

Solnyshko

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77511616) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77511616>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander , Irina Rozanova
Additional Tags:	Post-Episode: s01e06 The Cottage (Heated Rivalry) , Internal Conflict , Childhood Memories , Implied/Referenced Suicide , Soft Hockey Boys , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Seventy-Two Hours
Collections:	i read new yorker now
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-11 Words: 8,298 Chapters: 1/1

Solnyshko

by [shoulderbone \(lavenderforluck\)](#)

Summary

They linger in the last dregs of light reflecting off the lake. Shane takes Ilya's hands, placing them over his own cheeks, and quietly asks Ilya to take him apart.

Or: seventy-two hours at the cottage that summer.

Notes

This is me spiralling about funny, beautiful, sad Irina Rozanova and her son. This is also me spiralling at those photos of Hudson in that yellow jumper. Not a lot of plot, mainly vibes and I took creative liberties in inventing backstories and am not necessarily following the books.

no beta, all mistakes are my own. hockey is a sport i love but there are bound to be some inaccuracies/awkwardness because i am not a professional hockey player lol.

the russian is latinized/transliteration - not everyone's cup of tea, i know. i've also found two different spellings of 'solnyshko/solnishko' so if anyone has any insight on that, let me know, from my research it seemed pretty down the middle. I am not Russian, do not speak the language, just a obsessive user of both reddit and wikipedia. apologies for inaccuracies!

Takes place near the end of the two weeks in the book.

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



They piece together how it went. Slowly and then all at once. Or something like that. The timelines are messy, and the memories all a little skewed one way, now that Ilya's actually dared to look back at all of it.

Back at the cottage, they linger in the last dregs of light reflecting off the lake. Shane takes Ilya's hands, placing them over his own cheeks, and quietly asks Ilya to take him apart.



Yuna sends three polite (if not a little pointed) texts to Shane the next day in the lead up to their dinner plans. Shane reads them all aloud, exasperated in a way that Ilya understands is actually relief. It's been a life-altering twenty-four hours, Ilya thinks, and Shane isn't someone who welcomes change, especially when not on his own terms.

For the most part, he seems to be handling it well. But then again, Ilya doesn't have anything to compare it to.

When David and Yuna arrive, it's in a flurry: there's the groceries and the three rapid fire questions from Yuna to Shane, who responds in kind, too quickly for Ilya to translate, let alone process. And then there's David: slower tempo, but still overwhelming, greeting Ilya much more warmly than expected, with his bumbling way of speaking and large, gentle hands. He's already lost his keys five minutes into arriving, much to the mirror chagrin of his wife and son.

Ilya has no idea what to do with himself. He hovers around the edges of the room like a shadow, which is a *little* disheartening to think considering how bright and open the kitchen is.

Golden hour is nearing. The breeze smells like salt and brine as it wafts in from outside.

Everything feels like it's been set at two times the normal speed, and he's struggling to take it all in. There's the way Shane slices vegetables in neat silver bowls and Yuna pours a broth from a tupperware into a pot on the stove. There's the way they're both talking about a coach Yuna doesn't like, their expressions mirror of amusement and distaste, their conversation so comfortable and easy, full of euphemisms and references shared between the two of them. Ilya can barely keep up. David is coming in and out of the house like he's on rotation, each time bringing more and more stuff from the car, and Ilya realises what he's looking at is a *family*.

A real family, imperfect, sure, but kind, and easy, and *real*. It makes him want to weep, which fills him with embarrassment. For so long Ilya told himself *this* was unattainable, but still, he wanted it so badly, the way a child wants something. This tremendous, wonderful, awful thing, that is now suddenly very real and right in front of him. The wanting bowls him over like a suckerpunch.

He takes it upon himself to put music on Shane's complicated soundsystem. There's a bluetooth that requires wifi and a special app that Shane had downloaded onto Ilya's phone for him, then several steps to connect the surround sound to the main console. Ilya takes his time with each step, lingering at each step to ensure it's done properly. Then he peruses the playlists, settles for one Shane put on earlier: some Japanese jazz quartet from the eighties, name forgotten.

When Ilya returns to the kitchen, there's a tall vase on the counter, filled with freshly cut sunflowers.

"Those are nice," he says.

"Mom brought them, said we needed them," Shane rolls his eyes.

"Everyone needs flowers, and they're my favourite," Yuna teased. She gives Ilya a kind smile.

"Mine too," Ilya nods, his face doing something ridiculous, he's sure. He clears his throat. "Can I help with...something?"

Yuna sends him out to set the table. Ilya takes it as an act of mercy.



The entire room is engulfed by burnt amber sun. They'd forgotten to lower the blinds. Again. It's with great reluctance that Ilya blinked his eyes open. Early evening, he deduces, and remembers the nap.

Shane is still asleep, cheek mushed against the pillow, freckles like a constellation; his body bathed in warm light. Ilya holds still, drinks in the sight of Shane. He can never make up for all the times he hadn't allowed himself to look.

But he's looking now. It's a moment he knows will become a memory. In this moment, it is summer forever. The cottage exists because the moment does, and everything is warm and beautiful and painting Shane's skin gold.

Everything's been about now. Time is pressed to the edges of their existence. The reality of their normal hovers in the near distance, but not yet. Right now, it's just them, and all that has happened here, and these endless, numbered days.

