

limelight and limerence

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by [idiotsinkdaisies](#)

Summary

He glances at the window. Nobody is looking. Their cards are down. All of their cards are down. He's still looking over his shoulder. "You are out, you are on a team with potential -"

"We," Ilya corrects. "We are all of those things."

The start of the season marks Shane's first year with the Centaurs and playing with his husband. He's got a lot to prove now that the honeymoon is over.

Notes

set after events of the long game. cw for canon typical mental health discussions

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

Cold air is cold air, but he could tell the difference between the night sky and the rink by smell alone. His head tilts upward and the wind lifts his hair, bringing the scent of fresh water and dirt and the new goldenrod bushes growing in their garden.

The first game of the season is tomorrow. It will be a home game, filled for the first time with fans that know they are together. It will be the first game they play as married partners. Shane wants to win.

“Good?” Ilya asks, sitting down in the spot next to him. He passes a mug of decaffeinated tea. “You look like you are thinking too hard.”

“I’m not,” Shane says, reflexively, and he sips on the drink. His mug is chipped and has a faded logo from his high school team, nearly a decade and a half ago now since he wore those colors. The tea is sweet. Ilya added honey.

“Okay,” Ilya says, and takes his hand. Shane would know his hand from his calluses and the rough skin that stretches over each knuckles. His fingers thread into his, and Ilya places a line of slow kisses down his palm. He leans into his shoulder and breathes, pushing his face into the soft wool of his sweater.

“We have a big first tomorrow,” Shane says, into the fabric. “I’m thinking about that.”

Ilya holds his face with both of his big hands. His thumb swipes a gentle line down his cheek. “Think less,” he says. Shane nods. “Come to bed.”

Later, lying together in silence, Shane takes a minute to study Ilya's sleeping face. They left a single lamp on and it cast the room in a warm glow. Ilya is painted golden. He trails a finger over his stomach, tracing out layers of fat and muscle that carry him through games and practices and life.

“Do you know what is more perfect than playing together?” Ilya asks. His eyes crack open, pupils darkened with the hour and residual want.

“Winning the cup together?” he asks. Ilya blows a raspberry. “Winning a gold medal together?”

“Hm,” Ilya says. “Also good things. But no. I meant this.”

“This?”

“This,” Ilya agrees, and pulls Shane to his chest. His arms wrap around his body, his hand squeezes at his chest, and his breathing slows until Ilya is asleep. Shane, however, is left awake.

They win their first game and Shane lands hard on the bench in the locker room. Shane shucks off his gloves and his guards and mostly tunes out the celebratory cheering of the

Centaurs until he picks out the sound of the post game interview. He looks up, searching the room for the source of his husband's voice.

"Hey, here," Wyatt murmurs. He angles his phone so Shane can see.

Ilya has four different microphones in his face. "They played well," he is saying, lips already quirking upward. "We played better."

"What's it like playing with Hollander after years of being his rival?" another reporter asks. A camera flashes. Shane exhales sharply.

"Good," Ilya says. He shakes his head. "No, it is great. We make each other better."

"You used to play like you hated each other on the ice-"

"No," Ilya interrupts. He holds out a finger. Shane takes the phone from Wyatt and squeezes the screen. "We played like we wanted to win. Never hate. I've always loved him, even before I knew the word. Even when I could not say the word. Especially then."

There is a brief respite as the room waits with bated breath for Ilya to continue or for a reporter to breach the silence. Ilya seems content to wait, smiling that insufferable smile of his. Eventually, a single hand rises.

"How do you think the Centaurs will do this year now that you've deepened your center?"

"Ah, a hockey question!" Ilya exclaims. "Thank you. This is the year we will win the cup."

The room explodes into questions.

At Troy's house, there is endless ribbing about Ilya's declaration. Shane settles into a chair and cradles a mostly full bottle of Labatt Blue. Troy has a firepit, and the Centaurs sprawled out around the cackling flames. Ilya's hands fly as he speaks, playful, with a weight off of his shoulders. Their teammates watch Ilya with a rapt attentiveness. These are Ilya's friends, people who have played by his side for years and kept him sane when Shane could not.

He must sense his gaze because he turns, eyes crinkling and face softening. Shane takes Ilya's empty bottle and goes inside to get him a new one. His husband follows him in, pressing a kiss to his neck as he presses him into the counter. He spins so he can kiss Ilya properly.

"I am happy," Ilya says, the words radiant and redundant with the force of his smile. Like this, he glows, in his prime as a player and a leader. Shane's heart clenches.

