

what the morning brings

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what the morning brings

by [magneticrats](#)

Summary

Birdsong fills the air and the sun is warm through the gaps in the trees. The air is sweet, and Shane thinks that the cottage has never felt more like home than it does now.

If it was heaven in his twenties, it was something even greater now.

Notes

title from wheat kings by the tragically hip

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

When Shane wakes up, there's slats of sunshine streaming through the bottom gap of the blinds, and Ilya's side of the bed is empty. There are muffled sounds of laughter and splashing of water drifting in through the window screens that make him sit up, and a quick glance at his phone tells him it was already past ten in the morning.

"Jesus Christ," Shane mutters to himself. Generally speaking, his first day back at the cottage after the season was over, he always slept in a little. It was a rare occasion, something he afforded himself at the end of long months of playing hockey. *Never* this much.

His hand fumbles for the remote for the blinds and he clicks the button to make them open all the way. The mechanism that makes them move creaks and shudders with age as they let in the full morning light, and while Shane is grabbing a shirt he makes a new note on his phone that he should have someone come out to look at fixing them this summer.

The day is bright and green, and there's little clouds dotting the sky here and there. Shane's gaze instinctively travels down to the waters edge where he can see Ilya and the girls swimming off the dock. Shane bites the inside of his cheeks. *They're in the shallow water and they have life jackets on, relax*, he tells himself.

The three of them had come out to the cottage a week or so before Shane. The playoffs had ended for him even before that, but there had been things to deal with in Ottawa. Paper work and tying things up with the team for the season, promotional things. Discussing the one heavy question on everyone's mind.

"Are you coming back next season?"

There had been no pressure for Shane to decide at the moment. He had the summer to think about it, really. He had signed a one year extension the season prior, and he thinks he could do that again. Probably. His body wasn't what it used to be at 42 years old, but physically, he could take another season. He could make another run for the cup. If he wanted.

Ilya had always assured him that if he wanted to, and his body felt like he could, he should do it.

Letting his hand rest on the glass as he watches his family at the edge of the lake he knew so well. Shane notices how dirty the glass is on the outside, a fine layer of dust that clouds everything just so. He adds window washing to the summer to-do list while he makes his way to the kitchen.

Shane's favourite mug is sitting clean and ready beside the coffee maker. The coffee is still hot, and Shane pours himself a cup. Watches the steam rise and he breathes in the smell. It was good to be home—not the giant house in Ottawa, but the place that was as much a part of him as the blood and bones beneath his flesh.

He quietly tidies up the kids plates from breakfast that are still on the table, puts them all in the dishwasher and wipes down the counters. The light is on in the oven, which tells Shane that Ilya had gone ahead and made something for him as well.

Anya is spread out on the deck in the morning sunshine when Shane goes outside, her tail thumping against the hardwood when she sees him come out the sliding glass door. She was getting up there in age for a little dog, almost ancient, but besides the arthritis that they were managing with meds from the vet, she was hardy as ever. Taking in the peaceful life. Shane thought she had the right idea, now more than ever.

He stops to give her a scratch between the ears, “Hey there, old girl.”

She huffs a content sigh and closes her eyes, and Shane leaves her to it as he walks down to the lake’s edge, coffee in one hand.

Ilya and the girls are out of the water by the time he gets down there, standing on the edge of the dock and pointing at things. Fish and bugs, probably. Stella and Elena were both really into the all the creepy crawlies, and Shane would probably end up back here with her later in the day and they would tell him all about the things they had seen this week.

“Ah, look, there is your daddy, now,” Ilya says, then is bending down to whisper something in the girl’s ears, and giant Ilya-like smiles appear on their faces.

Shane has just enough time to put his coffee on a nearby rock before he’s being attacked, the girls wrapping their wet arms around his legs and shaking their wet hair all over him.

“Woah! Good morning,” Shane grins and kneels down to wrap an arm around each of them, “What, do I look like a towel or something?”

That gets a chorus of giggles, and an eye roll from Ilya.

“Morning daddy,” they say in unison.

Shane kisses each of them on the cheek before asking, “Did you have a good swim?”

“We did. I’m getting really good,” Stella says proudly, as she wiggles out of her dad’s grasp.

“Uh-huh,” Elena nods in agreement as Shane unbuckles her life jacket and puts it off to the side. She was younger and still finding her way with the world, always wanting to be close to somebody right now. Her little fingers clasp tightly onto Shane’s shirt and Shane knows; it wouldn’t be like this forever.

Stella had been the same way just a couple years ago, and then Shane had gone on an extended road trip. When he came back, it was as if suddenly she was a new little person. It happened all the time. He missed Elena’s first steps, and Stella’s first word. They were growing up and changing, and there were gaps that Shane couldn’t ever fill, because he wasn’t there.

