

From Husband to Teammate

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From Husband to Teammate

by [Nivaria](#)

Summary

Now that Shane has been outed and joined the Ottawa Centaurs, he has to navigate how to act around his new team with his husband by his side.

Notes

This fic wouldn't exist without Lydibug giving me the idea and cheering me on as I wrote. I hope it's everything you wanted!

Chapter 1: Barbeque

Shane didn't know what to do with his hands.

Bood had invited everyone for an end-of-summer barbeque and it was going to be Shane's first time interacting with his new team. They'd all been at his wedding, of course, but that was in the capacity of celebrating his and Ilya's love. *This* was about bonding and strengthening the team. Shane was almost positive Ilya had put Bood up to it, as a way to ease Shane into things. Now he wouldn't have to face everyone for the first time in the locker room, which he was grateful for.

But...he didn't know how to *do* this. Shane had been on the same team for his entire career. He was used to being Captain, welcoming new trades and taking newbies under his wing. How was he supposed to act from the other side of that relationship?

And then there was the bigger, more important factor. Shane knew he was an incredible hockey player, and he could survive no matter what team he was thrown on. But on a team with his *husband*? What did that look like? How familiar was he allowed to act with these guys' *Captain*? If Shane scored a goal, was Ilya allowed to hug him like he did to Troy? Or would everyone freak out over it?

And it wasn't even time to really worry about that yet because they hadn't even hit the ice together. No, now they were supposed to be socializing. *Mingling*, Ilya had said in that way he had where he wanted you to be impressed with his English vocabulary.

And Shane was trying, really. But he didn't understand most of the inside jokes, he didn't know where he was supposed to sit when the food was ready, he kept confusing the wives' names, and he *didn't know what to do with his hands!* He had picked at his food, taking small enough nibbles that Ilya had eyed him with concern. It had been months since Shane had given up his restrictive diet, but sometimes found himself falling back on the control it allowed him when his thoughts were spiraling about other things. Ilya knew that, of course. He knew that if Shane was being picky with his food it was indicative of a larger problem, but Shane *was* eating. He had chosen the chicken specifically so he felt like he actually *could* eat it, but the longer he took, the longer his hands had something to do, so he continued chewing tiny bites longer than necessary.

When he'd finally had to admit he could no longer get away with looking like he was eating, Shane threw his empty plate in the trash and joined the group on the covered patio, leaving Ilya back at the firepit. He hated doing it. His husband was a comfort to have by his side, but Shane needed to be seen as more than their Captain's significant other. *He* was a player too, and he needed to be able to stand alone.

Troy was the first to greet him, casually leaning back against the bench, his arm along the top behind Harris. Not an embrace, just a comfortable position. Shane wondered if Ilya could pull that off, the closeness without outright affection. Maybe Ilya would be up for practicing it at home later?

Next to them was Wyatt and his wife – Caitlin? No, that was Dykstra’s wife, right? Lisa, then...probably. Wyatt was explaining a new comic series he’d picked up to one of the younger players, Lisa’s legs were thrown over his, a beer tilted straight into the air as she chugged it down.

She didn’t come up for air until it was empty, and immediately noticed Shane watching her. “Rough day at work; he’s driving,” she said by way of explanation before reaching over to trade her empty bottle for the full one Wyatt had apparently only been holding for her sake.

Wyatt cut off his own topic to further explain, which Shane appreciated. “Lisa is a doctor at a children’s hospital.”

Ah, Shane thought he understood then; not everyone could be saved. Maybe this could give him perspective, that his day really wasn’t so bad after all? But now that conversation had been directed towards Shane, it seemed to have been the signal for everyone to turn their attention. Shane went from having his hands lay awkwardly in his lap to crossing his arms over his chest. But then he thought that looked closed off and he didn’t want to come across that way so he dropped his arms and leaned forward to rest his elbows on his knees. His hands clasped together, hoping it didn’t look like some kind of weird prayer stance.

Ilya saved him a few minutes later, and Shane loved him even more.

“Come, you must talk to Haas. Is fun when he turns so red!”

Wyatt laughed as Ilya pulled Shane up, “Don’t embarrass the kid too much!”

“You are okay?” Ilya asked, handing Shane a bottle of apple cider, bringing Shane an immediate sense of relief. Finally, something new to do with his hands! If he just barely sipped on it he could hold onto it the entire night.

“Yeah, of course,” Shane answered, and it wasn’t a lie. His hands and his heart were full, now that Ilya had a hand on his back, guiding him to the side of the yard where Haas and Chouinard were playing cornhole against two of the wives – Cassie and Selena, maybe, though he wouldn’t stake a guess on who was who.

“Haas, look! Is your second favorite player!” Ilya gestured with his own drink at Shane, and Shane lifted his slightly in a wave.

Luca was distracted at exactly the right moment for his throw to miss the board entirely, eliciting a “Dude!” from Chouinard and sending the wives into giggles about big strong hockey player athleticism.

“I should get a redo, he did that on purpose.” Luca’s face went red exactly like Ilya claimed it would.

