You Have a Little Life in You Yet

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/80745021.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV), Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Svetlana Vetrova, Hayden Pike, Jackie Pike, Yuna Hollander, David Hollander, Luca Haas, Wyatt Hayes, Zane Boodram, Harris Drover, Troy Barrett, Brandon Wiebe, Evan Dykstra, Jean-Jacques Boiziau | J. J. Dagenais, Gen (Game Changers), Nick Chouinard
Additional Tags:	Presumed Dead, Airplane Crashes, Ottawa Centaurs Player Ilya Rozanov, Alternate Timelines, Minor Character Death, Blood and Injury, Major Character Injury, Autistic Shane Hollander, Suicidal Thoughts, Grief/Mourning, Depression, Good Friend Svetlana Vetrova, Starvation, Disordered Eating, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Heavy Angst, Implied Sexual Content, Internalized Homophobia, Spoilers for Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers), Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers), Depressed Ilya Rozanov, Cannibalistic Thoughts
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-03-06 Completed: 2026-03-12 Words: 38,306 Chapters: 5/5

You Have a Little Life in You Yet

by OrYouCouldHaveMine

Summary

PLANE CARRYING OTTAWA CENTAUR'S HOCKEY TEAM, COACH, PERSONNEL, REPORTEDLY LOST CONTACT, PRESUMED MISSING -

Shane's eyes scan over the words, once, twice. It's not true. It's some mistake. He knows it.

"Lost contact?" Hayden asks, his tone a mix of concerned and confused. "What's that mean? Like they lost their ability to communicate? Won't that make landing hard?"

J.J. frowns. "I do not think they will be landing," he says solemnly.

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The Ottawa Centaurs plane crashes in the Canadian wilderness. Shane tries to get answers while Ilya tries to stay alive.

Notes

IMPORTANT NOTES

Content warnings:

This fic will have some gore, minor character deaths, and basically anything you would imagine as a result of a plane crash.

There will be a lot of suicidal ideation and thoughts, as well as self sacrificing behaviors and self harming behaviors. Mentions of disordered eating, self hatred, and other heavy themes will be prevalent.

Timeline changes:

For this fic, I switched the teams that Shane and Ilya were playing so that the Centaur's plane would crash over the Canadian wilderness.

Hayden does NOT know Shane and Ilya are together at this point.

In TLG, Ilya starts therapy in November of 2020 and the plane incident happens in January of 2021. For this fic, I had him start therapy in June of 2020, while the plane crash is the same.

I had Troy start at the beginning of the season instead of being traded in November. It's fairly arbitrary to the plot, but it fit better with my timeline.

Everything else is fairly canonical in terms of timeline.

Updates to come out daily

Chapter 1: Pray God You Can Cope

“Oh, God," he prayed once again, "by all means test us to the limit of our endurance, but please make it humanly possible to go on. Please let there be some sort of path."
— Piers Paul Read, Alive

Montreal loses their game in Carolina, which is annoying. Ilya’s team had won against Washington earlier in the day, Shane had seen, but he hadn’t had a chance to congratulate Ilya yet. Of course now, it would probably be less congratulatory and more having to listen to Ilya gloat about how the Centaurs had won while Montreal had lost. He should’ve reached out, really. He uses the three hour time difference as an excuse, but it doesn’t even make sense because Ilya’s game had been at noon, completed before Shane even got on the ice for his game in the early evening. Maybe he’s being shitty. He should be happy that the Cens are doing better under Ilya. Maybe it’ll make Ilya seem happier. Ilya doesn’t seem happy much these days. Maybe it’s another reason he hasn’t reached out yet, and maybe it makes him even shittier.

Whatever. Carolina has a better team than Washington.

Shane is walking up to the bus with the rest of his team though, when there’s some sort of commotion. J.J. is holding his phone out while Drapeau looks on with him, like they’re frozen in place in front of the bus.

Hayden nudges Shane. “What do you think’s going on?”

Shane shrugs. “Dunno. Washington player gloating at the press conference, maybe?”

They approach, and J.J. turns to face them. Drapeau looks a little stunned.

What’s going on?” Shane asks.

“A tragedy,” J.J. says, and he holds his phone out.

PLANE CARRYING OTTAWA CENTAUR'S HOCKEY TEAM, COACH, PERSONNEL, REPORTEDLY LOST CONTACT, PRESUMED MISSING -

Shane's eyes scan over the words, once, twice. It's not true. It's some mistake. He knows it.

"Lost contact?" Hayden asks, his tone a mix of concerned and confused. "What's that mean? Like they lost their ability to communicate? Won't that make landing hard?"

J.J. frowns.

Shane feels like he's in a dream, unfocused and slightly muffled, his peripheral swirling and unclear.

"I do not think they will be landing," he says solemnly. "The last reports are of the plane losing altitude. An engine went out, and then it just… disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Asks Hayden. "Fuck. How does a plane disappear? Like, off their radar?"

J.J. shrugs, but he scrolls down a bit on the article while the other three men huddle in close, reading from his phone.

Air Traffic Control reportedly lost contact with the aircraft at approximately 5:30 PM Pacific Standard Time, while the aircraft would have been at its cruising altitude over a remote area of Alberta. Concerningly, it is possible the aircraft would have been in proximity to the Rocky Mountains, making emergency landing difficult. The United States NTSB is investigating this incident in cooperation with the Canadian government and Transportation Safety Board of Canada. We have contacted both for a statement…

Shane's eyes skim lower down on the article.

The Ottawa Centaur's Captain, Ilya Rozanov, was traded to the Centaurs last year after….

… he was reportedly a passenger on that plane…

Shane doesn't realize he's falling until Hayden grabs him by his armpit and holds him up.

"Hey, hey, man," Hayden says frantically as J.J. helps him stand.

"Hollander. Captain," J.J. says. Shane feels like he's in a fishbowl, the words blurry and hard to understand. His knees buckle again.

"Shit, man," Hayden says. "We gotta get him on the bus before reporters come over, okay?" He speaks to J.J. "Shane, buddy," he says to Shane. "Let's get you sitting down."

"Shit," J.J. hisses.

Shane He feels like a child, maybe. Like adults are talking around him, and he's just learning to walk, to hold himself up while everything is collapsing around him.

"Rozanov. That's his friend, man," Hayden says.

"The camp," J.J. agrees. "Oh, Hollander," J.J. says softly. "Hey, there is no news yet, yes? Maybe they just lost contact and they are returning. Maybe they made an emergency landing, yes?"

Shane doesn't answer. He thinks he blacks out.

Someone is helping him get on the bus, walking him to the back. There are murmurs around him.

Is he okay?

Oh, he's close with Rozanov.

Fuck, I hope they're okay.

Is there any news?

Hayden sits down next to him and murmurs to J.J. "I got it, it's okay. We don't wanna overwhelm him."

Shane is very grateful to his friend.

"I can't check the news," Shane says quietly, monotone. "Can you?" His voice doesn't sound like his own. It sounds too far away.

"Yeah, buddy. I'm gonna be checking the news the whole bus ride, okay? You're gonna be the first to hear anything."

Shane nods.

His phone rings.

'Mom'

"You wanna get that? I can give you some privacy," Hayden says.

Shane shakes his head. He can't do that right now. Because his mom knows about him and Ilya. His dad knows about him and Ilya. They're the only two people in the world who know, and if Shane talks to them, then…

Then it's not just his friend Rozanov who was on that plane. It's Ilya. It's his soulmate. It's the man he wants to marry.

His phone vibrates.

[Mom - 9:44 PM]

Call me when you can. We are praying for him. We love you so much.

"I think I'm gonna throw up," Shane says, his voice quiet but level.

"Shit. Okay. Hold on, uh…" Hayden scrambles a little, but somehow manages to procure a sick bag from somewhere in their seats, and holds it out.

Shane looks at it, and almost like it's his own choice rather than his body forcefully rejecting his stomach contents out, he vomits once into the bag, then sits up straight again.

"I got it," Hayden says, taking the bag.

"You don't have to-"

"Four kids," Hayden reminds him. He disappears for a moment, probably to throw the bag out in the bathroom behind them.

Shane looks at his mom's text, and then he notices another notification. Instagram.

IlyaRozanov **1 hour and 28 minutes ago**

sent you a message

Shane opens the message with trembling hands. He's three hours ahead. They lost contact at 5:30 PST. It's 9:48 PM EST. Ilya sent this as the plane lost contact.

I love you. Always. Maybe from the first time I saw you

I am thinking only about you right now. A million memories. Thank you for those.

Whatever happens, I am with you. Safe in your heart. I believe it.

He doesn't realize he's dropped his phone on the ground until Hayden is picking it up, holding it back out to Shane, only he pauses, looking at it.

"Holy shit," Hayden whispers.

Shane can't move. He can't turn his head to look at Hayden. He can't lift his hand to take his phone. He can't even tell if he's breathing right now.

"Holy shit," Hayden repeats. "Lily," he says, putting the pieces together.

Shane can't even nod. Someone else knows, now. Someone next to him. Which means it's not just his friend on the plane, someone he respects, someone he runs a charity with. It's Ilya. It's someone he loves.

His phone rings again in Hayden's hand. "It's your mom."

Shane doesn't move.

"Can I answer? She's probably… does she know? Can I answer?" Hayden asks.

“Yes,” Shane says quietly, answering all of the above.

Hayden sits down again and answers the phone, putting it to his ear.

“No, it’s Hayden. Yes. Yes, he’s here. I don’t know… maybe like, he’s in shock? No, nothing. Yes… yeah. No, I didn’t know. I just found out. Of course. Yeah. To yours? Yes, of course. We’ll be there as soon as we can. Yeah. I know. I know. Okay. I know,” Hayden says, then turns to Shane. “Can your mom talk to you?” He asks.

Shane doesn’t move.

“I’m just gonna… no, he’s not doing anything. I’m gonna hold the phone up for him.”

Then, his phone is held to his ear by Hayden, and he hears the voice of his mother. “My baby,” she says softly, and that’s all it takes for Shane to crumble.

“Mom,” he whispers.

“Oh, baby,” Yuna cries. “I know. We’re gonna figure this out. We’re gonna do everything we can, okay? You’ll be here so soon, and we’re gonna figure this out,” he says.

Shane nods. He isn’t sure what to figure out.

Because if he lets himself think about it, he knows. He knows.

Ilya is dead.

—-

Hayden is thankfully quiet for the rest of the ride to the airport. Shane would be grateful, if he had the capability to process anything. He's aware that he cries the entire way to the airport, because his face is wet, but he's not really processing that. He's silent at least, not drawing attention to himself as tears stream down his face.

The bus pulls up to the airport where the team will get on their chartered jet back to Montreal. Hayden sets a hand on Shane's knee. "We can wait until people are off," he says.

Shane nods, before a sinking feeling hits him. How is he supposed to get on an airplane? How is he supposed to get on a plane and not think about Ilya's last moments? What was it like? He obviously knew what was happening… he used his last moments to send Shane a message.

Shane retches again, but nothing comes out, and Hayden strokes his back. "Shane," he says softly, in a voice that makes Shane ache. He doesn't know what to do. There isn't anything to do.

"I'm okay," Shane says, and he stands when the bus is mostly empty.

Hayden walks in front of him, slowly, and stops him when they're off the bus. "Everyone knows you two are close, okay? With the charity and stuff. No one is thinking anything about you being upset, alright? I just… I know it's not the most important thing, but if you're worried about that, you don't have to be."

Shane leans in and hugs him and tries and fails not to sob into his neck.

Someone will bring their bags and equipment and everything to the plane. Shane just needs to walk, to put one foot in front of the other until he's on the plane, crossing the tarmac to their privately chartered jet.

No one says anything to him, but he feels eyes on him, curious, sympathetic. He hears whispers, murmurs. Hayden stays by his side, not unlike a guard dog, and fuck, Shane loves him. He hasn't even questioned anything, he hasn't said a single thing about it all.

Ilya is dead. Shane wonders if there will even be a body, or if it'll all be burnt up in the wreckage. If they'd gone from cruising altitude to crashing, probably.

"I'm just gonna text your mom, okay? So she knows we're getting on the plane, and then she can meet us at the airport," Hayden says, once he and Shane are seated in the back row of the plane. He hands Shane a water at some point, and Shane stares out the window the entire flight home, thinking about the last things Ilya would have seen. He gets through it, somehow. The plane lands.

He wishes it didn't. For a brief second, he wishes it didn't. He wishes his plane would crash too, because it would be easier than having to face this. Maybe he'd see Ilya again. He doesn't really believe that, but Ilya does. Shane is a selfish, horrible man, because he would sacrifice every single one of his teammates if it meant he could see Ilya again.

Hayden gets up after the plane lands and talks to some people up front. Shane can't see well, but it looks like he's talking to the coach and the social media manager. He comes back a few minutes later as the plane is taxing. "They're gonna make sure there's no press, okay? We may have to hang back a bit. Just… You know. Hollander and Rozanov. There's gonna be people wanting a statement."

Shane nods. "Okay."

He moves on autopilot once they're cleared to de-plane. J.J. claps him on the shoulder once, and a few other teammates say passing words of comfort. Shane doesn't register them. His coach stops him before he gets off.

"Be in touch, Cap. Whatever you need," he says.

Shane nods. "Thank you," his mouth says, but he doesn't even feel himself say it.

Hayden walks him out, takes him inside, practically shields him from any onlookers, and then he's pushed into his mom's car in the passenger seat while Hayden gets in the back. His mom reaches his arms over the center console and hugs him immediately.

"Shane," she exhales into his hair.

"Have you heard anything?" Shane asks, his voice too flat. He feels guilty for being able to speak, for being even somewhat composed. He should be inconsolable, right? Will that happen, he wonders?

He hasn't had the courage to check his phone, and he's trusted that Hayden would tell him if anything was reported, but he also knows his mom. He knows she'd fight for answers and use her connections.

A car honks at them from the pick up line.

"Let me get on the road, honey. Okay?" She says.

Shane nods.

They're pulling out of the airport when he can't wait any longer. "Mom," he says, his voice cracking.

"The plane reported turbulence about five minutes before it went down. It stabilized, and then it lost altitude suddenly," she says.

Shane feels his vision go black around the edges like he's in a tunnel. He can't tell if it's blurry because he's crying again or because his body is shutting down, focusing on vital things like breathing instead of seeing. All he registers is the red and white lights from the cars in front of them.

“The pilot reported that, and said they’d lost an engine. Air traffic control directed them to turn around and go to the nearest airport which was… I don’t remember. But they lost contact shortly after. They don’t know why,” she says.

“Yes, they do,” Shane says quietly. “Are they searching for wreckage now?”

Yuna nods. “Yes. But…” she hesitates. “They haven’t found anything yet. They were over the Rockies, but the plane hasn’t been found yet, where they would expect it to be. It’s possible, if it drifted for a while after telecommunications went down… They don’t know how off course it was before-”

Shane lets out a ragged sob, broken and awful, torn from his chest.

Yuna grabs his hand, and he feels Hayden reach forward to grip his shoulder.

“Hayden, are you… You’re okay coming to Ottawa?” Yuna asks.

“Of course,” Hayden agrees. “I talked to Jackie. She can come tomorrow and her sister will watch the kids,” he says.

Yuna nods. “Dad is home in case there’s any news. We have food, he’s making up the guest bed for you, Hayden,” she says.

“I want to die,” Shane whispers softly.

“Baby,” Yuna says, clutching his hand so much it hurts. Shane wishes it would hurt more.

“I can’t…” He says, and he reaches up with his free hand, now balled into a fist, and hits himself on the head, hard.

“Shane,” Hayden gasps at the same time Yuna says “Shane,” so soft, so disappointed.

He doesn’t care. He doesn’t care about disappointing anyone. All his life, he’s tried not to disappoint people; his parents, his coaches, his teammates, his fans. He never felt that with Ilya. He never worried if he was disappointing him. Maybe he should’ve. Maybe he was letting Ilya down too, and he didn’t even know it.

He hits himself again, twice more, as Yuna struggles between driving and intervening, and Hayden manages to reach around his headrest and catch his wrist.

“Sorry,” Shane says gruffly, shaking his hand away and setting it on his lap. The hand on his wrist was enough to snap him out of it, at least. He’s sure Hayden is scared, trying to catch Yuna’s eye in the rearview mirror. His mom has seen this before, though. Not for a while, not since Shane has been an adult. He used to do this when things were too much, when he couldn’t process anything. Hitting himself was something concrete, tangible, it hurt, but he could understand it. It distracted from the other things. He hasn’t done it in years. He thinks this warrants it.

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” she says.

“I need to close my eyes,” he says.

“Okay."

They’re quiet the rest of the way to Ottawa. Yuna pulls up to the house, and Shane’s dad steps out just as the car parks. Shane doesn’t move, so Hayden steps out and opens his door, and only then does Shane realize he should unbuckle. He steps out, and he’s instantly enveloped in his dad’s arms, firm and grounding. He fights every urge to push him away. He doesn’t want to cry more. If he’s given kindness, he’ll cry.

Still, he leans into the touch, inhaling deeply against his dad’s shoulder.

“Son,” David says quietly.

“What do I do?” Shane asks, his voice broken and small. “Dad, what do I do?”

David is quiet for a long moment, his hands firm on Shane’s back. “Nothing without us,” he finally says.

—

Somehow, Shane manages to change and brush his teeth. He forgoes dinner and thankfully no one pushes the issue. He crawls into bed and he takes out his phone, switching it to Do Not Disturb as he pulls up Instagram.

He rereads Ilya’s messages, trying to hear them in his voice, with his accent, before he taps on Ilya’s account. The last post is of the foosball table Shane had gifted him for Christmas. Shane hasn’t even seen the post. The one before that is of Shane’s exercise ball in Ilya’s gym. There’s one of a puzzle Ilya had done with Shane’s dad, one of his loon tattoo. Every single one, in some form, is about Shane, about them. No one else would know or suspect, but each and every post is an homage to their relationship, like a diary written in code. Had Ilya been so desperate to share their relationship that he was sharing these little clues, secret messages, an online journal to show how much he loved Shane?

And Shane hadn’t even congratulated him after his game.

He doesn’t actually stop crying, but at a certain point there’s just a steady stream of tears rather than body raking sobs. His mom comes in to check on him. She asks if she should stay, but he says no. She looks like she doesn’t believe him, but she leaves, despite the way it looks like it pains her.

His dad comes in after, sitting on the edge of his bed. He wishes he knew the right words for his dad to say, because he knows he wants to say something. He wants to comfort Shane, to tell him it will be okay, but there’s nothing to say. Nothing will ever be okay.

Hayden comes in a while later, sitting in the same spot his dad had. “Jackie can come with the kids tomorrow, if you want,” he offers.

Shane doesn’t answer.

“Maybe that would be a lot. I don’t know what to say,” he says after a pause. “I can’t even… I don’t know what you’re going through. I’m sorry. I just… I never knew. He makes you so happy. For so long,” Hayden trails off. He must have done the math, realized how long ‘Boston Lily’ had been in Shane’s life..

Shane nods once. He doesn’t know how Hayden is still using present tense.

“Whatever you need, man. Anything. Jackie and I are gonna be here. Okay?”

Shane nods again. He can’t speak, but Hayden doesn’t push it. He squeezes Shane’s shoulder and leaves.

Shane only knows he slept, because when he wakes up, it’s just starting to get light out. He’s confused for a brief moment, confused by being at his parent’s house, by the time, but then he remembers.

Ilya is dead.

He lets out a wretched sound and grabs his phone, turning notifications on again.

Rose has texted, same with J.J. and his coach. There are multiple news alerts.

The plane is still officially missing. There has been no progress, no leads.

There's a text from a number he doesn't recognize, and he opens it.

[Maybe: Svetlana Vetrova -11:44 PM]

Hello. Is this Shane?

This is Ilya's friend, Svetlana.

I think maybe you are important to him.

I would like to talk.

Shane bolts upright, typing out a response immediately.

[5:36 AM]

Yes. It's Shane.

I don't know what to do.

I feel like I'm dying

He doesn't know why he says it. It's true, but it doesn't make sense to send it to her. He's never talked to her. If he's honest, he's hated her. Not that that's fair. He's appreciated how she'd been there for Ilya, but he remembers that night, the first time Ilya had been to the cottage, when he'd said he could marry her. Shane's blood had boiled. And before that, during the infamous day of tuna melts, when he'd said it was nice to have someone regular around. He'd hated her. He'd hated her for existing and for knowing Ilya first.

Now, he wants to see her more than anyone. She knew Ilya. She knew him, maybe like Shane did. Maybe she hurts as much as he does.

[5:42 AM]

There is no more news. I keep checking. Do you know anything?

Have they found anything?

[5:44 AM]

Nothing.

[5:45 AM]

You love him, yes?

[5:45 AM]

Yes.

[5:46 AM]

I thought it was you.

He loves you too.

I wanted to meet you.

[5:47 AM]

It's my fault. I wanted it to be a secret.

I want to see you.

I feel like I'm going to die. I don't know what to do.

I want to wake up

[5:50 AM]

I will come. Ottawa?

[5:54 AM]

Yes.

[Address attached]

This is my house. I'll be there later today. I'm at my parent's now.

The possibility that this isn't really her, that it's some reporter or scammer doesn't even cross his mind. It doesn't matter. If there's a chance, he needs to see her.

[5:56 AM]

Okay. I will come.

Shane, I'm not giving up hope. Okay?

Ilya would not want that.

—

It's a near impossible task to leave his parents. They don't want him to leave, and it hits Shane, halfway into the argument, with Hayden and Jackie standing outside to give him privacy, that they don't trust him to be alone. They're worried about him. They don't know what he'll do on his own.

"I have to," he says, his voice broken. "I need to be in our bed."

"Then let us come," his mom begs. "We won't be in the way. Let us just be there, Shane. You shouldn't be alone."

He takes a steadying breath. "His friend is on her way."

His parents look a little stunned by this.

"Svetlana, you know? His oldest friend. She's coming. I just need… I'm sorry. I'm so close, if I need you, I'll call. Please. I promise. I'm not going to… I'm gonna be safe. Okay? I'll

call you later.”

His dad looks to his mom, and squeezes her hand, and he watches the two of them communicate silently. They know each other so well. He wonders if he and Ilya ever looked like that to anyone else.

Probably not. Shane wouldn’t allow that. He wouldn’t allow Ilya to love him like that in front of anyone else. He didn’t deserve Ilya, and now he’s gone.

“Okay,” Yuna says finally. “You call every hour, and if you don’t, I’ll come over.”

“Okay,” Shane agrees. “Jackie and Hayden will drive me there.”

Yuna nods, and she pulls him into a tight hug as David wraps his arms around the both of them.

“We love you, Shane,” he says, his voice soft.

Shane pulls away first because he doesn’t want to cry again. “You’ll keep calling places?”

“Yes,” Yuna agrees. “I won’t stop.”

—

Jackie and Hayden hug Shane at the door, helping him carry in the packaged food his mom insisted on sending him with. He knows he won’t touch it, but at least he’ll have something to offer Svetlana. She sent him her flight info earlier, and she’d insisted on renting a car from the airport.

It means he has two hours between Jackie stroking his hair and telling him to call if he needs anything, that they're getting a hotel nearby, and Svetlana arriving.

The moment the door closes behind Hayden and Jackie, he realizes this is a terrible idea. He's alone in his cottage, the place he's spent so much time with Ilya. He also can't think of anything worse than being here alone than being here with his parents or Hayden. It's not that he doesn't love them. They're being great. They're being perfect. It's just, nothing can fix this. No one can fix this. And he just wants to be alone for a while. He doesn't want to have to hold himself up in front of anyone else for a while.

