

If you were gone, I would know.

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If you were gone, I would know.

by [Twin Flame Blues](#)

Summary

Once outside, he leaned forward and put his hand against the cold stone wall. His phone was still to his ear, the message still recording.

“Ilya. Please. Please. I can’t do this. I don’t know what to do. Please. You can’t be dead.” His voice broke on the word. “I love you. I love you so much. More than anything. I need to hear your voice. I need you to...I need you...I need you...fuck. Please Ilya, please.”

Shane took the phone away from his ear and held it between both hands as though he were praying. He realized he was on the floor and didn’t know how he got there. He was crying. He was fairly certain he was hyperventilating.

His brain was desperately trying to grab at anything. Any thread of logic. Any idea of what to do next.

I have to see him.

Yes. That made sense. Shane needed to get to Tampa. Now. He would go there. He would find Ilya. Ilya would be fine. They would be together. He would see him. Tell him how much he loved him. He had to go. He had to go now.

OR: What if Ilya lost his phone during the emergency landing, Shane couldn't reach him, he panicked, and chartered a plane to Tampa to find him instead...

Notes

sneaks quietly through the door, trying not to disturb anyone

...hi? It's been (checks watch) a while? Like, two and a half years, a while? And suddenly here I am again in a totally new fandom because I binge watched all of Heated Rivalry, then binge read the entire series, this idea came into my head, and I have been incapable of focusing on anything else until I wrote it down?

Well, here it is. Spoilers abound for The Long Game.

I just...really wanted to see what it would be like if Shane couldn't wait to make sure that Ilya was ok after the plane incident...

Anyway...does this mean I'm back? WHO KNOWS! But...here's this, I guess? Happy New Year?

tosses inordinately long one shot and runs

Shane

Shane winced as he pulled his hoodie down his chest, silently cursing the player that had checked him hard into the boards during the second period.

Great, just what I need, he thought, tentatively rolling his shoulder, testing the muscles and hoping to avoid a trip to the medic. The team was already subdued enough because of the unexpected loss to Washington, Shane didn't need them to start worrying about an injury to their captain, too.

Deciding that the pain was manageable, probably just a bad bruise, he finally allowed himself to grab his phone from the top shelf of his stall before sitting down heavily on the bench. He had a rule after a loss: He had to complete his post-game routine—remove and carefully restack all his gear, speech to the team, interviews with the press, boiling hot shower, fresh set of comfortable clothes—before he read or responded to any texts from Ilya. It gave him the motivation to actually get through it when all he really wanted to do was go back to his hotel room and sulk in silence for the rest of the night.

Quickly scanning his notifications, he didn't see anything from Ilya. He wasn't surprised. Shane knew the Centaurs were flying to Tampa for their next game, and he wasn't sure exactly when their plane was supposed to land. He quickly opened his messages and typed out a quick text.

Jane: *We lost. I could really use your help to take my mind off of it ;). Text me when you land, and maybe we can FaceTime later?*

He pressed send, hoping it wouldn't be too long before he got a response. Ilya was never one to turn down an offer for FaceTime sex, or phone sex, or really any kind of sex—especially when they were both on the road and needed a little stress relief. Shane smiled in anticipation.

Feeling a little better now, he began slowly scrolling through the other notifications on his phone while he waited for the call to board the team bus back to the hotel. Texts from his parents apologizing for the loss and reassuring him that he'd get them the next time. A selfie of Rose from the set of her new movie showing her covered in fake wounds and gore, accompanied by a text saying "don't worry, it could be worse!" Twitter notifications he would never read, and finally, a notification that he had several new Instagram messages.

Shane quickly clicked to open the app, remembering that sometimes Ilya would use that to communicate when he only had access to WiFi. A smile tugged on his lips when he saw that the messages were in fact from @Rozanov81.

Shane

You are the best thing in my life.

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

Shane blushed and smiled to himself. It still surprised him sometimes, how completely Ilya gave his love to Shane. How much Shane loved him back. There were times when it felt like too much to contain inside his body.

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.

Shane's brows furrowed. There was something about those last messages that seemed... wrong. Off in some way.

The words themselves were romantic, yes, but there was a weight to them that set off an alarm bell inside Shane's head. Whatever happens. Whatever happens? What was happening? Shane knew that Ilya had been struggling. Lonely. Shane's heart clenched remembering their previous conversation. How much he had overlooked. How badly he wanted to fix it. Ilya had told him he was seeing a therapist. Was he depressed? Was this...could he have? No. No. Shane shook off the thought before it took root. It was something else. Ilya was just being dramatic. Maybe they'd been drinking on the plane. Maybe he—

“Holy shit! The Centaurs’ plane crashed!”

Shane's head snapped up, his eyes locking on J.J. across the room. He was standing up, rapidly scrolling on his phone as murmurs started to build from other players around the room. Shane shook his head, certain he had misheard.

“Wh-what did you say?” Shane said weakly, already feeling like his limbs were turning to lead.

J.J. glanced up at him before looking back at his phone and nodding his head. “The news is saying there was a fire on the plane. Or engine failure? They’re saying the plane crashed outside Tampa. Or...had to make an emergency landing? I don’t know, the reports aren’t super clear. Some say there were casualties, some say there weren’t...” He trailed off as he continued to scroll through his phone.

Shane felt the world stop around him. He was sure that J.J. was still talking, that his teammates were talking, asking questions, but he couldn’t hear them.

He couldn’t breathe.

He couldn’t breathe.

His vision was tunneling. His heart was beating too fast.

Those messages from Ilya. They were...Oh god. Oh god.

Ilya was dead.

Ilya couldn’t be dead.

Shane wouldn't survive. *Couldn't* survive without Ilya.

He had to be alive.

He had to be alive.

The world could not exist without Ilya in it. Shane was sure of it.

His eyes suddenly refocused. Without another thought, Shane clicked on Ilya's contact and called him. His other hand came up to his hair, roughly pulling at the strands as he rocked back and forth, waiting for the call to connect.

It rang once.

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

Shane started shaking his head back and forth. He heard the beep.

"Please. Please answer your phone. Oh god. Please. This isn't happening. This can't be happening. Please pick up. Please. You have to pick up. I can't... YOU HAVE TO ANSWER YOUR PHONE!"

His breaths were coming in sharp pants now. Distantly in his mind, he knew he was screaming. He didn't care.

A hand landed gently on his shoulder and Shane flinched away like he'd been burned. Looking up he saw Hayden standing in front of him, eyes wide and terrified, mouth open like he was searching for words to say.

The locker room suddenly became too hot. Too small. Too crowded. Shane felt trapped like an animal in a cage. Without thinking, he shot up and stumbled as quickly as he could through the door and out into a quiet hallway.

If he had been able to take in what was happening around him, Shane would have heard Hayden call for him as he blindly made his way toward the door. He would have seen every single one of his teammates staring at him, some questioningly, some with fear. But he couldn't take it in. And it didn't matter. Nothing else mattered. Nothing but Ilya being alive.

Once outside, he leaned forward and put his hand against the cold stone wall. His phone was still to his ear, the message still recording.

"Ilya. Please. Please. I can't do this. I don't know what to do. Please. You can't be dead." His voice broke on the word. "I love you. I love you so much. More than anything. I need to hear your voice. I need you to...I need you...I need you...fuck. Please Ilya, *please*."

Shane took the phone away from his ear and held it between both hands as though he were praying. He realized he was on the floor and didn't know how he got there. He was crying. He was fairly certain he was hyperventilating.

His brain was desperately trying to grab at anything. Any thread of logic. Any idea of what to do next.

I have to see him.

Yes. That made sense. Shane needed to get to Tampa. Now. He would go there. He would find Ilya. Ilya would be fine. They would be together. He would see him. Tell him how much he loved him. He had to go. He had to go now.

