

a hole in his arms where the world used to be

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a hole in his arms where the world used to be

by [justhockey](#)

Summary

“There’s information coming out that the Centaur’s plane crashed on its way to Tampa.”

The entire world tilts on its axis.

For a moment Shane feels like he’s being burned alive, and then in an instant it’s just bitter cold; there’s ice in his veins, his lungs, his heart. God, his *heart*. Is it still beating? He can’t tell. Surely not. Surely, if Ilya were - if he were *gone*, then Shane’s heart would have fallen still. There would be nothing left for it to beat for.

Notes

Title from *Epic III* from Hadestown.

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

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [\[授权翻译\] 世界曾在他怀中](#) by [hyacinthiassms1895](#)

Shane's hair is still damp from his rushed, post-game shower, and it's dripping onto his crumpled white shirt as he stands behind the podium, waiting for this goddamn media circus to be over with. The questions are always the same, the *answers* are always the same, and right now Shane wants nothing more than to crawl into bed and sleep for the next eight hours.

They're in Raleigh now - after just defeating the Canes - then they're on to Nashville, St Louis, and Chicago, before finally heading home. It's a long stretch, and Shane misses his home and his bed and his boyfriend. The last one most of all.

As he's finishing up answering yet another question about how they plan to get the powerplay going - *short shifts, quick passes, get the puck in deep* - a low murmur begins to travel through the hoard of reporters. There are wide eyes and frantic glances exchanged, and hurried, borderline panicked whispers.

A hand shoots up to grab Shane's attention.

"Shane, do you have anything to say about the news coming from Ottawa right now?"

Everything inside Shane stills.

They know, he thinks. *Oh my god, they know.*

But he can't panic, can't shut down, can't give them the confirmation that they're looking for. Not if he has even the slightest chance of protecting Ilya and himself from the fallout of this. They might be able to spin it, might be able to come back from it. Might be able to hide it if Shane just keeps his shit together.

So he sucks in a breath, chuckles, and says, "I just got off the ice. What news is that?"

There are more concerned glances, more quiet muttering. But their faces...they don't look hungry for a soundbite, they're not foaming at the mouth to be the first to get a comment from Shane after he's been outed. No, they look *scared*, almost.

Something is wrong.

"There's information coming out that the Centaur's plane crashed on its way to Tampa."

The entire world tilts on its axis.

For a moment Shane feels like he's being burned alive, and then in an instant it's just bitter cold; there's ice in his veins, his lungs, his heart. God, his *heart*. Is it still beating? He can't tell. Surely not. Surely, if Ilya were - if he were *gone*, then Shane's heart would have fallen still. There would be nothing left for it to beat for.

He can't move. Can't think. He can't even breathe.

There's an agonising hollowness inside of him, echoing through his blood and bones and soul. There are two giant, iron fists clutching at his lungs, forcing the breath from him,

making Shane dizzy with lack of oxygen. He knows he's being asked more questions - knows he's being watched, and analysed, and waited on - but Shane can't seem to move. Can't even force himself to blink.

"Shane. Shane? Do you have a comment about-"

"Are you sure?" He manages to choke out, his voice all mangled and broken like there's been a car crash inside his chest. Or a plane crash, perhaps.

It's another reporter who answers. "It's been confirmed that there were issues with the flight, yes."

"It - it crashed? Can someone...can someone tell me if - can you confirm..."

Shane knows what he's trying to ask but the words won't come out.

He wants to ask if the plane really went down, if there are survivors, if Ilya - his boyfriend, the love of his life - is still breathing. He wants to wail and scream and beg, wants to claw his chest open and crack his ribs just to see if his heart is still beating inside of him. He'll know then, if Ilya is alive or not.

He clutches at his chest, tries to feel the movement beneath the palm of his hand. He can't. He can't feel it. He knows that, objectively, his heart is still working - he's sitting here, conscious, alive as much as he can be if Ilya is not - but he can't feel it. And suddenly it's as if he's outside of his body; Shane is somewhere else, watching all of this happen. Watching himself fall apart in front of a room filled with reporters who are desperate for a story to sell.

"Is he - is he-"

He almost says Ilya's name. Almost asks if he's...not dead - he can't say that word out loud when it's connected to Ilya's name - but if he's *alive*.