Of course, winter must be spectacular here too. And now there's the chance of a future, whatever that may be. He tries to imagine what it would be like to wake up from a mid-afternoon nap in six months time, still naked except for one sock and dried drool in the corner of his mouth. Shane Hollander next to him, still asleep, the world outside an endless blanket white snow.



The end looms nearby, and neither can face it. Not yet. Not yet. It was impossible. Unfathomable. Ilya is swept away by the intensity of it all, riding a high that was so euphoric it was almost soul-crushing, and Shane isn't fairing much better, despite his attempts.

On the eve of their impending departure, after a minor meltdown (from Shane) and a minor silent spell (Ilya), they discovered it *was* possible with their schedules to stay for three extra days.

"Is possible, here, look," Ilya points at their overlapping schedules. Shane's is colour coded, and his week starts on a Sunday. "I don't have to be there in Boston until Tuesday evening."

Shane looks dumbfounded, like he doesn't trust it should be that easy. "Oh. I guess that could work."

The relief of being able to spend an extra *seventy-two fucking hours* with Shane nearly topples Ilya right over. He understands, with dire certainty, that he is totally fucked.

He excuses himself to smoke a cigarette. He wants to know how it was possible. How he was suddenly a person who loves someone else. Is loved in return.

It took Shane a while (one hour and twenty-two minutes, Ilya counted) to be fully convinced it would work. But once all the negative possibilities were examined, and the pros and cons lists were written, and once he'd asked Ilya a million and one times (he counted this too) if it was truly okay, he relented with a nod. And then Shane looked at Ilya and smiled.

A new smile, he thinks. The kind that makes Ilya squint, as if he were staring directly into the sun.

Yuna drops by that afternoon to pick up something of Shane's and reassures that Shane's plan *does* work, and it sounds like a good idea, and then Ilya chimes it was actually *his plan*, not unkindly, but perhaps not exactly warm, either. He had no idea how to act around someone else's mother. It'd been a long time. It made him awkward, a feeling he absolutely disliked.

"I don't think you should overthink it too much. Just enjoy," Yuna offers on her way out. She gives Ilya the impression that she is trying to make up for something, and Shane is aware of it but pretends like he isn't. Ilya wonders if they're always like this, if this is the dynamic, or if

it's because Ilya's here too, an intruder in their lives. Maybe both. Probably. He tries not to think too deeply about it.

There's no need to make such calls for his own schedule. Everyone was used to him going under the radar, which is by. He moved his flight with little consideration for the cost, thinking to himself: I bet Shane has insurance for things like this. Because that would be the Shane Hollander thing to do.

They exist on a different plane of reality: one of stolen time. Ilya decides right then and there: he does not care. He does not care if the rest of the world looms outside. He does not care if he is in the middle of fucking Canadian wilderness with a thousand birds and bugs and spiders and things that creep around in the dark. He does not care if he has no reception and no access to late night bodegas or somewhere to buy more cigarettes.

He wants to be here. Once he's made the decision, it is startlingly obvious. He could almost fool himself into believing it didn't change absolutely everything. That the life as he knew it has dissolved into something new, something unknown, something with the unsettling potential of being everything he's ever wanted.

But that's a problem for Ilya of the future. Right now is all that matters, and the rest is far, far away.

"What was your favorite thing to eat as a kid?" Shane asks him, over lunch.

They're on the terrace, eating some kind of wrap with the leftovers from the night before. Shane had made a mixture out of soy sauce and sesame and told Ilya to dip it in if he wanted to add more flavour. Ilya did. It tasted nice. A little sweet.

"Mm." Ilya finished chewing. "I liked many things. But my mother used to make *Shchi*, it's very traditional soup, and I would eat it when it was very cold or I was sick."

"*Shchi*," Shane repeats softly to himself. "What's in it?"

"You can put many different things, but usually meat and cabbage. And some...spices, I guess you can say. I liked mine with tomato, but not everyone makes it that way."

He's always asked a lot of questions, even back when Ilya and him were barely anything but hands and mouths in an anonymous hotel room. Too many.

Shane asks another question about the recipe and he nods along like he's making a mental list, and probably he is.

Shane's curious in a way that Ilya was not allowed to be growing up. In the Rozanov house, asking questions was a sign of disobedience: questioning the rule of his father, of his father's world, of his father's world view. It would have been seen as being ungrateful. Of not being satisfied with doing what you're told and nothing more.

Having met Shane's parents, and knowing what he does about Shane, he was encouraged to be curious. He was encouraged to try things he found interesting. Shane was not an

embarrassment, or a disgrace to his country or tolerated only when quiet. Not like Ilya was.

“Do you ever make it in Boston?” Shane asked.

“Sometimes, when I bother to go to Baza.”

“What’s that, like a Russian supermarket or something?”

“Yes. They have good Pelmeni. Do you know it?” Ilya asks. Already his mind swims with the idea of Shane staying at his after a game and Ilya makes it for dinner.

“No. I don’t really know Boston that well...” Shane trails off, and then looks at him. “What’s Pelmeni?”



“*Solnyshko*, I do not think you understand what you are saying,” it slips out while they’re bickering that evening. “But I am concerned about your terrible opinions. Kolvachuk’s goal was good, Nasher is idiot, end of story.”

“It took a long time to discuss that penalty, that’s all,” Shane grumbles.