"You should be happy," Shane says. He glances at the window. Nobody is looking and everyone knows. Their cards are down. All of their cards are down. He's still looking over his shoulder. "You are out, you are on a team with potential -"

"We," Ilya corrects. "We are all of those things."

Shane buries his face into his neck so he doesn't have to worry about his expression anymore. There is something strange about being *out*. People know his sexuality like they know his face. His most closely guarded secret is mentioned in fourteen different *Buzzfeed* articles. The cards are down.

He pulls off when the door opens, and picks at the label on his own beer. "Harris!" Ilya greets. "What a surprise to see you here."

Harris and Troy have lived together for months. Shane glances up. His head tilts back as he laughs.

"Hey," Harris says. "We boring you? What are you two doing in here?"

"Nothing," Shane says, at the same time that Ilya says "kissing."

Shane flushes. He's sure of it, and can feel the blood rushing upward. "Kissing," he corrects, and it's worth anything because now Ilya's laughing, fingers tangled in his belt loops, throat bobbing with the joy of it, of having people to annoy and be annoyed by. Shane remembers the early years, before he had been able to ask or know, when he would watch Boston games and wonder if Ilya got along with teammates or if he had been tolerated for his skill. It is nice for Ilya to have his team that loves him off ice.

It is late, and Shane is the only one awake, slipping out of bed to work off the restlessness under his skin. Their tea mugs are together on the counter. The little honey bear has been left out, the lid still on the counter. He takes out his phone instead of wiping down the counter. Without letting himself think, he posts a picture of their mugs, with a singular heart in the caption.

His thighs ache from the squat rack. Shane has hit a personal record - only five pounds heavier than his previous one - and the five pound difference feels like a thousand as he slowly lowers himself onto the couch. He switches the TV to the sports channel, settling on a rerun of a game from last season.

Luca is already a better passer than this, more at ease in his second season. The team overall is better now - able to continue their strong starts further into each period. They've gained an unmeasurable amount of confidence and chemistry, nearly unrecognizable from the team Ilya had joined. More passes connecting, more goals scored. Shane takes notes on his phone for most of the players so he has specific advice to dole out over the next few weeks. Troy should practice his backhand. Wyatt has a weak side - of the clips Shane could find most of the goals he allows come from the left side of the rink.

Ilya stands in front of the TV with his hands on his hips. "Is this relaxing for you?"

"This is how we win," Shane says. "Elimating weak spots. Strategy."

“The power of friendship?” Ilya says.

“Who taught you that phrase?”

Ilya kisses him. His hands are careful as they undo the drawstring of his pants, and then his left takes Shane’s phone and tosses it out of reach. He drops into the space between his body and the coffee table.

“I was looking at that,” Shane says, cupping the mess of his husband's curls. He runs his fingers through the strands, tugging lightly as Ilya nips at his thigh.

“Look at me,” Ilya says, and takes him in his mouth.

He melts into the couch, mouth falling open. Ilya's expert fingers pull his thighs apart, digging into spots that drag pathetic sounds out. Shane pants. He hardens quickly, Ilya's tongue dragging upwards until only the head is in his mouth.

“Fuck,” Shane says on an exhale, watching as Ilya reaches down to palm over himself. Ilya smirks.

“I have not done anything yet.”

Shane traces the slope of his brow to his nose, to his cheekbones and to his chin. He's overwhelmed sometimes, with the way Ilya looks at him. His finger moves reverently upward until he is grabbing a fistful of hair.

“Please?”

His mouth is hot and demanding, slick as his hand keeps Shane's hips pinned. Shane loses the tether to his composure quickly, like this, with Ilya on his knees. Ilya used to be described as wild at every turn, the reckless player seen with different girls in different cars every weekend. The only thing about Ilya that Shane would describe as wild is this smile of his, the one that nearly splits his face open when he has gotten what he wants.

Morning sun cascades down the kitchen counter and Ilya slides a plate to the spot in front of him. He props his head up with his hands, grinning cheekily. Shane narrows his eyes.

“What?” he asks.

“Nothing,” Ilya says, but his eyes sparkle with mirth and Shane risks a glance to his plate.

“Oh,” he says. The stacked pancakes have a smile drawn on with blueberries, dark indigo bleeding out where the fruit had split. Shane rotates the plate so the shape faces him.

“Cute because you are cute,” Ilya says, and comes around the counter with his own plate. He cannot decide if Ilya's sweet tooth or sweet talking is worse for him, since both end with Shane indulging in more softness than he typically allows himself. “Unless you prefer mine?”

The other blueberry pancake is decorated with a dick shape. Shane snorts. Ilya reaches out and he tilts his head back so they can kiss; Ilya's hands are warm and sticky as they cup his face. His mouth tastes like blueberries, the kiss sweet like syrup.

