

The Common Tongue of You Loving Me

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The Common Tongue of You Loving Me

by [sarantae](#)

Summary

On the cusp of retirement Shane revels in the quiet moments that's led to this: the gray in Ilya's beard, the ache in his joints, the fingerpaint drawings on the fridge.

Notes

This has been sitting in my drafts for 18 months, and fits in somewhere between and around [this](#) and [this](#), but can be read independently.

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

So much of their time has been spent rushing and hurrying, so now they take their time with each other, lingering in bed, making it a hobby to laze around on slow mornings. More often than not these days Shane opts out of his morning run to instead spend time breathing in Ilya's sleep warm scent and listening to his heart beating steadily in his chest.

On mornings like these Shane can't help but reflect on the past, on how many times they didn't wake up next to each other, on how one of them always left the other almost immediately, robbing each other of soft touches, whispered words and warm sheets.

Shane thinks they might have gotten together quicker if they hadn't rushed apart, but he also thinks it's what makes moments like these now, today, more special.

He'll never tire of the way Ilya smells, warm and slightly sweaty, how the coarse hairs on his body tickle Shane when he rubs their thighs and chests together. How Ilya's chain tangles with his own, and how Ilya's hands are always on him in some way, even in sleep.

Now Ilya's got one hand tangled in Shane's hair, the other on his stomach, his chest rising quietly in the early morning light. They're supposed to be getting up soon for a pre-training camp workout, but Shane's too comfortable, and he wants to linger in the last moments of this pre-season quietude.

Shane still loves hockey, and is convinced that being on the same team as Ilya has only heightened his love for the sport. But he turned forty in May and he still feels last season in his bones. It's very likely that this will be Shane's last season, mostly because he wants full mobility of his limbs and function of his brain for his retirement and the time he'll spend with Ilya and their kid.

(Kids, maybe. They're tentatively approaching the conversation about having a second child, mostly because they want Maya to have a sibling and because a part of them miss early mornings and baby blabber.)

As much as Shane he would love to spend the rest of the day wrapped around Ilya, the sounds of a waking household fill the quiet. Somewhere in the house a door shuts, probably his dad getting up to let Anya out and start the coffee. His mom follows not long after, their quiet voices drifting up the stairs.

Shane closes his eyes, squeezing Ilya a little tighter, and holds on to this moment, this slow morning, one of many over the years.

*

"You're such a cheater!"

Ilya looks up from the pool table where he, with a mix of skill and distraction, just dumped the eightball in its net.

Shane is leaning on his cue and laughing. They're at Monk's, mourning a major loss against Vancouver, but then again Shane is laughing at him from across the pool table so it's not all

bad.

At this point Shane's only been a Centaur for about a month, but he's less anxious than Ilya has ever seen him. It bodes well for the rest of the evening.

"I do not cheat," Ilya argues and walks to the other side of the table, resting his hand on the polished wood of the frame, leaning into Shane's space. "Just because you cannot stop looking at my ass "

Shane rolls his eyes, but then he bites his lip and lets his eyes wander down to Ilya's hips, leaning his head to the side to glance behind him. Then he scrunches up his nose and shrugs.

"It's alright."

Ilya can't stop the wide smile that spreads in his face, leaning in to steal a chaste kiss.

Someone chirps them to get a room, and Ilya turns around to see Bood and Wyatt at a nearby table grinning but raising their glasses in a toast.

"Hey, ignore them," Shane says, stepping closer, placing a hand on Ilya's hip, his thumb grazing skin where Ilya's shirt has ridden up.

Shane stands a few inches shorter than Ilya, perfect height for Ilya to press a kiss to his forehead.

It's exhilarating to be with Shane in public like this. Being able to look at him, flirt with him, touch and kiss him, with the only reaction being their teammates having a little fun.

Ilya must not be very good at disguising his thoughts, because he thinks that what he's seeing in Shane's fond expression is mirrored on his own face.

"It's nice," Shane says, his hand still warm on Ilya's hip, "being here with you."

Ilya nods, his mouth doing something that attracts Shane's attention.

"It is." Cupping Shane's face, Ilya drags his thumbs over the freckles on his cheekbone.

It's a little bit ridiculous that even after all this time, Ilya can't get enough of Shane's freckles. Sometimes he tries to count them, and he's never succeeded, but that's okay, just means he'll have more time, more excuses to keep looking.