“No, you are better sportsman than that. You do not get a redo on the ice if you miss the net but you do not complain then!”

Haas turned his attention back to the game, grumbling what sounded like, “On the ice I *expect* people to try and sabotage me.”

“Have you ever played, Shane?” One of the wives asked, gesturing with the beanbag in her hand. It proved that other people liked to hold onto things too, so maybe Shane wasn’t the only one whose hands served no purpose at these types of functions.

“Oh, yeah.” Shane didn’t know what else to tack onto that. He didn’t want to say *where* he’d played or with who, because the answer to both of those was with his old team, and fuck those guys.

“Oh good, maybe you can play next. These guys are about to lose pathetically.” The wives giggled again and Shane had to wonder if they’d taken to the Lisa method of drinking.

“Sure, sounds fun,” Shane agreed, pleased when Ilya’s hand pressed firmly on his back, but then tensed when Ilya used that stability to lean over and kiss Shane’s shoulder. His eyes darted quickly between the four playing, waiting for some reaction to Ilya’s movement.

“Is okay,” Ilya whispered in his ear. “This is a good team, remember. They do not care that we are together.”

Slowly, Shane’s body relaxed and he allowed himself to lean, just *slightly*, closer to his husband while waiting their turn to play. It warmed him to have this privilege. Shane thought he could get used to that feeling.

Chapter 2: Practice

“I’m serious, Ilya!” Shane was beginning to get frustrated. This wasn’t the first time they’d started this conversation, but somehow they always got derailed. Usually it was by Shane bringing up something they *couldn’t* do in front of their teammates, and Ilya pointing out that they had better just do it right *then* to get it out of their system.

That wasn’t an option this time while Ilya was driving them both to their first practice. Together. On the same team. It was still too good to be true. They’d known this was coming since before their wedding, and it had still been baffling when they’d woken up this morning, ate breakfast together, and got into the same car. They were going to *finally* be playing together!

And it all started with this. Their first practice as teammates. Where Shane *had* to be sure Ilya understood the ground rules.

“Yes, yes, I *know*, Shane. We have been over this. I promise I will not be overcome by your brilliant goal scoring and drop to my knees on the ice to suck your dick.”

“Ilya!” Shane lightly smacked Ilya’s chest with the back of his hand.

Ilya chuckled in response but finally cut Shane some slack. “I am kidding, moya lyubov. I mean, is true I will not blow you on the ice, BUT,” he raised his voice to cut Shane off from further protests, “I will also not do the other things we discussed. I will not kiss you no matter how kissable you look.”

Shane huffed a sigh, knowing that Ilya would keep to that but still wishing he’d be more serious about it. “What else?” Shane quizzed.

“Shane, I am not a child who needs reminding. I will not stare and watch your every move as you skate circles around the rest of the team, even though you have a wonderful ass that I want to watch always. *When* we sit next to each other,” that had been something Shane wanted to avoid but Ilya had insisted upon, “I will not grab your thigh,” Ilya took a hand from the wheel to do exactly that, squeezing gently, “in support because it’s your first day or in loving caress because you deserve to be touched that way.” He let off pressure to allow his hand to slide back and forth along Shane’s thigh, and Shane was grateful he didn’t use the opportunity to graze against his cock. Shane wasn’t sure he’d be able to resist hardening if Ilya had. Something about the way Ilya was proving that he *did* actually listen to Shane, even when he was being an ass, was doing it for him.

Shane grabbed Ilya’s hand and lifted it to kiss the back.

“Ah, ah! None of that. You said kissing was not allowed. Unless this is just one way? You can kiss me whenever, yes? That would actually be good. Let everyone see how you can’t keep your hands off me.”

Shane chuckled, resting their connected hands back in his lap. “No, the rules go both ways, but only while we’re at work, and we aren’t there yet.”

“Ah, of course.” Ilya paused, coming to stop at a red light. He leaned over then to pull Shane in for a gentle kiss. “I can still kiss you on the way to work.”

“Yes,” Shane whispered, kissing him again before settling back. He closed his eyes to prevent him from looking around to other cars. He didn’t want to know if anyone had seen through their windows. It would just hike up his anxiety for no reason. They were *married* and perfectly allowed to kiss in public. When not at work, at least. “What else,” Shane asked, settling back in his seat.

Ilya rolled his eyes. “I will *try* to not have ‘heart eyes’ when I inevitably end up looking at you for a second longer than I am supposed to. I cannot promise this though; I cannot help it. I see you and I am reminded how much I love you. How else am I supposed to look?”

Shane melted a bit, despite Ilya being full of it. They’d managed to hide how they felt for *years*. Surely Ilya could reel it in for a few hours at a time when they were working?

“Okay, thank you. That’s all I’m asking.”

Ilya huffed, but didn’t have to voice his opinion. Shane already knew that Ilya thought these restrictions were unnecessary. He had agreed for Shane’s sake anyway, and Shane had agreed that they could *maybe* loosen up after Shane had found his place on their team. No promises.

