

dancing in the dark

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by [mycatpomona](#)

Summary

Ilya is like his mother in the way that he plays with fireworks and skates on not quite frozen rivers.

Shane often finds himself lost in translation.

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An exploration of Ilya and Shane, their mental health, and their relationships

## Notes

as usual, heed the tags. I tried to be as thorough as possible.

CW: mania, depression, suicide, spontaneous combustion (metaphorical), drowning (metaphorical), mentions of abuse

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

## Chapter 1: you can't start a fire without a spark

Ilya is like his mother.

He is like his mother in the way he cooks his eggs and the way his hair curls and the way he writes his name (soft boiled with salt and hastily peeled; golden ringlets that turn to dandelion fluff in the summer humidity; illegible and heavy handed, leaving deep indentations in at least the next three pages of his notebook).

He is also like his mother in the way that he plays with fireworks and skates on not quite frozen rivers.

In his memories, he sees his mother at her brightest : He is 4 years old, and he is laughing wildly while his mother chases him around their apartment on roller skates. He is 7 years old, and his mother spirits him away after hockey practice to get a secret sweet treat, throws him a wink as she hands him an overpriced pastry, and says *don't tell your father*. He is 11 years old, and she throws herself into learning how to knit, staying awake all night in order to present him with a pair of brightly colored (if a little lumpy) wooly socks first thing in the morning. When he thinks of his mother, he is struck most by just how brightly his mother burns.

Memories of his mother's depression lurk underneath these visions of his mother on fire - he is 5 years old, and she will only eat eggs and sour pickles. He is 9 years old, and she has stopped reading, stopped singing, stopped smiling. He is 12 years old, and she lies alone and unmoving while an empty pill bottle lies overturned beside her.

Ilya at his brightest is like a roaring campfire that occasionally flares to terrifying heights. Ilya at his brightest is a precise and imposing opponent on the ice. Ilya at his brightest also touches himself in the showers in front of Shane Hollander without considering the consequences. Ilya at his brightest laughs long and loud with Svetlana, stays out dancing until last call and is still wide awake for practice after only 3 hours of sleep. Ilya at his brightest also grabs Shane by the throat and kisses him stupid in a bathroom, with the entire league and a couple hundred fans just down the hallway. Ilya at his brightest deep cleans his entire house and puts homemade tuna salad and carefully sliced cheddar cheese into 4 separate tupperware containers. Ilya at his brightest also wields his father's temper, shouts cruel nonsense at the man he can only love behind closed doors.

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Ilya sometimes feels like he has very suddenly fallen through the ice into a frozen river. Humans can only swim, shiver, and scream for so long. Their minds go foggy. Their speech slurs. Their heart rates slow. They fall unconscious. They drown.

*Ilya drowns.*

He's drowned before, of course. He drowned for the first time at 12 - the loss of his mother was a change in the atmosphere, in gravity, a change in the tide itself - how could he even hope to fight the current trying to pull him under? In Ilya's mind, his father yanked him out of

the frigid sea by the scruff of his neck before tossing him sputtering on the docks, his eyes a warning. Not “I don’t want you to drown”, but “Next time, drown quieter”.

He drowned again during his rookie season. His brother threatened him. His father got sick. He drowned. He drowned in two inches of water, and no one around him paid much mind. He was strong, he was competent, he kept his cards close to his chest. He should be able to get up, right? He imagined his teammates chirping in his mind “It’s two inches of water, Roz, surely you can manage”.

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Since he was a teenager, Ilya has wondered who could be outside of burning and drowning. People definitely like him better when he's burning. When he’s burning, he wins cups. He fucks, frequently. He buys anyone - the team, his niece, strangers at a bar - anything they want. He laughs.

He thinks people might have feelings about him drowning if they knew about it (Ilya tries very hard to make sure no one else can tell he is drowning). The fear of someone trying to help him - offering a hand or a life preserver or an oxygen mask - and then getting cast out to sea in his riptide haunts him. *It's better this way*, he rationalizes, *so no one else will get hurt when I drown*.

