

for the hope of it all

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by [CountingRaindrops](#)

Summary

Wanting to get an escape from the ‘power couple’ taking the media by storm over the last couple of months Ilya decides to escape to a place where no one cares about Shane Hollander. Russia. Sure it wasn’t a place Ilya loved to be these days but he needed the break for a few days.

Shane Hollander finally took the first step towards his own betterment— okay, Rose slowly walked him into that step but it counted— and now he felt more ready to try and go for what he really wanted.

Only life had other plans for them both.

Notes

Hello! First time writer but big fan of Heated Rivalry and the Game Changer series! Had this idea for a fic and had it planned and written within like two days so here we go Timeline might be wonky I think but it takes place after Shane and Rose break up but before the All-Stars Games. Same with where characters are, I'm sure some of the people I mentioned weren't at certain events that take place but that is the joy of fan-fiction right?

also sorry for any grammar or spelling mistakes! and I hope you like the fic! :)

The amount of relief Shane Hollander got out of his break up with gorgeous movie star Rose Landry would probably seem downright crazy to the people in his life. It would seem crazy to anyone who didn't know exactly the kind of *person* Shane really wanted. But he was relieved. Beyond so, even. He was relieved that even with everything that came out— a far too apt choice of words— Shane and Rose were able to maintain a friendship with one another.

They had only just broken up the night before and in a desperate attempt to show that he really wanted to be 'friends' Shane had invited Rose out with his team after their game in Montreal.

They had back to back games against the New York Admirals and Shane was happy to report that they won the game that evening. The other team wasn't overly bitter about the loss, they seemed ready to rally and work harder for tomorrow's game actually, so when some of the Voyageurs invited some of them out to a local bar there were quite a few who were quick to join.

It was at a bar that they frequented often enough, it was in fact Hayden's favourite bar to go to, so they were considered to be somewhat regulars by the staff. The bar definitely leaned more into a sports bar, with various sized tv's set up around the average sized building, some with the same games playing twice but for the most part different games and sports on most screens. The lighting was warm and bright enough to be comfortable but not dim enough to make the place feel dingy. There were booths lined against one wall and tables scattered about while a beautiful looking oak bar was against another wall with customers lined up against it waiting for drinks.

"And then I told him to go and fuck himself!" J.J retold heartedly, sharing a story about an encounter he had with one of the more annoying players on Toronto's team. His words had guys from both teams exclaiming excitedly, everyone always eager to hear about the clashes players would have with one another on the ice.

They were having a good time and for the most part it was pretty much only hockey players in attendance tonight. Both teams had been in this industry long enough to not let a single loss get them down too much, though the Admirals certainly were having a lot of losses whenever they were away from home. From the Voyageurs were Shane, Hayden and J.J, as well as a fair amount of others that Shane wasn't as close with, and from the Admirals were Scott Hunter, Carter Vaughan, Eric Bennet and a couple others Shane couldn't name at the moment. There were a lot of wives and girlfriends there too, at least from Montreal's side, Shane was smiling as Jackie— Hayden's wife— waved her hands avidly as she spoke about something.

Jackie's mother was watching their kids that evening, her parents in town for a visit and urging her to have a night out with Hayden in the city, and Jackie jumped at the chance for a kid free evening. She and Rose were getting along great, the two of them speaking to each other most of the evening so far. It was something that had Hayden shooting Shane significant looks that practically screamed '*marry her*'.

They were looks that were worlds easier to ignore now that Shane knew he and Rose were on the same page. He had yet to bring up their break up to anyone, just because he knew most wouldn't understand or believe they broke up when they were hanging out again already. There was an ease to hanging out with Rose now, an ease— that at first had been pure fear— at someone knowing the truth about him. Shane was enjoying his time with Rose now more than ever now that he no longer felt the need to try to be something he knew deep down he wasn't.

Tomorrow would be both teams last game for the next few days, the MLH team games lulling in preparation for the All-Star games that would start this weekend. Given it was a Tuesday, Wednesday when they were done with the last game, most of the guys were eager for some time off. Those who weren't attending the All-Star Games would get even more time off, with no games scheduled until the following week. Shane knew Boston finished up the last of *their* games the night before and had already started their game free week.

Why exactly he knew that was obvious and Shane tried not to let his thoughts linger too long on Ilya Rozanov. But when it came to Ilya Shane was incapable of not thinking about him even when he tried.

He knew he messed up the last time they were together, could think of nothing about that since he ran away, but he was hoping Ilya would talk to him again. Well, the actual last time Shane saw him was only less than a week ago at that stupid club but that was a memory Shane refused to think more on, the image of Ilya curled around some unknown girl hurting in a way he knew wasn't fair considering he had been dating Rose publicly at that point.

Based on the game schedules Shane wouldn't see Ilya again until the All-Star Games and he wasn't sure if he was dreading the fact or relieved. Three days and he would see Ilya again, would be playing on the *same team* as him for the first time in their entire careers. *That* was a thought that had him feeling excited despite the nerves. He had always wondered how they would play together on the ice.

Shane, since breaking up with Rose just the night before, had been spending every second planning his next meet up with Ilya. Or, planning the conversation he wanted to have with him— *needed* to have with him. Shane needed to voice this thing that the two of them were trying to dance around. Needed to tell Ilya his recent realisation and cautious acceptance of who he really was. (with Rose's help.)

He forcibly pushed the thoughts away for the time being and focused on enjoying a night out with his friends. He was standing around a table with Hayden and Jackie on his right, Jackie seated in one of the tall chairs around it, and Rose was just in front of him in another chair. Shane couldn't help but feel like he was hiding behind her a bit but given that Hayden was half behind Jackie's chair maybe he didn't look out of place. J.J was in one of the other chairs, leaning on the table as he spoke, drink curled in one hand, and Drapeau was on his left but more focused on talking to an Admiral player who was standing beside him. Carter Vaughan had claimed the last seat at the table and he had an arm slung over Scott Hunter's shoulder as he shared his own stories in turn, the former always a social butterfly in ways Shane couldn't help but envy.