Practice was a frustrating exercise in learning their new dynamic. Ilya was team captain, and Shane was just a player. Ilya was respected and idolized and had a say in everything. Shane had only even talked to a couple of Centaurs players before joining their team. He had no rapport with them and some of the younger players even seemed mildly afraid of him. Shane didn’t understand why, and when asked about it, Ilya laughed.

“Is because you managed to tame *me*. The legendary Shane Hollander must really be on another level to have brought their captain to heel.”

But at least Ilya had managed to do everything he’d promised. The only touch they’d shared was a quick clap on Shane’s shoulder or back in passing, which he also did to several of the other guys. It helped that most players were out of shape from their time off, and struggling to stay upright through all the drills, let alone have the energy to take notice of Shane. He hoped that would help him transition smoothly into his new place on the team.

What came after practice proved to be the greater problem.

The team all crowded into the locker room, groans of pain and complaints echoing off the wall. They began undressing, some moaning that they needed a friend to drag them into the showers because they’re legs wouldn’t take them another step.

Shane was moving slowly too, but not because he was overly worn out from practice like the others. He had just realized they would all be showering together. Which included himself and Ilya. The set of husbands on the team. They were fucked.

“Ilya,” Shane said quietly. Ilya hummed in acknowledgment that he was listening as he unlaced his second skate. Shane sat beside him, glad that noise from the others meant he didn’t need to lean into Ilya to keep their conversation only between them. “You can go first. I’ll take my time getting undressed and jump in real quick when you’re done.” Shane couldn’t believe they hadn’t thought to go over shower procedure ahead of time.

Ilya dropped his laces and sat up. “What are you talking about?” The confusion on his face was cute, and Shane acted like he needed to stretch to the side to put some more distance between them. Ilya would never let him live it down if *he* was the one who broke their rules first.

“The showers. I’ll wait.”

Ilya’s brow furrowed more and he shook his head. “Why would you do this? You are sweaty and gross and I know you want to shower.”

“Well, yeah, but you’re already closer to being undressed. So you can finish up and go in. Maybe tomorrow I’ll shower first.”

“Shane, no, what? Did you shower separately in Montreal?”

“No, of course not.” Shane laughed softly at the absurdity of that. He’d been showering with other guys for most of his life at this point.

“Okay, good. Because the Centaurs don’t shower separately. Is part of the bonding experience. Why do you not want to shower?”

Shane didn’t even know how to answer that; wasn’t it obvious? “Uh, because we’re married and it might make them uncomfortable? I don’t know, it’s just weird, Ilya.”

“Is only weird if you make it weird, Shane. They do not care that gay Barret showers with them. They did not care when team captain,” he smacked his own chest, “was revealed to be bisexual and had been showering with them the whole time. You are not so special that they will suddenly care.”

Shane blushed at Ilya’s insinuation that Shane was different than anyone else. “No, but that’s different than a married couple.”

“Is not like we will be fucking against the shower wall.” Ilya paused, tilting his head. “Unless that is what you are wanting? I could maybe be convinced.”

“No! No, of course not.” Shane pushed a hand through his sweaty hair. “Okay.” He let out a deep breath. “Okay, you’re right. I’m being ridiculous. It’s fine.” He waved his hands in the air as if waving the problem away.

Ilya lifted a hand and just barely stopped himself from placing it on Shane’s thigh. He balled it into a fist as he pulled away, and the care Ilya was putting into keeping Shane comfortable helped calm his nerves. Showering *would* be fine.

Maybe it would have been, if Shane hadn’t made it weird.

Ilya walked in first, grabbing a spot by Bood and turning on the water. Shane didn't even hesitate at the spot open on Ilya's other side, continuing to the far side of the room to an open showerhead.

He'd barely stepped under the spray when a voice called over the noise of the water. "Hey Hollander, why aren't you showering next to Roz?" Shane had to crane his neck to find the source, not knowing everyone's voice yet. It was Dykstra, mindlessly soaping himself while he waited for a response.

Shane blushed as more attention turned his way, several of the guys glancing between him and Ilya. Somehow, their distance is what had caused a stir. Ilya would be insufferable tonight.

"Uh, I always use showerheads in the corner." It was a lame excuse and not even true, but it was the only thing Shane could come up with under pressure.

"We don't even have our first game for weeks! You can't bring out superstition already!" Hayes yelled from two spots over. He probably didn't need to be so loud, but Shane assumed that was for everyone else's benefit more than his own.

"If anyone knows superstition it's the goalie, so you gotta listen to him here, Hollander!" Bood was leaning around Ilya to agree with Hayes. "Get over here so I don't have to yell to talk to you. Everyone else back to your own business!"

Shane, still blushing, turned off his water to trudge back towards the entrance. He was grateful at least that Bood's order had pulled a lot of eyes off of him. When he's turned on the water at his new spot, Ilya said to Bood, only loud enough for Shane to hear, "Is your fault now if Shane gets hard. I am very hot. Will be difficult for him to resist now that he's next to me."