"You are so beautiful," Ilya says, a little boldly here in their little bubble next to the pool table in a pub surrounded by their teammates.

Pink floods Shane's cheeks, but he meets Ilya's eyes. "Shut up."

"Is true. Sometimes I look at you and my breath goes," and then he mimics losing his breath.

Shane's eyes dip to his mouth again, and then his hand pulls Ilya's hip closer when he kisses him a little less chaste than before, because their tongues touch.

"No, seriously, get a room."

Troy stands on the other side of the table, slightly flushed, possibly from the half empty pitcher he has in his hands.

He nods to the pool cues in their hands. "You about done?"

"Why, who are you playing?" Ilya lets his hand fall from Shane's cheek only to run it down his back and settle it in the back of Shane's pant pocket.

Troy nods towards the bar. "Hazy's getting more beer, but then I'm kicking his ass."

And then he stumbles taking a step closer to the table, the beer in the pitcher almost spilling over. It makes Shane laugh, a sound that vibrates through Ilya's chest where Shane is leaning.

"You're a mess, Barrett. Where's your man?"

Ilya had seen Harris earlier, had seen him and Troy standing close by the bar.

"Talking to Haas and Chuck." He frowns at himself. "Theo. He's talking to Haas and Theo."

Ilya spins around. "Theo is here?"

He had met the guy inside the Centaurs' mascot a few times, and every time had been more entertaining than the last. For a guy in control of a giant beaver costume he was surprisingly uncoordinated out of it. But clumsy limbs aside, Theo was a great guy. Funny and talented, young and ambitious.

"I'll go say hi, you stay and watch Troy make a fool of himself." Shane kisses his cheek, pats his chest and takes the pitcher out of Troy's hand before leaving them.

"Why are you so drunk?" Ilya crosses his arms and watches Troy. He can't remember ever seeing him this messy. His hair has dried, falling into his eyes. His cheeks are flushed, a crease between his brows revealing that he's almost too drunk to stay focused.

Troy shrugs. "'M just happy."

Ilya watches him more closely but can't detect a lie. Just a mid-twenties guy with a lot of money to drink beer for.

"Good," Ilya relents, beginning to pick up the scattered balls and gathering them into a triangle. "Happy is a good look on you."

"Likewise."

Ilya looks up to find Troy looking at him, his eyes swimming but nonetheless serious.

On its own volition, Ilya's gaze finds Shane. He's at the bar now, talking to Theo (who thinks he's being subtle the way his and Luca's sides are pressed close, but Ilya files that for later.) Shane is laughing at something Theo tells him, his head thrown back.

And then his eyes lock with Ilya's across the room. And he winks.

Happy is a good look on him, too.

*

The light that explodes behind Ilya's eyes is unwelcome. Even with his eyes closed the room starts to spin. "Close the curtains! My eyes are burning!"

There's a chuckle somewhere in the room, but Ilya's too busy burying his head into the nearest pillow. Then the bed dips and a cold hand lands on his shoulder.

"Don't you think you've slept in long enough?"

For a man who had been sloppy drunk on tequila the night before, Shane sounds almost as bright as the light lingering on the inside of Ilya's closed eyes.

"Shut up," Ilya grumbles and throws out a blind hand to reach for the blanket. "Why are your hands cold?"

Shane's other hand joins his first in a place no cold hand should be.

"Fuck off!" Ilya shouts, sitting up in defeat. It's an instant regret when the room spins.

"Woah there," Shane chuckles, gripping him around the shoulders to steady him. "How much did you drink last night?"

Last night they hosted their first Halloween party as a couple. It had been fun, and it had been a relief to have Shane here with him. They'd had all their friends here, their teammates and some of the training staff, and everyone had been dressed up.

There had been a lot of alcohol, courtesy of the younger players who are all bad influences on the older players who still think of themselves as the younger players. Ilya had been drinking and he'd been delighted to see Shane drinking and letting go. He'd realized that he'd never seen Shane do shots, and it had been *a sight*.

He'd been loose enough to not care about an audience when he had taken a shot off Ilya's collarbone, licking salt off Ilya's skin and biting into the lime wedge stuck between Ilya's lips that had, inevitably, led to them making out like teenagers in the kitchen.

But now Ilya sighs, palming his forehead and leaning forward to keep the nausea at bay. "Too much probably. Not good with the pills."

