

Lessons in PDA

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Lessons in PDA

by [garden_songs](#)

Summary

5 times Shane Hollander makes a conscious effort to publicly display his affection for Ilya Rozanov, and 1 time he doesn't need to think so hard about it.

Notes

shoutout to my lesbian wife for proofreading this. #stopautistichate

Ottawa - November 2021

The Proposal

Shane Hollander was two spoonfuls deep into his nightly therapy-mandated dessert of strawberry ice cream when he finally felt brave enough to broach a subject that he had been avoiding.

He cleared his throat and waited for Ilya's attention, but his husband was busy clanking his spoon into the porcelain of his already-empty dessert bowl. It reminded Shane of a cat uselessly clawing at the walls of its litter box. His grandma's cat always did that.

He took another bite of the ice cream that was becoming a little too soupy for his liking. And then he tried again, louder this time.

Ilya looked up as if he was a cartoon character being caught in the middle of something nefarious, and Shane almost forgot what he was going to say because he was so endeared.

"Sorry," Ilya said sheepishly. "I know you hate that noise. I forgot."

Shane had forgotten he hated that noise too, in all honesty. He smiled politely. *You are forgiven*, he said with his eyes.

"I actually have something to say," he announced. He sat his bowl back on the coffee table and placed his hands in his lap.

"This is serious," Ilya sat his bowl down too, and his spoon fell to the other side of the rim with a clank, reaching out to touch Shane's spoon next to it. *This is a sign*, Shane thinks. *Our spoons touched. That is definitely a sign.*

"Only a little," he admitted. "It isn't a huge deal. Well it is to me, but it might not be to you, so just take this with a grain of salt—"

"Are you gay?" Ilya asked, deadpan. "Are you coming out to me?"

"What? No! Well I mean yes but no that's not—" Shane groaned. "Just let me explain."

Ilya waved a hand and waited for Shane to continue.

"We have been out for almost a year now," Shane started slowly, "And you know? It took me a while to get used to it, obviously. I wasn't completely prepared to be outed. Like, I knew we would be coming out in the summer, but I had this timeline in my head that was really helping me break it down. But then that timeline was ruined because of the whole FanMail thing which I am *sure* you remember."

Shane took a deep breath, and Ilya continued to listen intently. "Anyways, all of this to say, I think I'm finally feeling comfortable being *us*. And I think you are too."

Ilya nodded. "I am."

"So, I would..." Shane bit his lip and strung together his next sentence in one big breath, "I would like to be more affectionate in public with you."

Ilya blinked. "That is all, *moya lyubov*?"

"I told you it's a big deal to me!"

"Yes, yes, yes," Ilya smiled. "It is big deal. My husband wants to *hold my hand*," he sang.

Truthfully, it had been a *majorly* big deal to Shane. Ten whole therapy sessions dedicated to breaking down his feelings about each and every outcome to each and every display of affection he could possibly think of. He mulled over these thoughts for weeks, months. He had to break down his guilt about this even being a problem in the first place because *what does that say about me? I have to go to therapy just to be able to give my husband a kiss on the cheek in front of our friends.*

And then there were the follow up sessions, where he started to worry about bringing it up to Ilya at all. Because what if Ilya liked it the way they were? What if this were enough for him? Or what if this hadn't been enough for him and he waited so long he resented Shane now?

His therapist, Cynthia, had the patience of a saint. He made a mental note to make sure he got her an excellent gift this Christmas.

"Yes," Shane finally said. "I want to hold your hand."

Ilya smiled so wide Shane had no choice but to smile back. He only had a second to react before Ilya was climbing on top of him.

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The Rink - November 2021

Lesson #1

The easiest place to practice, of course, was at practice. Shane and Ilya didn't get out much during the season, and the Centaurs were really gay. They were the gayest group in the league by far, and so they should've been the easiest people to hold gay hands with your bisexual husband in front of.

The Centaurs were also, to Shane's unfortunate luck, insufferable.

It had been a few days since Shane had brought up wanting to explore PDA with Ilya, and they still hadn't fully committed to the experiment.

“I want you to hold my hand,” Shane said seriously, looking up at Ilya in the rink parking lot.

Ilya smiled, goofy and lovestruck. “Now?”

Shane shook away the rest of his first-time jitters and nodded. He was going to do it, and everything would be okay. The world would not implode, time wouldn’t stop, and he’d come out the other end better for it.

“Shane, you look nauseous,” Ilya’s lips twitched as his smile fell. “Are you sure you’re ready for this?”

“Yes,” he breathed out. Shane stretched out his hand towards Ilya’s. He felt stiff and awkward.

Ilya took his hand with the gentlest touch, and Shane melted into it. *There you are*, he thought. *Of course we’ll be okay.*

He was hyper aware of his clammy palm intertwined with Ilya’s warm, dry hand. He wanted to retreat, pull his hand away, and mutter something about being too sweaty, that they could try again next week. But Ilya’s touch was inviting, and it was grounding Shane as if it wasn’t the cause of his neurosis.