"I love you," Shane whispers, and he can feel how wide Ilya smiles. "I love it. Thank you."

Another kiss, and then Ilya pulls back and mutters something about leaving the burner on. His back is wide and gold, dark freckles and moles litter his shoulders. Shane takes a picture of his plate first, centering the smile, and then one of Ilya humming to himself as he carries dirty dishes to the sink.

A comment from Hayden will read *now my kids want special pancakes from him. does he take requests*, Ilya will respond *I do for Jackie and her wonderful children* ❤️, and Hayden's *what about me* 🙄🙄 will be left without a response.

The Saturday before the anniversary of Irina's death, they are crammed in the visitors locker room in Montreal going over last minute strategy, and Ilya will not make eye contact with him. Instead, he's every picture of the perfect captain, their brave and fearless leader.

His new coach seems to understand that Shane does not need flowery words when it comes to coaching and motivation, so Wiebe's private pep talk for the Montreal game is brief and amounts to *remember that we've got your back*, which Shane appreciates.

Shane understands abstractly that there is a reason for motivating speeches. There is a camaraderie that comes with teamwork and struggle, of standing shoulder to shoulder and being encouraged to dream. He had coaches when he was younger that would pull him aside to recount numerous trials and tribulations. Shane never cared. The point always ended up being *always do your best*, or something similar. He prefers the tagline.

When Ilya stands in the center of the locker room he is commanding. "Fuck Montreal," Ilya says. "And fuck Hayden Pike in particular."

"Ilya," Shane laughs. He shakes his head.

"Fuck Montreal, end of sentence," Ilya corrects. Wiebe fails to stifle a laugh. "We will play hard. Because we are a team. We are a team on and off the ice, yes? Can Montreal say this?"

Shane's heart beats. The room choruses in agreement, in playful ribbing and cheer. Wyatt nudges their skates together to get his attention, and Shane raises an eyebrow in question.

"Fistbump, man," he says, with his hand up. Shane taps their knuckles together. Wyatt beams.

Ilya's looking over with a fond grin. "Fuck Pike on three. Shane, *my love*, can you please take a video of this?"

They lose the game. It is a 4-3 final score, and Shane scores two goals against Montreal's new goalie. So does Haas.

Ilya does not score, despite half a dozen attempts.

He's still smiling in the aftermath, all wrapped in good natured humility as he bemoans an unlucky game to their teammates and the press. Ilya shows the right amount of defensiveness, the right amount of disappointment. Shane chews on his already rough lips and draws blood.

"Good?" Shane asks once they are alone. Ilya has already tucked the duffles into the trunk and clicked his seat belt on.

"I am fine," Ilya says. His white knuckles tell a different story. "I wanted to win."

"I wanted to win too," Shane scoffs. "Is this all on you? We're a team."

"I am captain," Ilya says. He's still rolling his left shoulder, proof that the hit he took early in the game has bugged him more than he let on. He flashes a practiced smile. "The loss is on my shoulders."

"Turn your press voice off!" Shane exclaims. He looks away. The loss is fresh and Shane has his own wounds to lick when it comes to Montreal. "You're talking like there's still a camera in your face, Ilya."

"I do not pretend to care about this team," Ilya says. He has never enjoyed losing. This game, Shane had something to prove. He needs to play harder, to play faster, to shoot with a higher accuracy if he wants to beat Montreal, if he wants the cup.

"That's not what I meant," Shane says. The night time is quiet. When he looks over, Ilya's eyes are closed and his head is thunked back against the headrest. "You're talking to me. Not the press room."

"Me?" Ilya echos. He glances at Shane, and then back at the road ahead. He sighs. "Ten minutes until we are home. I will be not-okay then."

"Okay," Shane echos.

They get home and the group chat with the Centaur team has a few dozen unread text messages planning an impromptu hangout at Wyatt's. Shane leans against the counter as he watches a conversation splintered into dozens of individual texts. He tracks Ilya as he emerges from his shower, silent, eyes half lidded and his curls flat and unstyled. Ilya leaves the door to their room open.

Shane places an order for takeout and texts the group chat that they will not be joining. A few rowdy messages float in, directed at them.

what r u 2 doing tonite instead of mourning w/ us 🙄🙄🙄

Each Other? 😏

Shane dislikes the comment, and opens up a text to Wyatt. *Hey. Thanks for invite, have fun tonight! Don't mention to team, Ilya will later if he wants, but the anniversary of his mom's death is Monday. So we're not in a party mood. Sorry!*

He reacts with a simple heart and sends his well wishes.