Because what does it matter now, anyway, if the plane has really crashed?

What was any of it for? The sneaking, and the hiding, and the secrecy? All of it was so they could build a life together, so they could do it on their own terms, so they could have a future. If Ilya is...then it was all for nothing. All the years of missing each other when they could have been loving each other - it was all pointless. Time wasted. A future burned to ash in a matter of seconds.

Shane feels like he is dying.

His knees begin to buckle and he can't hold his weight up any longer.

But then there are hands wrapping around him, holding him up as a familiar voice mutters in his ear. Someone is tugging at him, talking slow and steady - to Shane or to the reporters, he isn't quite sure.

"Come on, Shane. You have to move," the man says. Then, "Sorry, guys. This is - this is a shock for all of us."

Shane finally manages to move, turning his head to look at the man who has started to pull him away from the podium. Hayden. Of course it's Hayden, who else would it be? There's no one else who understands what's happening right now. No one else who gets that Shane's entire world is crumbling around him; the ground beneath him is turning to dust, and the sky is falling, and Shane is going down with it.

Good. He wants to.

If he hasn't got Ilya to go home to, then he doesn't want this life anymore. The thought comes to him with startling clarity. No fear, or questioning or doubt, just the absolute certainty that Shane doesn't want to be in this world if Ilya isn't.

He doesn't remember walking out of the press room, or through the winding corridors of the Lenovo Center. He doesn't know if anyone tries to stop them, or talk to them, or redirect them. He doesn't even know where he *is*, when Hayden finally pushes him down into a chair and pulls another one out for himself, close enough that he can sit right in front of Shane.

Hayden's hands circle around Shane's wrists, holding onto them as he tries to catch Shane's eye.

"Shane, buddy. You need to - hey, *Hollander* - you need to breathe."

He doesn't even realise he's holding his breath until those words shock him into the present. His lungs are aching with the need for oxygen, and the breath he sucks in is ragged and painful.

"Hayden - is he. Is he-"

"I don't know. Right now, we don't know anything," he says. "They fucking ambushed you in there, but the truth is everything is mostly just rumours right now."

Shane hears Ilya's voice in his head; his slow, soothing Russian drawl as he talks Shane down from a panic attack. *In, out, good job Hollander*. He listens to him - takes a breath, and then another, and then another. He waits for it to get easier but it doesn't.

He waits for the pain to ease, but it won't. Not until he knows.

He nods, an odd sense of determination washing over him. No one knows anything yet. Issues with the plane could mean anything - a million different things that aren't dangerous, or life threatening, or catastrophic. This could all be a huge overreaction. He knows what the media is like, knows firsthand how they twist and spin and manipulate things in order to fit their own narratives and cause as much drama as possible.

"What do we know?" He asks Hayden, finally looking him in the eyes.

"The plane had engine trouble and they lost contact with it. No one can reach the aircraft, or anyone on board."

Shane nods again, too fast, too many times. There's a frantic edge to it, hysteria that's trying to build but Shane refuses to let it happen.

He wants his phone, wants to call Ilya and hear his voice on the other end of it, safe and unharmed and *his*. He knows it would be pointless right now, though, if all contact is lost. He'd just work himself up with every call that goes unanswered. He'd twist himself in knots until he's nothing more than a ball of anxiety.

Shane puts his hand over his chest again; he can feel the erratic beat of his heart.

"He's okay," Shane says.

"I'm sure he is, buddy."

"No. No, I *know* he is," Shane tells him. "I'd feel it. If - if something was wrong, if he were...I'd feel it. I'd know."

Saying it out loud makes it feel more real, more certain. Something settles in Shane, steadfast and resolute. Ilya is okay because he refuses to accept an alternative. Ilya is okay because he's *Ilya*; he's invincible and indestructible, and he's *Shane's*. The universe can't take Ilya because Shane won't allow it.

He shakes away the fizzy feeling in his hands, straightens up in his seat and takes another long, deep breath.

"I need to get to Tampa."

"Shane--"

"I'm not asking, Hayden. I'm telling you."

He needs to get there, he needs to be there for Ilya. Because whatever is happening right now, it's going to be scary and overwhelming and Ilya is going to be afraid. So when he touches down - safe and sound, because he finally deserves some good fucking luck - Shane needs to be waiting for him. Or, at least not too far behind.

