Soulmates (or Shane and Ilya winning the Love Game)

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Soulmates (or Shane and Ilya winning the Love Game)

by Justaromanticfool

Summary

He knew it stung Ilya, people not understanding. It stung him too. Because to Shane, loving Ilya was like breathing and also like standing on solid ground after years of drifting. It flooded him and steadied him at the same time. It hurt, knowing the world reduced them to a rivalry, a strange story, a piece of scandalous gossip when what they had was so much more. He wanted to be by Ilya's side for everything, the mundane, the bright and the hard. And maybe not everyone who was in love felt like this, so overwhelmed and so steadied all at once. But Shane did. And if love was a contest, well… he is the winner.
Best couple. Number one. Most epic love story ever.

Or 4 times Shane told people him and Ilya were practically soulmates and the 1 time the universe told him.

Notes

This is my first fan fiction ever. This is mostly the result of me barely getting sleep these last few days as I moved to a new city where I don't know anyone to start a PhD at the small age of 23 - so yes I have been feeling overwhlemed. I am a romantic at heart and I have always wanted a sappy fic with soulmates Hollanov. I also love Shane Hollander and will always be his biggest defender. Maybe I am projecting myself onto him a bit but his character has always resonated with me with all his earnestness, anxiety and imperfections. So enjoy, english is not my first language and my brain is sleep deprived so be gentle with me. Also, like Shane, I am a slut for praise so feel free to post your comments !

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: Scott, Kip, Wyatt and Troy : better than a Stanley Cup

It was the Centaurs' first match against the Admirals since Shane joined the team, and he and Ilya had gone to the Kingfisher with Scott and Kip after the game. Tonight they'd been joined by Troy and Wyatt too, riding the high of a hard-fought win.

Shane was buzzed enough to be leaning into Ilya, though he'd never admit it. Two beers weren't much, but it was enough to loosen him up and from the way Ilya kept throwing him those sly looks, Shane knew damn well he'd been caught out. He buried his face briefly against Ilya's neck, grounding himself in the familiar scent. Ilya, without missing a beat, pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

"This is still so weird," Scott muttered, eyeing the quiet affection between the newlyweds.

The table laughed, and Shane flushed under the sudden attention.

"You get used to it," Troy said. "Mostly we're just grateful to Shane. Rozanov's chirping's gone down, like, fifty percent now that he's busy following Hollzy around like a duckling."

That set everyone laughing again, except Ilya, who mock-gasped, hand over his chest.

"Excuse me? I am captain. I do not follow. I lead."

"Right into Shane's lap," Wyatt shot back.

"Still the weirdest love story I've ever heard," Scott added.

That wasn't something they hadn't heard before. People never quite knew what to do with them as a couple. Shane understood why. He'd always been a private person, used from a young age to keep his life locked down, like showing too much of himself might cost him everything. And despite appearances, Ilya wasn't much different. Sure, he loved to post pictures of them online, never missed a chance to kiss or tease Shane in public. But the soft, vulnerable side of him, the one Shane loved most, was shown to only a lucky few.

"We are not weird, Hunter. We are best couple. Number one," Ilya said with a mock pout.

But Shane felt Ilya's hold tighten around his waist, saw the shadow flicker in his husband's eyes. He knew it stung Ilya, people not understanding. It stung him too. Because to Shane, loving Ilya was like breathing and also like standing on solid ground after years of drifting. It flooded him and steadied him at the same time. It hurt, knowing the world reduced them to a rivalry, a strange story, a piece of scandalous gossip when what they had was so much more. He wanted to be by Ilya's side for everything, the mundane, the bright and the hard. And maybe not everyone who was in love felt like this, so overwhelmed and so steadied all at once. But Shane did. And if love was a contest, well… he is the winner.

Best couple. Number one. Most epic love story ever. The thought came in Ilya's smug, childish voice, and Shane almost laughed out loud. Then he frowned. Where was all this sappy shit coming from? Maybe he had drunk more than he realized.

"Shane?" Wyatt's voice broke through his thoughts.

He blinked. "What?"

"We're talking about what we'd say to our younger selves, if we could," Wyatt explained.

How the conversation got there, Shane had no idea. Probably Scott being nostalgic because of his looming retirement, the Ilya voice in his head helpfully provided.

"Man, imagine someone telling you you're going to be a three-time Stanley Cup champion when you grow up!" Troy teased.

"And that you are going to marry a hot Russian who is even better than you at hockey," Ilya quipped instantly, grinning around the rim of his glass.

"Little Hollander would be so confused," Kip laughed.

Shane thought about it, again strangely emotional. What would he say to his younger self if he could? First thing, he'd hug that kid. Because if adult him had enough anxiety to fill a stadium, little him had been worse. Shy, wound tight, always feeling a little different and on the outside. Hockey had been everything since he was four, his excuse for why he didn't need friends, why it didn't matter that other kids laughed or played without him. He'd told himself he could make friends later, when he made it to the NHL. But the truth was, he'd never expected to make real connections, platonic or romantic. He'd been too controlled, protecting himself with discipline and routine, too afraid of emotions that might get messy.

And then he'd found Ilya.

"I think," Shane started, his voice quieter now, "I would tell him how brave he is to go after what he wants. And that I know he's working so hard to be the best at hockey, and that I know he loves the game so much."

Shane thought back to the shadow in Ilya's eyes when Scott had made his comment, and shifted, looping his arms around Ilya's neck, tilting his head until their eyes met. Ilya was already watching him fondly but his grin faltered under the intensity of Shane's gaze, his expression flickering into surprise, then something more uncertain and softer.

"I would tell him all the sacrifices he made will pay off. Because one day, hockey will give him the love of his life. And the feeling of loving him and being loved by him will trump winning the Stanley Cup any time."

Shane barely managed to finish before Ilya kissed him. The kiss was fierce and embarrassingly emotional. Shane kissed back without hesitation, a quiet sound escaping him as he encouraged Ilya closer. See? We ARE the cutest couple. Best love story, Shane thought.

When they finally pulled apart, the rest of the table was staring at them like, in various shades of disgust.

“Unbelievable,” Scott groaned.
“Did he just say love beats the Cup?” Troy demanded.
“Fuck you, Shane,” Kip said, shaking his head.
Wyatt stood, already heading toward the pool tables. “Okay, soulmate hour is officially starting. I’m out.”
The others muttered their agreement as they got up too, leaving Shane and Ilya behind.

Ilya smirked after them, then turned back to Shane, eyes still bright and a little wet. “See? Even they know. We are number one couple.”Shane rolled his eyes, but couldn’t stop grinning as he leaned in to kiss his husband once more.

Chapter 2: Harris, Bood and Centaurs fans : the freckles that got me my husband

“Okay Shane, you ready for this?” Harris asked.

Shane nodded. He was sitting down on a stool in front of a white background with a Centaur logo on it. He could see Ilya and Bood talking quietly in the corner, Bood’s presence explained by the fact he was scheduled to film after Shane, and Ilya’s presence explained by the fact he could not miss any opportunity to fluster Shane.