He can’t imagine himself on solid ground, only spontaneously combusting or developing hypothermia in brackish water. If he could stay intact, he’d do so many simple things. He’d become a regular at the cafe down the block. He’d borrow books from the library and remember to return them on time. He’d take a yoga class. He’d get a dog. He’d fall in love, and the guilt wouldn’t make his chest hurt.

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The first thing Ilya notices about him is that Shane Hollander glows. He doesn’t burn like Ilya. He glows like a lighthouse piercing through the hazy night. *Follow me*, he beckons, *I will guide you to shore*.

Shane’s glow is so different from Ilya’s burning. They kiss, and warmth settles in Ilya’s ribcage. Shane pulls Ilya’s hair and the sun kisses his cheeks. Shane whimpers and keens, and Ilya feels a little feverish.

There are lots of things Ilya can’t control. Shane likes being something he can. The routine - *on your knees, use your words, cum for me* - is soothing for both of them.

Shane on the ice is a force of nature. Shane with his teammates is reserved and quiet. Shane being interviewed is diplomatic (and French). But with Ilya, Shane glows.

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The strings tying him to Russia are cut one by one, and as they fall away he feels 20 pounds lighter. The icy water is still oppressive, still suffocating, but for the first time he isn’t anchored to the riverbank. He can track the light guiding him away from the undertow, maybe even try to surface again.

Shane holds him while he cries. He puts on his glasses just because Ilya likes them. He tells him “I won’t understand, but you deserve to say how you feel”.

*Inhale.*

*“I’m so in love with you I don’t know what to do about it”.*

*Exhale.*

“Ok, I’m done”

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He has never told anyone about his mom before. His teammates knew that she died when he was very young and the gold cross he wears belongs to her. None of them have seen a photo or heard her favorite song. He’s pretty sure none of them know her name.

“You must miss your family, even if they suck”

Ilya inhales sharply and the campfire smoke burns going down.

“My mother didn’t suck. She was great.”

Shane pauses.

“How did she die?”

Ilya feels like he’s choking on his tongue.

“By accident,” *breathe, Ilya*, he tells himself, “She accidentally swallowed a whole bottle of pills”

The air shifts.

“How old were you?”

“I was 12,” *breathe* “I found her,” *breathe again* “I don’t want you to think she was weak”

Shane’s hand ghosts over Ilya’s ribs.

“I don’t”

“She wasn’t. She was so funny, and beautiful. She was so sad, and my dad was so hard on her - motherfucker!” he jumps, startled by the noise. *Stupid Canadian wolf bird.* Shane cards his fingers through Ilya’s hair, and he chuckles softly.

“Do you want to go inside?”

Ilya exhales.

“No,”

His eyes watch the campfire in front of him flicker and crackle. It's oxymoronic. Fire flares, consumes, ignites, *burns* and somehow it also warms, comforts, and *glows*.

## Chapter 2: baby, I'm just about starving tonight

### Chapter Notes

Heed the updated tags lads, I tried to be as thorough as possible.

CW for bullying, ableism, body dysmorphia, eating disorders, racism, homophobia.

Shane often finds himself lost in translation.

When he is 7, he visits Japan for the first time (his mother's favorite cousin is getting married, and it is absolutely *imperative* they make the trip). He has so many family members that he has supposedly met before, who gesture broadly to indicate just how little he was when they last saw him. At the prompting of his mother, he smiles and nods. He has cousins around his age, but he cannot understand them. He furrows his brow and tries to parse the unfamiliar phrases, but eventually they get bored and go back to giggling amongst themselves.