They had made it the entire distance between the parking lot and the entrance to the rink when someone finally called out to them.

“Hollander! Rozy!” Wyatt Hayes called. He was already jogging towards them, waving a hand around with a stupid grin on his face. Shane braced himself for bullshit.

Ilya waved his free hand politely and yelled back, “Hi Hazy!”

Hayes caught up with them and was only a little out of breath when he did. He gave each of them a firm pat on the shoulder.

“Boys, I am so proud of you!” Hayes exclaimed. “Look at you!”

Shane blushed bright red. *Moy pomidor*, Ilya’s voice said in his head. He took a deep breath and reminded himself that he’d prepared for this reaction. He knew that if anyone was going to be overly happy for them, it was going to be Wyatt Hayes. And he knew all he had to do was nod and smile. As long as Ilya did the same, there wouldn’t be a scene; Hayes would be distracted by the time they walked into the locker room.

“Aren’t we so cute?” Ilya beamed. Shane suddenly felt dumb for not outwardly expressing his desire to play it cool. Why had he thought Ilya would already know to play along?

“The cutest!” Hayes agreed. “Hey, we should ask Harris to take a few pics! This...” He gestured to their hands, “would be great on Instagram.”

“No, we should not.” Shane laughed uneasily. He could be chill but still express his boundaries. Therapy had helped him evolve!

“Aw, come on,” Hayes wined, shaking Shane’s shoulder a bit. “You guys would get, like, a million likes! PopBase would probably repost it!”

“Absolutely not,” Shane said, a little more seriously now. Hayes was like a puppy who hadn’t been properly trained. Shane likened him to Anya in this moment with the too-lenient Ilya as a trainer; the mutt still never listened when Shane told her not to jump on their freshly-washed sheets. Hayes just needed a firm hand to tell him *no* sometimes.

Hayes actually *pouted*, but it seemed to work. Shane smiled to himself, feeling proud. *And* he was still holding Ilya’s hand: double proud!

The rest of their walk was quiet. Ilya had started asking Hayes about some show he recommended, and he seemed to instantly forget about his viral idea. Shane fell into a comfortable stride with Ilya and started imagining them as a unit. He could pretend they were connected at the palm, their fingers sewn together. Maybe it was some weird evil scientist shit, like in *The Human Centipede*. He shook that thought out of his head quickly.

Instead, he thought of them as always being like this. Like there was no “before,” where they couldn’t even be seen in the same room more than a few times a year. Like he had been born with the lines in his palm trickling into Ilya’s. Like his blood flowed through both of them, an endless loop.

His thoughts were interrupted as soon as they stepped into the locker room.

The Ottawa Centaurs stood there in a circle, staring at the door, waiting, presumably, for Shane and Ilya to walk in.

“What?” Shane lifted his free hand up in exasperation, “What is everyone looking at?”

“You guys...” Boodram trailed off.

“Look cute!” Evan Dykstra finished for him. “Way to go, Ilya!”

The locker room cheered for his husband. His husband, who did not go to over 15 therapy sessions to work through some crazy internalized homophobia just so he could hold his hand. His husband, who would probably get on his knees and suck his dick in front of the team if Shane asked. His husband, who was *not* the one being brave right now.

“Why are you cheering for him?” Shane asked, a little annoyed. It was just like Ilya to steal his spotlight.

“We’re cheering for both of you, Hollzy!” Boodram whooped and started another round of cheering.

“That really isn’t necessary,” Shane mumbled, feeling even more embarrassed somehow.

“Yes, we are very cute,” Ilya said, “But this is not big deal. My husband and I love each other very much, and when you love someone very much, you want to touch them. I know some of you maybe have not had birds and bees talk, right?”

The rookies, joined at the hip as always, all groaned in embarrassment. Shane briefly wondered if they were becoming an amoeba.

Shane was thoroughly annoyed now, but he needed to change the subject before Ilya launched into the sex talk with the rookie players. He regretfully turned the attention back on himself.

“How did you guys even know to wait for us?” He asked, exasperated.

“Hazy texted us!” Dykstra announced proudly. “Look, he even sent us this cute pic of you guys walking in!”

The picture was grainy, and Shane wondered if Wyatt Hayes was getting paid enough, because this was definitely taken on a Nokia flip phone. But he could see the clear outline of he and his husband, walking hand in hand through the parking lot. He couldn’t hold back the smile that grew on his face.

“You guys are weird.” Shane mumbled, but he was thoroughly blushing.

“Aw, so cute,” Ilya cooed. “Hazy please send to me, *da*? I want to post on my story.”

“No, Ilya!” Shane groaned.

“What? Not even my close friends list?” Ilya pouted, and his phone dinged in his pocket.

And he was so irresistibly cute, Shane had no choice but to acquiesce. He nodded curtly and turned to start getting undressed.

“We should get ready for practice,” Shane cleared his throat. He was assistant captain, after all, so someone had to be the responsible one. And it wasn’t going to be his husband.

The rest of the team finally turned their attention away from him and Ilya and the locker room returned to normal. He was surprised at how easy that had been. He knew his teammates would be annoying, but he didn’t expect them to move on so quickly. Maybe this would be easier than he thought.

