

So Happy Together

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So Happy Together

by [calistoga](#)

Summary

Shane and Ilya go to their first BBQ at Bood's. Together. As a couple. And Shane is a nervous wreck of a man.

Also bonus fluff with Harris and Troy.

Song inspo and the title: Happy Together by The Turtles

Set around late April/early May during The Long Game

Notes

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

Set around late April/early May during The Long Game, let's say 2 weeks or so after Ottawa was knocked out of the playoffs.

Shane took a deep breath and paused with his hand on the car door. He could do this. He knew deep down there was nothing to worry about. But he couldn't get his hand to open the door. He closed his eyes and tried to relax the tightening in his chest.

"Shane?" Ilya asked quietly from the driver's seat.

He didn't get a response, so he put his hand on Shane's shoulder and tried again. "Shane? *Moya lyubov'*, talk to me."

"It's so silly. I know it's gonna be fine, I just..."

"Not silly. It is normal. But yes, we will be fine. It's just groceries," he said lightheartedly, squeezing Shane's shoulder through his t-shirt and trying to lighten the mood. "I come here all the time. They are good people."

Shane held himself back from repeating, *again*, all the things they were both perfectly aware of. It *was* just grocery shopping, but the first time they've done it *together*. In *Ottawa*. The first time as *The Out, Public, Queer Celebrity Athlete Couple* that had just turned an entire sports industry on its head. Grocery shopping was the most boring, mundane chore to be doing together, and yet a huge, groundbreaking step, which was entirely on-brand for *them*.

Them, *Ilya and Shane*, the couple who hadn't done a single damn thing in their relationship "in order." The couple who'd gotten engaged before they'd even gone to a shop together. Who'd hooked up for years before even sharing a meal together. Who'd made entire life-changing and career-changing plans before even saying "I love you." And who'd fallen in love long before even remotely realizing they liked each other at all. Nothing happened "in order" for them and Shane had to work through his worries with every inch of new territory they covered together.

If going to the grocery store was already this daunting, Shane didn't want to think for a second about Bood's party tomorrow.

"You're right. I know you're right. Just give me another second." He took in another deep breath, and as he let it out, he focused on the side mirror that showed him the local organic grocery store behind their parked car. As if he were a spy that needed more intel on how to best infiltrate the target.

The front of the store was decorated with a few flags and banners to show support for different Ottawa events, groups, and social equality movements. A Pride flag was prominently hanging in one of the main storefront windows, next to a black and red banner that read "*Go Centaurs!*"

Ilya's words repeated in his head, *they're good people*.

“Okay.” He turned to look at Ilya. “Let's do this.”

Ilya grinned and reached for Shane's face, giving him a quick kiss. “You got it. Let's do this.”

They stepped out of the car and joined up behind it where Ilya took their reusable bags out of the trunk. Ilya reached his hand out and Shane took it immediately, threading their fingers together. He was still mostly terrified, but he wasn't alone. He'd never have to face anything alone ever again, he realized. He smiled up at Ilya and Ilya pulled him closer, gently knocking their shoulders together.

As they walked across the parking lot, Shane stared ahead at the juxtaposition of the hockey colors that gave him comfort, and the rainbow that still, inadvertently, made him uneasy at times. After forcing himself to hide so much of himself for so long, then suddenly having nothing hidden at all, he'd managed to make good steps toward self-acceptance. Pride, on the other hand, would probably take more time.

“You have the list?” Ilya asked, bringing Shane back down to Earth as they stepped inside and Ilya grabbed a shopping cart. After Ilya pulled his hand away, Shane immediately wanted to grab it back, more for comfort than anything.

“Uh, yeah.” He pulled out his phone to open their shared shopping list app that they each had access to. “We're still thinking pasta salad, right? With the grilled veggies?”

“Right. And some normal beer. The cider from Harris is good, but too sweet sometimes.”

“Crazy to hear something is too sweet for *you*,” Shane teased, as Ilya turned them toward the produce.

They stood in front of a wall of fresh vegetables and Ilya stared at Shane while Shane stared at the shopping list. Ilya mentally patted himself on the back for delegating “list management” to Shane; it turned out to be exactly what he needed. Shane had a goal in front of him, he had a mission, and most importantly, he had something he could constantly stare at in his hands so that he wouldn't nervously glance around the store the entire time. Ilya watched him scroll up and down the recipe page a bit too, not to learn anything new about how to boil pasta, but it was a solid distraction.

