

the way you love me

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the way you love me

by [justhockey](#)

Summary

Ilya knows that no one loves the same version of a person; his Shane is different to Yuna's Shane, who is different to David's Shane, who is different to J.J., or Rose, or Hayden's Shane. And while Ilya knows he'd fall in love with every single version, he's happy he gets this one. Happy he gets the Shane who lets himself be trusting, and vulnerable, and honest.

It makes Ilya wish he could have loved Shane earlier - makes him wish he could have known him longer. But he's just glad he gets to do it now, here, like this.

(Or, four times people are surprised by Shane's clinginess, and one time they completely expect it.)

Notes

Title from *Addicted* by Haley Joelle.

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

1.

In the dying days of their summer at the cottage, Ilya wants to cling onto every last moment with all that he's got. Soon there will be training camp to attend, and new rookies to deal with, and all of Ilya's captainly duties for what will be his final season in Boston.

But, for now, there's just Shane.

And for all that Ilya wants to make the most of these last few days they have together, Shane is even worse.

He sleeps with his body curled into Ilya's every night, even when their skin grows slick with sweat. They eat breakfast with Shane's ankle hooked around Ilya's beneath the table. Shane pulls Ilya's head down onto his lap when they're watching movies, and he washes Ilya's hair when they shower, and he holds Ilya's hand when they stroll down to the water front.

It's like he's scared to let go.

Scared that if they're not touching then Ilya will disappear, and this moment will be gone. Scared that everything they've found here at the cottage - everything they have confessed, everything they have promised to each other - will have never existed at all.

Most of all, Ilya thinks Shane is scared that this is it - this is all they will get.

After nine years of dancing around each other, pretending this meant nothing, denying themselves the only thing they might want more than hockey, it feels surreal that it finally belongs to them now. That they belong to *each other* now. And it's terrifying to think that Ilya has to leave soon, and this little bubble of perfect bliss will be broken. That, if they let it, all this progress could fizzle out into nothing.

But neither of them want this to end. Neither of them want the 300 miles from Montréal to Boston to open up a cavern between them that they can't cross.

There's too much to lose, now.

Ilya knows what Shane sounds like when he whispers *I love you*, and how he looks first thing in the morning with a pillow crease on his cheek, and the way Shane laughs when Ilya teases him in front of his parents. Ilya knows how it feels to love and be loved by Shane Hollander, and now he's had a taste, he's addicted; he won't ever be able to give it up.

Thankfully - somehow, impossibly - Shane seems to feel exactly the same the way. And though Ilya isn't quite sure he deserves it, he's willing to be selfish about this. About Shane.

So Ilya will take the small touches, and the brief kisses, and the casual affection he's been longing for for years. He'll take the casual displays of domesticity that he never thought they would get to have.

Ilya will take whatever Shane is willing to give him.

Yuna and David are back at the cottage.

They're funny, and caring, and the kind of parents Ilya thinks all kids deserve to have. And, for some reason, they actually seem to *like* Ilya. They even want to see him one last time, to say goodbye before real life starts up again. However, they don't want to encroach on Ilya and Shane's last two days together, so they're here now instead for a goodbye dinner.

Even with his parents here, Shane is still attached to Ilya like a limpet.

When Shane passes behind him as they're all cooking dinner in the kitchen, he rests a hand on Ilya's waist and kisses the top of his shoulder. While they're sat down to eat, Shane uses his thumb to swipe a smear of sauce off Ilya's cheek then licks it clean. He leans into Ilya's side when he laughs loudly at one of David's terrible dad-jokes, and turns to Ilya to see if he is laughing too.

He's affectionate, and gentle, and so unbearably sweet with Ilya, like Shane is proud that he gets to show his boyfriend off for the very first time.

Yuna and David absolutely notice.

They don't say anything about it - Shane gets his polite, Canadian manners from them, after all - but Ilya notices the way *they* notice. Their eyes will latch onto Shane's hand on Ilya's thigh, or Ilya's arm draped casually over Shane's shoulders, and they'll subtly glance at each other as if to say, "*Are you seeing this, too?*" and Ilya isn't sure what to make of it.

He's certain it's not disgust, or anything close to that. Yuna and David love Shane unconditionally, and a little fraction of that love has been generously extended to Ilya as well. So it doesn't *bother* them, he doesn't think. But. They're undoubtedly feeling some type of way about it.

They're sitting out back after dinner, and though the sun hasn't gone down yet there's a small fire glowing orange in the pit.

When Shane is satisfied with how it's burning, he steps back towards the couch that Ilya is sitting on. Without hesitating, without even thinking, Shane sinks down beside Ilya and immediately snuggles into his side. Shane is half sitting, half lying, almost turned on his side so he can rest his head on Ilya's shoulder and wind his arm around Ilya's waist.

Like it's instinct, like it's something programmed into the memory of his muscles, Ilya curls his arm around Shane's shoulders and pulls him even closer. Shane hums softly and squeezes Ilya's waist, and Ilya feels the way Shane's body melts against him.

"This has been a really nice evening," Shane says, loud enough for his parents to hear. There's reverence in his voice, like he, too, can't quite believe this is something they get to have now.

"Thank you for having us," David replies.