The Centaurs were filming a video answering fan questions about themselves. They were doing a lot of that stuff this season. Shane personally thought it diverted attention from what mattered most: hockey. But Ilya had explained to him, “Fans don’t only care about hockey skills, Hollander. They want to know if we’re nice guys.” He then smugly affirmed that his delightful personality had partly boosted ticket sales since he joined the Centaurs. Shane had replied in kind, teasing that maybe Ilya had to make up for a lack of skills with his big personality, which Shane could not relate to. Ilya had then tackled him to the couch and whispered something about showing him what else was “big" about himself.

The questions started harmlessly: “How does it feel to play for your hometown team?” “What’s the difference in play style between Montreal and Ottawa?” “Breakfast?” “Cat or dog person?” Harris had to silence Ilya’s genuine outrage on behalf of Anya when Shane attested he was a cat person.

“Okay, next question: this person asks, what do you think is your best attribute?”

Shane visibly flinched. Complimenting himself was not his forte. He could hear Ilya and Bood snickering and glanced at them. Ilya caught his gaze for a moment and silently mouthed, “Your ass.” Shane groaned, feeling his face heat immediately, a low blush spreading from his ears to his neck.

“Ugh… I’ve never really thought about it,” Shane started, his voice hesitant. “I guess… my freckles? I didn’t always like them. Neither of my parents have them, so I always thought it was a bit strange that I did. Freckles tend to be inherited from a parent, right?”

He paused, realizing he was leaning toward a biology lesson rather than answering a fan question. Harris nodded encouragingly, giving Shane a gentle smile. Shane exhaled, shaking his head slightly at himself, and decided to go with the flow.

“Yes. So… my freckles. Ilya once told me they were stunning, that they took his breath away… ever since we met for the very first time,” Shane said with a shy, fond laugh, glancing around for Ilya. “So I guess I was born with freckles… because they’d get me my husband.”

Shane’s eyes landed fully on Ilya, and he froze. His husband’s face was bright red and barely containing his sappy grin. Bood, completely unbothered, was snapping a photo at full

volume, clearly enjoying the moment, and glanced up at Shane with a teasing grin.

Harris chuckled softly, shaking his head. “Oh wow, I did not expect that. Who knew our captain was so… mushy?”

Bood smirked and raised his voice to say, “Hollander, I think the question was about your best attribute as a player, but thanks for… that. Cute bit.”

Shane groaned, rubbing a hand across his face. He could feel the heat in his cheeks. Well, at least he’d managed to fluster his husband. And maybe he’d never live this down but somehow, that was fine.

Chapter 3: The Internet : a decade-long love story

Shane had never been the jealous type. Well, that was partly because he was competitive and knew no one could even come close to him for Ilya. Yes, his husband had slept around a lot before they became a couple. Yes, Shane had far less experience than Ilya. But he understood that for Ilya, physical intimacy had been a form of solace, a way to grasp for connection while finding it impossible to be fully, authentically himself with anyone else. Shane knew he was as special to Ilya as Ilya was to him. Still, Shane was human, and humans, he was learning, could be possessive and sentimental creatures.

After their relationship was revealed and the news of their marriage broke, a few of Ilya's past flings had reacted online. Most of it was harmless and humorous: women congratulating Shane for being the one to make THE Ilya Rozanov settle down. A running joke emerged, with many expressing gratitude for having experienced Ilya before he was officially off the market. Shane knew his husband was skilled in bed, but he didn't particularly enjoy the public reminders that others had once benefited from that … expertise.

Shane was lounging on the couch while Ilya was at a meeting at the rink performing his captain duties, when he saw it. A model Ilya had slept with a few times in Chicago was mouthing lyrics to a song while applying makeup. Taste by Sabrina Carpenter, it was indicated in the top corner:

"I heard you're back together and if that's true
You'll just have to taste me when he's kissin' you
If you want forever, and I bet you do
Just know you'll taste me too"

The caption read: "When the playboy hockey player you were seeing finally settles down, but you know you are unforgettable."

Logically, Shane knew it meant nothing. Ilya had stopped his casual affairs months before first coming to the cottage, the moment he had admitted to himself that his feelings for Shane were permanent and something he no longer wanted to escape. Shane scoffed. Ilya had been his for nearly seven years before they became officially exclusive. Little did she know, she was the one who had tasted Shane on Ilya's lips, he thought petulantly.

Scrolling through the comments, Shane was amused, and a little smug, to see others shared his perspectives:

"Girl, get up. Latest news: Ilya has been obsessed with Shane's freckles since they met… The boy was down bad from the start."

"Imagine thinking you could compete with THE Shane Hollander."

"As an Ottawa fan, Rozanov's obsession with Hollander is peak romance, I was told by my teenage girls. My daughters became hockey fans just from watching how he gazes at him when Hollander scores."

"Who are these two? Hockey players? I might have to start following hockey now."

A notification popped up,distracting him from his online scrolling, "You have a memory. This day 12 years ago." It was a photo of the set from the CCM shoot Shane did with Ilya before their rookie season. He smiled, remembering it was where it all started. Maybe supermodel Kylie from Chicago would be less smug if she knew that.

Feeling bold and childlish, and because he had promised himself to be more open about his love for Ilya, he dug through his gallery for the shot of him and Ilya giggling at the CCM shoot, foreheads touching. Ilya had sent it to him last year; it had briefly been his phone background. Shane then opened Twitter, looking for a recent, rather presumptuous tweet about himself he has seen a few days ago.

When he was done, he stared at the post, thumb hovering over the "post" button. The photo was the unedited CCM picture—two boyish rookies laughing, a song from his shared playlist with Ilya, playing softly in the background (Soft Spot by Keshi).
His caption: "12 years ago today. To the person at CCM who had the brilliant idea of launching a joint ad campaign with me and Ilya: thank you. May God bless the dinosaur that died to make the fossil fuel that became gasoline in the car that took your mom to the hospital to give birth to you. 12 years ago, the day my husband kissed me for the first time."

It was a little unhinged, Shane thought. He was 90% certain his friends would text him, concerned for his sanity. But he was even more certain it would make Ilya laugh and happy, maybe even blush, and that was worth any minor embarrassment. He took a breath and posted it.

Unsurprisingly, it sort of broke the internet.

"12 years ago? Before their rookie year ? Trust Shane Hollander, golden boy, to have an epic love story."

"😤 This is peak soulmate energy. How does it feel to be God's favorite ?"

"The funniest part? Every woman who had a fling with Rozanov now knows Shane was always on his mind 😭"

Friends and teammates jumped in. Privately, they were annoyed that Bood had won the long-running bet on how long Shane and Ilya had been seeing each other. Publicly, they played along with the jokes.

Wyatt: "Yo, call Netflix—enemies-to-soulmates romance incoming."

Harris: "🥹 Cutest love story ever."

Bood: "Thanks for the thousand bucks, boys 🫡"

Dryksta: "The power couple of hockey, everyone."

Hayden: "Proud to have been the (reluctant) sidekick in that romance movie of yours."