He's only been taking his antidepressants for a few months, and they're both still learning to navigate what that means for their diet and lifestyle.

"Shit." There's no hint of teasing in Shane's voice now. "That was really irresponsible of us."

"Mhm," Ilya grunts. "Doctor said it might have negative effects, that I might feel worse."

Shane's quiet for a beat, then his cold hands find their way to Ilya's forehead. The chill is a blessing on his aching head, and Ilya sighs, leaning in to the touch.

"How do you feel right now?"

Ilya laughs, but then he groans. "Super hungover. Your hands are cold."

"I took Anya out for a walk," Shane says, and kisses his temple. "Let me make you something to eat, and then we can just stay in bed all day?"

Ilya nods meekly. Then Shane kisses his cheek and leaves the bed.

"There's a glass of water and Aspirin on the table there," Shane says before leaving the bedroom.

"I love you!" Ilya calls after him, immediately regretting the volume of his own voice. Wincing, he reaches for the water and the painkillers, downing it all in one go.

Anya must have heard him, because it doesn't take long before she's by his side, tail wagging, tongue lolling out of her mouth. She sits politely on the floor next to their bed, and after a quick glance to the door, Ilya reaches for her and makes room for her in the bed.

"Quick, before Shane gets back." He cuddles her to his chest, enjoying her soft and warm body against his own aching one.

He must have fallen asleep again, because the next thing he knows is Anya wriggling away from under him. He protests, but then Shane climbs in and takes her place.

"I've got PB and J, some Nutella, and cream cheese and cucumber. No crusts." Shane holds out a plate for him, and when they've arranged themselves with their back to the headboard, Ilya grabs for a Nutella.

"You did not have to cut off the crust. I am not 5."

"Sometimes you are."

"Hm."

They eat in silence, the only sounds coming from Anya pacing the floor, and the TV showing reruns of American sitcoms on low volume.

*

"Before I do this, I need you to know that I have always loved you."

Shane whips his head around just in time to see Ilya jump over the boards and onto the ice. The cheer in the arena is deafening when Ilya does his warm up lap, and Shane follows him with his eyes.

The sight of Ilya on ice will never not be the best sight ever, and sure, he sees him on ice almost every day.

But there's something different about today, about the circumstances of why Ilya is on the ice in the first place.

This is their first All-Stars weekend as a married couple, and unlike their everyday job, this weekend they're competitors. Rivals.

Like in the good, old days, Shane thinks. But then he thinks that there aren't any good old days anymore, not when today and tomorrow are better than the old days simply because they're married.

And now Shane watches Ilya take his position at the starting line and watches his expression change from cocky entertainer to determined skater.

They've entered the fastest skater competition, just like last year, because Ilya wants revenge. He's convinced he'll be the fastest skater this year because Shane is no longer on that high performance diet.

The horn sounds and Ilya takes off. He's extremely fast, his thick thighs working overtime to get him forward. When he rounds the corners, Shane holds his breath, hating himself a little for being so worried. They've done this for ages, this year is no different.

Except that when Ilya comes back, having beaten Shane's time by .2 seconds, he leans in to plant a kiss on Shane's hair to disguise the sweet nothings he whispers in his ear.

"Good job, baby," Shane says after, voice low and just for Ilya, because he knows what the pet name does to him. And, if he's being honest, to himself, too. Ilya's eyes are dark and dangerous.

(The first time Shane had called him "baby" had been an accident (actually it hadn't, Shane had been thinking about trying it out, to see what it did.) He'd been out of his mind with arousal, Ilya's mouth sucking a mark into the nape of his neck, his hands firm on his hips. He'd been pinned to the wall, Ilya fucking him into the bathroom tile when he'd opened his mouth to urge him on.

"Harder, baby," he'd panted and then gasped when Ilya had bitten his neck. He'd moaned, the sound echoing loudly over the sound of the shower spray.

"Baby," Shane had repeated and had been rewarded with Ilya thrusting harder into him.)

Now, a few months later, they're so lost in each other they don't notice they both lose to some rookie from Seattle. But maybe it's okay for them to take a step back and let newer talent take the heat for once.

*

"Do you want Mom or Dad?"

Ilya looks up from his Switch. He'd been engrossed in an intense rentnegotiation ith Tom Nook. "What?"

"Do you want Mom or Dad? For the family trip?"