He toes off his shoes and pads to his bedroom, which he really sees as their bedroom, and he crawls into bed.

He inhales into his pillow deeply and he hates himself. He hates how neurotic he is, the way he'd changed the sheets the last time he and Ilya had had a night here together. They don't smell like him.

Fuck. He needs Ilya. He needs Ilya badly. He feels like he's going to rip off his own skin, tear it from the bone, rip his own chest open, crack open his own ribs. He needs to scream. He needs to break something.

"Why?" He says into the empty room. Why? Of every plane? Of everyone? Why?

He wishes it had been him.

No, he doesn't. Then Ilya would be alone.

Ilya doesn't do well on his own. Shane thinks maybe he's been ignoring that for a while, because facing it will make him feel too guilty. Ilya had come here, to Ottawa, for him. He'd given up so much, and Shane wasn't enough for him. Shane didn't give him enough time. Ilya's been lonely, and so has Shane, but Shane's been denying it, like if he can ignore it for himself, he can will it away for both of them.

Shane isn’t doing so well on his own either.

He needs something of Ilya’s. It’s delusional, but maybe there’s a sock, some underwear beneath the bed, something of his, something Shane hasn’t sanitized or compartmentalized or tried to erase from his life, something he hasn’t sectioned off because he’s a fucking coward, and Ilya is too good for him, making himself small just to fit into the segmented boxes of Shane’s life.

He gets on his hands and knees beneath the bed, and he finds something he didn’t put there.

He slides it out, flat and hard, leatherbound.

It’s a notebook. Or a journal, maybe. Shane doesn’t know the difference, he just knows it’s not his. It’s something Ilya must have stowed away, hidden in Shane’s life, tucked away just like his full fat cream in the back of Shane’s fridge, and his Russian vodka stowed away in the freezer. Is that really all Shane had given him? Ilya uprooted his life, and Shane had given him little hidden nooks where he can burrow into.

Shane cracks it open, only to find words he doesn’t recognize. He’s learned the alphabet, and he can sound out words, but he can’t put them together, not these words. He sees a few he recognizes. ‘мама’ , mom. ‘Любовь’, love. He sees his own name.

He looks at the top corner of the page, and sees the date is from some time last year. He sifts through it, until the last page, and sees it’s still from some months ago. He didn’t know Ilya was journaling. He wonders if there’s more, ones before this, ones more up to date. He wonders how long Ilya has been putting his thoughts inside of a journal because he can’t open up to Shane.

—

Shane had envisioned meeting Svetlana many times. Maybe over drinks at some fun, trendy bar. He’d ask her for embarrassing childhood stories about Ilya, and Ilya would groan and pretend to be annoyed, but Shane would know he wasn’t, not really. Ilya would be so happy

to have his two favorite people in the world together in one spot. Shane would put his jealousy aside, and he'd be happy to meet someone who loves Ilya.

Shane never envisioned their first meeting to look like this. He never envisioned this lithe, beautiful woman having to hold Shane up by his arms so he wouldn't collapse the moment he opened the door for her. He never envisioned crying so hard he'd end up getting snot on the shoulder of her shirt, that she would stroke his back and tell him she knows, she knows, you sweet, poor boy. There's still hope. There's no news, which means there's still hope, but fuck, they both know they're lying to themselves.

"I need your help," he tells her, once he's calmed down, once she's been kind enough to get tissues from his own bathroom and pour him water from his own sink. He sets the leather bound diary on the table, and slides it across to her. "Please. I need to know what he was writing before… before-"

She looks down at the diary. "Ilya's? In Russian?"

Shane nods once. "I was going to google it but… I need to hear it from someone he loved." Shane gets a cold chill when he realizes he'd used past tense again. Svetlana isn't, so he shouldn't either, like maybe if he believes enough, it will be true. "Loves. I need to know."

Svetlana nods once. "Are there more?"

Shane shrugs. "I don't know. Probably. This one stopped a few months ago. Probably at his house."

"Are you sure… I mean. You didn't know he was writing these. They could find him. It's been a day. If you read these, you can't unread them," she says. "His… privacy?"

He can tell she's not even sure of herself, but he understands. He's asking her to read the private thoughts of her oldest friend, something he never intended to be read. "It's… It feels like this is all I have of him. Where he could be himself. His Instagram-" he cuts himself off, not wanting to cry again. "I just have to know."

“Okay. I can do it,” she says. “I can type it out, maybe that would be best? So you can read it on your own, then?”

“You would do that?”

She nods.

“How long can you stay? You can stay here. I’d like you to, I think,” he says.

“A few days. I can stay a few days. I can get a hotel-”

“No. No, Ilya would want you here. He would want us to be together. If… um. If you want,” he says. He doesn’t mention how having her here, Ilya’s oldest friend, his piece of home, with the same accent, makes him feel closer to Ilya.

“Yes,” she says, taking his hand from across the table. “He loves you so much. When he was back in Russia, the last time… for his father’s funeral. I knew he loved you then. I didn’t… I wasn’t sure it was you, but I knew it was love.”

Shane’s bottom lip shakes. “He always said how much he loved you too.”

Svetlana lets out a sound then, a high pitched cry that hits Shane in his core, and he stands up, kneels beside her chair, and wraps his arms around her body, holding her close. “Thank you for being here.”

Svetlana drives them to Ilya’s house in Ottawa, in the rental car. It’s a few hours later, after she’s eaten a few bites of some rice dish, and Shane has traced over the letters he can’t read over and over again. He needs to go tonight. He can’t imagine waiting a moment longer.

“Do you want me to-” she says once she parks in Ilya’s driveway.

“Please come with,” Shane says.

She nods, and gets out of the car. Shane leads the way, taking out the spare key.

He’s rarely here alone, only a handful of times when he’s arrived before Ilya. It’s never felt this empty, though.

He turns the key and steps inside. It’s dark, echoing the sound of Svetlana’s heels as she steps inside behind him. Shane kicks off his sneakers and waits as Svetlana bends over and pulls her heels off.

He hears a sniffle and turns to her, her cheeks wet, glistening with the moonlight seeping through the windows.

“Sorry,” she whispers.

Shane remembers how Ilya had said the same thing the first time he cried. Maybe it was a Russian thing, to apologize for emotion. Shane gets it.

“I just have never been here. To his home. I didn’t think it would be… without him,” she whispers, her voice breaking at the end.

She looks so delicate now, so small. Shane has spent years intimidated by her, jealous of her, this woman who has held such an important spot in Ilya’s life. It seems so silly now. Shane should have realized how much she loved him and how beautiful it was. Seeing her here, crying, small, Shane feels guilty for ever having one ounce of malice toward her.

“I know,” he says softly.

He also feels guilty for his own protectiveness of his relationship with Ilya, something that maybe bordered on paranoia. Ilya would have had Svetlana over if it weren’t for Shane, he is sure of it. He would have hosted dinners for the three of them, gotten drunk and laughed and talked about everything. Shane never would have allowed it.

“Um,” Shane starts, because he thinks of something. “It’s probably not a good time to ask but… have you heard from his family? His brother?”

She nods once, sharply. “You don’t have to worry about that. I will handle.”

Shane frowns. “You don’t need to do all that.”

She shakes her head. “No. It’s just his brother. He barely speaks English anyway. And he is awful. Already asking about a body, about money.”

Shane’s chest aches at the mention of the word body. Is that all Ilya is now? Soulles, a shell, burnt up somewhere in the mountains? It’s so cold out there. Ilya hates the cold.

“What are you gonna-“ Shane starts.

“Ilya changed his will. I know this. His brother is entitled to nothing, and there is a trust for his niece. There is nothing more to say to that scum, okay?”

“Thank you,” Shane nods. While it’s of course unfortunate that Ilya has no family, no one back home, it does uncomplicate that aspect of things. “My mom is… she’s really pushy. Like, um. She pushes for answers. She’s talking to people, trying to find things out.”

Svetlana nods. “Yuna Hollander.”

Shane seems surprised by this. “Did Ilya mention her?”

Svetlana smiles softly, the first one Shane’s seen. “No. You are a very good hockey player, Shane. I like hockey. I like to know things.”

Shane nods stiffly. “Uh… I should go look. His bedroom, probably.”

“Okay,” she says. “I will wait out here.”

Shane is grateful. It seems as though Svetlana knows exactly where he’ll need her and where to stay back. Ilya’s bedroom is for Shane alone. No one else besides a decorator has stepped inside of it.

Shane walks through the house with a purpose, keeping his eyes forward, single minded with his mission. He moves to the bedroom, not daring to look at anything besides the night stand yet. It’s the place that makes the most sense, he thinks. Ilya would probably be writing in bed. Unless he had the journal with him. Unless the journal is burned, lost in the wreckage, with Ilya.

It wouldn’t be in the drawer where lube and toys are kept, because Shane goes in that drawer. He opens the thinner drawer above that one, and it’s about the first thing that’s gone right. There, right on top, is a journal identical to the one at home.

Shane opens it up, looking at the letters he can sound out, but not quite decipher. This one starts shortly after the last one ended. He slips through the pages, and it stops abruptly, right after New Years, right when Ilya would have left for his Washington game. Shane clutches the journal to his chest, hugging it close.

He misses Ilya.

He sits down on the edge of the bed, and it's a mistake. He can't help himself as he lays down, slowly laying back in the middle of the bed. He stays like that for a moment, before he moves up the bed, and rests his head on Ilya's pillow.

It smells like him. Shane burrows into it, pressing his nose into the fabric. It smells like his hair product and his shampoo and his cologne and faintly human too.

He shuts his eyes and pretends Ilya is here, laying on Shane's side of the bed.

"I miss you," he says softly. "I really want you to come home, Ilya. You kinda have to. I don't know what I'm gonna do if you don't come home. So you have to. For me. I know you'd do anything for me. So even if you feel like giving up, or you don't want to come home for you, you have to for me. Okay?"

He keeps his eyes screwed shut for a few long moments, like the longer he keeps them closed, the longer he can imagine Ilya is there, next to him. If he opens them, the bed will be empty besides himself. He doesn't want to see it. "Ilya," he whispers, and this time he hears the wetness in his own voice, the crack in his throat as he tries to hold back a sob.

It's futile.

He doesn't realize he's screaming until Svetlana is bursting through the door. She throws herself over him, covering his body with her own, her hands rubbing up and down his back, then wrapping around him and holding him tight to her chest. He's screaming so loud it hurts his own ears. His throat aches. He's sobbing, crying, but he's mostly screaming, guttural and awful. He feels Svetlana tremble against him. He's scaring her but he can't stop, so he forces his head into the pillow, fabric stuffed into his mouth to at least muffle the horrible sound. He doesn't want to hear himself either.

It's like if he screams enough, he won't have to feel it. He can take all of the pain and put it outside of him. A careful life of holding things in has done nothing for him. He lets it out, hoping it will help, but how does someone force out twenty-nine years of repression? Ilya had done his due diligence, spooning out careful bits of emotion. He'd worked hard, dutiful and careful, not enough to scare Shane off, but enough to let some of it seep out, to let it sit between them, or to take some of it on himself.

“Shane,” Svetlana whispers against his ear. “You have to breathe. You’re going to hurt yourself or pass out. Breath,” she soothes.

Shane tries to, but he chokes on the breath. He tries again, and then it feels like he’s hyperventilating. The only interruption between the wracking breaths are sobs, but it’s better than screams, maybe. He’s calming down. His head is pressed to her chest, and maybe he should feel weird about that, like it’s inappropriate or something, but he doesn’t. It’s comforting, being held there while her hands rub over his back.

He wonders if she did this for Ilya, back when they were children. When Ilya found his mother.

He wonders if he’s with her now. He hopes desperately that whatever Ilya believed about the afterlife is true, that he’s with her again. Maybe Shane would see her some day, then. He hopes it’s soon. He feels immense guilt the moment he thinks it, guilt for wishing himself gone, for what it would do to his mom and dad.

Maybe something good will happen, like an asteroid will come wipe out the entire planet. Then he could be with Ilya and his parents, and no one would miss him, and he wouldn’t have to miss anyone, because everyone would be together. It would be juvenile if it weren’t so dark.

Day two without Ilya, and Shane is manifesting a mass extinction event.

Svetlana makes a sound above him, soft and gentle, and it takes him a few moments to realize she’s singing something. It’s soft, and a little sad, in a language he wishes he understood better. He picks up a few of the words. He hears the word for sleep and the word for moon.

Eventually, his breathing slows down and his sobs quiet. He lifts his head up, and looks at her, his vision blurred. His head hurts so much from crying. It hurts so much he feels it in his teeth.

Svetlana doesn't look scared when she looks back at him. She looks sad, maybe a little worried, but not scared.

"I'm sorry," Shane says softly, just like she had.

"No reason to be."

"What was the song?"

"Ilya liked it. When we were little. After… his mom. She would sing it to him, so then I would sing it to him too. He said he was too old for lullabies, but it always helped him sleep," she says, her eyes watering.

Shane pulls her tight to him. He's never been particularly physically affectionate, but he can't help it. "I'm so happy he had you," he whispers into her curly hair.

"He has us," she says. "Let's go back, okay?"

"Okay."

Chapter 2: I Know You Have a Lot of Strength Left

Chapter Notes

> Hellooooo. Some mild gore in this chapter btw.
>
> I spent a good amount of time researching plane crashes but I won't lie that some of my info is from Yellowjackets and Lost, so apologies if anything is inaccurate. Don't use this as a guide for surviving a plane crash ;P

Ilya dreams of his mother, but this time it feels more real than the other times. She isn't at the cottage this time. She's next to him on the plane, occupying the empty seat beside him, looking ahead. She's more clear than she usually is. Usually she's a little blurred around the edges, slightly transparent, like if Ilya tried to touch her, his hand would go right through her. Now, she looks just as real as her surroundings.

"Mama," he says quietly, looking to her. He doesn't want anyone else to hear him. She looks at him and smiles softly, before she lowers her head, resting it between her knees, her hands folding on top of her forehead.

"Mama?" Ilya asks.

"Do what I'm doing, Ilyusha," she says softly in Russian.

"The oxygen mask," Ilya says, questioning. Isn't he supposed to wear it?

"It's too late for that, my love. Put your head down."

Ilya does, mimicking his mother's position. He lowers his head and puts his arms on top of it, hands folded together nearty in his hair, and he turns his head to the side enough to look at her. She doesn't look back. Her eyes are shut, like she's bracing herself.

When his eyes open again, she's gone. Ilya smells smoke. He straightens up, looking around. Something is very wrong. The overhead compartments are open, bags flung from them. There is so much noise. Shouting and screaming, and awful metallic clanging.

"Mama?" He says softly. "Mama?" He repeats, crying out. Someone grabs his hand, and when he looks up, Harris is locking eyes with him.

"Ilya," he says, his voice strained. He looks panicked, his eyes frantic, a small gash on his cheek.

Okay. Ilya needs to get up.

"Troy," Harris says desperately. "He's hurt."

Ilya steps into action, only giving the seat next to him one last perfunctory look to make sure his mother is really gone. He undoes his seatbelt, suddenly aware that the plane they're on is no longer moving. It's also no longer whole. When he looks in front of him, there's a handful of rows, and then a big opening. There is snow and pine trees and nature, through the gaping hole of where the cockpit should be, glistening in the golden hour sun.

Ilya moves to the row in front of him and gets down on his knees, in front of where his teammate is unconscious, slumped back in his seat.

He doesn't know what to do. He's not a paramedic. He remembers that April back in 2017, when Shane had gone down on the ice. He'd felt helpless and paralyzed, wanting to help,but having no idea how.

"I think he hit his head," Harris says, and then he leans in and pulls back Troy's eyelids, one by one. What the fuck. "Okay. They aren't enlarged, so maybe he doesn't have a brain bleed," Harris says, but it sounds like he's guessing.

“Have you seen a woman?” Ilya asks. “Blonde?”

“What?” Harris says, looking to Ilya with wide, confused eyes. “No. We crashed. Are you okay? Did you hit your head?”

Ilya stands up slowly, feeling very separate from his body. It feels like one of his video games, like he’s pressing a button and telling his limbs what to do, as he stands and looks around.

Yes. They crashed. That’s why the plane is broken. That is why they aren’t moving. The plane was falling, and it did what things do when they fall and nothing intervenes to catch them. It hit the ground.

Haas is shaking in the seat one row back, trying and failing to undo his seatbelt. Ilya takes a step forward and unclicks it.

“Thanks,” he says quietly, looking up at Ilya.

Okay. Okay. So they crashed. But they’re alive. Ilya saw his mom. But he’s alive. He’s the captain of this team. They’re alive.

“Okay,” he says loudly, surprised by his own volume. “Look around you,” he says, assessing. ”Help your neighbor. Is anyone else unconscious?” he asks.

No one answers.

“Hello!” He yells, maybe too loud, he should’ve cut the middle, but this time, people look up, twenty odd some sets of wide, scared eyes, all on him. He doesn’t register them, doesn’t make eye contact with anyone. He can’t see their fear right now, or he won’t be able to speak. “If you can get up, get up. Check on the people next to you. Tell me if someone can’t wake up. Or if someone is hurt. Okay?”

“Yes, Captain,” a chorus of quiet murmurs comes out. People move, shuffling around, speaking quietly, assessing the people in their rows.

Ilya nods once before he looks to the gaping hole in the front of the plane. “Do not leave here,” he orders. No one looks like they have any plans of leaving.

Coach Wiebe was in front, along with a half dozen other coaches and trainers, the equipment manager, and the pilot of course. Probably the flight attendant too.

Ilya takes few steps forward, but the plane creaks beneath him, making an awful metallic grating sound. He stops halfway up the aisle, between his team and that broken, jagged hole.

“Coach?” He asks. He doesn’t see anything besides snow and trees.

“Roz,” someone calls back, sounding scared. Ilya turns around to see Zane Boodram looking at him. His expression is awful, crumpled and horrified.

Ilya doesn’t speak. He slowly walks back to the row that Bood is in, and in slow motion, he forces himself to look.

It’s the rookie, the one a few months younger than Haas, scouted right after high school, young and quiet, still finding his own footing.

His fibula, Ilya thinks, the larger of the two bones in his shin, is broken. Ilya knows this, because he is looking at the jagged, broken edges of it, burst through the rookies flesh, through his sweatpants.

He should be screaming. He’s not.

Ilya can’t speak either, his tongue feeling numb and sluggish in his mouth.

“Captain,” Bood says quietly.

The rookie, Maxwell, looks sheet white, clammy and sweaty, his eyes glassy and staring straight ahead, his breath shallow. Breathing, though. He is breathing. Ilya will do everything he can to keep it that way.

Ilya nods, steadying himself. There’s so much blood. This is too much blood. There’s red everywhere, soaking through the grey fabric of the rookie’s sweatpants.

“Belt,” Ilya barks. “We need a belt.”

Wyatt is next to him then, undoing the belt of his khakis. Everyone else is mostly in athletic wear, but Wyatt was supposed to meet his wife for a late dinner, so he’d dressed before. She was supposed to get him from the airport. It’s their anniversary. He’d been excited.

The leather belt is pushed into Ilya’s hands. A few people hover, but most probably can’t stomach the sight, others still checking on each other, moving luggage that has fallen, undoing stuck seatbelts.

“Bood,” Ilya says. “I think… Maybe he should bite something? Yes? Like on tv? So he doesn’t bite his tongue?” Ilya doesn’t fucking know.

Bood nods, and he picks up the in flight magazine from the seat, rolling it up.

“You stay by his head, okay? Maybe like… talk to him.”

“Yeah. Yeah,” Bood nods.

Ilya lowers himself to his knees, and only then does he realize he's in pain, his hip aching sharply as he moves. He must have hurt it on the landing. He feels lucky, though. His bones are all still inside his body. He remembers the vision of his mother, telling him how to brace for impact, and he wonders if that was the difference; if he'd had his legs crossed or his knees pushed up against the seat in front of him, if his bone wouldn't be pushed through his flesh too.

The wound is partially obstructed by the sweatpants, but it makes little difference. There is stark white bone that's mostly covered in deep, dark red, with viscera and skin sticking to it. When Ilya looks closer, he sees where the lower half of the bone snapped, the part that went straight up through Maxwell's shin, beneath his knee. Ilya can't see the other part of the bone, where it may be hanging on to muscle above. It's hard to tell how out of place things are with how wet and dark everything is.

"Okay?" Ilya asks, his eyes flicking up to Bood. He doesn't dare to look at Maxwell, with his unseeing eyes, his jaw pried open to tuck the rolled up magazine inside.

"Okay," Bood says distantly.

Ilya moves slowly, lining the belt up below Maxwell's thigh, and his fingertips go to touch him there, to lift it enough to slide the belt beneath it.

His body jerks like some animal, trapped and confused.

"Hey, hey, hey," Bood says, in a tone that wishes to be soothing but comes out more frantic.

"Hold him still," Ilya says, cringing at how harsh the order comes out.

Bood does something above Ilya, maybe pushes his hand to Maxwell's chest, and then Ilya is quick, lifting the rookie's thigh up to slide the belt beneath it, before he sets it down, ignoring the way the man writhes in his touch.

He makes a sound like a sob or a gargle, animalistic and awful. It makes Ilya feel sick. Not the gore in front of him, the blood and the bone, but that sound, like it's been ripped out of him, has bile rising in Ilya's throat.

Ilya pulls one end of the belt through the buckle, and looks up at Bood again. "I will have to do this very tight, I think. He is bleeding so much. It's not going to be good," he says, clinical and emotionless. It is a fact. This will hurt.

"Shit. Okay," Bood answers, and he moves to hold down both of the rookie's shoulders.

Ilya does it as quickly as he can, yanking the belt tight before buckling it.

The man above him howls, his body spasming, and then just as quickly he goes limp, slumping over while Bood tries to support his head enough to guide it back on the seat.

"Fuck," Ilya says, standing. "Is that bad?"

"It's probably from shock," Wyatt says from where he's standing behind Boodram. "Lisa.. uh. I'm trying to call her, but-" Right. Wyatt's wife is a doctor.

"No service," Harris says from a few rows up. "I checked. Can someone… It's Troy. He's breathing, his pulse is there, but he's not waking up," Harris's voice cracks. "You guys have seen concussions, can you-"

Ilya steps out of the aisle, feeling more alert than when he first saw Troy. He doesn't feel attached to himself yet, but he can process things. He's not looking for his dead mother anymore.

"Recovery position," Wyatt says. "I think that's it. On his side, in case he vomits. Uh… you have to keep his neck stable in case it's injured. Check pupils, pulse, breathing, vomiting," he rattles off.

“That’s good,” Ilya nods. Positive feedback is good. As captain, it’s important to give positive feedback, he says, reciting the words he’s heard from coaches through the years.

Wyatt steps up. “I can move him, Harris, you help hold his head.”

Ilya nods, grateful for someone else to do the lifting. He looks down to find his fingers are shaking and they’re bright red, covered in blood. He wipes them off on a seat but it doesn’t do much.

He also notices for the first time that it’s cold. It’s very cold. He can’t even tell if his fingers are shaking from adrenaline or from the chill. When he looks over at his teammates, he sees their breath in the air. It makes him want a cigarette.

“Okay,” Ilya nods. “Harris and Hayes, you take care of Troy.”

The two nod and step into action, the plane creaking as they move forward.