“We’re glad we got a chance to see you again before you leave, Ilya,” Yuna tells him.

The simple kindness of it startles Ilya. He’s never known the affection of a father, and he’s almost forgotten what the love of a mother feels like, so to have Yuna and David - the love of his life’s parents - not just tolerate, but actually *like* him...Ilya thinks it’s going to take a while to get used to that.

It’s a good thing he plans on keeping Shane forever.

“Yes. Me too,” Ilya agrees. “I have enjoyed getting to know you.”

“Oh, honey. The pleasure is all ours,” Yuna says.

Shane doesn’t speak, but he squeezes Ilya’s waist again and presses a kiss to the divot above his collarbone.

Conversation flows easily with the Hollander’s, and that’s something Ilya hadn’t known he was worried about until he had felt the weight being lifted from his shoulders.

On the flight to Ottawa, on the car ride from the airport to the cottage, in those awkward few moments when they first walked through the door, Ilya had been deathly afraid that these two weeks would be the end of him and Shane. The final nail in the coffin.

He’d been terrified that, when Shane actually got to spend time with Ilya - got to know him properly, not just through sex or through texts or through a few stolen hours - that Shane would call this whole thing off. Maybe they wouldn’t get along, maybe they would have nothing in common, maybe they just simply wouldn’t work together.

And just when that fear had finally been alleviated, they’d gotten caught, and Ilya had to contend with the fact that he also needed to get along with Yuna and David. Not for his own sake, but for Shane’s.

It was a fear he never needed to carry.

Ilya could talk to David about cooking, and the years he spent playing college hockey, and the puzzles he loves so much. He could talk to Yuna for hours, about hockey stats, and brand endorsements, and *ShaneShaneShane*. Ilya talks about his own family sometimes, too, in dribs and drabs when the moment allows for it.

And he never, not once, feels like he has to perform for them - like he has to be more, in order to not disappoint.

If Ilya feared that Yuna and David wouldn’t think he was good enough for their son, the way Shane touches him and talks about him and shows him off to his parents quashed that fear pretty damn quickly.

They look at Ilya like they’re thankful for him.

The sun has started to slip behind the tree line on the far side of the lake, and while the temperature has begun to drop the fire is still keeping everyone warm. It’s a serene night,

quiet except for the fire, and their voices, and the occasional loon call that still makes Ilya jump and Shane giggle.

Shane shifts, pulling away from Ilya for the first time since he sat down. “Just going to the bathroom,” he announces as he stands.

Before he goes, though, Shane leans down and presses a kiss to the mop of curls on top of Ilya’s head. It makes Ilya’s cheeks feel warm.

The conversation pauses for a few moments, Shane’s shoes crunching on the gravel as he heads back up to the cottage. Ilya looks at Yuna then David, and finds both of them looking back at him. The flickering firelight catches the gold specks in Yuna’s eyes, and in an instant Ilya knows exactly where Shane got his lethal doe eyes from; there’s something so honest in them, that makes Ilya want to be honest back.

“We’ve never seen Shane like this before,” Yuna quietly confesses.

“Oh. Like...?”

“Like...touchy,” David clarifies. “Affectionate.”

Yuna chuckles, an almost disbelieving sound. “I’m sure you know what Shane is usually like, and, well. He’s been that way since he was a little boy - never wanting to give hugs, or cuddle when he was sad, or hold hands to cross the road.”

That isn’t a version of Shane that Ilya has ever known.

He’s picked up on it slowly, over the years. The way that Shane is the first of his teammates to withdraw from a celly, or - when they’ve been at awards shows together - the way he manoeuvres out from under an arm around his shoulder, or a hand stretched out to shake his own.

More recently, Ilya has noticed the way Shane allows his parents to hug him, but mostly seems grateful when they let him go.

It’s strange for Ilya, who’s only ever known a Shane that seeks out his touch - a Shane that nuzzles Ilya’s hand on his cheek, or arches up into Ilya’s body, or chases his lips for a kiss.

Ilya knows that no one loves the same version of a person; his Shane is different to Yuna’s Shane, who is different to David’s Shane, who is different to J.J., or Rose, or Hayden’s Shane. And while Ilya knows he’d fall in love with every single version, he’s happy he gets this one. Happy he gets the Shane who lets himself be trusting, and vulnerable, and honest.

It makes Ilya wish he could have loved Shane earlier - makes him wish he could have known him longer. But he’s just glad he gets to do it now, here, like this.

“But with you,” Yuna continues, shaking her head as she smiles, “with you, it’s like he can’t stay away.”

“I think, maybe, we have spent enough time trying to do that. We don’t have to hide how we feel from each other anymore.”

David nods his head. “It’s nice, that he’s so comfortable with you. So free. We’re just - we’re really happy about it. Thank you.”

“It’s good, to see him so in love. I think - I think we worried, for a while, that Shane would never get that. But you’ve given it to him,” Yuna says.

“He’s given it to me, too.”

Ilya’s throat suddenly feels thick with emotion, or maybe it’s just the smoke from the fire, but he’s not quite sure how else he’s supposed to respond to his boyfriend’s parents *thanking* him for - what? Loving Shane? That’s the easiest thing Ilya has ever done. There’s no thanks required, not ever.