Bood laughed loud enough to pull eyes back their way. Shane ducked his head and tried to pretend he wasn't dying from embarrassment. At least with how he was feeling now he really *didn't* have to worry about popping a boner in front of everyone.

Ilya smirked his way, like that had been his exact plan all along. Shane scowled and focused on washing. At least he knew what to expect now, so tomorrow's practice would be better.

Chapter 3: Monks

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They had fucking won!

It hadn't been a particularly hard game, and it hadn't been against a rival team, but this win felt monumental anyway. It was the first game of the new season, and more importantly, it was the first game with Shane playing on his team.

And the Centaurs had knocked it out of the park, so to speak. They had...gotten it through the five-hole, maybe? He would workshop the phrase later, but right now there was just elation. There hadn't been a single hesitation on the ice. No lack of trust between new teammates or old. Shane had been where he needed to be to assist and where the others wanted him to be to score. It had been seamless.

The locker room was deafening with his teammates' boisterous cheers. Backs were slapped and hugs were shared. Several people had gone up to Shane specifically to congratulate him on a great game. Besides their wedding day, Ilya had never been so happy as he was at that moment.

Ilya raised his voice to be heard over the noise. "Okay, okay, yes, you were all almost as amazing as me!" Lighthearted jeering sprang up among the laughs. "A game like this must be celebrated! I expect all of you at Monks tonight!"

More cheers went up, echoing off the walls as the team finally started undressing for the showers.

Ilya approached Shane, smiling. Quietly, just for his husband, he said, "You played beautifully. I am so happy to have you on this team." He leaned in, just wanting a small peck to commemorate their victory, but Shane leaned back before they could connect with a hissed, "Ilya!"

Shane glanced around in horror, and Ilya followed suit, checking for who might be watching and making Shane so nervous. But there was no one. The men around them were busy with post-game necessities, some of them still chattering loudly away. Not a single person was looking their way as far as Ilya could tell, but he straightened up anyway.

"Of course, not at work. I got caught up in the moment." It was what they had agreed before practices had begun. Shane was adamant they be players before husbands within these walls, and that meant no kissing. It meant he couldn't hold Shane's hand or hug him for more than half a second after a goal. Ilya didn't agree with the restrictions, but he would do anything for Shane, and that included easing into their displays of affection.

"Let's get cleaned up and then we can celebrate. Race you?"

Shane's suggestion came while he already had half his gear off and Ilya hadn't yet started, but he would never back down from a chance to show his husband up. In one swift motion he pulled his jersey off, signaling his acceptance of the challenge.

Shane made it to their car only steps ahead of Ilya. As soon as Ilya had the passenger door open, Shane loudly proclaimed, "I win!" in case Ilya had missed Shane's perfect ass just in front of him as they scrambled for first.

Ilya shut the door behind him, and without a word, leaned over the center console, his hand snaking around the back of Shane's neck to pull him forward for a kiss. Ilya held him there, tilting his head and deepening the kiss. The peck he'd wanted before was a thing of the past, his desire and need for his husband growing with every second he had to keep his hands to himself.

Shane pulled away much sooner than Ilya would have liked. His cheeks reddened as he glanced out the windshield.

"We are not at work now. Is okay for me to kiss my husband in our car." Shane had even initiated a kiss or two in this exact vehicle, so Ilya knew he wasn't wrong.

Shane nodded, embarrassed, but Ilya didn't know if that was from potentially being caught by someone walking by or because he'd pulled away like their actions weren't allowed.

"Yes, sorry, you're right. It's fine." Ilya had a feeling that it *wasn't* exactly fine, but asking Shane when he was embarrassed was just going to end up unproductive and with both of them frustrated. "Let's get to Monks. I don't want to be the last one there."

Ilya *loved* being the last one there. He could make an entrance that way, all eyes on him. But that was exactly the reason Shane *didn't* want to be last, and Ilya could understand that. The time they arrived anywhere was far down the list of what Ilya cared about when he had Shane's comfort to consider.

At Monks, Ilya pulled the door open, letting Shane precede him in. The team had taken over one side of the bar, loud "Hey!"s filling the space as they approached.

More of the team trickled in as Shane and Ilya found space among the group, Ilya pouring them each a drink from the pitcher someone had already ordered. Shane's smile at receiving only a half full glass pleased Ilya, and he bumped their shoulders. The team talked and joked, a couple of the wives showing up to celebrate and socialize. It was nice, this easy camaraderie. And Ilya couldn't believe it was finally his.

He grabbed Shane's hand, pulling it off the table and linking it with his. Shane stiffened beside him, the muscles in his arm tensing as Ilya dragged it over to rest their joined hands on his leg. Ilya whispered, "Rasslabyat'sya," in his ear. Relax. "No one can even see. And we are not at work." They were supposed to be free to show affection in public, but Shane still struggled with the grey areas. He would kiss Ilya while they were grocery shopping without hesitation, but among their team Shane still felt like he needed to be someone else.

