

i know paradise

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by [tothemoon](#)

Summary

Ilya didn't listen, leaning in a little closer so their arms touched for a moment. They'd been warned by his mother about the intensity of Japanese summers, and the both of them had grown up cold weather boys, but Shane always found Ilya's warmth otherworldly, a sensation that defied any measure of temperature.

Shane and Ilya take a trip.

Notes

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

Shane had been in the bathroom when the turbulence started. It surprised him at the time, because there hadn't been any alerts about keeping their seatbelts on, so here he was, jostled around in what amounted to nothing more than a closet, mouthwash all over his t-shirt. It lasted for all of seven seconds or so, this earthquake in the sky; he'd flown countless times since he was a teenager, and experienced all kinds of sky tectonics, but he couldn't think of the last time it was bad enough to feel like he was being slammed against the boards. He could hear a yelp outside, maybe even a scream, but soon it was over and he was on his feet again.

He'd barely heard the announcement from the cockpit as he quickly paced back up the aisle. *Just a bit of turbulence, should be clear skies the rest of the way*, the pilot reassured them, but Shane found Ilya on his seat, back too straight, white-knuckling the armrest with one hand and gripping his mother's crucifix with the other. He was looking straight ahead, eyes unblinking and a little wet.

"Hey," Shane whispered, in the kind of tone that was like a Pavlovian response for Ilya; instantly, his back was slumping against the seat again, body slacking with one long exhale.

"Sorry." Ilya looked away for a moment, finicking with the window shade. "Just the fucking thing, right?"

Shane looked to his own seat from across the aisle; they were on a trip, just the two of them, which meant splurging a bit on the flight, especially if they were going all the way across the world. He'd loved the luxury of the lay-flat seat, but it'd been hard not to sleep next to Ilya for even just a few hours, and cursed their distance even more now.

Ilya had no choice but to fly after the near-crash, given that they were always traveling for away games, and he mostly took turbulence well enough, but sometimes it'd get bad like how it just was and it'd leave him shaken. Shane wished he could sit in Ilya's lap, offer himself up like a weighted blanket, but as the flight attendant came by, politely telling Shane to return to his seat, all he could do was sneak the squeeze of Ilya's hand that Ilya didn't seem willing to concede.

"Soon," Shane lied, because they still had another eight hours on the flight.

Ilya accepted the lie though, and grinned back at Shane when he took a closer look at the white of his t-shirt, distinctly stained with minty blue mouthwash.

"You cheat on me with an alien, Hollander? What do they call it? Mile-high association?"

Shane could only smile back, relieved that Ilya was making jokes even if it came at his own expense. "Mile high *club*," he corrected, and he wished it wasn't giving him any ideas.

"Maybe that is where the turbulence came from," Ilya suggested. "Alien rocked your world."

"Fuck you," Shane said, and Ilya could only raise his eyebrows to say, *yes, later*.

Well, the pilot had lied. Despite the assurance that the rest of the flight would be a smooth one, Shane and Ilya experienced more turbulence, some of it so bad that the plane had dipped a few times and suitcases came flying out of the overhead. The screamers were the worst part—god, a woman was downright *sobbing* in premium economy—that by the time they landed, it'd felt like they'd been on an odyssey for half of their lives. Ilya, in particular, seemed taken aback by the fluorescent lights in the airport, and the immense July humidity, and looked dazed as they let the people mover take them to baggage claim. They waited there for what felt like another year, their missing checked luggage elusive and taunting. A myth, at this point. They would never see them again.

“Your foot,” Ilya said, looking down.

Shane didn't realize how much he'd been tapping it. He was overstimulated, sleepless, and pulled so tight inside himself he felt like a cue ball waiting to be launched somewhere far and unknown. The thing was, he'd been to Japan before, but only as a small child with his parents, not with someone like Ilya. This was their first international trip together, not counting their honeymoon, and the turbulence had felt like a bad omen so far.

“Sorry,” Shane said. “I'm good. Really.”