His brain started to piece things together. Their game had been early. It wasn't even 8pm yet. He could get to the airport. There must be flights to Tampa tonight? He needed to call an Uber. He might have to wait hours at the airport. Hours sitting in a loud terminal while he felt like his insides were shredding apart. Could he do that? What if he rented a car? How far could it—

His phone suddenly rang in his hand. He jumped, immediately accepting the call without even seeing who was calling.

"Ilya?!" He gasped into the phone. Hope crashing into him.

"Shane? No, I'm sorry, it's Farrah."

A broken sob wrenched its way out of his throat.

"Oh Shane, I'm so sorry." Farrah's voice was low and somber on the other end of the line.

Shane's face crumpled. "Do you...know? Is he?" He couldn't bring himself to say the word.

"No. No. I don't have any information yet. I've been contacting the Centaurs PR, but no one has gotten back to me yet. The reports are still murky. I've been trying Ilya, but his phone is going straight to voicemail."

Shane couldn't speak. He put one hand over his eyes, trying to block out the light. If Ilya was gone, light didn't matter. It no longer existed.

Farrah must have been able to hear him crying. "Oh Shane, it's ok. I'm sure he's ok. Lets not jump to any extreme conclusions right now, ok?"

Shane sucked in a breath. "But...his phone...he'd call..."

Farrah jumped in. "That doesn't mean anything. He may have had to leave it behind when they got off the plane. Or the battery is dead. The team might be talking to the police, or investigators. He might have just needed a minute to compose himself before he called you."

Shane nodded his head against the tears. He needed that to be true. He desperately needed that to be true.

"I have to get there. I have to see him. I..." His voice broke. He tried to take a deep breath so he could actually lay it all out. "I need to get to Tampa. Can you help me? I'm sure there are

flights tonight from one of the airports around here? Or even just somewhere close? I could rent a car and drive the rest of the way, I don't care. Anything."

He heard Farrah chuckle humorlessly. "I figured you might say that. As awful as this situation is, this is one of those times where having a lot of money really can help. I already talked to a charter company. There's a plane waiting for you at DCA right now. It can wait for a bit if you need to go to the hotel to get—"

"No no," he cut her off, "I don't need anything. I can go right now. Thank you. God Farrah, thank you so much. I..." He shook his head, unable to continue as tears began streaming faster down his cheeks.

"Don't thank me, Shane. I love you guys. Whatever I can do to help, I'm here. No matter what. Ok? I'll text you the address for the private terminal."

Shane jumped up, thanking her again and quickly hanging up the phone, filled with overwhelming gratitude toward his longtime agent. He had a plan. He just had to get to the airport.

A ping sounded as Farrah's text came in. Shane looked down, but realized immediately that he couldn't read the words on the screen. He tried desperately to wipe the tears from his eyes, but they wouldn't stop. And even if they had, his hands were shaking so badly that he didn't think he'd be able to type the address in any way.

Without a thought, he turned around and burst back through the doors to the locker room.

It was quieter now, some of the guys must have already gone out to the bus, but Shane's eyes quickly landed on who he was looking for.

He rushed up to Hayden, barely noticing that he was sitting silently next to J.J. or that they both jumped when Shane reappeared.

Without preamble, Shane shoved his phone directly in front of Hayden's face.

"Hay, I need you to call me an Uber to that address. Right now. Please." His words were shaking, coming out unevenly between his panting breaths.

Hayden stood slowly, his hands up as though he were trying to prove to Shane that he wasn't a threat.

"Shane, take a deep breath. Talk to me. Where are you going? Were you able to reach..." Hayden gave Shane a significant look while he pressed his lips together and shot a quick sideways glance to J.J. and the other team members in the room.

Shane shook his head violently. "No. No I...No. That's why I need to go. Please Hayden." He pressed his phone into Hayden's chest before turning his eyes to J.J. "Is there any more news about the plane?"

J.J.'s eyes were wide and bewildered. "No, man," he said quietly. "Nothing's been confirmed. Shane, what's going—?"

Shane didn't let him finish before turning back to Hayden, even more frantic now. "Please," he begged, sobbing. "Please Hayden, please."

Shane could see tears well in Hayden's eyes as he nodded, grabbing Shane's shoulders. "Yes, ok man. I'll do it right now."

As Hayden started to work on his phone, Shane turned around and rushed to his stall, blindly searching around until he found his wallet, completely ignoring his duffle bag and other belongings. He didn't need them now.

Shane ran his hands roughly through his hair again. He needed to move. He needed to be on the way to see Ilya. The longer he stood here the more he panicked, allowing himself to believe the worst. His breaths were too shallow and fast. He could hear J.J. asking questions behind him, to Shane or Hayden he wasn't sure. He wouldn't be able to answer anyway.

After what felt like an eternity to Shane but was likely only a few seconds, Hayden's voice popped up. "Ok, the car will be here in 5 minutes. They're going to meet you in the same place the bus dropped us off, ok?"

Shane turned, nodding wordlessly as he grabbed for his phone. Hayden kept his hold on the other end.

"Shane," he started tentatively, "what do you want me to tell management?"

Shane felt lightheaded.

"I don't know, tell them...tell them anything...family...emergency...or..."

Unbidden, a bright stab of anger rocked through Shane like a lightning bolt. He shouldn't have to do this. He shouldn't have to make up a story. If this had been one of his teammates' wives, no one would ask a single question. WHY did he always have to make up a story?

Rage overpowered him.

None of the reasons they kept their relationship a secret mattered. It was so clear now. None of the *stupid fucking reasons* that Shane used to convince Ilya to keep their relationship a secret mattered. Shane's anxiety about what might happen if the truth came out evaporated in an instant, leaving no trace.

The league didn't matter.

His team's reactions didn't matter.

Hockey didn't fucking matter.

If tonight's game was the last Shane ever played, he didn't care.

Ilya belonged to Shane. Shane belonged to Ilya. That was all that mattered. He couldn't give a fuck what anyone else thought about it.

Shane ripped his phone from Hayden's hands.

"TELL THEM THE FUCKING TRUTH! TELL THEM THAT MY BOYFRIEND, THE LOVE OF MY FUCKING LIFE, MIGHT BE...*dead*."

The last word came out as a whisper as Shane's vision suddenly went white and his knees gave out.

Distantly, he heard Hayden scramble forward and mutter a strained "*fuck*" as he caught Shane before he hit the ground.

...

"Shane?"

"Shane? Can you hear me? Shane!"

Shane's mind came back to consciousness slowly. He felt dizzy. His face stung. Why did his face sting?

"SHANE!"

SMACK!

His eyes shot open as his hands came up to his cheek. He was immediately confronted with Hayden, his face so close to Shane's that he couldn't even see the whole thing.

"...What...? Did you...hit me?" His words were slurred and confused.

He heard Hayden blow out a breath of relief.

"Yes. Sorry. I just...you weren't responding to us and I didn't know what else to do. The car is almost here, do you need me to tell them to wait?"

Reality came flooding back in. He had to go. The plane. Ilya. He had to go.

Shane started to struggle to get up, only to realize that Hayden had his hands around both of Shane's arms, holding him down against the wall of the locker room. Shane felt trapped again. He started to thrash.

"Let me go! Let me go! I have to go—" His tears had started again and now everything was blurry. He felt another pair of hands grasp his shoulders—J.J., he assumed. He thought he could hear him saying something, trying to calm Shane down. Hayden, instead, shook him roughly until Shane finally slid his eyes back toward his face, everything still out of focus.

"Shane! Shane. Listen to me. I *know* you need to go. You're going to go, I promise. But you're hyperventilating right now, and I don't want you to pass out again. I need you to take five deep breaths for me, and then I'll help you up and you can go, ok?"

Shane's vision was tunneling again, but he nodded his head slowly, his eyes lazily drifting from Hayden's intense, focused stare to J.J.'s utterly shocked expression.