There was a bit of a louder murmur near the bar and when Shane glanced over he could see the line of people who had been standing around there were now clustered closer to the smaller t.v just behind the register. The sight had him frowning a bit and Hayden clearly spotted the same thing as him.

“Hey, Joe!” Hayden called out and the man behind the bar— Joe— glanced over at him. He was a middle aged man with a thick beard that matched his bushy eyebrows and almost always looked like he was scowling though Shane knew he was a very nice guy. “What’s going on?” Hayden asked him with a faint gesture at the t.v everyone was so interested in.

Joe made a faint gesture to it as he said. “Plane crash. News started talking about it around an hour ago.”

“Put it on another screen,” J.J was quick to tell him, gesturing to one of the bigger t.v’s since the only screen the broadcast was being played on was too small for them to see or hear.

He didn’t need any more prompting and Joe pressed a few buttons and soon the larger t.v in the bar switched to the broadcast and *everyone’s* attention was captured. Plane crashes were something everyone always focused on when it happened and as people who were constantly on planes to travel between games hockey players paid even closer attention to the subject.

“... sources say the plane began to experience some unknown malfunction,” the woman dressed in a smart red suit reported in a firm tone. So not a plane crash but some kind of malfunction? “Shortly following the distress call made by the captain, ground control lost contact with the flight and it has yet to be found. The only thing we know for certain is that the flight *was* going down when the final distress call came through.”

Shane shook his head slowly as he slid his drink onto the table, not looking away from the broadcast as the woman continued to speak. Around the bar everyone had abandoned their conversations in favour of watching the most recent news unfold. Joe said this was only first reported about an hour ago which meant no doubt this would be on the news for the next few weeks to come, depending on when the plane was found.

“Families are no doubt being informed now about what has happened, any and all people on the flights manifest being carefully looked over,” the woman went on to say as a generic picture of a plane sat in the upper right corner of the screen. “If authorities haven’t managed to contact them yet the families will soon know as recent leaks revealed the long list of passengers on the flight.”

Shane was wondering *where* this happened, the woman had been in the middle of speaking when Joe turned the channel but he knew she would soon enough repeat the same information as no more new information came forward. It’s how it always went for things like this, the news doling out the same things over and over while everyone continued to watch as they waited for something new to learn.

A paper is handed to her just off the screen, slid onto the table in front of her, and she glanced down at it while keeping up her steady stream of words. “The plane has yet to be found but authorities in nearby countries are searching.” She paused and a look of *surprise* came across

her face which was a rarity in itself. Normally broadcasters had a poker face like no other, always managing the same bland expression no matter what they reported.

“We just got a list of the passengers,” the woman reported as she looked back at the camera directly. “And according to the manifest one of the passengers was none other than Boston Captain *Ilya Rozanov*.”

“Holy shit,” J.J said suddenly and the sound of a drink hitting the floor accompanied the gasps let out by numerous people.

A picture of Ilya was now in the corner of the screen, his official MLH headshot with that smug smile of his on his face, and the woman continued speaking. “The plane was taking a direct flight from Boston to Moscow, Russia, Rozanov’s home country and city.

“A malfunction was said to occur and we have here the captain and flight crew's final call before contact was lost.” The picture of Ilya was swapped to another generic photo, this time one of an audio file, and soon a static recording was played. “This is Captain Cooper, flight number IL5673, we are experiencing a system malfunction. Reason unknown.” There was static and then the voice came out again, still firm but more louder as background noise could be made out. “Systems are reporting an engine failure, mayday-mayday, we are going down. I repeat mayday-mayday, we are going down. Systems— may— down—” the audio cut off to static after that.

As the recording stopped the reporter said. “The search has only just begun but the plane's flight tracker is not transmitting a location. Its last pinged location was near the coast of France and people can’t help but wonder if this will be yet another situation where a plane—and all onboard— vanish without a trace.”

By the time she was finished there was a loud, deafening ring in Shane’s ears. Everyone around him started murmuring to one another as the reporter began to repeat information and soon enough phones started pinging. No doubt other players and hockey avid people trying to get in touch with anyone who can confirm what was already confirmed.

Shane shakily stepped away from the table and pulled out his phone. He was quick to open his messages, spotting one from his mom that he ignored in favour of opening a thread he hadn’t typed in in months.

Jane: Tell me you’re okay.

With his heart in his throat he watched as the message went through but no ‘delivered’ notification followed. The small fact made his head spin and the ringing in his ears seemed to grow louder. He moved further away, mindlessly shrugging off the hand that gently touched his arm that he knew had to belong to Rose, and Shane stumbled towards the bathroom. No doubt the chaos of what just happened would keep people from sparing him a second glance but even if they did look at him Shane was too far gone to care.

Once he got into the bathroom Shane all but fell into a stall, slamming the door shut behind him as he slid to the floor. He felt like he was vibrating, his heart pounding in his chest while his limbs refused to cooperate. Shane managed to get his phone in front of his face as he

pressed the call button— the first time he’s ever called Ilya— and as he put the phone to his ear there wasn’t time for more than a ring before Ilya’s voice came through.

“Hi. This is Ilya. I will never listen to your voicemail.”

Shane almost could have *laughed* at the undeniably ironic voice message Ilya had set up for his phone. But he didn't, instead he felt his vision tunnel as his chest tore itself in two and a sob forced itself out. Shane tried desperately to breathe, to get *any* amount of air into his lungs, and he felt his head hit the edge of the stall door as the world around him continued to get smaller and smaller.

He wasn’t sure how he got home after the bar but he knew he managed it. Managed it without tipping anyone off to just how earth shattering that broadcast had been to him. Everyone had called it a night after that, no one able to keep a good night going in the wake of the news, and Shane had been faintly relieved to not have to come up with some excuse.

Since getting home he had been watching the news obsessively. Waiting for any kind of new information but coming up infuriatingly empty. He knew he should be asleep— would normally be asleep by now— since he had a game tomorrow but it was an evening game and they didn’t have an early practice. Normally Shane would go in anyways but he couldn't. He felt sick at the thought of even playing tomorrow.