Ilya didn't listen, leaning in a little closer so their arms touched for a moment. They'd been warned by his mother about the intensity of Japanese summers, and the both of them had grown up cold weather boys, but Shane always found Ilya's warmth otherworldly, a sensation that defied any measure of temperature.

They lingered like this, grazing fabric and bare forearms against each other. Soon their suitcases came down the conveyor belt like an answered prayer, and Shane wanted nothing more than to cry from joy.

By the time they settled in the hotel, it was seven at night and both of them were on morning time. Ilya took his usual pill, Shane changed out of his stained shirt, and the two of them set out for dinner. They were staying in Shibuya, one of the busiest hubs in the world, not just Japan, which made Shane instantly miss the peace and quiet of the cottage. Ilya, spontaneous,

had wanted to try some place they found on the street, preferably an izakaya where the businessmen were getting absolutely shitfaced, while Shane had wanted to try one of meticulously researched places he'd saved in his excel spreadsheet. They bickered about this as they wandered through the aisles of a FamilyMart, drawing a few looks from unsuspecting customers.

"My god, Hollander. Who cares about Michelin-whatever-the-fuck? Is a scam so they feed you tree bark. And then we'll be hungry in an hour."

Both of them were stocking up on snacks with a competitive fervor, hyper-focused on filling their own baskets to the brim.

"Well, sorry I don't want cigarette smoke all over my clothes." Shane rolled his eyes. "Or drinks spilled on me!"

"Eating on street level is better," Ilya insisted. "More enjoyable. Like we're really in the city."

"But the restaurant I bookmarked has a nice view. Like, really aerial."

"High rise, so what? We've been in plenty of those."

And Shane had to admit, this much was true. They'd spent a lot of their younger years in high-rise hotels, closing the curtains, or hoping that the penthouse altitude would be enough to shield them from prying eyes. It made his stomach lurch, slightly. He shook off the feeling, only to find Ilya, turned away towards a fridge full of canned coffee offerings. He rubbed his eyes, considering a colorful can with added sugar before putting it back.

Shane looked down at Ilya's basket, feeling his face warm. Ilya had stocked up on healthier snacks for the room, like pre-boiled soy eggs for protein, yogurt, and packaged nuts. He'd even had the foresight to get them bottles of water for the room, in case the mini bar had proved lacking, alongside a few cans of ginger ale.

"Fine," Shane conceded. "But if I smell even a little cigarette smoke on my clothes later, you're paying for the dry cleaning."

Ilya looked smug in his victory, but softened as he glanced over at Shane's basket. In it were things Shane knew Ilya would like: rare flavored kit-kats, seaweed-flavored potato sticks, a baumkuchen, melon bread, and at least five kinds of instant ramen. He zeroed in on the baumkuchen, saying that it looked like a donut. He mouthed the syllables to himself, before remarking that it sounded German.

"I think it is," Shane said. "But they're popular here, I think. I ate them sometimes, growing up," he added, when he remembered his great-aunts spoiling him with desserts. "They're sweet, and they're nice to share."

Ilya smiled without looking at him, perhaps delighted, and tucked his chin down towards his chest before the both of them got in line to pay.

“We’re not having sex tonight,” Shane said when they got back to the hotel room.

“What?” Ilya looked absolutely drained of life. “Wouldn’t it be good release?”

Shane wasn’t so sure about that. Sometimes their sex was so electrifying it was like a kind of jet lag in itself, something so life-bringing Shane could feel it in every pore after. He’d always want more, and then he’d stare at the ceiling, sleepless, heart thrumming in his throat. And there were times, yes, where they’d wreck each other into unconsciousness, but he thought about the early morning Tsukiji tour he’d booked and how they were past the point of refunds, deciding not to risk it.

“Think of the tuna,” Shane said.

“The *what*?”

“The tuna auction we’ll be touring. Sometimes, they sell for millions! It’s serious business.”

Ilya grinned at this, and he came to the verge of a laugh. His face flushed a bit, and his eyes looked so open with adoration. Shane smiled back at him, but didn’t understand what had left Ilya so besotted.