When Shane stands back up, Elena in his arms, Ilya is waiting with a kiss, and Shane hums into it happily.

“You didn’t wake me up,” Shane says.

“I think you needed the rest,” Ilya says and runs the tips of his fingers through Shane’s freshly cut hair, “You’re old man now. Look at all this grey.”

Shane had a lot of greys, but he thought Ilya’s hair colour just hid them better. At least, that’s what he told himself, “Okay, so what does that make you?”

Ilya smirks, “I am not a hockey player anymore, so I am still young. Sorry to break this news to you.”

It’s Shane’s turn to roll his eyes then but he doesn’t have a comeback for that. It was true, in ways. Shane was like Anya, ancient in the world he had spent so long in.

Stella sighs dramatically, “Can we go back inside, now?”

Ilya ruffles her hair and nods up to the house, “Go. I will race you.”

Stella’s eyes light up and she takes off up the pathway without another word.

They both watch her go for a second when Ilya turns to Shane, “Did you get breakfast I left for you?”

“Not yet. I saw it though, thank you,” Shane looks up the pathway, “Aren’t you supposed to be racing right now?”

“I give her head start, it is more fair this way,” Ilya says with a shrug.

Shane looks at Stella who hasn’t slowed down yet, and laughs, “Well, she’s already near the top, so, you’re gonna lose if you don’t catch up soon.”

Ilya mutters something in Russian and grins, kissing both Shane and Elena quickly on the cheek before taking off to try and reclaim victory from his seven year old daughter, “See you two at the top, huh?”

“Don’t be a sore loser!” Shane calls after him, shaking his head when his husband reaches Stella near the cottage and swoops her up in his arms causing yet another set of excited shrieks. Shane sets Elena back down, but she holds onto his hand the whole way back up.

“What do you want to do today, Elena?” Shane asks her as he helps her up the first step they come to.

“Umm,” she stops to ponder, because walking *and* thinking about a big broad question like that was probably a little much to ask in the morning, “Can we colour in my new colouring book that grandma got for me?”

“Sure, bug,” Shane says with a smile, “Whatever you want.”

Birdsong fills the air and the sun is warm through the gaps in the trees. The air is sweet, and Shane thinks that the cottage has never felt more like home than it does now. If it was heaven in his twenties, it was something even greater now.

Elena stops near the top step and she looks deep in thought, finding her next words before looking up at Shane with a frown, “Daddy, are you going to leave again?”

Shane feels his heart drop, “No, no, I’m all yours. Hockey’s done for the season.” *Done forever. Maybe*, he doesn’t say, but he thinks it is. He’s had enough time missing this.

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It starts raining sometime in the afternoon while Ilya is on a run. Shane had taken the girls in the woods out back to collect some bugs in their portable mini terrarium that they got from the science museum, and they could hear the heavy drops of water in the tops of the trees before it reached them. It wasn’t a hard rain, light and gentle.

“Oh no!” Stella yelps dramatically, holding her hands over her chest as she turns on a heel to run back to the house “I don’t even have a rain jacket!”

“Hold it, you have to let these guys go before we go back inside, okay?” Shane nods to the little bug enclosure they had propped up on a fallen log.

He takes turns giving each of them a bug, one by one. A roly poly, a lady bug, and some harmless little beetles among the leaves and sticks they had stuck in there for the bugs to stay comfortable. The girls find a place for each little creature out of the rain.

“Nice job,” Shane tells them when all the bugs are safely back in the forest while gathering up their belongings, “You two want to go watch a movie?”

That is met with a resounding yes from both of them. So Shane takes them in and gets everyone changed into some dry clothes and settled in the den downstairs. He grabs all the blankets from the closets that he can find, and dumps them on the couch to a fit of giggles, covering the girls with the avalanche.

“This is too many blankets, dad,” Stella says through laughs as she digs her way out.

“Maybe,” Shane nods and then sits down next to where Elena is still hidden under the pile. He gasps, “Hey, where did your sister go?”

Stella hums and plays along, “I don’t know. Maybe she went to our room.”

There’s a muffled giggle from beneath the blankets, that grows louder as she sticks out her head, hair standing straight up from the static, “Hey! I’m right here!”

They all laugh, and Shane feels a warmth in his chest as he smooths her hair back into place. Dark like his own, but curly like Ilya’s. Biologically speaking, she was only one of theirs, but you would never know. Both girls were a perfect mix of each of them.

Shane chooses an old movie from the cupboard, one of the classic Disney ones that he had stocked the cottage with sometime after Stella was born. They curl up together and Shane realizes he hadn’t seen this particular movie since he was a child, and maybe the beginning was a little darker than he had meant for it to be.

Ilya gets back not long after, and he comes downstairs sweaty and wet from the rain. There's a raised eyebrow and a pointed look at Shane after taking in the scene in front of him.

