

Nothing Small

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by [jp_ruzu](#)

Summary

A misunderstanding, old insecurities, and one badly timed coffee leave cracks in Shane and Ilya's marriage just as the Centaurs take the ice against Montreal. When a sudden injury forces everything into sharp focus, love has to speak louder than pride.

Notes

This fic was inspired by a tweet about Shane and Ilya fighting before a game and one of them getting injured, leaving the other drowning in guilt. I hope you enjoyed reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it. 

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

Shane was actually having a good time.

He sat at the small kitchen table he'd grown up with, legs stretched out awkwardly because he'd never quite fit it right even as a teenager. His dad was rinsing dishes at the sink, his mom hovering nearby with a mug already half-full of coffee she definitely planned on refilling.

"You only come visit when your husband is busy," his mom teased, nudging his shoulder as she passed behind him. **"If I didn't know better, I'd think you were avoiding us."**

Shane smiled, easy and genuine. **"That's not true. I'd visit even if Ilya wasn't stuck in meetings."**

His mom hummed skeptically. **"Mm-hmm. And I'm sure it has nothing to do with the Centaurs board keeping him hostage today."**

He laughed, the sound light, familiar. **"He's the captain. Comes with the job."**

They moved together toward the kitchen, his mom reaching for the coffee pot. **"More?"** she asked, already tipping it toward his mug.

"Yeah," Shane said, glancing down as his phone buzzed in his pocket.

Once. Twice. A third time.

He frowned slightly, pulling it out. He expected the team group chat—maybe the coach updating them after the meeting, maybe Ilya sending a quick *still alive, miss you*. His thumb hovered, relaxed.

Then he saw the notifications.

Tags. Mentions. A gossip account he recognized immediately.

His stomach dropped.

The first photo loaded slowly, like his phone was being cruel on purpose.

Svetlana and Ilya stood outside a coffee shop, mid-greeting. Her lips brushed his cheek, casual, friendly—nothing scandalous. Nothing that should've hurt like it did.

The second photo followed. Closer. Svetlana's hands wrapped around Ilya's forearms as they stood at the counter, her fingers gripping just a little too familiarly. Ilya was listening to her, head tilted, posture open.

The third photo was the worst.

They were seated at a small café table, steam curling up from two mugs between them. They leaned in toward each other, shoulders nearly touching, both caught in the middle of laughter

—unguarded, warm, intimate in a way that made Shane’s chest tighten painfully.

His brain lit up all at once.

He didn’t tell you.

Everyone else knew first.

She’s touching him.

They look happy.

You weren’t invited.

Rational thought tried to fight its way in. *Ilya loves you. He chose you. You’re married.* But it was like trying to whisper over a fire alarm. The hurt came fast and sharp, settling deep in his ribs, spreading outward until it was hard to breathe normally.

He stared at the screen a second too long.

“Shane?” his mom asked gently. **“You okay, sweetheart?”**

He blinked, realizing his smile had slipped. His hands felt stiff, phone suddenly too heavy.

“Yeah,” he said automatically, tucking it back into his pocket. **“I’m fine.”**

His dad glanced over from the sink, unconvinced but quiet. Shane forced himself to take a sip of coffee, the warmth grounding him just enough to stand.

I’ll deal with it later, he told himself. *At home. Or maybe not at all.*

Because somewhere beneath the hurt and the noise, the rational part of him still knew the truth.

Ilya loved him.

By the time Shane got home late that afternoon, the hurt had settled into something quieter but heavier, like a bruise pressed too often.

Their home smelled like garlic and butter. Ilya was at the stove, sleeves rolled up, moving with easy familiarity as he stirred something in a pan. He turned the moment the door clicked shut, smiling.

“Hey,” he said warmly, crossing the space to press a quick kiss to Shane’s mouth. **“How were your parents?”**

Shane kissed him back automatically, but his body didn’t quite follow through. His shoulders stayed tight, his hands fisting briefly at his sides.

Ilya noticed immediately.

“Something wrong?” he asked, brow creasing. **“You look... off.”**

Shane shook his head. **“No. It was good. I had a good time.”**

Ilya studied him for another second, then nodded, letting it go—for now. **“Dinner’s almost ready.”**

They ate mostly in silence, the kind that wasn’t uncomfortable so much as unfinished. Shane pushed food around his plate, appetite gone, every clink of cutlery too loud in his head.