When they were ready, Shane reached for Ilya’s hand again and led him to the ice.

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Boodram’s Residence - December 2021

Lesson #2

The Centaurs were much more normal after that initial test. It became a routine; Shane and Ilya would hold hands whenever they could when they were walking around the rink. It was

easy for Shane now, and he found himself reaching for Ilya's hand outside of practice too. In the grocery store cereal aisle, while walking Anya around their neighborhood, at dinner with his parents. It felt as natural as breathing, and Shane was more than a little proud of himself.

"I'm proud of you," Ilya said one night as they got into the back of an Uber. Shane had reached out and let their hands settle together between them in the middle seat. They were on their way to Boodram's house for a team Christmas party, and they had both pregame with a shot of Ilya's good vodka. Shane had even managed to keep his down without a chaser. He was pleasantly buzzed, and so was Ilya based on the way he was ogling.

"Yeah?" Shane asked, and he was glad the back of the car was dark enough that Ilya wouldn't be able to see him turning red.

"Yes, sweetheart." Ilya moved in so he was whispering in Shane's ear, his breath hot on his neck. Shane didn't even flinch.

"You are doing so well, being so brave."

Shane leaned into his voice and squeezed his hand. He would do anything if it meant Ilya was going to talk to him like *that* tonight.

Ilya pulled away, teasingly, dragging Shane with him. He laughed and shook his head. "Keep it together, Hollander, we have a whole dinner to get through."

Shane huffed but pulled himself back into his own seat. He could practice patience, among many other things.

The night started off with a fancy dinner meticulously prepared by Cassie, Zane's wife. She had instructed Zane to make sure everyone was on their best behavior long enough to have a civilized meal before the party really started. The Ottawa Centaurs were nothing if not terrified of making any WAG angry, so they complied easily.

Throughout dinner, Ilya kept a firm hand on Shane's thigh. Nothing too risqué—it rested just above the knee as a gentle reminder that, *yes, I'm here, yes, we are together*. Shane relaxed into the touch easily even when Harris raised an eyebrow and winked at them from across the table.

The party moved outside after dinner as they all gathered around the fire pit in Boodram's backyard. Ilya offered Shane the last chair, which he took gratefully. He was about to ask Ilya where'd he be sitting when his husband plopped himself on the ground between Shane's legs.

Shane bristled, but Ilya just leaned back into him, his head practically laying in his lap.

"This okay?" Ilya asked shyly. He had his neck bent back as far as it could go so he could look at Shane's face. Shane had the impulse to kiss him then. Like Spider-Man and Mary Jane, which was totally *not* one of his fantasies or anything. He wasn't ready for that level of intimacy in front of his teammates yet. He trusted them, but he also didn't want to be made a spectacle at a team party.

But this, so far, was okay. No one batted an eye at the domestic affection, and Ilya was warm. The unusually balmy December in Ottawa was still colder than Shane particularly enjoyed, and he could feel the chill through his leather bomber jacket. But in all the spots where Ilya was pressed against him, he was warm.

Shane nodded. “You’re like my blanket,” he replied, dragging his fingers through Ilya’s soft curls and taking a long sip of the wine that had found its way into his hands at some point.

He let himself sink into the conversation around the firepit and found himself enjoying the physical contact with his husband. Not even the kind of bittersweet enjoyment he usually had, the kind that still left a lead ball of anxiety in his stomach. No—this was pure comfort and trust.

Luca Haas sat in the chair next to Shane and peeled the label off of his beer bottle. He always looked so nervous around Shane, even though he was a self-admitted Ilya Rozanov fanboy. They hadn’t talked much because Luca seemed to forget how to speak every time Shane tried to have a conversation with him, which, while not often, *had* happened a handful of times. And now the red wine was feeling like maybe he should try again.

“Hi Luca.” Shane turned his head to look at Luca’s face. They were the only two members of the circle at this point who hadn’t joined in on the heated debate of which *Twilight* movie was the best.

Luca smiled at him politely and nodded a hello, and Shane knew he would have to say more to get anything out of him. This was the problem between him and Luca: neither of them were incredibly skilled at socialization. He wished Ilya would stop yelling about the complexity of *New Moon* long enough to help in his endeavors.

“Is that jacket new?” Shane asked, and *what the fuck?* Why would he ask that of all things? He could suddenly think of 20 different conversation starters he could have used instead.

Luca looked at him with an odd expression, but he smiled as he shook his head. “No, this jacket isn’t new. It is the one I was given when I first got drafted.”

Shane nodded. “That’s cool. So I guess it’s, like, over a year old now then.” *God.* He could not stop the words from falling out of his mouth. Alcohol was a social lubricant for sure, but it didn’t make him any better with the content of his socialization.

“Yes, I guess it is.” Luca started to look a little concerned. “Are you, um, cold or something?”

And *Jesus Christ*, of course Shane had managed to make one of the kids feel like he was asking for his varsity jacket. Worst of all, he knew Luca was deeply considering giving it to him without him even asking directly. He needed to fix this pronto.