Luckily, the sound of Shane’s footsteps approaching puts an abrupt end to their conversation. They all know without having to say it, that it’s not something Shane needs to hear; this conversation was just for the people who love him.

Shane sinks down onto the couch again, burrows into Ilya’s side like he’s trying to hibernate there, in Ilya’s arms. Ilya kisses his forehead.

“What were you guys talking about?” Shane asks through a yawn.

“Oh, Yuna was offering to show me your baby pictures.”

“*No!*”

Ilya feels a quiet, joyful smile curling the corners of his mouth upwards. He reaches a hand up to touch it, slow and subtle, trying to disguise the movement as something casual even with his heart beating like thunder in his chest.

He is so happy, and he is so in love.

2.

The first time Ilya ever saw Shane sick, it was 2015. December, if Ilya remembers correctly, and Boston and Montreal’s second meeting of the season.

The Bears had wiped the floor with the Voyageurs, and Shane had played, well, not like *crap*, exactly - he was still the best player on his team - but definitely the worst Ilya had ever seen him. He’d been so concerned that he’d genuinely considered following Shane into Montreal’s locker room to check if he was okay, before he’d realised what the fuck he was playing at.

Instead, he’d bombarded Shane with texts until he finally replied, saying he couldn’t meet tonight.

That hadn’t worked for Ilya.

He prodded, and teased, and pressed at Shane, until he eventually just said: *I'm outside*. The creaky back door had opened onto the affectionately nicknamed Murder Alley, and Shane had ushered Ilya inside. Despite his absolute adamance that he wasn't going to meet Ilya, Shane had still gone to their sex apartment, almost like he knew he was going to cave.

It didn't become clear what his deal was until they were shut away in the apartment.

Shane's eyes were bloodshot and puffy, his nose was red and kept twitching as he sniffled, and while his skin was pale and sallow, the circles beneath his eyes were as black as night.

Ilya had chastised him for playing while sick, Shane had naturally told him to fuck off, and then Ilya had forced Shane into bed and told him to *stay*.

Thirty minutes later Ilya brought Shane chicken noodle soup, gatorade, and a box of aloe-infused tissues for his little Rudolph nose. Shane had been too sick and too exhausted to put up much of a fight, so he ate the soup and drank the gatorade, and Ilya stayed with him until he fell asleep - but only because Ilya promised he would stay on the other side of the bed, and not get close enough to catch Shane's cold.

Only when he knew he'd miss his curfew if he didn't leave right away, did Ilya kiss a sleeping Shane on the forehead and sneak out of the apartment.

It had been a moment far too tender for what they were supposed to be to each other, so Ilya had kept that bit secret. Especially the part where Shane had reached a hand out, half delirious, and asked for Ilya to stay. That was something Ilya kept for himself.

Now when Shane is sick, it's a totally different story.

The moment Ilya had answered his boyfriend's facetime call, he'd known. Shane's eyes were glassy, and his skin was sweaty, and he looked downright miserable. When he'd whispered, "*Ilya*," and his voice had cracked, he looked so pitiful that Ilya wanted to weep.

With a solid 32 hours before his next game, and only an optional practice in the meantime, Ilya had gotten in his car and drove the two hours to Montreal so he could take care of Shane, even if only for a day.

When Ilya unlocks the door and slips inside, the apartment is completely silent.

He expects to find Shane sleeping in bed, but Ilya doesn't even make it that far; Shane is curled up on the couch, a blanket pulled up to his chin, sleeping with a frown on his face. He looks so pathetic that Ilya simply has to kiss him about it. He crouches down in front of the couch, leans in, and presses a series of kisses to Shane's clammy forehead, his eyelids, and his perfect, freckled nose.

He grumbles at the disturbance, but when his eyelids flicker open and he sees Ilya's face, his eyes instantly fill with tears.

"You came."

“Of course I did, sweetheart. You are sick.” Ilya sweeps his thumb across Shane’s freckles, relishing in the way it makes him smile.

“I missed you so much,” Shane whines as he tries to sit up.

Gently, Ilya places a hand on Shane’s shoulder and presses him back down.

“I missed you, too,” Ilya promises, kissing him again on his forehead. “Is there anything I can get you? Soup? Water? Medicine?”

Shane shakes his head, then scrunches his nose up when the motion clearly makes him feel worse.

He’s so cute that Ilya wants to eat him.

“Had soup, drank water, taken pills,” Shane assures him. “Just cuddle? Please?”

And how could Ilya ever say no to that?

Clearly Shane isn’t up for moving to the bedroom, so Ilya helps him sit up just enough that Ilya can sit down on the couch and lay Shane’s head on his lap. Not quite satisfied with that arrangement, Shane rolls over so he’s facing Ilya, and looks up at him with those big, brown eyes he inherited from Yuna.

“I can’t believe you drove all this way,” Shane mumbles. “You have a game tomorrow.”

“I wasn’t going to leave you alone looking so sad. And I’ll be back in time for the game, don’t worry.”

“Don’t wan’ you to get sick,” Shane slurs, sleep starting to drag him back under.

“I am Russian,” Ilya reminds him. “We do not get sick.”

Before the words have even left Ilya’s mouth, Shane is sleeping again. He isn’t frowning this time; his face is peaceful as Ilya cards his fingers through Shane’s hair.