They return home from the trip, and Shane begins to recognize a different language barrier he couldn't put his finger on before. He asks his classmates if he can play pokemon cards with them, and they laugh at a joke he didn't hear anyone tell. When he goes to hockey practice, no one ever wants to be his partner. He has to run drills with the 16 year old assistant coach, so he gets scary good scary fast. He thinks that being scary good, that scoring goals and winning games, will impress his peers, but somehow this only makes them avoid him more. He keeps giving the wrong answers to questions he didn't know even had a right answer (Apparently, "The pink one" is the wrong answer to "Who's your favorite power ranger?").

He starts to pick some things up through context clues. Crying is for girls, so he wills away his tears. Thomas the Tank Engine is for babies, so he throws out his books. The food his mom packs is stinky, so he stops eating lunch altogether. There's still something off about him - his peers can sense it immediately - but no one will tell him what it is. If making friends is like speaking Japanese, he's getting the vowels all wrong

The language that Shane does speak fluently is hockey. He watches a defenseman crack his neck and flawlessly intuits his next move. He senses where the puck is by the way it reverberates across the ice. He immediately knows where a deflected puck will land and spirits it away before the opposing team even knows it was blocked. On a usual day, he can't understand a word people say. On the ice, he orates. He gives a fucking filibuster, and people pay attention.

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Ilya Rozanov is unintelligible in more ways than one. Shane definitely doesn't understand any Russian for one thing, but Rozanov's casual charisma and subtle sarcasm is even more

opaque. When he speaks Russian, Shane can usually pick out a cognate or two, and try to Google translate what little he remembers after Rozanov leaves. The subtext of their hookups is untranslatable. Google doesn't know what to make of "what does it mean when a man tells you to drink more water?" "what does it mean when a man calls you boring?" "what does it mean when a man is a little mean to you but you also kind of like it?" Yahoo Answers and r/relationships offer him little in the way of coherent advice.

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Shane really likes it when Rozanov tells him what to do.

His brain rushes a mile a minute, constantly. *I was weird in that interview. Is this too much rice? Reebok wants the sponsored post published by Friday. It's definitely too much rice. That pass last night was sloppy. I can't eat this much rice.*

It's easy to follow instructions - *on your knees, use your words, cum for me* - and Rozanov makes it worth his while when he does. It's humiliating to have his chin tilted up like an unruly child, forced to look Ilya in the eye and beg for what he needs.

"Please fuck me. I need you inside me."

Rozanov grins, kisses him, and gives him what he asks for.

Rozanov threads his fingers through his hair, gives a gentle tug, and Shane melts. He sucks a bruise into his neck, and Shane imagines that this is what people who are really into meditation feel. His thoughts float by like fluffy clouds or something. Rozanov presses inside him, and his entire body *burns*.

Afterwards, Rozanov peppers kisses to the back of his neck and murmurs soft words that Shane doesn't understand. He wakes Shane briefly before he leaves, kisses his hair. Shane vaguely remembers telling Ilya that it makes him feel better to know for sure when he left.

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Shane picks at scabs - the irregular texture makes his skin crawl, so he picks at scabs until he bleeds. He has 17 pairs of the same black socks because they don't have those seams that bother his toes. Shane has been to a club maybe twice? The flashing lights, loud music, and stench of old cigarettes sets his teeth on edge. Shane washes his clothes in scent free detergent and folds them into tidy packages before putting them in his carefully tetris-ed carryon. Shane eats the same things every day. Brown rice, carrots, broccoli, kale, tofu, tuna. Nothing with a weird texture, nothing with an unusual flavor, nothing unexpected.

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If he's being honest, he also eats the same thing every day because it makes it easier to keep track of his macros. If he eats the same meal (brown rice with miso, canned tuna, kale, and carrots) every day, then he can do the same workout routine (a 5K run, 30 minutes on the rowing machine, a strength routine, the same yoga cooldown video) every day. If he does the same workout every day, he can make sure he is in top physical condition. If he is in top physical condition, he can play his strongest game.

