

Can't Turn Back Time

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Can't Turn Back Time

by [ultigirl](#)

Summary

Things are settling down in Shane's second year with the Centaurs. He's married to the man of his dreams, found his place with the team, and beginning to feel comfortable in his own skin. When Yuna (mom manager extraordinaire) comes to him with an opportunity to do a new campaign for Rolex, she thinks it's a great opportunity to reset the narrative about him in the public eye. Shane isn't so sure because it feels like they are asking him to go backwards.

Chapter 1: Rolex Redux?

Shane was exhausted. Preseason workouts were always tough, regardless of what team he played for. This was his second year with Centaurs, so he knew the ropes – the coaches, most of the other players, the drills, the effort required.

But they'd won a playoff series for the first time in decades, so expectations for this year were at an all-time high, which was why Shane was sprawled out on his couch after a grueling workout, wanting nothing more than for his husband to get home from his captain's meeting with Coach Wiebe.

What he was not looking for was his mom to march into his living room to discuss as potential sponsorship deal.

Shane appreciated all the work his mom has done over the years as his manager, marketing his image, booking modeling gigs, and lining up sponsorships. He really did, but right now he was tired and just not that interested.

The thing about Yuna was that she never called ahead to schedule these types of meetings. She just appeared, when an opportunity arose – sort of like a storm -- and Shane had learned to read her atmospheric pressure by the angle of her tablet against her chest.

Today it was clutched flat. Protective -- which meant she wasn't sure what Shane was going to think about whatever she was about to say.

"Rolex," she announced, settling into the chair across from him lounging on the couch. "They want you back."

Shane looked up. He'd been working his fingers through his hair, working out a post-shower tangle at the nape of his neck. "I didn't know I'd left."

"You know what I mean." Yuna's eyes tracked his hands, and something in her expression flickered. "They're doing a new campaign. *Legacy* athletes. Very prestigious. They specifically requested you."

Requested. Shane had learned to hear the words underneath Yuna's words. Requested meant *conditional*.

"What's the catch?"

She shifted. His mom never shifted.

"They'd like you to... revisit your earlier aesthetic. The one from the original campaign." A pause, careful as a knife. "More clean-cut."

Shane's hands went still in his hair.

It fell past his shoulders now. He'd stopped cutting it somewhere in the chaos of the trade—first out of neglect, then out of spite, then out of something else entirely. Something he hadn't had a name for until Ilya had pushed it back from his face one morning and said, *I like seeing you like this. Soft.*

He hadn't known he was allowed to be soft.

"They want me to cut my hair."

"They want you to *consider*—"

"Mom."

She stopped. Credit to her, she didn't look away. "It's a significant opportunity, Shane. The narrative around you since the trade has been... complicated. This could reframe things. Remind people of who you were."

Who you were.

Shane thought about who he'd been during that first Rolex campaign. Twenty-three and starving for approval, performing a version of masculinity he'd studied like game tape. The right handshake, the right smile, the right way to hold his shoulders so no one would ever look at him and *know*.

He'd been so careful. So controlled. So fucking miserable.

"I'm not that person anymore," he said.

"I know you've been through changes—"

"Do you?" It came out sharper than he intended, and he watched his mom's face do the thing it did when she was recalculating. He took a breath. "I'm not trying to be difficult. But you're asking me to go backward. And I can't explain to you how hard I worked to get *here*."

Here, with his hair long enough to pull back. Here, with Ilya's ring on a chain against his chest. Here, with a pride flag hanging in his stall because the rookies had asked if they could put one up in the locker room and he'd said *I'll do it*, and it had felt like laying down a burden he'd been carrying so long he'd forgotten it was heavy.

Yuna was quiet for a moment. "It's just hair, Shane."

"It's not, though." He pulled the elastic from his wrist, started gathering the strands back. His hands were steadier than he felt. "It's not just hair. It's me finally not performing for everyone else's comfort. It's me figuring out what I actually look like when I'm not trying to disappear."

He thought about all the years of too-short cuts, the way he'd flinched from anything that might read as feminine, as queer, as *wrong*. The way he'd policed his own body like it was enemy territory.

"I spent my whole career trying to be invisible in exactly the right way," he said. "I'm done. If Rolex wants legacy, they can have this version. The real one."

Yuna studied him for a long moment. Her tablet lowered, just slightly.

"I'll tell them the hair stays," she said finally.

"Thank you."

She stood, then paused at the door. "Shane? For what it's worth—I'm glad you found it. Whatever *this* is." A gesture that encompassed his hair, the home he'd built with Ilya, the new confidence that enabled him to tell her no. "It looks good on you."

After she left, Shane sat with his hands in his lap, breathing through the strange ache in his chest.

It wasn't just the hair. It was never just the hair.

It was permission. It was *presence*. It was taking up space in his own skin and refusing to apologize for it.

He pulled out his phone and texted Ilya: *Rolex wanted me to cut my hair. I said no.*

The reply came in seconds: *Good. Would have been a tragedy. I have plans for that hair.*

Shane laughed, surprised and warm.

This, he thought. This was the person he wanted to be.

Chapter 2: Undone

Chapter Summary

After Shane's tense chat with his mom about the Rolex campaign, Ilya complains loudly about what a stupid idea he thinks it is for anyone to suggest that Shane cut his hair -- only to realize that the fact that Shane's mom asked and to some degree pushed the idea is really bothering his husband. He works to reassure him in a way that only Ilya Rozanov could.

Chapter Notes

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

Ilya arrived home minutes later. After he'd showered and cleaned up, Shane found him sprawled across their couch with his phone and a protein shake, looking unfairly good in sweatpants and nothing else. He lit up when Shane walked in—he always did, like Shane was something worth being excited about, and Shane still hadn't gotten used to it.