"Breathe with me, ok Shane? In..." Shane tried to make his lungs cooperate, only able to gasp in a small amount of air. "Ok, hold that in...now slowly breathe out. Follow me." Shane tried to focus on Hayden and copy his movements, pursing his lips and slowly blowing air out of his mouth. Hayden squeezed his arms and nodded.

"Yes. Good, Shane. Again. Breathe in...hold it...breathe out. Again. In...out...In...out..."

It started to feel a little easier to get his body to cooperate. His mind felt a little clearer, a little sharper. Everything was still blurry, the tears weren't going to stop, but Shane started to feel like he would be able to stand and get himself to the car.

"...In...Out...One last time. Breathe In...hold it." Hayden moved his hands to the sides of Shane's face, a look of fierce determination in his eyes. "He's going to be ok, Shane. I know he is going to be ok. You're going to get there and see him and he will be fine. Ok? Now breathe out..."

Shane stared back into Hayden's eyes, slowly nodding his head. He couldn't stop himself, he leaned forward and threw his arms around his best friend, hugging him tightly as he cried against his shoulder.

"Thank you, Hayden. For...for everything. Thank you."

Hayden hugged him back just as fiercely for a moment before he leaned back, pushed himself up to standing, and held out his hands to help Shane up.

Much more steadily than he felt, Shane rose, nodding once more to Hayden, before turning toward the door—only to be stopped by J.J.'s large form, somehow looking sheepish as he carefully held Shane's phone out to him.

"I...downloaded Signal onto your phone. It's a messaging app that works over WiFi, so...it should work while you're on the plane. We..." He waved his hand toward Hayden, "we'll text you if we hear anything, ok?"

His voice was quiet, laced still with some shock and what Shane could now understand as hurt, but it was steady. Shane opened his mouth to say something. To thank him, or apologize, or...he didn't know. But J.J. just shook his head and held out his phone.

"It's ok, man. We'll figure it out later. Go get him."

A tearful smile tugged at Shane's lips as he grabbed his phone and ran through the doors, down the tunnel, and toward the car that would get him one step closer to Ilya.

...

Shane didn't really remember the time between the locker room and now, sitting in the back of a black SUV as it inched its way toward DCA. He barely heard the driver give a cheerful, "hi there! How's your night going?" as he threw himself into the backseat, before he had looked at Shane through the rearview mirror and seen the terror on his face and the tears tracking steadily down his blotchy cheeks. His eyes had gone briefly wide before he turned around and immediately began maneuvering the car out of the arena's parking lot.

Shane could tell that the driver was doing his best to weave through the traffic and get to their destination quickly, and the part of his brain that was hardwired by his mother's unyielding reminders to always be kind and courteous knew that he should be thanking him, but that part of his brain was not in charge right now.

Instead, Shane had his head down, staring at his phone, manically going back and forth between checking for news, sending Ilya frantic text messages, and calling him—hoping to whatever god was out there that this time he would pick up.

Jane: Ilya

Jane: Ilya, please. Please respond.

Jane: I love you.

He hit the button to call.

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

He ended the call with a sob. Checked for news. Went back to his texts.

Jane: I'm begging you, please be ok.

Jane: I love you so much, baby.

Shane had never used a pet name for Ilya before, but in the moment, he couldn't stop himself.

Jane: Please, I'm begging you, please answer your phone.

Jane: I just want to hear your voice. I can't stand this.

He hit call again.

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

It went on and on like that the entire 32 minutes it took to arrive at the airport. Text. Check the news. Call. Text. Check the news. Call. Sometimes Shane left voicemails, but sometimes he simply couldn't get his mouth to form any words.

Before he even realized that the car had stopped, his door suddenly opened, and a man with salt and pepper hair wearing a crisp collared shirt leaned his head in.

“Mr. Hollander?”

Shane immediately started maneuvering to get out, realizing he had never even put on his seatbelt.

“Yes, yes that’s me.” He said breathlessly, still a bit unsteady on his feet.

The man just nodded and directed Shane toward a set of double doors. “Right this way.”

The only private planes Shane had ever flown on were the team planes that ferried them from game to game, so he had no idea what to expect when he entered the small, private terminal. Thankfully, the same man who he had been following from the car simply led him down a short corridor, asked to check his ID—it took Shane 5 tries for his shaking hands to actually get it out of his wallet—and confirmed, with a questioning arch of his eyebrow, that Shane didn’t have any luggage, before walking to a door, swiping his key card, and ushering Shane straight onto the tarmac.

A small but sleek looking jet sat only 50 feet away, two pilots waiting by the entrance. Seeing Shane, they both walked forward, faces serious.

The older of the two outstretched his hand. “Mr. Hollander, hello. I’m Captain Roland, this is First Officer Chen.” Shane shook his hand, mumbling a hello as his body buzzed, anxious to just get on the plane and actually get to Ilya.

The Captain put his other hand on Shane’s shoulder and squeezed. In that calm, determined voice only pilots were ever able to master, he leaned down slightly and looked Shane right in the eye.

“We’re going to get you there as fast as we can.”

A hum of agreement came from the first officer. “We promise.”

Shane’s face crumpled as he nodded and his tears intensified, so grateful for these two men, for Farrah, so overwhelmed by what was happening, and so terrified that this would all be for naught, and he would never see Ilya again.

The two men led Shane to the plane, up the steps, and told him to choose any seat he liked, before they headed to the cockpit to finish their flight checks and get them in the air.

Knowing these would be the last few moments that Shane had cell service, he quickly called Ilya one last time.

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

Jane: You have to be ok.

Jane: I have to see you.

Jane: I’m getting on a plane.

As the plane taxied toward the runway, he tried—hopelessly—to slow his breathing. Two hours. He would be there in two hours. Shane would get there. Ilya would be there. Shane would hold him and tell him he loved him and listen to his heart beating strong, steady, and alive. Two hours.

Suddenly, they were in the air, and Shane looked out the window as the lights of Washington, D.C. got smaller and smaller. He could do this. He could make it.

Sometime later, the fear and desperation having overcome him, Shane gave in and opened Instagram to re-read Ilya's last message.

Shane

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.

Tears falling, Shane took a shuddering breath and started to type a response, desperately hoping that he was not sending the words into the ether.

Ilya,

I love you so much. More than everything else in my life. You are the first thing I think about when I wake up. I think that's been true since the moment I met you.

I want to say so much...

Ilya

“Fuck! How much longer is this going to take?” Ilya shouted in frustration, slamming his hands against the table of the hotel bar while he stared down at the brand new iPhone sitting in front of him.

He felt Luca Haas shrug next to him. “It’s porting over all your info, that’s why it’s taking so long.”

Ilya tried to translate the words in his head. His heart had not slowed down at all since they’d had to jump on those ridiculous inflatable slides to get off the plane. His body was still

tingling and numb. His hands were shaking. And trying to understand English was far more difficult than usual.

He let out a growl, turning to face Haas with what he was sure was unbridled anger on his face. He'd feel bad about that tomorrow, but right now, he simply didn't care. "Port? What is port?"

Luca flinched back at his tone before his eyes went wide in understanding. "Oh, it's, um...all of the data from your old phone," he inclined his head toward Ilya's utterly useless phone that sat, cracked black screen blank and taunting him by the minute, next to them on the table. "Like your contacts and emails and stuff, so sometimes it takes a while."

Ilya nodded his head silently. He knew that. Of course he knew that. He was so grateful that Wiebe had sent one of the assistant coaches to the Apple Store as soon as he was able so that they could replace the phones of all of the players who had lost theirs in the accident.

The accident.

Ilya still couldn't believe it. His brain had not let him begin to comprehend what had really happened. All he could focus on was getting this stupid phone to work.

Because it had been almost four hours now since the plane had somehow managed to land safely, without any injuries, and he still hadn't been able to contact Shane.

Shane.

Just thinking about him brought tears to Ilya's eyes, and he had to quickly squeeze them together to try and get himself under control.

