oh so fond

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/75065336.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Yuna Hollander, David Hollander, Zane Boodram, Troy Barrett, Wyatt Hayes, And the rest of the Centaurs, The Pike family
Additional Tags:	Fluff, Domestic Fluff, Hurt/Comfort, Angst and Feels, Anxiety, Minor panic attack, Non-Chronological Order, Time Skips, neurodivergence, Soft Hockey Boys, They're in love you're honour, and it's disgusting (but not really), fonding, 5+1 Things, can you tell how soft they are for each other, Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-01 Completed: 2025-12-11 Words: 16,052 Chapters: 6/6

oh so fond

by inyourorbit (atmospherex)

Summary

[fond] adj. : have an affection or liking for someone

> “I love our friends, but after a certain point all I want is to get away from everything and just come home to you. With you. Whatever, as long as it's just-” he let out a big yawn, eyes fluttering shut, “just us. That's home.” He whispered, nuzzling in closer.
> Ilya watched the slowing of Shane's breath, the rise and fall of his chest, the way his eyelashes caressed his cheeks and felt that warmth again, spreading from his finger tips to his toes, coiling through his stomach and taking root in his heart. This overwhelming fondness. He was so in love with this man, and he thought about how right Shane was, even as sleep was pulling him under, the way he could understand Ilya's emotions and put a name to them even when Ilya didn't know it himself.

Or:

5 times Ilya is fond of Shane and one time Shane is fond of Ilya.

Notes

They fond over each other equally ok! Because they are sappy gooey messes at heart, and are absolutely gone for each other. But I really wanted to write Ilya being soft for Shane over all his neurotic habits and tiny quirks (I love my little neurodivergent baby) because you know Ilya would be all sappy for his boy doing the littlest things (like folding his clothes before hooking up - I see you episode 1).

Disclaimer: I know nothing about hockey or Canada and my Russian is google translate level - this is pure self indulgence and fluff

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shane was sick.

His husband (Ilya still marvelled over that word sometimes; Shane was his *husband*) rarely got ill, making sure he always carried hand sanitiser on him and wiping down outdoor surfaces with anti-bacterial cloths before sitting down, forcing everyone else to wipe away any germs before they even looked at food. Ilya supposed he should be thankful, considering the last team barbecue where they had all scrimmaged around in the grass in a tug of war that turned into a wrestling fight before Bood yelled that the burgers were ready. He remembered Shane's horrified stare as a flock of hockey players barrelled towards the food table, mud on their cheeks and grass staining their palms, grabbing at patties and buns and whatever condiments they wanted to add.

“Oh my god,” he'd whispered to himself in disbelief and Ilya grinned from where he was towelling his hands dry (because he had sense, duh).

“Guys,” Shane had said, and his tone carried the rare command which made all the men snap their heads to look at him. Hollander had relaxed far more than when he'd first joined the Centaurs, but the others were aware that their co-captain could be strict at times and still remembered the 5 AM drills he put them through last playoffs. Ilya knew they loved him, it was present in the way they defended him on the ice (not that Shane couldn't hold his own, he was just never a player to get into stupid fights), how they hugged him in the locker room and teased him when they went out. But he also knew they admired his dedication, his passion and sometimes single-minded determination to win, it was just that sometimes it led to them being dragged along to yoga classes at the crack of dawn too, and they grumbled and whined but they would do it, for Shane. And also because Shane was probably right about the whole core strength thing, but no one would willingly tell him that.

“Guys,” Shane repeated slowly, hands on his hips (God, he was cute), “have any of you washed your hands?”

Comically, they all looked down at their palms and back up at Shane in sync, like little meerkats standing in a row. Shane raised an eyebrow and all the men mumbled something along the lines of “No” and “Sorry”, Ilya thought some of the rookies might have even said *Sir*. Shane hadn't even raised his voice, but it was like when a parent was disappointed in you for doing the same thing for the 50th time, and Ilya watched with amusement as they all trudged to the kitchen in single file.

“And don't forget to-” Shane started, but they were already toeing off their shoes at the back door, careful not to get mess onto Cassie's floors. “Huh,” Shane said to himself, a small smile gracing his face.

“Feeling better, Hollander?” Ilya said, pressing a kiss to the side of his head.

“Yeah, much. I just don't want them getting sick you kno- wait, have *you* washed your hands?” Shane said, glancing up at him. Ilya waved his fingers in front of Shane's face “I learnt a long time ago, *moya lyubov*”. Shane grinned and reached up to press a chaste kiss to his lips, and Ilya's heart did some weird flippy thing. “Is this because I washed my hands?” Ilya mumbled against his lips and Shane just whispered “Shut up,” and kissed him some more.

And now Shane was cocooned in the blankets, drinking the miso soup Yuna had brought over. Ilya had sat next to him, helping to gently shift him into a sitting position on the bed, fluffing the pillows up behind his back as Yuna ladled the soup into Shane's mouth. He had protested, mumbled something along the lines of “*Mom*, I can do it myself.” with bleary eyes and a pout on his face, but Yuna had merely hushed him and told her to let him take of her *baby boy,* while Shane had turned beet red (Ilya's favourite colour) and Ilya had bit his lips to stop a giggle from escaping. David made Ilya leave Shane's side “You can't be stuck next to him for 24 hours, son.” (It did something to Ilya everytime, being called that) “Come here and have a cup of tea with me.”

But instead of tea, David made them hot chocolate, dotted with whipped cream and marshmallows on top, a foamy concoction that warmed him from the inside out. Ilya let out an appreciative hum at the taste and David chuckled next to him on the sofa.

“Are you doing alright?”

“Me?” Ilya said, surprised “I am fine, it is Shane I am worried about; he does not usually get sick.”

“Looks to be on the mend though, doesn't have a temperature anymore, thankfully. But have you been taking breaks? Going out for walks?” Ilya made some noncommittal noise, and David looked at him over the tops of glasses in his patented *Dad Stare*.

“I have not been out much,” Ilya admitted, “I was scared Shane might need me.”

“Oh my sweet boy,” Yuna said, strolling out of the bedroom, carrying the soup bowl in one hand, while with the other she stroked Ilya's hair back from his forehead and planted a soft kiss there. “Shane will be fine. And we're just a couple of minutes away, you can always call us if you're worried, and we'll come over while you take a break, yes?”

“*Da*, yes.” Ilya murmured, leaning his head back into Yuna's soft touch for a moment before opening his eyes. “He finished the soup?”

“Mm, yes. Miso soup is his comfort food when he's sick, and he pretends to complain, but he loves being coddled when he's like this.” Yuna grinned.

“Oh yeah,” David chuckled “do you remember when he was younger, he would just stay cooped up in bed with the sniffles, waiting for one of us to find him and give him a hug?”

Yuna laughed and Ilya smiled fondly, thinking of a tiny Shane huddled in blankets.

Some time later Ilya said goodbye to Yuna and David, and made sure Anya was comfortable in her bed before making his way back to Shane. He stopped at the door and paused at the sight before him: Shane was covered in blankets, only his black hair and eyes peeping out, cuddling the pillow Rose had gotten them as a gag gift for dear life (it said Hollander's sexy boy toy in sparkly pink writing, and Ilya *knew* Shane secretly liked it).

The bed dipped as Ilya slipped in beside him, stroking his hand through Shane's hair gently. Shane made an appreciative hum, and the pillow was thrown across the bed (sorry Rose) as Shane slid closer to Ilya, dragging him down and wrapping his arms around Ilya's torso, before tucking his face into Ilya's neck.

“You okay, *moya lyubov*?” Ilya whispered gently, smoothing away the furrow between Shane's eyebrows, while the other hand cradled his hip. “Hmm, yeah.” Shane muttered, nuzzling closer, as if he was trying to burrow into Ilya's skin. Absurdly, Ilya thought that if there was a way, he would let him, let Shane seep into his bones, tangle with his soul, and keep him that way forever. Ilya continued stroking Shane's hair, while his other hand flitted over Shane's body in feather light touches: dancing over his freckles, tracing the shell of his ear, skittering down his arm. He thought Shane was asleep, but then Shane pressed his lips to Ilya's neck, his pulse point, and mumbled softly “Missed you, stay with me, please.” before wrapping around him tighter and dozing off. Ilya froze for a minute, just staring, feeling like an overflowing cup with this love, and warmth and *fondness* for the man in front of him. Eventually, he found his voice “Always, sweetheart,” he whispered, pressing a kiss to Shane's forehead, before pulling him in closer.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first fic for this fandom because these hockey boys have taken over my brain. Comments and kudos feed Shane's praise kink ;)

Chapter 2: 2

Chapter Summary

> And we're back! Fair warning: this chapter deals with Shane's anxiety and panic attacks, but they're minor. Also: angst - but again, not much? It's more soft emotional boys crying together and comforting each other (everyone's favourite).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ilya could tell Shane was antsy: he had snapped at Ilya twice, before looking contrite and apologising profusely (like the polite Canadian boy he was, except of course, when he was swearing like a sailor) before heading to their underground ice rink to practice and blow off steam.

It had been two hours now, and Ilya missed his husband's face.

Ilya went down the stairs, following the sounds of the puck hitting the net, as Shane skated away and reaimed again, and again, and *again*. His first thought whenever he saw this rink was *damn, they were rich*. And then his second thought was guilt. He knew Shane felt it too, and they had many conversations where they ruminated over how ridiculous it all was, the absurd amount of money they were given to play this sport, the silliness of it all. He knew Shane gave money away to charities on the regular, besides the Irina Foundation, and Ilya did too. It was never really mentioned in public, not something to be brought out at press interviews and be praised for, it was just something they *did*, a small way to make things better, this crazy, unfair world they lived in. A tiny way to make amends of some sort, to give just because they could, and to be grateful for the ability to do so.

The *clang* of the puck hitting the edge of the goal snapped Ilya out of his thoughts.

“Fuck,” Shane swore, sweat beading his hairline as he skated towards the puck. Ilya didn't think Shane even knew he was there. Shane got like this sometimes, a singular determination taking root in his mind, compounded by an anxious thought playing on repeat, pushing him to be better, to be the best, to be *enough*. Ilya's stomach had dropped the first time Shane had told him that.