(They agree to disagree about Russia’s gold at the 2008 Worlds. For now.)

Later, Shane asks what the word means. It’s dark, and warm, the doors cracked to let in just a little breeze, their ankles overlapping on the sofa. Ilya is drinking this dark, smelly tea Shane promises will help him sleep.

He gets this look in his eye, right before he asks a question, Ilya notices.

“What was that word, the one you called me earlier?”

“What?” Ilya plays dumb, because he can. “When? I call you many things.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Before dinner. When you were being a dick.”

“Who are you calling dick?” he argued, kicking the blanket off his feet for no reason other than to do something. “I’ll show you dick.”

Shane wasn’t taking the bait. He has that gleam in his eyes and Ilya knows he doesn’t stand a chance. “It started with a—not a *S*, but a s-sound. *Sol*...something.”

“Hmm...*Solnyshko*?” Ilya pretends to think, looking down at his phone. “That means...slow one. Because you are slow.”

He’s rewarded with one of Shane’s balled up socks thrown at his head: white knit with red stitching on the heel. He makes a show of swatting it away and gasping in offense.

“I don’t believe you.”

“Hollander, I told you, I tell the truth. Always.”

“Liar.”

“*Solnyshko*,” Ilya teases back.

It always happened like this now: one moment they were on opposite sides of the sofa (or the rink. Or the world) and then suddenly they collided: four hands, two mouths, one heart beat, beating heavy and loud in Ilya’s brain. *Thump-thump-thump*. The noises Shane makes; the way Ilya tries to swallow all of them up. Selfishly coveting. The rest of the world could have Shane Hollander, but not this: this was just for him.



Most of Ilya’s early or formative memories were on the ice: the sound of the skates, the cut of a blade on the ice, sticks tapping, the shrill ring of the whistle, the sound of his father knocking on the barriers. The way he yelled when Ilya made a mistake; the way he yelled when Ilya did something right. In his memory, they sound the same.

It took years for Ilya to accept it was impossible to do right by Grigori. Maybe he still hasn’t accepted it.

Once he was discovered by an associate of Svetlana’s father, everything was about hockey. Every birthday it was better sticks and new skates and helmets. Once or twice a jersey. If Ilya wanted toys like any other seven year old, he doesn’t remember. There was no such thing as play time when you were destined to be great.

Except one. He can remember it the way one remembers a dream: all outlines and blurred edges and soft, buttery light. He was five and sitting on his mother’s lap, his legs against the soft cotton of her dress: she was wearing white, or maybe yellow: something pale and washed out. She was sick: that’s what he remembers being told. She was sick and had to rest, his father said, and Ilya was too much for her to handle.

He’d been brought to visit only once, by his grandmother when his father was away. He’d begun to fear she was gone forever, but suddenly there she was again: blonde hair twisted away from her face, a little tired, a little too pale, but alive, and smiling at him. Her hands outstretched, her embrace firm and strong and real, as she picked him up and held him. They’d stayed the entire afternoon, drinking Kalmyk tea and talking. He sat in her lap the whole time.

Ilyushenka, look! I got this for you, he thinks he can hear exactly how her voice sounded. She always kissed him around his ears when she said his name, her hair tickling the crown of his head. Her chin against his temple, a gentle pressure. Always there, just out of sight.

A *Ptitsa schast'ya* dangled between her fingers. *Bird of Happiness*. The wood was so smooth when he reached out to touch. Its wings so thin and delicate and painted bright yellow.

Irina came home later that summer, and any traces of her previous sickness had vanished. She was his mama again: bright and jubilant, a burst of joy and safety in the strict gloom of their home.

Whenever it became too much he could trust to look at her, and find her already looking back at him, her gaze as warm as a thousand suns. To be loved without question or reserve was something he never, even as a child, took for granted. He knew what it meant. He knew what it looked like.

They hung the bird in his room. He watched it spin in the gentle breeze during the summer, when the windows were open. He pretended, as a child, that it would come alive when no one was watching. He pretended, as a teenager, that it *was* his mother. Whenever the wind would cause it to spin, it meant she was there with him, her mouth pressed to his ear, whispering,

Ilyushen'ka, Ilyushen'ka, Ilyushen'ka, Ilyushen'ka, Ilyushen'ka, Ilyushen'ka, Ilyushen'ka,

Ilyushen'ka,

Ilyushen'ka,

Look! Look! Look!

Look!

I got

this

for

you.



It's the first cloudy day since Ilya's been here, and he's oddly giddy about it. There's something so familiar about grey skies and low-hanging clouds. It's still very clearly summer, and if he had to guess, there's probably a storm coming later. He spends a few good moments just looking out the windows, tangled in Shane's navy duvet. Everything smells like them.

Shane is already awake, he realises. He's reading a book, propped up between his knees, chewing absentmindedly on this thumbnail. He's wearing his glasses, which sends a thrill through Ilya, pooling in the bottom of his spine.

“What are you doing,” he grumbles. Does not bother to lift his head off the pillow.

“Good morning.” The smile in Shane’s voice is evident. “I’m reading. Some people do that.”

“Some people,” he says, just to say something. Shane exhales with exasperation, and rolls half on top of Ilya, arm across his back, nose pressed to his temple. They exhale together in the small dark space between them, and Shane kisses his cheek bone and it feels like *good morning*.