All he had been able to think about, since that first jolt of turbulence, had been Shane. *His* Shane. Everything had become so clear. Nothing else mattered to Ilya other than Shane. His career didn't matter. Hockey didn't matter. Russia didn't matter. He only wanted to be with Shane. He could see their future: Ilya and Shane kissing at their wedding, spending lazy days together in bed, laughing as they cooked together for Yuna and David, Anya chasing their kids in the backyard at the cottage...

Ilya wanted it. He wanted it all. The thought that it could be taken from him so easily had shaken him to his core. Ilya didn't want to wait any longer to live that life. And he needed to tell Shane.

He needed to tell him everything. About how he had been feeling. About his depression. About therapy. About why he didn't care what happened when they came out. About how he would give up everything if it meant they could be together, really together, right now.

And he needed to tell him. Now. This waiting was driving him insane.

Right after he had sent his Instagram message to Shane—a message he was not even sure had gone through—the plane had rocked so violently that Ilya's phone had slipped from his hand and slammed somewhere onto the floor near his feet.

After they landed, and even though the flight attendants had been yelling at them not to take anything and to get to the exits as soon as the plane had come to a stop, Ilya had searched blindly on the floor for his phone, a feeling of relief rushing through him when his fingers wrapped around it.

But the feeling had not lasted long.

As soon as he had made it down the inflatable slide and been ushered toward the waiting medical teams, he looked down at his phone and pressed the button to wake it up.

Nothing had happened.

It was only then that he realized that the screen had shattered, and that his phone was covered in a sticky liquid he could only imagine was a mixture of all of the drinks that had been dropped and sloshed around the floor of the plane as it careened toward the ground.

He didn't know what to do. He realized, to his horror, that he did not have Shane's phone number memorized. He had just been "Jane" in his phone for so long that it had never seemed necessary before.

Ilya had already sworn that as soon as this new phone started up—well, ok, after he called Shane and heard his voice—he would immediately memorize his number. Burn it on his brain like a brand.

Because Ilya had been wracked with fear and uncertainty since the moment his feet had hit solid ground.

He was ok—but was Shane?

Had he heard about the emergency landing? Did he know that Ilya was ok? Was he worried? Had he even read the Instagram messages Ilya had sent? Ilya closed his eyes and shook his head against the memory now.

He had meant every word, that wasn't in doubt. But if Shane had seen those messages, and if he had heard about the plane, and if he hadn't been able to reach Ilya...

If the roles had been reversed, Ilya didn't know what he would have done. He worried that the panic attack that would have taken him over would have been so debilitating that he would have to be hospitalized.

Is that what had happened to Shane?

His sweet, beautiful, kind, anxious, Shane?

Shane, who had taught Ilya what it meant to truly love another person.

Shane, who had a secret smile only Ilya ever saw, his nose scrunched and his freckles on display, that always took his breath away?

Shane, who always tried so hard to plan out their future with care and consideration.

Shane, who never looked more beautiful than in the moment that Ilya pressed his cock inside of him, his face so open, full of pleasure and wonder, and free from any stress or anxiety.

Shane, who had started a charity to honor Ilya's mother.

Shane, who gave everything of himself, felt so deeply, and for some unknown, blessed reason, had chosen to love Ilya as much as he loved him.

Not being able to talk to him was starting to cause Ilya physical pain. He felt a throbbing in his chest that just kept getting worse. Like a black hole growing larger and larger by the second, threatening to swallow him whole.

Trying to distract himself, Ilya looked around the half-deserted bar where he had been sitting for the last two hours.

About half the team was still here. The others had gone up to their rooms, either to call loved ones or just to decompress from the trauma they'd all just experienced.

Ilya knew that, as their captain, he should be doing something. Checking in. Making sure they were ok. But he just...couldn't.

Because he wasn't ok. And he didn't have anything he could offer the others to make it any better.

He looked around the bar.

Dykstra and Wyatt were sitting at a table, a pitcher of beer sitting between them, quietly talking to each other.

Bood was alone at a table next to Ilya, staring blankly into a glass of whiskey, his eyes red and glassy. Ilya had never seen him drink anything but beer, but he knew that he had been on the phone with his wife, Cassie, for at least an hour, and didn't begrudge him the need to take the edge off.

Troy was at a table, texting frantically—to Harris, Ilya was sure.

Even Dillon was still out, watching aimlessly as people walked in and out of the lobby.

Ilya's heart clenched for his team. They were good, kind, people. They had welcomed him with open arms. They had treated Troy with such respect when he came out. They were his *friends*.

More than anyone in Boston. More than anyone else since he had arrived in North America. He felt so lucky to have them. He was so happy that they were all ok. But as much as he wanted to talk to them, hug them, celebrate with them, he couldn't force his body to get up from this chair. Couldn't force his eyes to look anywhere but the slowly creeping progress bar on his new phone. Shane was his only priority.

He hoped, desperately, that one day soon he could introduce Shane to all of them. That he could tell all of these people how much he loved him, how incredible he was, how lovely and

kind...

But for now, all he could do was stare at the progress bar on the screen, praying to whatever god was out there that it finally—

And then it did.

Suddenly, without warning, Ilya's new phone turned on. And before he could even unlock it, an unending string of *ping ping ping ping ping ping ping* erupted, as all of the messages he had missed over the last several hours flooded back in.

Missed call - Jane

Voicemail - Jane

Missed call - Jane

Missed call - Jane

Voicemail - Jane

Missed call - Jane

Missed call - Jane

Missed call - Jane

Voicemail - Jane

Missed call - Jane

They just kept pouring in. But before Ilya was able to click and listen to a single message, texts began flooding his screen.

He pulled a gasping breath in as he watched his phone begin to vibrate unendingly—hundreds of messages appearing on his screen faster than he was able to read them. He tried desperately to catch snatches of the words—realizing quickly that every single one was from Shane.

Jane: Ilya, please.

Jane: Please, my love.

Jane: Answer your phone.

Jane: I love you.

Jane: This can't be real. You have to be ok.

Jane: I'm begging you, please be ok.

Jane: I love you so much, baby.

Jane: I don't care about anything else but you.

Jane: Please god, please be ok. Please.

Ilya's vision blurred as tears began to fall, unbidden. He sniffed, desperately trying to catch as many of the messages as he could. At this speed, he was only reading one in every three or four.

He heard a surprised chuckle from Luca. "Damn, cap, I didn't realize you were *this* popular!"

Ilya couldn't even turn his head.

Jane: Nothing else matters but you.

Jane: I love you more than my own life.

Jane: Please, fuck, please don't be dead.

Jane: Ilya, I won't survive this.

Jane: Why did we hide? We wasted so much time.

Jane: Ilya, baby, please.

Jane: I have to hear your voice.

Jane: I need to hear your voice.

Jane: Ilya.

Jane: My love.

Jane: Baby.

Jane: I'm yours, Ilya. I have always been yours.

Jane: I don't believe it.

Jane: You have to be ok.

Jane: I'm getting on a plane.

That last message confused Ilya. A plane? To where? Home? Ilya was certain that the Voyagers were not traveling again until tomorrow.

He didn't know what to do. Realizing it was the fastest option, Ilya quickly tapped out a message.

Lily: I'm ok. I love you. Call me.

Ilya's heart was beating too fast again. He needed to talk to Shane. He COULD talk to Shane. He could comfort him. He could tell him how much he loved him. He had to go, now.

Frantically, he began gathering his things, yanking at the charging cord in the outlet beneath their table so he could rush outside to make the call.

He was leaning down to grasp the cord when he heard Luca's harsh intake of breath.

"Holy shit. Is that...*Shane Hollander*? What the hell is he doing here? What the—"

Ilya abandoned the cable and shot his head up so fast he briefly felt dizzy. But his eyes were searching, staring through the archway that separated the bar from the lobby. It only took him an instant to see it.

Shane.

Shane was here.