He needs to pull Ilya into his arms, and kiss his lips, and feel his heart beating against Shane's chest.

He doesn't care what it takes, or what it costs him, or what he has to do to get there. Tomorrow's game doesn't matter, the Voyageurs don't matter, Shane's *career* doesn't matter - not more than Ilya. Not more than his sweet, sweet boyfriend, who just a few short days ago thought Shane wouldn't choose him over hockey.

"It's going to be difficult," Hayden sighs, running a hand through his hair.

"Why? I get on a plane, I fly to Tampa, I--"

"Shane, buddy. You almost collapsed back there when you found out. The media are going fucking feral right now," Hayden explains. "It's gonna be hard getting you out of the building."

Oh.

He'd had a vague sense of awareness that he was being closely watched, when he was standing up there in front of a room full of reporters as his entire world caved in around him. He'd known, distantly, that he had eyes on him. But he hadn't really considered it until now, faced with the reality of the chaos his reaction caused.

People are going to want answers; they're going to want the story.

Shane doesn't plan on giving it to them. Not now, not like this. They've fought so fucking hard to make sure that, when it happens, it happens on their own terms. That isn't changing now.

"Sneak me out the back and get me into a car. I'll handle the rest."

"Shane--"

"What if it was Jackie?"

It's a low blow, maybe, but he needs Hayden to understand. He needs him to get what this feels like right now. Like there's some unknown force trying to rip his organs out of his body.

Hayden's face scrunches up in pain, then he nods. "Okay. Let's do it."

Shane is in an Uber on his way to the airport when he finally pulls his phone out of his bag. He wants to call Ilya but knows he couldn't bear hearing it go to voicemail, so he calls Farah.

The conversation is fast, professional, productive. By the time they hang up there's a charter waiting for Shane at the nearest airport, ready to take him to Tampa as soon as he arrives. He responds to his parents' frantic texts with all the information he has, and then promises he'll let them know more when he makes it to Florida. He thanks Hayden for his help.

And then - then he sees the notifications. The Instagram messages from *IlyaRoz81*.

Shane holds his breath as he opens them.

Then he almost throws up.

You are the best thing in my life.

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

I am thinking only about you right now. A million memories. Thank you for those. Whatever happens, I am with you. Safe in your heart. I believe it.

He almost asks the uber driver to pull over on the side of the road, but they're so close and Shane can't delay this journey for a single second longer.

Every part of him aches.

In what he thought might be his last moments, Ilya reached for his phone to talk to Shane. To tell him how much he loves him. To say...to say *goodbye*. Amongst the panic, and chaos, and fear, all Ilya could think about was *him*. Was leaving some piece of himself behind for Shane to find - to hold onto.

Shane can't bear how much he loves Ilya. There's not enough space in his body to hold it all; it's overflowing, spilling out of him in stuttered breaths and silent tears. He's not sure where it's all supposed to go if Ilya - if he isn't...

He promised himself he wouldn't, but he can't help it. He dials Ilya's number and holds the phone up to his ear.

"Hi, this is Ilya. I will never listen to your voicemail."

Shane gasps at the sound of his soulmate's voice, then he fights back the tears to leave a message Ilya might never receive:

"Hi. I love you. So much. So fucking much, Ilya. Okay? It's gonna be fine."

He bites down on his lip to hold back the sob that's trying to claw its way up his rib cage and out of his throat.

"You're gonna be okay, and we're gonna - we're gonna come out, and live happily ever after. Yeah? I love you. I love you. I'll be there soon. I promise."

He hangs up. The silence is deafening, and agonising, and Shane feels like he's dying. Then-

"Sir? We're here."

Everything happens in a blur.

Before Shane knows it he's sitting in a luxury seat on a private charter plane. They're racing down the runway. They're in the air.

Somewhere over South Carolina he's gets an alert that the Centaur's plane is confirmed to be on the ground in Tampa; there's no other information.

It has landed, though, not crashed. And if that's all Shane has to hold onto then he'll clutch it with both hands.

He refreshes his phone every thirty seconds for the rest of the flight, hoping to see something new. Something about the passengers, if anyone is hurt, if Ilya is okay. There's nothing. No updates, no messages from Farah, or his parents, or Ilya. There's nothing but a horrific buzzing beneath the surface of Shane's skin, getting more and more frantic with every second that passes.