The team group chat has been going constantly since the news broke. Everyone was talking about Ilya. Despite most people finding him to be an asshole and not liking him outright at times, no one wanted something like this to happen. Especially to someone as well known and as talented as Ilya. Everyone seemed suspended in a state of disbelief but a few of them — the New Yorkers at least— had gotten a hold of some Boston players who said none of them had heard from Rozanov since the end of their last game. Their coach and Ilya’s agent have both tried too but they did get word that Ilya was checked off as boarded on the flight manifest.

Shane had felt sick when he saw that message, like it was a confirmation that Ilya was gone. All he could think about were his last moments with Ilya. That stupid club and both of them with different people. Worse were the thoughts of that last day with Ilya. With Ilya being more open and earnest than Shane had ever seen him. Calling Shane *Shane*. And then Shane repaid that by running away scared.

He felt stupid now. He felt sick and *so* stupid. He felt like he just threw away all the extra time he could have had with Ilya. He felt like maybe if he didn't do what he did then maybe Ilya wouldn't have even gone to Russia. Shane couldn't help but wonder *why* he went since he knew Ilya usually only went back in the summer.

His parents messaged him, talking about what happened— Hayden messaged him personally along with Rose— but Shane couldn't answer any of them. He couldn’t answer because he couldn’t react the way he wanted to. As far as the world was concerned he and Ilya hated each other. So for anyone to see him in this constant state of tears, clinging to the hope that Ilya was still alive, would make no sense.

It was an equally devastating and infuriating thought.

The next evening the locker room was uncharacteristically quiet before the game. Everyone silently got dressed while a radio sat perched on one of the benches playing the latest broadcast on the plane crash. Malfunction. Vanishing.

“There is still no sign of the plane or any news as to *where* the flight might have wound up. It’s now over a day since communication with the crew was lost but the search is still on going,” a generic man’s voice spoke through the radio. “The lead investigator involved in finding the aircraft is giving a speech now.”

There was a rush of noise, some reporter that worked with the radio clearly in whatever space the speech was being given alongside countless others, and then another voice sounded. “At this point in time the passengers and crew are only considered to be missing. While we know the plane was going down there was nothing relayed to suggest that the aircraft was incapable of making a landing. Nor were the signs of a break in the structure's integrity.” The man’s voice was firm, he sounded like someone who did this often, gave speeches where he emitted calm even in the most high stakes of situations. “I won’t give false hope but I won’t crush anyone's hope either. There’s just as high of a chance that the captain was able to land the plane— although roughly— just as much as there is a chance that the plane made a crash landing. Regardless, we will not stop searching for the passengers and crew. France officials are working tirelessly alongside us as we work on locating the plane.”

The radio host's voice came through again as he said. “By now all family members of the passengers and crew have been informed but one has to wonder *what* they are—”

With a click the broadcast shut off and Shane, along with the others, looked up to where their coach was standing with his hands on his hips. He was nodding silently to himself before he looked over at each of them. “This is our last game, boys. Until after the All-Star Games. You remember that.” He waved a hand at the radio and said. “I need you to put this aside for the next couple of hours. I know that will be hard, I know Rozanov was one of us, a fellow hockey player, but we need to get through this game. Even if the worst has happened we all know there was nothing Rozanov loved more than a great game.”

Truer words had never been spoken but Shane still couldn't help the way his stomach twisted with anger and guilt. Irritation crawled across his skin as he resisted the urge to ask what any one of the people on this team knew about Ilya. He knew should have been giving that speech, rallying up the team for one last game before their short break, but he couldn't. Shane doesn't think he spoke more than three words since first seeing the broadcast.

He scrolled the internet endlessly, already seeing people making post after post about Ilya. The most gut-wrenching one was a post a young girl made about how she met Ilya at the airport the day of his flight. She spoke of how kind he had been and that even though he was busy he had stopped to take a picture with her. Attached to her post was the picture and it had gone viral since there were many who believed it would be the last photo ever taken of the infamous Ilya Rozanov.

He had stared at the picture obsessively since first finding it, his throat tight and his eyes wet. Ilya had looked like he always did, incredibly gorgeous and confident and everything he was

known to be. He had a smile on his face but Shane knew him well enough to know he was tired too, the circles under his eyes a bit darker than normal. It was just like him to take a picture even if he didn't feel like it.

Shane hoped, more than anything, that the pilot managed to land the plane safely. He hoped that the passengers— ALL of them— were okay and not hurt too badly. He hoped that the people searching would find them soon and that this nightmare would be put to a rest. He hoped he would get the chance to talk to Ilya again, to apologise and to make up for all the time he lost being an idiot.

Shane hoped for it all.

Ilya made the decision to avoid the internet.

The week leading up to the All-Star Games could be a free one if a team was lucky. If the schedules lined up nicely. They usually stopped games by that Thursday so that the players needed at the All-Star Games could be available and sometimes a team played their last game as early as the Sunday before.

Boston had their last game on a Monday— a game that they lost much to his annoyance—which meant until his flight to Tampa Bay on Thursday Ilya didn't need to do anything. At least that's what his agent and his coach had told him when he last spoke to him yesterday.

He planned to go to Russia. It was something he usually avoided until the summer but Monday morning he got a call from his father that stirred up some guilt in Ilya. There was the added fact that he knew Svetlana was in Moscow, having dropped her off at the airport not long ago after their evening together in Boston, so Ilya already had plans to meet up with her so they could do the things they always did in Russia.

He was still upset about the whole Hollander thing. Which made him angry that he was upset. He was annoyed that anytime he looked at his phone and he was forced to see Shane Hollander and Rose fucking Landry. He was tired of having the couple shoved down his throat.

Yet another reason to go to Russia. At least over there no one cared about Shane Hollander.

Ilya was sitting in the stiff airport seats that always sat outside the gate to whatever flight people would board. He watched as people lined up to board and made no rush to do the same. He had a first class seat, already assigned to him, so he had no interest in standing heel to toe with people he didn't know. The airport wasn't terribly busy for an early Tuesday morning which was a relief. Ilya only got recognised by one person, a girl who couldn't have been older than twenty, and barring asking for a single picture she didn't really bother him, heading on her way after they took the photo.