Shane was standing in the lobby, shoulders tight, hands in his hair, eyes red and face raw with emotion, desperately turning back and forth, looking for something. Looking for...

"Shane?"

Ilya stood so quickly from his table that the chair he had been sitting in skidded back and toppled over. The noise seemed to startle Shane, who whipped his head in Ilya's direction.

The second their eyes locked, Shane curled in on himself, a broken sob escaping his throat as he took a step forward, toward Ilya.

Ilya was moving before he could even think, dodging tables, ignoring calls from his teammates, his eyes blind to anything that was not Shane.

Shane was doing the same. Shoving chairs and tables out of his way as he ran straight toward Ilya, his eyes both fierce and terrified, clear but overwhelmed, filled simultaneously with love and so much pain.

Ilya wasn't sure how long it took to reach him. Seconds, he supposed, though it felt like an eternity.

But suddenly, without warning or hesitation, Ilya found himself flush with Shane's chest, the air knocked out of him as he was wrapped in his arms, as Shane kissed his shoulder, his neck, his collar bone, and ran his hands along Ilya's back, around his ribs, up into his hair, pressed against his chest...

Ilya was so overwhelmed that it took a moment to realize that Shane was talking to him, crying into his skin.

"I thought you were dead."

“I thought you were dead.”

“I love you so much, Ilya. I love you. I love you.”

“I was so scared. I thought you were dead. You were dead.”

“You were dead and I was dead. I *died*, Ilya. I died without you. I can’t live without you. I can’t. I can’t. I can’t.”

Shane was sobbing now, leaning his whole body into Ilya as though he had lost the strength to hold himself up.

It didn’t matter. Ilya would hold him up. He would hold him up forever.

Losing control of his own emotions, Ilya pressed his lips into Shane’s neck as his own tears began to fall.

“Oh sweetheart, I love you. Moya lyubov. It’s ok. I’m ok. I’m so sorry I scared you. Ya tebya lyublyu. Ya tebya lyublyu. Is ok now. Everything ok. Take deep breath, moya lyubov. Please, sweetheart. I love you. Please...”

Shane didn’t speak, he just shook his head against Ilya’s shoulder, crying while his hands kept roaming around Ilya’s body. Pressing against his shoulders, sliding down his arms, roving around his chest, slipping down his ribs, curling around his back...Shane seemed to be taking stock of Ilya, making sure all of him was still there.

All the while he whispered into Ilya’s neck...

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I love you. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Ilya moved his hands up to cradle both sides of Shane’s face, forcing his beautiful eyes to look at him.

“Why are you sorry, moya lyubov? Do not be sorry...”

But Shane was shaking his head against Ilya’s hands, his own coming up to circle around each of Ilya’s wrists.

“No, no. I...I’m so sorry I made you hide. We wasted so much time hiding...” His words were coming out between sobs, as Ilya tried desperately to wipe away his tears with his fingers. “I *made you* waste so much time hiding. I made you think this, us, was something to hide. It’s not, Ilya. It’s not. I love you so much, baby. I don’t care who knows. I want everyone to know. You are the most important thing in my life. You are the only thing that matters. I don’t care what else happens. It doesn’t matter. All I care about is you. That you’re safe. That I can touch you, and hold you, and be with you. Forever. Forever...”

Ilya’s heart was beating out of his chest again, but now it was for an entirely different reason. With tears still streaming down his face, he stepped even closer to Shane, pressing their bodies even further together, tightening his grip on Shane’s face.

The smirk he reserved only for Shane spread across his face. His thumbs caressed Shane's cheeks, wiping away his tears.

Ilya leaned in, his mouth nearly touching Shane's.

"Call me baby again, please."

Shane huffed a laugh.

Sniffing through his tears, Shane slid his hands across the sides of Ilya's face, up into his hair, gently grasping his curls and tilting his head back.

"Baby..." he whispered against Ilya's mouth. "Can I kiss you?"

With everything inside of him, Ilya wanted to lean forward and capture Shane's mouth. He was desperate. But he also knew that Shane was not thinking clearly. He knew that if they kissed, right here in the middle of a hotel in Tampa, it would cross a line they could never come back from, and he needed to know if Shane was sure.

Pulling back slightly, Ilya's eyes bored into Shane's dark brown depths.

"Moya lyubov... People can see us. Is that... are you sure that is ok?"

Before Ilya could even finish the sentence, Shane was shaking his head, his hands wrapping around the back of Ilya's neck.

He looked straight into Ilya's hazel eyes. It felt as though he was looking straight into his soul.

That special smile only Ilya ever saw graced Shane's lips.

"I don't care who sees us, Ilya. I want everyone to see us."

Ilya barely had time for the smile to spread across his face before Shane's lips met his in a desperate, unforgiving kiss.

The whole world faded away.

Ilya felt more than heard Shane release a sob as he leaned in to the kiss, his hands tangling in Ilya's curls and holding on as though he would disappear if he let go. Ilya, too, groaned in relief at the feel of Shane's lips on his, his tongue tracing lightly over Ilya's mouth, begging entry he was only too happy to give.

For the first time since the plane had begun to jerk, Ilya felt truly alive. Grounded. *Safe*. Because he was in Shane's arms, Shane was kissing him more fiercely than he could ever remember before, and he could feel Shane's overwhelming love for him with every brush of his lips, every caress of his tongue, the way his fingers were running back and forth from his neck into his hair, even the little puffs of breath he released in the tiny seconds their lips didn't touch.

Ilya gave it right back.

He told Shane how much he loved him in the way he pulled their bodies even closer together, by running his hands solidly up and down Shane's back before squeezing both of his hips, pressing his tongue against Shane's, and kissing him as though his life depended on it. Ilya thought that maybe it did.

Ilya wasn't sure how long they stayed like that, frantically holding and touching each other as they kissed themselves into oblivion. Eventually though, Shane pulled back, dragging his hands down from Ilya's face to his chest, stopping directly over his heart. With a stuttering breath, Shane leaned his head forward onto Ilya's shoulder.

"You're really alive." Shane whispered, sounding as though he was only beginning to believe it.

Ilya crushed him into a hug.

"I am alive, sweetheart. We are both alive. Everything is ok." He pressed a gentle kiss to Shane's temple. The words helped Ilya believe it too.

It was only when Ilya buried his nose in Shane's hair to breathe him in that he started to hear it.

A cacophony of clapping, cheering, and wolf whistling coming from the direction of his teammates still sitting in the bar.

He smiled into Shane's hair and pulled back, placing his hands on either side of Shane's cheeks and gently raising his head to look at him.

Tears were still spilling down his face, and Ilya brushed them away with his thumbs, before placing a single, chaste kiss on his lips.

With a smirk, he inclined his head toward the noise, his eyes never leaving Shane's.

"So, do you want to meet them?"

Ilya wasn't sure if now, with reality crashing in around them, that Shane might regret his decision. Though he had no idea how he would be able to explain away kissing a rival team captain in the lobby of their hotel—a hotel that was nearly 1,000 miles away from the city that rival had played a game in just a few hours before—if Shane wanted him to...

Ilya searched his eyes for any fear or doubt, but instead they sparkled as Shane smiled shakily, released a surprised laugh, and nodded.

Ilya's smile widened as he reached down, threaded their fingers together, and turned back toward his team.

With Shane trailing just behind him, Ilya casually swiped his free hand through the air.

“Yes, yes, I know, I am best kisser you have ever seen. I will give you all pointers before next practice.”

They had arrived back at the tables where everyone was sitting—well, not anymore, everyone was standing now and staring, wide eyed, at Ilya and Shane. To his relief, while there was definitely shock on their faces, every single one of them was smiling brightly, seemingly thrilled with this unexpected development.

Ilya squeezed Shane’s hand.

“So, this is my boyfriend, Shane. We are in love.”

Shane gave a halfhearted wave and a bashful, “hi.”