Halfway through the meal, Ilya spoke casually, like it was nothing worth flagging.

“Oh—by the way,” he said, **“I had coffee with Svetlana earlier. She’s in town for business.”**

Shane froze.

Not outwardly. Not dramatically. Just enough that the fork paused halfway to his mouth, muscles locking as his brain caught up to the words.

“You could’ve told me,” he said finally.

Ilya blinked, clearly surprised. **“It wasn’t really planned,”** he said. **“She texted while the board meeting was wrapping up. I figured it’d be good to let you have some more time with your parents, and I’d catch up with a friend.”**

Shane set his fork down carefully. **“I don’t have a problem with you seeing your friends.”**

“I know,” Ilya said. **“That’s what this was.”**

Shane nodded once, tight. **“Actually, I like it when you do. When you have parts of your life that aren’t me. That aren’t about me.”** He hesitated, words pressing painfully against his ribs. **“It just... sucked finding out from fans tagging me in a gossip site that exists to stir shit.”**

Ilya exhaled through his nose. **“You know they want to stir trouble,”** he said. **“Why are you letting that get to you?”** His tone sharpened just a touch. **“It’s not a big deal. It’s nothing. You don’t need to get jealous.”**

Nothing.

The word hit Shane like it always did—small but devastating, bouncing off memories he never let himself linger on. Svetlana hadn’t been nothing. She’d been constant. Comfortable. Someone Ilya had slept with for years, someone he’d liked enough to consider marriage—not for love, but still.

“It’s not nothing to me,” Shane said quietly. **“You could’ve sent a text. Before you went out with her.”**

Ilya’s jaw tightened. **“This isn’t about her,”** he said. **“This is about you not trusting me.”**

Shane swallowed. **“It kind of is.”**

That was when Ilya lost his temper.

Not yelling. Not raised voices. Just a sudden coldness that cut deeper than heat ever could.

“I am married to you,” Ilya said sharply. **“I chose you. If you don’t trust me over something this small, then what are we even doing?”**

He stood, carried his plate to the dishwasher with deliberate calm, and walked into their bedroom without looking back.

Shane stayed where he was, staring at the untouched food in front of him. The hunger was gone, replaced by something hollow and restless. He cleared his plate mechanically, wiped the counter, waited—counting breaths, seconds, the rise and fall of his chest.

After a few minutes, he followed.

The bedroom was dark. Ilya was already asleep, turned slightly away, breathing slow and even. Shane stood there for a moment, guilt creeping in sharp and unwelcome.

Maybe I fucked this up.

He leaned down, kissed Ilya’s temple softly, then slipped into bed on his side, staring up at the ceiling long after sleep refused to come.

Morning came too soon.

The house was quiet in the careful, brittle way that meant neither of them had slept well. Shane woke and lay there for a few minutes, staring at the ceiling, rehearsing apologies that tangled in his chest. By the time he finally pushed himself out of bed, Ilya was already up.

He was in the kitchen, moving with the same controlled efficiency he used on game days. Coffee brewing. Eggs in the pan. Toast popping up.

Shane hovered in the doorway.

“Ilya,” he said softly. **“About last night—”**

“We’re going to be late if we don’t eat,” Ilya interrupted without turning around.

The deflection stung more than anger would’ve.

Shane swallowed and nodded. **“Okay.”**

Ilya set a plate in front of him anyway, like muscle memory had taken over where emotion failed. He knew Shane. He knew that if he didn’t put food in front of him, Shane’s anxiety would eat whatever appetite he had left before the game.

They ate in silence.

Not hostile. Just... empty.

Ilya didn’t look at him once.

The drive to the arena that afternoon was worse. No music. No casual touches. Just the hum of the road and the weight of everything unsaid pressing in from all sides. Shane stared out the window, guilt and hurt twisting together in his chest. He wanted to apologize again. He wanted to explain how his brain worked when things spiraled. He wanted Ilya to look at him.

Ilya kept his eyes on the road.

By the time they arrived, the tension between them was fully alive.