Already Ilya was feeling angry with his admittedly impulsive decision to go to Russia. He had just gotten off the phone with his father only mere minutes ago and the man was already back to being his normal, critically cruel self. Not for the first time Ilya thinks how hard his father made it to feel sorry for him.

As the line to board the plane neared its end Ilya stood up. He had no bags in hand since he had everything he would need in his apartment in Russia which made his decision to travel that much easier. He handed over his boarding pass to the gate agent, a woman around his own age, and after handing it back to him she was quick to get things together. Ilya was the last to board and soon her job would reach its end here. Ilya turned to go into the door but paused before crossing the threshold.

His thoughts turned to what awaited him in Russia. Of dealing with his brother and his harassing Ilya for money. Of listening to his father in his moments of lucidity, talking about what a disgrace Ilya was. Of running into Sasha again who has long since become more irritating than alluring.

Ilya didn't want to say he was running from his problems in America but he knew that's exactly what he was doing. Just the thought had a course of anger rushing through him and he silently cursed Shane Hollander's name. Cursed *himself* for ever uttering the first part of that name in a moment of stupid vulnerability. He knew Russia wouldn't fix anything and now that he was almost ready to take off he was more aware than ever before that this trip would likely end with him feeling worse. He wanted to not to see articles about Hollander and Landry. (articles he can admit he often *looked* for.) He wanted to not have to listen to what was left of his family berating him in cold tones. He wanted to escape for a while, not just run away to new problems or be stuck around old ones.

"*Shit,*" Ilya muttered to himself and he turned away from the door. He was absently aware of the woman who checked him in distractedly typing on the small screen without even a glance in his direction, possibly unaware of his departure from the flight, but whether she knew if he boarded or not didn't matter to Ilya either way.

He just left the airport.

Getting home was a strangely relieving thing. Since getting to America Ilya was someone who was almost constantly going. The amount of times he just relaxed at home were few and far between, he favoured entertainment too much. Whether sex, drinking, driving fast cars or playing hockey, Ilya wasn't a man who sat idle too often. He almost always found something to do because not doing anything led to his thoughts trailing into darker places and Ilya did not want to let that happen.

He would stay home for the next few days and while he wasn't going to do any of the normal things he did to distract himself he was going to keep himself busy. As Ilya stepped into his kitchen he pulled out his phone and determinedly turned it off. He had no responsibilities until he had to go to Tampa Bay and he was going to take advantage of the fact. As he threw his phone onto the counter he looked around his place and decided he would ignore the world until Thursday. He would put Hollander out of his mind for as long as he could and just try and get his head on straight. He hadn't been playing nearly as well as he knew he could lately and Ilya was tired of that.

Yet another thing his father would berate him for in Russia. If he even watched Ilya's games.

Svetlana wouldn't be waiting for him in Russia since he had made it sound like he was unsure if he even would go so he wasn't too worried about letting her know of his change of plans. And with her not being an issue Ilya didn't feel the need to worry about letting anyone else know his plans. Ilya would relax, maybe watch movies or something, and work out in the gym he had here. He would take some time to just focus on himself, something that— despite his narcissistic reputation— wasn't something he did often enough.

If he was being completely honest Ilya didn't think cutting off the outside world for a few days would be an easy task. He thought by the time the sun set that first day he would be filled to the brim with the desire to go on his phone again. But it was a bit of a strange relief to not have that waiting expectation. To not have the world's news on everyone and everything ready for him to stress out over. It was... relaxing, strangely enough. Almost boring but in a way that Ilya couldn't find to be bad in any way.

Still it wasn't something that could realistically last forever so on Thursday morning, while he was cooking breakfast, he decided to reconnect with the internet. He was making himself a straightforward breakfast, lazy as he poked at his eggs and bacon while they cooked, and turned on his phone before crossing to finish off his toast. He threw the two slices onto the plate he had ready with some hash browns done already before going back to the stove. He was just reaching to turn down the burners when his phone, now on, started to ping.

A lot.

"What the fuck?" Ilya muttered to himself, as he grabbed his phone where the notifications were rapidly growing. Swiping quickly to unlock it, Ilya watched as the little numbers on his apps quickly started to rise higher and higher.

Having enough of whatever it was that was going on Ilya opened up his browser and searched up his name. (Something he has done countless times before, he's not ashamed to admit.) He half wondered if his sex tape got released or he had some illegitimate child brought to light. Those felt like the only two possibilities for his phone blowing up as much as it was. Even if he had been no contact for the last four days it still didn't account for how many notifications he was getting.

The first thing he found was the newest one as well, an article about a plane that had crashed — or vanished since no crash had been found yet— on the way to Moscow.

With widening eyes Ilya said. "Holy shit." He summoned up enough forethought to move his bacon and eggs onto the plate and turned off the stove before he hastily opened up the most recent video.

"It's been three days since flight IL5673 sent out a distress call to say they were going down due to a malfunction and still the aircraft had yet to be found," a man in a suit reported in a professional tone of voice. "With each passing hour officials continue to narrow down the searching area from where the aircraft's flight locator last pinged before losing connection."

Ilya swiped into the next video and this one looked more sports related, a group of men talking with one another. “As everyone already knows, Boston Raiders captain Ilya Rozanov was on the flight bound for Moscow. Regardless if the flight is found soon no doubt the Raiders will have to sub in their alternate captain.”

With almost mindless movements Ilya flicked quickly through the accompanying articles before he exited out of the tab and opened up his messages. He was immediately met with countless people asking after him. *Why* they thought he would have answered after being in a plane crash was beyond Ilya but people were stupid. He froze when his eyes landed on the oldest but first new message he received since turning off his phone.

Jane: Tell me you’re okay.

The sight of Hollander's new message had Ilya’s heart lurching into his throat but he forced himself to ignore that as he pulled up his agent’s number.

