Shane is the one who is rumored to be dating Rose Landry, their pictures appearing all over the news and his television screen, even bouncing out of his teammates' mouths. It's all anybody seems to talk about these days, which is why he thinks about it so often.

All of those things I don't understand. Fuck. Shane must be feeling particularly experimental the past few years if he is going around dating famous actresses and getting fucked by men. What isn't there to understand?

"Hey, are you this much of a dick to everyone you know?" Shane asks. Ilya doesn't know if he's imagining the way his voice wobbles in between the words. "You'd be one shitty captain if you were. I mean, maybe you're nicer to your teammates, but I thought something was different the last time we met."

Ilya wants to stop him while he still can. He never wants to see Shane Hollander this drunk again. He should never see Shane Hollander again; they should pretend that nothing has ever happened between them and move on. Shane's dating allegations give them an easy way out. Why won't Shane just fucking take it?

Why won't Ilya make him?

"You kissed me on the forehead," Shane says. He steps farther back into the shadow, and the only thing that Ilya can make out clearly is the whites of his eyes, shining onto him even in the dark. "You—fuck—you made me a tuna melt, and you had ginger ale for me, and I don't even know how you know I like it. When you touched me, I thought—"

Shane wipes one hand over his face, letting his fingers linger on the bottom half. Ilya can't let him continue. Ilya can't—

"I thought it meant something more," Shane whispers, "and I couldn't for the life of me figure out why I was thinking that. Or if I wanted it. It wasn't sex. It wasn't sex, Ilya. And it scared me because I think there's something wrong with me."

"Ilya," Shane says, the words stumbling out of him like a person limping toward the light, "I'm afraid that I'm in love with you."

Ilya feels a foreign cold wash over him, more frigid than anything he has experienced in his home country, shuttering around his heart, which wobbles on a fragmented tempo. "No," he says, shaking his head, even though he wants to believe it. "No, you aren't. You can't be."

"That's what I told myself," Shane says miserably, and he turns roughly, bringing his forearms up to hold his weight against the bathroom stall, head hanging between his biceps. His jacket drags a ragged shadow across his body. "I mean, you're you, and I'm me, and we're both men, and I like Rose, she's good company, but—"

"Hollander, stop," Ilya says, horrified. "Stop."

Shane turns toward him, and that's when he can see that the other is crying, moisture gathering in the bottom of his eyes. His eyes, so open, wider than a palm spread for forgiveness, glinting with tears.

"I'm sorry," says Shane, and it makes Ilya wish that he were dead. It's not an unfamiliar feeling to him—he's thought it in the past, and knows he will continue to do so, but it's the first time that he's felt it because of what he's done to another person. Often, he is caught up in removing himself from the pain of the world. Never before has he so fervently hated himself for what he does to others, what he is doing to Shane.

Shane's mouth parts as if to add more, but it only hangs there, slightly widened, the parting just enough to fit Ilya's thumb there, where he knows Shane will lean into his embrace as if touching can save either of them.

"Please say anything but that," Ilya says thickly. No amount of backtracking will undo the massive shift that Shane has put forth, as if the tectonic plates are resizing beneath their feet.

Who is he kidding? It's not just Shane's fault. It's both of theirs for playing along with the game as if the rules were fair to begin with.

Ilya presses his fingers to his eyes, pushing hard enough that he crushes white spots to filter through his vision, and still, he cannot erase the look on Shane's face when he cries.

"It was useless to tell you," Shane is saying. It sounds like he's fumbling his way toward something, like a man in a dark room hungry for the light, and he can't tell if it's toward the door or toward Ilya. "It won't change anything, and you don't feel the same."

No, Ilya thinks, but he lets Shane move without correction. It becomes clear that Shane is edging toward the door, away from him.

"I need another drink," Shane says, and then the door creaks open, a rush of sound flooding the space with it, and soon he is gone, leaving only the cold air that hurries in to fill his presence, wisping into nothing between Ilya's shivering fingers.