Ilya frowns. "What are you talking about?"

"The family trip!" Shane looks at him from where he's sitting at the dinner table with his laptop open. "You know, the thing the league does every year where they invite players' parents on the road, usually somewhere south, and we hang out with them in between games?"

Ilya is vaguely aware that this is a thing both the Bears and the Centaurs have done in the past, but he usually mentally checks out. Why should he care about family, when both his parents are dead?

Swallowing, Ilya shrugs. "I never paid much attention."

Shane's eyes soften behind his glasses. The light from the laptop makes him paler than usual, his freckles standing out. Ilya reaches for him.

"Tell me about this family trip." Ilya beckons him over and Shane obliges.

Sitting down on the couch, he wraps Ilya in a hug, resting his head atop his soft, curly hair.

"I used to bring Dad along, because that's what they did in Montreal. Some of the guys didn't bring theirs, and now I realize it must have been strange for them. Family is hard, and maybe some of them didn't have great relationships with theirs."

Ilya hums, closing his eyes, touching his hands to Shane's resting on his chest.

"Troy actually took it up with management, asking them to allow moms or other guardians on the trip."

"Good. Troy's father is an ass."

Shane chuckles and kisses Ilya's temple.

"So do you want Mom or Dad as your parent for our roadtrip to Florida?"

A lump rises in his throat and he tries to swallow. The implication that he needs Shane's parents to stand in for his own hurts a little, but that's not fair to Yuna and David.

Over the past four years, Shane's parents have been just as much his own as they have been Shane's. He has way more good memories with David than he ever could have hoped to have with his own father.

And Yuna. Ilya doesn't think he could've ever hoped for a better mom than her. The few happy memories he has of his own mother have been tarnished over the years, washed out so

they're nothing but vague sensations of feeling happy. But Yuna is kind and gentle, and more than once she's called him her favorite son.

"Do you think David would be okay with wearing a Rozanov jersey?"

Shane smiles against his temple. "I think he'd be honored to."

Ilya grins. "I am the favorite son after all."

"You are not!" Shane pinches him in the side, and then they're wrestling.

And like always, wrestling leads to kissing, and then Shane's pants are off.

*

Ilya has known for a long time that he wants kids, plural. He's not sure if it's a response to having a shit brother himself, but he wants a kid and he wants that kid to have a sibling that doesn't suck.

He thinks about raising a son, thinks about the expectations society has to boys and remembers how he was raised and how his brother was raised, thinks about the traditions that comes with raising boys. Then he thinks of his legacy and of legacy players, of the pressure and expectations that come with that. With raising a boy in the hockey community and the way he'll be expected to pass on his talent to a boy with his name on his back.

It gives him anxiety to think about, so he tries not to think about it. Tries not to want it too much, either. To want a boy in 15, 20 years to have Rozanov written on the back of his jersey as he gets drafted.

But it wouldn't just be Rozanov on his back, wouldn't it? It would probably be Rozanov-Hollander, or Hollander-Rozanov, or whatever name the boy decides.

And it gives him comfort to think that he won't be alone in raising this boy. He'll have the competent hands of not only his husband but also his in-laws and the makeshift family he's acquired over the years.

*

They're on the back porch, packing away the things they'd set out for brunch. The weather is mild, the sun warm but the wind is chilly enough that they'd had to bundle up in fleece and windbreakers. Yuna and David had just left so now it's just the two of them, and Anya running around in the backyard.

"David fed her a piece of bacon," Ilya says as Shane loads plates and utensils into Ilya's hands.

"What?" Shane sighs. "He knows we're trying to teach her not to beg at the table."

"But she's such a sweet girl, so well-behaved."

"I know, but rules are rules."

"So bossy," Ilya mumbles and walks into the house to the kitchen.

Shane watches him go, shamelessly checking out his ass in the joggers he's wearing.

"I think you like it," Shane calls after him before collecting the rest of the things and following him inside.

They work quickly to clean up and pack away leftovers before grabbing more coffee and going back outside. Ilya grabs a tennis ball and some other toys for Anya.

It's a day off from the rink, and usually they'd spend a day like this inside in bed. But ever since starting the process of adopting, they had realized they needed more grown up downtime activities. Shane had made solid arguments that "multiple orgasms" wouldn't look great on their application.

So now they spend their downtime doing stuff like hiking, brunching, and playing with their dog.