And so they did their best to sleep. As the clock crept towards two in the morning, Shane shifted over in bed, tired of shutting his eyes. He knew he was exhausted—not just from the travel, but the trials and tribulations of winning the Stanley Cup—and hoped that all that effort would give him at least a few broken hours of sleep; but he was awake, for better or worse, without Ilya in the space next to him.

Shane sat up, finding Ilya sitting sans shirt at the window, looking out at the view over the city. The curtains were open, and they had a corner room, which allowed Shane to see all the lights of the city. Montreal and Ottawa were also cities of course, and he’d been to New York and Los Angeles and so many other so-called hot spots, but there was something about Tokyo that left him breathless. Maybe it was the idea that they no longer had to hide, that these high-rise views were not the only ones they could afford. A nice view was a nice view, but the ground floor was also theirs now, too.

As he got up to join Ilya by the window, he made out of the slow red blinking of antennas, and how the light seemed to stretch out like an ocean. Down on the street, taxis ambled through green lights. Kids were leaving school from practice, bopping a volleyball in the air, while co-workers, buzzed and happy, laughed in the street. Shane even spotted a boy on a bike with flowers in the basket, and wondered if that boy was in love.

He smiled at all this, leaning over to fill the gaps of Ilya's fingers. Shane found a small tremor in the hold, like Ilya was especially wired.

"You okay?" Shane asked.

"Mm."

"Be honest."

"I am tired," Ilya said. "The kind that makes you alert for some reason."

Shane was tempted to ask more about specifics, to diagnose, but settled on silence instead. He knew there was lots to be amped up about—winning the cup as members of the same team, being married, turbulence, jet lag—and decided that they were meant to have so much in this life. He was happy to be here in Tokyo with Ilya, even enough to lose sleep over it.

"How about you?" Ilya asked back.

"What about me?"

"Are you tired?"

"Beyond," Shane huffed out a laugh. "Like, we're in another dimension, or something."

"And how do you feel, being here?"

Shane didn't know how to answer the question. He knew Ilya was asking because he'd spent an important portion of his life, rooting and uprooting from Moscow to Boston to Ottawa, that any manner of place—*origin*—was potent to him. Shane was half Japanese after all, so that had to count for something right? But Shane wasn't sure how to feel. In their first few hours in Tokyo, he felt mostly like a tourist.

"I think it all goes back to hockey," Shane tried explaining.

"Oh, does it?" Ilya narrowed his eyes in some pretend-annoyance.

"When I was a kid, I used to tell people I was born in the North Pole. Like, it made sense to me. I'm meant for the ice." Shane peeked up, finding that Ilya's face had softened.

"But I didn't think about what I was, Canadian or otherwise. Like, there's English, sure, whatever, but then I really worked on my French because, well, I knew there was a good chance I'd play for Montreal. But I never had the chance to learn Japanese. Not a lot, anyway. Just phrases here and there. It just didn't fit into what I was bringing to the rink. In a way, hockey was my country first."

“And now?” Ilya asked, because it wasn’t just about hockey anymore. After everything that had happened with the outing, and Shane joining Ilya in Ottawa, he knew better than that.

“I don’t know,” Shane said, because he was getting more comfortable with this, *the unknown*. The world was vast and very beautiful. “But I’d like to find out.”

Pulling Ilya away from the window altogether, Shane sat him at the foot of the bed, toppling over Ilya to offer some needed weight. Maybe he wanted to feel something solid, too. Ilya responded by wrapping his arms around Shane, dragging needy kisses across his jawline. He huffed out another long breath and flipped them over, so now that Shane was on his back. It didn’t start sexual, because mostly he always just wanted to be close to Ilya regardless, but soon enough he was sighing from Ilya’s body on his, shivering at how a rough, big hand palmed its way under his sleep shirt before yanking it off altogether.

Slowly, Ilya took down Shane’s boxers, while slid Shane off Ilya’s briefs. And then Ilya snorted, his face beaming so lovely in the low light, he seemed celestial.

“We are naked,” he said, “in Japan.”

Shane followed him in his laughter. It was rare to find each other like this in a different context, given all they had devoted to hockey and their designated cities across North America, so Shane decided to bask in it.

