

into the unknown

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into the unknown

by [niemi](#)

Summary

“Do you think alternate universes exist?” Shane asks.

A conversation of ‘what if’ arises.

Notes

hey...! I just wanted to write *something* for these two men who have plagued my mind night and day for weeks.

it's short and mostly sweet with a dash of sadness. most importantly, it's domestic hollanov.

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

“Do you think alternate universes exist?”

The words fall into the air, disjointed and rushing out within a single breath.

The question has been brewing in Shane’s mind for a handful of minutes now, his hand absentmindedly resting against bare skin belonging to the heavy, familiar body lounged on top of him.

He takes a quick breath.

Ilya doesn’t acknowledge Shane for a long moment, his curly hair still against Shane’s upper chest. Then, slowly, he lifts his head and rests his chin upon the same spot, eyes peering up at Shane. His gaze flickers briefly to the television, putting two and two together.

The third episode of an ill-executed and incoherent show is playing on the screen, its main character, Jane, in the midst of yet another awfully difficult decision. Yes, Jane. She’s managed to cross three dimensional planes into three parallel universes over the stretch of the last couple of episodes, during which her primary priority has been to find and screw each of her alternate selves’ boyfriends. It’s remarkably explicit. Shane and Ilya have been chasing the loose ends of the terrible plot after missing several chunks of time to their own distracting hook ups.

The show was, of course, Ilya’s choice.

He considers Shane’s question. “Is not so crazy theory. Nice idea – different universes, different versions of you and me.”

Shane hums. His throat feels rough.

Ilya narrows his eyes slightly and waits him out.

The show had sparked the initial thought. From there, Shane was helpless to stop his thoughts from trundling along, growing out their web of interlocking thoughts. Emotions have been caught up in the mess of it all. Worry and anxiety mixed in.

Who would Ilya be in another life? Who would *Shane* be? Who’s to say what may be? What difference would a single choice make?

“Do you think we would have fallen in love in any other universe? If we weren’t hockey players?” Shane continues, “How would we even meet? You’d be in Russia and I would... I don’t know what I’d be doing. Working in an office?”

“I would find you.”

“You wouldn’t know me.”

“Yes but I’d find you,” Ilya says with firm assurance and presses his cheek against Shane’s chest again, attention drifting to the television. “Universe would make sure.”

Jane is on the precipice of yet another universe; she's hovering on the threshold, tempted to take one more step into the unknown. Shane watches without seeing.

Belatedly, he says, "I didn't realise you were such an idealist."

"Am not." Ilya shrugs. "I know me. And I love you in every universe."

Shane smiles but it wavers.

He doesn't believe in the concept of soulmates. As much as he loves Ilya, he's not sure their coming together was any form of divine intervention, any universal nudging. It's impractical, unreasonable. And besides, he puts *them* down to Ilya's pursuit of what he wanted, plus a few years of them chasing their tails in denial and crashing back together time and time again.

Jane crosses over the almost-invisible line between worlds, effortlessly moving into another version of her hometown. A mirror world of the same faces yet different stories.

"But. Maybe if I wasn't quite *me* and you weren't quite *you*, then there'd be someone else for you, someone more suited— better." Shane says, almost murmuring.

Ilya huffs and shifts again, until his chin is propped on his hands on Shane's chest. His eyes look golden in the lamplight's glow. "Better how?"

"Someone else— someone not boring."

"Not boring is better?"

"Maybe," Shane says with a shrug. "To another version of you."

Ilya's eyes narrow slightly then roll.

"Fine. Maybe I find a beautiful, sexy, not-*boring* woman and marry her and have ten children. But I would be sad and I would never figure out why," Ilya says, "I would have an endless ache in my chest, calling out for a man I have never met... and I would be miserable."

"Miserable?" Shane says with a smile.

"The most miserable man on earth," Ilya says, "And rich. Of course."

Shane feels a sense of satisfaction, his small, worrisome anxieties shifting sideways and sliding away.

"Me too. Miserable without you."

Ilya nods and moves to return to his makeshift, human pillow and the godawful show. But Shane has more to say, so many more niggling thoughts clawing at his skull.

"What would you want to know about yourself? The other you, I mean," Shane asks.

