Through the Phone

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Through the Phone

by taliiaa

Summary

Set in Russia during episode 5, a grieving Ilya calls Shane to talk and asks him to distract him from his thoughts.

Aka a sweet little Hollanov phone call

Notes

i intended for this to just be ilya’s pov, but then it turned omniscient as i kept going. i don’t normally write this way but… hope it reads okay lol

See the end of the work for more notes

“Where are you?” Shane asked.

Ilya lifted his eyes from the cracks of the pavement he had been following. He had been wandering the streets of Moscow for the past hour trying to escape everything. Ilya couldn’t deal with Alexei pushing him, berating him, making him feel like scum anymore. This is why he hated coming back here. It was *his* father that had died too, yet Alexei didn’t seem to think he was allowed to grieve as well.

“Mmm. I’m just walking. I needed to get out.”

Ilya exhaled slowly, his breath fogging in the air. He shoved his free hand deeper into his coat pocket.

There was a pause on the other side of the line, a careful, measured silence. Ilya could almost picture Shane, his brow furrowed, lips pressed together as he considered his words carefully.

Shane didn’t want to push, didn’t want to say the wrong thing and make everything worse, but he also couldn’t stand doing nothing. He had made it clear that Ilya could talk to him, confide in him about his problems and that Shane was willing to share his burden. That Shane wanted to take on some of the weight, no matter how heavy it got. Ilya could sense Shane was about to make that offer again - to be whatever Ilya needed - and it made Ilya’s chest ache all over again.

But Ilya couldn’t admit how he was feeling. Not now, when his throat was uncomfortably tight, and tears were at risk of leaking out of his eyes if Shane asked questions like *“Are you okay?”* or *“How are you feeling?”*. Those were the type of questions that were far too caring and gentle than what Ilya deserved right now.

“Can you tell me something?” Ilya asked, forcing the words out before Shane could fill the silence himself.

“Yeah - what?” Shane replied, immediately attentive.

Ilya looked around at the snow starting to fall and quickened his steps to get under a pink tunnel. Before stopping, he scanned the space out of habit - making sure there was no one smoking, no couples making out, and no teenagers laughing and being obnoxious. Satisfied it was empty, he stepped inside and let his back fall against the side of the tunnel.

“I don’t know,” he mumbled at last, staring at how the snow cast moving shadows as it fell. “Anything really. I… I don’t want to think about my family right now.” His voice wavered on the last word. He shifted his grip on the phone, thumb sliding down to cover the speaker as he sniffed quickly, trying to keep everything contained. A second later, he lifted the phone back to his ear, pretending nothing had happened.

“Oh, yeah sure,” Shane said, a little uncertain but willing. “Uh… my mom was telling me that last week, Minnesota was playing New Jersey and they had -”

“Tell me something different.” Ilya cut in, more abruptly than he meant to. He squeezed his eyes shut, forehead resting briefly against the cold wall of the tunnel. “Just - not that.”

Shane stopped cold, his mouth still half-open with the rest of the sentence dissolving before it ever made it out. He was planning to tell Ilya what his mom had told him about the Minnesota team - they had a breakout game against New Jersey and might have just established themselves as contenders for the Cup. Montreal and Boston both had yet to play Minnesota this season, so Shane thought Ilya would be interested to know that the Minnesota team was shaping up to be a tough opponent - for the Raiders and the Metros.

But Ilya’s voice had been so quiet. Tired in a way that made Shane rethink everything he was about to say.

Maybe Ilya wasn’t in the mood for sports talk. Understandable, if hockey made him think of his dad - or his brother - and that subject was still hitting too close to home. Grief had a way of poisoning even the things you loved most, and it was still so raw for Ilya.

“Oh,” Shane said quickly, wincing at himself. “Okay. Yeah, sorry.”

“Is okay,” replied Ilya softly.

The words were gentle, forgiving, but they didn’t quite convince Shane. He could hear how thin they were, how carefully placed. Shane tightened his grip on his phone, heart aching with the urge to make this easier somehow. What was the right thing to say? How could he give Ilya what he needed through a phone? He wished he were there in person, wished he could read Ilya’s body language instead of straining to interpret the spaces between breaths over a phone line.

Shane swallowed and stretched his legs out on the stairs in front of him. He tried to think of something else he could tell Ilya - something not hockey related. But every inch of his life revolved around hockey, so he was having trouble finding a different conversation thread to go down.