And then there was Ilya. He saw the post while walking to his car after the coaching staff meeting, curious about the sudden flood of Instagram mentions. Surprised to see Shane had posted something so audaciously out of character, his first reaction was a free, genuine laugh, his heart swelling with delight. He knew Shane had been making an effort to be more open, but this… this was provocative and deeply revealing. Then, a flicker of concern crept in. Had something happened ? He knew media speculation about his past could sometimes make Shane tense, even if he insisted it did not bother him. Well, if Shane was feeling territorial, Ilya thought, the best course of action was to head home immediately and remind him, in no uncertain terms, exactly who he belonged to.

Giving one last fond look at the photo of their younger selves, Ilya left two comments as unhinged as Shane's post, because why shouldn't they be loud and obnoxiously happy about their love ?

"We are number one couple 😉"

"Moya lyubov ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️ My heart (and one other part of my body) knew instantly. Sorry my stubborn head needed time to catch up. I love you, always."

Chapter 4: Arthur Pike : What's a soulmate ?

Chapter Notes

> This fourth part is a bit longer. It is really dialogue heavy, blame it on me missing my family and especially my baby nephews and niece. It is also a sort of love letter to Shane Hollander who I think does not deserve the hate he gets. Yes, he is less emotionally intelligent compared to Ilya but I don't think he is that oblivious especially to the pain of those he loves. He literally suggested to Ilya to seek professional help but got shot down, guys ! Not his fault he is not a mind reader and did not want to push. So here I hope you enjoy this chapter despite its sappiness, haha. The next one will be split in two. Part one will be published late today or tomorrow, I think :).

It was summer, and Ilya and Shane were at the Pike house for a lazy, sunny afternoon by the pool with Hayden, Jackie, and the kids. After swimming for the better part of an hour, Ruby and Jade declared they'd had enough and wanted to throw a dance party. Ilya, of course, jumped at the chance and was now in the backyard twirling the girls around like a man possessed and not a hockey player recovering from bruised ribs, the girls' shrieks of laughter carrying all the way inside.

Shane, meanwhile, was in the living room with Arthur, carefully building a Harry Potter lego set. The boy had slipped quietly up to his mom when the girls started blasting music and asked if he could go inside instead. Shane had been quick to offer his hand and his company.

He always had a soft spot for Arthur. The boy reminded him of himself sometimes, easily overwhelmed, shy, always trying not to be a bother. It couldn't be easy, Shane thought, having two big sisters who were both whirlwinds of energy and extroversion. Hayden sometimes admitted he worried about Arthur, about his quietness and the way he struggled to make friends. Shane always tried to reassure him: *Look at me. I had the best parents in the world, and I still ended up an anxious mess. The fact you notice already makes you a good dad.*

Right now, Arthur was working quickly, small fingers snapping together what looked like the Weasleys' chimney. For his age, he was surprisingly fast, like his mind was always three steps ahead. Sometimes Shane wondered if Arthur's quietness was due to too many ideas, too much imagination, all folded neatly inside. The boy was always drawing, coloring, building. Shane felt suddenly emotional at the thought of watching him grow up, find himself. He wanted to be there for his favorite nephew no matter what life threw at him. Shane reached out, brushing a gentle hand through Arthur's damp hair. The boy looked up at him, soft smile tugging at his mouth.

"Uncle Shane, you can go join the party if you want," Arthur said softly, not quite meeting his eyes. "I'm good on my own."

Shane shook his head immediately, his voice warm. “What? No, buddy. I’d rather be with you.”

Arthur’s fingers fidgeted with a stray lego piece. “I know I’m no fun,” he whispered, so quietly

Shane almost didn’t catch it. Shane’s chest tightened. He carefully set the lego aside, pried the piece from Arthur’s small hands, and tugged him into his lap on the couch. He tipped Arthur’s chin gently with his fingers. “Arthur. Look at me.”

The boy blinked at him, hesitant. "Who says you are no fun ?" Shane asked, dreading the answer.

"The other kids at school. But it’s okay, Uncle Shane ! I don’t mind !" Arthur looked at him with big, earnest eyes, like Shane was the one that needed comforting.

“Arthur. You are plenty of fun,” Shane said firmly, holding his gaze. “People just… have fun in different ways. Me? I have the most fun when I’m reading books about hockey, doing yoga or hiking. While your Uncle Ilya thinks fun means dancing like a maniac and making a lot of unnecessary noise.” That earned him cute giggles from Arthur.

“And guess what? I have so much fun with you.” Shane leaned forward until their noses bumped, lowering his voice into a mock whisper. “Don’t tell your sisters, but… you’re my favorite.”

Arthur gasped, eyes wide, and then burst into a delighted laugh, clapping his hands over his mouth like he wasn’t supposed to let it escape. Shane couldn’t help laughing too, hugging him tighter.

“I mean it,” Shane said more softly now, his tone steady and sure. “I love you. And when I was a little boy like you? I was the quiet one too. I liked being on my own. But then I found my people. Your dad, for one, he’s my best friend. He was so stubborn about being my friend, even when I thought I didn’t need any. He made a place for himself in my life and never left. And then your Uncle Ilya came along. And he loves me just the way I am. The shy, quiet, sometimes boring version of me.”

Arthur studied him with wide, thoughtful eyes, then tucked his face briefly against Shane’s chest before admitting, muffled, “I feel alone sometimes.”

Shane’s throat tightened. He pressed a kiss to the top of Arthur’s damp hair, rubbing a soothing hand over his back. “I know, buddy. I really do. But you won’t always feel that way. You’re going to find your people too.”

Arthur leaned back a little, frowning in thought. “My soulmate ? Like Uncle Ilya is your soulmate?”

Shane blinked, then laughed in surprise, the sound caught between amusement and disbelief. “Where did you learn that word?”

“The other day. I heard daddy tell mommy, uncle Ilya was your soulmate.” Arthur’s little brow furrowed, like he was trying to remember exactly. “He sounded… like he was complaining a bit.”

Shane chuckled, shaking his head and ruffling Arthur’s hair. “Yeah, well… he’s right. Uncle Ilya is my soulmate. That means we were meant to find each other. That we’ll support each other and push each other to be better. That we’ll love each other forever, no matter what.”

Arthur’s eyes widened, voice hushed with wonder. “Do you think I’ll have a soulmate?”

“Oh, baby. I’m sure you will. One day you’ll meet someone who makes you feel safe and happy, like you’ve known them forever. And then you’ll never feel alone again.” Shane kissed the boy’s hair, then leaned back with a playful grin. “And until then? I can be your person, okay? Uncle Ilya will just have to share me with you. He’ll deal.”

That got Arthur giggling again, wiggling in Shane’s lap as Shane tickled his side.

“I love you, Uncle Shane,” Arthur whispered, earnest and a little shy, placing a tiny hand on Shane’s left cheek.

Shane hugged him tighter, whispering back, “Oh, buddy. I love you too.”

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At the kitchen sink, Hayden gripped the counter and tried to steady his breathing. He’d gone inside to check on Arthur and Shane when he overheard his son’s small voice: *I know I’m no fun.*

The words had cut straight through him.

His boy was lonely. And Hayden, his father, felt like the shittiest dad in the world. He wanted to storm into the living room, scoop Arthur up, and promise he was the most perfect boy that had ever lived. Instead, he stayed rooted to the spot, tears pricking his eyes.