“So, peppers?” Ilya prompted, giving him a little nudge with his elbow.

Shane's eyes snapped up to the veggies, then to Ilya. “Yeah. Um. Sorry,” he breathed out.

“It's okay,” Ilya replied steadily. He pulled the mesh produce bags out of their totes and held one out to Shane.

“*Pertsy i chesnok*?” he asked slowly, deciding to quiz him on his Russian vocabulary. Maybe that would take his mind off things.

“Peppers and... onion? No. Garlic?”

“Yes!” Ilya beamed at him. “Very good. And I will get-”

“Ilya Rozanov!” a pleasant, happy voice called from behind them. They turned to see a smiling older woman with short gray curls and an apron with the shop’s name on the front. She abandoned her cart full of products in favor of walking toward Ilya with open arms.

“Janice! Hi!” Ilya said back. He bent down, way down, to give her a hug. She was about a foot and a half shorter than him.

“How have you been!?” she exclaimed as she pulled back and kept hold of his shoulders. “I am so happy to see you! I haven’t seen you since... well, all of that.” She waved her hands around, clearly unsure how to broach the subject of “The Video”, and looked up at Ilya sympathetically. “How the hell are you? How have you been doing?”

“I’m okay, Janice. It’s been hard, of course, but we’re okay. I’m happy to see you too.”

The “we” of that statement clearly broke her out of her “Ilya Rozanov trance” and she finally looked over at Shane.

“Oh my goodness! And your Shane is here too! Hello, Shane Hollander!” She reached out to hug him too, then hesitated. “I’m sorry, you don’t mind a hug, do you? I’m a hugger, but I can dial it back,” she said with a laugh. She was so warm and friendly and grandmotherly, there was no chance Shane would say no.

“Um, no, it’s okay!” Shane quickly replied, accepting her hug. She stood on her toes to put her arms around his shoulders. He instantly felt some of his worry melt away. “Hi, Janice. Nice meeting you,” he said as she stepped back.

“Oh, it is *so* good to meet you too. I was so sorry to hear what happened to you guys, my heart hurt for you so badly. Ugh, how awful.” She put her fists on her hips. “It’s great to see you here together though, Ilya, you look happier than ever. You know, that Instagram post of yours made me cry my eyes out, it was so sweet. I was standing right there next to the strawberries, just bawling.” She laughed and jabbed one thumb in the air over her shoulder, pointing to the fruit on the opposite side of the produce section.

“I’m sorry we made you cry, Janice!” Ilya said sweetly. “But thank you for your kind words. They were happy tears, I hope, yes?”

“Of course! Just remember that no matter what, Rozanov, we are here. for. you.” She poked Ilya in the arm to punctuate the last few words, then beamed at them again. Shane wondered if she ever stopped smiling. It was kind of nice, actually. “Oh! I’ve been wanting to tell you since the playoffs! That beautiful powerplay goal in the last period when you got the assist off Barrett - that was gorgeous! Really amazing, I loved it.”

“Oh, thank you,” he replied, almost shyly. “If only we scored one more time after that, but, you know.”

“Please, Ilya!” She playfully punched him in the ribs. “You guys got us to the playoffs! The *second round* of playoffs! For the first time in ages! We were over the moon no matter what. Don’t feel bad about that for a second. And don’t you dare listen to any of those shitheads out there who have nothing nice to say. About hockey, or you, or Shane, anything, you hear me?”

She pointed her finger back and forth between the two of them. Her instructions were so stern, yet caring, Shane would probably jump off a cliff if she asked.

“Yes ma'am, I hear you, Janice,” Ilya replied.

“This city is lucky to have you, you remember that, alright? Anyway, I’ll let you boys go before I talk your ears off.” And Janice definitely sounded like she could go on all day, especially about hockey. “We’ll see you soon, right? Go Centaurs!” She quickly looked back over at Shane. “Oh! Sorry, Shane! Nothing against Montreal, but I’m a big-time Ottawa homer, have been my whole life,” she said joyfully.

“No worries! I grew up an Ottawa fan too, I get it,” he replied as he smiled back at her. *Believe me, I’m not much of a Montreal fan either these days*, he continued in his head.

“Alright, bye guys! We’ll see you around! Come back soon!” She gave them both a parting hug and Ilya said goodbye.

“That. Was. Adorable,” Shane said, grinning at Ilya as they started to select their veggies and bag them up.

“She is adorable. Janice is the best.”