Ilya feels as if he’s been submerged into warm water, just deep enough to make him tread. Heat spools through his belly to the rest of his body, and when he finds Shane’s mouth he pours that feeling into it: that searing, overwhelming tangle that’s lived in Ilya’s throat for the last year. Even longer than that.

He kisses Shane with an intensity that betrays his naked desire. Sex has always been a way for Ilya to lose himself; this is not that. This is something completely different. It’s always been different with Shane, in a way he never had the words for. Didn’t want the words for. Couldn’t bear the wanting, which was a slippery descent into *hope*. He told himself a thousand times: end this. End this. End it now.

What a waste of time. There was no ending to this: not when Shane arches into him, hands scrambling for purchase in that desperate, needy way that Ilya understands intimately: feels in his own body as he surges closer, holding Shane just as tightly.

Naked and warm from sleep, morning breath and chapped lips, they become needy and inseparable, as if taking even a moment to pause for breath or adjustment was too risky, unfathomable to consider. Shane’s hip lines up perfectly against Ilya’s cock, where he rocks slowly against him, their ankles intertwined, shins pressed together. Shane’s panting into his mouth, hand tangled in Ilya’s curls, tugging hard at the scalp, and it feels so good to be held this way, and it feels so good to nip at Shane’s bottom lip, and lick along all his teeth, and press his mouth messily against his chin, his cheek, his nose, whatever he can get away with touch, holding, kissing.

When Shane groans, low in his chest, Ilya feels it reverberate down his spine, and he thrusts against him one final time before sliding down his body and settling between his legs, hands kneading the meat of his thighs, nosing at the soft skin there between the crease of his hips. Ilya inhales deeply, the combination of sweat and skin and *Shane*, heady and sharp in his nose.

He feels drunk, or floating, or something in between: his mouth swallows Shane down, tongue flat, taking him until the back of his throat protests. Then he takes him some more, nostrils flaring, and waits, waits, *waits* until tears gather in the corners of his eyes. And still he takes more.

Shane is making all kinds of sounds: the unfiltered song of intimacy, every choppy inhale and half-swallowed gasp. His thighs are around Ilya’s ears, drowning out the noise and turning the world hazy and dull: Ilya just keeps his mouth where it is, drool slipping through his lips and into the dark hair at his base, unsettled in his intimacy as he is emboldened by it. He feels consumed by Shane, undone by him, even when he is the undoing.

Shane's orgasm builds and Ilya cradles him through it, slowing to a tortuous pace, keeping his attention fixed on Shane's fucked out gaze, wings of pink spreading from his freckles to his temples. When it finally hits, Ilya feels the roll of his body like a wave around him, from the nape of his neck down his toes. He pulls off and swallows, resting his cheek on Shane's twitchy thigh.

After a moment of breathing together, he's gathered up for a kiss, and Ilya knows Shane tastes himself on his tongue and suddenly, as if he were the one to have just come, Ilya feels pliable and sensitive and desperate for attention. He feels ruined. He presses up against Shane and hopes his mouth can translate the feeling running through him.



Later, it does rain, just as Ilya predicted.

After an hour spent in bed, smelling like each other's sweat, they ran a bath in the rarely used tub Shane had—facing each, legs intertwined, skin flushed with warmth, smelling of lavender and pine—

After an hour spent in the bath, they made lunch, and Shane fussed, hair damp across his forehead, about missing out on his smoothie, and taking a handful of horse sized vitamins with a shot of ginger, and then Ilya insisting on making his own (very) strong black coffee, only for Shane to add agave syrup and soy milk and have the audacity, to criticise the taste—

After an hour lounging around on the sofa, music playing softly out of the complicated (*'it's a one of a kind Mitsubishi Diatone X-10, excuse you'*) sound system, and Shane begs off to load the dishwasher or some other boring chore, and Ilya is left in the quiet, eyes tracking the drip-drip of the rain on the tall windows—

Eventually something pulls his eye: a shelf behind the sofa, clearly not decorated by any designer: the broken, frayed spines of a ten or so books about bird species, another stack of cross words and a well-loved English dictionary. Ilya presses his fingers against one of the books, and tries to create a picture of a younger Shane reading them. It makes his stomach twist in the most peculiar way.

He pulls away, restless for something else. On another shelf, empty except for a blue vase and a shrivelled cactus, was a polaroid camera.

“What are you—” Shane starts behind him, and Ilya swirls, finger already over the button. “Hey!”

“Oh. Look, it works,” Ilya says, pulling out the photo that slips out. Shane was wearing a t-shirt that looked worn and soft with age, a sort of creamy yellow that reminded Ilya of banana milkshakes: a bygone colour from a childhood he didn't have, but probably wanted. Yes. Definitely wanted.

Shane shot him a look without heat. “Congrats. Now give it over.”

“Mm. No. I don’t think so.” Ilya squinted into the tiny viewfinder and flashed another, unleashing another round of complaints from Shane, who was now trying to snatch it. Ilya held it just out of reach for him, up on his toes, which Shane was unhelpfully stepping on.

“Give me it, asshole—”

“Stop whining—”

“I’m not—”

Ilya swirled out of reach, yanking his precious toes out from under Shane’s feet and jumping up on the sofa, leaping into the other corner. He was a little out of breath when he holds a hand out and says, “Listen. This is mine now. I take photo of you. You look adorable like this and I want to take photos. Now.”