“Sometimes,” Shane whispered, sitting on the floor organising his socks, it helped him at times, to have something tactile to grab onto, some kind of task, as he sorted through his thoughts. “Sometimes,” he began again, and Ilya waited patiently behind him, his arms loosely wrapped around Shane's torso, not too tight that he felt trapped and like he couldn't get out if needed. “I feel like hockey is the only thing I have to offer. It's the only thing I've always been really good at, so no one cares about the other stuff. Like- like it doesn't matter if I don't like to go out and get drunk, or party with strangers or it takes me time to become good friends with people, if I have this. Because then I can just be Shane Hollander the Hockey Player and that's all they want from me, and if I don't even have that *then- what good am I?”*

Ilya had been so glad he had been sitting behind Shane then, because he had no idea what face he was making, and he was sure that if he had seen Shane's expression at that moment he would have started crying like a baby. That was when they were going to play their first match against Montreal, and Ilya knew there would be some growing pains, a reckoning of some sort. Shane had been stuck in his own head for days, closed off, practicing obsessively, pushing himself to the brink of exhaustion and swearing he was absolutely fine. On day five Ilya had seen enough, and staged an intervention, telling the Centaurs to close up the rink for the day and dragging Shane home and running him a bath, before curling up with him and waiting for him to talk.

He was seeing the same signs now, but he couldn't figure out why. They had already played against the Voyageurs a couple of times now, given they were halfway through Shane's first season, and he had gotten calmer as the relations with his former teammates had thawed (although some of them were still dickheads, and Ilya made sure he let them know when they were on the ice, penalty be damned). He watched as Shane skated around the rink gracefully, moving backwards away from the net and couldn't help but think: even like this, Shane was beautiful. He had taken off his helmet, and his hair framed his face in wispy strands that fell away from the bun at the back of his neck, his cheeks were flushed bright pink from exertion, making his freckles stand out starkly like stars sprinkled across an inky sky. There was a casual flow to the way he moved, like water rippling down a stream, one with the air and ground beneath his feet, like it was sliding with him, tracing his tracks. Shane belonged to the ice; but sometimes he let it consume him.

“Shane,” Ilya called, and Shane startled, almost dropping the stick as he turned to look at his husband.

“Ilya, what are you doing here? You don't even have a sweater!” Shane replied, skating towards the edge of the rink where Ilya stood. In truth, Ilya hadn't even noticed the cold, he had been too captivated by the man in front of him to take mind of anything else (he was a goner. When did he get so *sappy*?) but he smirked and looked at Shane “Aw, I'm sure you can lend me your jersey. I know it does things to you to see Hollander written on my back.”

Shane's eyes darkened but he wrinkled his nose all the same “Gross, Rozanov, I'm all sweaty.”

“Even better, *moy pomidor*.” Ilya winked, and Shane laughed and swatted at his chest lightly “You're insufferable.”

Ilya preened at making his husband laugh, but then his gaze shifted to Shane's hands which were red and cracked from gripping the stick for so long with such force.

“Shane, no gloves?” He said, gazing at his husband.

“Oh-” Shane said, looking down as if he had just noticed the state of his hands “I guess I was too busy focusing on the puck, that I didn't even realise.”

“Come here,” Ilya said softly, taking the stick from his hand and leaning it against the railing. He stepped back as Shane swung over and helped him sit on the bench, before kneeling to take his skates off.

“Ilya, you don't have to- I can take off my own skates.”

“I know, you are big, strong, hockey player, *da?* But I want to take care of my big, strong, husband sometimes, so let me.”

Shane shook his head, his hair flopping over his face as a goofy grin spread across it. “I love you,” he said softly, leaning down to press his lips to Ilya's. He returned the kiss enthusiastically, sliding his hands into Shane's hair, gently pulling it free of the rubber band as he dragged Shane closer. They both broke apart, taking in air rapidly at the same time “That good, huh?” Ilya smirked. “Fuck off,” Shane laughed “like you can catch your breath.”

“How could I when I'm around you, *krasivyy*?” Fuck, Ilya would never get tired of making Shane blush. They stayed like that, grinning at each other, Ilya crouched on the floor and Shane leaning over him, one of his hands still resting on the nape of Ilya's neck, tangled in his curls. After a moment (or a minute, or five) Ilya cradled one of Shane's hands in his, tracing over the red angry lines delicately, and pressing a kiss to each fingertip.

“Shane,” he started softly, “what is going on?”

Shane sat back on the bench, leaning away from Ilya, but he didn't remove his hand and that was a win, “Nothing, I'm practicing for our game.”

“Our game is not for a week yet.”

“Well, practice makes perfect.”

“You are already perfect-” Shane scoffed and rolled his eyes, avoiding Ilya's gaze “or as close to it as they'll get. You are Shane Hollander. Or do I need to remind you again?”

Shane bit his lip, his cheeks heating once more.

“Come on,” Ilya said, rising up to sit next to him, one leg on the bench while the other lay resting on the floor as he turned his body towards Shane. “We promised to be honest, *da?* We're a team, you and me.”

“The best team,” Shane added, looking down at their clasped hands and interlocking their fingers.

“That's right,” Ilya agreed, before tilting Shane's chin up with his other hand and meeting his warm brown gaze “so tell me what you are thinking?”

Shane blew out a breath “A lot of things,” he admitted, “I'm not sure where to start.”

“Tell me one?”

“We're playing Boston.”

“Yes,” Ilya said encouragingly, gazing at Shane.

“And I don't want to lose.”

“Yes, sweetheart, neither does anyone else. We will give it our best shot,” Ilya said, swiping his thumb over Shane's cheeks, freckles disappearing beneath his fingers.

“But it's more than that, it *means* more.”

“You mean for the playoffs?”

“No, just-” Shane let out a frustrated sigh, teeth gnawing on his bottom lip, brows drawn together like he was trying to put together puzzle pieces, slot each word into place.

“We will try, yes? We will give it everything, and we will win, and then we will make it to the playoffs.” Ilya said gently, brushing a thumb across Shane's bottom lip.

“It's not the playoffs. Or-yes, but not really. It's just- we *can't* lose. I can't let everyone down, and I don't want to lose because-” Shane let out a strangled noise and pressed his eyes shut, focusing on taking deep breaths. Ilya breathed with him, his thumbs rubbing soothing circles on the backs of Shane's hands.

Once Shane opened his eyes Ilya reached for his jersey, tugging it upwards “Take these off, you need more air.” Shane nodded, and suddenly he scrabbled to lift the cloth over his head and folded it carefully behind him on the bench. Then he tugged at his trousers and folded them too, sitting beside Ilya in a long sleeve t-shirt and leggings. Normally Ilya would be worried about the cold, but Shane was red and his breaths were still a little shaky, and he thought the cool air would do him some good, help decrease the hot flushes and calm him down. Shane leaned back against the railing and closed his eyes, his head tilted towards Ilya, just letting air pass in and out of his lips.

This way, Ilya count each freckle on his skin, track how his eyelashes fluttered, see the little divot between his brows. Ilya waited for Shane to come down, recognised this was some kind of panic attack, though not a full-blown one, and knew how Shane felt during them: dizzy,

hot, suffocated. He needed to be grounded, tethered to this reality somehow, and Ilya did just that, shifting their hands and lifting Shane's sleeve so he could get more skin-on-skin contact, their arms intertwined.

“Sorry,” Shane whispered after awhile, blinking rapidly and looking at Ilya.

“Never,” Ilya returned firmly, bringing their clasped hands up and pressing a kiss to Shane's knuckles, “never apologise, sweetheart.”

And then Shane was on his lap, straddling him, arms wound around his neck and head tucked into the crook of his neck, breathing in him as if trying to drown in Ilya's scent.

“Everyone in Boston hates us,” Shane started after a while, pressing the words against Ilya's skin. Ilya waited, his hand running up and down Shane's back, letting the words come to him “I- you moved to Ottawa for *me*, and now they hate us because it cost them Ilya Rozanov, because why wouldn't they, you're fucking brilliant and- I need us to win. I need to prove that we're worth it, that this team is worth it, that you made one of the biggest sacrifices ever and I want to-” *prove I'm worth it, that I won't let you down, that you didn't come all this way for nothing.* Ilya could hear the unspoken words clear as day, the ones caught in Shane's throat, like tenterhooks in his soft, vulnerable skin. It reminded him of one of their first losses: they had been on a winning streak, high off beating the Voyaguers, but then they had come up against Detroit and it had been a dirty fight, all bloody teeth and bruised ribs. Shane had a few drinks, a rarity for him, and then they were in their hotel bed, Shane mumbling words into his chest.

“Ilya.”

“Hmm, moy kotenok?”

“I'm sorry.”

“What for, sweetheart?”

“For not saying I choose you over hockey sooner.”

“Shane-” Ilya's brows furrowed, as he pulled Shane up to look at his face, his eyes were glassy and his cheeks were splashed pink.

“No, listen. I do, I do*, choose you over hockey, always, but-” They had already talked about this, whispered conversations in the safety of their home, late at night curled up in blankets like two commas curled around each other, lazily splashing their feet while sitting on the dock in the cottage.*

“But-” Shane hiccuped, a tiny little noise and his eyes widened at the sound before he shook his head, carrying on “I wonder what I would be without hockey. Hockey gave me everything: it gave me you*, and without it I'm just- I'm just boring Shane Hollander. Never*

goes out, never does anything fun, boring, boring, boring and you- you're so beautiful." Shane gazed up at him and Ilya's heart clenched, there were two tear tracks down his cheeks, but Shane didn't even realise he was crying "And you deserve someone so good, so, so good because you're so bright - the brightest thing in my life and I want to be good enough for you and-" And now Shane really was crying, a mixture of hiccups and sniffles, droplets dripping onto their duvet.

"*Darling," Ilya breathed, and his voice cracked on the word, as he pulled Shane up to sit on his lap, thumbs carefully wiping away the tears. "You are* everything*," he said, reverence coated his words. "No one knows me the way you do, loves me the way you do. I do not deserve* you*, and all your effort. How you know when to give me space and when to push for more, how you take care of me, even on my bad days, all the little things you do for me. All the hard things you do for me: looking after me, learning Russian for me, loving me-"*

"It's not hard," Shane interrupted, holding Ilya's cheeks between his hands "it's not hard at all. Loving you is the easiest thing I've ever done."

And now Ilya was tearing up too, and what a sight they made: twisted together in the bed sheets, kissing and crying, and kissing again, like they couldn't get enough, like they were drowning and this was oxygen.