But then he’d heard Shane’s voice. Soft, firm, coaxing Arthur’s laughter out, wrapping reassurance around wounds Hayden hadn’t even realized his son was carrying. Arthur reminded Hayden of Shane sometimes. Quiet, anxious, carrying more inside than he let on. And right now, Hayden couldn’t imagine anyone better than Shane to make his son feel seen.

So he’d left them to it, slipped into the kitchen, and promptly started sobbing.

“Hayden?”

He turned. Ilya stood in the doorway that linked the backyard to the kitchen, holding an empty glass. He looked, well, horrified.

Hayden let out a watery snort, which only made Rozanov’s eyes widen further. The man looked fulled on panicked now.

Hayden tried to explain, but instead another wave of tears broke loose. Ilya swore under his breath, shut the door firmly, and snatched a napkin off the counter. He came over, pressing it into Hayden's hands, his big palms settling awkwardly but steady on Hayden's elbows.

"Pike. What is happening? Tell me. We deal with it." His voice was clipped, urgent, like he was bracing for the worst.

Hayden shook his head and took a breath, forcing himself to calm down. "It's okay. I'm okay. I just—I overheard Arthur telling Shane that kids at school said he's no fun. That he feels lonely." His throat closed again, fresh tears burning. Hayden willed the tears away, full out sobbing in front of Ilya Rozanov was not something he wanted to do, like ever, but the tears kept coming.

"Oh… Arthur," Ilya said quietly, and to Hayden's surprise, his own eyes were glassy. For some reason, that almost undid Hayden more. *See? His boy was such a good boy, he was amazing. Everyone loved him.*

"It's okay," Hayden tried to explain, swiping at his face. "Shane was wonderful with him. Had him giggling by the end. But I just… I feel like I failed him somehow."

He pulled two beers from the fridge and handed one to Ilya, desperate to anchor himself in something normal. Ilya cracked his open, took a long swig, and then said, slow and deliberate.

"Shane is… gentle soul. He hurts when people hurts. He would move heaven and earth to make someone feel better."

Hayden stilled, the words hitting deep. It was so plainly but beautifully said.

"You are not bad father, Pike. I don't know if Shane told you… but my father was not a good man. Shitty father." His voice went blunt, but his gaze softened. "Your girls, so loud, so confident. Arthur, yes, quiet, maybe different. But very creative. He is not afraid to be different, even if different is lonely sometimes. That takes strength. And when children are strong enough to be themselves, that means parents did something very right. I think."

Hayden's throat tightened again. He hadn't expected this raw honesty from Ilya. Years ago, he'd given the man hell when he first found out about him and Shane. But over time, Rozanov had surprised him, revealing this strange mix of blunt edges and startling wisdom.

"Thank you, Ilya," Hayden said softly, lifting his beer in a small gesture of sincerity.

Ilya's mouth curved into something wicked, eyes glinting. "Please tell Shane I comforted you. Me playing nice will make him horny." Hayden groaned, dropping his head into his hands on the counter. He took a long pull from his beer, choosing not to dignify that with a response.

Rozanov smirked, satisfied, but Hayden noticed the way his eyes flicked toward the living room, where Shane's low voice still carried faintly. Something gentler softened his expression.

Hayden leaned back in his seat at the counter, sighing. “You know… it was so hard to become Shane’s friend.”

That earned him a curious tilt of Ilya’s head, like he wasn’t sure where Hayden was going with this but encouraging him to go on.

Hayden gave a small, wry smile. “I think it took me two months to get him to have a conversation with me that wasn’t about hockey.” Both men snorted at that.

Ilya didn’t interrupt. He just stood there, giving Hayden his full attention, eyes locked in the way he sometimes looked at Shane, like he was hungry for every scrap of history, every piece of Shane’s life that had existed before or without him. Hayden had always thought, maybe cynically, that it was impossible for anyone to wholly know another person. But Rozanov? He looked hell-bent on trying.

Trying to show his gratitude, repay Ilya for comforting him, even if awkwardly, Hayden went on.

“He was so shy off the ice. Reserved to the point of invisible sometimes. Or maybe like he wanted to be invisible when he wasn’t playing hockey.” Hayden’s voice dipped, almost guilty. “Sometimes, I feel bad because I never even entertained the idea that he might not be straight. I’d just… always ask him about girls. I know better now. And I’ll do better.”

He stared into the bottle in his hand, turning it slowly. His voice softened. “I didn’t think about it enough, what it must’ve been like for him. Keeping so much of himself locked away. I hate it, sometimes, that someone as good, as wholesome as him had to live like that for so long. Afraid to just… be.” He cleared his throat, pushed past the lump.

“When he told me he was gay, I had this awful thought that his obsession with hockey, his drive to be the best, was just… a way to guarantee people would love him anyway. Celebrate him for something, even if they thought he was different. And I swore to myself, Shane was going to have the most amazing man. If I had to go out and find him myself, I would.”

Hayden huffed a laugh, finally daring to glance at Rozanov.

“And then he told me about you.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched, but he didn’t speak.

“I was scared,” Hayden admitted. “I knew Shane wasn’t naive, but still. You had this… image, you know? The playboy, larger-than-life Ilya Rozanov. I thought you’d hurt him. But more than that, I thought the two of you were impossible. And all I wanted was for Shane to have something nice and peaceful. I wanted him to like, get to exhale. He deserves that more than anyone.” His throat was thick, but he pushed through it. “So maybe I’m a few years too late saying this. But thank you. For loving him. You’re a good man, Ilya. I know your story has not been entirely peaceful but it certainly has been epic. And honestly, you kind of worship the ground he walks on. Shane is lucky to have you. He told Arthur earlier that he found his soulmate, someone who loves him even when he feels a little different, a little

boring. And all I can hope is that Arthur will find someone one day who loves him as sincerely, as wholly as you love Shane."

For a moment, silence hung heavy between them. Ilya blinked a few times, jaw tight, something raw flickering across his face. Then he let out a short, incredulous laugh.

"Pike… are you pregnant? Or dying?"

Hayden groaned, tipping his head back and taking a long gulp of beer. "Jesus Christ, Rozanov."

But the corner of his mouth lifted, and when he looked back, Ilya's grin had softened. He cleared his throat. His voice was quieter, almost rough.

"Thank you. You're a good friend. I'm glad Shane has you too."

"Don't worry about it. But I should warn you… you've got competition. I heard Shane tell my son he'd be Arthur's person until he found his own. Uncle Ilya will just have to deal with it." Hayden teased.

Ilya let out a low chuckle as he started toward the living room. "Please. He is already Ottawa's sweetheart. What's one more competitor compared to an entire city?"

Hayden snorted and tossed his crumpled napkin into the trash.

"Arthur Pike! I hear you trying to steal my man!" Ilya's voice rang out, exaggerated and playful, followed by the unmistakable sound of a raspberry being blown, probably against Arthur's stomach. Hayden paused in the kitchen doorway, smiling as his son's laughter mingled with Shane's. The sound filled the house easing the last of the heaviness in his chest.

Tomorrow, he decided, he and Arthur were going to have a boys' day. They'd buy legos, eat greasy hamburgers, maybe even paint their nails if Arthur wanted to. And Hayden would tell him how much he was loved and what a perfect little boy he was.