Shane did relax at the reminder, and Ilya rubbed his thumb along the back of Shane's hand, hoping to keep him that way. He turned his attention to another conversation, trying to show Shane that their touch didn't distract or bother anyone. It only served to boost Ilya.

After some time like that, Ilya thought Shane might be ready for another small push. Afterall, Shane always excelled when challenged to go farther or work harder.

"Yes! Was just telling Shane the other day. *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie!" He was pretty sure Shane hadn't even been listening to him, Boyle, and Dykstra discussing movies, but this was a great way to pull innocent attention to the two of them.

"No way, man! I will die on the hill. *Die Hard* is *not* a Christmas movie!" Dykstra was somehow always in opposition to Ilya's opinions, which worked well because Ilya always had fun shutting him down.

"Of course it is. Happens at Christmas time. John McClane even has big bear for Christmas present!"

"I'm with Roz," Boyle agreed. "It even all goes down during a Christmas party."

Shane finally jumped in, Ilya already knowing his opinion on this. "Nah, no way. It's a movie that takes place *during* Christmas, that doesn't make it a Christmas movie. There's no holiday spirit!"

"Hear hear!" Dykstra raised his glass in mock toast to Shane for defending him.

"You are wrong, but is cute you think this way, so is okay." Ilya smiled, raising their still connected hands and kissing the back of Shane's. He tensed again but Ilya was determined to pretend he hadn't felt it, continuing the conversation that was extending out to the rest of the team, everyone choosing a side of the debate.

When they'd moved onto debating the second movie's categorization, Ilya leaned into his husband again, checking in. "Did you notice? They did not even blink an eye at us. We are no different than Shoe and Selena," he nodded his head off to the side where the couple was having a quiet moment in a booth to themselves, "or Holmber with that bunny." Ilya gestured the other way, where a few puck bunnies had gathered around the younger guys on the team. Holmber was the only player with one in his lap, making out. Not a single person seemed to notice or care. They never did.

But *Shane* cared. Not about the others, just about *them*. "It's not the same and you know it," Shane whispered back, turning slightly in his seat towards Ilya, a clear indication to everyone else that they were having a semi-private conversation and to butt out. Ilya copied Shane, tilting his own shoulder inward, creating a bubble just for them. "That bunny is *nothing*, and Nick's wife isn't part of this team. She isn't around all day everyday needing to be seen as more than just an extension of her husband."

"And Harris? He is part of this team even if he does not join us on the ice, yes? He has no problem being affectionate with his boyfriend. Why are we different, Shane?"

Shane pursed his lips. “You know why.”

Ilya did know, because he had felt it to a degree as well, at first at least, and they had discussed it more than once. The fear of being discovered had been their reality for more than a decade and everything in Shane still screamed that he had to hide.

Add onto that the complication of joining a new team and Shane’s anxiety skyrocketed. Ilya had told Shane more than he needed to know about every single player, but Shane still didn’t feel like he *knew* them yet. He wasn’t to the point of sitting back and shooting the shit with them as *himself*, let alone as Ilya’s husband. But the title had gotten into Shane’s head. He didn’t want to *just* be ‘Ilya’s husband’ the way that Cassie was Bood’s wife before anything else. Shane wanted to be a player with an actual name, not to be defined by who he loved. It was a point of contention between them, since Ilya was thrilled to be known as *Shane’s* husband. But he understood where Shane was coming from.

Plus the pressure Shane put on himself to be the best player was crippling. He didn’t want to be seen as receiving preferential treatment because of who he was fucking, so he wanted to limit reminders as much as possible.

The list went on and on about why Shane was struggling with their situation, and Ilya had no idea how to help him through it other than to keep slowly pushing Shane out of his shell. Ilya squeezed Shane’s hand in comfort and dipped his head, confirming his understanding.

A month ago Shane wouldn’t have let Ilya hold onto his hand like this while out at a bar surrounded by their team. Before that he would’ve been bouncing his leg nervously if forced to sit next to Ilya. Today they’d done both, and Ilya had even gotten to kiss said hand.

It was progress, and that was enough for now.

Chapter End Notes

Shoe is what I decided Ilya calls Chouinard, because it’s too close to the first syllable of his name to just ignore.

Chapter 4: Family Skate Day

The middle of November brought a new event for Shane. The Centaurs took a day off of training to host a family skate day. They were able to bring in significant others, kids, parents, or whoever else they wanted, to join them on the ice for the day. It was a chance to show their kids all the hard work that was put into their professions and way to help the team continue its strong familial environment. Ilya promised the event was always a ton of fun.

It was immediately apparent that Ilya was right. Some of the spouses clearly took their position as WAGs seriously and glided across the ice just fine, while others preferred to keep close to the boards when their husbands were otherwise occupied.

The hockey players skated circles around everyone, unable to help showing off in ways that their speed during games just didn't allow for. Some of them were comparing different ways to stop for a captive young audience, others were pretending to figure skate with terrible versions of spins. One sister in law apparently *was* a figure skater and was doubled over on the ice at the player's efforts.