“Go slow. The rest of you, stay back here. We don’t know if the plane is stable… the weight, uh…” he can’t think of the word.

“Distribution,” Haas supplies from where he’s still sitting in the aisle row, beside another teammate, O’Connell, a father, close to retirement. Both men look to be in one piece, at least.

“Yes. Thank you. Bood, you stay with Maxwell. The bleeding is stopped?”

“It’s hard to say, Cap.”

“Maybe, can you tear his sweatpants off? We can look for first aid, something to clean it?”

Bood nods.

“Rozanov,” Haas says softly. “Where’s coach?”

Ilya frowns. “I don’t know. And the pilot too. Fuck…” Ilya says, thinking. “Assistant coaches, goal coach, equipment manager, trainer… They were in front. I called and I didn’t hear an answer.” There were potentially eight to ten people up front. Ilya can’t count them right now. He has people in front of him, and there’s more damage that needs assessing.

“Maybe the other part of the plane is up ahead,” Luca says optimistically.

“Yes,” Ilya nods, but he feels sick saying it. “Probably. I don’t want us to move yet until people are stable. I don’t want the plane to shift.”

Haas nods.

Ilya looks around him. There are twenty players and Harris back here, and two trainers who happened to be in back with players when it went down, there’s Gen, the photographer. That’s all Ilya sees. Everyone else who worked for the team, and everyone who worked on the plane was up front.

Only then, a sound comes from the back of the plane, and a small, female voice calls out for help.

“I got it,” Dykstra says, standing up from the back row.

Ilya nods. Okay. Twenty players, Harris, Gen, two trainers, and the flight attendant.

Troy is unconscious. Maxwell is hurt. The flight attendant is calling for help.

“Who else is hurt?” Ilya says, looking around.

“My wrist is broken,” Chouinard says, where he’s sitting a few rows up. “Sorry, it just… wasn’t as important.”

“Okay. So… sit tight. We will see what we can use to make a brace, yes?”

Chouinard nods, and Ilya’s chest aches with something. Pride or sorrow, the way he’s sat here, no doubt in pain, but not daring to take away attention from anyone who needs it more. “And Cap? Uh…” he sighs, bracing himself. “Boyle was in front too. He was sitting next to me, but he had to talk to coach Wiebe about something. He went up there before the turbulence."

Fuck. “Okay. We are going to take care of our people here, and then we are going to find the rest.”

“Hey!” Dykstra calls from the back. “Can someone give me a hand? The cart is stuck, she’s okay but she’s blocked in.”

Reg, a backup goalie Ilya doesn’t know as well, steps up. “Coming,” he says.

Okay. Ilya stands still in the aisle, going over what he knows, who is here, who is hurt, who is missing, what needs to be done, the priorities.

“The sun is setting,” Haas says quietly, almost inaudibly. The words send a chill down Ilya’s spine.

“Yes,” he says. It is, and fast. It was already setting by the time they crashed, and things are getting dark quickly. “Haas, you want to help me find supplies? Flashlight, blanket, first aid, water, that sort of stuff?”

Haas stands.

“Okay,” Ilya nods. At least he has something to do besides going through another mental inventory.

“Ilya,” Gen calls from a row further up.

He turns quickly, facing her.

“I’m coming to help. We have to find the ELT,” she says.

Ilya stares at her as she stands.

“The Electronic Location Transmitter. It’s an orange box. It’ll be somewhere in the rear. We can look for flares and things too,” she says.

“How do you know this?” Ilya asks incredulously.

“I watch a lot of crash investigation shows, okay? Come on,” she says, stepping up and nudging him.

The three of them move toward the back of the plane, where Dykstra and Reg have managed to untrap the flight attendant. She’s banged up, and there’s a gash on her arm, tearing the blue sleeve of his shirt, but she seems okay. She’s probably in her forties, petite and scared looking, sitting on the floor with Dykstra’s hoodie draped over her shoulders as she shakes.

Gen gets down on her knees in front of her. “We need to find the ELT,” she says. “And anything we can use.”

She nods, and Gen helps her to her feet. “Okay. It’s back here,” she says, leading Gen to a compartment in back. Ilya doesn’t follow, not wanting to crowd them. Moments later, a sort of impromptu assembly line forms. The flight attendant, Ilya curses himself because he doesn’t even know her name yet, pulls out stacks of blankets. She passes them to Gen, who passes them to Ilya, who passes them to Dykstra, who passes them to Haas, who starts passing them out to the team. The same routine is done with some flashlights.

“There’s a compartment above the emergency exits,” the flight attendant speaks loudly enough for Ilya to hear. “It will have flares and rafts, maybe an axe, but you can only access it outside of the plane, for post evacuation. So people don’t use them to hijack,” she explains. “There are life vests under the seats, people can use those for warmth too.”

“What about the ELT?” Gen asks. Ilya is glad, because that also seems the most important to him.

“Got it,” the flight attendant says triumphantly, holding up a screwdriver from the compartment. “I need this to take the panel off to get the ELT,” she explains, and then she moves away from the compartment to go further back toward a panel near the tail. She kneels, and Ilya watches as she undoes the panel, screw by screw, and then pulls out an orange box.

“You know how it works?” He asks.

“Yes. And there’s a manual,” she says.

“Thank god you were back here. Your name?”

“Beth,” she answers.

“Thank you, Beth. I am Ilya. This will tell them where we are?”

Beth is quiet for a moment as she studies it.

“Beth?”

She looks up at him. “It’s supposed to go off automatically, during a crash. It should. When it’s triggered by a certain G-force. But if the pilots anticipate a crash, they do a manual activation,” she explains. “They would have done that,” she says.

“Okay,” Ilya says. “So… Good? Yes?”

“They have a…” She inhales. “They have about a fifty percent success rate. During crashes.”

She holds up the orange box, and Ilya’s eyes hone in on the antennae, metal and shiny and broken, cracked in half.

“Oh,” Ilya says, and his knees buckle. He clutches the beverage cart just as Dykstra goes to hold him up.

“Now what?” Gen asks. “If we find the cockpit, we can see if their transmissions are working, right?”

Beth doesn’t move, doesn’t speak.

“Right?”

She stands slowly. “What do you mean? Find the cockpit?” She asks.

Oh. Right. She’s been trapped back here, blocked in her lodgings by a cart that wedged itself against the door. She doesn’t even know the plane has been dissected, severing them from the

rest.

No one speaks, so Ilya does. “The plane is… not whole.”

She moves quickly then, pushing past them, and she stops dead in her tracks as she looks out at the hole that should be the front of the plane, now nearly dark. Ilya notices the darkness too. Somehow, there are some emergency lights still on, running along the floor and ceiling of the plane, flickering like even they don’t know how they’re still on, like they’re just waiting to give out. Still, it is now very dark. Ilya watches as his teammates use flashlights to see, pulling down their carry-ons from the overhead compartments to pull out additional clothes for warmth.

“I’m sorry,” Ilya says.

“They’re all dead,” she says softly. “There’s no way… If the plane broke apart-” she stops herself from continuing.

Ilya feels incredibly cold.

“Okay,” Gen speaks, her voice authoritative. “We don’t know that, and if the ELT is dead, our best shot is finding the cockpit, because they could have a way to transmit a signal, right?”

Beth shakes her head. “He lost it. He lost contact when the plane dropped the first time.”

Ilya doesn’t remember the plane dropping more than once. He remembers the turbulence, and then a drop. He remembers screaming, his stomach plummeting. He remembers pulling his phone out and messaging Shane, and he remembers his mother. He doesn’t remember the impact.

“Maybe he can find it again,” Gen says, her voice starting to sound desperate. “We look for the cockpit. If we can’t find that, we figure out how to get to the flares. It’s dark out, they’ll be visible. People will be looking for us,” she says.

Beth nods, but she has a sort of far away look on her face that terrifies Ilya.

“Is a good plan,” he answers Gen. “You both will come with? In case…” he pauses, then lowers his voice. “If the pilot is dead, someone who knows how things work, yes?”

“Yes,” Beth agrees.

Gen nods.

“I’ll come too,” Haas says. “If people need help or anything.”

“Good. Okay,” Ilya says. “Our coaches are there. One of our players is there. The pilot is there. We are going to find them, and we are going to contact someone.”

Dykstra claps Ilya on the back. “That’s right,” he agrees, encouraging.

Ilya steps back into the cabin of the plane, and looks to Bood first, who is still sitting beside Maxwell. “How is he?”

Bood frowns. “No change. He’s breathing. He’s cold. I put blankets on him, but he hasn’t woken up.”

Ilya nods, but then, there is the first sign of something going right.

“Troy,” he explains, moving forward quickly, getting on the ground in front of where Troy Barrett is sitting upright, leaning heavily on Harris.

“He is awake!” Ilya says, his tone unbelievably happy, his eyes flicking between Troy, who looks a little dazed, and Harris, who can’t stop looking at Troy.

“Quieter,” Harris whispers.

“I think it’s a bad concussion. He was out for a while, so…” Wyatt says. “But it’s really good he’s awake, isn’t it, Troy?” Wyatt says.

“Yeah,” Troy rasps out. “Hi Roz.”

“Hi,” Ilya smiles, and reaches forward to squeeze Troy’s hand firmly, and then he leans in and kisses him on the top of his head. It’s stupid, but he’s just happy for one thing to be okay.

“Keep your eyes closed, buddy,” Harris murmurs softly. “Just relax.”

“He is in good hands,” Ilya says, squeezing Harris’s hand as he stands.

He turns to Chouinard, who holds up his wrist, braced in some hockey tape and a broken off handle from an overhead compartment. “Connors patched me up good,” he says. “We found some Advil too.”

“Good,” Ilya nods. “This is good,” He turns to the rows behind him where most people sit, and he speaks loud enough to be heard, but gently enough to not hurt Troy, hopefully.

“Listen up. Everyone needs to stay warm, okay? Put on your extra clothes, use blankets, gloves, hats. The life vests can help too. This is Beth,” he says, nodding to the flight attendant standing in between the tail section of the plane and the main cabin. “Beth, Gen, Haas, and I are going to try to find the front of the plane. We are going to look for our people, and we are going to find a way to signal that we are here.”

He doesn't tell them about the ELT. They didn't know about it in the first place, so they don't need to know that it's broken. No one else who knew about it says anything either, which Ilya is grateful for. He can tell them after, but he doesn't need to give anyone another thing to lose hope over.

"They have to be looking for us, right?" Wyatt speaks.

"Of course," Ilya nods.

"Yes," Gen says. "I'm sure everyone is looking."

Ilya is sure too. Of course they are. Canada, America, he is sure it is everywhere. It's just… it's dark. And it's cold. And they're in the wilderness, presumably. And people are hurt. And people are missing. And he really wants some fucking confirmation that someone knows where they are. He doesn't want people looking, he wants people on their way. He wants to be found.

Shane is probably panicked.

Ilya shuts his eyes tightly, just for a moment, like he can will that thought away. He can't think about that right now. He has a job to do. He can't think about Shane panicked, worrying about him, reading those messages and thinking Ilya is dead. He really thought he was going to die when he sent them.

"People coming with me," he says. "Coats, gloves, anything to stay warm. Does not matter if it's yours, if someone has something warmer, okay?"

Teammates stand then, pulling things from their suitcases, offering their warmest items, gloves and coats and hats to the four person mission. It's a briefly touching moment in a sea of chaos. He feels like he's suiting up for armor. Once they're armed with flashlights, Ilya stands in front.

“I will go first, slowly. One step at a time. No one follows until I am off the plane, okay? I don’t want two people in front shifting the balance,” he says.

The other three nod.

“Okay,” Ilya says, and then he steels himself, faces forward, and takes slow, steady steps toward the hole. He only hopes it’s not too far off the ground. The ground seems level right in front, at least, not at some awful angle that could have them up in the air. When he gets to the edge, his flashlight illuminating the sight in front of him, he is relieved to see snow only about two feet down.

He assesses, and then he jumps, cringing at the way the plane creaks from the movement, but he needs to avoid the jagged, broken edges of the plane, and there is no one there to catch him.

It’s quiet outside. It’s so quiet and it’s so cold, and it smells like smoke. It smells heavily of smoke.

“Okay,” he calls out. “Next person.”

A minute goes by, and then Gen is there, standing two feet above him. He steps close to the broken edge, and reaches out. “Get down, and I will carry you.”

“Fuck’s sake,” she huffs, but she listens, and Ilya lifts her easily enough, depositing her on the snow.

Luca is next, and Ilya doesn’t carry him, but he does hold a hand out, and helps guide his jump away from the plane, onto the snow.

Beth is next. Ilya tells her to lower herself down, and she does. He wraps his arms around her, while Luca and Gen shine flashlights to illuminate things. He lifts her up, and then he lowers

down into the snow, right beside where he'd set Gen. He leans down to pick up his flashlight he'd set in the snow, and when he stands up, she's gone.

A scream starts but it's cut off almost immediately, before it's replaced by Gen screaming and Haas yelling "What the fuck!"

Ilya is frozen. "What…" he says, unable to form words. "Where?"

"Beth!" Gen screams. "Beth, where are you?"

Ilya can't process what's just happened. He picked her up. She was in his arms. He set her down, and now she's gone. He frantically sweeps with his flashlight until it lands on a disturbance in the snow, a trail made by a body that looks to be about ten or fifteen feet long until it drops. Nothing. Blackness.

"I set her down," Ilya says quietly. "I set her down on the ground. I didn't drop her," he says. He doesn't know if he's speaking to himself or to anyone else. "I set her down."

Luca puts a hand on Ilya's shoulder. "You did. I saw it. She was on her feet and then… Like the snow shifted. It broke apart."

Ilya feels like he's been seeing tunnel vision this entire time, since they crashed. He's been seeing what's right in front of him. He's been seeing problems, prioritizing them, trying to solve each one in order of importance, right in front of him. He slowly turns away from Luca, and he lifts his flashlight, panning out for the first time. The blinders he's been wearing fall off, and the flashlight illuminates the whole picture.

All around them, at every side, are drops. Sharp, jagged, sloping, dangerous angles. He turns back to the plane, his eyes following his flashlight.

"Fuck," Gen whispers.

They have three quarters of a plane, sitting atop the ridge of a mountain. In front of them are taller peaks. Beneath them are shorter peaks.

“Ilya,” Haas says softly.

Ilya turns to where he’s looking, his eyes tracing down the light of the flashlight, to something about a hundred meters down and fifty meters away, resting atop of another ridge not dissimilar to the one their part of the plane is precariously perched.

Ilya knows why it smells like smoke now. Beneath them, is what was the front of their plane, broken pieces big and small strewn about in a trail of debris, with black, thick smoke billowing out of it.

Chapter 3: All the Things I Should've Said That I Never Said

Chapter Notes

> You get two chapters today because I wrote a lot.
>
> This chapter is super heavy. Like very heavy. The tags are doing some heavy lifting for this chapter, so take care.
>
> I'll have another one up tomorrow, once I edit it.
>
> The dates for the diaries are in DD.MM.YY format, hopefully I did that correctly!

Shane sets the second journal on the kitchen table in his home, next to the first one. It's late by the time they get back to the cottage.

"I can do some tonight," she says.

He looks at her, surprised.

"I'm not tired. I'll do some."

"Thank you," he says.

"Do you have anything to drink?"

Shane goes to his fridge. "Water, ginger ale, I can make you a juice-"

"No, ah…" she looks away, like she doesn't want to admit it. "Stronger. I just… I think it would help me. To read these."

“Oh,” Shane says. That makes sense, but he feels guilty, asking her to do a task so horrendous she needs to numb herself to do it.

He pulls Ilya’s vodka from the freezer, almost full. “This okay?”

She smiles softly. “I sent him that. That would be good.”

He brings the bottle to the table along with two glasses, and he sits across from her.

She opens it, and pours them each some. He should feel bad for not being a gentleman, for not pouring it, but it’s so foreign to him. Her fingers leave clear indents over the frost on the bottle.

“Thanks,” Shane says.

Svetlana lifts her glass up, and it feels weird, but Shane clinks his against hers before he takes a swallow, wincing at the taste.

“Ugh,” he grimaces.

“It hasn’t grown on you?” She asks.

He shakes his head. “The first time I had this…” he thinks about the memory. It used to hurt more, but now he thinks about it more bittersweetly. Like, if only he could tell those two men, those young men, where they’d end up.

Only… well. Now he’s ended up here. And it’s worse than anything he could’ve ever imagined.

She waits patiently, not pushing for him to continue. He gets why Ilya loves her.

"It was in Vegas. We'd uh… you know," he says, and she nods, agreeing, she does indeed know. "He poured me a glass, and then I'd pushed. I asked about home, and he got… you know how he gets." Present tense. That's good. "I hated it," he laughs, a little surprised by the sound. "I had this stupid vodka I didn't like, he was smoking in bed, not talking to me, and I knew I wasn't gonna see him for months. He didn't even kiss me. And I left. And it fucking sucked. I was so… I just felt like, I don't know. Used. I didn't get it, how he was protecting himself. Maybe me. I get it, now."

She nods solemnly. "He's an imperfect man, but he loves very deeply. He didn't have a lot of love, growing up. So I think maybe it scares him."

Shane nods. "We talked about it after. Years after. He looked so sad, to know how I felt. Like neither of us realized how important the other person was. That's what…" he takes a shaky breath. "I'm so scared. Of these," he say, tapping his finger against one of the journals. "Like if I find out he didn't know how much I care. Doesn't know. I've been so scared. He used to be too, but I think when his dad died… like once he decided he wouldn't have to go back to Russia. Now I think, I don't know. I'm holding him back. He'd come out. It feels so stupid now. I love him more than anything, and only a few people know. Well, I guess Hayden and Jackie now too. But it's like, now that…" he cuts himself off from saying *now that he's gone,* "I just want everyone to know. It hurts so much," he says, gasping for breath suddenly. "I don't know what to do with all of it."

Svetlana takes his hand in hers and squeezes it tightly.

"I think he's still here," she whispers, like she doesn't want anyone else to hear. No one else is here. Maybe like she doesn't want to jinx it. "Do you feel it? Like… I don't know. Listen. Breathe. Do you feel it?"

Shane is quiet, and he shuts his eyes, inhaling deeply. No. He doesn't feel it. He doesn't feel Ilya, his Ilya.

"Yeah," he lies, because it's easier. "Maybe."

—-

When Shane wakes up, the house is empty. He walks to the kitchen and finds the dishwasher running, and a handwritten note on the counter.

Went to the store. Laptop has translation - June 16 2020 - July 15 2020

Shane looks at the note and rereads it before rushing to his laptop. He'd gotten it out for her after finishing his vodka and going to bed. The vodka had helped him sleep, at least.

He opens the laptop with trembling fingers, not bothering to move it somewhere more comfortable. He sits at the table and opens it, the word document up already.

16.06.20

Today I saw the shrink for the first time. She said a diary would be good. I said I am not a twelve year old girl.

It was very hard. I do not want to go back. I will. I wish my mother had done this.

Shane stops breathing immediately. Ilya was seeing a therapist? Since *June?* And that's what the journals are for? Why hadn't he told Shane? Shane had never expressed anything negative about therapy. Once, Shane had even brought it up, casually, suggesting it, and Ilya had brushed it off, made it very clear that it was something Shane shouldn't bring up again, so he hadn't. Why wouldn't Ilya have trusted Shane with this? Unless it was because of Shane?

24.06.20

Shane won the Cup. His team does not know how lucky they are to have him. I do.

I am excited for him to be home. When it is not hockey season, I feel like he sees me. I'm not upset. I love his passion. I want him to win, sometimes more than I want to win. I just miss him so much. Two weeks together before training starts up will be good. I could reschedule with Dr. Galina, but I won't. I want to, so I shouldn't. I think that's good. I won't tell him yet. He would worry too much. He worries anyway. I think he sees more than I give credit to. He worries I am like my mother. I worry about this too. But my mother did not see a shrink, and my mother was married to my father. I have Shane.

Shane pushes aside his embarrassment that Svetlana had read this. Entry two, and Shane is already coming off awful. Maybe he is awful. Ilya knows how passionate he is about hockey. He likes it about Shane. But this validates the fears, the feeling that Shane had indeed been neglecting Ilya.

02.07.20:

I fucked Shane so good he cried today. It was great.

Later, I cried too.

Fuck, Svetlana had to read this too. Shane pushes it aside. There's too much to take in, he can't feel weird about it, about the fact she's reading about their sex life. Shane remembers this day. It was the first day back at the cottage, the two of them together. Ilya had edged him and held him down, fucked him fast and then slowed down just as Shane was about to cum, over and over again until Shane was crying. He doesn't remember Ilya crying after.

03.07.20:

Svetlana called today. I miss her. I don't miss Russia. I think she knows, but I don't want to ask.

04.07.20:

Went swimming today. Shane said it was too cold but he got in anyway and we kissed until he shivered.

I dreamt of my mama again after. She was on the pier, watching us play in the water. I did a hand stand for her. It's very stupid. It made me so happy. I wish Shane could have known her. Maybe he would have saved her too. Like he saves me.

But if he can't, it's not his fault. I dreamt about drowning after.

Camp is going well. I wonder if Shane wants kids. He is very nervous, I can tell. I think he will loosen up. He probably thinks I'm having too much fun. It's good for the kids. Otherwise they'll all grow up to be like him. That sounds mean. Fun and hockey can exist together. I don't think he was told that. I wasn't either, I guess. I just did it.

Shane feels his breath hitch, close to tears. He remembers the day at the cottage the first time, what Ilya had said. "She would have loved you, like I love you." Ilya is right, too. Shane did think Ilya was too silly, not serious enough with the kids. You have to be serious to go pro. Ilya just wanted them all to have fun.

05.07.20

Shane isn't eating enough. He is mad when I say things about it. It's like he thinks I'm not also an athlete, like I don't care. I think he cares too much in a bad way. He doesn't let himself enjoy things. Food that tastes good. He acts like it offends him for existing, for tempting him. I touched his back on the driveway today, and he acted like I burned him. No one was around. "What if someone drove by?" He asked.

"Okay. They would see me. If my hand is on your back or not."

"You're right," he said. "We should stay in the back yard."

So what? I am a prisoner? I was okay being a secret. What is next? He's scared someone will look in the windows? He builds a dungeon for me?

Maybe that would be hot

It hurts when I'm not allowed to love him

Shane feels shame building deep inside of him. He's so ashamed. This is how Ilya had felt? He can't even process the guilt, the regret. It's just shame right now, and a hope that things turn around.

Ilya can't have died feeling this way. Shane would never forgive himself.

06.07.20:

I dreamt of her again today, in the hammock. She would not talk to me. I kept calling for Shane to come out to meet her, but he wasn't fast enough. She was gone by the time he came out. He was mad I interrupted him. I woke up so angry. He was asleep, so peaceful and beautiful, and I was so mad.

Even in Ilya's dreams, Shane is not there for him. His chest aches.

08.07.20:

Dr. Galina asked me about who I have. Shane has Rose and his parents who know. I have no one. That's not true. I have his parents too, but they are his. They would always choose him. I have no one. Maybe I could ask him if I could tell Svetlana.

We talked about home, about Russia. We talked about this in relation to my sexuality. I like her. I got mad a little, though. Like I have to defend Shane. I say these things and it's like she feels bad for me or something, like Shane is awful for this.

I tried to explain why it has to be a secret and she knows, but I defended him.

Shane's chest aches and he wants to scream. Why didn't Ilya tell him? Had he told him? Had Shane ignored it? Was Shane counting calories when Ilya told him he was going to therapy? What had Shane missed?