“No! No, I’m not cold.” He slapped both of Ilya’s shoulders a little harder than he probably should have. “He’s keeping me nice and toasty. And the fire. That’s keeping me warm, too.”

Ilya looked up at the two of them, confusion flickering across his face before morphing into amusement. Shane wanted to groan out loud.

Ilya raised an eyebrow at him. “What are you two chatting about?” He asked.

“Nothing! Just Luca’s jacket,” Shane gestured to the current bane of his existence. “It’s nice, right?”

“You have same jacket at home, I have same jacket at home,” Ilya spoke, oblivious. “You say it is not insulated enough for cold weather. You hate this jacket.”

Shane could strangle his husband. He tried to send a message to him telepathically. *NOT HELPFUL!*

“You’re right.” Luca nodded his head up and down aggressively. “The jacket is not insulated enough. Would not be good for anything colder than this, and I would probably be cold now if it wasn’t for the fire.”

Shane breathed out a sigh of relief. He should have known Haas would understand the intricacies of which jacket would be suitable for different types of weather.

In all his panicking during the conversation disaster with Luca, he hadn’t even noticed that Ilya had leaned forward, away from his touch, so he could twist his body around and look at the two of them. Shane ached for the contact again.

“Come back,” he mumbled, reaching for Ilya’s head.

Ilya sat back between Shane’s legs and he welcomed back his warmth. He missed him when Ilya got up intermittently to get them drinks, and he wondered how he ever got by not constantly touching his husband. He had always told Ilya they would not be the gross couple who makes out in amusement park lines, but at that moment, he wanted Ilya to climb into his lap and kiss him.

He settled, instead, for his hand to be lost in Ilya’s curls at every opportunity. If Ilya was close enough, Shane was attached to him.

He and Luca actually bonded over a plethora of topics once they found their rhythm, and he was grateful to have someone to talk to one-on-one rather than trying to join the group's conversation. The rest of the night moved on like that: relaxed and easy.

When it was finally time for them to go home, Ilya ordered their Uber and took Shane’s hand to lead him to the end of Boodram’s driveway. It was quiet and dark, but Ilya’s hand was warm and familiar.

“You did so good tonight,” Ilya purred into Shane’s ear. “So *healed*.”

Shane laughed and swatted him away. “Did Galina teach you that word?”

Ilya shook his head and ducked down further, so his mouth was moving against Shane’s neck as he spoke.

“No,” he breathed. “You have definitely used that word to describe yourself. But is true, you worked so hard and it is paying off, *da*?”

Shane nodded and leaned over, exposing more of his skin to Ilya's mouth. He knew this was the point where he was supposed to say something smart-assy back, but his brain was cotton candy. He was riding the high of this achievement, and he secretly couldn't wait to tell Cynthia about the evening.

"You," Ilya kissed his neck then, finally, and Shane gasped, "will be rewarded tonight."

Shane smiled as Ilya peppered kisses all over his neck while they waited for their ride. He would definitely be leaving this part out in therapy.

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Some Club in WeHo - December 31st, 2021

Lesson #3

Shane had gotten used to a lot of things in recent history. Clubbing, however, was not one of them. But when you are in LA for a game, and it's New Years Eve, and your longtime friend/ex-girlfriend, Rose Landry, invites you and your husband to her VIP section at her favorite club, do you really have any choice but to say yes?

Shane still considered saying no, but Ilya looked at him with *those* eyes, *that* pout, and Shane couldn't say no. So much for the resolve he pretended to have.

That's how they ended up in the VIP booth of some WeHo club that Shane didn't even know the name of. He nursed a vodka cranberry and nodded his head along to the blaring techno music, watching as Ilya danced with Rose. She threw her head back laughing, and Ilya grinned back at her. He kept a polite hand on the small of Rose's back as they swayed to the music.

And Shane totally wasn't jealous. He knew Rose had no interest in Ilya, and Ilya only had eyes for him, but they looked so carefree and happy. If there were paparazzi allowed in this club, they would already be reporting on how Ilya and Rose both dumped Shane in favor of being with each other, and Rose was also probably pregnant. The tabloids loved to speculate that she was pregnant.

Okay, maybe he was a little jealous, but who could blame him? He wanted to rock with Ilya in the middle of the dance floor and laugh at his stupid jokes and be rumored to be pregnant with his babies.

You are allowed to want those things, Cynthia's voice said in his head, and you are allowed to act on them.

He downed the rest of his drink and headed closer to the music.

“May I?” Shane raised an eyebrow at Rose as he cut in. “I hope you don’t mind me stealing your new boyfriend.”

“Ugh, of course not.” Rose pulled away from Ilya and moved his hand to rest on Shane’s waist instead. “I’m probably going to get back with my ex later anyways, and then probably settle down with him and finally get pregnant because that’s what everyone wants.”

“We can start a rumor that you’re our surrogate,” Shane joked, and he leaned in to kiss Rose on the cheek before she left.