They set up cones to guide their kids through and some had donned the player's extremely large jerseys, most of them tied off in some way to keep from dragging. One kid was hiding behind a goalie leg pad while her mom pretended she couldn't find her. Coach Wiebe was holding his wife's hand as they slowly made their way around the ice.

Ilya led a chain of kids with hands all linked around the ice, going slow for the youngest of the group while a few of the other players flanked the line in places to keep anyone from toppling over and bringing the whole line down with them. One little boy had to have a hand on his shoulder basically the entire time as he couldn't stop wobbling. Afterwards, Ilya offered to lead the teens in the same game. They agreed to the human chain but didn't want to be babied.

"No, would not dream of babying you. You are practically adults, yes?" They seemed to like that thought right up until Ilya took off, towing them behind. With the younger kids, he'd mostly kept to the outer edge of the rink with just slight swerves to avoid other people teetering into his path. Now he let loose, zig-zagging between other players interspersed with random straight stretches that made everyone fear they'd be slammed into the wall.

At one end of the rink, Ilya took a sudden turn for the middle, eliciting a squeal from one of them. Ilya tugged the chain to the center of the ice to start weaving through a set of cones not currently in use. Upon seeing this, a teen towards the end of the chain lost their nerve and let go of the person in front of them.

Unfortunately, that didn't stop her momentum, sending her crashing into the first cone that Ilya's remaining chain had just cleared. She tripped over it, causing the next two people behind her to trip and crash into the ice as well. The last one in the chain managed to let go and swerve out of the way, avoiding the fallout. Shane secretly thought that kid had the best chance at a hockey career of the entire group.

Dads came rushing in, panicked—they knew better than anyone how hurt you could get on the ice—but the kids started laughing in their pile, easing the worry on their parent’s faces. The players helped their kids to their feet as Ilya skated up alone.

“What is this? Chain is serious business, there is no time for laying around!”

“You were going too fast,” Shane said, having also rushed over. “You set them up for failure.”

“What is failure? I do not know this word!” He gestured back to the teens who had held on, explaining, “They kept chain strong, they survived. These three need more training; we will go again.” He slid forward, reaching a hand out to link up again, but Shane laughed and grabbed it before he could, tugging Ilya away.

“Stop torturing them—”

“Who tortures? Was fun! Were you jealous? Is why you have my hand now, yes? I can give you a turn, too.” Ilya waggled his eyes, comically suggestive.

“What?” Shane looked down, realized he *was* holding Ilya’s hand, and immediately pulled his hand away, making Ilya frown. Shane shook off that worry in favor of pointing Ilya towards the entire reason he’d been skating towards Ilya in the first place. “No, I just thought you might like to know my parents are here.” Ilya invited them before Shane had even heard about the occasion, and Shane knew he was excited to be able to invite family to this event for the first time ever.

Ilya perked up, his head jerked to the side, searching. A grin took over his face as he waved when he spotted them, then he yelled, “Wait there just a minute!” He turned back to Shane, smile sliding off his face as he measured the space between them. “Is okay to hold hands, Shane. You are my husband. Everyone here knows this. We are not even working today. I thought you had become okay with this?”

Shane hated that look on Ilya’s face. The disappointment and sadness brought on by Shane’s inability to reconcile their new reality after so many years of keeping his hands to himself. He *had* been getting better. They’d hung out with their teammates in large and small groups over the past couple months to help familiarize *both* of them with how they could act around others. Yes, Ilya had been more gung-ho about it all, but he also knew everyone that Shane was learning to be comfortable with. Hand holding, specifically, hadn’t been a problem for Shane in a while, but he preferred to minimize touch when they were at work.

“I *am* getting better, I’m trying, Ilya. I just...” Shane looked around at the shrieking kids and delighted families. There was only one net set up, and most of the cones had become scattered as people fell and knocked them around. Cassie slipped and pulled Boody down to the ice with a laugh, kissing him as kids frantically skidded around them. Nick and Selena were skating slowly, arms wrapped around each other’s waist while she yelled for their youngest to be careful. There was no real reason that Shane couldn’t be affectionate with his husband when every other couple around them was doing so. He turned back to Ilya. “I know this isn’t the same as being at work, I’m sorry. We’re on the ice and I just...forgot for a

second. That we could have this.” Shane retook Ilya’s hand as a further apology. He *did* love touching his husband, no matter how he came across sometimes.

Shane’s words sounded lame to his own ears, but Ilya’s face softened and he closed the space between them. He leaned forward to rest their foreheads against each other. “Moya lyubov, is okay. We are figuring this out.”

Shane knew *we* meant *Shane*, but he appreciated that Ilya was willing to lump himself in as well. When Shane had joined the Centaurs they’d promised each other that they’d never be alone again. Knowing Ilya would stay by his side as Shane reconciled the different parts of his life made the whole ordeal significantly less daunting.

They held their position, giving them a moment of silence to breathe together and pretend no one else was around. When Shane let the tension in his shoulders drop, Ilya finally pulled away, smiling.