"Here girl, fetch!" Ilya coos and throws the tennis ball into the back of the yard.

Shane sips his coffee, watching Anya search for the yellow ball. The sun is warm on his face.

"Today is my parents' wedding anniversary." Ilya says it so casually, as if it's something Ilya has just realized.

Shane looks at him then, unsure what to say. And then Anya comes back and demands Ilya's attention, dropping the tennis ball at his feet.

Crouching down, Ilya rubs her head, kisses her between her eyes and throws the ball again. He doesn't get back up.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Shane reaches down and squeezes his shoulder. He leaves his hand there, feeling the warmth from his neck.

"Don't know what there is to say. Just today, a long time ago, they got married."

Anya comes back with the ball, refuses to let it go, and makes Ilya rub her belly before letting it drop out of her mouth. Tongue lolling, she gets up and Ilya throws the ball.

"She's insatiable."

Shane smiles. "Big word."

"Had to learn it," Ilya says and rises again. "You are insatiable, too."

Shane shrugs. "Like father, like daughter." Ilya leans in and takes Shane's mouth in a deep kiss.

They break apart and Shane leans his forehead on Ilya's temple.

"Do you think they would have liked me?" Shane asks after a while of enjoying Ilya so close.

Ilya chuckles and wraps an arm around Shane's shoulders. "My father not so much. But my mother would have."

Ilya talks about his mother more and more, something Shane pays rapt attention to. He enjoys watching him smile fondly when he remembers things Irina Rozanova said or did.

"She was so kind, I think she and Yuna would have been good friends. But she would probably beat her at Yahtzee."

"You beat her at Yahtzee," Shane reminds him, patting him on the chest.

"Like mother, like son." And then Ilya kisses him again, marveling that it still hasn't gotten old.

Shane's mouth on his still makes him the happiest he's ever been.

*

It's one of those nightmares where Shane is aware it's a nightmare, but where the only thing he can do is to ride it out. Honestly, the nightmare's not too bad, it's just that it's apparently the end of the world and he's watching a countdown on live TV.

Ilya is there, too, somewhere out of reach, and it's the panic that courses through his body that's the most unsettling. The knowledge that his best friend, the love of his life, is nowhere to be seen in this alternate reality where the world is ending in 30 seconds.

And Shane knows, because, again, he's aware this is a fragment of his sleep deprived imagination, that it doesn't matter, that he'll see Ilya again when he wakes up.

But he's so upset, so thoroughly panicking that he won't get a last glance, a last smile, a last and final kiss before -

He wakes up, heart pounding, body frozen and tense. He's on his stomach, breathing hard, struggling to make sense of where and when and how. He senses he's alone which doesn't help to calm him down. No warm body to press against, no warm neck to breathe into.

He sits up quickly, tries to look for light in the darkness, but the bedroom is dark and quiet, save for the light that slips in through the window curtains. Shane knows that outside the moon shines, casting its pale light onto the river and painting the outlines of the trees in the backyard.

Shane leaves the bed, goes to the ensuite to wet his face with cold water. Then he buries his face in Ilya's towel, doesn't care that it's still damp and probably a week overdue for a wash. It smells like Ilya's cologne and it calms his frantic pulse and the beating of his heart.

He walks downstairs and into the living room. The TV is on, volume off, which momentarily causes Shane's panic to spike, but it's just the sports channel showing reruns of old documentaries at this hour of the night. The blue light from the screen casts shadows into their living room and Shane sees the backlit figure of his husband leaned back on the couch. His curly hair sticking up in wild directions.

"What are you doing up?" Ilya asks quietly, not moving to watch Shane come closer. Shane's glad he's heard him, he wasn't sure how to make his presence known without causing mayhem.

"I had a nightmare about you, and I wanted to check up on you. How's it going?" Shane lowers himself into the couch, sitting close but not close enough to disturb the tiny body resting on Ilya's bare chest.

Maya's been with them for a few weeks, and she's finding it difficult to sleep through the night which is something Shane's mother and their pediatric nurse have told them is completely normal for her age.

"Is fine, she thinks hockey is boring, falls asleep instantly." Ilya yawns then and Shane looks at him.

Ilya's eyes, hidden behind a pair of blue-light glasses that Shane finds unfairly sexy, are glued to the TV, his face lit up in pale blue light. His beard has grown beyond its usual lazy stubble, making him every bit as stunning and handsome. They're both getting older, and Shane can't wait to see their age in the gray hairs of Ilya's beard.