He’s so beautiful that it sort of hurts to look at him.

In rare moments like this, when the whole world is quiet and Ilya gets to just *look*, he can’t quite believe that this is his life - that this is his man. Ilya feels so full of love for Shane that there’s no room inside of him for almost anything else; in everything he sees, everywhere he goes, every moment he lives, Shane is always there. The biggest thing in every room, the brightest spot in every memory.

He’d give up everything for this, and he’s so lucky that Shane would never ask him to.

Ilya has been sitting completely motionless for close to two hours, when there’s the click of a key inside a lock. By the time he registers that someone is about to walk in on them, Hayden Pike appears and instantly frowns.

“What are you doing here?” Hayden asks, accusatory.

“Shhh,” Ilya hisses, pointing down at Shane sleeping on his lap. “He’s asleep.”

Hayden’s eyes widen briefly as his gaze follows Ilya’s finger down to Shane, who has his face pressed into Ilya’s stomach.

“He, uh, wasn’t answering his phone. I came to check on him.”

“He’s okay, just sick,” Ilya tells him. Then, “I am going to take your key away.”

Hayden scoffs. “You can’t take *my* key for *Shane’s* apartment.”

“I can if you keep showing up uninvited.”

“Fuck you, I was-“

“*Shhh*,” Ilya reminds him, quickly silencing Hayden.

He looks like he wants to say something else, but he keeps his mouth shut, instead sitting down in the arm chair and making himself comfortable.

For all that Hayden and Ilya get on each other’s nerves, Hayden really does care about Shane. The chirps they trade are more lighthearted than they used to be, and they have a truce with each other now. Hayden had been difficult about their relationship at first - judgy, and mean, and downright disrespectful - until Shane had made it clear that, if it came down to it, he would choose Ilya over Hayden.

Ilya never asked Shane for that; he would have spent the rest of his life tolerating Hayden Pike’s casually cruel taunts, if it meant keeping Shane. But Shane had given Hayden the ultimatum anyway: grow up, or get out of his life.

Hayden picked the former.

He and Ilya have been...acquaintances, ever since. Tentative and sometimes strained, but both of them making the effort to keep Shane happy. And because, even though they’re loathe to admit it, they do kind of get along when they forget they’re supposed to hate each other.

“He didn’t feel great during the game last night. I told him to let me know how he was feeling this morning, but...” Hayden gestures at the still sleeping Shane.

Ilya takes his hand out of Shane’s hair and gently feels his forehead with the back of it. “His fever has come down a little since I first got here.”

Shane murmurs softly and Ilya glances back down to find Shane’s bleary eyes looking up at him. Ilya smiles, trailing his finger down the side of Shane’s face to soothe him.

“Time is it?” Shane mumbles.

“Doesn’t matter,” Ilya tells him. They don’t have anywhere to be. “Just rest, sweetheart.”

“Stay? Please?”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Shane hums in acknowledgment, then nestles in closer to Ilya’s stomach. He presses a kiss there, and Ilya can see the slightest hint of a smile tugging at the corner of Shane’s mouth.

With slow, lazy limbs, Shane takes hold of Ilya’s hand and puts it back in his hair, encouraging him to play with it again. Ilya chuckles.

“Okay, okay. Needy,” he teases.

“Love you, baby,” Shane whispers, and then he falls right back asleep.

“I love you too, sweetheart,” Ilya replies, even though Shane won’t hear it.

For a moment Ilya gets caught up in watching Shane, and forgets that Hayden is even there. It’s only when Hayden shifts awkwardly in his seat that Ilya remembers.

When he looks back up, he finds Hayden watching them with a dumbfounded expression on his face. It’s not exactly a new look for Hayden, who gets confused by big words and his twins’ maths homework, but it feels strange to have it directed at Ilya and Shane.

“Can I help you?” Ilya asks sarcastically.

Hayden clears his throat. “It’s just - it’s weird, seeing him like this.”

Ilya glares at him.

“No, not *bad* weird,” Hayden rushes to clarify. “I’ve just never seen him this way before.”

“This way...?”

“Vulnerable, I guess? He usually hides it. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him let someone take care of him before, not even his mom, let alone *ask* for it. But he asked you to stay.”

Shane chooses that moment to stir again, not fully waking, but coming close enough to consciousness that he nuzzles into Ilya’s stomach like it’s instinct. Like he’d crawl into Ilya’s skin, if he could find a way to do it without hurting him.

“He can’t get close enough to you,” Hayden chuckles, almost incredulous.

“He’s affectionate,” Ilya says, earning a disbelieving snort from Hayden.

“I don’t think anyone else in the world ever gets a clingy Shane.”

Yuna and David had told him something similar once, about how Shane is different with Ilya than just about everyone else in his life. *Free*, David had said, and Ilya had felt so fucking proud that he gets to be that person for Shane - the person he never has to hide around.

“He knows he is safe with me,” Ilya says quietly, and Hayden just nods like maybe he’s finally starting to understand.

3.

Rose Landry is nothing like Ilya expected her to be.

Okay, sure, Ilya is man enough to admit that during the brief - horrifying, agonising, terrible - months that Rose dated Shane, she became a caricature of a Disney villain inside Ilya’s head. And while he’s mostly accepted by now that she isn’t some evil seductress who lured Shane away from him like a siren in *The Little Mermaid*, he’s still not expecting...this.