"There he is," Ilya said, making grabby hands. "Come here. I need to hear about this Rolex bullshit."

Shane wandered back towards the couch he'd vacated after his tense talk with his mom. Now he let himself be pulled down, half on top of Ilya, face pressed into the warm skin of his shoulder. Ilya's hand found his hair immediately, fingers sliding through it, and Shane felt something in his chest unclench.

"Tell me," Ilya murmured against his temple.

"I already told you. They wanted me to cut it. I said no."

"Yes, but you didn't tell me *details*." Ilya's hand tightened, tugging just enough to tip Shane's head back. His eyes were bright with outrage. "What kind of idiot looks at you and says *less of this, please?* Criminal. Should be arrested."

Shane huffed a laugh. "It's a watch company, Ilya. They have a brand."

"Their brand is *wrong*." Ilya was warming up now, gesturing expansively with his free hand while the other stayed tangled in Shane's hair. "Do they not have eyes? Do they not see what I see? This—" another tug, proprietary and fond, "—is a *gift*. A national treasure. I should call them personally and explain."

"Please don't."

"I will explain," Ilya continued, ignoring him, "that hair is essential. That I have *plans* for this hair. That when I pull it in bed and you make that sound—you know the sound—"

"*Ilya.*"

"—the little gasp, yes, that one, it is the best sound in the world, and they want to *take that from me*—"

Shane kissed him to shut him up, which was maybe what Ilya had been angling for all along. It worked, for a minute. Ilya's hand flexed in his hair and Shane did make the sound, quiet and involuntary, and Ilya smiled against his mouth like he'd won something.

But when they broke apart, Ilya's eyes searched his face, and Shane watched the performance fall away.

"Okay," Ilya said, softer now. "What's really wrong?"

Shane closed his eyes. He should've known he couldn't hide it. Ilya read him like he read the ice—instinctively, completely.

"It was my mom," he said. "Yuna. She brought it to me. She thought it was a good opportunity."

Ilya was quiet for a moment. His thumb traced Shane's cheekbone, waiting.

"She said it could *reset the narrative*. Remind people of who I was." Shane's voice cracked on the last word, just slightly, and he hated it. "And I know she didn't mean it like that. I know she's just doing her job. But—"

"But she is your mother," Ilya finished. "And she looked at you and asked you to be someone else."

Shane nodded, not trusting his voice.

"Шейн." Ilya shifted them both until they were facing each other, Shane's back against the couch cushions and Ilya hovering over him, expression fierce and tender at once. "Look at me."

Shane looked.

"You worked so hard," Ilya said. "I watched you. All those years, trying to be what everyone wanted, making yourself small. And now—" He touched Shane's hair again, gentle this time, reverent. "Now you are *you*. Big and loud and beautiful. You take up space. You let yourself be seen."

"It's just hair," Shane whispered, echoing Yuna's words, and Ilya shook his head.

"It is not just hair. It is you saying *this is who I am*. It is you being brave every single day." He pressed his forehead to Shane's. "Your mother loves you. But she does not always understand what it costs, to find yourself. How much you have to fight to keep it."

Shane's breath shuddered out of him. "Sometimes I still don't know if I'm doing it right. Being... this. Being gay, being out, being—"

"There is no right way," Ilya said. "There is only your way. And your way is perfect."

"You're biased."

"Yes. I am in love with you. This makes me very biased and also very correct."

Shane laughed, wet and surprised, and Ilya kissed the corner of his mouth, his cheek, the hinge of his jaw.

"You never have to be smaller for anyone," Ilya murmured against his skin. "Not for sponsors. Not for cameras. Not even for people who love you. You are allowed to be exactly this much." He spread his hands wide, grinning. "This much Shane. Maximum Shane. It is what you deserve."

"Maximum Shane," Shane repeated, something warm blooming behind his ribs. "That's not a thing."

"Is now. I invented it." Ilya kissed him again, deeper this time, licking into his mouth slow and deliberate. His hand found Shane's hair and *pulled*, and Shane arched into it, gasping.

"See?" Ilya's voice had gone rough. "Best sound. I am not giving this up. Rolex can find someone else."

"Already told them no," Shane managed.

"Good. Smart. This is why I love you." Ilya shifted his weight, pressing Shane into the cushions, and the lazy heat of the evening sharpened into something hungrier. "Now. Let me show you how much I appreciate your choices."

"Yeah?" Shane was already breathless, already reaching for him.

"Mm." Ilya's mouth found his neck, teeth grazing his pulse point. "Going to take my time. Going to use this hair exactly how I want. Make you feel so good you forget anyone ever asked you to be less than this."

Shane stopped thinking about Rolex. Stopped thinking about narratives and optics and the performance of straightness. Stopped thinking about anything except Ilya's hands and Ilya's mouth and the way he whispered *beautiful, perfect, mine* into the skin of Shane's throat.

Later—much later—they lay tangled together in the low light, Shane's hair a disaster and his body loose and warm. Ilya traced patterns on his chest, humming something tuneless and satisfied.

"You know," Shane said, "you could have just told me you like my hair. You didn't have to make a whole speech."

"I have many opinions to share." Ilya pressed a kiss to his shoulder. "Also, you needed to hear it. You need to hear it a lot. I will keep saying it until you believe it."

Shane turned his head, found Ilya's mouth, kissed him soft and slow.

"I'm starting to," he said.

And for the first time in a long time, it felt like the truth.

Chapter End Notes

I cannot get ideas about Shane's inner journey after he and Ilya are outed in the Long Game out of my head, so here's another little vignette exploring his journey to becoming Maximum Shane.

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