“Ew, weird ethics, definitely would get us cancelled.” Rose was smiling back. “Have fun, lovers!”

Shane watched as she danced her way off the floor and towards the bar, and then he finally looked back at Ilya.

Ilya was smiling at him, too, with that big, genuine smile he did every time Shane surprised him. Shane reached up to touch the corner of his lip.

“I want to dance.” He moved his arms to circle around the base of Ilya’s neck, and Ilya clung onto his hips.

“What a treat.” Ilya leaned down to kiss his forehead, and Shane could feel the beads of sweat on his upper lip. His body was hot against him and he was able to stamp down the annoying voice in his head that mocked, *everyone is watching you*.

They moved together on the dance floor like that for a few songs while Shane loosened up. Ilya was easy to dance with. He effortlessly found the rhythm and carried Shane along with him. Shane got lost in the beat and Ilya’s strong hands caressed his back as they rocked in a much less polite way than when he was dancing with Rose.

At some point—when the music was pulsing just in time with his own heartbeat—Shane twisted himself around so his back was pressed against Ilya’s chest. He kept one arm looped around his neck and used the other to guide Ilya’s hand to his waist again. Ilya laid his palm flat on the expanse of Shane’s stomach, his pinky finger toying with the hem of Shane’s black t-shirt.

“You can,” Shane breathed out, leaning his head back to speak into Ilya’s ear. “You can touch me.”

Ilya groaned, and moved his hand under his husband's shirt. He palmed at Shane’s abs before he reached up further until he was clawing at his chest. Shane arched towards his touch, but Ilya pressed him closer, his hand keeping Shane in place.

“So beautiful, *moya lyubov*,” Ilya growled into Shane’s ear. “Finally letting me show everyone who you belong to.”

Shane nodded and smiled stupidly. “Feels good.”

And he could cry, because it really *did* feel good. He wasn't burdened by the shame or embarrassment he always felt. He didn't feel like he owed this to Ilya or that he was obligated to do this to follow some secret sociological rule. He felt like he *wanted* this. He wanted Ilya's wandering hands and hot mouth and the dick that was pressing against his ass. He wanted it all, and he got it all.

"Do you want to go back to the hotel?" Ilya asked him, and Shane laughed.

"I'm having fun." Shane shook his head. "You can wait a little longer."

Ilya shifted his hip back into him so that Shane could feel how hard he already was.

"Can I?" Ilya kissed his neck, right in the spot he knew drove Shane crazy.

Shane didn't have much resolve when it came to Ilya, but this time, he would. It took everything in him to shake his head again. "Just a little longer. I want to dance with you."

Ilya smiled and held onto him tighter. "Whatever you want."

They continued like that for, well, Shane didn't know how long. He felt buzzed and absolutely in love, and he could sense that Ilya felt the same. Every time he looked up into his eyes, he looked back at him with a silent, *please let me take you home*.

And Shane was nothing if not accommodating, so he didn't make his husband wait that long. He wouldn't admit it to Ilya, but he was feeling pretty eager, too. He pushed himself off, mourning the heat and sweat that had sandwiched them together.

"I'm gonna go say bye to Rose," Shane yelled over the music. "Do you want to come? Or meet me outside?"

Ilya just nodded his head to the door and mouthed, "Send her my love."

Shane smiled to himself, satisfied. He had definitely made Ilya wait too long, which meant his night was about to be even more fun.

He found Rose at her booth, chatting animatedly with one of her many movie star friends. Shane couldn't remember the name of this one, but he had played her love interest in some cheesy romcom recently.

"We're heading out!" Shane leaned in so Rose could hear him properly.

Rose looked at him, perplexed. "It's not even midnight yet!"

Shane suddenly remembered why they were there in the first place and felt embarrassed. New Year's Eve. Right. They were supposed to stay out until midnight. There would be a countdown and stuff. There was no turning back now, not with Ilya waiting for him outside the club, probably pacing around impatiently.

"Sorry?" Shane shrugged sheepishly. "I really can't think of a good excuse."

Rose laughed and waved him off. “I saw you two on the dance floor. I knew you wouldn’t make it past 11. *Go*, be fruitful and multiply and what not.”

Shane scrunched his nose. *Gross*. He kissed Rose on the cheek and waved politely at the actor sitting next to her. Shane realized he looked eerily similar to Ilya, which he would *definitely* be bringing up to his husband on the car ride home. He knew the jealousy would rile him up even further.

“I flirted with your doppelgänger,” Shane mused when he found Ilya waiting for him, leaning against the brick exterior of the club looking very mysterious and very sexy.

Ilya raised an eyebrow, and Shane could tell he was trying really hard to remain playful. “Oh? What was his name?”

Shane sighed. “I don’t know, we were too busy making out for me to ask many questions.”

Ilya shook his head and chuckled, and then he was grabbing Shane by the wrist and dragging him into an Uber. Perfectly executed ragebait.