The Centaurs felt it the second they stepped into the arena. Teammates exchanged glances, a few tried jokes that fell flat, subtle attempts to thaw something neither husband seemed ready to touch. Captain Rozanov was all business—focused, sharp, distant—never once meeting Shane’s gaze during warm-ups.

Shane skated like he was holding himself together with tape and stubbornness, eyes shadowed, shoulders hunched just slightly inward.

He looked like a kicked puppy.

And everyone noticed.

Montreal was already loud, already hostile. The familiar jeers crawled under Ilya’s skin the moment he stepped onto the ice. He hated them. Always had. The way they’d treated Shane when their relationship had been accidentally dragged into the open had left something ugly and permanent lodged in his chest.

Tonight, that anger burned hotter than usual—but it was controlled.

Whatever was breaking quietly between him and Shane, hockey was still hockey.

They played like men possessed.

Ilya drove the net with ruthless precision. Shane threaded passes through impossible gaps. They read each other instinctively, muscle memory overriding hurt, trust on the ice still intact even if it felt fragile everywhere else.

Shane assisted on Ilya’s goal.

Ilya set Shane up minutes later.

By the end of the second period, Ottawa was up 3–1. Shane had an assist. Ilya had a goal.

They didn’t celebrate together.

But the connection was still there—sharp, undeniable, burning just beneath the surface—proving to everyone watching that whatever was happening between the husbands, it hadn’t touched the way they played.

Midway through the third period, with the pace frantic and the noise in the arena rising to a fever pitch, it happened.

Shane carried the puck down the right side, legs pumping, vision locked forward. A Montreal defenseman stepped up to angle him toward the boards, body low, stick extended. Shane tried to cut inside at the same moment, instinctively shifting his weight to slip past.

Their skates clipped.

It wasn't dirty. It wasn't intentional. Just bad timing and too much speed.

Momentum carried them both forward, and Shane went down hard—his shoulder hitting first, his helmet snapping back as his head struck the boards at the wrong angle.

The sound was wrong. Dull. Sickening.

Shane slid down the boards and collapsed onto the ice, motionless.

Ilya's breath left him in a rush as his brain caught up to what his eyes were already screaming.

Not his head. Please, not his head.

They were always careful. Always. Shane's concussion years ago—before they'd ever been anything—had changed everything. The occasional headaches, the extra precautions, the unspoken fear that lived in the back of Ilya's mind every time Shane went down near the boards.

The arena fell into a strange, horrified hush, broken only by the shrill whistle and the scrape of skates stopping short. Ilya was moving before he consciously decided to, heart slamming against his ribs, breath tearing out of him as he dropped to his knees beside Shane.

"Shane," he said, panic bleeding into the word. **"Shane—look at me. Baby, look at me."**

Nothing.

Shane lay still, eyes closed, one arm twisted awkwardly beneath him. The sight made Ilya's vision blur, fear clawing sharp and merciless up his spine. Trainers were there in seconds, hands steady as they assessed Shane's responsiveness, one of them carefully stabilizing his head.

"Give us some space," someone said, gentle but firm, guiding Ilya back just enough.

As they began removing Shane's helmet—slow, deliberate, careful—something inside Ilya cracked.

The guilt hit then. Not abstract. Not later.

It came all at once, brutal and suffocating, replaying the past twenty-four hours with merciless clarity. Shane standing in the kitchen, trying to apologize. Shane saying it wasn't small to him. Shane carrying the hurt quietly, spiraling because that was how his brain worked—because small things became enormous when anxiety took hold.

Ilya knew this. He had always known this.

He knew Shane overthought. He knew panic could spiral fast and vicious. He knew how his meeting with Svetlana must have looked—how Shane knew she'd been his fuck buddy for years, someone constant and familiar, someone Ilya had once admitted he liked.

And instead of understanding, Ilya had shut him out.

I should have told him.

I should have reassured him.

I should have held him.

Shane stirred as the trainers fitted a neck brace, his brow furrowing as consciousness slowly crept back in. His eyes fluttered open, unfocused, confused.

“Easy,” one of the paramedics said gently. **“Don’t try to move.”**

Shane swallowed, lips parting. **“Ilya?”** he murmured, voice thick and disoriented.

Ilya surged forward, this time no one stopped him. He grabbed Shane’s hand, squeezing tight, grounding himself in the warmth, the proof that Shane was still here.