"Too bad her parents are both hockey players then," Shane murmurs and gently touches Maya's curls, her cheek, and her chin.

Her mouth is closed around a pacifier, her cheek resting on Ilya's chest. She's an odd contrast to the bear tattoo she's facing, but Shane finds it a beautiful thing. His hand trails over her back and over Ilya's hand which he grabs, curling his fingers around Ilya's.

"She's so tiny," he whispers. Ilya squeezes his fingers as best he can, hums in agreement. Then he snorts, mumbles "look," and Shane draws his attention to the TV screen.

They're showing the documentary of them, of their rivalry before the public knew the truth. It's funny, sometimes, to be reminded where they've come from and where they are now. So Shane scoots closer, rests his head on Ilya's shoulder and feels Ilya place a kiss in his hair. It doesn't take long before Shane falls back asleep to the sound of his husband's and his daughter's breathing.

*

When he wakes up, he's on his side on the couch, a blanket over his shoulders. On the chaise lounge in front of him, Maya watches him with her big, curious eyes, her mouth busy with the pacifier.

"Hi there baby girl," Shane croaks and leans up on one elbow. He smiles down at her, touches her cheek gently with a finger. It's soft and smooth and Shane blames the bright, early morning light on why his eyes well up.

Maya's pacifier falls out of her mouth when she giggles and grins up at him, her smile so wide it reveals a few teeth growing out of her gums.

"Big smile," Shane chuckles, his heart lurching when she reaches for him.

Sitting up, he pulls her into his lap so they can look at each other. "Where did Papa go?"

"Papa went to go make coffee," comes Ilya's voice from the kitchen. And then he rounds the couch, setting two mugs on the coffee table before sitting next to Shane. He leans over and kisses Maya's cheek before kissing Shane's lips. "Did you have a good sleep?"

"I did, sorry for falling asleep on you."

"You know I don't mind." Ilya strokes Maya's hair and cheek before tickling her stomach. She giggles and grabs on to Ilya's hand, her small fist closing around his thumb. He kisses her hand.

Ilya makes a struggling sound and leans into Shane. "I love her so much already, Shane."

"I know," Shane sighs and grabs Maya's other hand. "I didn't think it was possible, but I think I might even love her more than you."

Ilya gasps exasperatedly, making Maya giggle. "You take that back. Don't worry, Mayenka. Dad is only teasing."

The nickname falls off Ilya's tongue with such ease and finesse that Shane almost doesn't notice it. It makes him smile.

"Did you have a nickname? Growing up?"

Ilya looks at Shane, pensive. "My mother called me Ilyusha when I was very young."

"That's a nice name. Ilyusha," Shane repeats in fluent Russian.

Ilya grins. He takes Maya off Shane's lap and points to the coffee on the table. "Drink your coffee, Dad. Papa needs a nap soon."

The coffee has gotten a little cold, but that's okay because soon Maya is back in Shane's arms and Ilya's kissing his cheek before heading up to bed.

Anya comes in from the backyard then, a chew toy in her mouth. She looks around, most likely looking for Ilya.

"He went to bed," Shane says to her, momentarily wondering when conversations with dogs and babies became his daily life.

She seems to make a quick decision, dropping the toy and trotting over to Shane and Maya on the couch. She sniffs curiously at the child in Shane's arms, and then licks her face making Maya giggle and grab for her. But Anya runs off and up the stairs, very likely into bed with Ilya. Shane allows it.

"Just you and me, baby girl," Shane tells her and wipes the dog spit off her face. "What do you wanna do? Wanna help Dad do laundry?"

She makes a noncommittal noise when Shane stands and walks to the kitchen.

"Let's get you some breakfast, too."

*

"You should get one," Ilya smirks before biting his nipple.

"What?" Shane gasps.

"A tattoo. Right here." He bites down on the side of his chest, then soothes it with his tongue.

"Why?"

"Would be sexy," Ilya breathes into his ear before nipping the lobe, tugging at the hoop Shane hasn't ever bothered to replace. "Like this ring. Or your chain."

He dips down to mouth at Shane's neck, scraping his teeth gently over his clavicle. Shane's hands are spread wide across Ilya's warm back, their legs tangled under the sheets.