Kissing Ilya slow and heavy and smothering, Shane took his turn to beam.

“Hey, aren’t we technically having morning sex?” he asked, and Ilya looked incredulous.

“Ah, so we *are* having sex, then?”

“Yes,” Shane said, “in Japan,” before Ilya laughed again and pried this thighs apart.

Somehow, they had made it to the tuna tour the next morning. Despite their bleariness, and how comfortable and bare they found themselves in bed, Shane decided it was best not to miss it. Admission fees aside, he secretly thought of tuna as something sacred in their lore (if he could call it lore), and still flushed when he thought of Ilya making him a tuna melt that first time. He still regretted running away that day, even if it felt like a million years ago at this point. He’d apologized many times since then, even if he didn’t have to, and sometimes snuck those extra *sorrys* in the form of kisses, or lazy calf massages on the couch.

“Remember when you made me a tuna melt?” Shane asked in the back of the cab, en route to Toyosu Market.

“What, the one last week?” Ilya said. “You did not like the jalapeño, I know. Hurts your stomach.”

“No, not that. You know, the first one.”

“Ah,” Ilya said, a little more demurely. “Yes, of course. That was long ago.”

“You had everything all prepped and ready to go, I remember. *Tupperware*. Honestly I was expecting you to have like, just vodka in your fridge. Did you make them a lot, at the time?”

Ilya gave Shane one of those lopsided smiles of his, but he seemed shy somehow, to the point where he had to cover his mouth.

“Tell you what,” Ilya said. “We play a game. I don’t know, like we guess how much the most expensive tuna sells for. If you win, I tell you. If I win, I take to my grave, yes?”

Shane frowned. “So serious for such an easy answer.”

“We both know it was not easy back then.”

That much was true. They’d overcome a lot to get to where they were. When Shane felt the air thicken, perhaps on the verge of seriousness, he leaned into it, honoring the years of stupidity and pain and suffering that got them here, to the back of this cab. He hooked their thumbs together over the leather mound of the seat, if only to remind himself of what they had now.

“Well either way,” Shane said. “I will be destroying you at the auction.”

And Shane did win, and big, at that. He was no expert on bluefin tuna, or how much they usually went for, but he took one look at the biggest one, believed in its heartiness, and guessed it would fetch for more than 200 million yen, or around 1.7 million in Canadian.

Ilya, maybe irritated by the heat and the maritime smell, and less believing in the power of a big fucking fish, said he’d go lower. A hundred yen, he said, without much consideration. In truth, he seemed a bit disinterested in the happenings. Shane could feel Ilya watching him instead of the action, which made him want to say: *Come on, Ilya! Look! Look how much tuna has brought people together!*

Waiting on the platform for the train, they shook on Shane’s win and let their grip linger a little longer before releasing. Ilya smiled wearily, and took a deep breath like he was confessing to a homicide.

“I didn’t just have all that in my fridge back then,” Ilya said. “I bought the tuna for you. Even the pickles.”

“Even the pickles?” Shane asked, his voice wondrous and small.

“And the ginger ale.”

Shane could’ve kissed him right then and there, really, he could’ve. He wouldn’t, not with the train pulling into the station at that moment, and all the people coming and going, but he thought: *well, you must all know anyway*. There was no hiding the smile on his face, and way Ilya gently prodded him into the train car, his hand on Shane’s shoulder.

“The great Ilya Rozanov,” Shane chirped in a low voice, appropriate for a quiet train car. “Wandering in the supermarket for tin cans.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, leaning into Shane as the train swayed just so.

Stupidly, Shane had not had enough water.

At home, he was the king of hydration, ensuring he always had enough to get through all his workouts and practices and games. Here, though, he’d underestimated the humidity, and was too busy marveling at the city all around them until it was too late. They were three days into the trip now, and here Shane was waiting in the shade against a tree in Yoyogi Park, fighting back the color in his vision. Ilya had run off to the nearest vending machine he could find for water, or an electrolyte drink, and had yet to return.