He knew it couldn’t have been easy for Ilya to say he needed a distraction. Ilya wasn’t the kind of person who asked for things like that. If he was reaching out now, it meant things were heavier than he was letting on.

“Um…” Shane began, rubbing a hand over his face as he searched his memory for something, anything. “My dad was telling me about this coworker of his who was on a flight the other day that -”

“*Shane*,” Ilya interrupted. There was a pause, then, “Something else. Please.” The *please* was so quiet it was nearly a whisper.

Shane closed his eyes. For half a second, he had a selfish urge to huff into the phone. He’d offered Ilya two different threads to latch onto, two neutral, harmless distractions, and neither of them had been good enough. The thought flashed through his mind before he could stop it, unfair and immediately regretted.

But the way Ilya had said his first name… there was sadness woven through it so deeply that it made Shane's irritation dissolve almost as soon as it surfaced. That single word carried more weight than any explanation could have, and Shane found himself unable to snap at him.

Instead of snapping, Shane felt the opposite pull - an almost overwhelming urge to do something *more*. To be there in a way that a phone call didn't allow. He imagined Ilya walking alone in the cold, shoulders hunched, breath fogging the air, and wished he could crawl through the phone, wrap Ilya in his arms and reassure him that everything was going to be okay.

But he couldn't do that. He had to do his best through the phone. Shane continued to try and remember recent events, news, texts from his mom, and random conversations at practices from the past few days, searching for something that Ilya may want to hear.

Ilya didn't want to hear hockey-talk, and he didn't want to hear about Shane's dad's coworker, so Shane attempted to pivot in a different direction.

"You know my teammate Hayden Pike?" Shane asked. He barely gave Ilya time to respond before he rushed on, already wincing at himself, "Sorry stupid question, obviously you know him - he's been on the same team as me for almost ten years now and you've played against him every time we face each other."

"Well, he and his wife Jackie have four kids - Arthur's the oldest - he's a boy - then Amber, Jade, and Ruby. All girls after that. Jade and Ruby are twins, actually. Jackie was completely thrilled when they found out, but Hayden? He was losing his mind. I don't think I've ever seen someone so excited and so stressed at the same time."

Shane paused to see if Ilya wanted to say anything, or to ask for another subject change. But he was only met with soft breathing on the other side of the phone, meaning Ilya was still there, listening, and he didn't mind hearing about Hayden's family.

"He just kept worrying about every little thing - how they were going to need a new car, how they were gonna manage four kids in car seats, if they needed a bigger house… They already have a pretty nice house though, out in the suburbs of Montreal with plenty of bedrooms for the kids. And with a really big living room, perfect for watching games. They like to entertain, that is, invite the whole team over to watch other games during the season if we're not traveling."

"I uh - I actually watched you win the Cup at his house," Shane admitted. "Do you remember that day?"

There was a pause on the line, long enough that Shane wondered if he'd misjudged things. Maybe he shouldn't have brought up hockey again, or addressed Ilya directly when he had said he just wanted Shane to distract him. Shane held his breath, bracing himself to pivot to a different conversation thread if he needed to. Then -

"Yes," Ilya breathed.

Shane wanted to say more. He wanted to tell Ilya how spectacularly he'd been in that game - how he'd seemed unstoppable, skating like the ice belonged to him alone. Everyone could see the passion and desire on his face as he commanded the rink, ordering his teammates during the game with the skill of a true captain. How even in Hayden's house - a house full of people who hated Boston with a passion - every single one of them had been forced to admit it: Ilya had been the best player on the ice that night.

On any other day, Shane knew Ilya would've soaked that up. He would've relished in the praise while encouraging Shane to keep going, to list every play, every moment where he'd shined. But, he didn't want to get too into the hockey talk right now. He needed to keep Ilya distracted with harmless conversation.

"Anyways - I think it's a pretty nice house, but Jackie and Hayden have already started looking for something new. I think Hayden has two - maybe three? - years left in his Metros contract, then it's either retire or resign. He's only a few years older than me - than us - so I doubt he wants to retire just yet, maybe in another five to ten years or so. Depends on how long he would re-sign for. I think he'll stay in Montreal until then anyways. I mean, he never really expressed any interest in playing elsewhere, and I don't think he particularly wants to play in the States. His whole family is Canadian, so it's easier for him to play here." Shane was rambling at this point, telling Ilya little things about Hayden that he doubted Ilya particularly cared to know. But Ilya just let him talk.