His agent was a man named Fredrick but Ilya has always called him Freddie. He was an older guy who got the job done but was also easy going when the time called for it. He never grew annoyed with Ilya’s at times childish or standoffish attitude which was why Ilya continued to work with him. When he was first drafted Ilya had shuffled through different agents but they had all been bad fits until Freddie came along. He had been Ilya’s agent for the last *three* years.

Ilya held the phone to his ear, listening as the phone rang while his thoughts swirled around his head, and after about seven rings that almost had Ilya rolling his eyes in annoyance Freddie finally answered.

“... Ilya?” his tone was disbelieving and unsure, which was expected.

“I was not on plane,” Ilya said first off, needing to make that clear after everything he just listened to and read.

“Ilya, holy shit,” Freddie choked on, sounding more harried than Ilya had ever heard him. Which was saying something considering he was *his* agent. “How?”

Rubbing a hand across his mouth, Ilya said. “I checked into flight, was going to go on, but decided to... leave trip at last second. Decided to just stay home.”

“How come you didn’t answer your phone?” Freddie asked, sounding a bit more like himself but his voice was still a bit faint. Ilya could practically hear him pacing in his office.

“I turned it off,” Ilya said and then was quick to defend the choice. “You and Coach both told me I was free until All-Star Games. I decided to unplug for some days so I shut off my phone.”

Freddie let out a huff and now it was his head shake that could practically be heard through the phone. “Okay,” Freddie said in a more firm tone. “Next time you go off the grid just put your phone on Do Not Disturb and make sure my number can get through.”

Ilya almost wanted to laugh. “Believe me. I will do that absolutely.”

“Alright, I’m going to contact your coach and the proper authorities to get everything sorted out so for the time being try not to contact *anyone*,” Freddie started to list off, getting down to business. “The last thing we need is outright panic of confusing press releases so lay low.”

“Lay low,” Ilya repeated slowly with a frown.

“Stay out of sight,” Freddie said more clearly.

Pursuing his lips, Ilya couldn’t help but ask. “What about All-Stars?”

There was a pause. “You’re set to appear so you’re free to go. They never removed you off the roster since you weren’t considered dead, only missing. Then it was so close to the event that the league thought it would be in poor taste to change anything. That it would look disrespectful, like they were saying you were already dead.”

Ilya was silently cursing his sudden need to go no contact with the world. He could feel a headache building up at having to deal with the fallout of this choice. The last four days—three and a half?—the world knew of him as missing in a big plane crash. Likely believed him to be dead. And now he had to report he was as fine as can be. Ilya wasn’t even the one who would have to deal with the biggest mess, Freddie was, but still the whole thing left him feeling on edge.

“My flight for Tampa leaves tonight,” Ilya reminded him.

With a quiet noise, Freddie said. “I’ll figure something out. Stay by the phone and leave it *on*. I’ll call you back soon.” There was a brief pause and Freddie added. “Glad you’re okay, kid.” Before he hung up.

Letting out a heavy breath, phone dropping to his side, Ilya glanced over at his now cold breakfast. Though he did not feel like eating at all he forced himself to pick up the plate and went to go sit on his couch. He absently turned on the tv to nothing in particular and then poked at his food as he took a closer look at his messages.

There were a lot of familiar names and a lot of unfamiliar names. Some unknown numbers too. He noticed neither his father nor his brother were anywhere on the list of names—messages or calls—and Ilya wondered if Alexei had already tried to gain access to his bank accounts. He knew he wouldn’t be able to do so, not without a confirmed death, but Ilya also knew his brother would try either way.

Yet again his eyes lingered on Hollander’s message and Ilya tried not to let it build into something like hope.

Hollander was a Canadian at heart, polite to a fault when it came to most, so of course he would send a message. Even if they weren’t talking lately they had unknown each other since they were seventeen and that at least warranted a text.

Ilya tried not to hope this meant anything more than common courtesy. Tried not to hope it meant Hollander felt... *anything* for him. Tired not to hope it meant that maybe things would go back to what they were before Ilya messed up. But Ilya, as he has learned, was stupid when it came to Hollander.

So of course he hoped for it all.

When Ilya got to Tampa Bay— by a private plane Freddie somehow managed to secure— he was ushered up to his hotel room and told to stay there. It was a room that was far smaller than Ilya's had in a while but he got the feeling it was a purposeful move. It was late enough that Ilya didn't complain either way.

As he promised Freddie had called Ilya back not long after their first talk and had added Ilya's coach to the call who had sounded beyond relieved to hear him alive and well. Ilya wondered if his coach was relieved because he was okay or if it was because of how much the team would drop in win rates if Ilya wasn't around. The two had laid out all the plans moving forward and Ilya could only silently nod as they spoke before verbally confirming he understood and ending the call.

After making sure Freddie was aware, Ilya had called Svetlana. He did not want her to think he was dead— or even possibly dead— any longer than she already had. She of course had been very relieved to hear from him. Then cursed him up, down, left and right. Then went back to being relieved. The two of them had spoken for almost two hours despite seeing each other not long ago and Ilya talked about nothing in particular the whole time. He knew, both from the length of the call and what happened over the last few days, that Svetlana had only wanted to hear his voice for a while, which was something he was more than ready to indulge her in.

He hadn't replied to Hollander— or anyone else but Ilya didn't really care about anyone else — but he did look at his message far too often. He would see him in the morning anyways and as Ilya glanced towards the Tampa Bay night sky he wasn't sure how he felt about that. By now the city was packed with some of the best athletes the MLH had to offer, no one nearly as good as Ilya but close enough he supposed. He wondered if Hollander brought Rose Landry to this thing. Plenty of players brought their wives, girlfriends and kids.

Just the thought had a twisted feeling curling in his stomach.

Letting out a breath Ilya crossed to his bed and tried to ignore any nerves he felt about tomorrow. Freddie said the league already knew he was fine and that anyone that *needed* to know now knew. He also said first thing in the morning the statement would be released. It would state that while Ilya *should have* been on the plane a last minute change of plans had him leaving the flight and then went on to assure everyone that he was in fact alive. There was talk of being grateful for the concern afforded to him and how Ilya also hoped those who

were on the plane were found safe and sound. Then added on was a statement confirming his attendance to the All-Star Games.