Rose is loud and inelegant in a way Ilya hadn’t been anticipating, and he absolutely means that as a compliment.

She’s nothing at all like the put-together version of her that shows up in the tabloids or on the big screen. Nothing like the Rose who had been dancing with Shane at the club that one, awful night.

She shows up to Shane’s apartment in baggy sweats and an oversized hoodie, with a yellow star sticker on her chin that Ilya quickly learns is a pimple patch. She hugs Shane like they didn’t just see each other in Vancouver last month, and then she hugs Ilya too - just throws her arms around him like they’ve been friends their whole lives.

Then she proceeds to rip apart Ottawa’s power play for the next fifteen minutes.

Shane watches Ilya and Rose’s back-and-forth, his eyes alight with glee. But just when he thinks he’s in the clear, Rose turns on Shane and decimates Montreal’s penalty kill. She also refers to Hayden’s most recent game as an *amateur production of Bambi on Ice*, so, naturally, Ilya kind of adores her.

She laughs with her whole body, head thrown back and shoulders shaking, and she sometimes snorts a little, too. She’s completely unselfconscious about it, though, like she knows exactly who she is and has no intentions of sanitising herself for anyone’s comfort.

Ilya loves her for Shane - loves that she is someone who sees him, the *real* him, and doesn’t ask for anything more from him than a place in his life.

Ilya also loves that Shane doesn’t feel the need to hide around Rose.

Maybe it’s because she was the one who came out to him *for him* - Ilya thanks her for that, by the way - or maybe it’s just because she’s so warm and light to be around, but Shane makes absolutely zero attempts to keep his distance from Ilya.

He slips his arm around Ilya’s waist as they lead Rose through to the dining room, presses a kiss to Ilya’s cheek when he thanks Rose for being such a good friend to Shane, and he holds Ilya’s hand on top of the table while they eat.

He’s so carefree with his affection, and Ilya is basking in every ounce of it.

Afterwards - when the dishwasher has been loaded and they've migrated to the couch in the living room - Shane leans himself back against Ilya's chest with such enthusiasm that Ilya huffs out a surprised gasp. Without even giving him a chance to get comfortable, Shane then pulls Ilya's arm over his chest so it's pinning him back against Ilya like a seatbelt.

Once he's happy with their position, Shane absentmindedly plays with Ilya's fingers like a fidget toy as they chat about Rose's latest movie.

"Anyway, the point is: it sucks," Rose finishes with a flourish.

Ilya snorts, and Shane rolls his eyes.

"None of your performances suck," Shane says, "you know that."

She sticks out her tongue and blows a raspberry at him. "Of course I know that, I'm fantastic. But the *movie* sucks."

"No, no. I think the plot of a genetically mutated octopus attacking a submarine full of spies has real...*depth*," Ilya jokes.

Shane chuckles, but Rose's gaze narrows as she gestures at Ilya, pointer finger outstretched but wine glass still in hand.

"You're such a *bitch*," she announces with utter delight. "No wonder Shane loves you."

Ilya lets out a bark of laughter while Shane groans dramatically. He swivels around in the circle of Ilya's arm so he can bury his face in Ilya's neck, attempting to hide the blush colouring his cheeks.

"He's embarrassed because he knows it's true," Ilya fake-whispers at Rose.

Shane, in a display of both embarrassment *and* comfort, sinks his teeth into Ilya's skin like there's nobody there to see it happen.

"Don't be a dick," he huffs, but Ilya can see the smirk on his face.

"But sweetheart, you love it when I'm a dick. Even Rose agrees."

Rose laughs, and Shane halfheartedly slaps Ilya on the stomach, and suddenly he knows this is a night he is going to hold onto.

Ilya is going to remember it when things are tough - when the distance and the schedules and the missing each other feels like too much - and it will remind Ilya exactly what all of this is for. All the hiding and the secrets are so they get more moments together like this, where they get to just *be*.

Ilya dips his chin to place a kiss on Shane's forehead, and Shane sighs quietly. He leans into the kiss, chasing Ilya for another when he starts to pull away. Ilya obliges, this time kissing Shane softly on the lips.

“Oh my god,” Rose groans. “You guys are so sweet it’s making me nauseous.”

Shane looks at Ilya, smiling as he rolls his eyes - a secret just for them - before turning back around and taking up his original position: Ilya’s arm slung over his chest, their fingers tangled together, and a kiss to Ilya’s forearm, just for the sake of it.

“We didn’t even *do* anything,” Shane argues.

And maybe it would be true, for anyone else. Maybe causal touches, or brief little kisses like the ones Shane keeps reaching for, are completely ordinary for most people - most couples. But they are not like most couples, and Shane is certainly not like most people.

“Shane,” Rose scoffs, “I dated you, remember? I know what you’re like.”

“Please don’t.”

“Please *do*,” Ilya interjects.

“He wouldn’t even hold my hand when we were together!”

“*Shane!*” Ilya gasps, scandalised.

“Stop.”