“I’m here,” Ilya said urgently. **“I’ve got you. You’re okay.”**

Shane’s fingers curled weakly around his, relief softening his expression even through the haze. **“Okay,”** he said obediently, slurred but trusting.

They loaded him onto the stretcher, and Ilya didn’t let go for a second.

The coach was already at his side, eyes sharp but kind. He gestured toward the tunnel without hesitation.

“Go,” he said. **“We’ve got the game.”**

A few teammates shouted encouragement as they passed—angry, focused, determined.

Ottawa wasn’t done. They were going to finish this. Not for the points. For Shane.

Ilya stayed with him as they moved, never letting go as the stretcher rolled down the tunnel, the noise of the arena fading behind them. The bright lights overhead blurred into long streaks, Shane’s grip tightening and loosening in weak pulses, like he was anchoring himself to the only thing that felt solid. Somewhere behind them, the doors to the rink closed, sealing the game away—shouts and skates and anger all left behind.

The last thing Ilya saw before the doors shut was a flash of Centaurs blue, his team skating back into formation, sharp and determined.

Then the stretcher lifted.

The doors slammed shut, sealing them inside the ambulance, and the world narrowed instantly.

Sirens wailed overhead, rhythmic and relentless. The lights flickered softly against white walls as the vehicle lurched forward. Shane lay strapped to the stretcher, neck brace snug, eyes glassy with pain he was clearly trying to outrun.

“Stay with us, Shane,” one of the paramedics said calmly, fingers checking his pulse. **“Keep your eyes open.”**

“Don’t fall asleep on us,” the other added, voice gentle but firm.

Shane nodded, but the movement was barely there. His brow creased, a quiet, pained sound slipping from his throat before he caught himself. His jaw clenched, eyes squeezing shut for half a second too long.

“Okay,” he said, voice slurred, thin. **“I’m... okay.”**

He wasn’t.

The pain was written all over his face—the tightness around his eyes, the shallow way he breathed through it, like every pulse behind his temples hurt too much to acknowledge out loud.

Ilya leaned closer, careful not to jostle him, resting his forehead gently against Shane’s now-bare hairline. He threaded their fingers together, thumb brushing slow, grounding circles over Shane’s knuckles.

“I’m here,” he whispered, low and steady. **“You’re doing great. Just stay with me.”**

One of the paramedics glanced over, expression softening. **“You’re helping,”** she murmured to Ilya. **“Keep talking to him.”**

Shane shifted slightly, a soft whimper escaping before he could stop it. **“Head hurts,”** he admitted, almost apologetic.

“I know,” Ilya said immediately, voice thick but controlled. **“I know, baby. They’re taking care of you.”**

The paramedic adjusted something near Shane’s shoulder. **“Pain’s expected,”** she said reassuringly. **“But you’re safe. Just breathe.”**

Shane tried. He really did.

He turned his head a fraction, eyes struggling to focus until they found Ilya’s face. Relief washed over his expression, even through the pain.

“Are you... still mad at me?” he asked quietly.

The question broke something open in Ilya’s chest.

He froze, breath catching hard before he forced it out again. **“No,”** he said immediately, shaking his head. **“No. I’m not angry.”** His voice cracked despite his best effort. **“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have reacted like that. I should have listened.”**

Shane studied him for a moment, as if weighing the truth of it, then smiled—small, crooked, aching familiar.

“Okay,” he murmured. **“I love you.”**

Ilya tightened his grip, pressing his forehead back against Shane’s gently, like a promise. Tears burned hot behind his eyes.

“I love you too,” he said fiercely. **“Always.”**

The siren carried them forward, steady and loud, but inside the ambulance there was only the sound of breathing, hands held tight, and the quiet certainty that whatever hurt they’d carried into this day hadn’t broken them.

They were still here.

Still together.

End Notes

Falling into the Heated Rivalry rabbit hole was absolutely not on my 2025 bingo card—but a few Tarlos pages I follow on IG kept posting about Shane and Ilya, and well... here we are. I read Heated Rivalry and The Long Game in three days, loved them to pieces, and couldn't believe how similar the series feels to the actual content and emotional beats of the books. Now I'm just waiting for all of us to finally get to the cottage.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!