Their room is dark. Shane lets in the smallest sliver of light, enough to cast a yellow line over Anya and Ilya, before closing the door behind him.

Ilya's eyes are closed. One hand is buried in Anya's soft fur, drawing lazy circles that prove he's still awake. Her tail thumps on the comforter as Shane dips into bed. He says nothing about the fact that Anya is not allowed on their bed.

"Hi," Shane whispers, and crawls forward until he's half over his husband. "What do you need?"

"To sleep," Ilya says. He winds cold hands under his shirt, pressing for the skin contact. "Maybe I will dream."

"*I love you*," Shane says in Russian. He moves until they are one form, so tightly wrapped that nothing could fit into the space between their bodies. "*Always*."

Ilya's eyes are nearly black in the lamplight. He thumbs away his tears. "I wanted to win for you," Ilya says. "To prove that they were wrong to let you go."

"Hey," Shane says. He presses an opened mouth kiss to his forehead first, lingering, taking a moment to feel his husband breathe. "I know that."

"I wish you could meet her," Ilya says. He blinks at the non sequitur. "She would love you."

"Yeah?" Shane prompts. He brushes his fingers across the golden chain. Ilya's hand covers his, and presses the small cross into the swell of his chest.

"In my dreams, you have met her."

"You dream about that?" Shane asks. It is a gooey feeling, one that runs through him like water. Ilya smiles softly, a private one, a much quieter smile without his practiced brashness.

"I have a lot of dreams," Ilya says. His voice cracks around the word dream, and his fingers tighten on his waist. "I am having a bad day, Shane."

"Yeah," Shane says, and pushes hair back from his forehead. "It's okay."

Ilya wraps his arms around him, and starts to cry.

His fan interactions in public have been mostly positive in the last few months. Still the same selfie requests, still the occasional heckling that Shane's mostly sure is playful. No one has ever tried to do an interview during his grocery run before.

"A few questions, Shane Hollander?" He says again, and Shane almost feels bad when he turns into a new isle. The man is persistent.

“Sure,” Shane says, his jaw tight. They lost to Montreal - is that what he wants to know? Is this man hoping he'll get a soundbite of Shane talking about his identities? The man holds up a phone, the screen showing the seconds ticking upward on some recording software.

“Do you think the Centaurs have a real shot at the cup?” is the first question. Shane has answered this before: any team that wants the cup has to commit to belief and blind hope.

“Yes,” he says, and does not elaborate.

“Why?”

Shane bites his tongue. “Ilya and I are two of the best players in the league. Wyatt and Haas have gotten better each season - the entire team has gotten better. This is lightning in a bottle and we are going to take advantage.”

“Thank you,” he says, and presses his glasses further up his forehead. “Do you ever think about what might have been different without Rozanov -”

“What?” Shane interrupts. He feels - not quite a revulsion, but an itch - at the idea. Nobody is looking at him, but he feels eyes anyways, knows the hits that articles quoting him get.

“You two. If you hadn't met. Do you ever think about how your career would have progressed differently? If you would still be in Montreal?”

“Are you asking if I would still tolerate assholes in locker rooms? If I'd still be straight?” Shane asks. “Do you think I started sucking dick on accident?”

“In a world without him!” he tries, holding up a placating hand. It is a bad question on a bad day. Ilya is still in their bed, and Shane is trying to find fresh spring peas in September.

“I'd find him again. Fuck you,” Shane says, and leaves the car behind in his rush out of the store.

He parks the car on the driveway and risks a glance to his phone. A missed call from Ilya, roughly 45 unopened text messages from various people, seven of which are from their shared manager. There's one from J.J. - and Shane feels out of his own body opening that text. A year ago, this time, J.J. would be texting him constantly with party invitations or about the team. Their text thread has grown sparse in the recent months.

I wanted to let you know I saw what the reporter said and I think that guy is a dick. Hope you're doing well man! Shane stares at the text. He reacts with a thumbs up.

“Ilya?” he calls out, toeing off his shoes in the entrance. “I am home!”

His husband is out of bed. He rounds the corner. He's easy and warm in low slung sweats, clearly amused. “Hello, *love*. Did you have an interesting trip?”

Shane winces. “You saw?”

“Yes,” Ilya says. He wraps himself around Shane, and pulls until Shane is winding his arms around his neck. “Everyone knows you started sucking dick on purpose.”

“Oh my god,” Shane mutters. He squints at the headline on Ilya's phone. “Shane Hollander Exchanges Tense Words with Journalist?”