The descent takes too long. *Everything* takes too long.

It's been just over three hours since he was ambushed with the news during the media scrum, but that feels like an entire lifetime ago now.

He hasn't heard Ilya's voice in far too long, hasn't seen him in even longer. And the last time - god, the last time he'd seen Ilya they'd had the worst fight of their entire relationship. Shane had said such unforgivable things, things he didn't even *mean*. And Ilya had looked so devastated, so completely *broken*, because he thought that hockey meant more to Shane than Ilya did. He thought Shane wouldn't choose him.

As he stands in the airport with nothing more than his wallet and dying phone, Shane doesn't know what to do next. He hadn't thought further than getting here, but now he's in Tampa and he has no idea where to go.

He calls Ilya again. He gets his voicemail. He throws up in a brightly lit bathroom and refuses to look at his reflection in the mirror.

Shane has never felt so aimless - so *helpless* - in his entire fucking life.

When his phone rings in his hand, for a second he convinces himself it's Ilya. That he's calling to say he's okay, he's unharmed, everything is fine. Shane can't help but be disappointed when he sees Farah's name lighting up his screen.

"I know where they are," she greets him with.

"He's - is he okay?"

"Most of them have been taken to a hotel not far from the airport. The ones who were hurt have been transported to the closest hospital," she explains. "I don't have names or details, but I have an address."

The relief that floods through Shane's body is nothing short of immense. His knees almost buckle under the weight of it.

If there were fatalities, surely she'd have heard, right? If the injuries were serious, Farah would know. She would tell him.

"Send it," Shane all but demands. Then: "Thank you."

"Go get him," she replies.

Shane refuses to check the hospital first. He refuses to even entertain the idea that Ilya is hurt. He's at the hotel, Shane is absolutely certain of it. There's simply no other option. So he books himself an uber there, just before his phone finally gives up and dies on him, and he holds his breath the entire drive to the hotel.

When he's finally standing outside, Shane is almost afraid to go in.

Out here, everything is possible. Out here, Shane still gets to hope. He gets to believe that Ilya is unharmed - that everyone on the team, all of Ilya's friends, will be okay. But the

moment he walks inside that hotel, the moment he finds someone from the Centaurs and asks about Ilya, is the moment everything could fall apart.

Schrödinger's Ilya: both here and not, until the moment he opens the door.

Shane can't wait a single moment longer, though. He can't survive the wondering. So he steels himself, steps forward, and walks inside.

He's met with chaos.

The lobby is filled to the brim with hockey players, all pacing nervously, or making frantic calls to their loved ones, or sitting in small groups just so they don't have to be alone. It's a wall of noise, and bodies, and movement, and Shane can't - he can't see Ilya. Not even when he rolls up onto his tiptoes to survey the crowd, searching every face for a glimpse of the man who owns his entire heart.

It's so busy that he doesn't expect anyone to notice him. But then -

"Hollander?"

Shane flinches, lowering back down onto flat feet as he looks for the person who said his name. It doesn't take him long. Troy Barrett is heading towards him, a knowing expression on his pale, clammy face.

"Troy, hi. Is everyone okay? Is-"

"Ilya is fine," Troy says.

And Shane almost collapses then and there.

He doesn't ask how Troy knows why he's there, who he's looking for, because it doesn't matter. Nothing matters except Ilya - except the fact that he is okay. He's alive. Ilya is still breathing, and Shane's heart is still beating, and the future they've spent a decade working towards is all still intact.

"Oh my god," Shane whispers, and for the first time since the news broke it feels like those iron fists release his lungs.

"He, uh. He just went up to his room. He borrowed my phone because his broke during the landing," Troy explains.

That explains it all, then. It explains why Shane's calls kept going to voicemail. Because he knows there's no way on this earth that Ilya wouldn't answer his calls unless he had absolutely no choice in the matter.

Shane pulls his long-dead phone out of his back pocket and shows the black screen to Troy.

"He's in 2416," Troy says, and Shane is moving before he's even finished speaking.

"Was that Shane Hollander?" He hears someone ask, but he doesn't turn around.