Chapter 5: +1 - What do you wish for ?

Chapter Notes

> Okay, here is part one. I wrote this story only so I would get to write this part, so I am feeling so nervous right now. Trigger warning : a lot of fluffy, (unrealistic some might say) soulmate shit incoming 🫣. Part two will mostly be in Ilya's POV so that will be a bitch for me to write.
>
> I don't want to spoil too much so read the end notes for more !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the off-season. Shane was over at his parents' house, sorting through some foundation logistics with Yuna and now lounging in the living room with his dad, catching up while his mom prepared iced tea.

"Have you decided where you're going for your trip this summer?" David asked.

"Yeah, actually! We're going to Italy. Milan, Florence, Rome, Venice… and a short hike in the Dolomites." Shane grinned, leaning back. "I can't wait."

"You're staying in Rome?" Yuna came in just then, balancing a tray with three glasses and a pitcher of iced tea. "Sweetheart, you already visited when you were little."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Mom, I was seven. I don't remember much. And actually we picked Italy because Ilya told me one of his only happy memories with his whole family was a trip to Rome when he was a kid. Funny enough, he was six or seven too, so who knows, we could've been there at the same time."

"Oh honey, that's so lovely," Yuna said, setting down the tray. She beamed, proud that her boy was so romantic.

"Well, it's a packed holiday, but I'm sure you've planned every detail," David teased, standing to fetch something from the corner cabinet.

He returned with a stack of photo albums. "Actually, this reminds me. We found these while cleaning the attic. Figured you might want to take them. I know how much Ilya loves seeing your baby pictures."

Shane flushed instantly, much to his parents' amusement.

"You cleaned the attic without telling us? We would've helped."

"Shane," Yuna scoffed. "Do you think we're old? We can clean a room, mister."

“Actually,” David cut in, flipping pages, “I think the Rome pictures are in here somewhere… Let’s see… Your seventh birthday. Ah, here we go, Italy !"

Shane leaned in, curiosity piqued. The photos were a time capsule: his parents looking impossibly young, himself small and freckled.

"Here is us at the airport,” David said, chuckling. “You were sulking because we wouldn’t let you bring your hockey gear. We tried to explain you wouldn’t be playing hockey in Italy, but you wouldn’t listen.”

“Aww, and you can still see the tear tracks on his cheeks in this one,” Yuna cooed, sliding closer to point.

They turned the pages together. The Vatican. Shane with gelato smeared on his chin. The Colosseum.

“Oh, look, the Roman Forum!” Yuna pointed. “You were so impressed by the size of it. You asked your father if this was where the 'old-time people' played hockey, and you were very concerned about where all the ice had gone.”

Shane groaned, but he was smiling. “Sounds about right.”

“Oh, and this one!” Yuna suddenly exclaimed, her tone shifting to fond amusement. “The fountain tantrum!”

Yuna pointed at a photo. There he was, perched on the edge of the Trevi Fountain, grin wide enough to squish his freckles. A woman sat a little distance away, laughing as she looked at him. She had long brown curls, hazel eyes, sharp brows.

“The what?” Shane frowned.

David laughed, a warm, familiar sound. “You don’t remember? The Trevi Fountain. You saw people tossing coins in and decided you had to make a wish. But we were out of coins. You sat down right there and just started wailing like the world was ending.”

Yuna nodded, her eyes crinkling. “You were so dramatic. And then this kind woman came over. She didn’t speak much English, but she smiled and gave you two coins. Said you could have two wishes. I was so grateful I almost cried.”

“Yeah,” David added, tracing a finger over little Shane’s grinning face in the photo. “You stopped instantly. Threw one coin, squeezed your eyes shut like the fate of the universe depended on it. Then, you handed the other coin back to her, saying she should make a wish too.”

Shane’s pulse kicked up, looking at the woman in the picture, a flicker of memory surfacing: the cool stone under his legs, the roar of rushing water, the thrill of getting to make a wish, certain it would come true.

Yuna’s voice softened. “She asked what you’d wished for, and you told her, ‘I’m going to play in the National Hockey League.’ She laughed, said you looked so determined, she

believed you."

"And then," David said, searching for the words, "Oh, the funniest thing actually happened, you asked her what her wish was. And she said…"

"She said she has a small boy just like me," Shane whispered, finishing the sentence without meaning to. "Loves hockey. She wished he'd make it to the NHL too, and maybe one day we'd meet."

David blinked. "That's right." He looked at Yuna. "Do you remember what he said after?"

Yuna nodded, smiling at the memory. "At the hotel you told us that now you had to make it to the NHL, because two people had wished for it at the magic fountain. That the universe didn't have a choice. You were such a little smarty pants."

"It's such a sweet story," Yuna went on, shaking her head. "It's funny we never really talked about it before. It was just one of those cute vacation memories."

The room went quiet, Yuna and David smiling faintly, nostalgic about a little Shane who still believed in magic.
Not that they loved the pragmatic grown-up version of their son any less. David's smile faltered first when he realized Shane had gone pale, his eyes fixed on the picture, tears spilling silently down his cheeks.

"Shane," David said with sudden alarm. He shifted closer. "What's wrong, son?"

Shane couldn't speak. The pieces were crashing together in his mind with the force of a tidal wave. He shook his head, a quiet, overwhelmed sound escaping him as he folded into his father's side. David's arm came around him instantly and Yuna dropped to her knees in front of them, her hand coming to rest on Shane's knee, her face etched with worry.

For a long moment, Shane just let the tears fall, the weight of the impossible pressing down on him. Then, with trembling hands, he fumbled for his phone. He scrolled through his gallery, his vision blurry, until he found it: a picture Ilya had shared only with him. A young boy, small and fierce on skates, being steadied by his mother, her face bright with love and pride as she looked down at him.

The same woman. The same kind eyes, the same curls.

He held the phone up, his hand shaking so badly his mom had to steady his wrist to see.

Yuna gasped, her hand flying to her mouth. Her eyes, wide and disbelieving, darted from the phone screen to the photo album and back. "Shane… is that… is that Ilya's mom?"

He could only nod, his throat too tight for words.

No one spoke. The silence in the room felt profound, sacred. David's hand still stroked Shane's hair, his own eyes glistening. Yuna, still crouched before them, laid her head gently on her son's lap.

Then, David let out a watery, incredulous laugh. He cupped the back of Shane's head and pressed a kiss to his temple."Well," he said, his voice thick with emotion, "I always knew you were destined for great things, son. But this… this is something else altogether."

Shane let out a shaky laugh through his tears. But inside, he was reeling. He'd always thought their love was once-in-a-lifetime. He joked they were soulmates, but never truly believed in fate. He believed in work; he worked for everything, fought for it. And he and Ilya had fought like hell for what they had.

But in the safety of his parents' embrace, holding the proof in his hands, Shane finally let himself truly believe. That the universe had offered a shining red thread of possibility in a crowded piazza. And Ilya and Shane had been brave enough to pick it up and to choose each other, again and again, through years of secrecy and fear and doubt.