“He posted the transcript first,” Ilya continues, gleeful. “People did not believe Shane Hollander was so rude to a poor servant of the public -”

“Shut up. He’s already got the article up? It hasn't been an hour!”

“And the audio recording,” Ilya finishes. “You are a meme.”

Shane presses into his neck and sighs. His phone rings in his pocket and J.J.’s contact photo fills his screen, an old one from three years ago. He answers.

“J.J.?”

“You picked up!” J.J. exclaims. “I was going to draft a supportive voice note for you to find later with my text.”

“That was a good idea,” Ilya says. “Shane. Hang up.”

“Mon esti de tabarnak,” J.J. mutters. “We have an audience? Fuck you, Rozanov.”

“You say such sweet things to me,” Ilya coos.

It is easy. J.J.’s light ribbing like they were teammates again, like they were shoulder to shoulder in a locker room. “What do you want?” Shane asks. He coughs. “I mean. I appreciate you calling but -”

“Why now?” J.J. finishes his thought for him. “That journalist was a dick. Made me think about how I’ve been a dick. Then I started thinking about all these tar pits you keep stepping into. Did you know you can go around? You don’t have to step in and announce that you suck dick on purpose -”

“J.J.,” Shane cuts in. “Thanks. Maybe we can meet up next time we play?”

“I’d like that,” he says. “And I guess you could bring Roz if you want.”

Another loss and Shane barely feels the sting, down by one with the other team performing miracles on ice. This is a respectable loss. The other team had a great game while the centaurs only played good. This happens. It is unheard of to win every game in a season. Shane slams a locker shut and closes his eyes.

Wyatt is watching the post game interview and Shane lingers awkwardly at his side until he switches off his bluetooth and turns the volume up.

“Hollander did not score tonight, only you and Haas put up points. Is there a-”

“Happens,” Ilya shrugs. “Next question?”

“I don’t want to watch this,” Shane says, and Wyatt fully turns his phone off even though he had, presumably, been watching. “I don’t need to hear about how I’m in a slump. This is the worst time for me to be in a slump.”

“Stop saying the word slump,” Troy complains from across the room.

“Is there such a thing as a good time?”

“The year I came out and got married and changed teams?”

“There are probably better times,” Troy allows.

“I’ll fix it,” Shane says. He knows the steps: longer practice, more practice, and more practice. There are drills he will need to work, improving his stickhandling and accuracy.

“Fix what?” Ilya asks, fresh off the gaze of the cameras. His cheeks are flushed red with exertion.

“My stats,” Shane says.

Ilya looks confused as he wipes off sweat with a towel. “You are top five in the league with every single metric they will ever come up with.”

“This time last year I had seven more goals,” Shane argues. “That’s seven points - we’ve lost within a point three times this month. If we win those seven points, we win some of those.”

“Okay!” Ilya says cheerfully, and the three of them still left in the locker room stare. “We will replace you with Robot Shane that is perfect and makes no mistakes. And then we will replace Haas and Barrett and Wyatt. Robot Wyatt will be better than Wyatt and never let any goals in. Not me. It will be a team of robots and me.”

“Fuck off,” Shane mutters. “All I’m saying is that I need to be better. This is the first game in a slump, I need to make sure it is the only game.”

“Why am I being dragged into this?” Troy asks.

“One bad game is not a slump.”

“So you agree that I played a bad game?”

The argument continues on the drive home, through a shower, and over dinner.

He is wrapped only in blankets and Ilya, thumbing through his phone at tweets detailing fan reactions to the game today. “Ruby *Rozanoz* asked how old I am, and Jeff - that’s a long string of numbers - he said 30. Then Ruby replied with a skull emoji and ‘makes sense.’ Skull emoji? *Makes sense*? She’s implying that I should be dead.”

“You do look older,” Ilya says. He trails a string of kisses up his shoulder. “Handsome. Proof of the time we’ve lived together.”

Shane puts his phone down before curling into his husband’s arms. “You are such a romantic,” he says, eyes slipping shut as Ilya’s fingers tangle in his hair. He continues in Russian. “*I love you.*”

Ilya kisses his hair, murmurs the words back. “You worry people will find out you are gay, now you worry people will find out you are bad at hockey.”

“If I care five percent less each season, then this is fifty percent less than when I started. I only have ten to go before I don’t care at all.”

“Is that why Scott Hunter is the way he is?” Ilya says. “That is not how math works.”

“What do you know about math?”

“More than you,” Ilya counters. He tilts his head forward to kiss him. “You are less neurotic than the beginning.”

“Learn that in therapy?” Shane asks.