Ilya gives him a look that's become all too familiar – the one that whispers, *you're asking too many hard questions, sweetheart* – but then he relents without a single word of resistance,

"I don't know. Maybe... what is the craziest thing he has ever done? Has he jumped out of the sky, has he bungee-jumped? Has he fucked you on the top floor of a glass skyscraper?"

Shane grins, thinking of Ilya's demands each summer that they do *one* exciting thing before the cottage, one activity to make their hearts lurch into their mouths. "Nothing else?"

"Why do I need to know more? I am happy with my life."

Shane's hands tug at him, encouraging. "There must be *something*."

It's more than curiosity driving his insistence. He wants to understand Ilya more than he already does. He wants to imagine Ilya face to face with a strange version of himself and *know* what he'd say. He wants more than the superficial answers. There's a depth to Ilya that he often keeps tucked away from prying eyes. Even Shane isn't privy to the darkest corners. He wants to be. Is that so wrong?

"Maybe..." Ilya hums quietly and his eyes drift away, focusing on some distant point beyond Shane. "Maybe I would ask about my mother. If she is alive, how is she, is she happy? I hope she is not in Russia."

Ilya grimaces, just before Shane starts to say, "Maybe she would—"

"I hate that word. *Maybe*." It sounds bitter in Ilya's mouth, its meaning souring. "*Maybe, maybe, maybe*... There is no *maybe* about my mother's death. It was a stupid thing for me to say."

"No. *No*," Shane says, sharp but gentle. His hand rises quickly and instinctually to cup Ilya's cheek. Ilya naturally tries to move his vulnerability out of sight but Shane's hold keeps him in place, teary eyes on full display to Shane's sinking heart. "It's not stupid. It's not. Your mom, if she was alive somewhere, that would be good, right?"

Ilya's brow creases, tears held back.

"She wouldn't— Ilya, there's nothing wrong with wishing she was alive— she would understand. She could be happy."

"To be happy, she would not marry my father. I would not be born," Ilya says, "I am happy for that, but I do not want you to be alone."

Shane inhales sharply. "What? *Ilya*."

Ilya moves suddenly, climbing onto all fours, his limbs bracketing Shane on the sofa. Assurance replaces the vulnerability in his facial expression.

"In another universe, my mother would be alive, I would not exist, and you would find someone else, someone more serious. I think you would be fine. But I would not give you up for my mother, Shane," Ilya says, "You say she would understand. She would understand this

too, that I will not give you up for an imaginary life with happy mother and Russia and less... *sadness*."

How is it that Ilya can say the most romantic thing, and yet it be wrapped in the barbed wire of his agony? Shane almost cannot believe his ears. That Ilya would choose him over a life with Irina. A mother's love... Shane could never put it into words but he thought that Ilya's grief-stricken love might trump their love.

He finds his tongue. "But—"

"No more *but*'s, no more *maybe*'s," Ilya says firmly, a little exasperated.

"Ilya."

"*Shane*."

"You mean it?"

Ilya nods. "She is already gone. *You* are here, *you* are my husband. I don't want to live without you."

Shane's in a mild daze. They stare at each other for a long moment. Then, Ilya leans down to press his lips to Shane's forehead.

"I am tired of these, ah, hypothetical questions. I love *you*, this you, another you, every boring and exciting Shane Hollander." Ilya says, "я тебя люблю."

"я тебя люблю," Shane says plainly, accent heavy.

Ilya smiles. "I love you too."

He kisses Shane. Once quickly, three times slowly. His body relaxes, loses all firmness, and he retakes his role as Shane's blanket, long limbs settling on the sofa and Shane. His head comes to rest against Shane's sternum.

They lapse into silence and it sinks into the room, despite the television's continued noise. Their eyes return to the show.

Shane's focus is pulled to the curls beneath his fingers, the heat of Ilya's skin, the heartbeats stretching out. They lie there as time passes. Each handful of minutes takes them further into the evening. They have training in the morning, they should sleep. But Shane can never pull away from these quiet moments of peace.

Ilya breaches the silence with a short comment, "She should go home."

"What?" Shane frowns.

"Jane. She should do the smart thing and go home," Ilya says, "She doesn't care about these boyfriends or these stupid planets."