Chapter End Notes

While I do believe in fate (I love the movie Serendipity) I also think love in all its forms,especially loving yourself and others, takes hard work. I did not want to discredit the challenges Shane and Ilya went through (anxiety, internalized homophobia, depression …) to reach their "happy ending". The inspiration for this story came from a social media post I saw, where a woman discovered that her late mother had once been her boyfriend's kindergarten teacher and so they actually got to meet. I was so moved by this idea of a connection that transcends time, and I thought, how wonderful would it be if Ilya's mom had gotten to meet Shane, just once, and somehow gave her blessing? From that thought, this story was born.

Chapter 6: +1 - What do you wish for ? (Part 2)

Chapter Notes

> Okay, here it is, the last chapter of my first ever fanfic !!! It was certainly not easy and I feel like there is so much room for improvement but well it feels good to share it with you ! Thank you for all the comments, I have been so busy this week but reading them always gave me a boost of energy. Okay, enjoy <3 !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilya was sitting in Bood's backyard, a beer in hand, half-listening while Lucas and Wyatt argued animatedly about comic books like a pair of overgrown nerds. He let the chatter wash over him, slightly amused, but mostly just glad to see Lucas loosening up these days.

To be honest, he kind of missed his husband. Shane had gone to visit Yuna and David that morning, planning to be back by mid-day so they could head to the BBQ together. But a text had come instead: ***Staying longer than expected, helping dad and mom with the attic. I will meet you at Bood's later. Love you*** ❤️**.**

It shouldn't have been a big deal. Ilya didn't need to be glued to Shane's side 24/7. But the text had sent a jolt through him for one simple reason: Shane was lying. Just last weekend, Ilya had called David to ask if he could have Shane's anniversary gift delivered to their place, wanting to avoid ruining the surprise. David had agreed immediately, sounding a bit breathless. When Ilya asked if he was okay, David had said he was just tired from cleaning the attic all morning with Yuna. Ilya clearly remembered him adding that they were nearly done, going through the last of the boxes.

The lie was a small thing. Maybe insignificant. It was possible something in the attic needed fixing. But Ilya's mind, dramatic and treacherous, immediately spiraled into worst-case scenarios. What if Shane needed more space from him and didn't know how to ask for it?

The past three years had been more wonderful than Ilya had ever let himself imagine. Playing together, traveling together, living and training side by side. Winning the goddamn Stanley Cup together. Sure, they'd had to adjust, going from stolen summers and a few days a month to sharing every single moment. But they'd made it work, each carving out their own space. Ilya walked Anya, played video games with Wyatt, and even visited Shane's parents on his own. Shane took his solo runs, spent quiet afternoons reading, and diligently practiced his Russian. And always, after those small breaks, they came back to each other eager.

Truthfully, if it were up to him, Ilya thought they'd never do anything apart again. He smiled faintly into his bottle, thinking of how neither of them could seem to shower alone anymore. But the truth was, Ilya knew he was clingy. He would sometimes just find Shane reading and watch him, content to do nothing but stare. In public, his hand always found the small of

Shane's back, his shoulder, his hip, any point of contact to tether himself. This incredible, gorgeous man was his, and Ilya felt more in love every day. Touching Shane grounded him, even as he learned to temper the impulse, to respect the boundaries Shane needed. And Shane did need them. He was more reserved, more protective of the life they built behind closed doors. It wasn't that he loved Ilya less, it was just how he was built. What if Ilya's constant need for proximity was finally becoming too much? Shane had bent so far these past two years, pushing himself to be more open, more publicly affectionate. Ilya knew it wasn't easy. Shane's "golden boy" image already had people looking at him sideways for being with Ilya, the league's notorious playboy for so long. And Ilya hadn't helped, historically keeping his softer side hidden from the world, sharing it only with Shane and a few others.

But Shane had tried. That Instagram post before this season. God, that had been so un-Shane, it still made Ilya's heart thud when he thought about it. His husband, laying it all bare: that they'd been together, in some ways, since before their rookie years. It was outrageous and honest and absolutely terrifying for Shane to do. It had kicked up another storm of speculation about them, and he never wanted Shane thinking those grand gestures were the price of his love.

Because Ilya's love wasn't conditional. It was ridiculous, bigger than he thought any human could feel for another. They had two languages between them, but he'd never found words big enough for it.

"Rozanov, you're quiet." Wyatt's voice cut into his spiral, jolting him back to the present. His perceptive goalie eyes were watching him with a grin.

"What's with the long face? Are you sulking because Hollzy is not here yet ?"

"You kinda looked like a kicked puppy." Lucas added, snorting.

Ilya scoffed."Please. In any case, it's good to have time apart, it always makes things more…. eager in the bedroom." Ilya added, wiggling his eyebrows, prompting his two teammates to groan.

"Hi guys !"

If Ilya had any shame, he would have been embarrassed by how fast he straightened up, the grin that broke across his face entirely against his will. Shane was walking towards them, the sunlight catching in his hair. His easy smile softened into something more intimate the moment his gaze met Ilya's.

"Hollander, thank god," Wyatt declared. "Your husband's moping was bringing down the mood."

Shane huffed a small laugh at the teasing. He came up to Ilya, bending to press a quick kiss to his cheek before straightening. "Hi."

Ilya smiled up at him, helplessly sappy, and reached to lace their fingers together. "Hi, moya lyubov. How are Yuna and David? Were they disappointed their favorite son didn't visit?"

Shane smiled faintly. “Yeah, something like that. I’m gonna grab a chair.”

“What, no, sit here,” Ilya said, patting his thigh with a grin.

“Ilya, no. There’s no way we’d be comfortable in that chair.” He walked off before Ilya could protest.

When he returned, he sat a little too straight, shoulders a bit tense, Ilya noticed. He reached out, his fingers brushing Shane’s. A wave of relief washed over him when Shane’s hand curled around his, but the touch was fleeting. Shane pulled away a moment later to reach for his ginger ale, his eyes flicking toward the yard, avoiding Ilya’s gaze.

Ilya’s stomach tightened. “So, what happened with the attic?” he asked, aiming for casual.

“Oh. Just helping them sort through some old boxes,” Shane said, his tone forcibly light. He finally looked at Ilya, offering a small smile, but it didn't reach his eyes. It was then Ilya noticed the roughness in his voice, the tired shadows under his eyes. He looked the way he did after a brutal loss or like he had been crying recently.

Ilya’s heart squeezed. Something was very wrong. He burned to ask, to demand the truth, but he trusted Shane with his life. If Shane was hiding something, he had a good reason. A team BBQ was not the place to push.

“Okay,” Ilya said softly, forcing a smile of his own. He reached out and brushed his thumb over Shane’s wrist, a brief, tender touch. “We get food?”

Shane nodded quickly. “Yeah. Good idea.”

***

The afternoon drifted by in a haze of lazy heat and laughter, with the smell of grilled meat thickening the air. They mingled, Ilya laughing dutifully at Dillon’s stories about failed dates and enduring Dryksta’s music choices. From the outside, it was a perfect scene of team camaraderie. Inside, Ilya felt like he was holding his breath.

Shane was physically present, smiling and talking, but a layer of quiet separated him from the festivities, his mind clearly elsewhere. He conversed easily with everyone, except Ilya. Right now, he was deep in a conversation with Bood about the merits of different charcoal types. Ilya was horrified to realize his husband was actively avoiding him.