"What would I even," Shane gasps out between bites to his neck, "get?"

Leaning on his forearms, their noses touching, Ilya fixes his gaze on Shane. His pupils are blown wide, his cheeks pink, his forehead a little sweaty. Ilya grins.

"Whatever," Ilya bends and kisses him on the side of his mouth, "you," on his upper lip, "want," and then on his lips.

Shane deepens the kiss immediately, their tongues tangling and Shane's fingers gripping Ilya's hair, pulling him closer until he almost can't breathe.

*

Years later, when Maya is in their lives, he has her birthdate and birth flower tattooed on the left side of his ribcage.

Next to the sweet pea, he has a honeysuckle done in the same minimalist style, a flower Ilya kisses with so much reverence it takes Shane's breath away.

*

Christmas that first year with Maya is a whirlwind. With a baby already crawling and a dog up to no good now that there's a smaller companion, something is always crashing. Either Maya bumps her head on some furniture, or Anya's tail wags into one of the decorations, or Maya pulls on the Christmas tree to get Anya a toy in the shape of a Christmas bauble.

"Ilya, I need you to take her outside. Mom and Dad will be here soon, and we haven't set the table." Shane's uptight attitude has made a return, something he isn't proud of but also something he can't control.

He pulls Maya away from the Christmas tree in the corner and assesses the damage. It's not too bad, but it's not as orderly as it had been that morning.

They've invited Shane's parents as well as Troy and Harris for Christmas Eve dinner, their first as a family. Shane knows that once Troy and Harris bring Chiron, their living room will be a lost cause and that it doesn't really matter. But he's spinning out of control.

"Sweetheart, breathe." Ilya takes Maya from his arms and puts her in the playpen they've installed.

Wrapping his arms around Shane, Ilya spins him around and hugs him from the back. "Look."

And Shane does look. Because when he ignores the broken decorations and fallen baubles, he sees the living room for what it truly is.

It's lived in. Maya's playpen, the happy sounds she makes, the Christmas tunes playing vaguely in the kitchen and the crackle of the fire. Anya's bed by the fireplace and her toys in the corners of the room.

Shane puts his hands on top of Ilya's resting on his stomach, letting his pointer finger touch the ring on Ilya's hand. He breathes deeply.

"Thank you," Shane leans back into his touch.

Ilya kisses his temple and rests his cheek there. "When do we have guests?"

"Any minute now." Shane eyes the clock.

Then Ilya walks them to the hallway and stops at the door into the kitchen.

"What are you doing?" Shane smiles when Ilya turns him around and tips his chin up with his finger.

"Mistletoe," Ilya grins, tilting his head up where, true enough, a mistletoe hangs.

"Cheesy," Shane just manages to get out before Ilya kisses him deeply, with tongue and passion.

Later, when Yuna and David have gotten their pictures of Maya dressed in her finest in front of the Christmas tree, they get her into something less decorative and allow her to play around with the dogs.

Harris is deep in conversation with David, and Yuna and Shane are in the kitchen, so Ilya steals a moment for himself on the back porch. It's dark and cold, the stars visible in the sky. He says a quiet prayer for his mother, kisses his crucifix and lets it fall back under his dress shirt.

The door behind him opens and the dogs come running. They take off into the back yard, chasing each other.

"Great party, man."

Troy comes to stand next to him, wearing his coat.

Ilya smiles. "Thanks."

"Maya is adorable, she's such a charmer."

"She is. We got lucky."

Troy nudges his shoulder into Ilya's. "You guys are great parents."

"Hm," Ilya huffs. "How is married life?"

Troy chuckles and tips his chin into the collar of his coat, his ears no doubt going red. "It's amazing. Harris wants kids now."

That makes Ilya laugh and he throws an arm around Troy's shoulders. "I'll give you the number of our case worker."

They're quiet for a beat, watching the dogs tirelessly running around.

"You once told me, that family can be hard," Troy says quietly, his eyes facing forward.

Ilya remembers his first attempt at making Troy feel welcome, at making Troy feel a part of the Centaurs organization.

"But this family," Troy says and lets it linger. The meaning isn't lost on Ilya. "This is easy."

Ilya squeezes his shoulder and lets his arm fall away. "My brother in Russia is a dickhead, but you're not so bad."

Troy laughs and turns his head away to keep Ilya from seeing him wipe tears away. But Ilya sees and he smiles.