Ilya stays in that room for another twenty minutes before unpeeling himself to leave, soldiering through the crowd in the hallway and through the club to escape through a back door. In the corner, he can see that Shane has taken up his post once again, three glasses around him and more than enough to forget.

Ilya can't forget.

Ilya's right. Shane doesn't remember.

He doesn't know any of the details of the morning after, only that they must be horrifying enough not to be repeated, but he does know that Shane wouldn't act the way he does if he remembered confessing to Ilya.

He sees Shane at the club with Rose Landry. Eventually, the two of them must break things off, because they stop appearing in the press. He and Shane play together for the All-Stars game, and Shane tells him he's gay. Shane has sex with Ilya in the manner of somebody who does not yet know he is in love with his partner, looking up at him with a face so clouded in desire that Ilya can see him right down to the filament, and then Ilya's father dies.

Ilya knows. Ilya can't forget. It's that haunting confession still echoing around the bathroom of the private event that he has in mind when he tells Shane he loves him in Russian, knowing he can't say it in a way that matters. In a way, even though it has slowly morphed into Ilya's entire life, Shane's confession meant nothing as well. It meant nothing because not a single atom in the microcosm of their hidden life could shift with its epiphany.

Now, they're both in New York to watch the Stanley Cup play-offs. Shane has been texting him throughout the game, wherever he is. Ilya can imagine him looking seriously down at his phone, trying to figure out what to type in response to him while the hockey plays out

beneath their faces, somewhere in the stadium. Shane had flown down to watch the final and also to take Ilya up on his offer to spend the night in his hotel room, the thought of which almost blooms into a smile that he quickly wipes off his face. He pockets his phone, turning back to the game.

New York has done surprisingly well this season, with Scott Hunter returning to the helm with a vengeance. Ilya doesn't want to be Los Angeles in this game with how clearly he can see the rest of it playing out. It has been a hard-fought season, no matter what he thinks of Hunter.

Perhaps Hunter's comeback is a surprise, but the victory isn't. The rink explodes into a cacophony of sound when the buzzer goes off, and the players collapse on the ice. Ilya's phone buzzes in his pocket. *Not shocked*, says Shane.

Hunter is a boring man, Ilya texts back. *Something you two share in common.*

Haha.

They bring the cup out, and something within Ilya boils in rage, as it always will when he sees victory in somebody else's hands, but he's up here in the stands, and it doesn't matter, not really. There is still next year, and the year after that. He will die before he calls it quits. He watches Hunter minnow around the sheer white surface of the rink, holding the trophy up above his head, and rolls his eyes. Svetlana, who had made the trip with him to watch the game, slaps him lightly on the shoulder.

"What?" he protests. "Is not mine. I do not have to pretend to be happy."

"You hockey players are all the same," she says, whatever that means. Ilya turns back to the ice, arms untensing.

Something strange is occurring on the ice. Hunter seems to be gesturing to somebody in the crowd while the rest of his teammates gather around the cup, strangely isolated from them. Wherever he's looking, it's not to someone that Ilya can spot from his vantage point, and neither can anybody else around him who is craning their necks in the direction.

A man emerges from the barrier. Scott helps him over, then steadies him on the ice, holding onto him by the arms and staring down at him. Ilya furrows his eyebrows as he squints at the two. They look almost as if they're—

Scott Hunter kisses a man after winning a Stanley Cup in front of the entire world. The world, which, just beneath Ilya, has imploded into shards fracturing the reality he has always shouldered. His life's worst inheritance, the heaviest possible weight, heaved and shattered on the floor by none other than Scott Hunter. In its stead, a million new possibilities filter before his eyes.

His phone buzzes. *Holy shit. Are you seeing this?*

Ilya can't not see it. It's on the Jumbtron, on every screen around him. If he blinks, he can almost see himself there, but it's not Hunter and some random man, it's him and Shane.

Is that his boyfriend?