“She really seemed keen on you. Was this your secret hobby while I was in Montreal? Charming all the sweet grocery store grandmas?”

“Yes,” Ilya answered, cracking up. “Her wife loves me too, she is also super sweet. They own the store.”

“That’s nice.” Shane tried not to get stuck on the word *wife*, but it was a weirdly huge relief to hear, in a way. It actually made Shane relax a bit about being here in public, and it certainly explained Janice's passionate support. Ilya was right (again); there really were good people here. “How did you even meet them? Just shopping?”

“Yes, I usually come here when I look for your healthy food. They have a good selection of grass and hay and other things for rabbits.”

“Shut up,” Shane said, rolling his eyes, but appreciating the sweetness of Ilya going out of his way to buy ingredients that had fit Shane’s intense performance diet. Since losing the playoffs, Shane still liked to mostly eat clean, but at least allowed himself to not be as strict with it. It turned out that eating a carb every once in a while wasn’t the end of the world.

“Really though, I met Janice because I had to ask someone what the fuck ‘farro’ is, and she recognized me. Next time I came in, she introduced me to Barbara. It was really nice. Now we chat and talk hockey when I’m here.”

“That’s really cool,” Shane said, genuinely happy to see more facets of Ilya’s life in Ottawa. Shane looked back at the shopping list to stop himself from thinking about everything he must have missed in the three years of visiting Ilya, but never actually leaving the house *with* Ilya. He made a mental note to talk to him about that later.

They continued their shopping and found everything for dinner tonight and the pasta salad for tomorrow, a few other snack foods to bring, and a case of locally brewed lagers.

“Is there anything else on the list?” Ilya asked as they got in line to check out.

“I think so, didn’t we get everything?” Shane said as he pulled up the app one more time. It turned out there was one extra item on it.

- *I had fun shopping with you. I love being here and being out with you. Everything is okay, my love. I love you so much.* 🥰

Shane grinned down at the phone and his heart fluttered. Then a new item suddenly appeared.

- *Also your ass looks really good in those jeans* 🥰🍑🍑🍑🍑🍑🍑

He looked up at Ilya, who had his phone in his hands and was smiling like an idiot. They both burst out laughing.

Shane took Ilya’s hand, right there in the checkout line. In public, in front of everyone. And it finally didn’t matter if anyone saw them or recognized them.

“I love you, too,” Shane said, out loud, and (maybe) a bit proud.

“What are you thinking about?” Ilya asked Shane, who was glaring at the chicken breasts in the grill pan as if they’d murdered his whole family.

“What?” Shane asked, snapping out of his... whatever he was doing, as if suddenly remembering that he was in the middle of cooking dinner. “Nothing. Just... Thinking.”

Ilya exhaled through his nose, amused. “Yes. I know you are thinking. About what?” He stood behind Shane and slid his arms around his waist, holding him against his chest. He rested his chin on Shane’s shoulder.

“Just. You know.” He sighed and needlessly poked at the chicken with his tongs. Ilya waited. “Today was really good. I’m glad we did that. “

Shane’s hair was in a messy bun and Ilya loved the hell out of the way it made him look. He turned to kiss Shane on the neck, then on the exposed skin behind his ear. “I’m glad too. It was nice. To finally do that together. But you are cooking this chicken with an angry face, so I think there is more.”

“It’s not an angry face. It’s a normal thinking face,” Shane argued.

Ilya shifted to stand next to Shane and looked him in the eyes. He pressed his thumb in between Shane’s eyebrows, overdramatically smoothing out the furrow that had been between them for the last ten minutes.

Shane sighed again, then squirmed away so he could grab the meat thermometer and pretend to focus on the chicken. Ilya stepped back and leaned against the counter, crossing his arms, waiting again. With a frustrated Shane, patience always paid off.

“It’s...” Shane tried to start again, piecing the words together in his head. “I’ve missed out on so much of your life. I feel like there was so much wasted time, so much more we could have done.”

He moved the cooked chicken onto a plate and switched off the burner. Ilya opened his arms and invited him in, and Shane collapsed against his chest. “I was so scared of everything. Today I guess it hit me how we’ve barely done anything together outside of our homes, all because of fear. It feels... Sad. I don’t know. Like. A lot of regret.”

Ilya wrapped his arms tight around him. “Shane. Don’t put this all on yourself. Do not forget how scared I was too. Hiding was also my choice.”

“It feels like there’s so much I still don’t know about you.” He pulled back to look at Ilya. “I didn’t even know you were a regular customer at the little gay grocery store.”