“From an agent standpoint I have to say this will be great press for you,” Freddie told him after reading out the statement. “You’ve been the talk of every team and sport related channels over the last few days and the reveal that you are okay will only have people talking more.”

Ilya tried to ignore that. While he was always for being in the spotlight, and outright craved it at times, this one didn’t sit right with him. Not when there were countless families still waiting for word in their loved ones.

Shane never thought he would dread being at the All-Star Games but here he was. He had wanted to cancel, bail out of this trip entirely, but he knew he wouldn’t be able to get away with it.

It had been three days since he learnt Ilya’s plane had vanished— four days since it left for a flight that would end with a crash— and since then Shane has gotten no sleep. He felt like he was on autopilot most days and he was faintly relieved that everyone else was still in such a shock that no one took notice of him.

His parents worried of course, able to read him well enough to know he was upset, but he knew they put it down to how long he and Ilya had been in the same circles. Put it down to some long nostalgic feeling Shane may harbour for the kid he was drafted alongside. It was nowhere near close enough to the truth, nowhere near as gut wrenching as it actually was for Shane, but he accepted whatever comfort they could offer him.

It was Friday morning and Shane was in the large lounge/bar area of the hotel he was staying at. There were a bunch of players from various teams gathered around and enjoying the relaxing time they had. Some events were already happening and would continue to go on throughout the day but Shane didn’t care enough to watch and didn’t have anything to do himself until the next morning.

He was standing with Hayden and J.J and as Shane scanned the room he spotted Cliff Marlow across the room he wondered how the man was doing. He knew Ilya enough to know that Marlow was probably the person Ilya had been closest to on the Boston team. Marlow was the alternate captain to Ilya’s captain.

Shane dropped his stare to his drink, just a juice since it was first thing in the morning, and he listened on vacantly as Hayden and J.J talked about what they were looking forward to most out of this weekend. Shane almost cursed their ability to be so far from this. To not know enough to feel shaken and hollow in Ilya’s absence.

“Holy shit, did you hear?”

His head jerked upward as Carter Vaughan budged into their small circle and Shane felt his phone buzz in his pocket but he ignored it as he watched Carter, waiting to hear what was

going on.

Hayden was the one to ask. “What’s going on?”

In reply Carter held out his phone for them all to see and the first thing Shane spotted was the blaring title:

ILYA ROZANOV ALIVE

Just the title had the air in Shane’s lungs freezing and he stared at the article in hopeful disbelief, half wondering if the plane was found. “How?” J.J asked as he leaned closer to get a look at the article.

“Apparently Rozanov never got on the plane,” Carter told them with a disbelieving and almost amused huff. “He had been home on some disconnect from the outside world for the last few days. Never even *knew* what was going on.”

“Holy shit,” Hayden said with wide eyes.

Almost numbly, Shane pulled out his phone, not able to think of anything to say, half afraid he’d break into tears of relief if he even tried to say something. His eyes flickered down to his phone and when he saw the notification on his screen his heart all but stopped.

Lily: I am okay.

Shane's head darted around the room, like Ilya’s message alone could somehow summon him to Shane’s side, and he saw *everyone* with phones in hands. Clearly they all now knew what was going on, word spreading as fast as it always did in hockey circles.

“Apparently Rozanov is still competing in the All-Star Games,” Carter told them as Shane glanced back at the phone in his hand. “That's what the press release on his Instagram and on Boston’s official page said at least.”

“Holy shit,” J.J said now but his tone was very different. They all looked over at him in question but his attention was focused on the other side of the room and Shane almost broke his neck with how quick he turned his head to look.

There he was.

Ilya Rozanov was dressed up in casual shorts and a red Hawaiian shirt that would look more appropriate on a middle-aged father of three on vacation. Somehow, even with that fact, he still looked just as incredible as he did with everything else he wore. He strolled casually into the lounge, unconcerned by the way all eyes were focused solely on him.

It was Cliff Marlow who moved first and Shane watched as he all by enveloped Ilya in a fierce hug. Ilya easily returned the hug, giving Marlow back a firm pat, and Shane ached at how easy it was for Marlow to show his relief. How he didn’t have to worry about how it would look and what people would say.

“I’m going to talk to him,” Carter said then and Shane noticed other people looking like they wanted to do the same but clearly none brave enough to break that seal. As Carter moved across the room Hayden and J.J were quick to follow and Shane instantly fell into line with them.

When he got close enough Carter called out in the carelessly casual way of his. “Rozy!” Ilya glanced up at the sound of his name and smiled that crooked smile of his as Marlow stepped away from the hug. “What the hell happened?” Carter asked as they all reached the pair.

Ilya shrugged. “I wasn’t on plane.”

“No shit,” J.J said with a huff. “The airline said you were though.”

“I checked in,” Ilya told them, waving an absent hand and ignoring the way the people nearest to them were clearly listening in. “Was last to board and was right at boarding door to go on but I decided not to go.”

Carter shook his head with a wide grin. “You lucky son of a bitch.” It was a comment that had all of them, with the exception of Shane, nodding avidly. Ilya was beyond lucky for the choice he made.

“Why the hell didn’t you contact anyone?” Marlow asked next, clearly not having read the press release statement that was no doubt still making its rounds.

With a huff, Ilya retorted. “I had no responsibilities to worry about until All-Stars. I take time to go no contact. Turned off phone. Stayed off internet.”

“You are *never* going to be allowed to do that again,” Carter told him wryly and the face Ilya made in agreement had most of them making sounds of amusement.

“Rozanov!”

At the sound of his name Ilya, and the rest of them, glanced across the room where another Raiders player was waving a hand with wide eyes. With a faint goodbye to them Ilya and Marlow split off, crossing to the guy who’s name Shane couldn’t remember for the life of him.

Shane’s heart was in his throat. He felt like he was going to cry with relief as he watched Ilya move about, talking animatedly with people and just being... *alive*.