"Shane." He grabbed Shane's chin in his hand, gently tilting his face to look him in the eyes. "I love you. I love you even if we lose this game, if we lose a thousand games, if we can't play hockey ever again in our lives. You are more than hockey. I love you on the ice, yes, but I love you off the ice too, even more. You are Shane fucking Hollander and you are *mine* and that has nothing to do with hockey and everything to do with *you*." Shane gazed at him, a warmth spreading over his expression, adoration in his eyes and all Ilya wanted to do was kiss him, and kiss him and keep on kissing him, pouring every ounce of love like molten gold, liquid honey through the exchange of breaths, seeping through the cracks. He pressed a kiss to Shane's parted lips, and pulled back as Shane chased after him "You are worth it, win or lose, does not matter. You are enough, more than." And then Shane was pressing his lips to Ilya's, hands tangling in his curls, tugging and trying to get closer, desperate sounds falling from his lips. "I love you," Shane breathed and repeated it like a mantra, hooking his legs around Ilya's waist.

"Are we going to christen the rink?" Ilya mumbled after a minute (or two, or ten) and Shane huffed out a laugh.

"Why the fuck not?" He breathed, eyes twinkling "Remember centre ice?"

And Ilya loved him so *much*, he didn't know what to do with it sometimes.

"Fuck yes, Hollander."

Chapter End Notes

How are we doing?

(I thought this would be 1k, but then my hands just kept on typing...)

This chapter makes me think of this brilliant fic: the reassuring quiet of boring days by mareastralis which got me feeling all fuzzy so go have a read

Also krasivyy = handsome
Comments and kudos make Shane blush like a pomidor ;D

Chapter 3: 3

Chapter Summary

> The one where Shane scores a hat trick and the team goes crazy (as they should) and MVP shenanigans ensue.

Chapter Notes

> I loved writing Ilya being soft over how the team interacts with Shane and fully takes him in, I need another book (or another season 👀) exploring this part of their lives.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Fucking star, Hollzy!” Wyatt bellowed, throwing an arm around Shane's neck and pulling him in to land a kiss on his head.

“Thanks, Hazy,” Shane laughed, his eyes crinkled up and freckles all scrunched, hand coming to rest on the arm Wyatt had looped on his shoulder, “couldn't have won without an amazing goalie basically saving every shot on our team.”

“Stop being humble, Hollzy. That breakaway, whoo!” Bood cheered, “One of the most beautiful things I've seen in my life.

“Bood, don't you have a kid?” Troy asked.

“Yep, and that shot is definitely up there with Milo being born.”

“I'm telling Cassie,” LaPointe teased in a sing-song voice and Bood shook his head “Shut up, Pointy, you sound like my 5 year old niece. Anyways, I'm sure Cassie would agree.”

Haas snorted “You think seeing Shane score a breakaway is up there in her top 5 moments ever?”

“OK maybe not *top 5*,” Bood conceded “but one of my goals is probably up there.”

“Buddy, I don't think *any* goals are up there if we're talking about the highlights of her life.” Wyatt said, clapping Bood on the back and shaking his head.

“What,” Bood said, in mock affront, trailing after him.“Wyatt, come back here. We're not done with this conversation-”

“Alright, enough chit-chat.” Dykstra interrupted, swinging a massive pony stick in the air. “It's time for the MVP ritual!”

“The what?” Shane asked, looking warily at the huge horse head taped precariously to a broom stick. Ilya wanted to kiss him - well, he wanted to do a lot of things but most of them were very much not suitable for work, especially with the *three fucking goals* his husband had scored. Yeah, Ilya was hot and bothered, but he was also really fucking proud, and seeing Shane interact with the team like this: so happy, and carefree and actually having *fun* was a treat of its own, something he could watch forever.

“Yeah, what? ” Young echoed from where he was sitting, in the middle of taking off his trousers.

“Young, put some pants on, man.” Chouinard groaned, turning away.

“Jesus Christ,” Troy muttered under his breath, “never a normal day in this room.”

“Since Hollzy scored not one, not two, but three fucking goals this game-” people erupted in raucous cheering, and Ilya was certain they could be heard from the rink itself “and one of them was a breakaway in the last 5 minutes-” more cheers, Ilya's was the loudest of all, “he's getting MVP!”

“And you know what that means folks,” Holmberg started a drum roll and the rest of the room followed “the Centaurs parade!”

“The *what*?” Shane said, more loudly this time.

“Come on Hollzy, take the horse, there ya go,” Bood said, shoving the pony stick in Shane's hand. Shane stood awkwardly, fingers barely gripping the stick as if it was contagious “Er, what am I doing here, exactly?”

“You shove it between your legs, *duh*!” Young called, (had this kid started on the drinks already?) as everyone turned to look at him. Shane raised an eyebrow and Luca shook his head in disappointment (he really was taking after Shane day by day) “Young, dude.”

“What? I was being helpful-” Young paused and Ilya could almost see the cogs turning in his brain “Oh wait- oh no-” he turned red and covered his face, eyes peeping from behind his fingers “I didn't mean it *that* way,” he squeaked.

“Is this-” Shane started, and Ilya knew where this was going, could tell from the glint in his eyes “because I'm *gay*?” The little shit; Ilya loved him.

The locker room broke out into chaos, laughter and protests, (and was someone shrieking? Ilya hoped it was out of joy and not…anything else) as voices intermingled:

“Low blow, Hollzy, as if we would ever!”

“Look at this cheeky shit, see that grin on his face?”

“Can't lie, you walked straight into that one, man.”

“Young, you fucking idiot, never change.”

“Hollzy, you know we love you bud,” Bood's voice boomed across the room, as he dropped a kiss onto Shane's forehead (his husband was getting so many kisses today, Ilya couldn't wait to tease him and watch him turn the prettiest pink when they were alone) “now get on the damn horse.”

Shane gave a long suffering sigh “Fine, since you're all hooligans, and you insist,” but he had a grin that took over his face, and Ilya truly thought he would be content to stay here forever and *look* at him. Just take a step back and see the marvel that was *Shane*: his laugh, his smile, the way his freckles moved with each expression, the spark in his eyes, how his hair flopped so enticingly over his forehead, the different tones of his voice. Ilya could spend the rest of his life cataloguing each and every shift in Shane's demeanor, note down every pause and intonation, but he would still be starved for more, to know everything he possibly could about this man. Fuck, now he was horny *and* sappy; he was pretty sure those were his default states when it came to Shane anyway, so it's not like this was anything new.

Shane held the pony stick between his legs while Wyatt grabbed his left leg and Ilya grabbed his right, hoisting him up in the air and resting his thighs on their shoulders as he held onto the horse's head.

“What are we doing,” Shane laughed, hand tangling gently in Ilya's hair out of instinct to steady himself.

“VICTORY LAP!” Dykstra shouted, leading the charge as all the other guys piled up behind them “Go! Go! Go!” they ran out of the locker room, touring the offices, Ilya even managed to give Weibe a wave as he shook his head fondly at their antics, greeting the staff, (someone, he was pretty sure it was Bood, had gotten a pack of celebrations and was throwing chocolates at everyone as they ran) before heading to the rink.

Shane's fingers scratched softly at his scalp and Ilya glanced up at him.

“Hi,” Shane said quietly, a pleased little smile on his face meant just for Ilya, his fingers stroking through his curls. “Hi,” Ilya said back, just as softly, tilting his head back further “having fun?”

“Never thought I'd say being carried around in a crazy Centaurs parade is fun,” Shane chuckled, “but yeah, I really am.”

“Good, I'm glad, you deserve it.” Ilya smiled, and then he added, because he was soft and fond and Shane was so cute and right *there*, “You deserve everything.”

Shane made a little noise in the back of his throat, eyes turning hazy as he looked at Ilya (and it felt like he was staring straight into his soul, like he could see all the soft spots, the hidden underbelly he only exposed to Shane, meant just for his eyes).

“I'm so proud of you,” Ilya murmured, and Shane's hand came down to trace his brows before trailing down his cheek and dipping to the bow of his lips.

“Yeah?” He breathed, cheeks slowly suffusing with a pink blush as he stared at how Ilya's lips moved under his thumb. “Yeah,” Ilya repeated, “so fucking good, my boy, no one compares.” God, he loved how Shane's breath hitched, would die happy if that was the last thing he ever heard.

“OK,” Troy interrupted, shoving lightly at Ilya's back “we're in public you two, and Shane you're literally in the middle of a victory parade - keep it in your pants for 10 more minutes guys, please.”

“You're just jealous Harris isn't here right now, Barrett.” Ilya shot back, smirking. “Don't act like he doesn't go feral whenever you score a goal.”

Shane and Troy groaned in sync “I really wish Harris hadn't taught you that word,” Troy muttered and Shane joined him as he was lowered carefully to the ground by Wyatt and Ilya back in the locker room “Ditto.”

“You love it, darling.” Ilya grinned, after everyone had moved away from the massive group hug, relishing in the new flush dusting his cheeks.

“I really fucking do,” Shane whispered, leaning towards him, like a compass drawn to its north.

“Would you say I… rizzed you up?” Ilya interrupted, looking at him innocently.

“You what?” Shane scrunched his nose and Ilya really wanted to pinch his cheeks but he was pretty sure Shane would pinch him back, and his nails were *sharp*. “Is this something else Harris taught- you know what? Never mind, I don't care, just kiss me.” He said, already mumbling against Ilya's lips.

Ilya laughed and then followed his command, gladly.

Chapter End Notes

I haven't written something with so many interacting characters before, but this was really fun, I love the Centaurs.
I have to say, so many beautiful fics were in the back of my mind when I was writing this chapter, but the ones that kept coming up the most were:

the way you do it with ease by theoneiam2277

And the other one is Question of the day by wilmonstan12345

These are both amazing, so go and have a read!

Enjoy; comments and kudos are my bread and marmalade ;)

Chapter 4: 4

Chapter Summary

> Shane squeezed some toothpaste onto his brush before passing the tube to Ilya so he could do the same and then handing him the cap to screw back on. They stood at the mirror, side by side, hips bumping and eyes meeting in the glass, making them grin like children as they brushed their teeth, occasionally laughing and pulling silly faces as the paste foamed in their mouth.

Chapter Notes

> Warning: tooth-rotting fluff
>
> I think this is what I was working up to this whole time.
>
> They are domestic! And soft! And sleepy! And reflect on what home is, and how they have built a home together - help me, I'm melting into a puddle of goo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a long night: the Centaurs and all their families had gone out to dinner to celebrate the end of the season, and the crew had gotten progressively rowdier as time passed. Ilya was pretty sure he and Shane had been roped into doing karaoke at some point, both singing off key to Dua Lipa's “Levitating” and laughing too much to actually get through the second verse. But they clocked out at 11, along with the other men who were married or in relationships, (or the ‘no-fun ones’ as the rookies liked to refer to them) saying goodbye to Young and Holmberg who had roped poor Haas and Dykstra into an elaborate plan to visit a bowling rink and then a theater (at midnight, no less) and heading home instead.