He told Ilya about the closet stuffed with wrapping paper and half-expired chocolates he never ate, because Hayden's oldest needed to sell them for school fundraisers, and Shane never had it in him to say no. That he'd learned which colors of wrapping paper sold best, which chocolates Hayden's kids insisted were "the good ones." And how even though he didn't eat chocolate - especially not generic, school-fundraiser chocolate - he always let Arthur talk him into buying mass quantities of whatever the new flavor was that year. Arthur's class would get some sort of pizza party or ice cream party if they had the highest number of sales, and Shane would be damned if he didn't help contribute to getting the little man's class a party. Shane would offer some of the bars to his parents when he remembered them, but most of the time they just sat in the back of his closet.

"Hayden's kids call me Uncle Shane," he said, his voice quieter now "And I - " He paused, then huffed out a small breath, almost a laugh. "I really like it. Being called that, I mean."

"As an only child," Shane went on, "I never thought I would be an uncle to any kids. Never imagined that these kids of my best friend could be so important in my life and mean so much to me. They care about me enough to call me their *uncle*." His voice dipped, a little more vulnerable than before. "It feels… good. Like, like I belong somewhere."

Ilya swallowed, his throat tight. He shifted his weight, boots scraping softly against the pavement. "You do," he said finally, the words coming out rougher than he meant them to. "Belong."

Ilya didn't elaborate, leaving Shane wondering *where* Ilya thought he belonged. As a part of Hayden's family since his kids called him uncle? Or Montreal in general? Or was this Ilya's roundabout way of saying that Shane deserved a family and happiness, no matter what?

“Thanks,” Shane said, softly.

There was a beat of silence, only broken by a car revving its engine somewhere on Ilya’s side of the phone.

“Oh, are you still walking outside?” Shane tapped the screen of his phone to see that their call had been connected for over an hour. “You must be freezing by now.”

“Russians do not get cold,” Ilya said dismissively, and Shane smiled despite himself, picturing how Ilya was probably gesturing in that way he does with his hand.

“Sure, you’re all just born immune to the cold.”

“Is true,” Ilya insisted. “We are - how you say - built different.”

“Still,” Shane said, softening his tone, “you should probably start heading back to your apartment. You won’t be happy if you have to deal with a cold the whole flight back to Boston.”

Ilya groaned loudly in protest as he pushed himself away from the tunnel wall and started walking home, knowing Shane was right. His hands *had* started to go numb from holding his phone, even though he kept switching hands so one was constantly in his pocket.

“Boston would still beat Montreal even if I have cold,” Ilya declared stubbornly.

“Yeah, fat chance. I bet you’re a total baby when you're sick, missing practice to lounge in bed and eat chicken noodle soup and crackers.”

“Uh no,” Ilya said immediately, affronted. “Am no baby. Is you.” He sniffed. “And this American *chicken noodle soup* is disgusting. Marleau tried to make me try many years ago and I gag.”

“You gagged,” Shane repeated, laughing now.

“Yes. Gag. And not in way that you would like.”

A red flush spread across Shane’s cheeks. Ilya must be feeling better if he was back to joking about sex. “Oh, fuck you.”

“Maybe later,” Ilya purred, causing Shane to snort.

“But borscht is far superior.”

“Huh, borscht?” Shane stumbled over the pronunciation as his mind tried to remember what borscht had to do with gagging. Then he remembered the conversation they had been having about chicken noodle soup. “Never heard of it. Russian recipe I’m assuming?”

“Oh, *yes*.” Ilya smiled. “Very healthy, very delicious soup.” He paused, just long enough that Shane wondered if the call had dropped. “I can make it for you one day,” Ilya added carefully. “If you want to try.”

Shane was so stunned he was momentarily at a loss for words. Ilya Rozanov just offered to *cook a meal for him?* And cook something that was from Russia and was clearly very sentimental to him? If Ilya really was true about his offer, Shane figured he could ignore his diet for that.

“Yeah,” he said softly, “I would really like that.”

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End Notes

ilya: my mom is dead, my brother hates me, and now my dad is dead too and i can't process my feelings

shane: why don't i tell you about my mom, who is alive… or my dad, who is also alive and loves me…

our sweet autistic prince was doing his best to cheer up his man okay and he managed to get to a safe conversation eventually

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