09.07.20

What if I can't help it?

He reads this entry three times, not understanding it.

10.07.20

We spent all day with his parents yesterday. It was nice. I love them. I love him. I am very lucky. I am rich. I have a career I love. I have a man I love. I am so sad.

11.07.20:

I keep looking at the date. Time is passing too quickly. I can't bear the weeks apart. Shane seems excited to get back to hockey.

He sucked my cock so nicely today. He was so beautiful and attentive, doing exactly what I like. He swallowed my cum and said he loved me and I kissed him after, tasting myself. He said it's gross. I said I love to be gross with him. If he built me a dungeon, I would stay in it. I would eat his stupid food and live in the dungeon if I could see him every day.

13.07.20

He leaves in two days. So do I. Hockey will be good. The camp has been so nice. I have to remind myself that the camp was his idea. He came up with this, so we can be together. He created a fucking charity for me. He named it after my mother. Just to be with me. I am so selfish.

14.07.20:

Spent the day with him. I love him so much. I love him so so much.

15.07.20:

Back at my house today. Shane is in Montreal. Camp is over. Practice starts tomorrow. I will meet two new people. It will be a good year. I am nervous to meet Troy off of the ice. Maybe he will be homophobic, but at least he stood up to Kent. I hope I get to knock Kent's teeth out this year.

I miss Shane already.

Shane shuts the laptop quickly. He wishes he could speak Russian. He's half tempted to just put the rest into Google Translate, to spare Svetlana from reading more, to spare himself the embarrassment. He needs to know if things got better.

Svetlana probably hates him. She probably thinks he's awful. Even if Ilya didn't say it, even if Ilya loved him, it's clear from the journals that he is awful.

The front door opens, and Shane wishes he could disappear. Svetlana is carrying a paper grocery bag, dressed in jeans and a sweater. She's beautiful even without makeup, dressed down. Maybe Shane should have told Ilya to marry her. She would have been better.

“Hi,” she says softly.

“I don’t-“ he starts, then shakes his head. “I’m horrible.”

“What?” She looks stricken, and takes her shoes off, rushing over, setting the grocery bag down before approaching Shane. “No. No, no, you are not.”

He sniffles. “You read them. Look how I made him feel.”

She sits in the chair beside him. “Shane. Ilya is a sad mad. He always has been. He has you. Like he said, his mother had his father, but he has you. He is unhappy, but he loves you.”

Shane shakes his head. “How can you even be around me? Look how I made him feel. I didn’t even… fuck, I got upset with him for standing in the front yard!”

She frowns but reaches for his hand. “Yes. You are scared. I understand. He is scared too. You are not awful. Okay? Please, believe it. Ilya believes it.”

Shane doesn’t move.

“I would like to go see your mother today,” she says.

Shane’s head snaps up. “What?”

“Ilya said it himself, they love him. I think it would be good for us to be around them. And I would like to ask her myself what is being done. Please? I know you can call and ask, but I want to hear from her, you know? I check the news and I read the updates about the search and rescue, but I would believe your mother more.”

“Okay,” Shane agrees. It makes sense. He has a few texts from his mom checking in, and he’s responded enough that she hasn’t come to bust his door down. “I’ll tell her we’ll be there for lunch, yeah?”

“Thank you. And… you should talk to her too. You will have practice this week, a game next week. You have to decide what to tell your coach.”

“Right,” Shane nods. He hadn’t even thought of that. For the first time, hockey isn’t at the forefront of his mind. It’s strange, how Shane’s entire world has stopped, but all around him, it keeps spinning.

“I can translate more before then.”

Shane chews his lip. “Are you sure?”

She nods.

“Thank you. For being here. I don’t know what I’d do.”

She shakes her head. “No. I need to be around people who know him. This is where I want to be. With people who know my Ilyusha, for who he is.”

Shane lets out a broken sounding rasp. “I didn’t even know he was in therapy.”

She squeezes his hand. “It’s hard to know things he doesn’t want you to know. He’s not easy. But he is very worth it, yes?”

Shane nods, because if he speaks he’ll cry.

“Go take care of yourself. You need to eat, shower, okay? I will work. I got groceries. Healthy things for you, yes? Ilya always had healthy food in his fridge when Montreal was playing in Boston.”

Shane’s heart hurts.

—

Shane sits at the kitchen table with a glass of water and some cut vegetables and hummus in front of him. It’s the only thing he’d agreed to eat. Svetlana sits beside him, and Shane’s parents sit across. Shane is aware he’s being childish, picking at his food, keeping his head down. He doesn’t mean to be. It’s just easier to process the information this way. He can just listen, and not have to nod along or make eye contact.

The information is bleak and there is very little of it. There is no news, no outgoing communication, and no visuals. “As far as I know,” Yuna says. “They won’t tell me much. I’m just the mother of his… well. Friend and charity partner, to them. I’m not going to be privy to any information that hasn’t been released yet.”

“Shane is in his will. So am I. Official paperwork, yes? And, I would guess, Shane is some sort of… I don’t know what it’s called. If Ilya gets hurt, you know? To make medical decisions,” Svetlana says.

Shane’s head snaps up at that, looking to her. “Really?”

She shrugs. “I would think, yes. When he changed his will, after his father died, to cut out his brother. Who else would it be?”

That makes sense. Shane just has his parents in his.

“Okay. That’s good. Let’s do some digging, see if we can get in contact with whoever drafted that up, and then I can get back in touch with people. That’s really great. I don’t know if they’ll have any more information, but at least when they do, we’ll be contacted first,” Yuna explains.

“Yeah,” Shane nods. “Yeah, uh. He has paperwork and stuff at his house, I can stop by later and send it to you? Is that okay?”

Yuna nods immediately. “Of course.”

“Good,” Svetlana nods.

“I don’t want to make this feel like a meeting with an agenda, but… Shane,” Yuna says softly. “Have you thought at all about what you’re going to tell your coach?”

He shakes his head, looking down at his food again.

“Ilya is a close friend. I think he would understand you missing practice, but… There’s a game next week.”

“I can’t play it,” Shane says quickly.

“Of course not, sweetheart. None of us expect that. Just, it might be a little harder to explain that to your coach, given… Well. No one really knows the extent of your relationship,” she says.

“I don’t care,” Shane murmurs. “I don’t care about that anymore. It doesn’t matter. I can tell him, or whatever. Farrah reached out a few times, but I haven’t responded.”

Yuna nods. “Okay. Do you think you’d be up to calling her? We can do it together,” Yuna says.

Shane doesn't feel up to anything. It's exhausting, being here. He knows this is important, and he knows Svetlana was smart to push this, especially if it means getting more information. It just feels hard to do anything. "Okay," he nods. "Yeah." He pulls his phone out and goes to her contact.

"Oh," Yuna says, a little surprised that he's doing it now, probably.

She answers on the first ring. "Shane. How are you holding up?" She asks on speaker phone, concern lacing through.

"Bad," Shane says.

"Farrah, hi. This is Yuna Hollander, and you're on speaker, with my husband David, and Ilya's friend. Svetlana.

"Oh. Hello, everyone. I can't imagine what all of you are going through right now."

Shane doesn't know what to say, so he stays quiet.

"Thank you," Yuna says. "We're calling because… Well. Outside of the people in this room, very few people know the relationship between Shane and Ilya. Shane isn't going to be ready to be on the ice any time soon."

"Of course not," Farrah says immediately.

It's a little validating to hear that no one who knows about him and Ilya is expecting this of him.

“I don’t think we want to make any concrete decisions right now, but maybe you would be able to draft something up, something for Shane to send to his coach, to the team owner, so that he can take a leave from playing without it affecting his contract or anything,” Yuna says.

“Of course. And Shane, you would be okay with this disclosing the nature of your relationship with Ilya?” Farrah asks.

“That’s fine,” Shane says, sounding faraway.

“I will write up a few options and send them over to you this afternoon,” Farrah says. “I’ve also been looking over his contract and all of the clauses today and yesterday, everything related to family emergencies, leaves of absence. He is entitled to this time, and if there is any issue, we have someone on retainer at the firm to argue that,” she says.

“Thank you, Farrah. That’s great news,” Yuna says.

“And, Shane,” Farrah continues.

Shane thinks it’s nice she keeps addressing him, despite the barely there answers he gives.

“Do you have any interest in a statement that would be publicly issued? There are media outlets speculating on how you are handling this, given the charity and your friendship, but nothing beyond that. We wouldn’t need to disclose anything, but a sort of general statement, that you are concerned, waiting for any news, and wishing the best, and to respect your privacy at this time?”

“Sure,” Shane nods. “That sounds good. I’d uh… Like, I don’t care anymore. If people know. Just… A lot of other people were on that plane. I don’t need to make the focus on anything besides the people on that plane.”

“That’s very considerate,” Farrah says. “Okay. Give me a few hours, and I’ll have everything sent over, so all you’ll have to do is post a note, and send an email to your coach.”

“Thank you, Farrah,” Yuna says. “You are a lifesaver.”

“Thanks,” Shane murmurs.

“Of course. I am so sorry you are going through this. You’re all in my thoughts.”

—

It’s late afternoon when Svetlana and Shane go home. Both of his parents had given her long hugs, thanking her for being with Shane. It was sweet. He wishes Ilya could have seen it; his parents embracing someone in Ilya’s life. He wonders when else it would have happened. Maybe after retirement, at their wedding. The thought aches. They stop at Ilya’s on the way back. It’s a detour, but Shane is in and out quickly. He doesn’t let himself dwell this time. He finds the folder in a file cabinet, the one where Ilya keeps important documents, even though Shane has repeatedly nagged him to get safe. He doesn’t look at anything yet, but he’ll confirm he’s listed and tell his mom the firm that handled things tonight.

“I will translate more, now,” Svetlana says.

“Okay,” Shane nods. “Thank you. I’m gonna lay down, I think.”

Somehow, he sleeps for a few hours. When he wakes up, Svetlana is still at the table, her eyes flicking between the journal and the laptop.

“You worked this whole time?” He asks.

She looks up, a little startled. “Yes. I didn’t realize how long.” She blinks a few times, looking around the dark room. “I will take a break, I think.”

“You don’t have to push yourself,” he says.

“I know. It’s nice. To hear his words.”

Shane frowns. “Is it all bad?”

She shakes her head. “No. He loves you so much. It’s… It’s heavy, yes. He is very sad. But it’s not all bad. He is happiest with you. He just…” she sighs. “Yes, he wants more. But he doesn’t blame you. You know that, yes?”

Shane sniffles. “Yeah. Maybe I’ll go read them.”

“Okay. Don’t forget to eat. Drink water. You have to take care of yourself. Did the woman, the publicist, did she email?”

Shane nods. “Yeah. I sent it to my mom to look over, and then I’ll send it. It looked good, I think.”

“Good.”

Shane hovers for a moment, like he should offer Svetlana something, be a good host.

She reads him instantly. “I’m okay, Shane. Okay? Do what you need to do. I’m here to help, don’t worry about me.”

“He was your friend,” Shane says.

“Is,” Svetlana says. “Yes.”

Shane doesn’t know what to say to that, so he takes the laptop to his room, and sits on the bed with it, along with the paperwork.

He handles that first, but he doesn’t actually read anything. He just scans for his name. He doesn’t want to know what Ilya’s left him, what Ilya’s said. It’s too real. Sure enough, his name is there, and again, on the medical power of attorney information. He takes pictures and texts them to his mom. One step, done.

Next is his email. His mom responded after reviewing the email he forwarded from Farrah, approving. He doesn’t read it. He just copies and pastes the email meant for his coach, and sends it on, adding nothing. His coach will do what he needs to from there, and Farrah’s info is listed in case he has any issues with Shane taking a leave of absence. He doesn’t even let it faze him that this is how he’s coming out to his coach. It doesn’t fucking matter.

Next, the statement for his social media. This one, he does read. Farrah has it all nice and formatted, black text on a white background that he can just post on Instagram.

I am deeply saddened by the tragic and worrisome news about the Ottawa Centaurs. My heart is with every player, coach, trainer, personnel, and everyone working aboard the aircraft, as well as their friends and families. My close friend, Ilya Rozanov, is among those missing. I ask that my privacy is respected during this incredibly difficult time. For the time being, I will not be returning to the ice. Please, keep the Ottawa Centaurs and all those searching for them in your thoughts.

Love,

Shane

He posts it without a captions and disables comments. It’s good. It’s great, really. He hates calling Ilya his friend, but at least this time, he knows it’s not out of cowardice, but rather, a desire to keep the focus on what’s most important. He doesn’t need anything overshadowed by the gossip that would come from news of their relationship being public.

Once that's done, he goes to the document Svetlana has been typing in, scrolling to where he'd left off.

The rest of July and all of August is a lot of Ilya missing Shane when they're away and being happy when they're together. It's a bit of a rollercoaster that makes Shane feel deeply guilty. Ilya can be depressed, missing him, upset that they get so little time together, and then they spend a weekend together, and he's happy, recounting the sex, the conversations, the little moments. It's different than the summer when he'd sounded sad, even when he was with Shane. Maybe it's just something like that saying, distance makes the heart grow fonder, but Shane feels like he's Ilya's only source of happiness, reading it. He feels angry for a brief moment, until intense guilt replaces it. He can't be angry at his boyfriend who died two days ago. What sort of monster would do that? But he is. He's angry at the responsibility Ilya has put on him. Shane loves Ilya more than anything, and of course he misses him when they're apart. But he focuses on hockey. He sees Hayden, his parents. He doesn't retreat into himself, missing Ilya every second. He has a sport to play, to win. He never asked to be Ilya's lifesource. It's not fair. Is it?

Why hadn't Ilya told him any of it? How unhappy he was? They could've talked about it.

By late August, Ilya talks more about hockey. It's things Shane has heard before on their calls. Ilya is trying to connect with Troy, the one who transferred, the one who stood up to Dallas Kent. Ilya had been worried about him, but he sees something there, and he wants to know more. Shane knows all of this. He talks about Luca Haas, the rookie, and Maxwell. Shane reads these, hearing Ilya's voice in his head. Sometimes after phone sex, Ilya would talk about it, about how practice was going. Shane feels relief that at least he knew some of what Ilya was thinking. It wasn't all a secret. He still shared hockey with Shane.

Sometimes he writes more about the dreams of his mother. She's on the hammock at Shane's cottage in most of them, even when Ilya was back at his house. They're usually the same. Shane never is fast enough to meet her.

There are lulls. Some days are skipped. Some have a single line, something like '*tired from practice'* or '*it was a bad day'* or *'made Shane laugh so hard today on the phone'* or *'asked Dr. Galina how to stop missing someone so much it hurts'*.

He writes about visiting Shane's parents. He writes about how they always offer him ice cream, and how he knows if Shane was there, he'd refuse it. He worries about Shane, which,

reading these, feels silly. He should be more worried about himself. Shane is fine. Well. He was fine.

By October, when the season starts up fully, there's a lot more about hockey. It's a reprieve, at least. He cares about his team. Just from reading these, Shane can tell how good of a captain he is. He writes about each player like they're family. He writes about Chiron, Harris's dog that he's sent countless pictures of to Shane. He wonders if maybe Troy and Harris could be a thing. That's interesting, Shane thinks. He remembers when Ilya had told him about Troy being gay. It's sweet, how much he cares.

Only, then he remembers that Troy and Harris are both dead, probably burnt and frozen in the snow, and then it's not so cute anymore.

He wonders if they sat next to each other. He wonders if they held each other in their final moments, if they made some sort of confession.

He wonders who Ilya had, in his final moments. Shane's Instagram profile? Something Shane wouldn't have even checked, if it weren't for the news?

He shuts his eyes and tries to picture the plane. It's a horrible torture. He tries to picture himself next to Ilya, holding his hand, in their final moments. Dying with him. Ilya would never want that. Shane can think of nothing he wants more.

Shane reads about Luca Haas's first goal. He reads about Ilya watching Shane's game against Boston with Shane's parents, when he'd stolen Ilya's signature move. He'd ranted to Shane on the phone, but in the journal entry, there is nothing but affection and pride, not even a jab about how Ilya had done it better.

The document gets to the end, and Svetlana has a little note to herself on where she left off. It's late October, so there's just over two months left. Shane dreads them as much as he craves them.

When he checks his phone, Hayden, Rose, and a few other players have texted him about his social media post, telling them it was good and to reach out for anything. His mom has let

him know that she's contacted Ilya's estate lawyer. His coach hasn't replied yet.

He goes to the kitchen for water and finds the living room empty. He leaves the laptop on the table and goes to bed without eating. He'll eat tomorrow. He had a few carrots today, so… He'll eat tomorrow.

—

Svetlana is over the stove when he wakes up, stirring something in a pot. It's just after seven in the morning.

"Hi," she says.

"Hey," he answers, sitting at the kitchen island.

"I have to leave tomorrow. I'm sorry. But I can come back next week," she says.

"You don't have to do anything. You've done so much."

She stirs whatever is in the pot. "I want to. When does your mother wake up? Can we call her soon? You sent her the paperwork?"

"Yeah. I did. She reached out last night, but they probably aren't open yet, and it's like, four in the morning on the West coast. But yeah. She'll call once she gets in touch with the lawyer and stuff."

"Okay. I'm making oatmeal with fruit. You will eat it."

She reminds Shane of a mix of Ilya and his mom; the bluntness and the accent of Ilya, with the slightly sharp but maternal side of his mom.

“Is there sugar in it?” He asks.

Does it matter? Does it fucking matter? He’s not playing hockey. Ilya is dead. What does it matter if there’s sugar? But he can control this. This one thing, what he puts in his body, he can control, so he asks.

“A little honey. It will be okay,” she answers.

It’s not okay. It feels like concrete in his stomach, thick and sludgey. It tastes good and he hates it. He doesn’t want to taste. He doesn’t want to enjoy things. Still, he eats, moving his jaw up and down mechanically, tasting as little as possible, because when he stood up this morning he got light headed, and he doesn’t want to hit his head fainting or anything.

When he’s managed to eat what he can, his phone rings. It’s his mom. He puts her on speaker. It’s funny, how long he’s stayed so private about things; to Ilya for years, to Hayden, to Rose. He doesn’t think twice about letting Svetlana listen in.

“Shane,” she says. “I have someone from the Canadian Transportation Board on the line, okay? Ilya’s lawyer sent over the documentation, so he has permission to disclose information to you, and whoever else you approve.”

Shane sits up straight. “Yes. Yeah, you can say anything to my mom too. Svetlana is here too. There’s news?”

“Hi, son,” a man answers. He sounds older, weary. Shane braces himself for bad news. “I wish I had something to tell you.”

Shane deflates, his shoulders slumping. No news is better than bad news, he tells himself. It’s just, he can’t stop thinking of Ilya’s body, alone, cold. If he’s dead, which Shane knows he is,

he wants to bring him home.

“I want you to know that this is an all hands on deck situation. The Canadian and United States governments are putting every single resource at their disposal into locating the missing aircraft. No expense is too much, no corners cut,” the man tells him.

“I don’t understand, why hasn’t it been found? It’s a plane. How do they not know where it crashed?” Shane asks, his voice a little harsher than it should be.

“The search started close to where the plane lost contact. There’s a possibility that the plane was airborne for longer than that. It could have drifted, or, what we're hoping for, is that the pilot was able to maintain control and get the plane to somewhere he could land it. The issue with that, is that it significantly broadens the area to search,” he says.

Shane gasps, unable to speak. Could that be true? Could the pilot have maintained control and landed them somewhere? Could Ilya be out there, somewhere in the cold, just waiting to be found.

“What is being done?” Svetlana asks. “Like, helicopters, drones, that sort of thing? Do more!” She half shouts, her tone startling Shane. “Check everywhere! It’s cold, it’s been days! What if he is hurt?”

“Believe me, ma’am,” the man answers. “Every single resource is on this. It’s a vast area to cover.”

“They think it could have landed?” Shane asks softly.

“There’s no way to know. Look, son. The odds aren’t great. I will say that. But, the fact that the aircraft hasn’t been found, means it’s a possibility. When they lost contact, the altitude was fairly high, but dropping rapidly. At the rate it was dropping, if that trajectory was continued, we would have expected to locate the aircraft by now. The fact we haven’t, we have to consider that the pilot could have regained control and gotten it to a lower altitude, or that it could have drifted before it made contact with the ground. It’s rough terrain. It’s mountainous. It’s hard to say that there would have been somewhere to land. But by no

means is this considered a recovery mission yet. For everyone here, this is still very much a rescue mission."

Shane feels like his throat is closing up, and he tries to swallow, nearly choking on saliva.

"Thank you," Yuna steps in. "Please, I know there are a lot of families, and a lot of people you're probably talking to, parents and families you've spoken to. But we are Ilya's family. If anything comes up," she trails off.

"Shane will be the first to know. I've already added him to our file as the point of contact for Mr. Rozanov."

"Thank you," Shane whispers.

Him and Svetlana both cry when the call ends, holding each other. It's a complicated feeling. It's the first time that Shane has felt a sliver of hope, but he knows how dangerous that is. He doesn't want to latch onto it, lest it ends up hurting even more. He shuts his eyes and breathes, like Svetlana had told him to, days ago, yesterday, he isn't sure. He tries to feel Ilya. He can't tell. He thinks he would know if Ilya was still here. Would he? Would things feel different? Would he know, somehow, intrinsically, if Ilya was no longer here? Maybe it's just hope. He isn't sure.

—

His parents come over for dinner; takeout they bring from a place where Shane likes the salad. He picks at it. He wishes meetings weren't based around food, but he manages to eat a bit. He's quiet mostly, listening to his parents and Svetlana talk about tomorrow. He got a vague response from his coach that more or less said 'OK because I can't say otherwise, but let me know when you're ready to play again'. He didn't even say anything about their relationship. Yuna complains a bit about it, but Shane blocks it out. He doesn't have room to be mad about anything, not right now.

—

Svetlana leaves the next morning. She looks exhausted, and Shane realizes she must have stayed up all night finishing her translations.

“What can I do? To thank you? Anything. Like… Um,” he’s so fucking awkward.

“I have money, Shane,” she says, smiling at him, with just a twinge of pity. “I don’t need anything. Thank you. For letting me here. For letting me in. Please, if you hear anything-”

“I’ll call you immediately. I promise. I can’t thank you enough. I can’t imagine it was easy to go through those.”

She wraps her arms around him tightly. “It was my pleasure. I am glad I got to do this for you.” She pulls back and holds his shoulders, looking him in the eyes. “I still have hope.”

Shane nods. “Me too,” he answers. He’s not sure if it’s a lie or not, but it’s something. Reasonable doubt. He could believe it. It’s all he has.

“Okay. You have to eat, and you have to see your parents every day, and you have to let people in. Call Hayden. Ilya will be so mad when he comes back, mm? That Hayden was there for you? Let people in. People are all we have, Shanya,” she says, lifting a hand up to rub it over his cheekbone.

“I see why he loves you so much,” Shane says, his voice cracking.

She pulls him in again, just for a few seconds, and kisses his cheek when she pulls back. “Goodbye. I will be back here. The three of us,” she says, the wetness in her eyes spilling over. “I believe it.”

Shane doesn’t tell her how those were the last three words Ilya had written him.

—

01.11.20

Shane came over after the Halloween party. It was a surprise. He wore a fucking butt plug the entire car ride. It was so hot.

Something is so wrong with me. He left and I cried and cried. Like it did not even matter that he drove all that way to surprise me, that he did that for me. The second he left, I wept. I am broken. Not even Shane can fix me. Dr. Galina cannot fix me.