Shane sat back and closed his eyes. If he had to find any real blame for the headache, in all honesty, Ilya was the number one culprit. Shane had been too busy watching Ilya as *Ilya in Tokyo*. He mourned, maybe a little, or maybe a lot, the years in which he could not steal Ilya away to these other cities, on whole other continents, to observe him outside their usual circumstances. What storefront displays did Ilya find the most interesting? What magnets did Ilya pick up, in souvenir stands? What caught Ilya’s attention in restaurant menus? What did Ilya take pictures of? What did Ilya pray for at the shrines? The questions swam around in Shane’s thoughts like this, and knew, with some confidence, how to answer them, but he hated that it was something he did not know for sure until he saw Ilya, actually in motion; so whenever Ilya smiled, even softly, at something he didn’t expect him to, Shane felt some strange urge to cry, infuriated by the miracle in front of him.

“Shane.” He knew it was Ilya, huffing, like he’d just run a marathon. “You all right?”

Shane nodded. As he opened his eyes, he could feel the cool press of plastic against his forehead, which made him feel leagues better already. “Thank you,” he said, as he took his drink and Ilya plopped down next to him.

He’d gotten them both a Pocari Sweat, a vaguely lemon-y electrolyte drink that Shane decided he liked more than Gatorade. Ilya downed almost all of his in less than ten seconds it seemed, and was probably just as zapped as Shane.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said. “I should’ve gone.”

“I’m not the one who’s dying.”

“I’m not dying, just a little dizzy.”

“All right, all right,” Ilya tapped Shane’s bottle. “Now drink. You are going to crash at three, so you should at least be hydrated before that.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane did what he’s told, sipping. “You’ve been keeping track?”

“Yes, moy gubka.”

Shane searched for the word. “Sponge?”

Ilya nodded. “Like what you should be right now.”

“Fine, fine.”

Under the shade, Shane drank, stopping here and there to peer at Ilya again. He did his best to watch how Ilya watched people, traced his vision towards the verdant lawn, the sky-high fountain, the sparrows, toddlers in matching yellow hats and boxy-looking backpacks. Ilya didn’t seem particularly excited to be here, and Shane wondered if a park had been the wrong choice for a destination. Not to mention the tuna auction the other morning. He then thought of the Ginza clock, which was smaller than they both expected. The convenience store runs in the evening, always the same one a few blocks away from the hotel.

Shane worried, silently, that he was making boring choices; that this park was like any other park in a major city, well-manicured and nice to look at, but what else? He thought that he should’ve gotten to know Japan a little bit more, worked harder at his Duolingo lessons before coming here, not only for himself but for the sake of showing Ilya something a bit more interesting.

“Ilya,” Shane said.

“Hm?”

Just as he was about to say something about the matter, Ilya laid his head on Shane’s shoulder, humming wordlessly. His cheek was wet with sweat, mingling with Shane’s already-damp t-shirt, and all Shane could do was remember the other times Ilya had powered down, analyzing each instance like game tape.

“Ah,” he said, checking his watch. “It’s two o’ clock. Forget about *three*. You usually crash around this time yourself.”

Ilya smiled up from Shane’s shoulder, like it was nice to be known.

“Then maybe we stay here for a little while,” he said, which put Shane at ease. “It’s nice, yes? Being like this.”

And Shane leaned back on his arms, agreeing. He breathed in the summer air, some hint of Ilya’s scent mixed with hotel shampoo, and decided there were worse places to be.

By the next day, they had the energy to bicker again. The whole morning, Shane found himself worried about the next leg of their trip, like what time the Shinkansen was, where they had to be if they wanted the best sunset views later, when they’d have to forward their luggage, or have their laundry done. It was in his nature, to plan, and then plan out loud, but sometimes he’d be chattering only to find that Ilya had straggled behind to take a picture of something for the umpteenth time. This happened several times, Shane talking to who he thought was Ilya, only to find that it was a startled salaryman, or a grouchy old woman, or a gaggle of snickering teenagers (which he always found intimidating, regardless of country).