Annoyance prickled at the edges of his worry. What they had was solid. They could tell each other anything. After they got married, they had promised to be better at communicating, especially when one of them was hurting. Ilya’s own lies about his depression had nearly broken them. Suddenly filled with a sharp determination, Ilya decided he would get Shane and they would talk. Now. He splashed water on his face in the guest bathroom, dried his hands, and made his way back to the patio. He stopped just inside the sliding door, unseen, at the sigh of Shane and Bood still in deep conversation.

"You don’t think it’s too much?" Shane’s quiet voice carried from where he stood with Bood.

Bood chuckled. "You and Ilya? After everything you both went through? You deserve to be loud and in love. Relax, Hollander."

There was a pause. Ilya's breath caught in his chest.

Then Shane's reply, soft and contemplative. "Yeah." A small, shaky laugh. "You're right. Thanks, Zane."

Ilya turned away before they could notice him, his pulse stuttering. *Too much*. The words echoed in his head, confirming his fears. So that was it. Shane was feeling uncomfortable with how affectionate Ilya was in public, how much Ilya needed from him. Had he been forcing himself to be okay with it, pushing past his anxiety just to make Ilya happy? The thought made him feel sick.

As the sun dipped lower, people began to pack up amid a chaos of goodbyes and well-wishes for the summer. Ilya and Shane made their way to the driveway together, a heavy, unspoken weight between them. Ilya's heart felt like a stone.

"I had to park a bit farther away," Shane said, turning to face Ilya near his car.

Ilya just nodded, the lump in his throat making speech impossible.

Shane didn't leave, though. He stood rooted to the spot, swaying slightly. "I…" he started, looking suddenly overwhelmed.

Then, he erased the distance between them in one big step, linked his arms around Ilya's neck, and kissed him. Ilya kissed back immediately, one arm wrapping around Shane's waist, the other coming up to cradle his cheek. Shane was kissing him with a desperate, aching gentleness, alternating little nips at his bottom lip with deep, searching kisses that slid their tongues together. His hands caressed Ilya's nape, then drifted down to rest flat against his chest, right over his pounding heart. Ilya was stunned by the tenderness, relieved, and also very confused.

Several times, Shane pulled back only to tilt his head and dive back in, each kiss loving and full of unspoken emotion. Finally, they pulled apart, but remained wrapped around each other, foreheads touching. Both of them were panting, the world having narrowed to this single point of contact.

"Shane…" Ilya whispered, his voice fragile. "What is going on?"

He felt more than saw Shane swallow hard. Shane pulled back just enough to look Ilya in the eyes, his hand still resting on Ilya's nape. The setting sun cast a rose-gold hue across the sky, a slight breeze ruffling Shane's hair. With his rosy cheeks, sun-prominent freckles, and onyx eyes sparkling against the pink backdrop, Ilya thought his husband looked utterly ethereal.

"I'm sorry," Shane whispered. "I know I've been behaving weird. It's nothing to worry about." He took a shaky breath. "I have something to show you when we get home, okay?" He looked nervous, but resolute.

"Okay," Ilya agreed, his heart still thundering. Knowing Shane must be craving a shower after being out since 9 a.m., he added, "You go shower when we get home, and then we'll talk, my love." He leaned in for one more quick, reassuring kiss. "Go. We'll talk at home."

Shane offered a small, genuine smile, squeezing Ilya's hand one last time before turning to walk toward his car.

During the drive home, Ilya's mind was a chaotic whirlwind of Shane's tired eyes, the tender almost desperate kiss, and the conversation he overheard between Shane and Bood. He arrived first. Anya greeted him with a happy wag and Ilya gladly stopped to cuddle her and cooed at her. Her enthusiasm comforting. He then moved through the familiar motions on autopilot: feeding her, turning on a few lamps to push back the evening gloom. Needing to do something with his hands, he went to the kitchen and started unloading the dishwasher. He overheard Shane coming home, Anya's happy bark at seeing he was also back.

"I'm just going to take a quick shower." Shane shouted from the living room, making his way upstairs without waiting for an answer.

Trying to settle his nerves, Ilya also made his way to their bedroom and changed into a worn t-shirt and loose shorts. He made his way back and poured a glass of wine for Shane and vodka with ice for himself, carrying it to the living room before making himself comfortable on the couch.

A few minutes later, Ilya heard Shane's footsteps on the stairs. He appeared, freshly showered with damp hair curling at his temples, dressed in soft sweatpants and a Centaurs t-shirt. He smelled of clean seaweed soap. He looked more grounded, but a nervous energy still clung to him.

He gave Ilya a small, tentative smile as he entered the living room, but instead of coming to the couch, he walked straight past it and to the front entryway, where he'd left his keys.

"I'll be right back," Shane said, his voice a little breathless. "I just need to grab something from my car."

Ilya's brow furrowed in confusion. He'd assumed the "something to show him" was code for a difficult conversation. Not a physical object. He simply nodded, watching as Shane slipped back out the front door.

A moment later, he returned, carrying a large, old-fashioned photo album with a faux-leather cover.

"My parents found some childhood pictures while cleaning the attic last weekend." Shane said, smiling at Ilya.

"Tiny Shane pictures!" Ilya exclaimed, the giddy excitement in his voice momentarily cutting through the afternoon weirdness. He was helpless when it came to glimpses of a freckled, smaller Shane. He absolutely loved the proof that his husband's pout was a lifelong fixture, and he was endlessly thirsty for every detail of a life lived before him, wanting to love every version of Shane, even the ones he never got to meet.

Shane’s loud laugh at his reaction helped dissipate the remaining tension. He settled onto the couch, burrowing into Ilya’s side,a white envelope now also visible in his hand. Ilya instinctively circled an arm around his shoulders, pressing a kiss to his temple.

"I thought you wanted to talk," Ilya murmured.

"I did," Shane replied. He took a shaky breath, seemed to reconsider, then placed the album and envelope on the cushion beside them. In one fluid motion, he shifted, straddling Ilya’s lap.

Ilya’s eyebrows shot up, a familiar, teasing grin tugging at his lips despite his lingering worry. "Are we getting sexy instead?" He was, undeniably, glad to have a lap full of his husband.

"Shut up," Shane said, but there was no heat in it. He settled his weight more firmly, his hands coming to rest on the couch behind Ilya’s head. "I just… I need to be close to you, okay?"

The raw need in Shane’s voice sent a fresh jolt of anxiety through Ilya. His hands found their place on Shane’s waist, holding on. "What is happening, Shane? You are scaring me a bit." *Just tell me. Whatever it is, just tell me so I can fix it.*

"Oh, baby, don’t be. It’s—"

"I know I am too clingy!" The words burst out of Ilya, a preemptive surrender he couldn't hold back.

That stopped Shane cold. He blinked, then frowned in genuine confusion.

"What?"

"Is this why you lied? You needed time alone, right?" Ilya rushed on, the fears he’d nursed all afternoon tumbling out. "I overheard you with Bood. I know I can be too much, too affectionate, too needy. I never want you to be uncomfortable, Shane. I can be better."