He heard Shane breathe out a sigh of relief as they stepped into their house, and Ilya let out a small noise of contentment; gone were the days of his early twenties, when staying out till 2 in the morning was *tame*. Now, all Ilya wanted to do was have a good night out with the ones he loved and then go to sleep with his husband wrapped in *their* blanket, huddled in *their* bed, safe in *their* home.

He watched fondly as Shane carefully placed his shoes on the rack and neatly arranged Ilya's next to his, before hanging up his coat and turning to Ilya automatically and reaching for his too, placing them side by side, then stepped into the foyer and dropped his keys into the little

fishy bowl Ilya had gotten at a community backyard sale, because he thought it was too cute to pass up.

They both greeted Anya as she bounded up to them, and Shane scratched her behind her ears and under her chin as she preened (because she absolutely loved his undivided attention, not that Ilya could blame her) before she bounced onto Ilya as he leaned down and gave him an enthusiastic lick on his cheek. Ilya laughed and Shane giggled, before shaking his head and picking Anya up as she kicked her legs, cooing softly at her about bedtime and having proper rest so she could be a big, strong girl like her papa. Ilya watched them go and felt something unfurl in his chest.

He made his way into their room, flicking on the lights before dimming them slightly because he knew bright lights at this time, and especially after he'd been to a party, would make Shane's head hurt. The bedsheets were a mess, something Shane hated right before bed. He always slept better on clean sheets, all pulled taut, even though Ilya pointed out it was going to be messed up by their bodies anyway. Shane said it had something to do with getting in the zone, and clean sheets equalled clean sleep, and then Ilya inevitably made some dirty joke and it was a toss-up if they were getting to sleep anytime soon after that.

Ilya remembered how Shane had come upstairs to change them earlier that day, muttering about how they were overdue for a wash. But then Ilya had walked out of the shower and seen his husband in his cute little yoga shorts and that was the end of the laundry talk.

(Could Ilya really be blamed? Shane in yoga shorts was downright sinful, the way they hugged his ass, just begging Ilya to step closer and grab a handful, swiping his thumb- ok, yeah, he really needed to stop.) Instead, Ilya had ended up pushing Shane onto the bed, their mouths too busy with other things for Shane to protest about the sheets.

He grabbed some pillow cases and a bed spread from the closet, and tugged off the old one from the mattress, before spreading out the new sheet and trying to make sure the lengths were equal on both sides like when Shane did it. He was in the middle of stuffing the pillows into their covers when Shane came back.

“You changed the sheets?”

“*Da*, I remember we got a bit…distracted this afternoon”

“I wonder whose fault *that* was.”

“Shane,” Ilya said seriously, “you know I do not stand a chance against your yoga shorts.”

“Oh, so it's the yoga shorts that are doing it for you, not me?”

“Of course you,” Ilya said, and then paused “but it is mainly the yoga shorts, yes.”

“Fuck off,” Shane laughed, stepping into Ilya's space, his hands brushed against Ilya's stomach, as his thumbs drew small circles under his shirt.

“Thank you,” Shane said softly, a beatific smile on his face (even now, Ilya still couldn’t manage to believe it: how stunning Shane was, how he managed to take Ilya's breath away with a mere smile), “for changing the sheets. I know you're tired right now, and you could probably fall asleep on the sofa. I appreciate it.”

“You're welcome, *moya lyubov*. Although I will let you know I have standards, and I would never choose the sofa when I can share a bed with my beautiful husband instead.”

“Flatterer,” Shane blushed and bit his bottom lip, and Ilya's thumb reached up to pull it free “Never with you, there is no need.”

Shane grinned and then picked up the last pillow, deftly stuffing it into the cover before arranging them all meticulously on the bed: 2 for Ilya, because he liked the support for his neck, and one for Shane since he tended to sleep with his arm under his head, and many cushions dotting the edge of the side where Shane slept.

(Shane had explained once, a little sheepishly, that he liked to feel cocooned, with Ilya on one side and the pillows on the other, like he was in a fortress of warmth and comfort, and nothing could get through it. Ilya was sure he had the stupidest, most lovestruck expression on his face, but he didn't care, because how was Shane his?)

Shane walked to the closet and reached for his shorts, pulling out Ilya's too and grabbed one of Ilya's t-shirts for himself (they were always a little too loose and long on him, and it did something to Ilya everytime, seeing Shane in his clothes, the way the neckline was a bit too big and provided a tantalising peek at his collarbones; Ilya wanted to lick them), knowing that Ilya preferred to sleep without anything on top because he tended to run hot.

He handed Ilya his clothes (well really it was cloth, singular) before heading to the bathroom. Ilya stripped and stepped into the shorts before following Shane, who was already placing his shirt and jeans in the laundry hamper. Ilya dumped his stuff in there too, and then took care to make sure nothing was sticking out when he saw Shane glance at the sleeve hanging from the lip of the basket. He knew Shane's fingers were probably itching to fix it from where he stood, so Ilya bent down before he had to move.

It was a small thing, inconsequential (it was a new word, and Ilya tried to fit it in whenever he could so it would stick in his brain), but Shane's answering smile told Ilya that he knew Ilya knew, that this tiny little gesture meant nothing and everything, this act of knowing someone so well, in the big ways like their bodies and how they fit together, but in these everyday ways too.

Shane squeezed some toothpaste onto his brush before passing the tube to Ilya so he could do the same and then handing him the cap to screw back on. They stood at the mirror, side by side, hips bumping and eyes meeting in the glass, making them grin like children as they brushed their teeth, occasionally laughing and pulling silly faces as the paste foamed in their mouth.

From the outside it probably looked a little gross, but Ilya didn't care, he reveled in the familiarity of this, the safety of it and how they could be stupid unabashedly, with no reserve. They took turns to spit into the sink and wash their mouths, and Shane did some elaborate

dental routine which involved flossing and mouthwash while Ilya leaned back against the tile and watched, his eyes soft, feeling some kind of warmth mingle with the sleepiness as he looked at his husband.

Once Shane was done, and he'd applied face wash because he felt like his skin was ‘gritty from the club’ and convinced Ilya to put some on too because it smelled good (how did they make this thing smell like manuka honey and peaches? Ilya kind of wanted to eat it), he turned towards Ilya and tilted his head.

“Are you going to have a shower?” Ilya asked, because he knew Shane couldn't sleep if he went to bed feeling dirty.

“Are you saying I stink, Rozanov?”

“I've sucked you off after a game,” Ilya reminded him, just to see Shane's cheeks turn exactly that shade of pink, like the sky as the sun dipped, “this is nothing.”

“Such a menace,” Shane muttered, stepping closer to him. “I already washed my hands and feet, and I'm too tired to have a shower right now. I'll have one in the morning.”

“Mm, good idea Hollander,” Ilya said, tangling their fingers together, “wake me up and I'll join you.”

“OK,” Shane squeaked before clearing his throat and shaking his head like he was trying to rid himself of any fantasies, and Ilya couldn't help his smug grin.

“No,” Shane said sternly, pointing a finger at him, “none of that. We are going to *sleep,* you hear me? I'm tired and I'm going to wrap around you like a koala bear and everything else can wait till the morning.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Ilya said, his face split in a lovestruck grin as Shane pulled him by the hand towards their bed “have you been thinking about it this whole time?”

Shane slid in under the blanket and patted the duvet impatiently, instantly throwing a leg over Ilya's hip the moment he was settled.

“I've been thinking about it for the past two hours,” Shane mumbled sleepily, from where his face was tucked into the crook of Ilya's neck. “I love our friends, but after a certain point all I want is to get away from everything and just come home to you. With you. Whatever, as long as it's just-” he let out a big yawn, eyes fluttering shut, “just us. That's home.” He whispered, nuzzling in closer.

Ilya watched the slowing of Shane's breath, the rise and fall of his chest, the way his eyelashes caressed his cheeks and felt that warmth again, spreading from his finger tips to his toes, coiling through his stomach and taking root in his heart. This overwhelming fondness. He was so in love with this man, and he thought about how right Shane was, even as sleep was pulling him under, the way he could understand Ilya's emotions and put a name to them even when Ilya didn't know it himself.

“Sleep well, sweetheart.” Ilya whispered, pressing a sweet kiss to his forehead before tucking his chin over Shane's head and closing his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I loveeee reading introspective fics, shout out to and i spit out the seeds by linearity (this fic rewired my brain), and I wanted to do something similar in terms of the internal monologue (but a fluffier version). Not sure if I pulled it off, but it was so lovely writing it and delving into the domestic side of their relationship.

Comments and kudos give Ilya and Shane sweet dreams <3

Chapter 5: 5

Chapter Summary

Shane spends some time with the Pike kids and Ilya is smitten (like always)

Chapter Notes

I started writing this and then I realised they're playing hockey during the winter. I know they only have a short Christmas break, and have to start playing again in the new year? It doesn't matter, suspend your disbelief folks!

Also we get a lot of Ilya with kids, and I wanted to explore how Shane would be different in his approach to them (and I wanted to write Ilya being soft over it). I hope I pulled it off!

My French is as bad as my Russian, I'm sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They were at the Pikes' house, and it was chaos, just like Ilya liked it.

Shane and Ilya had spent Christmas with Yuna and David, and then had travelled to Montreal to spend the lead-up to New Year's with the Pikes. Normally, they would be at home in Ottawa, but they had gifted David and Yuna with a surprise trip to a holiday getaway planned ages in advance, and the Pikes had been telling them to come out to Montreal for weeks now.

Ilya was in the kitchen, helping decorate gingerbread cookies with Jade and Ruby while Hayden washed the dishes.

"Jacks," Hayden groaned, "you know we have a dishwasher for this, right?"

"Hayden," Jackie said, one hand resting on her hip while the other held the newest addition to the Pike family, little baby Amber, "if you want to eat triple meat lasagne, then you have to be prepared to scrape the meat off afterwards. The machine always misses a spot." Her tone brokered no argument and Ilya knew Hayden had at least the required amount of brain cells to see how he had lucked out with his wife. Who else would make him triple meat lasagne? The Italians were weeping.

"Thanks sweetie," Jackie said, planting a kiss to Hayden's cheek, and the man visibly melted, sighing contentedly. Ilya smirked, Hayden was like putty in her hands, absolutely gone.