Shane is a little out of breath too, and he huffs, clearly trying to suppress his amusement. “I don’t think it’s the smartest thing to do, leaving evidence lying around, loose.”

Ilya’s stomach flares at the way *evidence* sounds coming out of Shane’s mouth. “Loose?” He raises a brow. “You are loose with things?”

“No, but, you know what I mean—”

“No. I do not,” Ilya deadpans “Did you know my favourite colour is yellow? No. You didn’t.”

This makes Shane laugh, sputtering a “*What?*”

“Hold still.” Ilya orders. The camera flashes.



He thinks, distantly, again of winter. What will it look like here, at the cottage, when it is always gray, and always raining? When the lake has frozen and the trees are bare and the horizon is sheathed in snow? Soon, very soon, summer will be long over, and the cottage will be just another memory lodged somewhere in his chest, unable to pull free.

Ilya is used to wanting. On the surface, it's easy to believe it's all about winning and women and whatever looks fun at the moment. But beneath, beneath the surface: he oscillates between fear and hope, and it's a terrible pendulum to swing back and forth on. A kind of agony. To want is one thing, but to hope, to believe it could happen, that you could deserve it—a kind of agony, yes, Ilya decides.

There were nights his father would not return home and it was storming outside. His mother would come into his room after he was put to bed, and light a candle, and pretend there was no power out of respect for thunder and lightning Gods. She would curl up with him in his small bed, and whisper fantastical stories about them: Thunder and Lightning, Cloud and Sky, Sun and Moon and their stories and lore. Under the flicker of a single candle they huddled under the quilt like children at a sleepover, and Irina would shush Ilya gently whenever he laughed a little too loud.

Don't wake your brother, Ilyushka, she'd mock-scold. Now, where was I? Yes, now, Thunder was irritated with Lightning and went to give him a piece of her mind....

Eventually, he'd tire himself out, and Irina would rake her fingers gently up and down his back until he was soothed to sleep.

His eyes slip closed at the clap of thunder. He pictured Shane's hand raking his nails down his back.

"Do you like storms?"

"Hmm?" Ilya asks, blinking. He turns away from the window, where the rain was racing each other down the thick glass.

Shane is looking at him from where he'd fallen asleep on the sofa. It was a short nap, Ilya thinks. He hadn't been sitting there that long, except now it was darker outside, the lake and the sky blending into one murky green-grey cloud.

"I asked if you like storms?" Shane repeated.

"Yes." Ilya nods. "It's very...nice. You know. *Uyutnyy*. Like a warm bowl of soup."

Shane laughs, eyes crinkling. "Like Shchi?"

Ilya smiles briefly, and does not correct him. After a few minutes of silence, he pats the place in the windowsill beside him. "Come sit with me."

Shane rises slowly, blanket draped around his shoulders, taking great care to spread over the both of them as he clambers in next to Ilya, knee to knee. They were both a little too big for this window sill, but neither minded. It was strange to touch like this, for the sake of touching: Ilya wonders when it'll stop feeling like a surprise.

"What are those?" Ilya asks, pointing to the shelf behind Shane. "The New Yorker books. Your father's?"

Shane looks around, ears twitching when he confirms what Ilya meant. "Oh...no, those are mine. They're crossword puzzles."

"You like crossword puzzles a lot, hm?" Ilya bit his lip to keep from smiling. "You are bigger nerd than I thought."

“Shut up,” Shane teases. “I did them a lot as a kid. I used to get, I don’t know, stressed out, and they calmed me down.”

Ilya raises a brow. “You? Stressed out? No.”

Shane scoffs, as in *shut up, you’re annoying*, and it made Ilya bite his cheek to keep from smiling.

“Why were you stressed?” he amends, trying again. “Because of hockey?”

“No, hockey was my safe haven, honestly. I hated school, it was always just...too much going on. And kids are assholes, but I’m sure you know that, being one of them.”

Ilya smiles a little and nods, no longer in the mood to make fun.

Shane turns his gaze to the rain dripping past them, expression thoughtful. “My grandma was the best, though. When I’d get really overwhelmed, she’d take me to the bird sanctuary in Ottawa and we’d just...listen.”

“Is that where you learned to speak bird?”

He chuckles gently. “I don’t *speak* bird.”

“But you know a lot about them.” Ilya points out. “More than normal person.”

“Maybe. But I guess I’ve never been normal.”

“You guess, wow,” Ilya rolls his eyes. “Your grandma. What part of the family was she?”

“My mom’s. I used to call her *obaachan*, the Japanese word for grandma. She always wanted me to speak Japanese with her and go to the Hoshuko, the Japanese school in Ottawa. But Mom thought that would make it harder to...fit in, I guess.”

“Right. And you do very good job of that.”

“Shut up,” Shane knocks his knees against Ilya’s, but there was no heat in his tone. “I just don’t think she wanted things to be hard for me, like they were for her.”

“She wanted to protect you.” Ilya confirms. It made sense to him. Yuna seems like that kind of mother.

“Yeah, in a way. But I always felt kind of bad about it. Like I was letting my grandma down by not being more interested in our Japanese heritage. When I was getting picked on she taught me how to ignore it. And how to curse them out in Japanese behind their backs.”

Ilya laughed at that mental image. She sounded exactly like the kind of grandma he would have liked. “Is she still alive?”