Ilya cracked up. “And I didn’t know for a long time that the Pike children call you ‘Uncle Shane’ and that’s the cutest thing ever. It’s okay though. We were doing what we needed to.” He brushed back a little lock of Shane’s hair that had fallen out of the bun, tucking it behind his ear. “Remember, we were trying to stay safe. Keep each other safe. And we *were* safe. Even when it was really fucking frustrating to do that.”

He held Shane’s face in his hands and brushed his thumbs over the freckles on his cheeks. He kissed his sweet little freckled nose, then between his eyebrows, then kissed him softly on his lips.

“I am also sad, a little bit, about missing your life too,” Ilya continued. “But actually, I’m more excited. Now we get to learn everything new. Like meeting you for the first time again. I’m excited to meet you, and live with you, and go to little gay grocery stores with you, and learn everything about you.”

Shane smiled wide at that, causing his eyes to crinkle at the edges. “I like that. I’m excited to learn everything about you too.”

Shane was in exactly the same position as he was yesterday, frozen in the passenger seat with his hand on the door handle. Only now he was staring right at Zane Boodram’s house.

There were already a few cars in the driveway. There must be so many people inside. People Shane was about to actually meet for the first time, outside of a hockey rink, that is.

“It will be fine, Shane,” Ilya said, again trying to give encouragement from the driver’s seat. He grabbed Shane’s hand and kissed his knuckles. “Remember: good people only.”

Shane closed his eyes for a second and inhaled, then looked at Ilya with his “determined captain face”, as Ilya called it in his head. “Yep. It's gonna be okay. Let's go?”

“Let's go!” Ilya agreed excitedly. They quickly kissed each other over the center console and got out of the car, grabbing the food and drinks from the back.

Ilya looked back at Shane with one last “you can do this” smile, then hitched the crate of beer onto his hip and opened the front door without knocking. Shane followed close behind, his hands full with their bags. The door opened up into a huge, open home.

The living room had various seating areas around a big entertainment center and a blocked off corner with baby toys. The kitchen and dining room were visible further away, near wide glass doors that led to the back deck. The dining room table was loaded with food, like a professional caterer's setup, complete with big buffet-style chafing dishes with little fires underneath. Ilya wasn't joking; Bood does not fuck around when it comes to feeding people.

“Rozanov!” shouted several booming, happy voices at once, none louder than the host himself. They put the food and beer down in the entryway to greet everyone. Bood immediately set down his huge aluminum tray full of grilled meat on the nearest flat surface and came over to wrap Ilya in a massive bro hug, slapping him on the back. “Fucking finally made it! And Hollander! How the fuck are you doing, man, you good?”

“Hey, Bood. Yeah, I'm good! How are you?” Shane replied while accepting his own bro hug.

They greeted most of the other guests similarly, including Wyatt, Evan, Luca, and a number of other Ottawa players. Most team partners were there too, and Shane introduced himself around the room and shook hands with all the ladies.

Oh shit. Shane was a team partner now too. They'll have to add a new letter to “WAG” somehow.

Everyone was so sweet and welcoming though, Shane momentarily forgot about his nerves. He had put on his polite, confident face and voice, same as he would at a huge NHL awards party, meeting loads of strangers in rapid succession - people he wanted to make a good impression with. Fortunately, it turned out he didn't need the polite “Media Shane” persona for long. After a few greetings, he realized he felt a lot more comfortable than he'd expected.

“Shane! Hi!” Wyatt's wife Lisa said, giving him a hug. They'd met before at one of the All-Star games Wyatt had been in. “How are you holding up? I'm so sorry about what happened, that was terrible, I can't even imagine.”

“Hi! Yeah, I'm not bad. It was awful, of course. But, um, it's gotten easier over time, especially once playoffs ended, but uh. It's been tough, a lot of huge changes at once, for sure, so we're, um...” He didn't really have an end to the sentence in mind. He glanced over at Ilya, who was still making the rounds and greeting people. It just felt odd to say “we” referring to Ilya with someone who wasn't his parents or Rose or Hayden. Odd, but he liked it.

“Just taking it day by day?” she guessed.

“Yeah, for sure,” he said with a slightly nervous laugh.

“Well, we're glad to see you here. You're definitely in for a treat with Bood's cooking. You look great, by the way. Ilya too,” She said.

“Thanks,” he answered, looking down at his grey short-sleeved button up for no reason.