12.11.20

Shane is here. We watched the documentary. He saw the footage from when he got hurt. I told him not to look. I didn't want to look. I didn't want to see myself like that.

I wonder how often I look like that.

16.11.20

I am worried about Troy. I think his father is hard on him. I will try to talk to him.

There is more about hockey, entries about practice about games, more about Troy and their conversations. There are silly entries about Chiron, entries about nothing but the phone sex him and Shane had. There are entries about Shane's diet which make him feel bad. He wishes Ilya hadn't worried about that. Shane had it under control. Right? It's just a performance diet, and it's working.

01.12.20

Went to the children's hospital today. Besides Shane, games, and maybe Chiron, this is my favorite thing to do. It was very nice. I hope all of them get healthy. I hope they liked it as much as I did.

04.12.20

I decked that fucker Dallas Kent. He said something about me sucking Shane's dick. I don't even know what he said. I punched him right in the fucking face. The motherfucker. Rapist piece of shit. Homophobic scum.

It felt so good.

He got Troy good after.

Fuck I'm so glad I hit him. Fucker.

Shane remembers watching that live. Ilya hadn't mentioned anything about him. It makes sense. Shane would have panicked. He probably would have gone off on Ilya for having such an emotional reaction, because it would only confirm Kent's speculation.

10.12.20

I took Troy to the Kingfisher. He told me he was gay. I told him I am bisexual. He said he heard Shane is gay. I said enough sharing. Eric Bennet was there, and Scott and Kip. I would have told them all, if I could. I wonder what they said about me after. Maybe they think it's cool I came to their bar. Or they think I'm weird. I am weird. I am good. I think I am a good person. Troy trusted me.

It felt very good to tell somebody.

11.12.20

Got a day at home. I fucked Shane in front of a mirror. I made him watch, so he could see how he looks when he falls apart. I could do that everyday.

How much more of my life will be spent waiting? Counting down?

I'm happy. I am. Maybe here, I seem sad. I am sad too. What am I going to do? It's journals for therapy. I write when I'm sad. I'm not going to write about every time I'm happy. I am happy. I just spend so much time waiting. When will I see Shane again? How long? Sometimes I feel like I can't breathe without him. Part of me is missing. My heart.

15.12.20

I told Shane I came out to Troy. I heard him choking on something through the phone. You know what he said? "Did you tell him about us?"

Like it was the most terrifying thing. He didn't ask how it felt. To tell someone. He was just scared.

"Only you get to tell friends?" I asked.

It's like it didn't even matter to him why it was important I told someone.

Sometimes it feels like nothing has changed for him. We're still stupid boys with a secret, fucking when we can, hiding from everyone. Is that all it is to him, still? After all this time? After I moved my entire life?

God forbid someone know. Someone I choose.

FUCK.

It hurts. It fucking hurts.

Okay. It is later. He texted sorry. Well. He texted that he was trying to formulate an apology.

I love him so much it kills me. He asked me that one time. "Is it agony for you" maybe? Something like that. I didn't know the word, but I understood.

I told him no. Not anymore. Because we were together. I had just told him I loved him. He said it back.

It is agony now. I would not change it. Not for anything. But it is agony.

Shane wipes away tears, hating himself. He remembers that. No, he hadn't asked how it had felt to tell someone. His stomach had dropped, and he'd bitten his tongue so hard, forcing himself not to lash out, to ask how Ilya could do that without talking to him first.

He's spent so long being scared, when the only thing he should have been scared of was losing Ilya.

20.12.20

I wore a santa outfit and took pictures with Chiron. I am a very sexy santa. I wonder if Shane would let me wear the outfit in bed… I would make all of his Christmas wishes come true ;)

25.12.20

It's Christmas.

Shane wouldn't eat a cookie.

26.12.20

How could he ask me that. How. HOW. How could me ask me if I would choose him?

I already did.

How does he not know that??????

I already fucking did.

I sent him home. I told him to leave.

Shane's fingers dig into his pillow, and it's not enough. It's not enough, so he digs them into his palms, leaving little crescent shapes in the skin. When that's not enough, he hits himself with the base of his palm, firm, on his cheekbone. He gives himself a few dull thuds, punishing himself, self flaggelation, because he hurt Ilya so much. When he remembers that day, he swallows down bile, regretting dinner.

Only then, he thinks of something.

If Ilya is alive, he's probably starving.

The thought makes Shane's blood run cold. Here he is, refusing to eat, and Ilya might be starving somewhere.

Shane wishes he were dead. When he thinks about it this time, there is no guilt. He wishes he were dead. Ilya would have been better off.

He wants to do more than hit himself. He wants to hurt himself. For real. So he does the thing that will hurt the most. He forces himself to keep reading.

28.12.20

I got mad at Dr. Galina. I told her she was supposed to fix me. I feel worse than ever.

She said I needed to talk to Shane. To really tell him how I feel. I will. After the new year, I will. I will tell him about therapy. I will tell him I want to tell Svetlana. I will tell him when we are apart, it hurts.

I asked him to go to Bood's party, on boxing day. It's why he got upset. We both got upset. Of course he had the right to say no. I understand. And I've been holding back. He doesn't know how I feel. So it's my fault too.

But sometimes I think, how can he look at me, and now know how I feel? He would probably be upset even if he knew Dr. Galina knew about us.

I look at him sometimes, and I think, I am dying. Please touch me. I am dying. Hold my hand. Look at me like you love me. I am dying. I need you.

I would never leave. I love him so much. He loves me. I know it. I would never leave.

Not unless I couldn't help it.

The document ends.

Chapter 4: I Should be Hoping, but I Can't Stop Thinking

Chapter Notes

Mind the tags again for this chapter!

I hope this flows well and the pacing is good - I don't think I've ever written anything with this much action or description outside of smut. Fun but hard! I hope it pays off.

Ilya wants to get the flares now, insisting it's the best time. It's dark out, and they'll be more visible, plus they're all going to be looking for them now.

"They'll be looking tomorrow," Gen says.

"The snow just… it just gave out from under her feet, Ilya," Luca says, looking down at the path in the snow where Beth had slid down. "We need to be able to see. There's no way to climb to the side of the plane and get to the top if we can barely see what's solid ground and what's loose snow."

They're right, and Ilya knows it. Maybe he just wants to procrastinate getting back on the plane. He doesn't want to tell his team what they've found. It hasn't even hit him yet. If it had, he'd be crying. His coach. He loves Coach Wiebe. He's the best coach Ilya's ever had. He's a father and a husband. Boyle, his teammate, is gone too. Ilya doesn't know him as well, but he's a husband too. He's nice. He just went up to talk to Coach, and now he's dead. The other coaches, the trainers. They're all dead, in a burning wreck, too far down to even consider reaching. Beth was here, standing in the snow, moments ago, and now she's gone too. Of course they're right.

"Okay," Ilya nods. "You are right. Yes," he concedes. Part of him wants to just run, to push past them and climb up to the top himself, but he doesn't know if that would shake the whole plane. Maybe the whole thing would come falling down, and he'd be at fault for everyone's death, not just Beth's.

Gen studies his face for a moment, like she's reading his mind. "You set her down, Ilya. You didn't drop her. Okay?"

He nods, but he can't speak.

"Do you want me to talk?" She asks.

He shakes his head. "No," he says, his voice cracking. "I can do it. I am their captain."

Haas reaches forward and squeezes Ilya's wrist briefly.

Ilya climbs back on first, walking forward. The murmurs of the rest of the team quiet. They're back too soon. Everyone knows it. Luca helps Gen up behind him, and only when she's reached Ilya toward the back of the plane, does Luca climb back on too.

They know it's bad news. Ilya can tell from the way they look at him, the way they count three of them.

"The flight attendant?" Bood asks from the back.

Ilya shakes his head, but when he tries to speak, he can't. Again, he is failing. He looks to Gen.

"We're not in a good spot right now, guys," she says. "There's no good way to say it, but the plane is on a mountain, more or less. The ground is snowy and uneven. When Beth got on the ground, the snow gave out beneath her."

Ilya is grateful for her bluntness, the way she delivers the information.

“Fuck,” someone whispers.

“Is there any chance…” Someone starts to say.

“We lost sight of her right away. It looked like a far fall.”

She leaves out how it was all Ilya’s fault, how he set her down only for her to fall.

He speaks up though, now. He couldn’t say that part, feeling too guilty, but the next part, they deserve to hear from him.

He clears his throat and touches Gen’s arm, part in thanks, part to let her know he’s got the next part. The worse part.

“I love you all,” Ilya says, because he means it. “I am your captain, and I love every one of you. I am going to do everything I can to help all of you.” He takes a slow breath, and Luca touches his shoulder softly, standing close behind him. “The front of the plane is destroyed.”

There are gasps, curses, jaws that fall open.

“It is very far down, on the mountain. It is mostly burned. I do not think…” Ilya sniffles once, and curses quietly in Russian. “I do not think it would be possible for anyone to survive. I am very sorry to tell you this,” he says.

No one moves. No one speaks.

“It’s not safe for us to try to get flares tonight. They’re only accessible from outside the plane, and with the ground being unstable, it wouldn’t be smart for us to do now,” Gen says, stepping in. “But there are flares, and tomorrow when it’s light, we will get them,” she says. “If we haven’t been found by then.”

“Why… I mean,” Chouinard speaks up. “Why do you think we haven’t been found yet? It’s been hours.”

“It’s possible we drifted off course. Beth mentioned maybe they lost communication before we went down,” Gen answers. “But they will be looking. There is smoke and wreckage. They’ll find us. It’s probably easier when it’s light. The good news, is that we’ll stand out against the snow.”

“Isn’t there like, a black box?” Hayes asks.

“A black box only records flight logs. There is a location device, but… It was damaged in the crash,” Gen admits.

There’s another chorus of swears. Ilya thinks he hears crying. He can’t tell who though, it’s too dark, and he doesn’t want to search with a flashlight to see who is crying.

“I think,” Ilya says. “For right now. Everyone needs to stay warm and hydrated, and try to get some rest, so tomorrow, when they find us, we are ready. And if that isn’t right away, we will be rested and prepared to make sure they do find us, with flares. Okay?”

A few murmurs agree.

“We shouldn’t drink or eat too much,” Dykstra says. “In case we need to ration.”

“Ration?” Bood says. “We aren’t gonna be out here long enough for that.”

“We can’t know that,” one of the trainers says.

“Okay,” Ilya says. “It does not hurt to be… um.” Fuck, why can’t he think of words right now? Stress, maybe?

“Conservative,” Gen supplies.

“Yes. If you need water, get a water, but stick to one per person, okay? If you are hungry, one snack. Is okay? Then when it’s light, we can count and see,” he says.

No one argues, thankfully. Ilya isn’t sure what he’d do if they did. He isn’t going to tell people they aren’t allowed to eat or drink, but there is a sinking part of him that does wonder how long this could be, why they haven’t been found yet. Rationing isn’t a bad idea.

Ilya walks to the back of the plane again, and checks on Maxwell. “You want me to take over?” He asks Bood.

“Nah. It’s okay. He’s not bleeding more. I got him to sit up a little before, so he could have a few sips of water and some advil. I doubt it’ll do much, but…”

Ilya nods. “You are doing a great job,” he says.

“Harris,” Ilya says quietly. He’s sitting next to Troy, who is laying down with his seat reclined, his eyes closed.

“He’s napping. He was talking a little more. He had some water.”

“Okay,” Ilya nods. He looks around to where people are settling in. Some people grab waters. No one really goes for snacks yet. Makes sense. Ilya couldn’t eat now either. People grab blankets and recline their seats.

“Hey,” Luca says softly. “You need to drink water too,” he says.

“I’m okay,” Ilya insists. If they do need to ration, he’s not going to take up water for the rest of them.

Luca reaches into his backpack, resting on a seat, and pulls out a large metal water bottle. “You can share with me, then. I refilled it before we left. Then you don’t need to feel bad using the bottles from the plane.”

“Yes,” Ilya nods. “Okay. Thank you.” He looks to his empty row.

“You wanna… uh. Sleep in the seat by me?” Luca asks.

“I think so,” Ilya says.

He suddenly feels exhausted. The adrenaline has worn off. There’s nothing to do, nothing to solve, not until morning. It’s like once his body accepts that, the tiredness creeps in. He gives his coat he borrowed back to Chouinard, and he gets his own from his bag, along with a hat. He doesn’t have gloves, because he forgot them, but he’ll sleep with his hands in his pockets. Is it too cold? Will they all die of hypothermia, he wonders? Is the closeness of their bodies enough to keep them warm? They’re all Canadian residents, so they all have good winter coats, but will it be good enough? He has no idea. He’s too tired to think about it more.

He misses Shane. He can’t think about Shane. He has to get home to Shane. His messages to Shane… He slumps into the seat beside Luca, and does take a few small sips of water when the bottle is pushed into his hands.

“Thank you,” he says.

“You’re doing a really good job,” Luca says softly.

“Put your hood up,” Ilya answers. “So your ears stay warm.”

“Okay,” Luca says, smiling softly, sadly, and he does. They recline their seats and Luca uses his blanket to cover both of them.

It’s not too cold, Ilya thinks. He pulls the blanket up to his nose though, and then he reaches over to do the same for Luca. “So they don’t freeze off,” he explains.

“Goodnight, Cap,” Luca says.

“Yes. Goodnight.”

—

In the morning, Maxwell is dead.

Ilya wakes up to a commotion, his entire body jolting. It’s light out, but barely, and he’s cold. He’s cold in a way he’s never been. He’s spent the entirety of his life in Moscow, Ottawa, and Boston, and he’s chilled to his core, so he knows it’s cold.

Luca is asleep. For a second, he wonders if he’s dead, if he froze in his sleep. He hits him in the shoulder, hard, and Luca jolts awake too, his breath clouding up the air in front of him.

“What?” Luca asks, not awake yet.

“Sorry,” Ilya murmurs. There’s still a commotion, murmurs and whispers, so he stands up, looking toward the tail of the plane. People are hovering in Bood’s row, a few of them bent over the seat.

Bood stands slowly once he spots Ilya, his eyes locked on him, wide and terrified.

“Tell me,” Ilya says, because he knows already.

“He’s gone,” Bood says.

Ilya stays still for a moment.

“I’m sorry,” Bood starts.

“No,” Ilya says firmly. “No. Is not your fault.”

Bood looks devastated, broken and lost, and far younger than he is.

“Fuck,” he whispers.

Ilya trembles slightly. There are people dead below him, lots of them, but no one has had to see them yet. It doesn’t mean they aren’t dead, but it’s different. There is chaos and trauma in front of them, and the bodies a hundred meters below them feel further away, impossible to fathom.

Now, there is a body, right here, right in front of them.

Ilya has seen a dead body before. He wonders how many of his teammates can say the same. At twelve years old, Ilya was different. He had seen something that would change him forever, something he would never forget. He had found his mother, limp and cold and lifeless, her hand hanging over the edge of the chaise, and from then on he was different. His life was divided in two, a before and an after. He imagines this experience will do the same. If he makes it out.

Ilya still doesn't know what to say. Eyes are on him, staring, and he can't formulate words. Luca grabs his hand and squeezes it, comforting and reassuring.

"Okay," he says softly. "We cover him, yes? For respect. And we leave him. It is cold. He will stay.. Um." Ilya swallows. He doesn't want to talk about him like he's a body, something that will freeze instead of decay, but it's true. "This way, they will have his body. For his family. Right?" He asks. He feels so lost and afraid, not ready to be in charge like this.

Luca squeezes his hand again, twice, like a pulse. It's grounding. Ilya is very thankful to him.

"Yes," Hayes agrees. "That's right. I can cover him."

Ilya can't see him from where he's standing, besides the top of his head, and he feels horribly selfish for being grateful. "Thank you," he says. "Okay. Troy," he says, turning to Harris.

"Hi," Troy answers. There is a piece of fabric tied around his eyes.

"Blocking out light," Harris says, his voice sounding tired. "It's good for concussions. Since we aren't at a hospital."

Ilya doesn't know if that's true, but he nods. It sounds good enough. He remembers after Shane's concussion, he was told not to look at screens. Maybe it's the same.

"Everyone else?" He asks, fearing that someone else could have died in their sleep, that the cold got to them, that someone had some unknown injury.

"All good," someone says.

"Good here too," another voice echoes.

He looks over the group and tries not to dwell on the fact that it's one smaller, and he nods.

"Today we assess outside, and we get flares. Okay?" He asks. "I will not ask anyone to help."

At once, half a dozen bodies stand, and after that, everyone else does too. Everyone except Maxwell.

"We're helping, Roz. You aren't alone here."

"Yeah, c'mon, man. We've got this."

Ilya sniffles once, shutting his eyes tightly. Someone touches his shoulder from behind, a smaller hand, soft and delicate. For a stupid second, he thinks of his mom.

"We're here, Ilya," Gen murmurs.

"Okay. I am going to go out, now that it's light, and see where we can stand, okay? I will check the ground."

"No," Luca says firmly. "Not alone."

Ilya shakes his head sharply, looking down. "No. No one else is fucking dying. No one."

"Roz," Wyatt says. "You don't decide that."

"Yes," Ilya barks. "I do. I am captain. You are all looking at me, yes? Listening to me? Okay. So I decide, no one else is dying."

“No one else is dying,” Dykstra answers. “So you aren’t going alone. We’re a team.”

Ilya wants to curl up. He wants to crumble in a heap on the floor. He wants his mom.

“I cannot ask this,” he says quietly.

“You aren’t asking, bud,” Harris says softly.

Ilya’s head snaps to him. He’s not any bit of authority, but he’s not a teammate, and Ilya trusts him. Ilya trusts the way he’s got an arm wrapped around Troy.

“One person,” Ilya says.

Haas raises his hand immediately.

“No,” Ilya snaps.

He averts his eyes from however crestfallen Haas is.

“Ilya,” he starts.

“No. Not another rookie.”

Bood steps up, walking down the aisle confidently, like he knows Ilya won’t refuse him.

Ilya shakes off Luca's hand roughly.

"Ilya," he repeats.

"Sorry," Ilya murmurs. "Everyone else, stay put. Gen," he says, turning to her.

She nods once.

"Food and water?"

"Yeah."

"Gen is going to count food and water, and ration. Does anyone have an issue with that?" he asks.

No one speaks up.

"Okay," he nods. "Okay. I am… I am sorry, about Maxwell. He was a good hockey player, a good man." Ilya claps a hand on Bood's shoulder now that he's close. "Everyone here, you did good."

Bood lunges forward and wraps Ilya into a hug, tight and suffocating, as he gasps against his shoulder.

"I know," Ilya whispers. He does. He knows. He knows what it's like to find someone like that.

Bood pulls back and looks Ilya in the eyes and he nods, affirming that he's ready.

“I’m smaller,” Haas says. “I’d be better to climb up.”

“No,” Ilya half yells, turning to him. Haas looks stunned by it, his eyes wide and shocked. “No,” he says, softer this time, feeling guilty. “No more rookies.”

He’s not losing Haas. Maxwell was too much, and Ilya barely knew him. He should have known him better. He’s not about to risk Luca, just because he looks up to Ilya, because he wants to be the hero.

Over Ilya’s dead body.

And if it should come to that, so be it, Ilya thinks, turning around to make his march down the aisle of the plane, the impromptu plank into a sea of what is now the blinding whiteness of the wilderness, then so be it. Let it be him.

Maxwell was nineteen, maybe. He didn’t go to college, Ilya knows that. He’s a baby. A baby with a family, probably. A family who is probably already grieving, with no idea that he survived the initial crash, only to die under his captain’s care.

It should have been Ilya. The next time, if that should happen, it will be. He will lay his life down. He doesn’t care enough about it anyway.

He misses Shane so much. But Shane will be okay.

Won’t he?

Won’t he?

Ilya doesn't know. He hopes so. He doesn't want to hurt Shane. It's the last thing he wants to do. But in place of someone else's life? Well. They probably want it more than him anyway. If the value of a life is to be ranked, what is the measure? Age until death? Ilya's age and his drinking and his smoking and his unfortunate genetics count against him there. Should it be measured in how loved someone is? Ilya thinks Shane loves him more than anything, but these men are fathers and sons. Ilya is neither, not now. Or, should it be measured in want? Animals will fight to the death. Ilya will lay belly up, if it comes to that. The pills in his medicine cabinet, the ones he hasn't touched, stowed away, taunting, say as much.

If asked if any of them ever considered ending their own lives, Ilya thinks he might be the only one. So… If it should come down to it, then… Well. It seems fitting, it would be him. He will make sure it's him.

Bood knows the drill by now, waiting until Ilya has climbed off the plane until he follows, jumping down onto the snow.

"Holy shit," he murmurs.

Ilya looks around, and… yeah. Holy shit. Sometimes things seem better in the morning, but sometimes, the light illuminates exactly how bad things are. This is the latter. Ilya got a picture of things last night, but now, he sees the miles around them, mountains and snow, everywhere, as far as he can see, white and green and black.

"They'll find us," he says.

They will. Right?

Ilya's eyes track the surroundings, building an imaginary fence around them, until he has an idea.

"Hockey sticks are in cargo. With the equipment. If we can get them, we can feel the snow in front of us, yes? We can see what's safe, build a perimeter."

As of now, it's maybe twenty meters wide, he thinks; wide enough the plane looks stable, but narrow enough its wings are hanging over the edge of the ridge. On either side is a sharp drop though, the still burning remains of the cockpit to the right.

"Fuck," Bood whispers.

Ilya traces his stare, to where he can spot the unmoving body of Beth, half covered in snow, some fifty meters down. He didn't see her last night. She'd disappeared. In the light, she's a reminder of Ilya's failure, something he wonders how he'll ever get over.

"Oh," Ilya whispers.

"It wasn't your fault," Bood says, like he knows what Ilya is thinking.

Ilya stares at her. He knows she's dead. Of course she is. It's been all night, and it's cold, but she looks so… whole. Not broken and splayed out. She looks like she just slid down and decided to rest, not like she fell and broke.

"We should get our sticks. Before we go to the roof," he says.

"Okay," Bood agrees.

"You can stay here. I will go around-"

"No," Bood says. "And stop. Stop doing that. You're captain, okay? And someone needs to take charge. You're doing a good job, but you're not the fucking president, okay? You can't do things on your own. You don't owe anyone," he says.

Ilya blinks at him. "Okay," he nods.

Crawling on their hands and knees ends up being the best way to do it, once Bood has called to the team and Hayes has brought them gloves. Ilya goes first, crawling beneath the wing, slow and careful in case the ground should give out beneath them.

It's slow. It's so slow, by the time they've made a perimeter, using the hockey sticks to tap the snow, to test depth, and to build a perimeter that feels safe enough they can walk, all the way around the front and sides of the plane. The back is against some trees, hearty spruces that survive here.

If they can, maybe Ilya can too.

Luca comes out, peeking his head up once the perimeter is complete, with two waters and two bags of pretzels.

"No thank you," Ilya says.

"Roz," Bood snaps. "You've been moving for two hours. Eat."

"Not hungry," Ilya says sharply.

"Eat," he repeats.

Bood snatches the food and water from Haas and holds them out to Ilya who doesn't move for them. "What? So you can die, and then what? We need you," Bood snaps.

Haas is still standing at the opening.

"What's up, bud?" Bood asks.

“Uh, just, any status update? People are wondering.”

“We had to build a perimeter, so no one else dies like Beth,” Ilya says bluntly. “Flares next.”

Haas nods and retreats, but not before looking over each of them.