Ilya is typing before he even realizes it. *See me after the game.*

They've both been invited to a party thrown by Scott's team following the finals, which was either meant to be a pity fest or a celebration, depending on how the game turned out. As per, when Ilya arrives, the room is in full swing, alcohol frothing in every corner that he looks. It's packed with both strangers and people that Ilya has once played with, and it takes him a while to just get through the door. He keeps getting stopped to shake hands, smile at faces he will forget in five seconds, and get wrapped up in side conversations that he has to politely disentangle himself from, and he employs none of the etiquette that Shane might.

It's a long time before he even comes face-to-face with Hunter. The man from earlier is at his side, one arm wrapped around him—granted, if Ilya were in their position, he wouldn't want to let him out of his sight either, but it still fills him with a stab of almost unbelievable envy to see them looking so free before the media can catch up to them, if only for one night.

"Congratulations," Ilya tells him. His gaze drifts to Hunter's boyfriend. "For both things."

"Thanks," Hunter says with a broad grin. "It would have been nice to play against you this year, but I guess it wasn't meant to be."

Ilya feels his smile harden. Leave it to a hockey player to get a dig in. "I was going easy on you, Hunter. It has been a while since you last won, yes?"

They stand their gritting their teeth at each other for a moment before silently, mutually agreeing to move on. At his first scan of the place, he doesn't spot Shane, but eventually he's able to pinpoint him among the sea of black jackets, somewhere near the bar, but this time in a gaggle of men.

They all seem to be... taking shots. Ilya raises his eyebrows. It isn't the kind of thing Shane is usually caught doing, but he must have been caught up in the celebrations or equally knocked off guard by Hunter's very public coming-out as Ilya is.

Ilya can't take it. Shane's agreement to meet with him is burning in his pocket. He strides over to the group; most of them are Shane's teammates, and a couple others are hockey players that he recognizes from across the league. When he approaches, one he remembers to be Hayden Pike makes a face.

"Here's to another unexpected pairing today," Pike says, tugging on Shane's shoulder. "Hunter and his secret boyfriend first, and now here comes Ilya Rozanov."

"I don't require anybody to announce my entrance, but welcome," Ilya says. Pike glares at him. "Is very flattering."

Shane turns. His face flushes golden and a little pink in the bar lighting, the reflection of the bottles stacked against the wall glistening against his skin. “Ilya!” he says, much too delighted. He’s at least tipsy, but in a much different mood than the time before.

“Hollander,” Ilya says curtly, eyes darting around. Nobody had noticed Shane using his first name except for Pike, maybe, who shrugs it off to get his shot glass refilled. “Let’s speak, yes?”

“Yes,” Shane says, drawing out the *s* so that it trails long between his teeth. He stumbles out from his teammates crowding around him, a large smile on his face. They’re so close, and the bar so crowded, that if Ilya reached out now to put his hand on Shane’s waist, nobody would notice.

Ilya almost doesn’t even want to look at him, scared of the unguarded affection on his face. “Not here,” he says gently. “Too many people around.”

Shane cocks his head to the side. “My hotel is close by. I think. We can get a cab.”

Ilya, despite himself, looks around at the crowd. “And what if people take photos of Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov getting into the same car? You sober up and we talk when the party is done.”

Ilya doesn’t want to see the end of the party. On top of that, it’s not even his victory that he’s celebrating, so he has even less incentive to stick around, but he’ll do it if it means he can speak to Shane afterward. The room is already filled with so many people that he doesn’t know how much longer they can keep speaking before somebody else notices.

“I can’t wait any longer,” Shane tells him, and Ilya knows—he knows with striking clarity just what he means. “Is your hotel closer? We can go there. You leave first.”

Ilya hesitates. It is closer, only three blocks away from here, and Shane already has the address in their message thread. He leans closer to Shane’s ear. “1070,” he says, and then he draws abruptly away, turning and pushing through the crowd, knowing that if he looks at the other any longer, he won’t be able to stop himself.