(If he plays his strongest game, he won't disappoint them)

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White bread and cheese are not part of a macrobiotic diet. Shane starts doing calculus in his head. *Do I have to eat it? He's making it for me. Maybe I'll eat half of it? I can eat the tuna at least. I can scrape off the cheese and not eat the bread. Does this tuna salad have mayo in it? Does he have the nutrition facts? Everything is in a tupperware, none of it has a label.* Rozanov's smile lights up the room when he hands Shane a plate. Shane takes a hesitant bite and involuntarily moans. *God, bread tastes so fucking good.*

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Rozanov gently traces the stretch marks on his hips and he winces.

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Rozanov - *Ilya* - sighs Shane's name like a prayer. Shane's heart bursts.

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Reality hits him like a train. He can't do this. There are thousands of reasons he can't do this. He keeps his face as neutral as possible as he leaves, stays silent and still for the entire drive back to the hotel. By some miracle Hayden is gone when Shane returns. When he closes the door his legs immediately give out. He hasn't shattered like this since he was a teenager. He bites back a guttural scream, tries and fails to keep his voice down. He finds himself hitting his browbone with the heel of his hands without meaning to, bites the inside of his cheeks so hard he tastes blood. He cries ferociously, inconsolably, unable to catch his breath. He feels like he's dying. He might be dying.

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Rose Landry can read Shane like a magazine. So far, she's the only one who has noticed that Shane doesn't really eat food.

"Brown rice, kale, and plain tofu aren't a meal, Shane, they're a punishment," she says casually, like she didn't just pull back the curtain on his deepest shame.

"It's easier," he shrugs.

She drags him to a vegan restaurant in downtown Montreal and sits across from him as he contemplates the jackfruit tacos in front of him. She nudges his ankle with her foot.

"Come on," she says as she picks up one of the tacos, "I'll try it if you do,"

Shane takes a deep breath and selects the least loaded taco on the plate.

"Cheers," Rose clinks tacos with Shane, "On three - one, two, three - " she takes a hearty bite while Shane takes a more experimental one. Flavor explodes in his mouth and he groans. By the time Rose looks up, he's finished his first taco and has picked up a second. She smiles. Eating two tacos doesn't mean Shane's food issues will be gone forever, but she figures it's a start.

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For the first time in his life, Shane wants to explore. He wants to dream. He and Rose aren't dating anymore, but she remains a steady constant for him. She knows about him. She

knows, and she doesn't care. He can count all his friends on one hand, and he is so grateful he can count her.

He watches Ilya play in the hotel pool with a battalion of small children and can't help but smile when he pretends to drown so they can beat him. He lets himself dream - a little girl with Ilya's golden girls, a little boy with Shane's resolute gaze. Their tiny hypothetical family together at Metros Family Skate with Hayden, Jackie, and their kids, and it's all so beautifully mundane.

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They play one perfect game. Shane speaks fluent hockey, and Ilya speaks fluent Shane.

They talk, really talk, and for once it doesn't feel like they are speaking different languages.

"Goodnight, Shane," Ilya calls as he leaves. Shane understands the innuendo because he is starting to understand Ilya, so he shakes his head and chuckles.

"Goodnight, Ilya,"

## End Notes

bestowing upon Shane and Ilya the highest honor a blorbo can receive: my neuroses. They're just lucky they both escaped without either of them having Tourettes.

been dangling over the ledge of hypomania this week so I was up at 3:30 AM (as one does when feeling this way) and became possessed by the concept of Ilya and his mother having bipolar disorder. This was an attempt to exorcise those demons. Everything done by Irina while manic/depressed are things my grandmother, my father, or myself have done while manic/depressed (other than killing ourselves).

I haven't read either of the books yet, though I have gotten a couple spoilers through TikTok, tumblr, and AO3. If something contradicts Heated Rivalry book canon or The Long Game, it is because I have not actually read them.

work and chapter titles are from Dancing in the Dark by Bruce Springsteen.

Please let me know what you think, comments and kudos bring me such joy. I hope that this resonates with others.

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