“He really is fucking lucky,” Hayden muttered and when Shane glanced at him he was shaking his head. “Can you imagine being that close to a full on plane crash and just missing it out of pure chance.”

With an amused voice Carter said. “Maybe Roz was always right and he really is one of God’s favourites.”

They all snorted. It was a chirp that almost everyone had heard from Ilya at one point or another. Always said in that smug, borderline arrogant, tone of his while out on the ice and facing other teams. Whatever reason Ilya was standing here alive and will didn’t matter. Not

to Shane at least. He was just grateful that Ilya was alive. Rushing through his mind were all the regrets he's had over the last few days, all the words he felt he *should have* said but didn't.

He needed to talk to Ilya. Needed to talk to him like he needed air to breathe.

Ilya was playing some of the best hockey he's played in *months*. Before getting to Tampa Bay he had been packed with an anxious energy that somehow grew from more than just simply seeing Shane again. There were more eyes on Ilya than ever before and it felt like any and all mistakes he might make would be caught in an instant.

He always wanted to play on the same line as Hollander. Wondered how great they would be on the ice, wondered if it would be just as great as they were *off* the ice. He wondered if he would be playing as great if he *hadn't* heard that Shane and Rose Landry split up. He overheard Shane telling someone that they hadn't been compatible when he was asked about her. Ilya hasn't had the chance to talk to Shane himself, not with everyone wanting his attention after the news reports over the last few days, but Ilya had been relieved to overhear that conversation. He had been quick to make sure he was right about what he thought that word meant once he was alone.

On the ice Shane was playing just as great as him. Always the only one who could really keep up with Ilya on the ice. The two of them were speaking their own silent language on the ice, passing the puck without a second thought to each other and making quick goals that had the crowd going wild.

After an impressive goal Ilya hadn't been able to help grabbing Shane into a quick hug, pressing a cheeky kiss to the side of his helmet that he knew people would wave off as typical 'Rozanov hijinks'. The pretty flush that adorned Shane's cheeks and made his freckles stand out only increased his already incredible mood.

He hadn't gotten to relax as much as he would have liked— then again he supposed he relaxed a lot the last few days— as Ilya would have liked to have hung out in the pool. But since everyone was aching to have a conversation with him that hadn't happened. Instead he was stuck repeating the same words over and over and it was growing more and more annoying.

It was a relief when he was able to slip away, his eyes darting every which way for one person in particular. He eventually found him, sitting on the beach alone and staring out at the sunset. Ilya let out a quiet breath and then crossed the sand and sat two feet away from Shane.

"I heard about you and Rose Landry," Ilya said by way of greeting, eyes on the orange sky and low sun on the horizon.

Shane made a quiet noise. "We weren't compatible," was all he said.

"I looked up that word," Ilya told him quietly, in as casual a voice he could manage. "Thought I knew what it meant, I wanted to be sure."

In a surge of bravery Ilya slowly inched his hand to where Shane's was resting in the send, carefully brushing his thumb against his. He couldn't stop the rushing feeling in his chest when Shane met his cautious motion halfway.

"What room are you in?" Shane asked quietly.

It should have been embarrassing how quickly Ilya answered that question.

Never before has Shane been so anxious to meet up with Ilya. He spent all day seeing Ilya around and it still hasn't felt like it sunk in that he was okay. Shane was glad Hayden was distracted this evening with hanging out with some guys downstairs—no doubt he would have wanted to gossip about the whole Ilya being alive thing if he was in the room—and Hayden, along with others, was taking advantage of the free day they had tomorrow that only consisted of a late afternoon flight that would take them back to Montreal.

When he got to the door of Ilya's room Shane glanced around twice before knocking quietly. When the door was pulled open, and Ilya was revealed to be standing there looking as beautiful as ever, Shane almost cried with relief again. He watched as Ilya stepped back to let him in and Shane quickly slid inside. He was quick to take in the room, a bit small with lighting that was warm and low enough without looking weirdly dark. Shane crossed to the bed and sat down, looking back to where Ilya was leaning against the desk in the room.

"I'm so glad you're okay," he said first off, his voice feeling thick with emotion but thankfully coming out stable.

"I was never on plane. Never in danger."

"I thought you were dead. Or as good as," Shane retorted, not wanting to hear Ilya brush this off as no big deal after spending *days* with regrets and grief. "All I could think about was the last time we saw each other—" Shane cut himself off and shook his head, glancing at the floor before looking at Ilya again. "I'm sorry for leaving the way I did that day."

He could tell by Ilya's stance that he was ready to blow this conversation off like no big deal too.

"I think I'm gay," Shane said, before any smart or dismissive remarks could be made.

Now Ilya had an actual reaction though it was a huff of laughter as his face grew mockingly amused. He hummed quietly as he looked at Shane and asked. "You think so? What—What made you think that?"

"Fuck you," Shane said at once, even what happened wasn't enough to have him holding back a sharp retort to Ilya's at time irritating attitudes. "You're not gay."

"No, not completely," Ilya agreed with a huff.

"Well I *am*," Shane said firmly. "Completely."

“Okay, so you’re gay? So what?”

“Well, it’s kind of a big deal. To me at least. Sorry if I’m being boring again,” Shane retorted, trying his hardest not to feel hurt but not quite managing it. He understood what Ilya was thinking, he understood how ridiculous it might sound to come out to the guy he spent the last seven years sleeping with, but Shane had never said it out loud before.

He watched as Ilya let out a heavy sigh and he moved to sit next to Shane. “Why are you telling me this?” he asked quietly.

“Who else am I gonna tell?” he asked rhetorically, glancing at Ilya and the floor and back again. “It’s... not just being gay. It’s you. It’s this. Being gay is one thing, but this fucking your arch-rival is another thing.”

Ilya made a faint motion with his hand. “That’s why it is a secret.”

“I know that, but last time...” Shane trailed off and he made sure to look at Ilya again as he said this, even if his stare wasn’t purposely ignored. “And for the record, I am sorry about last time, OK? I’m sorry I freaked out. But before that... it was nice.”