Bood spins on him the second Haas is out of site. “Okay. What’s going on?”

“What do you mean?” Ilya asks, playing dumb.

“You gotta eat, man. You need water. What’s with the whole hero thing, huh?”

Ilya grunts, looking out into the blinding expanse. “Not hungry.”

“No,” Bood says. “No. You are. And you’re thirsty too. Anyone would be. So what the fuck is going on?”

Ilya spits into the snow, like he would on the ice of a rink before a chirp, only his mouth is dry and it doesn’t carry the same weight. “You see her down there? I set her down. I carried her off the plane, and now she is dead,” he says, jutting his chin out toward Beth’s body beneath them, obvious against the snow.

“Jesus, Roz. It was pitch black, and no one knew we were on a fucking,” he gestures around them, “mountain. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Maxwell is dead.”

“His bone was fucking-” Bood hisses. “Man. I was the one next to him! You think it’s my fault?”

“No!” Ilya half shouts.

“Okay! So it’s sure as fuck not yours!”

Ilya feels himself gasp. “I can’t lose anyone else. I can’t… I can’t-”

Bood steps in close and pulls Ilya in to his chest. Ilya feels small against him.

“Hey,” he says. “Our plane fucking crashed. It crashed, man. It’s not your fault,” he says softly, as Ilya leans into him.

“I know,” Ilya says, surprised to hear his own voice, crackling and wet.

“You gotta eat, man.”

Ilya sighs, but he nods. He eats the bag of pretzels and sips from the water, not tasking anything but the salt crystals melting on his tongue.

“Let’s get the flares,” Bood says, once they’re finished.

Ilya nods once.

It’s clear almost instantly that this isn’t doable. The plane is cold, a sheen of ice on it, likely from the condensation of twenty warm, less warm by the minute, bodies inside. When Ilya tries, staying within the bounds of the spread out hockey sticks, he slips instantly.

“Fuck. How will we do this?” He asks.

“We need more people. Two of us can hoist two more onto the wing, and then one of them can help the other to the roof,” Bood says.

“It’s not safe.”

Bood frowns. “We crashed like… what? Fourteen, fifteen hours ago? Why is no one here yet? Why haven’t we even heard anyone yet? Not a single plane,” he says.

Ilya’s stomach clenches around the half chewed pretzels that reside there.

“They don’t know where we are,” he says quietly.

“Yeah. So we gotta show them.”

—

Hayes and Connors lift up Ilya and Haas while Dykstra and Bood stand on the other side of the plane, ready to catch flares or any other supplies thrown down. It’s Ilya on the wing who has to boost Haas up, hoisting up by his thighs, a screw driver in his pocket in case he needs to pry open the compartment, given the amount of snow and ice that may seal it shut. He doesn’t want it to be Haas, but he’s smaller and confident he can do it, and it comes down to Ilya’s own protective streak against everyone else supporting the idea, so it’s how they end up here. Ilya insists on being the one up there with him, so he can at least control what he’s able to, and so if anything goes wrong, there’s no one else to blame.

No one knows what to look for, not even Gen. There’s just a general idea, and Ilya tries to keep steady as he holds Haas’s thigh, the plane groaning with the weight of two grown men on one wing. Maybe they should’ve had someone on the other side to counterbalance. Maybe it could have stopped what happens next.

Things happen so quickly, then. Haas asks to be higher up, for one more boost so he can be fully on the top of the plane. Ilya gives it, his hand is planted firmly under the meat of Haas's ass, and he pushes hard, enough to get him up over the curve of the top of the plane.

"Good?" Ilya asks.

Haas looks down at him and gives a thumbs up, and then he's moving, sliding fast, and Ilya watches in horror, frozen on the wing of the plane as Haas goes over the other side of the plane, out of view.

There's a sharp clanging sound when he hits the wing, and for one brief moment, Ilya thinks things will be okay.

"I'm alright!" Haas yells out, and for a half second there is relief.

Ilya doesn't see it happen. He only hears Bood yell out, "Sticks!", one single word, desperate and loud, and then there are yells, horrified and stunned, awful, a chorus of "no" and "fuck".

Ilya doesn't know what's happened. He heard Haas land hard and announce he was okay, and then chaos. There's no one near him. He feels stranded, alone on the wing, and sure, he could jump, but even with the border of hockey sticks he doesn't know that the force of him jumping off won't disturb the snow beneath them, that he won't go careening off or cause some sort of avalanche.

"Haas!" Ilya screams over the sound of yells. "Haas!"

He doesn't answer.

Ilya gasps. Haas fell over the edge, he thinks. Ilya pushed him too hard, and he shoved him right over the edge of the plane to his death. He's killed someone else.

“Ilya,” a voice calls back.

Haas. It’s Haas.

“I’m stuck, what happened?” Ilya answers, yelling loudly, loud enough his voice hurts.

“Dkystra,” Haas yells. “He just-”

Ilya sinks down into a seated position, his legs hanging down over the wing, and he jumps. The landing is fine, cushioned by snow, and he runs around the front of the plane to where people are gathered.

“What happened?” he gasps.

“He just went over,” Bood says numbly, looking over the edge, the opposite edge from the one where Beth lays, and the cockpit, far below her.

“Haas,” Ilya barks. “Can you see?” He’s higher up, so maybe there’s a chance, maybe he can see a way down, maybe they can get him-

“He’s not moving,” Haas says quietly. “I see him. He’s not moving.”

—

Once again, Ilya thinks he will have to deliver devastating news to his team, only then Bood, with his deep voice and a steadying hand on Ilya’s shoulder, speaks up to the nearly fifteen people who were inside the plane when it went down.

“Dykstra is dead,” he says. “He fell over the edge. He went past the border Ilya and I set up.”

There is a stunned silence.

“He was trying to save someone from falling,” Bood says.

Ilya thinks it’s nice that he doesn’t say who. It wasn’t Haas’s fault, but still. It’s nice. Someone could be anyone, and so everyone can imagine he was trying to save them. If he didn’t die trying to save one particular person, then no one particular person needs to blame themselves.

Ilya still wonders if he hadn’t pushed Haas as hard, if he hadn't slid over…

“He was a husband. He loved his wife, Caitlin,” Bood continues.

Ilya is glad he is doing this. He couldn’t. He’s not as good with names, and he’s shit at attending gatherings, spending any free time he has with Shane.

“His daughter turned one this past fall. He loved country music. And he was a damn good hockey player,” Bood finishes.

People clap a little, and Wyatt pulls Bood in for a hug, while Ilya stands back and watches.

“He was going after me,” Luca says quietly behind Ilya. “He wanted to catch me. He thought I was gonna fall off the wing, and he went past the border-”

“I pushed you too hard,” Ilya interrupts. “My fault. Not yours.”

“No, that’s-”

“Shut up,” Ilya hisses. He’d rather be mean than have Haas blame himself for a second.

“Ilya,” another voice says, softer, feminine. “People are hungry. Thirsty. There’s enough food and water for two snacks and waters a person, for two days,” she says.

“One,” Ilya say as he slowly lowers himself into a seat in front of everyone else, facing away from his team. “One per person. Four days,” he says.

“You think so?” She asks, not pushing, just wondering.

Ilya nods once. “Yes. To be safe. I think so. I am sorry.”

Her hand squeezes his shoulder.

“You’re doing so well. Coach Wiebe would be proud,” she says.

Ilya has never been more grateful than when she retracts her hand and turns away before she can see him cry.

She announces the food and water situation to the team. No one fights it. No one complains. They are good people. Or maybe they aren’t hungry enough. Maybe things will change. But for now, they listen.

“We could burn things. Luggage, seats,” a trainer speaks up, his voice soft. “We can start a fire, and find something to boil snow in. People can last a lot longer without food than water.”

“Great idea,” Harris answers.

“How long?” someone else asks. Ilya isn’t sure who. “How long can someone go without food?”

“Three weeks,” someone answers. “Sometimes longer.”

“Three weeks?”

“You think it’ll be that long?”

Ilya blocks out the conversation, finding it hard to listen to. He focuses on his breathing, in and out, slow, like how Shane does when he panics.

Someone sits next to him. Ilya wishes they wouldn’t.

“Hey,” Luca says softly. “We’re alive. They’re gonna find us.”

“Not all of us are alive,” Ilya answers harshly. He’s being cruel, but maybe if he pushes Haas away, he’s more likely to survive.

“We are. You and me. The rest of us. Thanks to you.”

“What the fuck have I done?” Ilya snaps, turning to face him. “Nothing. Killed a flight attendant. Pushed you too hard. What have I done?”

“You put a tourniquet on Maxwell,” Haas says.

“And now he is dead.”

“You helped Bood make a border. You told everyone to use blankets.”

“Ah,” Ilya nods. “I am a fucking hero, huh?” Sarcasm laces his words.

Haas grits his teeth, and it’s the first time Ilya has ever seen him resemble anything close to angry.

“You’re holding people together. Giving direction, ideas.”

“Nothing has fucking worked. And I’m out of ideas,” Ilya says, defeated.

Haas nods.

“I’m so fucking cold,” Ilya says, softer now.

Haas leans in and rests his head on Ilya’s shoulder, and Ilya stiffens briefly before relaxing. He’s not supposed to be affectionate like this. People could talk. People could get ideas. He wonders if Shane were here, if he would do this. Would a plane crash be enough for Shane to publicly show his love for Ilya?

“I bet when we get home, my parents do a whole Star Wars marathon with me,” Luca says.

“What?” Ilya asks, confused.

“I always want to watch it, but they hate space movies. I bet when I get home, they’re so happy to see me, they watch all of them. Probably they’ll get my favorite Chinese food too,” Luca says.

“Oh.”

“What about you? When you get back? Who’s gonna be happy to see you?”

Ilya is quiet for a long moment. Luca doesn't push. They’re on a mountain, in the wreckage of a plane. His friends are dead. His coach is dead. They’re talking about how long a human body can survive without food.

“Shane,” Ilya says.

Luca doesn’t even flinch.

“Shane will be very happy to see me. He will let me get McDonald’s without complaining, even when I taste like a Big Mac. And he will have my vodka from Russia. And he will be the big spoon, I think. Usually is me, but… I think he would do it, when I get home.”

Luca sniffles beside him. “Alright. So let’s go home. I really wanna watch Star Wars. And I really want you to get a Big Mac,” he says. He doesn’t even question the Shane thing. Ilya’s gonna make sure he gets to watch Star Wars again.

—

No one eats on the sixth day, because no one thought it would get to six days. It’s the last day of the food that was allocated on day two, but Gen says it might be a better idea to save it for the following day, in case. Everyone agrees.

Ilya thinks the cold will probably kill them before starvation. He imagines that’s a much more pleasant way to go, anyway. Probably quicker. Probably like falling asleep.

There’s been one more attempt to get flares, and while it didn’t end in death, it’s ruled out. A trainer named Carla tried, a woman Ilya barely knows, who helps with flexibility and stretches for the team. Ilya respects her, simply for being a female trainer in a male

dominated area, but when she volunteers to climb atop a frozen plane, he respects her even more. She says she used to be a gymnast, and she can use that to her advantage. She's small and it's easy to get her up, but it takes an hour for her to even find the panel, and then it's impossible to unscrew. She's shaking violently from the cold of being on the plane, and her lips are blue by the time Ilya helps her off the wing. Someone suggests using fire to warm the screws, but Carla nearly slides off like Haas had, and the risk of someone else dying doesn't seem worth it.

On day two, they tear off seats and lay them outside, starting a fire. It's a little warm, and people huddle around it. They still enter and exit the plane carefully, but they trust it not to fall by now. They find a kettle back in the flight attendant's cabin, and they use it to boil snow, sifting out dirt with a clean sock, so there is drinking water.

They lay out their suitcases to spell S.O.S. on day three.

People have paired off, more of less. They sleep beside each other for warmth. Luca has latched onto Ilya like a lost puppy. Ilya is too tired to push him away anymore.

Harris and Troy are together constantly. They speak softly and they hold hands, and Harris waits on him patiently. Troy complains of headaches, which worries people. None of them know how bad the head injury was, but there's a pressing need for him to see a doctor.

Gen and Michelle, the trainer, partner up, being the only two women. It's too cold and too dire for any of the men to take issue with being pressed together for warmth.

Ilya's phone is long dead. It must have died the first night, when he slept. He wishes it had a little charge, enough he could look at his private photo album, at the pictures of Shane he keeps there.

People are sleeping a lot. It makes sense. They need to conserve energy. They switch between laying on tarps set out by the fire, or huddling up together in the plane when it's too windy for the fire to stay lit.

On the evening of night six, the day everyone agrees to forgo food, Haas has a brilliant idea of using the tea bags from the beverage cart. Everyone stands around the fire, holding disposable cups of hot tea, and it's the first time Ilya has felt real warmth in days. He feels the hot water all the way down his throat, settling in his empty belly.

Day seven, Ilya needs a fucking change of plans. The mini liquor bottles in the beverage cart are looking too enticing, and he knows they'd only do harm, especially on an empty stomach. He's feeling self destructive, the urge to numb himself rising up.

Maxwell's body, covered in a blanket, sits frozen in the back row of the plane.

On day seven, they split up the last of the bagged pretzels. They've divided up the sodas and juices. It's not a lot, because this wasn't stocked for a full commercial flight, but it's still some calories. Gen pours everyone a half glass of orange juice on the morning of day seven. It burns going down, too acidic with little else in Ilya's stomach.

A fucking week. A fucking week, and they've eaten nothing but some bags of pretzels and the protein bars people packed, and little sips of juice and soda, split between twenty of them. Ilya's never been this hungry in his life. He downs hot water just to feel something in his stomach, reusing tea bags, convincing himself it's a broth, rich and nutritious.

People don't complain about it, though. Everyone knows how hungry they are. Their bellies ache and cramp around nothing, hunger pangs that no one has ever experienced before. Complaining won't make it go away, so they stay quiet.

Yeah, he needs a game plan.

He looks around, making sure everyone has finished their juice. He doesn't want to interrupt their meager breakfasts.

"Listen up," he says.

Weary, tired eyes look up to him, standing in the center aisle.

“I need to get down to the cockpit.”

“Ilya,” Wyatt starts.

“We are almost out of food. We will run out of things to burn in the fire. Without food, we can’t stay warm. We will die,” he says.

No one says anything.

“I need to get to the front of the plane, to see if there is anything we can salvage. Maybe we can find an antenna, something to fix the location device. Or some other way to communicate.”

“Roz, how are you gonna get down there?” Bood asks.

“Seatbelts,” Ilya answers. We’re going to cut them out, and tie them together, okay? Like… lowering me down,” he says, unsure if he’s explaining it correctly. His mind feels so sluggish now.

“And if it breaks?” Harris speaks up from where he’s sitting, holding Troy’s hand tightly. Troy sleeps. He’s been doing a lot of that. He needs to get to a doctor. Ilya doesn’t know what happens when a head injury goes on this long without treatment, but it can’t be good.

“Then I die. Okay. But if I don’t do this, we all die.”

“So you’re God now?” Wyatt says, standing up. “You get to choose who lives and dies? Who risks their life?”

“No,” Ilya snaps. “I only can make this choice for me. And I’m doing it.”

“Fuck that,” Wyatt says, louder. “You’ll fucking die, man. It’s so far. There’s no way the seatbelts will go that far, and the knots won’t hold. You can decide to do whatever you want, but I’m not gonna be a part of something that leads to your death.”

Ilya scoffs. “No. Of course not. That only falls on me, right? Only I have to be responsible for death, my ideas that have killed people.”

Wyatt’s eyes widen. “No one thinks that. No one blames you for anything,” he says softer.

“I do. I need to get us the fuck out of here. I need to,” he repeats the last part quietly.

“We’ll find another way, then. Something better than seatbelts.”

“Okay. Okay,” Ilya nods. He’s too tired to fight.

—

It’s a few hours later when Ilya is strapped into a contraption of rope. There was a lot of it, in cargo, used to strap down suitcases. Enough to tether to a tree and fortify a length of it with seatbelts so the bark of the tree doesn’t rip through it, when it shifts. They’ve developed a sort of pulley system, a way where two or three of them can give slack and lower Ilya down, and then pull him back up.

They did a test run with a suitcase, making sure it could get all the way down. It won’t be easy. The way down is sloping and uneven, with sharp drops and jagged edges. Ilya will have to kick off of the side of the peak like a rock climber, or else he’ll hit it, like the suitcase had on the trial run. The suitcase is also two hundred pounds lighter than Ilya. Maybe a little less, given the days without food. The cockpit is on a lower peak, not at ground level. It’s hard to tell how far below ground level really is.

The plan is to lower him down, and then he'll step out of the makeshift harness. He'll see what the view is from there; if from the lower peak, he can see how close ground level is, if things get less treacherous. Maybe there will be a way down, a way they can try to walk to find help.

Then, he'll check the cockpit for anything that can help, anything that isn't burnt to a crisp or melted. Gen said an antenna would be great, but any sort of transmission tools, headsets, radios, anything they can use to try to fix the ELT.

No one is particularly skilled with technology, but Gen knows a bit. One of the younger guys said he built out a gaming system last year, and he might know. The older trainer, a man in his late forties, does model trains for fun. He has some familiarity with wiring. It's all they have.

"Alright," Bood says, clapping Ilya on the back. "The second something doesn't feel right, you yell. If for some reason you can't, you tug twice on the rope, and we bring you up right away."

"I know," Ilya says. They've gone over this four times.

Everyone is gathered outside, anxious and willing to step in to help.

"You don't have to do this," Haas says quietly from a few meters back. "You don't have to be the one."

Ilya shakes his head. "It was my idea. I am doing it. If anything goes wrong, I came up with this, okay?" He can't have anyone else risk their life doing his idea. Truth be told, he isn't confident about it. So, no. No one else can do it. If Ilya dies doing this, he will die trying to save them. He will die trying to get back to Shane. That's enough. And no one can blame themselves. No one else is fucking dying doing something Ilya suggests.

Wyatt, Bood, and Connors man the rope. It's looped around two trees for stability, and also so that if the snow gives out with anyone bracing themselves, they can hold on to the rope and know it's at least wrapped around a second tree. No one is a fucking physicist, but it seems to be how a pulley system works, Ilya hopes.

The first few feet are jerky. Ilya struggles a bit, trying to lean back more into the harness, to put weight where the ropes wrap around his thighs, under his ass. This way he can have his feet facing the cliffside, kicking away from it when he swings too close, so it doesn't hit him.

"How's it feel?" Wyatt asks him.

Ilya looks up, clutching the rope tightly. "Good," he nods. "Secure. You can lower me," he says.

"Alright. Slow and steady," Wyatt answers.

They lower him in short bursts, and it's not the smoothest, but it's working. The rope is digging into him, but it's fine. He can handle it. They check in every ten meters or so. Ilya has to use his feet to step down the side of it, mostly horizontal, as part of the cliffside sticks out. When it drops again, he hangs down, letting them lower him.

"Looks like we're halfway," Bood calls out. "You doing okay, Roz?" Bood yells down to him.

"All good, yes," Ilya yells back. He doesn't tell them that from here, from halfway down, he can see Beth clearly. She's half covered in fallen snow, but he sees her legs, frozen, resting on the edge of a sharp jut of rock. If they leaned over, they'd see her too, but that would require going past the border of hockey sticks, and no one is doing that without a rope. "Keep going," he yells. He keeps the fear out of his voice. If this fails, he will die. He knows that. If the knots don't hold, if the rope rips, if the makeshift harness fails, he will careen down fifty meters of snow and rock. He really hopes that doesn't happen.

It doesn't. He gets to the bottom, the wide plateau of snow covered rock, the flat ridge of the peak below theirs.

“I’m down!” He calls out. He can’t see them from here, because they can’t step close enough to the edge to see him at the bottom, this close to the cliff, not without risking falling the way Beth had. He undoes the knot that allows him to step out of the rope. He’ll have to retie it. They had him practice a few times. Washington, one of his teammates grew up sailing, so he knows knots. It’s nice, how everyone has come together to share knowledge, to help, to offer up what they know to try to make this work. Ilya hopes it works. He hopes he can recreate the knot.

Once he steps out, he can see them. He waves up, and squints in the bright sun to see them wave back. The snow is slightly blinding. Ilya turns then, and walks toward the main part of the cabin. There’s debris everywhere, and up close, Ilya can see the devastation. It’s not just blobs and shapes down here. He sees panelling, wires, and stops in his tracks when he sees a charred human leg, detached from anything else. The toes are still intact, sticking out through a burnt shoe, frozen and pale.

He swallows and looks away. He takes careful steps, walking around the cockpit, but not getting too close to the edge of this area of flat ground. Looking out, this fares no better. The cliffs and peaks stretch out before him for as far as he can see. There is no simple way down, no way to climb and search for help. It’s abundantly clear that they will need help to come to them.

He steps back, approaching the cockpit. Despite the debris, there is a clear opening, and he can make out where the nose of the plane is angled into the snow. He’ll have to climb up a bit to get inside, then.

He assesses, circling it a bit, finding the lowest section with the least amount of sharp edges. He reaches out a gloved hand and strokes the edge, checking that he won’t slice himself open when he hoists himself up. He musters the strength he has, which doesn’t feel like much, given the lack of food over the last few days. His muscles shake with the effort, but he manages, swinging a knee up, and then he half tumbles inside, hitting a seat once he’s in.

It’s awful, inside. It’s dark and covered in soot. It smells like burnt plastic and vaguely of charred meat. Ilya pushes that thought aside. It’s hard to stand with the angle, but he uses the burnt seats to steady himself, before he takes in his surroundings. There are bodies, still seated. They are charred and unrecognizable, burnt corpses, but then he recognizes a half burnt sweatshirt over one.

“Coach,” he whispers. His eyes scan over him. He shouldn’t look. He should focus. He shouldn’t try to recognize anyone else. He shouldn’t look for Boyle, he shouldn’t try to determine which of the burnt bodies is who, but then his eye catches on something. Despite the soot, a shiny bit of metal catches the sun.

Ilya reaches down to the charred and frozen finger, and the gold wedding band on it. He reaches down to slide it off, stilling when the entire fingers breaks off with it, like some old crumbling statue and not a human body. Ilya almost drops it, but he gets the ring off and slips it into his pocket before letting the finger fall. He can bring this home to Coach’s wife. He can make sure it’s not lost.

He steps forward and forces himself not to look at any of the other corpses, and slowly makes his way down to the cockpit. The angle is awful, and he’s more climbing than walking, using seats to lower himself down. He thanks God or someone, anyone, that the door to the cockpit is open. Maybe it opened in the crash, or maybe it was the fire, but it’s open. It’s even darker in here, the snow blocking out the windows, only the light from the opening behind him filtering through.

Ilya pulls a flashlight from the duffle bag he’d brought down with him. The pilot is still in his seat, burnt like the rest of the bodies down here. Ilya sweeps with his flashlight slowly, looking for anything that isn’t destroyed. The headset is burnt nearly beyond recognition. There are loose wires and destroyed equipment, but he finds torn wire in the control panel and rips it out. Maybe that can help. He keeps looking. There’s some sort of radio thing, Ilya isn’t sure, and he picks it up. It’s burnt, broken, but then he spots something; a knob. He pulls at it with shaking hands, and out comes an antenna, shiny and undamaged, protected by being tucked inside of the radio. Bingo.

“Yes,” he whispers to himself. He tucks the radio and the wires into his bag, and looks for anything else he can take. There’s not much. It’s so dark and so burnt. The longer he’s here, the more he worries the whole thing could crumble beneath him. He just has to hope the antenna is enough.