“Sucker.” Ilya whispered once Jackie was out of earshot, just to see Hayden glower at him and start to retort before looking at the kids and reigning himself in with a harrumph. In truth, Hayden and Jackie were a nice couple, although how Pike had managed to land someone like Jackie, Ilya would never know, but it was too funny to rile Hayden up and watch him get all angry (and then see *Shane's* reaction to that, and watch the way his brows rose or his cheeks tinged with annoyance, and then melted into exasperated fondness. Shane had given up trying to force them to be nice to each other, and just accepted Ilya and Hayden's weird form of camaraderie through the exchange of jabs - mostly verbal, rarely physical).

All in all, Ilya thought his day was going very, very well.

“Hey, *Ruby*! I had the blue first!”

“Well you were taking too long, it's my turn now!”

“*No*, that's not how it works, you have to wait till I tell you I'm done.”

“Well by then the cookies would burn.”

“How? They're not even in the oven yet, you dummy!”

“*You're* a dummy!”

“No, you-”

“Alright girls,” Ilya interrupted, smoothly stepping in between them, swishing his waist and knocking them gently to the side, making them squeal and bounce away, “Ahh, there we go, more room for me. Now, where were we with these…what do you call them again? Ginger-elf man?”

“Nooo, Uncle Ilya,” Ruby said, “it's a ginger*bread* man.”

“A ginger red man?”

“A *gingerbread* man, Uncle Ilya,” Jade said slowly, enunciating each syllable. Ilya bent to his knees and met her gaze, opening his mouth in an exaggerated shape to copy her motions “A ginger…sad man?”

“No!” The two girls shouted, laughing. “You're so silly, Uncle Ilya.” Jade said, looking up at him. “The craziest,” Ruby agreed solemnly, before they turned to each other and burst into giggles again.

“Me? Silly? Crazy?” Ilya gasped dramatically, before putting a hand on his cocked hip, holding his pointer finger up and shaking it side to side in a motion the girls had taught him and pouting his lips. “*Nuh, uh, uh*.” The girls let out peals of laughter before clapping their hands and excitedly telling him to do it again.

“Alright you two,” Jackie said, having deposited Amber in her cradle now that she was asleep, “let's put these cookies in the oven, yeah? And then we can have them in a bit.”

Jade and Ruby went immediately, following behind their mum like little ducklings, begging to help or wear the gloves or turn the oven on. Ilya watched them go in amusement, but was distracted by shouts from the living room.

“Ha!”

“Nooo, not again. Come on kid, can't you let me have this?”

“Don't you say a win should always be earned, Uncle Shane?”Arthur returned, he tried to deepen his voice to mimic Shane, it failed miserably, but was cute all the same. “Can't give you free passes kid, it tastes so much sweeter when you win it for real.”

Shane shook his head before reaching out to muss up Arthur's hair while the boy ducked away too slowly.

“When did you get so smart, huh?”

“I was always smart, Uncle Shane.”

Ilya stood at the doorway of the kitchen that led to the living room, leaning against it with his head tilted towards the right, surveying the scene before him. Arthur and Shane were huddled on the floor in front of the TV, wrapped up in a large pink, fluffy blanket, controllers clutched in their hands while Mario Kart played before them.

It was competitive, it could be nothing less, knowing his husband, and it seemed Arthur Pike had a similar streak of ambition now that he saw his Uncle and was determined to match his level. He could see how Arthur sneaked swift glances Shane's way, delighted that this game was being taken so seriously, that Shane was devoting his time to play it, and really giving it his all, like he would with anything else that mattered to him.

And that was the thing: Shane did everything like it mattered, never one to go halfway, pouring himself into it with his mind and breath and energy. And it stayed with you, that level of dedication, that level of *care*, like Shane was leaving pieces of himself to be cherished, pieces that whispered ‘*This means a lot to you, I see you, I care, so it means a lot to me too.*’ God, Shane was going to make such a great dad.

“OK, there we go! I won!” Shane crowed, throwing the blanket off in his excitement before hastily pulling it back on and burying himself and Arthur in it even further to shield against the cold.

“OK, you won *once*,” Arthur mumbled petulantly, folding his arms, but as he watched Shane accept an imaginary medal and place a fake crown on top of his head, he couldn't keep in his smile.

“Alright bud, here's another life lesson for you: the best person to play with is a good sport, take the wins, but take the losses better,” Shane said, placing the crown gently on Arthur's head, “because that's how you come back harder next time.” He winked, finally prising a giggle out of Arthur as he tickled his sides.

“Ah! OK, Uncle Shane! I get it! I get it!” Arthur yelped, peals of laughter escaping his lips.

“OK,” Shane grinned, his eyes dancing with warmth and amusement.

“Alright, no more Mario Kart, you two!” Jackie called from the kitchen, “Shane, stop making my son anti-social when it's Christmas.”

“It's not Christmas!” Arthur and Shane called out at the same time, high-fiving each other.

“Oh yeah?” Jackie raised an eyebrow, “Come back to me when you ask for some more butter tarts Mister, and we'll see what happens.” Arthur's eyes went comically wide, and he was about to respond just as -

“Uncle *Shane*,” Ruby and Jade whined, running past Ilya with a plate of cookies in hand.

“Ruby! Jade! Don't run!” Jackie called, shaking her head after them, “Or no cookies for anybody!”

“Uncle Shane,” Ruby started seriously, hands on her hips “you've been playing with Arthur all this time and now we want you to play with us.”

“Yeah,” Jade continued, “no more boring games. We wanna play restaurant!”

“Mario kart isn't boring!” Arthur protested, his tiny face peeking out from the blankets.

“Yes it *is*,” Ruby and Jade retorted simultaneously, before they each grabbed one of Shane's hands and pulled him up, “we're gonna do fun stuff now.”

“We can play another round soon, okay bud? How about you come play restaurant with us now?” Shane asked gently as Arthur shook his head. “No way,” he wrinkled his nose, “Ruby and Jade always make me wash the dishes. I'm gonna find mom, I want something to eat.”

“Would that something be butter tarts?” Shane raised an eyebrow and Arthur blushed “Maybe,” he muttered, accepting Shane's hand and being pulled up.

“Well, can't blame you there, after all, it *is* still Christmas.” He smiled, just as Jade reached the end of her tether and stomped her foot, “Uncle Shane!”

“Sorry, girls,” he shook his head in amusement, “OK, right, restaurant, let's go.”

The girls brought out their tiny table and laid the huge pink blanket over it (“It's a table spread, isn't it pretty, Uncle Shane?” “Very pretty,” Shane said, looking at the engulfed table

and trying to keep his lips from twitching) before placing two plastic plates and small sippy cups on it.

“Uncle Ilya?” Ruby said, tugging at his hand from where he stood at the doorway, just watching (because he could look at Shane forever, but now was not the time).

“Yes, Ruby?”

“Come play restaurant with us!”

“Restaurant?” Ilya gasped dramatically, “Are you sure? I am a Russian hockey player, you know, I eat a lot. Too much. I will eat all your food, nothing left for anyone else.”

“No,” Ruby grinned, “we'll have enough. You have to share with Uncle Shane.” She said, sitting him down beside his husband.

“That pipsqueak?” Ilya pointed at Shane, “I could eat a whole buffet in the time it takes him to finish his breakfast.”

“Hey!” Shane protested in mock affront as Jade and Ruby laughed.

They carefully placed steaming cups of ‘tea’ in front of them and asked for their order.

Ilya put on a thick Russian accent and asked for whatever they had, and lots of it, making exaggerated hand gestures and looking starved, sending the girls into giggles.

“And what about you, Uncle Shane?” Jade asked, and then shook Shane by his shoulder lightly when he didn't reply, “Uncle Shane?”

“Oh- uh - sorry, mademoiselles,” Shane said, tripping over the words a little bit, “er - puis-je avoir un profiterole s'il vous plaît?” Ilya tried not to stare too hard at Shane's mouth, and he was succeeding (mostly).

“Oui, Monsieur.” Ruby nodded and skipped away to get the food.

“Not enough that you're pretty, you have to be French too?” Ilya whispered under his breath once the girls had gone to ‘make the food’.

“Be quiet, and stop being cute, it's distracting.” Shane grumbled, fiddling with the little cup and pretending to take sips from it, his huge hand dwarfing the handle, so he could only hold on with his fingertips. He was so damn adorable.

“It's distracting?” Ilya raised an eyebrow, “Hollander I am always cute, but what have I done - *oh*,” Ilya could feel a smug grin make its way across his face, “Is that why you could not reply? Because you were too busy staring at me?” Shane blushed pink and Ilya wanted to kiss him, chase the heat down his neck. “Aw, heart eyes Hollander, you are so…smitten.”

“Smitten?”

“*Da*, head over heels? Cannot help but look? Falling over yourself for-”

“OK, yeah, I know what smitten means.” Shane muttered, “And heart eyes Hollander is not becoming a thing.”

Ilya smirked, “Oh, it is already a thing. The Centaurs say it's their second nickname for you.”

“What? Since when?” Shane replied, turning to look at him. The flush was back, brighter this time. Ilya shrugged nonchalantly, “Since they realised how much you *luuuuuurve m*-”

“Oh my god,” Shrane groaned, and grabbed the cushion he was sitting on and smacked Ilya in the face with it.

“Uncle Shane! You can't attack our guests!” Ruby shouted, clutching a tray of cookies and plastic croissants.

“And what are you doing with the chair? Did you break our chair?” Jade asked, pointing at the cushion that was halfway to Ilya's face for another smack.

“No!” Shane yelped, hastily putting the cushion down and sitting on it, and fixing his hair, “I would never break a chair.”

“Ah, but you've broken a bed before, what is a chair?” Ilya whispered into Shane's ear, watching delightedly as he turned as red as a tomato before turning to look at Jade and Ruby. “Is ok, he is madman, but I do not mind. No need to call the police, crazy but harmless. We will survive,” he patted Shane's shoulder consolingly and felt Shane shake beside him, his body vibrating with…sobs? Ilya turned to his husband in concern, and saw that his face was flushed and his eyes were closed and a few tears escaped,

“Shane?” Ilya said gently, concerned, “Are you okay? I won't call you heart eye-”

But then Shane burst out laughing, and it turned out the tears were just from how hard he had been trying to stop his giggles, as they poured forth now, free and unrestricted.

And God, Shane was just so

Beautiful.