The walk back to his hotel is not a long one, but it is an illuminating one. He walks, his hands in his pockets, down the bustle of the New York streets. He’s wearing the same suit he’d worn to the charity event some months ago—Shane had never gotten to see it in full, nor had he gotten to take it off him. It’s still a nice jacket, the silk glistening under the lamplight, dyeing the black into a rich blue at the right angle.

Even with the night sky so dark overhead, the street is flooded in warmth, people still out at this hour to hurry home, stumbling arm in arm or slouched on the side of the buildings. The cars that thrum with the heartbeat of the city sail past. Somewhere close by, a train rumbles into a station. Everybody coming and going and coming and going and somewhere, Ilya has the choked-up, distant feeling that he is soon to arrive. Where, he doesn’t know yet. With whom, though, he has one person in mind.

His room is cool and impersonal when he gets in. He keeps the lights dim, the curtains open slightly to look out into the expanse of the city lights and the jagged jaw of the skyline. In his minifridge sits an overpriced bottle of hard liquor that he extracts without ceremony, popping the top and taking a long swig. He's not going to get drunk tonight, but he needs to catch up a little to Shane.

Ilya's staring out into the city when he hears the knock at his door. Shane is standing there, smiling a little like an idiot and still flushed, though whether it's from the alcohol or exertion, he cannot tell. Years ago, Shane would berate Ilya if he so much as left him outside for a full minute. Now, they've both been somehow fooled into the luxury of stalling.

Ilya opens his door as wide as it will go, and Shane steps through. And then it's quiet. Their shoes are muffled against the shortly-sheared carpet, shuffling past a glass coffee table and the long mirror that makes up one wall. They stop just before the bed.

"You drunk still?" Ilya says.

Shane shakes his head slightly. "I was never that drunk. I'm maybe tipsy." He still has a small smile on his face. "Are we going to talk about it?"

"Hollander, I will come to your cottage and we will have two weeks together," Ilya says softly. He tilts his head to the side, wanting to see as much of Shane's expression as he can when it dapples under the moonlight. Perhaps if Shane had not told him he loved him last year, he wouldn't be agreeing to this now. If he hadn't confessed the same in Russian over the phone.

Shane startles, blinks. "What? I was talking about Scott Hunter, but—but that's great, really, it'll be so nice, just the two of us. I have a grill, and there's a lake, and there really is no one out there but my parents. It'll be so fun."

"It will be," Ilya says, knowing that he shouldn't have said yes at all. What happened to his willpower to cut things off between them? Maybe he lost it when he heard about Rose. Maybe somewhere during the All-Star weekend. Maybe he never possessed it at all, convincing himself of a facade. "July, you say?"

Shane gives a quick, sharp nod. "We'll sort out the details later. This is so sudden. Like Scott Hunter's whole thing. I mean, I didn't even know he swung that way, you know?"

"He is very attractive," Ilya allows. "It would be a shame if he didn't."

"You can't say that when you have me in your room, all alone," says Shane. He swallows, his throat pushing out. Something shifts. "Because you do. Have me."

"I have you," Ilya says, like it's the first time he's realized it. They've had each other for so many years that it has never struck him with this particular quality the entire time. In this world, in this glittering expanse of a world, where Canada and Russia, Ottawa and Moscow, are so far from each other, and yet their lives have converged to have each other in them. It is so easy to let go, but Ilya has done so much out of spite, he wants to hold on even tighter.

“What Scott did,” Shane says, breathing heavily, “changed things for me. And I’m not mistaken when I say that I think they changed things for you, too, right? I never imagined loving somebody, a man, in front of everybody, in the midst of my career. I didn’t even know it was possible to be allowed to love.”

The tail end of his words comes out halted. Ilya knows what it must have taken for Shane to come out with it, and this time, he’s not even as drunk as he was the first time to help him with it.