“It was,” Ilya said quietly and the two words had Shane feeling relieved.

“And it felt like we were something.”

But instantly Ilya protested in a resigned tone. “We can’t be something, Hollander.”

“Would you want to be, if we could?” Shane had to ask. *Had* to voice out.

“We can’t.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

With a surge of anger Ilya finally looked at Shane. “What does it fucking matter?” he asked him sharply.

“I don’t think I can keep pretending I don’t like you anymore,” Shane told him honestly, sounding frustrated with the fact too but still firm.

Shaking his head, Ilya said. “You don’t like me.”

“Yeah, I do,” Shane said firmly, not letting Ilya think otherwise for a second. “I think I like you maybe a little too much.”

“Don’t,” Ilya said in a tight tone. “Don’t fucking do this, Hollander.”

He hated that Shane was doing this. He hated that Shane was dangling this impossible thing in front of him like it was somehow possible. They both knew it wasn’t. It’s why they worked so hard to hide it. But now Shane was coming along and trying to make it seem like they could be anything more than they had always been. He was coming along and making Ilya... *hope* when he knew he shouldn’t.

“I'm not...” Shane let out a sigh and his hands twisted together in his lap. “I thought you were gone. For good. I thought that I would never see you again and that the last time we would have spoken was me just being... a coward.”

Ilya sighed, looking up at the ceiling as his throat twinged. “I can't imagine what that was like for you,” Ilya offered quietly, because it was the truth. He couldn't have imagined being in Shane's place, having to spend days convinced he was dead and gone for good after the two of them left things in such bad terms. “I wouldn't want to know what it was like for you. But that doesn't change facts...” He let out another sigh and Ilya glanced over at Shane, needing to make things clear. “I wouldn't be able to go home again. Ever. Do you get that?”

“Because your family?” Shane asked almost naively.

“Because Russia!” Ilya all but shouted back at him. “I would not be able to go back to Russia!”

“What would happen to you?”

Shaking his head, an old age fear sparking up in his chest that he spent years trying to convince himself wasn't there, Ilya admitted. “I don't want to find out.”

Still, Shane, stubborn and sweet Shane, persisted. “But would your parents...”

“My father is police. My brother is police.” Ilya told him outright, not glancing at Shane, not wanting to see that hope of his die out.

“And your mother?”

“Dead.”

Shane's voice grew impossibly softer. “I'm sorry.”

“I was young,” Ilya offered but he didn't elaborate, changing the conversation to something less painful than losing his mother. “My father is very old fashioned. And sick.”

“Sick like crazy?” Shane asked in confusion.

“That too, a little, but no, sick more like...”

“Oh, like cancer?”

“Dementia.”

Shane's constant questions seemed to halt and he quietly said. “That's awful.”

It was the first time he ever voiced the fact out loud, his brother never wanting to hear anything on the matter and Ilya not wanting to bother Svetlana with such things. It was the first time Ilya offered any kind of personal information like that to anyone. Just the thought had his eyes stinging and he was quick to turn his head away from Shane to hide it.

“Hey.” Shane said quietly, reaching out to gently touch Ilya. “Hey...” he said, more reassuring this time and soon Shane was climbing into his lap.

The action only made Ilya’s throat grow tighter with emotion and he tried hard to keep Shane from seeing his tears as he choked out. “Sorry.” He could practically hear the judgemental words his father would throw at him, likely some remark about how weak Ilya was and for him to be a man.

But Shane didn’t blink at his vulnerability, only carefully taking hold of his face and pressing a reassuring kiss to Ilya’s mouth that Ilya was quick to chase. Shane pressed a kiss to his cheek then temple and wrapped Ilya up into a hug and Ilya was incapable of doing anything but *clinging* to Shane in turn.

“I can’t go back to pretending to hate you,” Shane murmured to him quietly, gently rocking them back and forth as he curled around Ilya, enveloping him in this comfort that had been lost to Ilya since the day he found his mother’s body. “I spent the last few days not able to really react the way I felt inside because as far as everyone knew we hated each other. I couldn’t... *grieve* the way I felt I needed to.”

Ilya’s grip tightened around Shane and the thick way he spoke told him Shane was close to tears too.

Things are still so complicated. They still couldn’t really tell anyone about them anytime soon even if they both wanted more. They knew they had everything going against them, that there was so much at risk. Their jobs. Their lives. What happened might have changed where they were both at in terms of their... relationship, opened eyes that needed opening, Shane obviously more so than Ilya, but that didn’t mean things would magically work out. They finally acknowledged they wanted *more* but would that be enough? Would that see them through hard hard times? Would that be enough for them to make it work? To make it to some point where this would be *so much* easier? Where they could just be... *together*.

Ilya and Shane both unknowingly made the silent simultaneous decision to just hope for it all.

July 2017

In the end the plane, passengers and crew were all found safely on the last day of the All-Star Games. The plane had managed to make a landing that was predictably rough and they had enough supplies to keep everyone fed and well until help came. There were some injuries but nothing critical and everyone on board would go on with their lives like they did before the flight— maybe with a deep seated fear of planes added on to their rosters.

Ilya would eventually return to Russia within the next two months after his father’s death, electing not to tell Shane about the trip until he was already in Moscow. His absence was

reported as a family emergency and Ilya knew enough to know he wouldn't get away with just stepping out of the league for a week or so until things were taken care of.

Shane would later get knocked out of the playoffs by an unintentional injury doled out by Cliff Marlow. Then he would go on to extend an invitation to Ilya to spend the summer at his cottage with him.

The Bears would be knocked out of the playoffs by the Admirals. Then the Admirals would win the MLH Cup and Scott Hunter would kiss his boyfriend on live television for all the world to see.

That alone would spark a lot more courage in Shane and Ilya and the two would both head out to Shane's cottage to make numerous plans filled to the brim with hope about the future they felt certain they would one day reach together.

It would take a few years but they would get there and when asked later about how they were able to do it, how they were able to wait years for their happy ending, both would have the same answer.

They did it for the hope of it all.

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