“I'm sorry, I’m sorry,” he said, waving his hands in front of his face and wiping at his eyes, trying to bite his lips and failing to contain his laughs. “I just- you're all too funny, ignore me.” Ilya could feel his own grin growing and Jade and Ruby were already giggling along with him, delighted at this turn of events. It was instinctive, to smile when Shane smiled, to see his eyes light up, sparkling like moonrise on a dark night, the rose blush on his cheeks, how he looked so soft, so inviting, this urge to hold him, and cherish him, and keep him safe from everything just to hear him laugh like that: a rich, deep, sound, something Ilya could drink in again and again, let it lull him to sleep for the rest of their lives. He looked like a tiny kitten, covering his eyes in embarrassment, a small smile still playing on his lips, and Ilya

couldn't help it: he gently pulled Shane's hands down by the wrists, and cradled his face in his hand, making Shane look up at him.

He took Ilya's breath away.

His eyes were so soft, full of warmth and joy and this *fondness*, which Ilya was sure must be echoed all over his face, was probably etched onto his skin, injected in his veins. And so, Ilya kissed him. A small, sweet press of the lips to Shane's mouth, swallowing down his surprised gasp and lovingly caressing his jaw before stroking his hand through his silky strands as he pulled away.

"*Ye tebya lyublyu*" He whispered, and he felt how Shane's lips moved underneath his as he breathed it back.

"*Ewww*," Jade and Ruby yelled, giggling and pointing "gross!"

Shane broke away, covering his face with hands, the tips of his ears a brilliant scarlet, and Ilya laughed, felt like he could go on laughing forever, with the amount of joy that filled his ribcage in this moment.

Later, when they were sitting cuddled together on the couch, flicking through HBO Max as Hayden and Jackie had gone to check on the kids and left them with the very important task of picking a movie, he felt Shane whisper against him.

"You're really good with them."

"So are you, *moy kotenok*."

Shane snorted and shook his head, "Oh please, I'm an amateur compared to you. You're so fun and you know how to pretend and be dramatic and all of that so well and I'm just…"

Ilya turned towards Shane more fully, cradling his face in his hands and tilting Shane's chin to look him directly in the eyes. "You are also fun, but more than that, you are *safe*. You are who they turn to when they are hurt, when they are scared, when the world gets too big for them. And that is another kind of gift in itself, *moya lyubov*."

Ilya thought back to earlier in the day when Ruby had got a paper cut and come running to Shane, distressed.

"Uncle Shane, I'm bleeding!"

Ilya had been busy twisting Jade's hair into a plait, and he'd paused, ready to lend a hand. But Shane was already there, gently cupping her tiny fingers in his palm, speaking in a low, soft voice to calm her down. "It's okay, Ruby. It's a paper cut, I'm going to run your finger under cold water for a little bit so the blood goes away. Is that ok?"

Ruby nodded slowly, tears shimmering in her eyes. "Okay," Shane said gently, tucking away strands of hair behind her ear and lifting her up to the countertop so she could reach the sink better. After the bleeding had stopped, he carefully dried the finger, patting it gently and talking to Ruby all the while, asking her about her friends and which Disney princess was her favourite. "Really? I always quite liked, er…the one who kisses the frog."

"Tiana?" Ruby said, head tilted to the side.

"That's the one. She always goes after her dreams right? And works really hard for it, and in the end she does get the restaurant."

"But there's so many other cool ones! Like Merida, she has a bow and arrow! Or Moana, she fights a HUGE crab."

"Hmm, alright, you can be the exciting ones going on adventures and I'll be the boring one waiting for you to come back and tell me all your stories, okay?"

Ruby giggled and rested her head on Shane's chest, "Okay. I love you, Uncle Shane." She mumbled and Shane's voice went soft, "Love you too, kid."

Ilya didn't think it had been possible for him to love Shane Hollander any more than he already did, but it turned out he was wrong.

"And you are who they come to when the world gets too loud and everyone is pushing and shoving and they want quiet and comfort. They want something steady, they want to be held and told it will all be okay. You give them peace." Ilya said, pressing the words into Shane's cheeks, his jaw, his forehead, leaving soft kisses all over his face, "I know, because you are this for me too."

Ilya watched from where he posed as a monster as Arthur tugged at Shane's sleeve, clutching his crocodile toy to his chest.

"You okay, bud?" Shane said, glancing down at him. Arthur shook his head and Shane furrowed his brows, dropping down to the floor and patting his lap for Arthur to sit down.

"I don't wanna play with Ruby and Jade anymore," Arthur mumbled into Shane's neck.

"Did something happen?" Shane asked softly, his hands moving up and down Arthur's back in a comforting gesture.

Arthur shook his head before looking up at Shane "I had fun playing dragons with them, but they're re loud and I don't wanna play anymore."

"OK, that's ok, bud. We can play something else. Just you and me?"

Arthur nodded and then paused like he was thinking very deeply about something. "Ruby and Jade called me boring…am I boring, Uncle Shane?"

"Hey, Arthur, look at me." Shane said, tilting the boy's head up gently and wrapping him in a hug. "You are not boring. Not at all. We all need some quiet time, and that's ok."

"Can I tell you a secret?" And Arthur nodded, his face still tucked into Shane's sweater, "I'm not the biggest fan of playing dragons either, I can never make the right kind of roar, I always end up sounding like a dog barking." And Arthur giggled at that, his small body shaking in Shane's arms. "And if you're boring, then I'm the most boringest boring man to have ever lived. And that's ok, you still like me right?"

Arthur nodded more firmly this time, looking up at Shane's face. "I like you a lot*, Uncle Shane." He said fiercely, as if trying to dispel any doubts Shane might have had. Shane smiled softly in return, "I like you a lot too, bud. Now, what should we play next?"*

And as Ruby and Jade tackled him to the ground, pretending they had finally slayed the dragon, Ilya knew had the stupidest smile on his face, but he couldn't help himself, and he didn't really care.

"You will be a great dad, Shane Hollander." Ilya whispered softly against his lips, feeling how they tugged up into a smile.

"So will you," Shane said gently, his fingers tangling in Ilya's curls as he pulled him down for a kiss, "I can't wait to do this with you."

"I know," Ilya said, smirking once they broke apart "I cannot wait to put a baby in you."

"*Ilya*! Oh my god." Shane shook his head, blushing, scrambling to get away as Ilya pulled him back to press kisses to his neck "I know you have thought about it before, *moya lyubov*."

And then Hayden and Jackie came back, flopping onto the other couch, curling into each other naturally. "How have you guys still not picked a movie yet?" Hayden groaned dramatically, throwing an arm over his eyes in distress. Honestly, and he called Ilya over the top.

"Like you'd sit and watch whatever movie Ilya picked anyways babe; you'd be complaining about his choices the whole time." Jackie said affectionately, patting her husband's cheek.

"What have you even been doing all this time? Actually wait -" Hayden backtracked, his eyes widening, "No, I don't want to know."

Ilya opened his mouth just as Shane shot him a look and promptly closed it, choosing to grab Shane's legs onto his lap and massage his feet instead. Shane sighed in contentment and Ilya felt a stupid, sappy grin on his face.

“Sucker.” Hayden mouthed as the movie started, and it was true. But Ilya really, really didn't mind.

Chapter End Notes

This update was a little bit late, but to make up for it, at least it's not that short?

I don't have a fic rec, but I do have a fanvid rec, I've been obsessed with Buckle by Florence + The Machine lately and to see such a beautiful edit of Hollanov to this is just perfection.
All credits to the creator!

The next update will probably take me a day or two, because I imagine it's going to be a longer one - we need to put Shane through all the feels lol.

Chapter 6: +1

Chapter Summary

And one time Shane fonds over Ilya (but really it's many, many times)

Chapter Notes

Happy Tuna Melt Eve! I can't believe we only have a couple more hours to wait until we get this scene (I'm fine, I am sooo fine).

I had a momentary urge to go back through the previous chapters and flip it to show Shane fonding over Ilya the entire time, but then this idea was stronger because I saw that Toronto premiere clip of Connor constantly looking at Hudson when describing his favourite things about him - their friendship is so beautiful <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rivalry to Romance: a peek into how two of the world's greatest hockey players nurtured a relationship through a decade.

You know them as Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, two generational players, competing since their rookie years for various awards and, of course, the Stanley Cup. But behind the chirps, a slow love was flourishing between these two men, and has now bloomed onto the public scene-

"Jesus," Shane muttered to himself, "that's a lot of garden imagery for a hockey magazine."

"*Shane*," Ilya whined from their bedroom, strolling into the lounge and peeking over Shane's shoulder at the tablet. "Are you reading that article again? If you wanted to know our love story so badly you could have just asked me, sweetheart."

"Ha, ha." Shane said dryly, rolling his head back to look up at Ilya "I'm just…nervous, I guess."

"Oh yes? I could not tell."

"Such a dickhead," Shane groaned, throwing the tablet aside, tugging at Ilya's shirt all the same, because when had he ever been able to resist?

“Oof,” Ilya huffed as he fell onto the couch, half lying on top of Shane, “are you trying to kill me? Is this stress relief?” His grin suddenly turned wicked, and Shane knew what was coming, “*Or* we could have some other kind of stress relief, hmm?”

“You're incorrigible.” Shane shook his head, pushing his leering face away.

“Incorri- what? Hollander, I do not know this word. It means sexy, yes? You are admitting the truth about your handsome husband?” Ilya said, nuzzling into the crook of his neck, the spot he knew always made Shane squirm and giggle.

“It means- *ah*-” Shane let out a breathless laugh, “like you never get enough.”

“Oh,” Ilya said, pulling away and looking at Shane very seriously, “then that is very true. How could I ever get enough?”

And something in Shane fluttered at the words, at the way Ilya gazed at him, and he had an urge to look away from the intensity, the *intimacy* of it all. But no, Shane thought giddily for the hundredth time, he didn't have to look away anymore. He didn't have to hide, no matter how terrifying it all seemed to let the world catch a glimpse of their love, this overwhelming, life-altering thing that existed between them, a golden cord wound around their ribs, tugging them closer with each breath, he was allowed to look back. On impulse, Shane grabbed the nape of Ilya's neck, fingers automatically sliding into his curls, and pulled him closer for a kiss. It was soft and sweet, gentle with its quiet admissions of *‘I love you’* and *‘You are everything’* and *‘I could never get enough either’*.

They broke apart and Ilya looked dazed, a goofy little smile on his face and God help him, Shane wanted to make him smile like that every day.

“It will be okay,” Ilya said, pressing his forehead against Shane's, “I know you were nervous about doing the house tour and interview so close to NHL Awards, but the tour was good, *da*? And I know you haven't been checking comments, which is good, but people love the interview.”