He doesn't care who else knows he's here. He'd happily shout it from the rooftops or broadcast it to the entire world; he doesn't care who knows about them, he can barely remember why he wanted to keep it a secret in the first place. Those kind of things...they don't matter in the face of such terror, or the possibility of such unimaginable grief.

He'd sacrifice everything as long as he got to keep Ilya.

He can't make it to room 2416 fast enough. The elevator feels impossibly slow, and the hallway is too long, and Shane's legs are unbearably heavy. It's only a matter of minutes, but it feels like an age before Shane is finally standing in front of Ilya's hotel room, raising his fist to knock on the door.

He hears muffled Russian coming from inside, the quiet shuffling of feet, then the click of a lock as the door handle turns.

And there he is.

His Ilya - his soulmate - alive, breathing, *beautiful*.

"Shane?"

"*Ilya*." Shane's voice fractures around his name.

He throws himself at Ilya - launching into his arms so fast and hard that Ilya stumbles backwards as he catches him. Ilya's arms wind around his waist as Shane wraps his own around Ilya's neck. They're both shaking, both clutching, both pulling each other so close that Shane can feel the frantic rhythm of Ilya's heart pounding against his own chest.

Ilya's heart, beating. Ilya, alive.

Ilya, Ilya, Ilya.

The sob Shane has spent hours choking back finally tears free from his chest; it's a wretched, broken thing, all ragged and breathless and pained. Ilya groans in response, tightening his hold on Shane so he doesn't fall to the floor. Then he pulls them both into the hotel room, slamming the door closed behind them and blocking the rest of the world out.

This moment isn't for anyone but them.

"I'm okay. I'm okay, moya lyubov," Ilya murmurs over and over again.

He runs a hand through Shane's hair, and Shane burrows his face in the crook of Ilya's neck. He breathes in deep, inhales the scent of stale air and smoke and - underneath it all - Ilya. Shane shudders, whines, sinks his teeth into Ilya's throat just to get closer to him. Would drink his blood, or burrow beneath his skin, or hide behind his ribs, just to be closer to him.

"Shane, sweetheart, I am safe. I am okay."

"You're okay, you're okay, you're okay," Shane repeats, over and over again.

“Yes,” Ilya promises. “Everything is okay. We are all safe.”

“*Ilya*,” Shane whines. “I thought - I thought I was going to lose you. I can’t. I can’t lose you, baby. It would kill me. I’d die.”

“You won’t. You won’t lose me, Shane. I am right here. See?”

Ilya moves to pull back and Shane whimpers, clawing at him to keep him close.

“Is okay. Trust me?”

So Shane loosens his hold just enough for Ilya to unwind one of Shane’s arms from around his neck, guiding it between them and pressing his palm against Ilya’s chest. It’s even clearer now, the strong, steady beating of Ilya’s heart. It’s the best thing he’s ever felt. Shane cries, pulling Ilya back into him and trapping their hands between their bodies.

“I can’t believe you’re here,” Ilya mumbles into Shane’s hair.

“Where else would I be?”

Ilya laughs. “Raleigh?”

Shane shakes his head and grasps Ilya tighter. “They said your plane crashed. I was doing media after the game, and they said you crashed and I - *god*, Ilya, I thought I was going to die.”

“I’m sorry, my love. So sorry you found out like that.”

“I had to come. I had to be here for you. I knew you were okay - I’d feel it if you weren’t.”

There’s something connecting Shane and Ilya. Beyond their love for each other, beyond their trust and belief and all the work that they’ve put in to make it this far. It’s beyond anything they can control - beyond anything tangible that they could see or touch. It’s cosmic. A gift from the universe. Something tying their very souls to each other. If that thing snapped, Shane would have known.

“You were right.”

Shane snorts. “Bet it hurt to admit that.”

Ilya laughs, too, and it’s the most perfect sound in the entire world. Shane moves his head back to look at his boyfriend, at the smile that’s lighting up his entire face. He can’t imagine a world without that laugh, that smile, those eyes. The mere thought of it is impossible, unbearable.

He doesn’t ever want to know what a world like that would look like.

“You’re okay,” Shane says again. “You’re safe.”

He presses a kiss to the hollow of Ilya's throat, feeling the rumble of Ilya's sigh against his lips. Then he kisses the bite mark on his neck, and his flickering pulse, and then the curve of his jaw. There's a faint bruise starting to appear there, and Shane frowns as he moves his hand to trace it.