"There you are." The door behind them opens and closes and then Harris is wrapping his arms around Troy. "What're you talking about? Why are you crying?"

"I'm not crying," Troy snuffles, which makes them all laugh. "It's nothing. You're looking for us?"

Harris pats his cheek and kisses him. Then he looks at Ilya.

"Shane's putting Maya to sleep, and I think we should head home. We need to be at my parents' place in the morning for breakfast."

Ilya wraps them both in a hug. "Thank you for coming, and thank you for the present for Maya."

They collect their dogs, and Ilya says goodbye to Troy and Harris at the door before running upstairs to find Shane in the nursery with Maya in her sleep clothes.

"Papa is here," Ilya coos when he walks over to them. "How is my Mayenka, are you ready to sleep?"

"I think she is," Shane chuckles. "She can't keep her eyes open."

Ilya kisses her forehead. "Did you have a good first Christmas?"

She just looks at him, her eyes barely open and yawns.

"I think that's a yes."

They put her down in her crib and leave the door open a little.

In the hallway just outside her room Shane takes a deep breath and leans back against the wall. He looks exhausted but there's a smile on his face, and Ilya knows he's more happy than anything else he could possibly feel at the moment.

Trying and failing to resist temptation, Ilya leans in and kisses him briefly. Their noses brush when Ilya pulls away, their lips still touching when he whispers. "Best Christmas ever."

Shane nods and cups his scruffy cheeks, pulling him closer still. "Best Christmas ever."

*

"Dad."

Shane blinks awake again, this time on his side, Ilya's arm slung over his waist, nose buried in his neck. The room is a little brighter, and the door is open, letting in sounds from a TV, the kitchen, and one of Anya's chew toys.

Maya stands in the doorway, one hand clutching a toy otter, the other on the door handle. Her unkempt curls unruly on top of her head just like her papa's.

Smiling, Shane lifts up onto his elbow, Ilya's arm falling off his waist, setting off the motion of him rousing from sleep.

"Hey baby girl, good morning." Shane pats the mattress next to him and Maya skips into their bedroom and jumps onto the bed, her small knees almost hitting Shane where it hurts.

"Say good morning to Chuck, Dad," Maya pleads, holding up the otter for Shane to kiss. The otter is the same they brought to meet her for the first time four years ago, and it shows. But nonetheless, Shane obliges his daughter and places a closemouthed kiss on the otter's slightly crusty face.

"Good morning Chuck, did you sleep alright?" Shane asks, fully serious which makes Maya giggle. Behind him Ilya presses his face into Shane's back, kissing his skin, his stubble scratchy.

And then Ilya's chin is on Shane's bicep and Maya lights up at the sight of her papa. They repeat the process of Ilya kissing Chuck good morning, speaking gently with Maya about her morning, about how Grandma and Grandpa made her pancakes which they ate *in front of the TV*.

Shane smiles and stops himself from saying something along the lines of "that'll only happen with Grandma and Grandpa" because he knows once retirement hits for both him and Ilya, they'll probably loosen up their parenting and allow breakfast and TV on regular weekends and not just during the summer.

"I have to pee," Maya says then, with all the confidence of an almost-five year old, and hops off the bed and bounds out the room.

Shane rolls onto his back, gazing up at Ilya who immediately leans down to kiss him - morning breath and all.

"Good morning, my love," Ilya whispers, pressing one more kiss to Shane's cheek before his fingers drift into his hair, wiping it out of his face.

"Good morning," Shane whispers back, one hand cupping Ilya's jaw, his thumb grazing the stubble that's gone more gray over the years. He shakes his head, incredulous. "How are you so hot?"

That makes Ilya laugh, which is still one of Shane's favorite sounds even after all these years.

"I could ask the same of you, Hollander." And then Ilya buries his face in the crook of Shane's neck, hugging him close. "Are you ready for one more of these?"

And Shane's not entirely sure what he means. One more season of long days, late nights, or hectic weekends; of training, parenting, living? One more morning of grandparents fitting into your morning routine, eggs and protein shakes, of the latest episode of Bluey? One more kid to wake you up in the morning, one more kid with needs beyond what you can give them but you're willing to try everything in your might to give them your undivided attention and love?

Whatever Ilya means, Shane's answer will always be "yes."

End Notes

Kudos and comments are encouraged and much appreciated!

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