“To talk about you,” Ilya says, and softens at whatever must show on Shane’s face. “You are the biggest part of my life, you come up.”

Ilya’s hand drifts lower on his head, down his forehead and over his brows. His thumbs press into the tightness, the lines that spell out Shane’s thoughts. “I can feel your frown. You think too much. Maybe therapy would be good for you too.”

“Maybe,” Shane allows.

“Not saying no?” Ilya asks. Shane swallows, suddenly a heavy lodge in his throat. The tightness is back, in his body and brows, the careful press from Ilya doing little to soothe him. He closes his eyes.

“I’m saying maybe,” he says. Ilya says nothing else, and slips a hand under his shirt. His palm traces gentle patterns down his spine, and his pulse slowly settles.

I used to feel sorry for whoever Roz was secretly dating, is a text that Shane was not expecting to receive. He opens his messages to see that Bood was still typing. he only ever talked about shane hollander, or shane hollander’s stats, or if the new hair cut suited him. was annoying as fuck dude i thought u would get a restraining order

Shane reads the words a second time, and then a third. He settles on *why are you telling me this?* in response.

Bood’s response comes within a minute. *One time Roz told me that you love him and I thought he was kidding.* A third text comes through before Shane can respond again: *Can a*

guy not get sentimental with his homies 🧑

Shane turns his phone off.

The woman in front of him has grey hair and sparkly reading glasses make her look like a children's librarian. The steel in her gaze says otherwise.

"I'm not good at talking about my feelings," Shane warns. His jaw is tense.

"Most people are," Constance says, and her tone is warm. "It's why I have job security. You can start with anything. There is no right topic."

"Do you know who I am?" Shane asks. "Like, that I'm a hockey player?"

"You requested me, and I specialize in a few specific things. That includes clients dealing with the pressure of the limelight and queerness. If you want to talk to me about hockey, I might have to recommend you to someone else." The room has a small wax melt going in the corner, a faint smell of lavender and lemon. Shane is high enough that he can see into the small pot, able to see the murky shade of purple only half melted.

Shane, despite his balled fists and rigid straight spine, relaxes enough to laugh. "I'm anxious," is what he decides to start with. "About all of the above, I guess?"

"Pressure comes from a lot of places," she acknowledges. He already can feel tears brimming in his eyes. How much shit has he endured, just to start bawling in a therapist's office?

Shane studies the view in the window, the tall buildings and trees. He's made lists before. "My career requires my best at all times, and sometimes I think hockey only wants certain parts of me. I'm gay, I left the team I spent years leading, and now I play with my husband. I want to win the cup."

Constance waits for him to continue, patient, not even making a singular note on the paper in front of her. He eyes it.

"I'm always planning," Shane continues. "For the worst case scenario, you know? I'm bad at relaxing. I spent so many years paranoid about my sexuality - and then it happened. I got outed. And, the cards fell in a way that I like, you know? But I'm still paranoid."

She finally makes a singular note, a striking line down the middle of the page. Shane frowns.

"Are you waiting for me to say something specific?" he asks. "I just gave you kind of a high level summary of my life. Shouldn't you start talking at some point?"

Constance tilts her head. "How do you process negative emotions, Shane?"

"Um," Shane says. "Like everyone else, I guess."

“Humor me,” she says. “How do people process negative emotion? And let's get specific. Sadness. How does the average person process sadness?”

“Getting out,” he says. He does not elaborate. Her bookshelves are littered with dense titles about psychology and the economy, and she has a small bird statue on the corner of one of the shelves.

“How about anger?”

“Punching walls,” Shane says. “Not me, but, I bet if you asked a bunch of hockey players -”

“I’m asking you. Tell me about a time you felt angry?”

“Leaving Montreal. Um. My team thought I tripped. I didn't. I was so fucking mad -” Shane stops himself. “So I left. I did not punch any walls. Or people.”

“You got out,” she says, and makes another note on the page. She looks at him. Shane shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

Once he gets home, Ilya laughs at him. “Maybe I get told to think about things, or to talk to people,” he says. “But I do not get homework.”

“This was her second idea,” Shane mutters. “I didn't like the first one.”

“You are trying to win therapy?”

“Do you want to come with me or not?”

This is stupid. But he picks a blue bat and holds it carefully, gauging all of the differences between a bat and a hockey stick. He'll swing this higher, keeping his center of gravity in his hips, with no skates to balance on. Shane's only baseball experience had been a singular t-ball team. He had not been invited to play the next season.

“You first,” Ilya says. “It is your homework.”

Shane swings at an old TV. It barely moves.