Ilya takes that hand, pressing his lips to Shane's open palm. "I am okay. Just bumped it against the seat in front of me when we landed."

It's a brutal reminder of what actually happened tonight. The plane didn't crash, but clearly it was bad. And Shane wants to ask but he can still feel Ilya shaking, so he figures that's something that can wait until tomorrow. They have time.

Shane stretches up in search of Ilya's mouth, and - not one to deny Shane anything - Ilya meets him halfway. The kiss is biting and desperate, filled with fear and relief and so much love that Shane can taste it in the back of his throat. Today, for three hours and forty six minutes, Shane feared that he would never get to do this again. As much as he told himself that Ilya was alive, that anticipatory grief didn't leave him until he held Ilya in his arms.

"I'd choose you," Shane promises him. "I'd choose you over everything, Ilya. Always. I *love* you."

"Oh, Shane. Sweetheart. I love you, too."

They stand there holding onto each other, awash with relief and gratitude and an inordinate amount of love.

"I don't ever want to let you go," Shane confesses.

"You don't have to," Ilya promises him.

Walking away has always been hard, right since the very beginning. Since that first time they hooked up, and Shane had to watch Ilya skulk out of his hotel room not knowing when, or if, they would see each other again. Every time Shane has had to leave Ilya's warm bed - or Ilya has had to kiss him goodbye - it felt like a part of him was being taken away, or he was leaving a part of himself behind.

The thought is even worse, now. Even more agonising, impossible, unimaginable. He never wants to let Ilya out of his sight - never wants him to stray more than an arms length away from Shane.

"Troy knows," Ilya whispers hesitantly, like he's afraid of Shane's reaction.

Shane kisses the first patch of Ilya's bare skin that he can find.

"I know. He's the one who told me what room you were in."

"I borrowed his phone. Mine broke, and I needed to call you," Ilya explains. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I don't care," Shane tells him. "I don't care if the whole world knows. I love you, and I'm not ashamed of that. I'm not ashamed of us."

Ilya sighs, his whole body shuddering like he's exhaling all the bad stuff in his lungs. Then he kisses Shane's hair, his forehead, his cheeks and nose and mouth. Shane laughs, turning his face into the affection like a cat looking for head rubs.

"I love you, kótik." *Kitten.*

He smiles up at Ilya, his boyfriend, the love of his life. His bones ache with tension, and he's exhausted from the adrenaline crash that's starting to hit him, but he's never been happier than he is right now.

"Can we - can we just sleep, please? I need to fall asleep with you."

"I should give Troy his phone back," Ilya says.

"Tomorrow. Please? He's not going anywhere, neither is the rest of the world. We can deal with it all in the morning."

Ilya nods his head, smiling. "Okay. Anything for you."

Shane uses Ilya's charge to plug in his phone, firing off a text to his parents, and Farah, and Hayden, to let them know that Ilya is okay. He doesn't wait for their responses, though.

They strip their clothes off until they're both naked, needing to feel each other's skin, and then they crawl into bed together. Shane lies flat on his back, tugging Ilya on top of him like some kind of clingy, weighted blanket. Ilya laughs, but he obliges Shane like he always does. His body presses all the panic out of Shane, and he settles into the mattress as Ilya peppers kisses into his chest.

I'm going to marry you, Shane thinks. It makes him smile to himself as the plan slowly begins to take shape inside his head.

He tangles his hand in Ilya's curls and just holds him. He focuses on the feel of his heartbeat, on the warmth of his breath as it fans across Shane's chest, on the way the tension seeps out of his body with every second that passes.

"Ya tebya lyublyu," Ilya murmurs, his voice fading away as sleep finally claims him.

"I love you, too," Shane whispers back, even though he knows Ilya can no longer hear him.

Sleep doesn't come for him right away; Shane is too busy watching Ilya breathe. But when it does it's slow, and peaceful, and restful. And when he wakes up, Ilya is still wrapped in his arms.

His whole world is right at his very fingertips.

End Notes

i put shane in raleigh because it's closer than washington & i wanted a shorter flight time!

this one is a bit iffy, sorry about that!

Works inspired by this one

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