“Now, I will go see your parents because they are missing their favorite son! You go teach some stick handling to the girls over there that have not been able to look away from you.”

“Ilya!”

“*Hockey* stick handling!” Ilya laughed and used their connected hand to push Shane in the direction he’d indicated.

Shane shook his head, exasperated, but so happy to watch Ilya’s joy as he approached his parents and wrapped his mom in a hug. He opted to ignore Ilya’s suggestion, gliding over to join his family.

Chapter 5: Christmas Party

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Ready to go?” Shane asked, watching Ilya do up the last button of his shirt as he came out of the bedroom.

“Yes. Are *you* ready?” Ilya inquired, and Shane knew he wasn’t talking about his clothes. “You remember our conversation, yes?”

Shane rolled his eyes, realizing this was payback from the many times Shane had checked Ilya’s recall. “Yes, I know. I’ll be fine.” They’d had a long talk about the Christmas party tonight: what Ilya wanted and what Shane was okay with. Shane thought it would help him, to have those expectations going into things, instead of unexpected touches that his body pulled away from before his mind caught up to what was happening. “I hope,” he tacked on quietly, not entirely sure he would do better, regardless of what he wanted.

Ilya kissed him softly. “We will be okay. You will tell me if you need to step away, and it will be fine.”

Shane leaned in for another kiss, thanking Ilya for his steadfastness.

The first step of their plan was set into motion the second they reached Wyatt and Lisa’s house. When they were both out of the car, Shane grabbed onto Ilya’s waiting hand. They would walk in together, and Shane was sure that he’d feel much more comfortable with the contact when it started in private like this. There would be no moment of shock when Ilya grabbed his hand. It felt slightly juvenile to be holding hands, but Ilya had fully supported the idea. Shane was fairly confident that Ilya would support literally any touch, though.

But it worked. Shane and Ilya entered the house linked to loud shouts of “Merry Christmas!” by the other guests. No one paid any attention to them beyond that, so they took off their coats and hats before coming together again. Ilya, having been here before, tugged Shane around the house to admire large cardboard superheroes dressed in Santa hats or lined with garland for the occasion.

The room with the largest Christmas tree (topped with a Captain America shield, star pointed perfectly upright) was the first that had a couch with enough room for both of them. That was their decided indicator of going forward with the next stage of their plan. Their hands released as they sat and Ilya laid his arm across the back of the couch. Shane had once thought they could practice doing this without touching and it would be a great compromise, but Shane was ready for the contact now and allowed himself to relax into the sofa. Their legs were touching and he could feel Ilya’s arm pressing lightly against the back of his neck. It was good, welcome even, to have his husband this close. Natural. Shane smiled for no reason at all and jumped into the conversation.

They stayed there chatting as people came and went, Shane having incrementally been leaning further into Ilya until the entire length of their bodies were touching. It was warm, comforting. Ilya shifted his arm back, allowing his hand to graze Shane's skin instead. He moved his fingers back and forth before shifting into the bottom of his hairline.

It felt good, *really* good, to have this kind of attention from his husband even when other people were around. How had he not realized what he was missing before?

But what if Shane started liking it so much that he got aroused right here in this crowded room? What if everyone noticed his boner and got disgusted or wished he hadn't been invited because he was ruining their holiday? And they all loved Ilya, would Shane's terrible addition to the group bring Ilya down with him? Just sitting here minding his own business could *ruin* the good friends, team, and life Ilya had going for him here. It was too much and Shane had no idea how his thoughts had shifted so suddenly.

Ilya must have felt the change, because his hand fell still on Shane's neck. Shane tried to take a deep breath to calm down, but when that didn't work it just made him feel like it was turning attention his way. What was even being talked about now? Had someone pointed a question his way that he'd missed and now they were all staring and watching his chest fail to rise and fall properly?

He shifted a hand from his own lap to Ilya's thigh, squeezing harder than he probably needed to. Ilya understood, because he always did. Shane would never stop marveling at how perfect Ilya was for him.

"Come," Ilya said, grabbing hold of Shane's hand as he stood. "Let us see if we can help speed the food along. It smells delicious!"

Shane couldn't even nod as he followed Ilya out of the room, past the kitchen where a few of the wives were standing around sipping wine, and through the back door onto the deck. A motion sensor detected their presence, illuminating twinkling lights along the edge of the deck's roof. Ilya pulled him off to the side so they weren't immediately apparent to anyone walking by the door.

Ilya turned to face Shane, grabbing his wrist to direct his free hand to Ilya's chest. He sucked in a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Follow me, Shane," he commanded, taking another deep breath, his chest expanding under Shane's hand.

And Shane realized, slowly, that he could. Whether it was because of the simple instruction or because it was Ilya, or just because the air out here was crisp and cool – it immediately felt easier to breathe. Shane sucked in a desperate breath, continuing to clutch at Ilya's hand still linked in his.

"Good, Shane. Another." Ilya took another breath and Shane followed. They continued the pattern, Ilya encouraging him until Shane's grip loosened and he began to sag. Ilya gently led him to a chair to sit, pulling another around the table to sit directly in front of Shane.