“Harder,” Ilya says, and then laughs to himself. Shane shoots him a dirty look before swinging again. The bat connects with three vases on a table, and they shatter to the ground in a satisfying clatter of broken glass and porcelain.

“Oh,” Shane says.

“Who are you picturing?” Ilya asks. “Crowell?”

“Sure,” Shane says, and spots a poorly made table. He swings down, cracking the wood in splintered halves. “I’m picturing him, and how we didn’t get to come out on our own terms,” he says, and swings again. A leg falls off. “They think I tripped,” he says, and the next leg

breaks into pieces. He turns and shatters a stack of plates. "I spent so many years hiding because I was scared."

He drops back against the wall and the bat clatters loudly to the floor. "I will never get those years back," he says, and then Ilya is there. The fuzziness Shane associates with anger is bubbling up, a coiling in his gut that he usually tries to keep at bay. "We have half an hour," Shane whispers. Ilya kisses his forehead. "Let's fucking go."

Cathartic. Destructive. It is an uncontained contained mess. Shane respects it. The employees at the Wreck Room usher them out promptly after their forty five minutes are up. Ilya is delighted at the different offerings the lady working the front desk recites for them, and already is trying to talk Shane into hosting the entire team at a session that involves smashing an entire car as they walk out to theirs.

He is used to the ache that follows a workout. Shane has pushed his body to the limit countless times over his career. There is always another mile to run and another weight to add. Swinging a baseball bat at a vase and watching blue ceramic shatter is a different kind of ache.

"I've cried more this week than I have in a while," Shane says, from the passenger seat. The day is waning into night, an orange sunset paints the horizon in a warm haze. Ilya drums his fingers on the steering wheel.

"You feel scooped out?" Ilya asks. "Like pumpkin guts?"

"Yeah," Shane agrees. Something fun floats over their radio and Ilya hums along, body bobbing with the melody.

"Then your therapist had a good idea. Did she have others?"

"Hot bath," Shane says. "Do nothing and listen to happy music."

"Nothing?" Ilya asks, with a too innocent expression that made Shane think about the few times they've attempted to share a bath tub. Shane cannot keep a smile down at the easy energy between them.

"It is supposed to be, like, meditative," Shane says. He glares, halfhearted at best, over at Ilya. "I will do it without you."

"I can meditate," Ilya says. "Ommm."

The bath idea is also nice. Shane's gonna have to look Constance in the eye and admit that they were both good ideas. They rarely use it together - but Ilya puts on something soft and holds him. Shane trails his fingertips over Ilya's arms, wrapped around his chest. The eucalyptus bubble bath formula is a pleasant scent, not too strong or overpowering. Ilya squeezes his chest. He settles back, their legs winding together as the warm water laps around his shoulders.

“We have talked about what makes you sad and what makes you angry,” Ilya says, and kisses the back of his neck. Shane tilts his head up, closes his eyes, and focuses on the sensation as Ilya trails upward, at the promise of his teeth. “What has made you happy?”

“This,” Shane says. “All of it.”

They're sprawled out on the mats of his gym. Shane chugs water before rolling the bottle to his husband. He sits up to drink.

Ilya's curls are darkened, his necklace shiny where the sweat has pooled on his chest. He drinks with his head tilted back, throat bobbing with each swallow. Faded purple marks litter his collarbones. Shane runs a tongue over his own chapped lips. Ilya says a phrase in Russian with his eyes still closed.

“Carve my nose?” Shane translates.

“To remember forever,” Ilya says. “You only have one nose. You are staring.”

Shane reaches for his phone where it was tucked under his bench. He switches to the camera app and focuses it on the Ilya in the reflection of his mirror. Ilya knows the weight of a camera lens and opens one eye. His expression is fond, sly as he looks at Shane taking the picture. The shot is almost playful, of Ilya looking out of frame, of Ilya looking at *him*.

His chest is visible from the stomach up, arms flexed as he holds himself up. The marks are visible. The pooling sweat is visible. The lovesick expression, with almost no doubt as to who he is looking at, is visible.

“Will you post?” Ilya asks.

“Can I?” Shane asks. “I've been posting more.”

“I know. I am your muse. I am your sexy French girl.” Ilya chants a litany of pet names. *Sunshine, bunny, heart* - he wrinkles his nose when he picks out the word for *washing machine*. “Tell me what you are thinking.”

Fame is strange. There are things he would never trade, not the time on the ice or the stability he's earned for his family. The limelight he would, all of the lights that pick him apart, searching for the idiosyncratic pieces of him that might satisfy the curiosity of fans.

“I hate the press,” Shane says, “I don't like being a spokesperson, and I never want to have to make a statement again to justify *us*. This is ours. But there are things that I want to share so people can see how happy you make me.”