“I’m serious! I was always the one to initiate things like that - holding hands, hugs, kisses-“

“-okay, well, I don’t think I need to hear that-“

“-but it never lasted long, because Shane would always find a reason to let go of my hand, or pull away, or suddenly something urgently needed his attention.”

Ilya can just picture it now: Rose Landry, one of the hottest women in the world, trying to hold Shane’s hand, and Shane tolerating it for 3.5 seconds before letting go and wiping his hand on his t-shirt. He has a habit of doing that - wiping off a *bad feel*, like velvet, or microfibre, or someone else’s touch when he isn’t expecting it.

It’s half-heartbreaking and half-endearing, and Ilya squeezes Shane tight and kisses the curve of his jaw.

“Okay, well - I’m gay, Rose, so I’m not sure what you expected from me.”

Ilya hums. “I mean, to be fair, you didn’t *know* at the time-“

“-okay, thank you baby. You’re supposed to be on my side, remember?”

“Always, bug.” Ilya promises Shane with another kiss.

“Why do you call him bug?” Rose asks.

“Because he is my little Shanebug. Like ladybug, with all the dots, see?” Ilya says, lifting his free hand to point out the freckles on Shane’s face.

Shane tries to bat Ilya's hand away as he starts to blush, and Rose just groans again.

She gestures at them - the way they're curled up together on the couch, lounging around like this is something they do all the time. Like existing in front of other people is totally normal.

"See! You're just...just *like* that. All affectionate, and clingy, and cute. It's disgusting," Rose says. Then, "I'm so happy for you."

Ilya is so happy, too.

4.

For a long time, loving Shane hurt. It was an actual, physical pain in Ilya's chest.

First, because of the fear that Shane wouldn't reciprocate Ilya's feelings, and he would spend the rest of his life carrying all of this love with no one to give it to and nowhere to put it down. And then second, because their love was all tangled up in secrecy and deception, spending years not knowing what sunlight felt like.

For a while there, it had felt like they would never get to be free; it had felt like they were doomed to spend their whole lives loving each other in secret.

The first day that Ilya walks into the Censplex with his husband by his side, it doesn't feel like real life. They're married now - they have the rings to prove it - the whole world knows about them, and they're about to begin the next step in their journey: playing together.

It still feels sort of surreal. It all happened so quickly - the video, the outing, the wedding, the signing - that they haven't had enough time to process all of it before pre-season begins. Pre-season in Ottawa, on the Centaurs, together, as *husbands*.

Ilya catches himself pinching the inside of his arm to make sure he isn't dreaming.

For the first few days of training camp, Shane is a little bit reserved. The team are fantastic, of course, welcoming him with eager, open arms, but the sting of Montreal's betrayal still lingers, the remnants of it echoing deep in Shane's bones.

They were people he had loved and trusted - people he had bled, and fought, and sacrificed for - and they'd turned their backs on Shane like he was nothing to them. Like the decade and the three Cups he gave to them didn't even matter.

Ilya understands the apprehension.

It doesn't take long, though, before Shane is settling in nicely with the Centaurs.

He listens to Wyatt rhapsodise about comic books, and talks to Bood about baby Milo, and answers every one of Luca's burning questions even though he keeps glancing intermittently at Ilya, hoping he'll come and rescue him. Troy apologises to Shane about the things he said and did in the past, and Shane doesn't say *it's okay*, but he does say *thank you*.

He slots into their locker room so easily, so seamlessly, that two days into training camp it feels like he has always been there.

Ilya has all but forgotten what it feels like to turn to the stall on his right and not find his husband sitting there, dressed in Ottawa black and red with an A on his chest.

And as Shane settles - as the reality washes over him that this place is safe, that they won't turn their back on him, that they accept Shane so readily *because* he loves Ilya, not in spite of it - snippets of his real personality start to slip out here and there.

LaPointe says something so stupid Ilya can literally feel some of his brain cells die, and Shane bites back with a remark so witty that he has the entire locker room in stitches before the words have fully left his mouth.

When Dykstra lines up a new playlist - "*I think you'll like this one, Hollzy*," - Shane very casually pulls out a pair of ear plugs and slips them into his ears. Dykstra's jaw drops, and the room laughs, and then Shane grins and takes the plugs out as quickly as he put them in, only teasing Dykstra.

After Holmberg fucks up a zone entry halfway through day three, Shane spends so much time working with him on it that when they're done, all Bergy manages to stutter is, "Thank you, Sir. I mean Cap - no, uh, Mr Hollander. Shane. Hollzy."

It all makes Ilya feel fizzy, like a champagne bottle that's about to pop. There's so much joy and excitement, and love and peace, all bubbling up inside of him, that he feels like he could float away.

Especially when Shane starts to touch Ilya.

Shane had held back at first, maintaining a complete air of professionalism in their workplace because he'd decided that was for the best. Decided it would make everyone more comfortable if they weren't husbands at work, just teammates.

As Ilya had suspected, Shane had been wrong.

Despite the guys' complete inability to understand how Ilya pulled Shane - which, *rude* - they're kind of obsessed with Ilya and Shane's marriage.

They're always asking questions, always curious, always interested in the *how's* and the *when's* and the *why's* of it all. Not prying, nor pushing beyond what Shane and Ilya are comfortable talking about, but invested in the way any normal person would be about their friend's decade-long secret relationship.