"I'm sorry," Shane whispered, feeling his eyes begin to water.

“You had panic attack. This is not something to be sorry for. You are okay now?”

Shane nodded, but he was still sorry. They’d been doing so well before he’d gotten in his own damned way. “Thank you. For getting me out of there. Thinking people were going to notice my freak out was making it worse.”

“Of course. I always love pulling you off into the dark by ourselves. Is my favorite place to be!”

Shane exhaled a laugh, feeling lighter. He was no longer on the verge of crying, Ilya always saving him so effortlessly.

“Do you...want to talk about what happened?”

Shane never liked talking about his panic attacks; he always felt embarrassed and stupid afterwards. And somehow, it didn’t always help to talk about it, the way talking was *supposed* to help. But this time specifically, Shane had to set the record straight so he nodded.

“It wasn’t...the touching. I mean, I guess it was, but indirectly? Our plan was going really well!. I was totally fine with what we talked about. And then you did the,” Shane wiggled his own fingers, trying to imitate the motion Ilya had been doing into his hair, and Ilya nodded in understanding, “and that was actually fine too. A bit surprising, but *nice*. I liked it.” It was a huge relief to Shane that he’d enjoyed it. It was the first time they’d done something new in front of other people that Shane hadn’t immediately pulled away from or shut Ilya’s actions down because of.

When Shane didn’t continue Ilya nodded his head forward. “I liked it too. But what, then?”

Shane blushed. “I liked it...*too* much. And then I wondered if you kept that up how soon I’d have an obvious boner, and then I was imagining people’s response to that, and then I thought people were staring and I was ruining the holiday and everyone would turn on *you* because it was your fault I was here and—”

“Shhh, moye yabloko,” Ilya interrupted, and Shane was grateful to be cut off because he could feel the panic creeping back in. “Is alright now.” Ilya fell quiet, giving Shane time and space to keep breathing. “Is impressive, how fast your brain comes up with all of this!” Shane chuckled again, shaking his head at Ilya’s antics. If overthinking was an Olympic sport, Shane could *really* impress some people.

Ilya leaned forward then, taking both of Shane’s hands in his. “Do you want me to tell you why none of that would happen, or will you believe me when I say it?”

“No, I know, logically. But thank you.” He paused, head tilting to the side as his head caught up with what Ilya had said. “Did you call me an apple?”

Ilya laughed and stood then, pulling Shane up too. “Yes! There was an apple pie on the dessert table when we walked by. Had my name all over it! The other food was ready too. We

should eat.” Shane nodded, smiling because ‘apple’ was significantly better than some of the other things Ilya came up with.

Ilya leaned forward slowly, giving Shane the chance to stop him, but Shane wanted the comfort now that the adrenaline had mostly worn off. Ilya kissed him, gently, and it was exactly what Shane needed to further ground himself.

“Come.”

Shane nodded, wanting the extra energy food would provide him right then.

They sat among friends at an extra table set up to help accommodate so many people. It felt normal and Shane could almost pretend that the last chunk of time hadn’t even happened. To everyone surrounding them, it hadn’t, thanks to Ilya.

It made Shane feel brave. He stabbed another roasted brussel sprout from his plate and held it towards Ilya. “Here, you have to try this.”

Ilya finished his sentence to Bood as he turned towards Shane. “What?” he asked, having not registered the words.

“Try these. They’re amazing.”

Ilya looked from him to the fork and broke out in a smile before leaning forward and taking the offered bite. He chewed a moment, holding Shane’s eyes. “Is good.”

Shane beamed inside, feeling like the words were more about him than the food. This was something they had discussed earlier today as an option if Shane was feeling up to it. Ilya probably hadn’t expected anything more of Shane after his panic, but it was the opposite. Shane wanted to lean into his husband for comfort, not pull away. And this small moment in time proved that he could.

“See, I told you you should eat more veggies. They’re good!” Shane wanted to smirk as he said it but couldn’t alter the giddy smile that had taken over his face.

“Bah! Is not *that* good. I will stick to my carbs and meats.”

“Oh my god you two are adorable.” Shane looked over at the voice to find Harris and Troy had joined their table. “Dang, that would’ve been a great picture for Insta. Here,” Harris scrambled to pull his phone out of his pocket, “do it again real quick!”

“Babe, no.” Troy placed his hand on top of Harris’ phone to push it down to the table. “You agreed not to work tonight.”

“I know, but did you see them?”

Shane blushed, looking down at his food. Ilya grabbed his hand under the table and squeezed before slowly lifting it to kiss the back of Shane’s hand. He could have stopped Ilya, and Shane knew there would’ve been no hard feelings. But he *wanted* it and was truly starting to enjoy the easy affection.

Their hands remained linked out of view, and Shane took the touch as a reminder that he had done well today. More importantly, it was proof that he wasn't alone in this. That he never would be again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for taking the time to come along with me on Shane's anxious journey!!

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