"Are you traumatizing our children with your sad movies, Hollander?" Ilya says with his hands on his hips, looking from the screen and back to the girls that both have big wide eyes watching the movie unfold.

"I'm not," Shane defends himself as Elena sniffs and tucks herself further into his side, "It's...it's a classic."

Stella looks at Ilya with tears welling in her eyes, "It's kind of sad, but I still want to watch it."

Ilya smiles at her, tucking a finger under her chin, "Oh zajushka, I will go have a shower and come watch with you. Okay?"

When Ilya comes back, his hair is still wet from the shower and Shane doesn't even mind when he lays his head on his lap. Anya is curled up beneath the coffee table, and Stella decides to sit on Ilya's legs. Elena stays curled up against Shane so still that Shane thinks she might have fallen asleep, and he was so comfortable that he might, too.

Hockey had given Shane so much, it gave him purpose and it gave him Ilya, and still would never compare to this. Not really.

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Shane finds Ilya starting a fire in the back after he puts the girls to bed.

"Hey," Shane says, arms folded against his chest, a sleepy smile as he watches his husband in the fire's light.

"Did they go to sleep okay?" Ilya asks while he steps away from the fire to wrap his arms around Shane, pulling him close with his hands on his ass.

For a moment, Shane feels like they're in their twenties again, transported back to when Ilya had just come to the cottage for the first time. He tries to remember what had been going through his mind back then.

Shane knew he loved him then, knew he wanted forever, and still, he never would have imagined being *here*. Having Ilya in his life for over twenty years, having their daughters, still playing hockey. It was more than he ever thought he'd get, and he was ready to let part of it go. Steeling himself to be ready, telling himself he was, but scared to take that final leap. To admit it. Shane never liked endings.

"They did, I think they were pretty tired. Busy day," Shane says, stifling a yawn.

"Happy to have their daddy back. They want to do everything with you, you know," Ilya says with a grin, gently swaying with his arms still locked around Shane.

There's something unspoken there. *While they have you. While they can.* Another gut punch. Not that Ilya had meant it that way. If anything, it was Shane filling in blanks with nothing but assumptions, but, it didn't make it less true.

Shane ducks his head out of habit, and he wants to say it before he can chicken out.

"I uh. I don't think I'm going to sign again."

Ilya pauses, "Oh?"

"I mean, I'm done. I think. With hockey."

Ilya's face is serious as he smooths his thumb over the small of Shane's back. He breathes deep. "Are you sure, Shane?"

"Yes. I'm sure."

"How does that make you feel?"

Shane felt something deep twinge within him, and suddenly, his eyes were watering. Avoiding Ilya's gaze by resting his forehead on his shoulder, he murmurs, "I'm scared. I...I know I have you, and the girls, and this beautiful life I get to live but I just don't know who I'll be without hockey."

"Hey, hey," Ilya soothes, hand braced gently on the back of Shane's head, "It's okay. We're okay. You will be who you always have been."

There's a strangled noise from the back of Shane's throat. *And who is that? Who is Shane Hollander without hockey? What will I even do?*

"So fucking what if you don't play hockey anymore? You are still you, you are good son, good father, good husband, good *person*," Ilya continues, "Don't worry about what will come after. You don't have to think far ahead about this one, Hollander. We have this life together, this is everything we wanted, right? You don't need a plan, this time."

Shane sniffs. Ilya was right. *This* was always the plan. The long game they were playing had happened. There were no secrets left to keep and no career to keep afloat. He wouldn't have to plan alternate days to celebrate holidays and he wouldn't have to worry about missing the girls' lives. There was bliss waiting for him after the skates were hung up, and always Ilya there to bring him back to Earth and remind him of it.

A deep breath fills Shane's lungs as he lifts his head back up, hands on either side of Ilya's face, "I love you so much," and he kisses him, soft and sweet and laced with the familiarity of so many years together, and the ones to come.

"I think," Ilya breathes when they part, "-you will always be boring Shane Hollander. And I will always love you."

Shane laughs and closes his eyes, resting his forehead against Ilya's. He holds him close, and lets the warmth of the fire envelop them.

“But...maybe we can make *one* plan...” Ilya says quietly after a few moments, and Shane opens his eyes to find him smiling.

Shane grins. He knows exactly what Ilya means. He wants one more kid, he always had. Always said that three was a good number. Shane always knew they would, too, it was only a matter of time. There was time, now. Time and security and nothing to worry about. Still, “Well. Maybe we could get another dog first?”

“Yes. I like that plan,” Ilya says.

Me too. *Me too*. Shane thinks.

End Notes

thank you so much for reading!! this is my first hollanov fic so go easy on me. I've been thinking about them being domestic since last june so it seemed fitting to start off 2026 by posting this little drabble:') if you enjoyed, comments and kudos are always very much appreciated <3

always feel free to come yap with me about these two on tumblr @magneticghouls

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