“You may know him, he is sometimes ok hockey player.” Laughs erupted around him, while Shane came up and lightly elbowed him. Ilya gave him a quick peck on the cheek before continuing. “He is also excellent kisser.”

His comment had the desired effect, laughter and warm smiles continued from his teammates while Shane covered his eyes with his free hand and whispered, “jesus, Ilya.” But he was smiling, and Ilya hoped it had helped to ease some of the tension he knew was still coursing through Shane’s body.

It also happened to be true.

Ilya once again gestured in between the group.

“Can we sit down now? I’m sure you have questions. I will answer them, maybe. Not about kissing, though, that lesson is for later.” He dropped down into a chair and pulled Shane down next to him, never releasing his hand.

With some more light chuckling, all the other guys pulled chairs around so they could sit facing each other. There was an awkward moment of silence while everyone just stared back and forth at each other, until a throat finally cleared.

“Well,” Bood began. Of course it was Bood. “This is an interesting development!” There were nods and more laughs of agreement around the tables.

“First off. Shane, it’s nice to meet you, you know, when you’re not slaughtering us in a hockey game.” Ilya turned to Shane with a fond smile as Shane chuckled.

His voice was quiet and a bit hoarse, but stronger than before when he responded. “Nice to meet you too. All of you. I’ve heard lots of great things about you from Ilya.”

Ilya squeezed again before moving their entwined fingers to rest on Shane’s thigh.

Bood nodded before continuing. “Secondly,” he turned to face Ilya fully, his face full of mirth, “Cap, I knew you were good, but, I mean, managing to pull the best player in the league? Nicely done.”

This time, Ilya threw his head back and laughed. Really laughed.

He looked over again at Shane and saw that he was smiling, his cheeks pink—from embarrassment or the crying, Ilya wasn't sure.

“Ok, ok,” Bood waved his hands to silence the laughter. “So, I do have some questions. Actually, I started to write them down during the...” He made an exaggerated show of checking his watch, “*nine and a half* minutes that the two of you were trying to suck each other's faces off.”

The table erupted in another round of laughter as Shane turned to Ilya, rolled his eyes, and then rested his head on Ilya's shoulder.

Ilya kissed him gently on the forehead before turning back to the team. “Ok, ask your questions.”

Bood smirked before he picked up his phone and clearing his throat. “Question one: What? And a follow up: The fuck?”

He set his phone back down and held his hands together on the table, waiting.

He felt Shane tense next to him, but Ilya knew Bood, and knew he wasn't actually angry.

He just smirked. “Yes, Bood, we fuck. I am very good at other things besides kissing, too.”

That earned another round of laughter from the guys, and another “jesus, Ilya,” from Shane.

Ilya turned toward him, a look of fake shock on his face. “What? Am I lying?!” He raised his eyebrows tauntingly.

Shane just stared back for a moment, clearly trying not to smile, before he rolled his eyes and said, “no, you're not lying,” before replacing his head against Ilya's shoulders.

“Alright alright, but really,” Bood leaned in, his face growing more serious. “You're obviously together. How long has this been going on?”

Ilya gave a half hearted smirk. “That is hard question. A long time.”

“It depends on what you mean by ‘together,’” Shane offered.

Ilya nodded. “Yes. We have been together exclusively for over three years, but we were seeing each other for...many years before that.”

“Ha!”

Ilya turned to see Troy with a triumphant look on his face. “Sorry! I just won a bet with Harris, that's all. I bet him that you had a secret boyfriend. Harris was still convinced you were straight. I'm never going to let him live this down.” He rolled his eyes as Ilya smiled.

Luca leaned in, clearly curious. “But wait, how many years?”

Shane shrugged. "Since our rookie season. Or, well, the summer before."

A chorus of "what?!" and "holy shit" bubbled up around the table before Wyatt leaned in to ask, "what does 'seeing each other' mean?"

Ilya raised an eyebrow. "Do I need to explain sex to you, Hazy? We were *seeing* each other. For 8 years. Whenever our teams played each other, at All Stars games, you know. Whenever we could. We were just," Ilya searched for the right words, "pretending it was not what it really was."

"Which was...?" Dillon asked tentatively.

Ilya and Shane answered at the same time.

"Love."

"Ok ok," Dykstra leaned in, hands over his heart. "This is the cutest thing that I've ever seen. The craziest, too, but like, definitely the cutest."

Ilya just smiled.

Bood leaned back in. "So...you've been keeping it a secret for all these years? Is it...still a secret? Does this need to stay between us?"

All of the guys leaned in, clearly willing to do whatever Ilya and Shane asked of them. Ilya's heart felt like it grew in his chest.

Before he could answer, Shane jumped in.

"I don't want it to be a secret anymore. We just...have to figure out how to tell the league..."

Ilya hummed, still in a state of excited disbelief that they were really going to do this. That Shane *wanted* to do this.

He raised his other hand to run it gently through Shane's hair.

"We'll figure it out." He whispered.

"Does your team know, Shane?" Troy asked.

Shane tensed, suddenly disentangling his fingers from Ilya's as he sat up straight. Ilya turned to him in concern. He was looking down at his lap, his hands squeezing in and out of fists.

"Um...well, they didn't. But...I'm pretty sure they know now. Or, at least, they know I'm seeing *someone* on this team..."

Ilya reached out and wrapped his hand around the back of Shane's neck, his thumb brushing soothingly against his skin. "Shane?"

Shane still didn't raise his head.

“Um. We were all in the locker room when we found out about...about the *plane*,” his breath hitched over the word, “and, I kind of...freaked out. I didn’t know what to do. The news was saying it was a crash, no one knew what happened. I was calling you over and over again. Texting you. I was yelling, I think. I think I may have screamed that my boyfriend...was...dead.” Shane’s voice was breaking over the final words, and even with his head down Ilya could still see his face crumple as his shoulders started to shake again.

In an instant, Ilya leaned over and gathered Shane into a tight hug. It took a beat before Shane’s arms reached around him, his hands fisting tightly into the back of Ilya’s shirt.

He rocked Shane slowly back and forth, rubbing his hands up and down his back.

“Shh, moya lyubov, it’s ok now. Everything is ok now. I’m so sorry you were scared. I’m so sorry I scared you. It’s ok. Please don’t cry. No more tears. Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Shane just shook his head against Ilya’s chest, his words coming out broken and stilted.

“I don’t think I can stop. I think...I think I’m having a panic attack. Or, that I’ve been having a panic attack for the last four hours and I...don’t really know what to do.”

Ilya’s heart was breaking. Shane, sweet, sweet Shane who already struggled enough with anxiety...and now this. Ilya hugged him tighter. He would do whatever it took to help him.

Gently, he brought his hands around Shane’s face, kissing away the tears on his cheeks, his closed eyelids, wherever he could reach.

He pulled back, squeezing slightly to get Shane to look at him. When his eyes finally opened, the desperation and terror that filled them almost knocked Ilya over. Shane. His perfect, lovely, kind Shane.

Ilya held his gaze.

“Lets go to my room. You can lay down and relax, ok moya lyubov?” His words were soft, hopefully soothing Shane’s overactive nervous system.

More tears fell, but Shane nodded slowly before whispering back in Russian, “Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Ilya’s heart stuttered. He could do nothing but lean in and press a kiss to Shane’s lips. He held their foreheads together for a moment, just breathing him in, before finally standing up and holding both his hands out to help Shane up as well.

“Roz,” Wyatt said quietly. “Your phone.”

Ilya quickly flicked his eyes in that direction and reached out to accept the phone Wyatt was handing to him, the charging cord carefully wrapped around it.

Holding most of Shane’s weight, he turned his head quickly, looking between his teammates, all of whom now wore somber expressions, but ones of understanding. These men, his

friends, who had just learned the deepest and most important truth about Ilya and embraced it, no questions asked. Who had welcomed Shane with open arms.

He didn't know what to say.