“Hollander!” Bood called from the spread on the dining room table. “Get the fuck over here and get a plate! Roz, is this how you treat your guests? You don't feed them or show ‘em where the bathroom is or anything? Jesus.” Shane already liked Bood a lot. He reminded him of J.J.: loud and outgoing and all about people.

“I am greeting people! I should not say ‘hi’?” Ilya defended himself. He also brought over the bags with the pasta salad and snacks.

“You know, Hollander, Roz *never* came to my parties before! He maybe showed up to like, 2 of ‘em, and that is *it*. He’d just fuckin’ disappear on us for days.”

“Yeah well, I was busy,” Ilya said. “I had a good reason. And now I can bring that reason to the party too.” He shamelessly beamed over at Shane, who promptly turned incredibly pink.

“Oh my god, Ilya,” Shane whispered as he looked up to the ceiling for salvation.

“What the fuck, Roz, that is the cutest shit ever. Alright, then.” He pointed at Shane with two finger guns. “‘*Reason for Rozanov's mysterious disappearances*’, come get a plate.” Bood went over all the dishes and explained the different flavors, levels of spiciness, the different meats and cuts and sauces. It was incredible.

Shane filled a plate with food and stayed back in the kitchen a bit, unsure of where to go aside from just following Ilya everywhere like a puppy.

Ilya traveled around and talked to a few more people, then made eye contact with Shane from across the room. It was the kind of look they’d shared a million times before at NHL parties, award shows, and All-Star events. Before, it had only been secret communication. It was, at most, an eyebrow twitch and a nod, the barest acknowledgement that the other existed. When all they could risk was a stolen glance, subtle and forbidden.

Now, Ilya savored looking at Shane. He openly gawked at him, even, with a smile so wide it hurt. Shane smiled back at him, glanced around at their teammates, then back at Ilya. An adorable pink blush bloomed across Shane's face. He bit his bottom lip as a wave of emotion washed over him. Relief, Ilya knew. Because he felt exactly the same.

Ilya left the tiny conversation circle he wasn't paying one bit of attention to, and made his way over to Shane at the island in the open kitchen. He put on a straight face and cleared his throat.

“Hollander.”

“Rozanov.”

They looked at each other rather seriously, coldly, just as they used to before, for all of about 3 seconds before it devolved into messy giggles.

“Hey,” Ilya said. He placed his hand on Shane's arm and brushed his thumb across his bicep, but felt the muscle tense under his hand. He removed it to hold his beer instead. Baby steps, Ilya reminded himself.

“Hey,” Shane said, a bit shakily. “Sorry. It's... I'm trying.”

“I know,” Ilya replied quietly. “It's okay. You're doing great.”

They both went outside to join the group on the patio. Shane sat in a chair next to Ilya, who shared a loveseat with Wyatt, and was keen to simply listen to everyone around him. Every person there was having such a great time. Every conversation was full of warmth and joy. He pushed away the worried voice that told him he should still be afraid.

“Shane, back me up on this,” Ilya asked, thankfully derailing his messy train of thought. “Is it weird if your goalie randomly asks you about AC/DC songs in the middle of a huge playoff game?”

Shane wasn't all that familiar with AC/DC, but he really didn't want the conversation to turn into another “holy shit, Shane doesn't listen to music” conversation.

“I dunno. It's hard to say. I guess Drapeau doesn't really talk that much at all during games, so I wouldn't know.”

“Is because Drapeau is boring. And a dick. But this guy?” He pointed at Wyatt with his thumb. “He will make amazing saves and then right after, he will ask you the weirdest shit. Like he asked me if I know what is in the inside of a pool table ball.”

“Okay, that one is not my fault!” Wyatt desperately tried to clarify. He hunched forward with his elbows on his knees and indicated around with the beer bottle in his hand. “That goofy forward in Calgary kept talking to his linemates about how stupid pool balls are made, so it stuck with me. By that point, I couldn't wait to get to the locker room and look it up, I was dying to know.”

“And this is what he is thinking about when he blocks all of your shots, Hollander,” Ilya said, pretending to speak to Shane “secretly” behind his hand.

Shane rolled his eyes and attempted to shoot Ilya a “yeah fucking right, you know damn well I scored on him 4 times in the last series” look when Harris and Troy appeared on the porch. Everyone's attention was redirected in a loud chorus of “*heeeys*” and calling their names. The whole group was so excited to see them. It gave Shane another reason to let go of a handful of his nervousness. Another gay couple was here too and every person here loved them to pieces.