“Really?” Shane asked, his face tilting up towards Ilya's, like a flower looking for sunlight, chasing the warmth, “They're not…bad?”

“There are always some suckers,” Shane's lips twitched at the new word Hayden had unwittingly taught him, “but most of them talk about how handsome I am, and how you managed to land such a catch.” Ilya smirked as Shane whacked his chest.

“OK, *fine*, they say you are the handsome one, gosh, so vain-” that earned him another smack and Ilya laughed, grabbing both of Shane's wrists in his hand and pressing a soft kiss to his cheek.

“They are happy,” he said quietly, voice holding an undercurrent of warmth and fondness that was just for Shane, “and supportive, and *proud*. Just like I am so proud of you for being so brave, *moya lyubov*.”

Shane let out a slow breath and rested his head on Ilya's shoulder, before turning his face sideways and breathing into his neck, pressing soft, lazy kisses to the skin there. “I'm so proud of you too. So much- I can't put it into words sometimes, but you inspire me and you make want to be brave and-” Ilya hauled him up, ready to kiss the living daylights out of him, but Shane stopped him, shoving at his chest, making him fall backwards onto the couch and straddling his waist in one smooth motion.

“Wait,” Shane breathed, as Ilya's eyes widened in surprise, “I just-” *want to love you, want to see you, want to worship you,* “want to tell you this.” He could feel Ilya relax beneath him, his body going limp as any remaining tension slipped away, languid under Shane's hands. Ilya's palms came up to rest on Shane's hips, and he grabbed one hand and pressed a kiss to each fingertip before placing one in the centre of his palm, thumbs stroking over each callus, taking in the years of play, of injury and hurt and the rush of a game.

“You make me so happy, you know that? Sometimes I wake up in bed and turn my head and there you are - and I find it so crazy that I can have this. I think I've wanted this-” Shane let out a breath, his eyes locked on Ilya's, fingers tracing random patterns onto his forearms, “forever, really. For a decade, at least. To just be able to wake up next to you, to keep you till the morning, and then the days and nights after that. To just have you and make you *mine*.”

Shane interlocked their fingers and felt as Ilya squeezed his hand, before trying to look away. Shane caught his chin and gently turned his face back, determined to make Ilya understand, to realise what this overflowing cup of love was, that felt like it would burst through the dams of his ribcage sometimes, splintering his body in two in a desperate effort to reach Ilya, engulf him in his love.

“And I still can't believe that you're mine, sometimes, because look at you.” Shane untangled one of his hands from Ilya's, brushing at the warm skin under his shirt, before trailing up his chest and caressing his jaw as Ilya gulped, “You're so goddamn *beautiful.* Sometimes I see you and all I see is gold: your hair, your eyes,” he tugged at one of Ilya's curls and he could feel Ilya staring, eyes never wavering from his face, “and I could just look forever and ever. You're like a revelation.” Shane said quietly, *reverently*, bending down to press a chaste kiss to his lips.

“And I don't say it as often, I'm not as good with my words but - I am so glad that we get to have this. That you chose me, chose *us*. And you make me better, in every single way. You make me braver, you make me open up and you make me ‘*calm the fuck down, Hollander’* and I love you for it. I think I was made for loving you,” Shane whispered, cradling Ilya's face in his hands, their chests aligned. This way he could clearly see the delightful flush taking over Ilya's cheeks, the pink tint and slow suffusion of warmth under his fingertips, the sparkle in his eyes, “It's all I want to do.” Then he leaned down and finally captured Ilya's lips and the world slipped away.

***

Shane could not stop staring at Ilya.

They were up in their penthouse suite, with an hour left before the NHL Awards; Shane had already hung out their blazers and arranged everything neatly, buttoned himself into his slacks and a shirt, because he liked to be prepared, and hated being late. Ilya on the other hand, had spent 40 minutes (despite his protests that it was 'only 20!', Shane had timed it, so he knew) in the washroom sorting out his *hair*. And Shane loved Ilya's curls, he was their biggest fan honestly, but he was pretty sure Ilya didn't need more than fifteen minutes to get them 'perfectly bouncy and delicious', whatever that meant. Shane suspected Ilya was *maybe* a little bit nervous.

And he got it, Shane had been a nervous wreck the whole week, and Ilya had been great: putting up with his rambles, and his tossing and turning in bed (well, before he pinned Shane down and made him *fucking relax*) and repeated questions and what-ifs (What if they hate us? What if the reporters ask something inappropriate? What if some random person says something - what if someone from the *Voyageurs* says something?).

Ilya's response to all of these had been 'fuck them' before he had kissed Shane down from his mental ledge, and once Shane wasn't hyperventilating anymore, wrapped him in his strong arms and soothingly whispered into his hair real answers along the lines of 'most people love us, and the ones who don't aren't important, and they're too scared to do anything anyway.'

So really, the only reason he was remotely calm right now was because Ilya had been so *good* to him, with his infinite store of patience when it came to Shane's intrusive thoughts and anxious spirals, no matter how many times they ran around in circles with the same fears over and over again. But now, Ilya was nervous. They had been out together at public events before, but none of it was as huge as the NHL Awards, and there would definitely be attention on them, with Ottawa winning the Stanley Cup for the first time in however many years.

Ilya had finally come out of the washroom, and stood in front of the floor length mirror fiddling with his bow tie, muttering to himself in Russian, trying to hide his nerves under a whole other language. As if Shane didn't know Russian, as if he hadn't spent years poring over the *genitive case* and other terms that made his head ache for this exact reason.

Shane strolled up to him and grabbed him by the shoulders before sliding his hands up to his neck, drawing soothing circles with his thumbs on the skin there.

"*Hey*," Shane whispered in Russian, "*you okay*?"

"*Yes,"* Ilya said back, just as quietly, as he tilted his head back, closed his eyes and focused on the sensations on his skin. They stayed like that for a long moment, just standing, sharing breath, sharing space, time unspooling between them until nothing existed but this.

Ilya let out a slow exhale, "*I am just…worried. I want to do this right. I want to-"* Shane waited for Ilya to arrange his thoughts, not pushing him, simply being there and silently conveying the words *'I'm here, and I'll still be here when you're ready to talk*'. He cradled Ilya's jaw and tilted his face down towards him, locking their gazes.

“I want to-” Ilya started, switching back to English, “go out there and have fun. Like any other couple would, and I want to be proud of my husband, because he won the fucking *Cup*, and I want to show them that I am proud.” Ilya paused then, averted his eyes, his hands automatically coming to rest at Shane's waist, like an anchor, like they had found their way home. “But I know we will get more attention because of…who we are. And I do not want you to be uncomfortable, ever. So will you tell me? If it gets too much?”

And something in Shane loosened, this tightly coiled wire that had been poised inside his stomach ready to tangle him up in knots and choke him, with how much Ilya *cared*. How, even in one of the biggest moments of their careers, his thoughts resided with Shane, and making *Shane* feel comfortable, and confident.

There was also a tiny stab of guilt, that his neurotic tendencies and all those years of hiding made Ilya worried to show his husband off, to be proud of what they had built together in case it was too much for *Shane*, but he shoved that down because now was not the time, and he could ruminate over it later, when they were home.

Shane leaned in and pressed a kiss to the tip of Ilya's nose, delighting in the way his eyes widened in surprise, “I want that too. I am so proud of you, and you know what? We deserve to make it everyone's business, because we-” he pressed a kiss to Ilya's cheek, “won-” another kiss to the other side, “the fucking-” this time one to his forehead, “Cup,” he breathed, before kissing Ilya's lips.

Ilya let out a soft sigh of relief, and Shane swallowed that too, kept that little noise of homecoming tucked into a corner of his heart sectioned off just for the man in front of him, and leaned into him further. He pulled back after a while because he was a minute away from dropping to his knees right then and there, and, well, he really didn't want to go downstairs with obvious wrinkles on his suit. Also, it was always more fun when they delayed it for a while, teasing each other and anticipating the moment they could be alone again so they could have *this*.

“Hollander,” Ilya groaned, breathing harshly against his neck. Shane couldn't help his pleased little grin; it was always a thrill, even now, to know he could make Ilya feel this way, reduce him to short puffs of air as he tried to catch his breath.

“Rozanov,” Shane moved backwards slightly, cradling Ilya's jaw as he made a small noise at the loss of contact, “we have to be downstairs in half an hour.”

“But I want you.” Ilya said, blinking his eyes open and all but *pouting*.

“And you will have me,” Shane tried to tamp down the shiver that went through his body at the way Ilya's eyes darkened at the words, “just not yet. Aren't you always telling me to be patient?”

“I hate when you are right.”

“You must hate it often then.”

“So annoying,” Ilya muttered, his expression morphing from heat to one of fondness as he pressed a chaste kiss to Shane's lips. It wasn't much of a kiss because they were both smiling too wide to actually do much, which was probably for the best, all things considered.

“OK, now let's fix this bow tie. What were you trying to do? Build a crow's nest?”

“Hey, I watched many YouTube videos for this.” Ilya sniffed as Shane shook his head fondly and started undoing the knot. He could feel Ilya's eyes on him the whole time, as he carefully took the two sides and crossed them over each other and folded it into a bow. His dad could probably do it neater, but it was still better than whatever Ilya had going on before.

“You're staring,” Shane mumbled. He could feel a flush darkening his cheeks as Ilya's finger came up to trace the colour. “I can't help it,” he murmured, “you are too beautiful, Shane.”

And why was it, out of all the things he said, it was the way he breathed Shane's name that got to him the most? He could feel his cheeks burning now.

“You can't say things like that,” he ducked his head, pressing his face into Ilya's chest, “not unless you want me to melt into a puddle of goo.”

Ilya huffed a small laugh, his chest vibrating beneath Shane's head, “We can't have that now, can we, sweetheart?”

And it was just so *soft*, the look in Ilya's eyes like molten honey, rich and sweet; Shane could drown in it forever, stay in this syrupy haze and forget the rest of the world. Shane, whose brain always ran on overtime, crowded with a million thoughts vying for his attention, truly felt it all dwindle away, a mere whisper in the wind, when he was with Ilya like this.