So much so, in fact, that their genuine interest puts Shane at ease.

It's only small at first; a hand on Ilya's back as they walk into the locker room, or fingers tangled together as they stroll through the parking lot after practice, while chatting with the guys. Nothing at all really, yet still, somehow, everything.

Baby steps, but Ilya knows how much it costs Shane to make them.

They're on the ice for practice, right before the start of a scrimmage, when Shane looks at Ilya and frowns. He skates closer, stops abruptly on his edges, and reaches his hands up to adjust Ilya's chin strap.

"It's twisted," Shane explains.

"Thank you, bug."

Shane finishes up quickly, but before he skates off to join his team on the other side of the rink, he leans in and presses a kiss to Ilya's nose. It's fleeting, featherlight, so brief that Ilya might have thought he'd imagined it if not for the way Shane's cheeks turn pink as he leaves.

Ilya wants to bite him, a little.

The next time, they're back in the locker room. The drills Wiebe had them running have everyone sweaty and exhausted, and aching in that good, hard-earned kind of way. Ilya collapses into his stall, breathless and panting, and watches his flushed, sweaty husband as he saunters over, looking only half as drained as the rest of the team.

He immediately senses Ilya's gaze on him, notices the hungry look on Ilya's face, and rolls his eyes - flattered, but exasperated. Shane doesn't hesitate when he sinks his fingers into Ilya's hair and ruffles his curls.

"Told you you should have been running with me all summer."

"We were on our *honeymoon*, Shane. The only cardio I needed was--"

Shane slaps his hand over Ilya's mouth. "Okay, that's enough thank you, baby."

Ilya can't speak with Shane's hand still covering his mouth, so he just wiggles his eyebrows instead.

Luca breaks first, his loud laughter echoing through the room. Then it's Choui next, then Hayes, and before they know it the whole team is laughing with them. *With*, not *at*, which a terribly important distinction to make. And while Shane shakes his head in an attempt at disappointment, he's smiling so wide that Ilya is pretty sure he's already forgiven.

Ilya is obsessed with the way Shane is obsessed with him.

He's always been a tactile person, ever since he was a boy. He'd always seek out his mother's embrace, or Sveta's hand, or even Alexei's arms once or twice, before hockey and their father and the drugs pushed them apart.

It feels something close to miraculous, that Ilya gets to spend the rest of his life with Shane, who simply cannot keep his hands to himself.

When Ilya comes back from the showers - he always takes longer than his husband, with his curl routine - Shane is sitting in the stall beside Ilya's, already half dressed.

His hair is damp, dripping onto his shoulders and turning his white t-shirt translucent. He's chatting easily with Bood, a relaxed slope to his shoulders and an easy smile on his face. And, worst of all, there's still a hint of pink to his skin. It makes his little ladybug dots stand out on his cheeks, and he looks so gorgeous that Ilya simply cannot help himself.

He approaches Shane quickly, curls a hand around the back of his neck, and leans down to kiss him.

Shane's lips part on a surprised inhale, but he doesn't push Ilya away. In fact, when Ilya starts to move back, Shane tugs on the chain around Ilya's neck and pulls him in for another kiss.

"What was that for?" Shane whispers.

"You look too pretty."

Shane's nose scrunches as he smiles. "You're ridiculous."

For a second or two, it's as if no one else exists - like they're the only two people in the whole world, let alone the room. But then someone drops something on the floor, loud and obnoxious, and it jolts Ilya and Shane out of moment.

Ilya pulls back from his husband, quickly stroking the side of Shane's face with his finger. Shane smiles, but it's clear he's become self-conscious all of a sudden.

"You're nothing like I expected, Hollzy," Wyatt says, catching their attention.

Ilya isn't looking at Shane but he feels him tense, and Ilya's hackles go up instantly. This might be his team and they might be his friends, but Shane is his *husband*. He'll fight anyone for Shane, will sacrifice anything - even hockey - for him.

But then-

"People talk about you as if you're some kind of hockey robot who doesn't do emotions, or whatever," Wyatt explains.

Ilya knows that's how a lot of people perceive Shane, but it's only because he's selective with the people he opens up to.

Before he was The Gay Guy in the league, he was The Asian Guy. There has always been that expectation on him, the pressure to be a model minority. Shane had to be completely irreproachable; at least twice as good as every other player, to be taken half as seriously.

If he cared even a fraction less about hockey, people would have found a way to say he didn't belong in the league. The 'hockey robot' schtick was a safe - if inaccurate - narrative for Shane to lean into.

He has to trust someone completely in order for him to be honest in front of them - to be vulnerable, or affectionate, or *real*.

But Ilya has never known a version of Shane that wasn't sweet - that didn't unfurl like the petals of a flower under Ilya's attention. He's always had that trust, even before he had a chance to earn it. Even when, perhaps, he didn't deserve it at all.

"But you're a bit of a marshmallow, aren't you?" Wyatt teases.

Bood laughs, loud and echoing, and Luca, and Troy, and the rest of the guys still lingering in the locker room join in. It's teasing, but not at all unkind - just a joke among friends. Shane rolls his eyes but blushes beautifully.

"Ah, but he is only so sweet for me," Ilya tells them.

He gets a ball of stick tape to the head for that one.