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A Crowded Ballroom - March 2022

Lesson #4

Shane felt uncomfortable, like he always did, when he was stuffed into a tuxedo. His bowtie felt too tight, his cufflinks were cold against his wrist, and he could feel his dress shirt sticking to his sweaty back. He searched for Ilya in the crowded ballroom and spotted him talking with some middle-aged woman. Shane knew her as an avid donor to the Irina Foundation, but he couldn’t remember her name so he couldn’t approach them. He huffed in annoyance and searched for another familiar face.

He settled on Hayden, because of course Hayden was there. All of the regular coaches of the Game Changers Hockey Camp were in attendance, and they mingled with the benefactors of the foundation. He and Jackie were talking over a plate stacked high with hors d'oeuvres.

“Great turn out tonight, man,” Hayden said as Shane approached, giving him a pat on the back while his other hand balanced his plate.

Shane nodded and directed his attention to Jackie, who was wearing a dress in a deep emerald color. Her hair was slicked back into a low twist. “You look beautiful, Jackie. I’m glad you were able to come.”

Jackie swatted at Shane shyly. “Thank you for inviting us. I don’t get to go to these kinds of things often. It’s nice to dress up and talk to other adults.”

“Hey! The twins are great conversationalists!” Hayden smiled proudly. “Just like their dad.”

Jackie rolled her eyes and shared a look at Shane that said, *husbands, amiright?*

Shane suddenly remembered *his* husband and scanned the space for him again. He found him easily and they locked eyes across the ballroom. Ilya winked at him while he continued his conversation with another donor. Shane gulped down a long swig of his ginger ale and smiled back.

Shane moved throughout the outskirts of the crowd, talking to anyone he could remember the names of. Ilya and Yuna were the ones who would handle all the real networking; Shane just had to converse enough to not look disinterested. Which he wasn't. He was *very* interested in anything that had to do with the Irina Foundation. He considered it his baby just as much as Ilya did, but that didn't make the social aspect of his responsibilities any easier. He would be drained by the end of the night.

At some point the staff had moved the dinner tables into a storage closet so a space for an impromptu dance floor was cleared. Mostly, it was used for further mingling, but there were a few couples who were slow dancing.

Shane was listening to his mother tell the owner of a chain of local restaurants about the hockey camp. The man had donated to the foundation for the last two years, but Yuna was determined to get some sort of lunch sponsorship for the following summer in addition to the monetary support. Shane tried his best to add in funny anecdotes and nod in agreement at all the right places, but he was distracted.

Ilya was totally in his element. Now that he had a stronger understanding of the English language, it was hard to get him to shut up. He dazzled everyone. Shane was constantly being reminded of how charismatic his husband was. Frankly, he didn't want Ilya to be charismatic with anyone but him.

But Shane would never take this away from him, and his jealousy had no real heat behind it. Truthfully, he was a little jealous that he couldn't be more like Ilya. If Ilya knew that, he knew he would be chastised and reminded for the umpteenth time that, *you are perfect as you are, Shane, do not compare yourself to anyone, Shane, especially not me.*

Shane tried to redirect his thoughts into a more positive headspace. It was easy for him to spiral, and he had been making a conscious effort to nip his anxieties in the bud before he became too obsessed with them. It was exhausting, but he had been successful more often than not.

He watched Ilya proudly and thought to himself, *that is my husband. My successful, effortlessly handsome, charming husband. Everyone wants him, but he wants me*, and that made him feel better.

He lost track of Ilya as his thoughts took him away from himself, but when he turned to his right, he was standing beside him.

“Where did you go?” Ilya asked, smiling down at him. He was holding out another ginger ale, as if he could sense that Shane had finished his.

Shane took the drink gratefully and shrugged. “I was just thinking about my husband.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow. “Really? Your husband? What about him?”

Shane sighed. “How he’s been ignoring me all night, choosing to canoodle with all of these rich, old people instead of being attached to my hip.”

Ilya grinned at him and shook his head. “*Canoodle*? That is a shame, to leave someone as beautiful as you alone all night.”

“It’s horrible, really. He hasn’t even asked if I want to dance with him.”

Ilya held his hand out to Shane. “Do you want to make your husband jealous?”

Shane took his hand and let him lead him to the dance floor. His parents were already there, talking quietly to each other and laughing. They looked so enamored; even after all the years they’d been together, his mother smiled at his father like he was her whole world.

Jackie and Hayden were there as well, and Hayden still looked like the same lovesick puppy he had been the night they met.

“Is a good thing Jackie got her tubes tied,” Ilya whispered as he gestured his eyes towards the other couple. Hayden was spinning Jackie around and she was laughing.

“They’re cute,” Shane admonished. “They don’t get to go out much without the kids.”

Ilya nodded. “Jackie is cute. Pike? Not so much.”

“You are such an asshole.”

“You love it.”

“I do,” Shane sighed. “You look like you’re having fun tonight.”

“The most fun,” Ilya smiled down at him. “My husband is slow dancing with me. Is like the prom.”

Shane frowned. “Ew, I do not want to think about prom right now.”

“But I bet you were so cute,” Ilya cooed. “I bet you wore blue tie, and your date was a hot cheerleader, and you went to Olive Garden for dinner after.”