Fame is fleeting, or at least Shane hopes. The general public still obsesses over their publicized story, but their limerence will not last forever. Their love will. Shane wants to be able to look back through his life and see the moments that will matter more than any medal. And, ultimately? He just wants to post about Ilya.

Ilya has a somber resting face. Moments like this, though, he opens like a sunflower, the furrows in his forehead melting into easy joy. “You have crush on me.”

“Fuck off,” Shane says. He opens Instagram. The photo crops easily into a square. This one, he captions with *Bonjour!*

The next informal team hangout takes place after a victory against Florida, and Shane finds himself in a corner arguing with Harris about some drama he had only half watched. Ilya wanders over at some point in the conversation and slings an arm over his shoulders, pulling him into his side. Shane pats his arm and keeps talking.

“You guys are nauseating,” Harris says. “Hold still!”

Shane snorts, and holds up his middle finger. He's pretty sure Ilya is too, one hand splayed over his chest.

The alcohol turns off the part of his brain that keeps his shoulders straight and his body tense, always too aware of the people around him and the space he occupies. Even the LED lighting feels saturated and fun instead of cloying like this, all the shared body heat reminding Shane of the team around him.

He spins through the house with a beer in hand as he says hello to the guys, popping in on different conversations about partners or movies or hockey. Someone takes his beer from him, and Shane barely notices, too caught up in a conversation with Haas -

“Hey,” Shane nearly shouts, dragging out the sound. He smiles. “Ilya!”

“You are drunk,” Ilya observes. “Can you talk?”

“I can talk,” Shane says, indignant. He gave relationship advice to Haas half an hour ago, and they had never spoken before. Or they had. He wasn't sure. “I can still say that I love you.”

Ilya's lips part. Shane has always liked his mouth.

He can kiss Ilya in front of all of their friends. This is a simple fact, but it is one Shane never used to count on. Years. Years spent hiding. There's another version of Shane still lying through his teeth when everyone asks if he is *fine*. A million choices led him here. Shane grabs Ilya's face and holds him still, searching his face.

Ilya's mouth is soft. Ilya's mouth is filthy. Ilya's mouth says *Shane* like the single syllable was beautiful. Kissing his husband makes him understand all of the pointless metaphors that compare love to breathing. There is competition here too, both of them pushing and pulling until Shane is pressed into a wall, warm hands rucking up his shirt.

“Get a room!” someone shouts. It's Troy.

“Fix your backhand,” Shane shoots back. He doesn't even look. They break to laugh, unable to keep kissing without clashing teeth.

"I love you too," Ilya says. "You are very drunk," he continues.

"Yeah," Shane agrees. He wraps his arms tighter around his husband - his husband! Ilya holds his waist. "I'm very honest. I do not like it. Or maybe I do?"

"Are you not honest? Usually?" His brow furrows, skepticism painting his cheekbones. Shane tries in vain to thumb away the tension.

Shane rolls his eyes, and steps back just enough to pull Ilya's palm up over his chest. His hand squeezes his pec. "I'm honest with you," he says. "The others? Sometimes. On the ice. It's a language, you know? I can speak hockey."

"And English, and French, and bad Russian?"

Shane runs his mouth up Ilya's neck. "Hair," he says, and Ilya does, gentle touches without any complaint. "You know what I hear? When we talk hockey?"

"What do you hear, *my love*?"

"That we're gonna win," Shane says, and then he's got Ilya's full attention, the attention of the entire room. He faces their team and throws his arms up. "We're gonna win the fucking cup!"

Ilya shouts more into his ear, unintelligible, hot slurred words that send sparks down his spine. He smiles. His eyes narrow, focused only on the purple lighting that paints his husband in a warm glow. Ilya is still talking, his lips moving, some nonsensical rant or cheer about their victories.

The picture gets sent the next morning, once everyone is home and nursing their hangovers. Shane opens it before remembering to turn his brightness down. It had been taken when they were still relatively sober, so Shane is only slightly flushed. Ilya looks good.

They are both flipping off the camera. He smiles.

He opens Instagram next. The photo is vertical, so he crops out the roof and most of their torsos. They're centered, wrapped in each other. The caption reads: *Stanley cup here we come!*

Ilya grumbles behind him, still lost to the world. Shane puts his phone down. There are a few hours before they will have to get up. These are hours that he will spend here: together. The world can wait.

End Notes

(maybe they win the cup, maybe not? it does not matter. either way they will do it together)

[i'm on tumblr](#) and fic is rebloggable [here :\)](#)

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