And Shane *did* want Ilya to keep taking those pictures, to enjoy himself, but not when they were rushing for the train, which would need a transfer to another train, and then a shuttle up the mountains. His mother had gushed repeatedly about Hakone, a town that sat on a volcano and made for gorgeous hot springs, and thought it’d be good to heal their battered playoff bodies.

So he rushed for the both of them. They would relax, especially after days maneuvering through so many people. He imagined the mountains would be cooler, more open, like the cottage.

But the Hikari 631 to Odawara was pulling into the platform at any moment, and Ilya was still standing back, maybe fifteen feet away, taking a picture of what, exactly? Shane couldn’t be sure.

“Ilya!” Shane yelled, which he didn’t want to do because he didn’t want to make a scene. “Come on! The train is going to get here soon!”

“Don’t worry, Hollander!” Ilya said, finger on the trigger, still snapping pictures. “It’s not going to leave without us!”

“Well, then maybe I’ll leave without *you*!”

Ilya stuck out his tongue, but focused on the shot when the train came rushing into the platform. It then dawned on Shane that he'd be waiting for this moment, that rush of something so incredibly fast suddenly making a smooth and complete stop. The Hikari 631 opened its doors, and Shane realized Ilya had been waiting at the right part of the track all along, because of course he was.

Ilya knew this too, cocking an eyebrow, and all Shane could do was mutter a affectionate, "fuck you."

On their first morning in Hakone, Shane and Ilya were having actual morning sex. It felt like a such a singular act when they were jet lagged, the both of them so deprived of sleep and rest that even forming the words, *do you want to* and *fuck yes* felt like too much energy to say. He wasn't sure why their circadian rhythms hadn't been broken yet. He'd expected Ilya to have acclimated already, given that he used to back and forth between Moscow and Boston, but it warmed him to think that Ilya was now firmly an Eastern Standard Time man; an Ottawa guy; *mine*.

This made Shane more excited than he wanted to admit. When Ilya was pressed up behind him, groaning out some incomprehensible, exhausted Russian, Shane was already guiding Ilya's hands past the waistband of his shorts and up past the shroud of his t-shirt. They were laying on a futon this time, close to the ground, which thrilled Shane because he felt he was feeling everything now, tenfold. There was nothing plush to fall back on, just hard body on hard body on hard floor, and he liked the roughness of an elbow or a knee bumping into a table, or one of their suitcases. *So much for healing our battered bodies*, Shane thought, before the both of them came back to life, and Ilya entered him from behind, the feeling of it so sharp and wonderful and breaking he could only call Ilya's name, *Ilya*, his first words of the day.

After, the two of them took a ropeway over Owakudani, where Ilya crinkled his nose at the sulfur in the air. Under them, the mountain green gave way to the bald, fuming ridges of land, where a volcano was quietly smoldering underneath the rubble.

"Moy yaytso," Ilya said, after they made it to the top, and Shane had run off to stand in line for a few minutes, for a surprise. "Are we going to eat those?"

"Egg," Shane remembered, from his Russian lessons. "Tamago," he also tried, perhaps shyly, in Japanese, because he'd felt proud that he ordered said eggs like this just minutes before, *tamago*. He felt the warmth of the paper bag in his hands, along with the two sulfur-black eggs waiting to be cracked. "They say they're supposed to lengthen your lifespan by seven years."

“So, if we eat a hundred, we should be good, right? Might make you better at hockey, too.”

“Don’t make me kick you off this mountain.”

Still, they ate their eggs and watched the clouds in the sky.

“You know,” Shane said. “Sometimes they don’t even let people up here, if the volcano activity’s too much.”

Ilya looked dreamy, all post-sex and sleep-deprived. He leaned over the back of the bench back, peering at the sloped land under the fence. He hadn’t said much all morning, which Shane still sometimes didn’t know what to do with, but he settled into it all the same and decided he didn’t need to fill the quiet this time.

“So the volcano, they knew we were coming here, yes?” Ilya finally asked. “They know our place is at the top.”

That was just the thing, Shane thought. Their particular language, which he never took for granted. They’d spent years learning this tongue through the silence, and Shane wanted to make sure he could always speak it back.