Shane shook his head no, teeth gnawing on his bottom lip. “No, no. She passed away when I was fourteen.”

“Sorry to hear,” Ilya says, and found that he was very sorry, even though his own grandparents were all dead and it was the way things went.

Shane looks up and gave Ilya a small, private smile that meant: *thank you*. Or: *I know*. Or: *me, too*.

Together they listen to the rain, until eventually Shane breaks the moment by asking, a cocky, little shit smirk on his face. “If you want to improve your English, I’d always be happy to do a crossword with you.”

“Over my dead fucking body, Hollander,” Ilya snaps back immediately. “Trying to make me as boring as you. No thanks.”

“I think you’d like it,” Shane teases back. Ilya doesn’t give him the satisfaction of a response. He presses his legs against Shane’s until he can feel their shins align, the bones digging into each other, not hard enough to hurt, but enough to remind Ilya that he’s here, that this moment exists.



He’s dreamt less at the cottage. He blames the sex. The summer sun. The irritatingly good mattress Shane has—ergonomic bullshit something something that actually makes his back feel incredible—and of course, he blames Shane. No dreams means no nightmares. He’s slept through the night, every night, without first exhausting himself in the gym or waking up at four am to smoke out his window. He wakes up rested, content, dare he say, *happy*—

But the dreams haven’t stopped completely.

This one is familiar. He’s been here before. Maybe many times.

It’s the grand stage at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. The ballet is about to begin. Ilya’s looking for his seat; he’s late, he knows he is, and the number on his ticket doesn’t correspond with any of the rows, and it isn’t until the lights go out and the orchestra begins, that he steals a seat on the very edge of the floor.

She’s beautiful, dancing up there. A glittering majestic beam of light. Irina’s smile seems to shine directly on Ilya, even though he knows she can’t see him from this lonely, dark corner. He is a voyeur: he is not allowed to be here anymore. But he can’t tear his eyes away from her.

Eventually, the show ends, and the crowd disperses, and the orchestra finally packs up, but no one notices that she is still dancing on stage. Ilya rushes to the edge of the stage as the lights go off, and he’s so small now, barely able to see over the edge.

Mama, it's over! He yells, in the hopes that if he can see her, she can see him, and they can leave together, arm in arm.

Mama, they've all gone home, you can stop performing now!

It's over. It's over.

Mama,

It's over—
all

They've

gone
home.



It's a lost-to-the-moment kind of evening: one of the warmest days they've had so far. A warning that the end is near, so here you go, *bask* in it—light glitters in the centre of the lake, splashes of pink and orange under the setting sun. And Shane is passing him a drink, an easy look on his face, one that says he's not thinking too hard, and it's startling to realise again that it's all becoming so familiar. And it's not that he's acclimated quickly, but rather that somewhere, deep inside him, something has been *dug up*.

Somewhere, a bird calls. It is not the bastard wolf-bird, but softer, shorter, like a stone skipping on smooth water.

"Do you know that one too?" Ilya asks.

Shane ducks his head, but from the way his eyes scrunch up, he's smiling.

"Carolina Wren, I think."

"You think," he deadpans. "You don't know? I'm disappointed. I thought you spoke bird."

Shane scoffed and bumped his head against Ilya's, just once.

Eventually, he asks, "Did you ever hang out at the lake, growing up in Russia?"

"Yes, sometimes."

He remembers swimming as a teenager with Svetlana at the lake just west of Moscow. He remembers losing his virginity in a pile of reeds after a party and two many sips of cheat vodka. He remembers fireworks illuminating off the water's edge. His mother's smile slid into view, holding a towel up.

Are you cold, Ilyushen'ka?

“But it wasn’t like this.”

“What was it like?”

Sad, part of him wants to say. But sad is too simple an English word. He searches for the right one and comes up empty.

“Moscow has pretty lakes. Very nice. But sometimes not nice. Maybe. There’s this word we have in Russian...*toska*,” he says. “I don’t know how to translate it exactly.”

“*Toska*,” Shane repeated, and besides the obvious flat Canadian accent, it wasn’t half bad. Not that Ilya was going to tell him that.

“It means like...not...*boring*,” he smirks.

Shane levels him with a look like he doesn’t believe it for a moment.

“Have you ever swam to the other side?” Ilya asks.

They both look out onto the water again, where the light has canopied in the centre. The earth cracked in half by the sun.

“I came close, once,” Shane says. His eyes were dark and far away: maybe he was remembering it. Ilya was always remembering things, most of which he wished he didn’t.

“If we raced, I bet I could beat you,” he grins. “I am good swimmer. Better than you. I can hold my breath for five minutes.”

“That is physically impossible,” Shane argues, matter of fact. There was that gleam in his eyes again: they both loved the challenge, the dare, the bet. That’s how they got into this whole mess in the first place, wasn’t it?

How did we let this happen?

What was it that Ilya said to Shane the other day, when they fucked over an hour with the windows cracked open, breeze drying their glistening skin?

We were both very stupid and irresponsible.

This is real though, right?