Ilya closes his eyes. Against his eyelids dances an entourage of his mom, his father, his brother, the strings that tied him back to Russia and the one shorn short at the stem. He’s here untethered and, miraculously, the only person he really has to hold onto is Shane. How it came to this, he doesn’t know. But he’s thankful.

“It is not as easy,” Ilya says, his gaze still shuttered. “Not that what Hunter did is easy. But it will not be any better.”

“‘It’ meaning what, Ilya?” Shane says. He’s bathed in the shadow when Ilya opens his eyes, but he steps a little bit out of its shroud. The moonlight sparks in his eyes, defining how they’ve gone a little glassy. It’s one of Ilya’s favorite things about him, those eyes. He can read everything through them.

“You know,” Ilya says, and Shane looks upset, so he adds, “Tell me like you did the first time.”

Now Shane just looks lost. “The first time?” he echoes. “Ilya, if you’re just playing with me, then cut the shit.”

“The first time you told me you loved me,” Ilya says gently.

Shane reels as if Ilya had punched him, actually taking a step back that Ilya recovers by moving in closer until he has him with his back to the window. His mouth opens and closes, lost for words. He swallows, and it’s a whole show. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Ilya puts his hands on Shane’s waist, thumbs resting atop his hip bones. Shane tilts his head back against the glass with nowhere to go, but his gaze doesn’t stray from Ilya. “In December,” he says. “The charity event. You were drunk, you found me in the restroom.” He speaks slowly so that Shane doesn’t miss a single word. “We hadn’t spoken since Montreal. You told me you loved me. When I left, you were drinking like you wanted to forget. And you did.”

Shane blinks, and he’s definitely crying because his eyelashes are wet. His gaze casts downward, but his next breath comes out stilted. Their heads are craned so closely together that Ilya can hear it. “What did you tell me that made me drink it all away?”

“I told you that you couldn’t be in love with me,” Ilya says, his voice tight and thick and squeezing his throat into a constricted mess. As difficult as it was to say in his mother tongue,

it's somehow worse now, and infinitely better to know that Shane understands. "You assumed I did not... feel the same, and I let you believe it. It was not true. I love you, Shane."

"Fuck," Shane whispers. "And why am I allowed to be in love with you now?"

Ilya looks askance, over the top of Shane's head, so that he's overlooking New York once again. Each of the buildings that look so tiny from his vantage point, as if he could crush them underneath his thumb, contains more lives than he could even comprehend, years unfolding like maps. And this is only one city. All of these lives in this world and only one love like theirs. He'd realized that they are very small, and the world is so big, and there are so many lives that are not theirs that if they were just a little selfish, a little brave, they would not be taking so much from this world at all. They would only be holding what is theirs, what they already have.

"It was not about allowance," Ilya says, bringing his gaze back to Shane and cradling his face in one hand. He strokes his thumb across his cheek, marvelling at how the body produces water and how this tear, too, is his. "We cannot stop it. Love finds us, even though the world is so large."

"I love you," Shane says, "and I'm not sorry." Ilya grins.

Shane runs one trembling hand down the top of Ilya's chest, trailing his way down the shirt and then tucking his arm around his back to bring him closer. With the other, he holds Ilya by the nape of his neck and pulls him into a kiss.

"I still don't have it figured out," Shane whispers against his lips.

"I don't either," Ilya says. He kisses him again, firmer this time, Shane's eyes and the city lights blinking behind his eyelids.

"We will figure it out, okay?" Shane pants, eyes flicking up and down across his face, fingers dipping into the soft hair tickling the back of Ilya's neck. Ilya's entire life is right here, so possible it hurts. "You'll stay until then, right, Ilya?"

"You cannot make me leave," Ilya promises into Shane's mouth. He tastes sweeter this time. Up above, the stars sparkle with an unknown intensity, watching over this one unwieldy, wondrous world.

End Notes

i told a friend about heated rivalry and now she says that every time she sees hr content she thinks of me. i think my job here is done. i feel like a fujoshi missionary. a fujoshionary, if you will

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