Shane stared at him, utterly thrown, before his hands came up to cradle Ilya’s face, his thumbs stroking his cheeks. "What? No, Ilya, you’re perfect. Oh my god. Is that what you’ve been thinking?" His voice was laced with dismay. "This is all a big misunderstanding. Fuck, I’m so sorry I worried you like this."

The relief was so potent it left Ilya feeling shaky and off-balance. "Then why were you so weird today? And why lie about the attic? I know your parents cleaned it last weekend."

A sheepish smile touched Shane’s lips, his fingers now fiddling with the hem of Ilya’s t-shirt. "Fuck, I really messed you up, huh? I'm sorry I lied. The truth is, we found something that… shocked me. And then I had to run an errand." He gestured slightly with his head toward the envelope, his gaze steady and soft. "That’s what this is about."

"Okay, but…" Ilya started.

"Let me explain," Shane interrupted gently, his hands sliding from Ilya's face to his nape, holding his gaze. "Just listen, okay?"

Ilya gave a tight nod, Shane took a deep breath, shifting closer until their faces were mere inches apart.

"So we were talking about our upcoming trip," Shane began, his voice softer now, "and Dad remembered he'd found the photo albums from when we visited Rome when I was seven. We looked through them together." He shifted in Ilya's lap, his hands finding a steadying grip on Ilya's shoulders. "There was a picture of me in front of the Trevi Fountain. You know the one, where people throw coins and make wishes?"

Ilya nodded, a faint, fond smile touching his lips. "Da. I remember my mother telling me about it." The memory was hazy, softened by time, but the essence was there. "She went there one afternoon. Brought back ice cream for me and Andrei. She said she'd made a wish for me." He didn't mention the fight with his father that had prompted her walk, the tense silence that had hung over their hotel room. He focused on the good part, the part with his mother's soft voice and the sweet, melting treat.

"Well, we were there one afternoon," Shane continued, pulling Ilya back to the present. "And I really, really wanted to make a wish, but my parents didn't have any coins. I was so disappointed I sat down on the edge and started crying."

Ilya huffed a quiet laugh, imagining a tiny, distraught Shane.

"What, Hollander, you believed in magic wishes?" His voice undeniably fond.

Shane's smile was wistful. "I guess I did. I saw everyone else doing it, and it felt… important. My parents were trying to calm me down, but this woman… she approached me." Shane's gaze intensified. "She was kind. She didn't speak much English, but she smiled and gave me two coins. Told me I could have two wishes."

Ilya's breath hitched, just slightly. Two coins. The detail was too specific, a ghost from a story his mother had whispered at his bedside. '*I gave one to a little boy… he was so sweet, Ilyusha…*'

Shane's voice dropped to a near-whisper, trembling with emotion. "I remember being so excited. I wished, with everything I had, that I would become an NHL player. And I was so thankful, I gave the other coin back to her and told her she should make a wish, too." He swallowed hard, his eyes glistening. "She asked me what I wished for. And then I asked her for hers."

Ilya felt the world slow, the air growing thick. He couldn't look away from Shane's face, terrified of the hope that was slowly growing inside of him.

"And Ilya…" Shane choked out, a tear finally escaping. "She told me she had a small boy, just like me. He loves hockey, too. So she wished he would join the NHL, and that maybe, one day, I would meet him."

The air left Ilya's lungs. The world narrowed to Shane's face, to the tears tracking through his freckles. The memory of his mother's voice, sharp and clear now, '*He loves hockey just like you.'* echoed in his mind. It was impossible. It was a fantasy. To ask, '*Was it my mom?'* would sound insane. He couldn't even form the words.

"Shane," he whispered, the name a broken thing.

Shane, seeing the sheer, overwhelming shock on his face, slowly reached for the white envelope. He opened it and carefully slid out the photograph.

"It was your mom, Ilya," Shane said, his voice barely a whisper, shattered with emotion. He held it out. "I recognized her from the pictures you showed me."

Ilya's gaze dropped. And the world stopped.

There he was. A tiny, freckled Shane Hollander, beaming. And beside him, her face turned towards the boy with a look of such open, warm affection, was his mother. He stared, his mind refusing to process it. He didn't know how long he sat there, motionless, just trying to make the impossible image compute.

A sound tore from his throat, a half-sob, half-gasp of disbelieving laughter. His hands came up, trembling violently, to frame Shane's face. His thumbs stroked over the beloved freckles, the damp trails of tears.

"Chudo moyo," he choked out, his voice raw. "Moye chudo." *My miracle.*

He pulled Shane in, pressing their foreheads together, both of them shaking, breathing the same air. He repeated it against Shane's skin, over and over again, like a prayer.

"I remember she told me," Ilya whispered, the words stumbling out. "She told me she met a boy who loved hockey like me." He let out a wet, broken laugh.

Shane let out a watery sound of relief. "She did? Thank god. All day I've been thinking what if I was wrong, what if I hallucinated the whole thing and you'd be weirded out?"

Ilya kissed him then, how could he not ? Because ever since he was seventeen, Shane Hollander had felt inevitable. A force of nature Ilya was powerless to resist. And now the universe was screaming its confirmation, that their paths were meant to cross, their lives tied together before they even stepped on the same ice, blessed by the first person who had loved Ilya unconditionally. He tried to pour all of it, the awe, the devotion, the sheer, staggering *rightness*, into the kiss, raking a hand into Shane's damp hair and pulling him closer, deepening it until they were both breathless.

He pulled back, nuzzling their noses together, his voice a hushed, reverent thing.

"I love you," he said, voice raw. "I have always known you were the love of my life. I'm proud of us. We built this, we fought for it. But knowing she saw you… that she loved you, even for a moment… it's like she blessed us. Before we even met." His voice broke again. "It

is a confirmation of everything I feel in my soul. The two people I love most in this world… they found each other first."

He held Shane tighter, the photograph still clutched in Shane's hand between their chests, a sacred relic.

"I also made a smaller copy for you," Shane whispered after a moment, his voice steadier now, filled with a tender warmth. "So you can put it in your wallet. Keep us both with you."

Ilya's breath hitched. "You are the best thing in my life Shane.", he simply replied.

He glanced at the picture again and looked from the bright-eyed boy and his beautiful mother back to the man in his lap, the same freckles, the same determined heart, now looking at him.

He leaned in for another kiss, this one slower and deeper. When they parted, Ilya's voice was low, husky with a need that felt different tonight. More solemn.

"Shane," he started, uncharacteristically hesitant, face still pressed to Shane's, talking against his lips. "Can I make love to you?".

The question felt somewhat necessary.

"Of course." Shane sighed the words. "I'm yours."

Ilya stood, lifting his husband in his arms. He carried Shane upstairs, both murmuring soft endearments to each other, between kisses. And then, all night, Ilya gave Shane everything he needed, wanted, begged for. Each touch like a promise kept.

Chapter End Notes

Tada ! ps. : Shane and Bood conversation was actually about Shane wanting to ask Ilya to do a renewal ceremony with their own vows this time, and he was feeling nervous about it, fearing it would be too much.

End Notes

As I said, I am a slut for praise (and constructive criticisms)!

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