Yeah, Ilya thinks, pressing his thumb over the lowest of the freckle constellation on Shane’s cheek. Kisses him slowly, savouring the way he tastes. *It’s real.*

Once, when Ilya was nine, his mother took him on a holiday, just the two of them. It was back when everything seemed possible, or at the very least, it would probably turn out okay. His mother was still sick sometimes, and she cried when she thought no one could hear her, so Ilya pretended not to listen in. But for the most part, she was the same Irina he adored: golden eyelashes, tanned skin, the dusting of freckles over her nose. Most of all, her smile was easy and unreserved, her teeth a little crooked, charm pouring out of her every word.

Innocence is buoyant and will float in the right conditions, but it is not immune to harm.

It was the beginning of summer: school had finished for the year, but hockey wouldn't resume until September. Alexei was at the cadet training academy, and his father was gone for a week to the east for something work-related. Ilya never asked him questions when he could help it. So it was the best part of summer, the most precious part, like a nearly-ripe apricot: where the skin is still taut across the fruit, the inside so sweet and a little sour. It was the best part of summer: it was just them.

They went to Odessa by train. Sat side by side and drank ice tea with a little extra jam at the bottom of Ilya's, sweetened just the way he liked it. The seats were high backed and stiff, and it was warm enough that his sweater made him itchy around the neck.

Ilyushen'ka, look, Irina pointed things out of the window whenever he was getting a little antsy. It was a long journey. Usually the distraction worked, until it didn't again, and he went back to kicking the seat of the old lady in front of him or complaining that it was warm. Then Irina would have to gently bring him back to patience again, to let the energy pass over him again.

It's easy to hate the little boy he was back then: so arrogant, so stupid, so blind to see that every moment he spent in her company was finite: it would only be three years longer that he'd have her. Sometimes it rattled him with unbelievable fury at his shortsightedness: every moment was precious, and any moment spent in the foils of his own childish drama was moments wasted: moments he'd never get back. Not even when he cried. Not even when he begged.

It's hard to accept that it wasn't his fault. Even now. Some things are just so ingrained.

They changed trains at a station at a small platform in the middle of the country. From a plane, the land must shine like a golden coin: for everywhere he looked, the world was sunflowers. Endless sunflowers, fields and rolling hills.

Let's go, Ilya, Irina gave him a mischievous smile. They left their suitcase with an old grandmother and went sprinting into the fields, Ilya following the blue hem of his mother's dress through the stalks.

Come on, follow the sound of my voice, She called out to him. *Catch me if you can!*

He ran after her, heels hot, laughter cutting through the sky. They were magnificent, those flowers, searing as a gleam of sunshine against the middle of a lake. Unbelievable. And

beautiful. His mother's sweet peal of laughter, the feeling of the leaves nipping at his cheeks.

He doesn't remember the holiday in Odessa. But he remembers the sunflowers like a mosaic of gold, and his mother calling out for him behind their giant, looming blooms.



Compatible [adjective] capable of existing or living together in harmony.

[Origin]: late Middle English: from French, from medieval Latin *compatibilis*, from *compati* 'suffer with'.



Summer is dwindling to a close. Ilya knows his time is up without even needing to look at the clock. He can feel it. He can feel it when he fucks into Shane that morning, legs wrapped around his waist, hips stuttering and slow as he bent over, their skin sliding across each other. There's sweat pooling in Shane's collarbones, and he dips his tongue to lick it, feeling his body begin to move again, of its own accord, to get as close as possible, until he's crawling inside, until he lives there. Somewhere between his ribs, where it was warm like the sun, and just as bright, golden and forever safe.

Shane's body receives him like he wants him to live there. Like he's made this space for them to be together. Where only they exist.

Let me see you, Ilya pants, pulling up and gazing down at Shane's languid, wanton form stretched around him, his cock red and neglected on his stomach. They look at each other and something inside Ilya flips a switch, and Shane seems to see it too, because he only holds him tighter. Their bodies become little more than raw shapes of colour and sound: they fuck like animals, relentless, and feral and full of something untouchable. Burning.

Solnyshko, there it is again, slipping out when he's forgotten himself. Ilya presses his thumb against Shane's lips, watches it disappear between his teeth.

I'm going to come for you, Solnyshko, oh, fuck—



Because he is now (boyfriends? I think probably, yes) in a *relationship*, Ilya finds himself having dinner with Shane's parents on their last night.

If Ilya had his way (which he does not), they'd be back at the cottage, fucking loudly, with the doors open and the blinds up and walking around naked just because they could. It is a much better use of their time, in his opinion, which he offered a few times (Shane did not disagree, but he did not agree, either). So here they were.

"This is lovely view," Ilya offers, sitting around their table, on the deck. The view from Shane's nicer, actually, but he does not need to say that.

"Thank you, Ilya," Yuna smiles. Her eyes are similar to Shane's, and not just in shape. They're dark brown, and seemingly endless, and full of warmth. "Have you enjoyed your time out here? It must be quiet compared to Boston."

"Yes," Ilya figures that should suffice both questions, and then realises that this might be the last time he sees Shane's parents for—well, he doesn't actually know and he's *not* going to think about it—so maybe he should try to make a bit of effort. At least a little.

"Did you have this place for long time?" he asks, and takes a sip of white wine, a little sweeter than he's used to.

"Since before Shane was born," David says. "It has been in the family for a while. It's a little old-fashioned, but we like it."

"Are all your family in Canada?" He asks this to both Yuna and David.

Yuna says, "My parents grew up in Vancouver, and we still have some family in Japan."

"Do you visit them? In Japan?"