Shane didn’t want to admit how accurate Ilya was, so he spun him around on his fingertip instead. The height difference made it awkward and they definitely looked silly, but Shane didn’t care. Not when he saw the delighted face Ilya made as he spun back around to look at him.

“We’re like them now,” Shane whispered as he laid his head on Ilya’s shoulder. “Like all the other couples. A year ago I didn’t think we would ever have this, and now...”

“Do you want me to go over and thank Hayden personally?” Ilya asked, and then he spun Shane around. He was smoother about it, and Shane swooned when Ilya brought him back into his chest.

“I still don’t love the way it all happened,” Shane huffed. “But I am glad it did happen, y’know? I can’t imagine not being able to do this with you now. If it weren’t for that video, I’d have to wait all night to get my hands on you again. I’d have to watch you dance with some random donor and pretend I didn’t want you in my arms instead.”

“Always so jealous, even in pretend situations,” Ilya tsked, “but I agree. I would not change anything. It was all worth it.”

Shane dragged Ilya down for a chaste kiss. *Yes, it was.*

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The Stanley Cup - June 2022

Lesson #5

The Ottawa Centaurs won the Stanley Fucking Cup.

The only thing that could have possibly made this moment better, Shane thought, is if we had beaten Montreal.

But Montreal hadn’t even made it to the playoffs without him, and that made him feel vindicated. No offense intended towards Hayden or JJ, of course.

The game had flown by, more so than any other Stanley Cup game he had played in. He and Ilya seemed to share a kinetic energy on the ice; it felt as though they moved as one body. Shane felt like he disappeared into some other plane of existence. There was no crowd, no cameras, no pressure. He played hard and pure and won the Stanley Cup *with his husband*.

He wanted to shove his middle finger into Crowell’s face, and in a way, he had.

“Holy shit,” he could hear Ilya breathe, doubled over as the final bell sounded out. “*Holy shit!*”

Shane nodded stupidly, still trying to comprehend how all of this had happened. He felt the wet glide of tears and sweat trickle down his cheeks. He could vaguely work out that there was a lot of motion happening, and that he was being swept into it. Troy was pushing him forward, slapping him on the back and screaming, “We did it!”

They had done it. Shane looked everywhere for Ilya, he found him, and realized he had been searching the huddle of bodies for him, too. The smile on his face grew when they locked eyes, and he opened his arms and waited.

Shane skated over, and he remembered the crowd and the cameras and the other team were all there, but he didn't care. He raced into Ilya's arms and let him engulf him.

Ilya looked down at him, smiling pure sunshine. "Should we kiss?"

Shane laughed unsteadily. "Fuck, I don't know? No, probably. Right?"

Ilya shrugged. "Hunter has already done it, we don't have to."

Shane nodded and pulled Ilya in for a hug again, but he knew he couldn't do anything more than that. Not yet. He squeezed Ilya tighter, and he knew his husband understood without him having to say anything.

Before he had any more time to contemplate, the rest of the Centaurs were barreling toward them, whooping. He and Ilya were dragged into the chaos and he could feel himself being hugged and kissed and slapped on the back by all of his teammates. The rest of the celebration on the ice was a blur, and he felt like he had teleported back to the locker rooms.

He knew they had press waiting for them, but Shane took his time showering and getting dressed. Boodram could keep them entertained while they waited for who they really wanted to talk to, the first *husbands* to ever win the Stanley Cup together. He wished he and Ilya could exit out a back door and drive to the cottage right then to celebrate.

"You know Hollander, you and Rozanov kinda chickened out," Dykstra said as he swung his duffle bag over his shoulder.

"Yeah, what the hell, dude!" Barrett lifted his arms up, but he was smiling. "Where was the camaraderie?" He was wiggling his eyebrows.

Shane was thoroughly confused now. He looked between his teammates with a blank expression and waited for them to explain.

"The kiss!" Dykstra said, exasperated. "The big kiss! You won the Stanley Cup! Where the hell was the kiss?!"

Shane blinked at him and then looked at Troy. "Are you guys serious right now?"

"I kissed Harris," Troy shrugged. "All the other guys kissed their wives and girlfriends. We were just expecting...more?"

Shane could not believe what he was hearing. He had scored them 3 goals, and they wanted *more*? He fumed internally and thought of what to say next.

Ilya pulled up next to him just in time, because Shane was at a loss for words. He smiled at Shane and his teammates warmly and placed a protective hand on the small of his back.

“Hollander is private person,” Ilya explained. “He does not want cameras and weird people to see us kiss. Is way too hot. Would end up on porn site.”

Shane flushed, turning a deeper shade of red, but the conversation didn’t feel as hostile as it had before Ilya had stepped in. He took a steadying breath and nodded in agreement with Ilya’s explanation.

“Yeah, that,” Shane muttered. “And I’m just not ready for that level of vulnerability.”

“That’s fair, we just wanted to make sure it wasn’t because you felt unsafe or something, y’know? Because we would have your backs if shit went down!” Dykstra looked at him seriously.