He climbs out, jumping down, and looks up at his team on the ridge above him. It looks even further away, from down here.

“Hey!” Wyatt yells out, the sound echoing.

“Antenna!” Ilya yells back. “It looks good!”

There are a few whoops of excitement, and Ilya makes his way back to the dangling rope. “I will yell when I’m attached!”

“Got it, Cap!” Bood yells back.

Ilya pulls rope back around his thighs, two circles of it. He steps in, and pulls the V shape of rope over his crotch, and then it loops over his shoulders. Everything is tied neatly and tightly, so he just needs to pull the one loose length around his middle and tie it off, to secure everything. He pulls off a glove to tie it, for precision, and remembers what Washington told him, looping it twice, pulling it through, tugging it tight. He pulls on it a few times, testing.

“Okay!” Ilya yells up.

He feels the slack disappear, the rope going tight when they tug it, and then he starts to be lifted up.

This is harder. Going up, he doesn’t have his feet first to kick against rock, to keep him from hitting the spots that stick out more. He tries to angle away, to shoulder against it, and to kick out when he’s able to. He’s panting from exertion, which hurts his lungs immensely in the cold. He feels exhausted, like he’s played the hardest hockey of his life, just from being lifted, from trying to avoid rock. The rope jerks him up, and then there is pain.

Fuck, there’s so much pain. His arm feels like it’s on fire, stinging and burning, and wet. Wet and warm. It’s nice to feel something warm, he thinks briefly, disoriented, before it hits him.

He’s bleeding. He looks down, and sees the trail of his own blood, pouring out onto the white snow beneath him, painting it red as he’s lifted up. He can’t tell how bad it is, but the amount of blood suggests it’s not good. He doesn’t even know what happened, but somehow, some

sharp bit of rock, or maybe even debris, maybe metal from the plane imbedded in the snow, something sharp has sliced him open. He can't angle to see, not with the way he's held up by rope, dangling and weak and in so, so much pain.

He's not making any noise. He should be, he thinks. Right? He should be screaming. When he tries, his lungs ache, and all that comes out is an exhausted rasp. Do they know? Does his team above him, pulling him up foot by agonizing foot, know that he might be bleeding out beneath him? With each tug on the rope, there is less of him to come up. He feels like a bled pig, strung up, throat slit, draining out onto the snow beneath him.

His last thought is that it's getting dark, and then he passes out.

—

Someone is stroking Ilya's hair gently. It's warm. His head is resting on something soft, someone's lap, and their hands are carding through his curls. "Shane," he whispers.

"Hey, bud," someone says above him.

Ilya blinks his eyes open and looks up to see Luca above him, looking down at his face. It's dark out. How long was he out? Luca's face dances, shadows flickering and moving, and Ilya realizes they're sitting in front of a fire.

Memories come back to him in bits and pieces. He remembers someone pulling him up, yanking him onto the snow. He remembers screaming. He remembers seeing red, staining the white snow. There were worried voices, frantic and stressed.

He remembers pain. Intense, awful pain as someone tied a rope around his upper arm. He remembers screaming when something was poured over the wound. Vodka, maybe.

"Am I alive?" Ilya asks.

“Yeah. You’re alive. We’re all alive,” Luca says.

“My arm,” Ilya murmurs.

“It’s still there. You got it sliced pretty bad. Deep. We patched it up good. Had to tape it. There was tape in cargo,” Luca explains.

Ilya nods. “I’m so tired.”

“You lost a lot of blood. Do you remember anything? We’ve been waking you up, giving you water and a soda.

Ilya shakes his head in Luca’s lap. “No. Don’t waste soda. Calories. You will need it,” he says.

“You lost blood, Ilya. You need it more.”

Ilya tries to sit up a bit, but he collapses instantly back into Luca’s lap.

“Hey, hey. Relax. You’re okay, I’ve got you. Just gotta rest and stay warm, okay? You’re gonna be colder since you lost blood.”

“The antenna?” Ilya asks.

“Yeah, man. They got it. They’re trying. You did really well.”

“Okay,” Ilya nods. “I’m going to sleep more.”

“Okay,” Haas nods.

Ilya wakes up again, and this time when he moves, he realizes Haas is laying down too, holding Ilya. Probably keeping him warm. In any other situation, Ilya would tease him, poke fun, ask him if he ever imaged getting to spoon his childhood hero.

Instead, he nudges Luca with his foot until he rustles awake.

“Hey. You okay?”

“Haas,” Ilya says, his voice weak. “I need to talk to you.”

“Okay. I’m here,” Luca says, sitting up a bit so he can look down at Ilya. The tarp rustles beneath them, keeping them dry from the snow.

“There is no food left,” Ilya starts.

“I have mine from yesterday,” Luca says. “You can have it. No problem. You should, you’re hurt.”

“No,” Ilya hisses. He feels coherent, and he knows he needs to make the most of it. Who knows if the next time he shuts his eyes will be the last? “Stop. Listen. There is no food. One bag of pretzels won’t save us,” he says, his voice raspy and tired. “We are dying. We will die. There is no food, there is no way to get food. Everyone knows this.”

“Okay,” Luca nods, because there’s no arguing it.

“I will probably die first,” Ilya says softly.

“What? No. Stop, don’t talk like that,” Luca hisses.

“*Listen,”* Ilya growls. “I lost blood. I am hurt. I am weak. If I die, this could solve a problem.”

Luca’s nostrils flare, confusion and then understanding crosses his features, briefly followed by anger. “Ilya, what the fuck are you saying? You better not be saying what I think you are.”

“If I die, there is food. Okay? This is permission.”

“No,” Luca says, and he shifts away, putting distance between himself and Ilya, like the very idea repels him.

“You have to,” Ilya says, desperation cutting through the words. “Everyone will die. The cold will kill you first, probably, when you’re all weakened from starvation. But it will happen. This can save you all.”

“You’re fucking crazy,” Luca whisper yells. “No. *No.* Would you? Huh? Would you do that to Maxwell? He’s right there. You think we’d do that to you? Could you do it?”

Ilya narrows his eyes. “Maxwell didn’t give permission. I am. I am begging. If I die, let it be for something.”

“You sound like you *want* to die.”

“I don’t!” Ilya barks out. “I don’t. I did. I did before, maybe. Not now. I want to go home. I want to be with Shane. I don’t want to, so if I do, don’t fucking waste it. Let it save you.”

Luca stands up, leaving Ilya on the snowy ground, the flames of the fire warming his face. “I’m not talking about that. You got the antenna. It’s gonna work.”

“Fine,” Ilya says, trying to sound angry, but it doesn’t carry much heat. “I will tell someone else. Someone stronger, hm? Someone who can handle it. Connors is a father. You think he shouldn’t go home to his kids? He would do it, to live.”

“All of us should go home. All of us. You think any one here wants to do that? Could live with themselves after? So you get to fucking die, and the rest of us would have to live with that? You can’t even say it, can you? Say it, if it’s so easy,” Luca says, anger rising in his voice as he looks down at Ilya.

“Fucking eat me,” Ilya growls. “To live. Don’t let me die for nothing.”

“You aren’t going to die,” Luca says, before storming off.

Ilya wants to follow, but he feels very weak. He manages to sit up at least, putting weight on his good arm. He hears Haas say something to Wyatt, who is sitting on the other side of the fire, and he watches as Haas gets back in the plane, and Wyatt gets up, replacing him at Ilya’s side.

“Hey,” Wyatt says, and he guides Ilya back to lean against him a bit.

“Hi,” Ilya says. The flames jump through in the cold air, flickering and bright. The front seats are almost all gone now. Soon they’ll have to rip up the carpeted floors for fuel. Who knows what they’ll use after that?

Who knows what they’ll use to cook Ilya? He hopes he can save them.

He feels his eyelids grow heavy as he watches the fire, and then he hears something beautiful. It’s a long, high pitched howl, pretty, and it sounds like home. Ilya remembers the first time he heard it, sitting next to Shane, watching a fire, just like this. A loon, he thinks. The call of

a loon. Ilya would be happy, he thinks, to die listening to the sound of a loon. He smiles, thinking of Shane.

"Wolves," someone yells.

No, Ilya tries to say, but his tongue won't cooperate. *No, don't worry,* he wants to tell them. *I thought it was a wolf the first time too. It's just a loon. It's a bird. Ask Shane. Shane will tell you. It's just a bird.*

Someone is screaming so loud, and Ilya is being lifted. Ilya is screaming now too. His arm, fuck, his arm. Stop pushing on his arm.

"I'm sorry," Wyatt yells. "Fuck, I'm sorry, we gotta go. Get up, get up," he yells. "I'm so sorry."

Ilya stumbles, half of his weight on Wyatt, and then he's lifted, shoved up onto the plane as someone else pulls him by his arms.

Fuck it hurts. *Stop,* he wants to scream. *Stop pulling my arms.*

"I'm sorry," Luca cries, pulling Ilya onto the plane as Hayes climbs up behind him.

The howling is louder now, but the screaming has stopped.

—

It's light out when Ilya wakes up. He can't move, but he feels warmth on either side of him, pressing into him closely.

“Hello?” He murmurs.

Haas is pressed to his front, and someone is behind him, holding him close.

It’s sweet, he thinks, delirious. They’re cuddling, Ilya, Haas, and whoever is behind him, breathing on his neck. It’s cozy. They’re keeping Ilya warm.

“Hey,” Haas says.

The person behind him rouses and sits up in the seat.

“Hey, Roz,” Bood says.

“Are we cuddling?” Ilya asks.

“Yeah, bud,” Bood says, stroking his back. “It got really cold.”

Ilya nods. “Okay. Very gay,” he says.

Haas laughs, a surprised, breathless sound.

“What happened?” Ilya asks.

Bood helps Ilya sit up too, and then he watches as Haas and Bood make eye contact, like they’re deciding what to tell him.

“There were wolves. They got, uh…” Haas swallows.

“Connors is dead,” Bood says.

“Oh.”

There’s a commotion then, before Ilya can even process it, before he can take in the information that one more of them is gone. There voices from the back of the plane, rushed and excited. Ilya can’t make them out, but then he hears Gen, her voice standing out against the men.

“I got a signal,” she announces. “I got a fucking signal.”

“Holy shit,” Haas whispers.

Chapter 5: Give Me These Moments Back

Chapter Notes

> Hello! Sorry this one took a little longer, I was dealing with power outages and thunderstorms and inner turmoil. I hope you like it. Thank you for reading this. I know it was very different from my usual smut, but I truly loved writing it.

Days pass cruelly. Shane researches starvation and its effects on the human body, curled up in his blankets in the early hours of the morning. He researches hypothermia, and he dreams of Ilya, lips blue, shivering, standing in the yard, in the snow. Shane calls for him to come back to bed, but he doesn't answer. He researches plane crashes and the likelihood of survival, his gut clenching with each statistic. He works out to pass time, to feel a burn in his muscles, an ache when goes to bed. He eats enough to function, reminding himself that if Ilya is alive, which, with each passing day, feels less and less likely, that he is starving, so Shane owes it to both of them to eat.

He calls Svetlana daily. Sure, he's texted Rose and Hayden, and a few other teammates. When they ask to call, he just says he's too tired, he isn't up to it. With Svetlana, it's easier. She knows Ilya. Sometimes they just sit in silence, going about their evenings, connected through a signal.

He sees his parents every day, at their insistence. They look at him with pity and concern, and Shane can't even be bothered by it. He is being both pitiful and concerning.

Nothing gets easier. Shane just wants to know. He's living in a suspended state, not knowing how to function, how to move about the world. If he grieves, it's like he's giving up on Ilya, but for how long can he wait? If he has hope, how long until he must accept defeat, and start the process of grieving all over again?

The worst part is that he can't control it. It's not up to him. He wants to control it. He wants to track it, to go through the steps, because he feels like he hasn't been able to take a full breath in days. He's burning out. He's close to giving up. He doesn't even know what giving up is. Maybe he gave up when he first saw that headline. Maybe he's on borrowed time,

hoping for something that will never come. How much longer can it be? Another week? A month? Will it be his choice, when he finally gives up?

He moves through his house like a zombie, muffled steps in socked feet, from the bed to the bathroom to the gym to the kitchen, only doing what he must for survival. Survival. What a thing. What a concept. Is Ilya thinking the same? What does his look like? He catches himself thinking of things he wants to tell Ilya, only for it to hit him all over again. He can't.

He reads the translations of the journals when he feels particularly masochistic, the journals opened to the same page of the dates he reads. He reads the English and strokes his fingers over the Russian words, trying to feel Ilya in them.

Every two days or so, they have a call with someone from the Canadian government, someone with details of what is being done. It's not enough, because they haven't found anything. Farrah and his mom handle things with his team and coach. He can't. Even the thought of it makes him feel weak, so he shuts it out. It's the only constant he's ever had, and he can't bear the thought of it. Maybe because every memory of it is tinged with Ilya.

He thinks about dying a lot. Maybe once he knows, he can think about it more seriously. He sets the thought aside, like adding an item to his grocery list or a new move to try on the ice, organized and compartmentalized: Consider Suicide Once Plane is Found, If Ilya Is Dead, Not Before.

Neat, tidy, scheduled. That feels better. At least it's a plan.

Then, on the eighth day, while Shane sits at the kitchen table of his parents home, peeling an orange with shaking hands and nails chewed down bloody, his phone rings, vibrating in the middle of the table.

Shane stares at the caller I.D. It's the Canadian Transportation Board again. Yuna had called them yesterday. Did they say they'd call back today? Shane can't remember.

He stares at it, unmoving.

Yuna hits accept and puts it on speaker.

“Mr. Hollander?” A voice asks, the kind, older man from the first call, Shane thinks.

This is it, he thinks. He can feel it. This is it. An end to his limbo. The news that Ilya is gone. To be fair, he’s thought that every time the phone has rang.

“He’s here, Yuna says, when Shane doesn’t pick up. “This is Yuna Hollander. You’re on speaker.”

“Okay,” the man says, taking an inhale.

Shane shuts his eyes, bracing himself.

“At approximately five forty this morning, Pacific Standard Time, so… four hours ago, a frequency from an Emergency Location Transmitter was picked up, belonging to the aircraft that the Ottawa Centaurs were on.”

Shane opens his eyes.

“Within an hour, air rescue was at the location. There was a rescue mission. Twenty-one of the thirty-three souls who boarded the aircraft were airlifted out. I am incredibly honored and grateful to be the one to inform you that Ilya Rozanov is one of those people.”

The world stops.

“Oh my god,” Yuna gasps.

“Wow. You’re sure? You’re positive?” David asks. It’s what Shane would ask too, if he could speak.

“Yes, we are sure. He, along with the rest of the surviving passengers of the aircraft have been brought to several hospitals. I have to tell you, I am unaware of the extent of any injuries or the physical state of anyone, but I can confirm with you that Mr. Rozanov is alive, and currently checked in to Saint Mary’s in Jasper, Alberta. It’s possible he will have to be transported to a bigger hospital depending on his state,” the man says. “I wanted to call you as soon as I had the confirmation he was alive, I hope you understand, I had no intention of providing false hope or letting you know there were survivors until I knew he was one of them.”

“Thank you,” Yuna says, her voice a strained whisper. “We will be on a flight as soon as we can. How will we know if he’s transferred?”

“I have alerted the hospital, and they have your contact information. They will contact you directly, as Ilya’s point of contact, if he is moved,” the man says.

“Thank you,” David says, his voice tearful. “You have no idea how grateful we are.”

The call ends, all without Shane saying a word.

Yuna is standing from her seat and rushes him, wrapping her arms around him tightly, and David follows, doing the same.

“Son,” David whispers. “Shane, did you hear?”

“Baby,” Yuna pleads.

He can’t move. He can’t speak.

“Shane, please,” Yuna whispers, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

“Is it real?” Shane whispers, finally, barely audible.

“Yes,” she says. “It’s real.”

Shane leans forward, pressing his forehead to the cool wood of the table as his parents stroke his back. He tries to breathe, in and out.

“Shane, I’m going to get plane tickets.”

He nods against the table, and then his phone rings again.

Fear hits him. They’re calling back. It was a mistake. Ilya is dead. They confused him with someone else.

“It’s Svetlana,” David says.

Shane picks up instantly.

“Shane,” she says, frantic. “The news said they found the plane. Nothing else. Please, did you hear-”

“He’s alive,” Shane says, and he listens to her gasp, a sharp, high pitched inhale.

“Oh my god,” she cries out. “They are sure?”

“I think so. They said.” He can’t formulate the words to say, yes, they said so, but I don’t think I could believe it until I see him, until I’m touching him.

“Shane,” she cries. “Tell me where to go.”

“Jasper. Alberta. Um.”

“Your mom will tell her the airport,” David says, gathering the gist of the conversation from the side of it he can hear.

“My mom will tell you the airport,” Shane parrots back. It’s all he can do.

“Okay. Shane,” she says again. “Okay. I will see you there? As soon as possible?”

“Yes,” Shane nods.

He hasn’t cried yet. He doesn’t know how he will, not until he sees Ilya.

When the call ends, his dad grips his shoulder, strong and steadying. “It’s real, Shane. The news is starting to report on it,” he says, looking at his phone. “”Your Ilya is alive.”

“Dad,” Shane whispers.

Yuna steps back into the room then. “Okay. Tickets are bought, the flight is in two hours. Closest airport is four hours from the hospital, in Calgary. It was the only flight out today. We’ll rent a car. I’m going to pack for everyone, okay? Anything else we need, we’ll buy there. You’re responsible for your phones and ID’s, and I’ve got the rest. David, stay with him,” she says, authoritarian and controlled, which is exactly what’s needed.

“Text his friend, Yuna. She’s going to fly out too.” David tells her.

“Already did,” Yuna nods, heading down the hall to the bedrooms. Shane feels intense gratitude for her right now, for the way she operates.

Fifteen minutes later, she emerges with three duffle bags. Shane doesn’t have much here, but he does have some spare clothes. It’s enough. They pile into the car and make it to the airport in record time.

There’s no time for private security for him, for his publicist, for anything else. His photo is taken by a few people outside the airport. People watch him. Thankfully, people give him a wide berth, likely having heard the news that the plane was found. They spectate, but they know better than to approach. Shane’s eyes flick to the TV’s in the airport. There’s a number of the alive and a number of the dead, but no names have been released yet. He’s Schrodinger's bereaved to everyone here, either grieving his friend or on his way to see him. No one asks. He’s grateful for that. He’s grateful for a lot.

He’s quiet on the plane, given a window seat in first class, beside his mother. He looks out the window, watching them take off, watching the ground beneath them get smaller. His mom gets him a ginger ale from the beverage cart, and he drinks it, not tasting. He turns the pretzels down, wondering if it’s what Ilya ate last. He wonders how long he’ll think like that. Will it stop once he’s seen Ilya?

Ilya. Only when the pilot announces that they are preparing for landing, does he let himself think of the possibility as something tangible, and not some impossible thing. Ilya. His Ilya. Alive. He doesn’t know what state he’ll be in; injured, thin, hypothermic. As long as he’s alive.

Yuna checks her messages when they land, and announces that Ilya’s been moved to a larger hospital. “It’s here,” she says. “In Calgary. Thank God it’s not Edmonton. We’re so close, Shane,” she says, squeezing his hand.

All he can think is that a larger hospital means Ilya needs more care. Fuck, what if he gets rescued only to die in a hospital?

A flight attendant interrupts the thought, bending down to speak softly to Shane recognizing him, putting the pieces together. “I have permission for the three of you to de-plane first, alright? We’re all really hoping for the best for you and your friends.”

Yuna clasps her hand. “Thank you.”

—

Eight hours earlier

“You’re serious?” Bood asks, standing up.

“I’m so fucking serious,” Gen answers, her voice a little manic.

“Will they- I mean- Do we know they’ll get it? The signal?” Haas asks, cutting himself off.

Ilya’s dizzy, looking between them, trying to process the information. Someone is dead. Wolves. A signal. A signal. Rescue.

“They should? I don’t know. I don’t know how it works, but there’s a signal, there’s a frequency and a green light, so that has to be good, right?” Gen answers, animated and frantic, but hopeful.

“Has to be,” Wyatt agrees from somewhere behind them.

“So… What do we do now?” Bood asks.

“I think we should build a fire, right? So they see us for sure. It could be a while, and we aren’t exactly in an easy spot to get to,” Gen answers.

A fire sounds nice, Ilya thinks. He's so cold. He's so cold and he's so hungry and he misses Shane. He leans in to Haas, who seems slightly surprised by it, but then quickly adjusts, wrapping an arm over Ilya's shoulder, and pulling him in. Ilya nuzzles into his chest a bit. This isn't right, something in the back of his mind tells him. He's the captain. He's gotta step up. He's gotta direct people. He's being useless and he's hurt, and fuck, why is it so cold?

"Hey, bud," Haas says softly against his hair. "You hear all that? We got a signal. You know what that means?"

Ilya nods against him, but doesn't speak. He hopes he makes it. He hopes it's soon. Shane would be so mad if he died right before rescue came.

Bood and Hayes help carry Ilya off the plane. They prop him up against the fire and wrap blankets over him and give him warm water to sip. He hears them murmur. There's a weird energy. It's not quite excitement, too full of uncertainty for that. It's antsy. It's cautious. It's full of a want so deep, but the stakes are so high, and the future so uncertain. It's life or death.

The rest of them could make it longer, at least. If help doesn't come, and Ilya does die, the rest can last a while more. Ilya's death would ensure it.

Sometime later though, Ilya doesn't know how long, there's a sound, mechanical and loud and familiar, and it's joined by screams of joy. Ilya watches in a sort of dreamlike daze as Hayes drops to his knees and kisses the snow beneath him, and as Bood jumps up and down and praises God. Others hug each other, laughing and crying. Ilya watches as Harris wraps his arms around Troy and hugs him, and then when he pulls back, only for Troy to lean in again, and press their lips together. Hayes wraps his arms around the two of them immediately after that, cheering.

Haas stays by Ilya, squeezing his hand tightly. "We did it," he whispers. "We did it, Cap."

A rope ladder lowers, and with it, two people dressed in bright orange from head to toe. Ilya listens as they ask how many of them are alive, and when Gen answers with a number one less than there had been yesterday. He listens when they say that an entire team is on the way. Lastly, he listens when they ask if anyone is hurt, and that they'll start with rescuing the injured. This first helicopter can hold five, they say, but more are coming.

Maybe before, Ilya would have fought it. He would've insisted on being the last saved. He would've been the literal captain to go down with the proverbial ship, sacrificing himself until last, not leaving until every last one of them has been saved.

Now, though? Ilya just wants to get back to Shane. It's not selfish to want to live. It's not weak to recognize that he is dying. Rescue is here. Ilya doesn't need to hang on anymore, and he doesn't need to sacrifice himself. He doesn't need to try to be a hero and insist on waiting, insisting on others going first.

There is no hesitation from his team, as they guide Ilya up and hand him off to the rescuers. They strap him down horizontally onto a stretcher, and he's slightly out of it when someone squeezes his shoulder and tells him he did well, and that they'll see him soon.

His eyes close somewhere between leaving the ground and arriving in the helicopter. More blankets are used to cover him, and someone is putting a cuff on his arm, checking his vitals. They hover for a while longer. Ilya's never been in a helicopter before. It's such a funny thought. He'd always wanted to, but Shane said they were dangerous. Now he's in one, being saved. He makes a mental note to say *I told you so.*

"It's loud," he says to a woman.