“She said she wants to find somewhere to be happy.”

“She is looking for something she could already have.” Ilya says, “Astrid. Her Swedish best friend... she is obviously in love with her. They should be together. Solve all problems.”

“How do you know?”

“Know what?”

“That they’re in love.”

Ilya’s lips quirk to one side. “I have experience in this.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane starts to smile. His eyes catch on the screen. “Hey, look, it’s alternate Astrid! She’s... I think you are right.”

“Of course I am. Astrid knows what she wants, in every universe.” Ilya sighs. “Jane is being an idiot.”

“Jane? An idiot?”

“It is what I said.”

Shane huffs. The gust of air ruffles Ilya’s curls and settles, as Shane narrows his eyes at the tv, trying to figure out if Ilya’s comment is a subtle dig at him. He loses a minute to his thoughts. Jane does look like him. Probably acts similarly too.

“Shane. If you find a stupid interdimensional portal to a different world, you will not go through, yes?” Ilya says abruptly, briskly.

“Not a chance in hell.”

“Good,” Ilya says, head tipping backwards, their gazes locking. “You will stay with sexy European friend who is in love with you?”

“Always. I promise.” Shane says easily. His oaths to Ilya always come too easily, slipping off the tongue, day and night.

“Good, then sexy friend will blow up the portal, and you will live happily ever after?”

Shane sinks down the sofa cushions, pulling Ilya tighter against him, all worries banished. He grins ridiculously and says, “I’m already living it.”

Ilya hums through his toothy smile. “Correct answer. Top prize! Extra blowjob for Shane Hollander tonight.”

“Shut up.”

Ilya’s eyes sparkle. “Does winner want his prize now or later?”

The growing hardness against Ilya's lower stomach is answer enough as Shane's grin stretches out.

It's safe to say they quickly lose track of Jane's interdimensional travel. Only when it's late and the background noise is rising to the climax of a cinematic piano solo, does their attention return. It finds Jane and Astrid kissing in the orange glow of the sunset — *her* Astrid. The portal crumbles on its own accord.

Ilya wears a stupidly gorgeous, smug grin. Silently screaming *I told you so*. Shane groans under the force of his own fondness.

"Do I get a prize too?" Ilya asks as he ascends to his knees. "For being right?"

"In your dreams." Shane chuckles.

"Ah! But I am living my dream!" Ilya whispers conspiratorially. His hands run up and down Shane's thighs. "So, prize? A prize from my beautiful husband, Shane Hollander?"

Shane shakes his head as his hands glide across the width of Ilya's back. "In another world, then."

"Do not tempt me, Mr Hollander," Ilya says, smiling. "I will drag you to this other world."

"Fine," Shane relents with a grin. "Fine. Ilya Rozanov gets a prize too."

Ilya nods and climbs off the sofa. "I'll accept it in the bedroom."

"The bedroom?" Shane asks rhetorically as Ilya hauls him to his feet. In one swift movement, Ilya ducks down and tosses Shane over one shoulder. He flails, yelling.

"I am taking my prize to the bedroom!" Ilya proclaims over Shane's noisy protests.

"Put me down! Ilya!"

"Never!" Ilya laughs. He walks like Shane weighs almost nothing at all and once they reach the bedroom, he places him gently on the bed, eyes twinkling with dirty thoughts. He crawls over Shane.

"I love you," Shane says breathlessly, "All of you."

He wants to say: *in every universe, in every life, in every version of you and me, through every up and down and twist and turn, in every nightmare and every happy ever after.*

He doesn't get the chance. Ilya leans down and kisses him hard and passionately, taking him apart. And Shane knows what Ilya is saying, he can feel it.

Me too, Ilya says, *Every possibility. Me too.*

How could he possibly ask for more?

End Notes

This started as a drabble to fulfil my internal need to write something about these two utterly hypnotising men. This is where I ended up. I fell into the age-old problem of *how on earth do I end this???* and the story just kept getting longer and longer... alas.

I hope this makes a small splash in the recent flood of hollanov fics; I'm happy to contribute whatever I can 😊

happy new year,
niemi

(new year, same old me (obsessed with queer love))

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