“Yes, the volcano knows,” Shane said, proudly, like fire.

And one night, like a prayer answered, the jet lag spell had broken. Ilya and Shane were staying in downtown Kyoto, buzzed off highballs from the convenience store, listening to Japanese city pop in their hotel room. After hearing a particular song in a cafe in Arashiyama earlier that afternoon, it had been enough for Ilya to go up to the waiter and ask, *what is this, I must know*, like he’d never heard music before.

Luckily for them, the waiter had spoken English. *I Know Paradise*, he said the song was called, and Shane thought the name was apt for some reason. From there, Ilya went and downloaded a bunch of similar songs onto his phone in the hotel room, and he seemed overjoyed at every song that played from his raspy speaker.

“So much feeling,” he’d said to Shane in Russian, which could’ve meant anything, and everything, since Ilya was the one saying this. “You can’t help but dance!”

Shane, already exhausted to his bones, could only watch helplessly from the foot of their bed. He smiled dopily, gushing out a “no, no,” when Ilya hauled him up to join him. In their state, it was more of a tired-drunk sway, but they kept their faces nose-to-nose and Shane couldn’t help but demure at the closeness.

“What were we even fighting about before?” Shane asked, because they had been, on their way back to the hotel.

“I could not tell you,” Ilya said, smiling.

At this, Shane nodded, and closed his eyes against Ilya’s shoulder.

There would always be fights, he decided, but there would always be this: dancing at the end of the night in a hotel room, the curtains drawn open.

Along the way, Shane and Ilya went to temples. It was hard not to, when there were so many of them in every town and city in Japan. Some were big and grand, jutting out majestically over mountain shelves, while others, as small as birdhouses, guarded the fronts of residential homes. Everywhere, there was somewhere to pray. Shane had learned there was a shrine for anything, really, like good test scores, or matchmaking, or even the curing of warts, and wondered if there was one for winning another Stanley Cup. Regardless, he’d toss a coin in, feeling selfish that he wasn’t wishing for world peace, and asked for five more championship wins anyway.

But mostly, he paid his respects because he knew the money donation would help with the shrines’ upkeep. It was the practical thing to do, especially in the face of increased tourism to the country, the added foot traffic. In truth, he wasn’t religious to begin with, aside from his usual pre-game superstitions. He usually finished praying a lot sooner than Ilya, who stood there with perfect posture, eyes closed, transported elsewhere.

Today, they were at Kiyomizudera, one of the bigger temples that Shane vaguely remembered going to as a kid, in Kyoto. His mother and father had mostly done the praying while Shane felt the need to guard their shoes at the door, since you had to take them off before entering the hall. He remembered this fondly, the two of them digging the yen out of their pouches, and how his mother had splurged on a lit candle in their family’s name, not just a coin offering.

Shane had watched all of this from afar, not really understanding anything he was watching, why it mattered. His family wasn’t usually the type to go to church back in Ottawa. His mother came back to him after a while, taking Shane by the hand, before proclaiming that the heavens had listened to her one and only biggest wish. *What was that*, Shane had asked, but then she just pressed a finger to her lips, telling him, *you’ll find out soon*.

“Hey,” he heard Ilya calling after him. “You all right?”

Shane didn't realize this, but he'd had tears in his eyes. "Yeah," he said, staring ahead, not even sure why he was crying.

"What did you pray for?"

With this, Shane thought about tossing another coin into the box. He thought about another cup, and opportunity, and good health. He refrained, turning to Ilya instead.

"Nothing," Shane said. "I think I have everything I could've ever wanted."

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I haven't written a fic in years, but hollanov have really taken over my brain and this just came out of me ahead of the cottage episode...apologies if there are any mistakes here, as I wrote this one pretty quickly. 😭 but i just really needed to get my feelings out there so here we are.

The song is "Ai no Paradise" or "I Know Paradise" by The Platters. Also a lot of the locations mentioned here are some of my favorites I've visited over the years in Japan, so it was so fun to include. I hope I did this character/relationship study justice!!!

Happy holidays, everyone! And thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for reading! Kudos and comments are so appreciated :)

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