The anger Shane had felt moments ago melted away. He knew he was being hyper vigilant, but he had never played on a team where everyone showed their unwavering support the way the Centaurs did. He understood now that they weren’t asking Shane to be some poster boy for pride. They genuinely wanted him to have the same experiences they did.

“Maybe if we win again next year.” Shane smiled softly, and realized that the whole team was staring at them now. Much like they had months ago when they first came in holding hands.

“You mean *when* we win again next year!” Hayes hooted, and the rest of the men cheered as well.

And Shane was overcome with love in that moment. Love for his team, love for hockey, and love for his husband. He turned to Ilya who was smiling so big his eyes scrunched up in the corners, and Shane couldn’t help himself.

He reached up and pulled Ilya in for a kiss, and their teammates cheered them on.

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Tampa Bay - January 2017

+1 Time They Didn’t Care

Shane sat in the airport wearing sunglasses and a ballcap pulled down over his face. He was riding a high that was somewhere between ecstatic and terrified, and the last thing he wanted was for a fan to notice him. He knew it was unlikely. He was in Florida after all, and as Ilya had once said, *they love me in Florida*.

He still erred on the side of caution and kept his head down and his eyes on his phone. He wished Rozanov would text him, just to have something to do other than scrolling through posts he wasn’t even reading.

As if on cue, his phone pinged with one new message from Lily.

Lily: Gate 29?

Shane looked around from under the hat brim. Clearly Ilya had someone spying on him, or he had somehow hacked into the airport surveillance footage.

Jane: What the fuck?

Lily: What is your favorite color?

He should have known Ilya wouldn't answer his question, but he was frustrated all the same.

Jane: What?

Lily: You don't know what color is?

Lily: Just answer question, Hollander.

Jane: You haven't answered mine.

Lily: Is surprise.

Lily: Favorite color?

Shane bit his lip and tucked his smile into the collar of his hoodie. He didn't need anyone to see the stupid grin on his face, whether they knew who he was or not.

Jane: Purple.

Lily: What? Seriously?

Jane: What's wrong with purple?

Shane watched as the dots appeared and disappeared on his screen. Ilya was clearly trying to say something. He figured he was trying to come up with the perfect insult.

Lily: You surprise me every day.

Shane blushed and sank down deeper into his seat. He felt like a 12 year old and he was even more ashamed to admit that he felt like this often with Ilya.

Jane: It's my mom's favorite color.

Lily: You cannot have your own?

Shane snorted and the old woman next to him shot him a glance. He nodded politely in apology and continued typing.

Jane: I can, but when I was little I kinda didn't understand the concept of a favorite color. So I just used my mom's, and now I just actually like purple.

Lily: Meet me at McDonalds by Gate 25

Shane looked around again and debated whether or not this would be a good idea. On one hand, he knew it was risky of them to meet up somewhere so public. On the other, his curiosity always got the better of him.

He was already walking to Gate 25. The choice had never even needed to be made.

Ilya was wearing a similar outfit to himself—a big sweater with the hood pulled up so that his curls peaked out around the edges and sunglasses that were identical to Shane’s own.

“Nice glasses,” Shane said, leaning against the wall where Ilya stood with just enough distance between them.

Ilya glanced at him and gave him a smile, warm, though tired.

“You came,” he said.

“Don’t I always?”

Ilya’s smile broadened, and he fished around his pocket for something. He looked shy, Shane realized, and maybe a little terrified. Shane understood that too.

“I got you this,” Ilya thrust the small package towards Shane. “Is good luck charm. Since you will need it, because we are going to destroy you at playoffs.”

Shane rolled his eyes but took the gift from Ilya’s hand, allowing him to swipe a finger over his pulse point as they parted.

He opened the package and found a tiny, purple bear made of resin. It was attached to a card that called it a “Worry Bear” and explained how it was meant to comfort its owner. Shane tried not to read too deep into the description, because if he did, he would surely start believing things that couldn’t be true about the way Ilya felt about him.

“A bear? Really?” Shane laughed awkwardly, trying to not cry.

Ilya smiled wider. “To remind you of me. I found it at airport gift shop. He needed a home.”

Shane couldn’t help himself. He threw his arms around Ilya’s waist and hugged him in front of everyone in line at the airport McDonalds.

He separated from Ilya quickly and looked around with startled eyes, but no one was paying attention to them. He breathed out a sigh of relief.

“Thank you,” he whispered. “This is really sweet.”

Ilya blushed now, and Shane felt proud he could have that effect on him.

“Is nothing. Hopefully it helps you. Voyageurs will need it. Comeau is playing like shit this season.”

Shane nodded, and he understood that Ilya needed to believe it was nothing for now. He needed to believe that all of *this* was nothing.

“I gotta go.” Shane pretended to look at the time. He was sure Ilya knew his plane wasn’t boarding for another 20 minutes, but Ilya let him lie, too.

Ilya nodded quickly and waved goodbye to him. Shane wanted to kiss him.

As he walked back to his gate, he cradled the tiny bear in the kangaroo pocket of his hoodie, and it felt like a promise.

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