I love you, he thought, *I love you so much I don't know what to do with it sometimes. I just want to keep you, I just want to hold you. I want to stare at your face forever but also be wrapped up in your arms and never let you go. Can I have both? Do I want too much? Will you let me have it? I love you, I love you, I love you. No one sees me like you do, no one gets me out of my head like you do, how are you mine? What have I done to deserve you? I love you.*

They were the kinds of thoughts that he could never hide, not when Ilya was standing right in front of him, and he was sure Ilya knew, judging by the expression on his face, that whatever Shane was feeling was written all over his face, like a canvas hung up for everyone to see. It felt like flowers, taking root in his heart, winding their stems up his throat and bursting out of his mouth in their obviousness.

“God, when you look at me like that- *Shane*-” and then Ilya was kissing him, tongue licking into his mouth, slow and indulgent, warmth flowing between them like the rush of water, like a whole fucking ocean. Who knows how long they stayed like that, entwined around each other? Shane didn't care, he much preferred to kiss his husband instead.

***

Shane could not stop staring at Ilya.

He was talking to a reporter on the red carpet, laughing and giving cheeky winks and just being charming, as per usual, and Shane was entranced. He had been in the middle of answering a question about who he thought were the greatest playmakers were and he had perhaps gotten a little too enthusiastic, waxing on about Kucherov and waving his hands about everywhere to demonstrate what he meant. It was the one time he *wasn't* a hockey robot. He couldn't help it, hockey plays were *fascinating*, okay? He could talk about ingenious assists for hours and which moves he found most inspiratio- oh wait, maybe he should go back on that previous sentence.

He felt Ilya's gaze on the side of his face then, but had carried on through his answer, not wanting to be rude to the reporter who was listening diligently and nodding at all the right times. But then he felt Ilya look at him again. And again. And again. On the fourth time Shane had looked up, catching Ilya's eye as he was in the middle of a sentence, and he lost track of his thoughts. He could feel his lips twitching up into an automatic smile, hands paused mid air as he gazed at his husband.

You're so beautiful, Shane wanted to say. And Ilya was: suited in his fitted blazer, the shirt that clung to his tapered waist just right, the suggestion of tantalising muscle that rippled beneath the fabric catching Shane's eye. He had an animal urge to slowly open the buttons on his shirt and lick a stripe up his abs, leave a mark on his chest that screamed *mine*. He raised an eyebrow and Shane felt himself flush bright red; Ilya grinned like he knew the thoughts running through his mind and Shane shook his head, turning determinedly back to the reporter.

“So, I know you did a house tour recently,” the reporter started and Shane bit back a groan. *Right, here it comes.* Of course, this topic would come up; the hockey world was obsessed with him and Ilya in some way or another: whether they hated the pair or loved them or just felt general confusion and ambivalence. “And it really highlighted your connection with Rozanov and how this is a serious relationship.” *Well no shit, we've been together for 4 years, and have been seeing each other for 11.*

Shane suppressed an eye roll and tried not to think about how Hayden or any of the players would feel if other people reaffirmed the validity of their relationship, as if they didn't know. As if they weren't in the relationship themselves.

“How has being open about your relationship impacted your playing and your experience of the sport?”

Shane could feel an instinctive response clawing up his throat, the media perfect answer, the part of him that had been honed and shaped since he was 13 years old, taught to never give anything away, never show your real emotions. But then he remembered Ilya's words, how he always wanted to Shane off, how he was so *proud* of them and what they had built together.

And Shane wanted that too. So much he could taste it: the euphoria, the relief of being honest and not having to hold himself back, no more picking out carefully curated answers like arranging shards of glass, one slip and everything would crack. He let himself speak, removing the armour he had constructed over 2 decades to let the world catch a glimpse of the overwhelming love he held for the magnificent man beside him. Shane didn't think he could ever be as eloquent or romantic as Ilya, but maybe he didn't need to be. Maybe just saying the words in the truest way he knew them was enough.

“It's made it a thousand times better. Playing with Ily- Rozanov, is like nothing I've experienced before. We only played together a couple of times at the All Stars, but to play with him everyday and see him on the ice, is an inspiration in itself. He's an amazing captain and always pushes everyone to their best, and an amazing partner too. It feels instinctive, being on the ice with him, like I can shoot the puck and know he'll be there to receive it. I've never had that before, it's almost-” Shane huffed out a laugh, surprised at his own rambling. He didn’t know he had so much to say, “It's almost like magic.” He said quietly, turning to look at Ilya as the other man grinned at the reporter in front of him, his curls glinting in the light and eyes dancing with mirth. He didn't know how long he had been staring before the reporter cleared their throat and Shane snapped back to look at him.

“Thank you, Hollander. That was very insightful.” Shane nodded, sure there was a bright flush on his cheeks (damn his circulatory system) as the reporter moved on to another player. Without conscious thought, his eyes turned back to Ilya (always back to Ilya, like he was a planet caught in the sun's eternal orbit, vying for the light that dripped from Ilya like gold) as he continued laughing and talking.

Shane could watch Ilya forever, he realised (for perhaps the thousandth time). It crept up on him each time like ivy, slowly planting its roots and then suddenly all you could see was vines, obscuring anything else that existed before. Looking at Ilya was a bit like that: Shane couldn't remember anything he ever wanted to watch more, couldn't remember a time *before* because most of the time it felt like this was inevitable. Something between a collision and the red string of fate his Obaachan used to tell him stories about when he was younger, and the sure belief, like a deep running current, like blood, that thrummed steadily beneath it all: that through all of these realities they would find their way back to each other out of choice.

Because Ilya was the most certain thing in his life; Shane was neurotic, and an overthinker, and a second-guesser when it came to his instincts about his personal life, but with this there was no hesitation. He would choose Ilya, and woke up every day making the same decision over and over again through the ups and downs and smiles and tears, the fights and kisses and laughs, because there was no one else like him. No one who lit Shane up with a mere glance, who could make him double over in laughter with just a quip, could soothe him with a single touch, and he knew Ilya felt the same. He felt a bone deep certainty settle inside him, the kind that came with loving and being loved, the familiarity of it all, the comfort.

And then Ilya turned towards him, locking gazes and said softly, “The best thing about playing with Hollander is that it is *Shane,”* and even in the midst of all these people, the

noise and buzz and crowd that sometimes felt like it could close in on him, Shane felt a piece of himself slot back into its rightful place under Ilya's stare. He was home.

Hollanov being fond of each other for 5 minutes straight by eTalk TV

Journalist: Rozanov, what has been your favourite part of this experience so far?

Rozanov: Besides winning the Cup? [*Rozanov winks and the reporter laughs*]

Journalist: Yes, well that must be the highlight, obviously, after Ottawa went so many years without one. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Rozanov: Well it means a lot, to be able to take us to the playoffs and win after so many years. Our team is amazing and the fans are so passionate, plus Ottawa is home, so it feels good to make everyone proud. [*Rozanov pauses and then shakes his head*] But winning the Cup was not the highlight. [*Rozanov is suddenly serious, looking intently at the reporter*]

Journalist: No? Then what was the highlight?

[*Rozanov turns to the side where Hollander is speaking to another reporter, a small smile is on his face as he watches Hollander gesture with his hands*]

Rozanov: It was getting to play with my husband. [*He stares at Hollander for another moment before turning back to the reporter, a smile on his lips*] That was the best moment, every minute that I got to see him on the ice and go home with him at the end of the day.

Journalist: It must be very different playing on the same team after being on opposing sides for so long. What's one thing you enjoy most about playing with Shane Hollander?

[*A larger grin makes its way onto Rozanov's face when he hears his husband's name. He looks to the side again before turning back to the reporter and tilting his head, thinking*.]

Rozanov: Hollander is dedicated, he gives his all to every session whether it's an optional practice or not. He never thinks of himself as better, and is always very humble, you would never know he has won 4 Stanley Cups. Well, unless you do something to annoy him, in which case you would probably deserve whatever he unleashes. [*Rozanov smirks and looks at Hollander again, his expression softening as he watches him*]

Rozanov: He is determined, his passion and enthusiasm is contagious; at times the locker room sounds like a zoo because it is *too* contagious. [*Rozanov continues to glance off camera and speaking, focusing on Hollander*]

Rozanov: He is competitive. The most competitive person you will ever meet, and he never does anything halfway. Players double his size are scared of him sometimes. [*Rozanov turns back to the camera and grins as he sees the reporter's expression*] Do you like how I keep

looking at him? How lucky am I, to get to see this every day? Come on, [*He gestures to the cameraman and tilts his head towards Hollander*] let's zoom over there.

[*The camera pans sideways, only to show that Hollander is already staring at Rozanov. He is standing in place a little way off, and his eyes are soft and warm. He has a sappy smile on his face, his head tilted to the side, watching Rozanov as he speaks]*

Rozanov: [*Rozanov locks gazes with his husband and says the next words softly, as if they are meant just for Hollander's ears, but they are picked up by the mic anyway*] The best thing about playing with Hollander is that it is *Shane*, and he is a once in a lifetime kind of player, the person who knows what I am going to do before I have even thought of it, sometimes. I am the luckiest man in the world to play with him every single day and call him my husband.

[*The reporter waits to see if he has anything more to say, but realises Rozanov and Hollander are too busy staring at each other and decides to wrap up the questions]*

Journalist: Thank you for your time Rozanov.

[*The reporter signals to the cameraman to stop rolling but not before one last shot is captured as the camera moves away: Hollander steps towards Rozanov and pulls him in by the lapels, he whispers something that sounds like Russian before pressing his lips to Rozanov's in a soft kiss, pulling him in in closer. The reporter can be heard making a noise that sounds suspiciously like a squeal in the background before they clear their throat and move away to interview another player]*

[*The camera is accidentally jostled one more time and a quick shot of Hollander and Rozanov is seen: Hollander presses a kiss to Rozanov's cheek and then slides a hand around his waist as Rozanov wraps an arm around his shoulders. They turn towards another camera to pose for a picture, faces serious. After a moment, Rozanov leans down and says something to make Hollander laugh, his head tilted back and a blush on his cheeks. They look at each other and grin, teeth bared and eyes crinkled, and cameras shutter in the background. They don't seem to notice; they only have eyes for each other.]*

Chapter End Notes

And we have reached the end!

I didn't mention anything about the actual documentary/house tour in this fic, but if you want to read something like that, chapter 7 of The centaurs have a PR problem (and it's married) by Justaromanticfool explores that (but really just read the whole fic because it's great)

This chapter took some time to write and it turned out to be longer than I planned because I didn't realise I had so much to say about Shane being a sap lol.

Thank you for sticking with me through this, it was a pleasure to write Hollanov and I hope you had as much fun reading this as I had writing it <3

End Notes

Thank you for reading xx Come crash out about heated rivalry with me on tumblr!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!