"Thank you," he whispered, hoping the emotions he was trying to express came across.

Bood just shook his head. "We're your friends. There is nothing to thank us for. Go. We'll see you tomorrow."

With a final look and a nod, Ilya turned his full attention back toward Shane, wrapping his arms around him and slowly leading him toward the elevators.

Shane didn't say anything as they made their way up the floors and toward the room, just sniffled and half heartedly wiped at his eyes as Ilya held him, trying to rub soothing circles along his back and down his arms.

When the door finally shut as they made it inside Ilya's room, he carefully maneuvered Shane over to the bed, pushing slightly on his shoulders to get him to sit on the edge. He leaned forward and pressed a soft kiss onto his head.

He kept his voice low, and hopefully calm. "I'll be right back."

He went to step back from Shane, intending to go to the bathroom for a cold washcloth he could use to sooth Shane's tear stained face, but before he could even move Shane's head snapped up, his hands immediately coming out to grip both of Ilya's hips, his eyes wide and scared.

"Go? Go where? Please...please don't go. I...can't..." His breathing was speeding up again, panic clearly rising.

"Ok, ok, I'm right here." Ilya sat down quickly next to Shane on the bed, pressing their thighs together and looping his arms again around Shane's shoulders. "It's ok. I'm here. Everything is ok now. I promise."

Ilya wasn't sure what did it, but it was like something suddenly snapped in Shane. He let out a gasping breath, suddenly moved to straddle Ilya's lap and crush him into a hug, and forcing out a "Fuck, Ilya!" before dissolving into heaving, wracking sobs.

It was as if the sounds of Shane's cries suddenly opened a door in Ilya's mind, and the weight of everything that had happened over just the last few hours suddenly hit him. His own sobs echoed off of Shane's in the quiet room.

They just held each other for a long while, letting the way their bodies clutched each other speak for them.

Eventually, Shane pulled back, still crying, and moved one of his hands to Ilya's face.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm such a mess...I should be comforting *you*, Ilya! It happened to you, not me! You're the one who almost..." Shane's jaw clenched and he shook his head quickly,

unable to speak the words out loud, his words still coming out between uneven, tearful breaths. “I should be taking care of you! I’m so sorry that I’m like this, that you have to take care of me. I’m so weak...” He squeezed his eyes shut, the shame written clearly on his face.

Ilya surged forward, his own hands coming to Shane’s face. Righteous anger filling him. He would not allow Shane to do this to himself.

“Moya lyubov. No. Don’t think that. That is not how I feel at all. Yes, it happened to me, and it was scary. But, Shane, the whole time, the only thing I could think about was *you*. How much I love you, how scared I was to leave you alone, how awful it felt to have our future taken away. How...*desperately* I want that future with you. You were the only thing that mattered. Not just in that moment. *Always*.” He rubbed his thumbs over Shane’s cheeks, his beautiful freckles, and looked deeply into the eyes he thought he might never see again.

“If it had been you. If I had not known if you were dead or alive...” Ilya shut his eyes against the shiver of icy, paralyzing fear that overtook him just thinking about it. “I would not have known what to do. I would have...broken.”

Shane took a deep breath in, nodding as he moved his hands to once again lay against Ilya’s heart.

“Seeing you in the lobby...I...can’t explain the feeling. Felt like...dreaming. Like I had somehow wished so hard, needed you so badly, that I just...made you appear. I can’t believe you’re here, Shane. I don’t...don’t even understand *how* you’re here. I am so, so happy you are here. I have never felt so happy. Holding you, taking care of you, being here with you, this is all I want. Ok?”

The love written all over Shane’s face was overwhelming as he leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Ilya’s lips.

Ilya deepened it immediately, tilting Shane’s head back and pressing hot, urgent kisses against his lips before moving his mouth down to his neck, his shoulder, the hollow of his throat.

Everything felt so overwhelming, so desperate, that the moment Shane rolled his hips against Ilya he felt himself immediately get hard.

He groaned loudly, pulling Shane’s mouth back down to his own. This only served to spur Shane on, his hands dragging slowly down Ilya’s chest until he grasped the hem of his shirt and immediately pulled it over his head—tossing it carelessly somewhere in the room.

Shane’s hands immediately came back to his chest, searching, feeling Ilya’s warm skin. “God, Ilya...” he breathed.

It felt reverent, the way Ilya’s name sounded on Shane’s lips, like a prayer.

That’s how Shane felt to him. Holy. A gift from some divinity that Ilya was not sure he deserved. But he would worship him anyway.

Reaching his hands to Shane's waist, he pulled his hoodie and T-shirt off together, tossing them aside before grabbing Shane around the ribs and maneuvering him up the bed, laying him down so Ilya could climb on top of him.

The deep breath Shane released as Ilya's body covered his sent a wave of arousal through him, and he surged on, kissing and licking down Shane's chest, biting his nipple in just the way that caused his back to arch off the bed on a moan, bringing a smirk to Ilya's face as he continued to travel down his body, kissing everything he could see until he made it to the waistband of Shane's jeans.

Sitting back up, he looked up at Shane's face and saw the love, desire, and pure *want* in his eyes that had Ilya's hand moving on its own, traveling up Shane's inner thigh before, with a smirk, rubbing over Shane's rock hard cock.

Shane closed his eyes against the feeling. "Fuck, Ilya, please..."

Normally, Ilya would make him wait. Draw this out until Shane was a writhing, begging mess. But tonight, the thought of waiting even a single extra second to feel Shane falling apart, to be inside of him, was impossible.

Ilya briefly stood to pull off Shane's shoes and socks, removing his at the same time, before he leaned back over, pressed open mouth kisses against Shane's still clothed dick, before quickly unbuttoning his jeans, pulling down the zipper, and yanking both them and his underwear off in one go.

Ilya took a moment to admire the body now laid out in front of him. Shane was perfect. The cut of his abs, his chest, his thick, muscular thighs. Ilya's eyes slowly roved back up, landing again on Shane's face. His beautiful face. The freckles across his cheeks that Ilya had once stayed up all night counting. His little nose. His plump lips. Those deep, fathomless eyes that Ilya could get lost in for hours...

"Ilya..." Shane's voice was quiet and filled with emotion.

Ilya just nodded, slowly climbing back onto the bed and lowering his head toward Shane's hard, swollen cock, lying red and needy against his stomach.

Unwilling to waste more time, Ilya leaned down and lapped up the bead of pre-come glistening on his slit before licking a stripe up the length of the underside and finally taking him all the way into his mouth.

Shane yelled something unintelligible, his hand shooting out to tangle in Ilya's curls—not pushing, not demanding, just feeling.

Ilya worked Shane's cock up and down, sucking, rolling his tongue, swallowing him down his throat as deeply as he could. He knew exactly what Shane liked, exactly what to do to drive him crazy, and Ilya wanted nothing more than to give him the most pleasure he could.

After a few moments, Shane's hand tightened in Ilya's hair.

“Fuck, Ilya, fuck. You have to...stop...need you inside of me. Please. Please...”

Desire shot through Ilya and he hummed around Shane’s cock, causing him to buck off the bed as he pulled his mouth away with a quiet *pop*.

After quickly grabbing the small bottle of lube from his suitcase, Ilya climbed back over Shane, kissing up his thighs, over his hips, up his stomach, and stopping briefly to place a soft, reverent kiss over his heart, before finally leaning back to pop open the bottle, drizzle a generous amount of lube around his fingers, and using his other hand to gently push Shane’s knee, encouraging him to open further for him.

Shane complied immediately, and Ilya followed him down, kissing him feverishly as he slowly worked his finger around Shane’s rim.

Shane inhaled sharply, his hands coming up to clutch at Ilya’s shoulders when he finally pressed in his first finger, slowly massaging, teasing his prostate until Shane was relaxed enough that Ilya could press a second finger inside.

“Oh God, Ilya, fuck...”