"Oh, a few times, when Shane was a child," Yuna smiles at her son, who is looking at his hands. "Before all the hockey stuff started picking up."

"My family's from Ottawa," David says. "For the most part. Except for my sister and her family, they're in New York."

"Shane's cousin Grace is a principal dancer for the New York City Ballet," Yuna offers.

"New York is good ballet company, yes?" Ilya asks, and feels his throat go all weird and ticklish.

"Best in the world," Yuna preens, clearly in her element discussing rankings and achievements.

"Mm. Well. There is always Moscow," Ilya pushes back, because he can't help but push back against the notions of American excellence. He looks over at Shane. "You never said your cousin was ballerina."

“Uh, no...I didn’t think it was interesting,” Shane says honestly, because he’s always damnably earnest when Ilya is not being overtly obvious. For whatever reason it does something to Ilya that he’ll never for the life of him understand. It makes him irresistible. And it makes Ilya pathetic and wanting to follow him around like a dog.

“Ballet is best sport there is. Besides hockey,” Ilya gives a disaffected shrug. He thinks that will be that but clearly all three of the Hollanders expect him to continue, so he does. “Russian ballet is one of oldest, best in the world. My mother was a ballerina. For Kirov Ballet in St. Petersburg.”

“I didn’t know that. How lovely,” Yuna says, a touch too understanding, and instantly, Ilya understands Yuna knows his mother is dead. He wonders if Shane told her, but knew it was unlikely. He was just as prone to secrets as Ilya is. That’s part of how they ended up here in the first place, eating fresh cod and drinking white wine with his parents.

He takes a sip now, to avoid making a face.

“Did she love being part of the ballet?”

“Yes.” Ilya looks at the lake when he says this. “I went many times with her.”

Irina spoke fondly of her time as a ballerina, and Ilya understood her passion, her dedication to something so beautiful and so brutal. *My favourite teacher was the most brutal in all of St. Petersburg, who would not allow us to cry. She would say, 'It's because I love you.'*

There is a lull in conversation, and Ilya is still looking out at the water, and he knows he's made it difficult to make light conversation the way Canadians prefer. That he's short and too the point and his English lacking is one thing. That his mother is always lying in wait, emerging like a shadow over Ilya is another.

“Ballet is more of a performance, than a sport,” Shane is throwing him a life raft; Shane is pressing his foot against Ilya’s under the table.

“Oh, and why not?” Ilya challenges. “You train, you practice, you have coach. You have team. You have awards. That is a sport.”

“But it doesn’t have the same objectivity as a sport, like, they don’t compete against each other, you don’t have the scoring, that kind of thing,” Shane grins like he *knows* he’s going to win, and—

Ilya should get used to this, he guesses, this smug little face, brow cocked, smirk playing on his mouth, and Ilya doesn’t know if he wants to throw something at Shane, or throw *himself*. He can’t help the smile on his mouth, it’s too strong an urge, and like Shane; impossible to resist.

He wakes in the middle of the night, when the sky is a black and blue canvas of stars and the silver of a crescent moon. Ilya wanders out into the living room and outside in the dark. The warmth of August had returned after the rainstorm and everything was supple and ripe made him crave a cigarette.

He sits out on the rock again, staring out into nothing, listening to the water lap against the rocks. Thinks of the dream that woke him up without meaning to. Running through the sunflowers, heavy and awful above him. Irina called his name from somewhere up ahead. Behind him. Next to him. Whispered on his neck.

Catch me Catch me Catch me Catch me—

Catch me Catch me Catch me Catch me Catch me—

*C a t c h m
 e*

A loon calls and Ilya spooks, and then laughs at himself. He doesn't think he'll ever get used to the sounds of so much fucking silence. He can't stop listening to them. And he wishes this, being here, went on forever, even though it's a silly thing to wish.

Sooner or later he slips back inside, brushes his teeth, trying to wash off the scent of cold air and smoke. Shane is sprawled on his back, one foot outside the duvet, hair brushing his forehead that made him look younger again. Ilya remembers when they were younger, and is surprised to find it makes him less sad to think about it then it used to.

In his open, half-packed suitcase (the attempt was made only because Shane was too smug about having his own packing done), underneath a pile of grass-stained socks and white t-shirts that smelt like the lake, was a single polaroid that Ilya packed accidentally-on-purpose. He couldn't help himself. The half-surprised smile of Shane, eyebrows raised in pretend-annoyance, wearing that washed out yellow t-shirt from a decade ago. How could he bear to let it go?

Tomorrow, they'll return to being Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander and they'll belong to the world again. Ilya tells himself he doesn't mind, not really, because tomorrow is still far away. Shane stirs when he lies back down, hand reaching for him in the dark.

Ilya let himself be held, and feels the little spiral of sadness from earlier loosen in him. In this moment—and it was all just a collection of moments, one after another—in this moment, they belong to each other.

End Notes

Obnoxious Shane-Hollander-is-sunshine metaphor side, probably will write a part two featuring shane pov winter and the ilya rozanov is sunshine metaphor will look completely different lol

This is the kind of [Ptitsa schast'ya](#) I imagined Irina gave Ilya.

I wrote Odessa with two s, in Russian it is two s and ilya is Russian/its his pov, but in Ukrainian, Odesa is with one s. I don't know if that's worth mentioning at all but given everything in rl I thought it worth mentioning.

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