He greeted them both and Harris was exactly as friendly and adorable as Ilya had described. He lit up the entire room. Well, entire porch. Troy looked a million times happier than how Shane had primarily remembered him, as the miserable-looking, dickhead Toronto forward.

Shane couldn't figure out why, but an odd, uneasy feeling bubbled up inside him. Not nervousness, but... something. He excused himself to the bathroom and set his plate down to head inside.

Ilya decided to follow him, and found Shane in a little library nook that was situated just off the dining room. He was looking out the window and taking steady breaths.

Ilya gently knocked on the doorless entryway to the room and Shane turned around.

"Hey," Shane said.

"Hi." Ilya walked over to him and put his hands on his shoulders, dipping his head down to look at Shane at his eye level. "*Vsyo khorosho, moya lyubov' ?*" [EN: Is everything okay, my love?]

"Um. *Da*. Yeah, I'm good. It's just... a lot, you know? It's kind of overwhelming. Like, I knew everyone would be nice, and they're great, they're all super nice. Actually, I think I'm overwhelmed by how nice they are, especially after Troy and Harris got here. It's dumb. I had still expected the negativity, I guess. For no reason at all. Probably just because I know they're your teammates, and hockey players aren't usually like this."

"It makes sense. There is a lot of negativity out there. But, remember that everything *here* is okay." He pulled Shane in for a hug and wedged his head under his chin, as if trying to physically block the negative thoughts from entering Shane's head.

"Also remember that Janice told you that you should not listen to shitheads," Ilya continued, making Shane laugh. "Everything is really okay. We don't have to be afraid. Not anymore. These are good people. They're not just teammates or hockey players; they're my friends. I wouldn't ask you to come if I didn't trust them. They love me, and now they love you. And most important, I love you."

Shane breathed in deep and held Ilya a little tighter.

"I can't even explain how happy I am that you are here," Ilya continued. "I'm happy to be here with you. I'm so proud of you. Proud of us. I really have dreamed about this for so long."

Shane turned his head up to look at Ilya. "I'm happy to be here too. You were right about them, everyone being so kind. I knew I shouldn't worry about anything, but... y'know."

"I know very well," Ilya said with a sympathetic smile. He snaked his index finger under the collar of Shane's shirt and pulled the chain out. The engagement ring dangled at the bottom of the loop, and Ilya slid it onto the tip of his finger, which was about as far as it would fit. He waved the ring in front of Shane's face.

"Remember I'm here with you. We're together now, and we can finally be together exactly how we want. We can sit at a party with friends, or we can leave immediately if that's what you want to do. No matter what. I am with you. But here, I promise we have nothing to be afraid of."

Shane reached under the collar of Ilya's snug dark green t-shirt to find his chain, and copied Ilya's motion with the black and gold band. He slipped the ring onto the first knuckle of his pointer finger and gently rubbed it with his thumb.

“Thank you so much. I know how important this party is to you, I'd never make you leave. But thank you for saying that. I'm glad we're doing this today. It feels good to be out here together.”

Ilya clinked their rings together in a cheesy sort of “toast” and then stuffed both of them back under their respective shirts.

“Come on. Let's go see all your new friends.” He kissed Shane on the cheek and led him by the hand back to the group on the porch.

The party continued into the evening, and once night fell, most folks had moved their conversations to the living room/kitchen area of Bood's house. Shane had been chatting with Lisa and Cassie, Bood's wife, in the kitchen about yoga. Once they went off to check on the kids upstairs with the babysitter, Shane noticed he felt pretty great, actually. The anxiety had virtually disappeared throughout the course of the evening.

Shane had also chatted with Harris for a while about hockey, Harris' job, and places and things to do around Ottawa, and Ilya was delighted. Mostly because Harris was the perfect person to bring someone out of their shell and help them feel confident (Exhibit A: Troy Barrett), but also because it was good for Shane to have more gay friends, Ilya thought. Shane was still working through complicated feelings about his sexuality that more than two decades of awful hockey locker rooms had instilled in him. It only got more complicated now that he and Ilya were publicly out. With Harris, Shane was in good hands.

Ilya had even dropped by their conversation for a minute and held Shane's hand, and Shane didn't flinch a bit.

After Ilya destroyed his younger teammates in an intense Mario Kart competition, thanks to his training for the children's hospital visits, he found Shane at the edge of a conversation circle with Wyatt, Lisa, and a few others, listening contentedly.

“Follow me?” he asked him quietly.