She smiles at him, soft and affectionate. "Yeah, it is," she says, and she fastens something on his head; big, bulky headphones that block out some of the noise. "You're doing so well, okay?"

He smiles back. She's nice. "I'm cold," he tells her.

"I know, hon. We're gonna get you somewhere warm soon, alright? You're so close," she tells him.

Troy is brought up next, then Harris, then Gen, and lastly, Carla the trainer, before the helicopter reaches capacity. As they start to retreat, Gen points out the window. Ilya sits up

enough to see what she's looking at.

It's a whole fucking fleet of them, all going to save his team. Ilya can rest now, he thinks. They're saved.

—

Shane stops at the door, looking at his parents. He's scared. He still doesn't believe what he'll find on the other side, despite what he's been told.

"Do you want us to go in with you?" His mom asks.

He shakes his head. "In a minute. Just… I just want a minute alone with him. Is that okay?" He doesn't want to deprive his parents of seeing Ilya, but he just needs one minute with him, one minute to make sure he's really back, alive, all to himself.

"Of course," his mom says. His parents squeeze his shoulder, and then they step back, sitting on the chairs in the hallway.

Shane braces himself and opens the door, stepping inside. He shuts it immediately before he looks up.

Ilya is awake. He's wide eyed and staring at Shane, his lips chapped and parted. His skin looks pink and raw, maybe from the sun, the way it reflected off the snow and burned Ilya's pale European skin. He looks thinner, his cheek bones sharper, his eyes a little sunken. His hair looks damp and plastered to his skin. There's a blanket tucked up under his armpits. His left arm is bandaged up from the shoulder down to the elbow. There are needles in his arm, and a white tube taped to his face that disappears in one of his nostrils. Shane hopes it didn't hurt going in.

Shane takes a shaky step into the room, quiet, staring, staring like he can't quite believe his eyes. It's selfish, but he needs Ilya to make the first move, despite all he's been through. He needs to know that this is real, that he's not making it all up, convincing himself because the other reality is too unbearable.

"Shane," Ilya rasps out.

"Ilya," Shane whispers, and then somehow, by some miracle, his feet carry him across the room where he promptly collapses onto his knees beside the bed, resting his head on Ilya's lap.

The hand attached to Ilya's good arm goes to his hair instantly, carding through it, tugging on it too tightly, too hard, like he needs it to ground himself. Shane wishes it were harder.

He lets out a sob against the blanket. "Ilya," he whispers. "Ilya, Ilya, Ilya." He says his name like a chant or a prayer, on his knees. Like worship.

"I am here," Ilya says above him, his voice thready. "Look at me. Please."

Shane lifts his head, meeting Ilya's eyes. They're sunken, with dark circles, and they're bloodshot, but the color of his irises is vibrant against the reddened whites, less hazel and more greenish blue, the sky after a midday storm. Isn't that fucking poetic? Isn't that what this is? Reprieve, salvation, a deep breath, a miracle after something so insurmountable.

They stare at each other for a long while, unmoving, like neither of them even want to blink, like if they risk looking away for just a moment, the other might disappear.

"I love you," Shane whispers, because it's all he can think to say.

Shane pries his eyes away when there's a knock at the door, and a doctor walks in, Shane's parents behind her.

“Hello,” she says. “I’m Doctor Ortega. I know you’re just getting reunited, and I don’t want to take away from that, but I’d like to briefly go over some things so I can leave your family to have your privacy. Is that alright, Mr. Rozanov?” She asks, looking to him.

Yuna and David meanwhile make their way to Ilya. Shane doesn’t make room, not wanting to leave his spot at Ilya’s side, but he watches as Yuna kisses Ilya’s head and whispers his name, and as David takes his hand and squeezes it.

“Yes,” Ilya nods, tears welling in his eyes as he looks between Shane’s parents. “Please. Then we will have time?”

The way he asks it aches, like he’s terrified of losing time, like he’s scared of missing another moment.

“All the time in the world, Mr. Rozanov,” She says gently. “The rest of your lives.”

“Okay, Doctor,” Yuna says, standing at Ilya’s side on the opposite side of the bed, while David pulls the chair up to sit by Ilya’s legs.

“Ilya has been through a lot, as I’m sure you can imagine. But he is stable. It’s incredibly good that he was rescued when he was. There are a few main concerns for us, though. Ilya had to have an emergency blood transfusion when he was brought in, for the blood loss as a result of the wound he sustained on his arm. His friends did a very good job of patching him up, but we have cleaned and stitched the wound. Considering the depth, there is a risk of nerve damage, but it’s a bridge we will cross when he can move it more. He is on antibiotics for the wound to prevent infection, and additional medication to treat anything he could have come in contact with from consuming snow.”

Shane makes a half choked sound at the words, at the thought of Ilya consuming snow for hydration.

“His hydration levels weren’t terrible, but the lack of food certainly depleted some important levels. These IVs are providing him with nutrition, saline, everything he needs to get back on his feet, and the tube you see in his nose is giving him nutrition as well. I’m sure you’re looking forward to a real meal, Ilya, and the great news is that now that you’re out of surgery for your arm, I am clearing you to get some real food. We’ll just start a little small, okay? Even after a week, the stomach shrinks a bit, and we don’t want you in any pain or have any difficulties with reintroducing solid food, especially with the tube, but I do want you to have something solid, and I’m sure you want that too. How’s that sound?”

“Very good,” Ilya nods. “McDonalds.”

Yuna laughs, a wet, tearful sound. “We’ll get you McDonalds, sweetheart. Is that okay?” She asks the doctor.

“A few bites aren’t gonna hurt him, but I don’t want to do more than that for now, okay?, She says gently. “I’d like to keep him here tonight, and likely tomorrow night, but then I think we can clear him to fly home. He will need additional care at home, likely daily for at least a few more days, but I am weighing the emotional toll as well. I know you want to get home as soon as possible, Ilya.”

“Yes,” he agrees.

“The last thing I want to discuss is the psychological impact of this event. You went through an immense trauma, Ilya,” she says.

“I have a therapist,” Ilya says. “She is very good.”

Yuna and David look at each other in slight surprise. Maybe Shane should feign surprise. He doesn’t.

“Good. It’s incredibly important that you take care of your mental wellbeing. Please see your therapist as soon as you're able to, and know we have professionals here, if you need."

“Yes,” he nods. “The others? Troy? They would not tell me, earlier, when I asked. I don’t remember, I was very confused.”

“Everyone who was rescued is doing well. They’re being treated, but I imagine you will have some visitors today. They’re all asking about you too. Troy will have some additional recovery, but he is doing well. I’m sorry I’m not able to give more information. It sounds like you all really looked out for each other out there,” she says, and pats his knee. “Unless anyone has any questions, I will leave you to it.”

“Thank you, Doctor Ortega,” Yuna says.

The doctor leaves, and Shane realizes he’d spent the entire time with his head in Ilya’s lap, Ilya’s hand stroking his hair. If the doctor thought it was weird, she was polite enough not to say anything about it.

When she’s gone, Yuna hugs Ilya, kissing his cheeks and his forehead, murmuring how happy she is, how much she loves him. He makes a weak sort of chuckle, but when Shane looks up, his cheeks are wet.

Eventually David has to pull her back, and Shane watches quietly, as he reaches down and gently musses up the top of Ilya’s hair. It’s so paternal, it makes Shane nearly sob. He wonders if Ilya’s father ever did that for him. Probably not.

“Really glad to have you back, son,” David says. His voice cracks too. Shane doesn’t think he’s ever seen his father cry before.

“Thank you,” Ilya says. “I love you.” He strokes Shane’s head again. “Shane,” he says softly. “I’m okay. I’m here. I love you.”

“I know,” Shane says against the blanket. “I’m sorry. I know. I love you.” He feels the way he did that day at his parents, after his dad had found them, but… No. Maybe not like that. He feels like he has everything he’s ever wanted, and he’s almost lost it, and he’ll do everything to never let that happen again. This doesn’t feel as scary. The fear is behind him now. He just needs to do better, to hold on. He needs to make sure Ilya never doubts for a second how

much Shane loves him. He stands up enough to pull the other chair over, and then he sits in it so he can be right at Ilya's eye level.

"Kiss?" Ilya asks softly.

"Yeah," Shane breathes, and he leans in, his hand instinctively going to the back of Ilya's skull. He kisses him softly, his lips scraping a little against Ilya's dry, chapped lips. When he pulls back, he feels wetness on his cheeks. His hand trails down Ilya's hair, down the back of his neck, and he rests it between Ilya's neck and shoulder where his thumb can rest over Ilya's pulse. He presses against it, counting it, feeling the blood thrum beneath the slightly calloused pad of the digit. He leaves it there, feeling the life beneath him, the pumping of Ilya's heart. It's real, he reminds himself.

"I'm sorry," Ilya says softly. "I am sure you were very worried," he says quietly.

"Ilya. You came back," Shane says.

"Yes. Always. I will always come back to you."

"Ilya," Yuna interrupts. "We can't… I can't even tell you how happy we are. Why don't we go pick up some food and give you two some more privacy, okay?"

"Thank you," Ilya nods. "A Big Mac. And a Coke, I think," he says. "Fries too. Honey mustard."

She laughs, nodding. "I'm half tempted to get you one of everything," she says. "But let's start at a Big Mac. Doctor's orders."

"Shane?" She asks.

"Uh," he says, looking at Ilya. "The same. I'll get the same thing."

—

Ilya feels as lost as Shane looks, the moment the room is empty again. Neither of them know where to start. Is there a place to start? It feels fuzzy and far away, but it also feels so close. Ilya is under layers of blankets, and the nurses have already brought in fresh, new warm ones three times since he's been here, but he still feels chilled. He's still hungry, ravenous even with the IV's giving him nutrition and the tube in his nose giving him food he can't taste. He wants to chew on something, bite down, swallow, animalistic and primal. He feels scared, cagey, like at any moment he'll be back there, bleeding out in front of the fire, listening to the howling of wind and wolves, wishing it were loons, wishing he were with Shane.

He is with Shane, he reminds himself. Shane's hand is holding his. He squeezes it, grounding himself.

"Ilya," Shane says.

"Are you okay?" Ilya asks at the same time.

Shane laughs then, a sort of harsh, wet sound. "Am I okay?"

"Yes," Ilya nods. He can't imagine anything worse than what Shane's been through. He can't imagine the waiting, the not knowing, thinking he was gone. Despite just coming out the other side of it, he thinks he would do it all over again before having to go a single day thinking Shane was gone.

"I'm okay," Shane nods. "You're here. You're alive. I'm okay," Shane says. "Are you?"

Ilya frowns. "I don't know. No, probably. Like, no. I know I'm not. But it's very hard to think about, when you're here. When I thought I would never see you again. So. Maybe things to talk about later, yes?"

“Yes,” Shane agrees. “Fuck, Ilya.” He rests his head on Ilya’s shoulder, and then, unexpectedly, he bites, his teeth pressing into Ilya’s skin. Just as quickly, he sits up, looking shocked and a little alarmed. “Sorry,” he says quickly. “I don’t know why… Or. I do, I guess. Just… You’re here.”

Ilya raises an eyebrow. “I thought if I was going to be cannibalized, it would be in the wilderness,” Ilya says.

“Don’t,” Shane says firmly. “That’s not funny.”

“Sorry. I understand,” Ilya says, stroking his thumb over Shane’s knuckles. “I would probably bite too. Like, you want to feel me. I’m alive, Shane. If you take the bandaid off the IV, there is blood. You can, if you want,” he offers.

Shane shakes his head quickly, but then briefly looks like he considers it. “I know. I felt your pulse.”

“It’s hard to wrap your head around. I understand. For me too. I was very… out of it, at the end. I had bled a lot. I was hungry, cold. I didn’t even understand what was happening,” he says.

“But you’re here.”

“I am. Others are not,” he says solemnly. “I tried so hard. Maybe too hard. Maybe people would have been better with someone else in charge.”

“No,” Shane says. “No, you brought so many people back.”

“Could have been more.”

“You’re back. You’re here.”

Ilya nods. He’s here.

The first taste of real food is so good Ilya actually moans around the bite. It would be shameless except for the fact that he blushes after hearing himself. He takes two bites of his burger, which, to be fair, is about half a burger, before Yuna pulls it away. “We don’t wanna overdo it, right?” she says. “You can have more later.”

She dumps out five singular fries onto his tray, and Ilya does his best not to glare at her, scooping up as much honey mustard as he can with each one. Shane swipes a finger over the corner mouth, wiping up the excess, before licking it off.

Shane eats too, stopping at half his burger, like he doesn’t want to eat more than Ilya and rub it in.

“Is okay,” he says softly. “Eat. I’m sure you didn’t eat much either.”

“I’m full,” Shane says.

Ilya doesn’t push.

Then, there’s a quick knock at the door, and it opens, with Luca Haas standing in the doorway.

“Hey,” he says.

Ilya looks to Shane quickly. Shane doesn't know that Luca knows. He’s going to panic, to make up an excuse, explain that Ilya is just his friend, something like that, but then Shane is standing, and Ilya watches with wide eyes as he crosses the room and wraps his arms around Luca.

Luca locks eyes with Ilya over Shane's shoulder, looking slightly startled, but then he hugs back before they pull away.

"I'm so glad you're okay," Shane says.

Ilya knows that the two haven't spoken besides some quick remarks on the ice, and he watches in bewilderment at the interaction, feeling touched in a way he can't even fathom.

"Yeah. Me too. Thanks to our boy Rozanov, really," Luca says. "How are you doing? They finally let me get up and walk around."

"Good," Ilya says, then looks to Yuna and David. "Luca Haas. You should remember this name, he will be captain some day," he says, watching Luca blush.

They catch up, which is to say, they talk about the hospital and Yuna offers some fries to Luca, and they don't talk about the ordeal, but it's enough. Ilya is sure to say, in the vaguest terms, that Luca is why he is here. Luca downplays, but Ilya dismisses him quickly. It's earnest. Luca Haas saved him, Ilya knows it. He hopes Luca does too.

"So…" Ilya says after a lull in the conversation. "I told Haas. About us."

"I figured," Shane says.

"It's cool, I'm not gonna tell anyone," Luca says quickly.

Shane smiles. Ilya watches him for any bit of doubt or fear. "It's cool. I think, uh. You know. When this is over, we'll probably tell everyone. If you want to," he says, turning to Ilya.

"Yes."

“I would have. I just didn’t want any of the attention off of, you know…” Shane gestures with his hand to them both.

“I’ll let you guys have some time. Uh, cool if I tell the others you’re okay with visitors? They want to see you.”

“Yes,” Ilya nods.

An hour later, Yuna announces that Svetlana has landed.

“You talked to her?” Ilya asks.

“Yeah,” Shane says, enthusiastic and rushed, like he can’t believe he didn’t say it yet. “Yeah, oh my God, Ilya. Yes. She stayed with me, the first few days.”

Ilya can’t help the tears that flow, running down his cheeks. “Sveta stayed with you? You met her?”

“Of course,” Shane says, stroking his hair. “Yeah. She was my… She helped me so much. She helped me through the first few days. And after. We talked every day. She’s the first person we told.”

“Oh,” Ilya sobs out, and Shane wraps his arms around Ilya, pulling him in. “Thank you,” he gasps. “Thank you for letting her in.”

“Ilya,” Shane breathes. “Of course.”

It’s a miracle Svetlana doesn’t hurt Ilya’s arm with the way she comes in. It’s a flurry, the way she rushes in, lets out a sob equal parts elated and horrible, and then she flings her body at him, nearly collapsing on his chest as she hugs him and whispers in Russian to him, *my*

Ilyusha, my Ilya, I love you, I can't believe it, fuck you, how could you do this to me, oh my God, you're here.

Ilya laughs and cries as he holds her, and then watches with a heart that feels close to bursting as she hugs Shane. She pulls him in tightly and kisses every inch of his face she can get until his crying turns into laughter and he's pushing her off gently. She hugs Yuna and David and expresses gratitude, and Ilya can't stop crying.

"You're okay, honey," Yuna whispers to him.

"Yes," he nods. "I know. I just… Everyone I love is here. I am so lucky."

—

The next two days are a bit of a blur. It does end up being two for Ilya, though others leave earlier, telling him to let him know as soon as he's back.

One by one, each visitor learns exactly what Shane is to Ilya. It's not scary. Before this, it would have been. But now after almost losing Ilya? Shane wants everyone to know. He's felt fear. He thought he had. That's unfair to himself, maybe. He had. He'd experienced real fear. But losing Ilya? It dwarfs everything.

Yuna and David get a hotel for the nights, and Svetlana gets a room next to theirs, but no one questions Shane staying. He's grateful, because he'd been prepared to fight. There's no need. Ilya has a private room, and Shane doesn't know the regulations, but no one who steps foot in the room even questions making him leave. It makes a surge of pride and possessiveness and protection rise up in his chest. *Fucking try,* he thinks. No one does.

During the day, Svetlana spends a lot of time with them. It's sweet. She's clearly happy, but it's an emotional influx for her too. "I knew it," she says at one point. "Do you know how many times we had to watch that boring documentary? God, I felt like I was on one of those Hollywood film location tours when I saw the cottage," she teases. Shane knows she's being playful to keep the mood light. He knows it wasn't like that. He loves her so deeply, in such a

short time, for everything. She's what both of them need. He hopes this is what she needs too.

Troy and Harris visit together, which is sweet. Troy is on post concussion protocol and will have a slew of follow ups, but he's cleared to leave. Svetlana is excited to meet the players she's likely heard so much about, asking them questions. People say their goodbyes, and on the third morning, Dr. Ortega clears Ilya to go home. Everyone knows to keep things light, which is nice. There will be time for more after.

If Ilya is scared on the flight home, he doesn't show it, with the exception of a firm grasp on Shane's hand for the entirety of the flight. He'd also been given a two day Xanax script, and while it doesn't knock him out, Shane thinks it must help. He's not panicked in a way Shane had worried, but he's quiet, choosing the window despite Shane offering the aisle.

"I want to see outside," he says simply. Shane doesn't push.

—

Ilya is given pill bottles and vitamins, pages and pages of discharge, and Yuna takes it all. The way home is long and quiet. Svetlana offers to come with, but in the end it's decided she'll come in a few days. Ilya needs to be alone with Shane. Shane needs to be alone with Ilya. Maybe, both of them need to be convinced that this is real.

They step into the cottage, bidding Shane's parents goodbye at the car. Ilya hugs them both for a long while, and Shane promises they'll both come over in the morning.

Ilya feels like him and Shane are baby birds on shaky feet, walking through the door, uncertain but gravitating toward each other.

Shane is too gentle when he hugs Ilya.

"I won't break," Ilya whispers against his ear.

“I know,” Shane says.

Ilya tightens the hug with the strength he has.

“Do you want to eat? We can order something, you just have to be slow,” he says.

“Yes,” Ilya says. He doesn’t want to waste time eating, really. He wants to hold Shane, to crawl into his skin, to just be as close as he can. But he also wants to eat, so he lets Shane order delivery from a sandwich chain. Shane guides him to the sofa then, and he pulls Ilya against him, mindful of his arm. *You could dig your fingers into it, if you wanted,* Ilya thinks. *You could count the veins if it made you believe I was here.*

“I have to tell you something,” Shane says instead.

“Okay.”

“I thought you were dead,” Shane starts.

“Yes.”

“No, Ilya. You need to know that. You know, but you don’t *know.* You don’t know what it was like. I thought you were dead,” he says, reaching a hand up to Ilya’s jaw, angling it up for eye contact. “I thought I would never see you again. I wanted to die.”

Ilya clutches Shane’s shirt at that. Sure, if it were Shane, Ilya would want to die. He would die. He’s almost certain of it. But the thought of Shane doing the same? No.

“Understand that, okay? I don’t want to upset you, I just want you to know. I found your journals,” he says, making eye contact like it’s painful.

“Oh,” Ilya whispers.

“And Svetlana translated them for me. Please don’t be upset at her. I asked her to. I just, I thought it was all I had of you. I wanted to find something of yours, and I found them, and I just-” Shane’s words break off into a gasping sob, and he tucks his head into Ilya’s shoulder, breathing heavily, just on the verge of hyperventilating.

“I’m not mad,” Ilya says, before he really thinks about it. “I am sure I would have done the same.”

“I thought you were dead, Ilya,” Shane whispers. Ilya’s neck feels wet. “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry for what I’ve put you through. I didn’t know. I should have. I was so scared and selfish-”

“Shane, Shane,” Ilya says, unable to hear any more of it. “Stop. I didn’t tell you. Okay. So now you know. It’s sad, okay. I am maybe… not doing well. But I almost died. And I learned that I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to do anything that takes me from you,” he says.

Shane pulls back a bit, like he needs to see more of Ilya.

“Okay. So, I will confess something too. I asked Haas to eat me.”

“*What?”* Shane asks.

“I thought I was dying. And everyone would die. Before the signal. And I wanted him to know, that if I died, it was okay. If it would keep them alive,” he says.

“Ilya,” Shane gasps.

“I’m here. It’s terrible, okay. I know. Awful,” he says dismissively. “I will tell Dr. Galina. You want to come with?”

“What?”

“Come with. Or we get our own therapist. Together. Probably, that would be good. We can talk about the journals, about everything. I’m so…” he’s tired. He’s so tired, emotionally, physically. “I can’t think about the journals now. I love you more than anything.”

“We can come out. Whenever you want. To the world. Anything,” Shane says, his eyes wide and bright.

“My love,” Ilya whispers. “Don’t do things because you feel guilty.”

“It’s not that. I want to. I was scared, and I’m not anymore,” he says.

“Okay.” Ilya kisses the top of his head. “We can do that. Therapy too. I want that,” he says, only realizing how true the words are once he says them.

“Okay,” Shane nods. “I felt so… I didn’t know. I didn’t know you felt like that.”

“Sweetheart,” Ilya whispers. He wants to explain that it doesn’t matter now. It does, of course, but compared to everything else? He wishes he could make Shane’s mind relax, to know that nothing is more important than being here, with him. “It’s okay. I’m here. Yes? Say it.”

“You’re here,” Shane repeats.

Tonight, they will go to sleep, intertwined, warm and close. Tomorrow, they will wake up, holding each other, remembering what it is like to wake up and not worry that they may never see the other person. They will go to Shane’s parents, and they will let Yuna and Farrah draft

some sort of statement for each of them. They will eat scrambled eggs cooked in butter by David, and Shane will not grimace. Ilya will swallow his pills, and maybe, in time, he will tell Dr. Galina that he is ready to take the other pills. Svetlana will visit, and they will talk about it all. They will meet with Ilya's team, and recount what they endured. They will mourn. They will mourn Coach Wiebe, Dykstra, Connors, Maxwell, Boyle, the trainers, the other coaches, Beth, the pilot, even.

They will wake up because they have to and because they want to, and because neither of them wants to waste another day with each other.

Probably, in the coming months, there will be work to do, and it will not always be easy.

They will come out, whatever that may look like.

Ilya will buy a ring, and Shane will too, he thinks. It will be a race of who gets down on one knee. Like most races, Shane will win.

But tonight, even through the glass of the windows of the cottage where they first told each other how much they loved one another, there is a long, high pitched call, a howl, carried across the lake, all the way to the living room where Shane and Ilya clutch each other close.

A loon, calling out. Maybe for its mate. Maybe just to be heard. Maybe for them.

“Not so scary, anymore,” Ilya whispers.

“No. Not so scary,” Shane agrees.

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