Ilya just smiled against Shane’s neck, kissing and biting as he worked his fingers in Shane’s tight hole. Twisting, scissoring, making sure that he was ready for him.

He could tell that he was working Shane into a frenzy, his head beginning to thrash back and forth as his moans grew louder and more insistent.

It only took a few minutes until Shane started speaking again.

“Please, I’m ready, Ilya. Please. I need you inside of me. Need to feel you inside of me. Please baby, please...”

Baby.

That word did something to Ilya. A shiver went up his spine. He needed to be inside of Shane. Now.

Slowly, carefully, he removed his fingers and repositioned himself, pouring more lube on his hand and pumping his own, desperately hard cock once, twice, before lining himself up.

He leaned back down over Shane, and with a whispered, “I love you,” pressed inside.

Ilya fought against every urge he had to shut his eyes against the overwhelming sensation—he wanted to watch Shane’s face as his head tilted back, his mouth opening in pleasure, his chest heaving as Ilya bottomed out.

Ilya paused for a moment to let Shane adjust, only to have his emotions suddenly overwhelm him just looking down and Shane, his fluttering eyelashes, his face finally free of the stress he had been carrying all night.

This, Ilya thought, is where I am meant to be.

Every part of him belonged wholly to Shane. Mind, body, and soul. If he could stay in this moment forever, he would.

Unbidden, a single tear dropped from his eye and splashed lightly on Shane's cheek, causing his eyes to flutter open, his gaze softening from heated pleasure to something deeper as he lifted a hand and gently brushed the next tear off of Ilya's cheek before it could fall.

They just stared at each other for a moment, before Ilya could no longer hold back. Burying his head in Shane's neck, he gasped out, "I love you so much, Shane," and started to thrust, setting a steady, hard rhythm.

Shane replied with a desperate, "I love you Ilya. More than anything..." before his voice turned into nothing but moans.

Ilya knew neither of them would last long, the overwhelming need to bring each other release overpowering anything else.

Ilya thrust faster, harder, desperate for Shane to fall apart.

Ilya knew he was close as Shane's moans grew louder, and, feeling his own release begin to tingle at the base of his spine, Ilya leaned his weight on one forearm and snaked his other hand between them, grasping Shane's cock and quickly working him up and down.

Shane's eyes shot open. "Oh, fuck! Ilya...fuck! You're going to make me..."

"Come? Yes, sweetheart. I want to watch you come. You look so beautiful. I love you so much. Please, moya lyubov, come for me. Come for me..."

It only took three more thrusts before Shane was shouting Ilya's name in pleasure, his release coating his stomach and Ilya's hand. Seeing Shane lose control was enough to push Ilya over the edge, and he buried himself as deep as he could while his own orgasm ripped through him.

Ilya collapsed on top of Shane, his head resting on his neck as they both inhaled heavily, trying to catch their breaths.

Shane's hands came up softly over Ilya's back before carding through his hair gently as he lifted his head to press a kiss to Ilya's forehead and whispered "ya tebya lyublyu."

Ilya let out a shaky breath. "I love you too."

They laid there like that, just breathing each other in for a few moments before Ilya's cock softened enough to fall out of Shane.

Ilya took a deep, steadying breath before slowly pushing himself up to standing, smiling softly at Shane as he held out his hand. "Come, moya lyubov, let's take a shower."

Shane smiled back and took his hand, carefully rising and following Ilya into the bathroom.

...

One extended shower later, in which Ilya and Shane took turns getting on their knees, unable to stop touching each other, they finally made it back into the main room, towels wrapped around their waists.

Ilya turned toward his suitcase. "Let me get you something to wear..." but Shane pulled back on his hand.

Ilya turned around, taking in the sheepish look on Shane's face.

"Sweetheart?"

"Can we...not tonight? Wear clothes, I mean. I just...I want to be able to feel you. Is that...ok?"

Ilya stepped into Shane, grabbing hold of his face and kissing him deeply.

He pulled back after a moment and laid his forehead against Shane. "Of course it's ok." Reaching down, he gently tugged the towel away from Shane's hips before pulling his off as well, tossing them onto a nearby chair and leading Shane toward the bed.

They were quiet for a while after they laid down, Shane's head resting on Ilya's chest as he listened to his heart beating, their fingers lightly brushing over each other.

"Private plane." Shane whispered into the darkness.

Ilya's brow furrowed. "What private plane?"

He felt Shane smile against his chest. "That's how I got here. I chartered a private plane. Or, well, I guess Farrah did, but...yeah."

Ilya's heart sped up and he wrapped his arms more tightly around Shane.

"Shane, I...I don't know what to say. I can't believe you...I just, I love you so much."

Shane brought his hand up to rest over Ilya's heart. "I would do it again. Whatever it took. Anything, Ilya."

What could Ilya even say to that?

"And I meant everything I said. About coming out, telling everyone about us. I know we have to figure out what to do about the league, and our teams, and I'm sure the press is going to be insane, but...I don't care. I want to tell the world how much I love you, Ilya." Shane tilted his face up to look into Ilya's eyes.

He could only smile. "I want that too, moya lyubov. I don't care about the league. Nothing else matters but you. We can figure it out, ok?"

Shane nodded and pressed a kiss over his heart before settling back into Ilya's chest.

...

Sometime later, after Shane's eyes had closed and his breathing had evened out, Ilya hesitantly reached over to the nightstand and grabbed his phone.

He tried to control his emotions as he scrolled through the hundreds of texts Shane had sent, begging, pleading for Ilya to be alive. He could only read a few before it all became too much. He scrolled further, looking at all the missed calls and voicemails, unsure if he would ever feel strong enough to listen to them. Finally, he saw the last notification: a message on Instagram. He couldn't stop himself, he opened it.

The first thing he saw was the message he had sent to Shane from the plane. So it had gone through...

But below it, there was a message back...

Ilya,

I love you so much. More than everything else in my life. You are the first thing I think about when I wake up. I think that's been true since the moment I met you.

I want to say so much. I'm just...not as good at saying these things as you are. But I'll try.

The very first time you touched me, when you shook my hand outside that stupid rink, it felt like my entire world tilted on its axis. But instead of everything turning upside down, it felt like, for the first time in my life, everything was right side up. Everything made sense.

You gave that to me. From that moment on, you became my anchor. Those moments we stole together over all those years, they were the only times I ever felt alive. Whole. Loved. Even when we were pretending.

I always loved you, Ilya. And I know you loved me too.

You loving me is the greatest gift I will ever get in this life. I won't ever let it go.

I want to build a life with you. I want to marry you. Fuck I want to marry you so badly. I want to be your husband. I want to wake up in the same bed every morning. I want to have stupid routines. I want to bicker about what we're going to cook for dinner. I want to have kids with you. I want to take turns driving them to school, and cheering for them when they play sports, or at their dance recitals, or just whatever makes them happy. I want to grow old with you.

I need to grow old with you.

I can't accept that you might be gone. It's not possible.

You're a part of my soul, Ilya. I think...if you were gone, I would know. I would feel it. My soul would be ripped in half.

So I'm going to land in Tampa. I'm going to get to your hotel. And I'm going to find you.

I have never believed in anything as much as I believe in us. Our love. It's forever.

In every life, I will find you.

I love you.

Ilya had to pull the phone away from his face and drop it back onto the nightstand so he could clamp a hand over his mouth and stop the sounds threatening to escape. Tears flowed from his eyes, down his temples, and into his hair. He focused on evening out his breathing so the jerking motion of his chest didn't wake Shane.

Shane.

His message made Ilya feel like his heart had shattered into a million pieces, and then reformed into something stronger, better, bigger.

Pulling his hand away from his mouth, he wrapped his arms carefully around Shane's back, spreading out his fingers to cover as much skin as he could. To feel as much of him as he could.

Shane was right. This was forever.

Ilya whispered into the still night. "We will have that life, moya lyubov. I promise."

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