“Anywhere,” Shane replied.

Ilya took Shane by the hand and led him out the house to the deck. They walked right past whoever was at the firepit and went to the far side of the porch. It wasn't at all a private spot, but it was far enough away from the others that they felt more or less alone. The warm glow of the strings of lights set an undeniably romantic mood and Ilya couldn't hold back anymore.

They leaned on the railing on their elbows and looked out into the darkness off the deck, fingers intertwined between them. Ilya knocked their shoulders together and Shane smiled, looking so beautiful and relaxed and happy. Ilya was so proud of him. But there was one more step he wanted them to take together.

“Can I kiss you, Shane? Now. Here.” He stood up off the rail to face him.

Shane bit his lip, considering. Ilya suddenly wanted to bite it too, but he’d be patient. Shane’s eyes darted around for a second of thought. He straightened up, rolled and squared his shoulders, and looked right at Ilya as he breathed slightly more intensely, forcing himself to jump over every mental hurdle his anxiety had placed in front of him.

“Yes,” Shane said confidently, firmly, his expression akin to his ‘determined captain’ face. This time, with the addition of an adorable smile.

Ilya grinned so widely that his face nearly split in two. He was so excited. He gently placed his hands on either side of Shane’s neck, brushing his thumbs over his jawline, savoring the moment and what was about to happen. Shane rested his hands on Ilya’s forearms and grinned back at him. Ilya tucked Shane’s hair behind his ears, just because he could. His heart leapt as he looked into Shane’s onyx eyes that nearly glittered with reflections of all the string lights around them. Ilya was completely enamored.

“I love you so much,” he whispered, as he dipped his head to finally kiss Shane on the lips. It was quick and chaste, but also so warm and beautiful and public and potentially visible to all the teammates around, and finally, fucking finally, they didn’t have to care.

“I love you, too,” Shane whispered back.

“Look at them. Aren’t they disgusting?” Harris asked Troy with all the faux seriousness in the world. He leaned back against Troy in the cozy loveseat in front of the fire pit, and Troy put his arm around him. “Seriously. How can they do that out in public?”

“Disgusting. I can’t believe they’re making us witness this,” Troy agreed. They were watching Shane and Ilya on the far side of the deck, leaning against the rail, quietly chatting, and looking so stupidly in love under the strings of warm lights. A meteor could crash into the house right now and they probably wouldn’t notice, they were so wrapped up in each other.

“There’s people around, there’s *children*,” Harris said, verbally clutching imaginary pearls.

“Well. There’s children upstairs with a babysitter.”

“Still! Look at these horrible, gooey, sappy, lovebirds. Like gross teenagers. Really, I might vomit.”

Troy and Harris both cracked up, mostly at themselves, but partially at Rozanov, who’d never shown this soft, romantic side of himself around others. It was truly adorable.

“You know, Roz said this is how he knew I had a crush on you early on. Apparently I'd look at you like that.” Troy kissed Harris' forehead.

“You would?” Harris turned to look at him. “Aw, Troy... that's so cute.”

“Yeah, and he gave me endless shit about it!” He smiled wide. “And he saw you were crushing hard, too, Harris, so don't think you were subtle either. He sees everything.”

Harris barked out a laugh. “Not anymore,” he said, resting back against Troy's warm chest. “Now that Hollander is here, he doesn't see anything other than him. Have you tried talking to him at this party? He can't look you in the eyes. He's always staring at Shane.”

“I think he's just happy that he finally can,” Troy said, rather wisely. They both watched Ilya twirl a lock of Shane's hair around and around his finger. He really did look disgustingly in love.

“I have literally never seen Roz this relaxed and happy. Not even with Chiron as a puppy,” Harris said, and they both laughed again. “Who knew? Who knew that Ilya Rozanov would think Shane Hollander is cuter than a puppy?”

“Um. Anyone with eyes would think that. Have you *seen* Hollander?”

“Troy Barrett!” Harris flipped around and looked at Troy in delighted shock. “No fucking way!”

Troy looked back at him with the same feigned shock and a huge smile on his face. “What?!”

Harris closed his gaping mouth, but still looked at Troy with wide eyes, amused and entertained. “I just can't believe you would say that in front of me, I don't think I'll ever recover,” he said playfully.

“Oh c'mon. Don't lie, I know you had a crush on him too.”

“I would never! I have only ever had eyes for Troy Barrett. I never even knew the meaning of ‘crush’ until he came along,” he said with solemn, dramatic flair.

“Harris, I saw those posters of his World Juniors team in a box at your parents' house. No one is that obsessed with Juniors without reason. Who the fuck even buys posters of Juniors teams?” Troy teased.

Harris squinted at him. “Someone who cares deeply for international youth hockey,” he said, fake-seriously again. “And teenage me who thought Hollander was gorgeous, obviously. Everyone with eyes thought so,” he conceded.

“You wanna know something embarrassing?”

“Tell me,” Harris said, pressing his lips together in anticipation.

“Early on, just after I was traded here, I, uh... I half-considered asking Roz for Hollander's phone number.”

Harris clapped his hand over his mouth and stared at Troy with the widest eyes ever. He made a shocked shrieking sound that was fortunately muffled underneath his hand.

“I didn’t actually do it! And holy shit, thank fucking god I didn’t. Can you imagine what Roz’s reaction would have been?”

Harris just kept staring at him, overjoyed by this admission. “You really wanted to…”

“Well! I thought! Maybe!” Troy suddenly felt flustered, trying to explain his “logic” at the time. He picked at the wicker arm of the loveseat. “You know… The rumor spread around that he was gay, then Roz figured out that *I* was gay… so… I mean… I was also trying really hard not to have a crush on *you*, so… You know…”

“Oh… Oh, Troy,” Harris beamed at him, then moved in close for a quick kiss. “That’s adorable.” He kissed his cheek. “And I love you.” He kissed his other cheek. “And it’s hilarious that we only just now talked about this while Hollander is literally standing about thirty feet away from us.” They laughed and looked back over to the gross Hallmark Movie couple across the porch. “While Rozanov… Plays with his hair?”

Rozanov was indeed playing with his hair and it was entirely horrible and adorable. Harris pulled his phone out and opened the camera. He zoomed in on Ilya and Shane, both in profile, under the warm cozy string lights. After adjusting some other settings that Troy couldn’t decipher, he took a few candid photos. In some of them, they were smiling, brightly beaming at each other, and in others, they simply looked smitten, just overtaken by love for each other. Troy had to admit, they looked really fucking good together.

“Are you paparazzi now? You gonna sell these? It’s not like you can post them on the Centaurs’ Twitter.” Troy asked.

“No!” Harris said, giggling. “But I’m guessing they don’t have a lot of photos like this. I think they’d like it.”

“Mm. I think you’re right.”

Harris put his phone away and snuggled back against Troy, putting his head on his chest, under his chin. “I’m happy for them.”

Shane and Ilya were settling into bed when Ilya’s phone buzzed on the nightstand.

Ilya turned away from where he’d been kissing a trail across Shane’s collarbone. He unlocked his phone to find that Harris had sent him a few photos. He opened the message and paused.

“Thought you might want to see these! You guys looked so happy and adorable. 💕💕”

“What is it?” Shane asked, noticing the shift in Ilya’s expression. Then Ilya smiled down at his phone, grinning insanely widely, while his eyes got a bit misty.

“Come on, what is it?” Shane asked again. Curiosity was killing him.

He could see in Ilya's face that he considered making a stupid joke in response, but then his expression collapsed into fondness, the face people make when they see a painfully cute animal.

"Oh my god. Look at us." He pointed the phone screen at Shane's curious face. "We look so happy. We look like... we are in love."

Shane took a moment to absorb the photo Ilya showed. It was him and Ilya at the party, under the soft string lights on the deck, looking at each other as if they were the only person who existed in the world. Shane had never seen any photo with this much love and adoration. In one, Ilya'd had his hand resting on Shane's shoulder, holding a few locks of his shoulder-length hair between his fingers.

"We look... ridiculously happy," Shane finally said. "And, really cute, I guess."

"I'm getting Harris to print these. We will get them framed," Ilya said decisively.

"And we'll hang them up. Here. In the living room. Put it on display," Shane said excitedly. "Send me those too, I want to post one."

Ilya smiled wide at that. He was so ridiculously proud of Shane's progress. His new self-confidence.

He reached over, put one hand on Shane's face, and kissed him softly. He was so excited for all the new experiences they would soon have together. For all the new learning and growing they'll get to share. For being free to finally do whatever they want, to love however they want. To finally *be* together. And be happy.

End Notes

Shoutout to the discord for being sweethearts as always. 💖 And thanks to [@peacelillies](#) for all the fun conversations and bouncing ideas around!

Happy 5 year anniversary of Heated Rivalry, everybody 🥳

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