"You're right, you know."

They're finally home, moving about the kitchen with the practiced ease of two people who know each other inside and out. Two people who have loved each other for so long that they're stitched into each other's souls.

Ilya pauses, leans back against the counter to look at his husband - messy hair, Ilya's hoodie with his number on Shane's chest, an ease about him that he's slowly getting back. *Perfect.*

"I usually am," Ilya agrees. "But what about this time?"

Shane scoffs and rolls his eyes, but the grin on his face as he slips his arms around Ilya's waist and bumps their noses together kind of gives him away.

"It's only with you that I'm like...like *this*," he says, pulling Ilya even tighter against him.

Ilya brings his hands up to cup the sides of Shane's neck and nudges their noses together once more, then lands a kiss on the corner of Shane's mouth. Ilya feels the way Shane's lips tick upwards in a smile.

"Well I should hope so, bug. You're *mine*, after all. My husband, my lover..."

"Okay, okay," Shane laughs, his head tipped back just enough that Ilya can swoop in and kiss the thrumming of his pulse. "I just mean - you bring out a different side of me. You're the only person in the world who gets this version of *Shane Hollander*."

Ilya doesn't respond right away; he scratches the hair at the base of Shane's neck until his eyes close, he kisses the freckles on Shane's cheeks, and he thinks for a moment.

Shane is right, of course.

Ilya *is* the only person who gets the luxury of having *this* Shane - the one who is sweet, and pliant, and who seeks out Ilya's touch like it's the air he needs to breathe. But-

“Maybe because you do not have to be *Shane Hollander Hockey Player* for me,” Ilya suggests. “You get to be just yourself. My husband. My Shanebug.”

“Yeah?”

“Mhm,” Ilya confirms. “You are still my big, strong, sexy hockey player, but - you get to be soft, too. There is no one to perform for when it’s just us.”

Ilya loves Shane when he’s arching beneath him, tears in his eyes, begging Ilya for more. Ilya loves Shane when he’s on the ice, fierce and aggressive and so fucking strong. Ilya loves Shane when he clings to him in sleep, when he asks for *one more kiss, please*, before Ilya leaves the house, and when Shane gets so stressed out that he loses his words for a couple of hours.

Shane is safe with Ilya, always. Every single version of him. There never has to be any pretence.

Shane sighs like he is letting go of something he hadn’t realised he was carrying. He lists forward, buries his face in the crook of Ilya’s neck and just breathes him in for a while. Ilya allows his hands to trail over Shane’s shoulders, down his arms, and curl around his back so he can enclose him in a little bubble of comfort.

This is Ilya’s favourite place in the world.

Out of all the cities and states and countries he’s visited - out of all the sights he has seen - nothing will ever compare to this: his husband in his arms.

“I love you, baby,” Shane says. “You know that, right?”

“I know, Shane,” Ilya promises him. “I love you too.”

+1.

Ilya cannot fucking *believe* this is his life.

When Ilya won the Cup with Boston in his first season as captain, more than anything, it had felt like a sigh of relief. Of course there was excitement and pride - for himself, and his teammates, and for Boston - but above everything, it had felt like a weight being lifted off his shoulders.

After spending his whole life hearing that he was lazy, undisciplined, that he would never be good enough - never amount to anything - all Ilya had ever wanted to do was prove his father wrong.

Hoisting the Cup had been that proof he was searching for. Ilya had pressed his lips to the hallowed metal, raised it above his head, and thought *thank god*. He thought, *I am not who he insisted I was*.

This time, lifting the Cup with his husband by his side, there is nothing but love and joy and gratitude.

And so much fucking alcohol.

Ilya doesn't know what club they're at, it's already the third one of the night. He doesn't even know what time it is. All he knows is that he just won the Cup, he's here with the teammates who he loves - and who love him back - and his husband, his Shane, is hanging off him like ivy.

Drunk Shane is a marvellous thing to behold. However bitchy, funny, sweet, clingy he is when sober, it's magnified by a thousand when he's drunk.

Ilya absolutely *loves* it.

Shane follows Ilya to the bar when it's his turn to buy a round, and he drags Ilya along with him when it's Shane's turn. He trails after Ilya when he excuses himself to the bathroom, and then pulls Ilya along behind him like a dog on a leash when he wants to get some fresh air outside. If Shane isn't touching Ilya, then he's searching for him - never more than a few feet apart for a few seconds at a time, like there's an invisible string tethering them to each other.

Ilya relishes in it, the easy way that Shane touches him now, like they've never had to hide it - like it doesn't matter who is watching.

He's on the way back from the bar with another tray of drinks, when they get separated.

Shane gets stopped by someone who insists on congratulating the team on their historic win. Ever the perfectly polite Canadian, even while absolutely hammered, Shane stops to hear out the super fan. Laden down with the drinks for his teammates who are becoming steadily more intoxicated, Ilya carries on to the table.

As he slides the tray onto one of the tables the Centaurs are occupying, four pairs of eyes flicker to Ilya, then behind him, and then back to Ilya.

"Have you lost something, Cap?" Choui teases.

"Yeah, I think you've left your shadow behind," Bood adds, kicking Ilya under the table as he takes a seat.

Ilya rolls his eyes, but he can't stop himself from grinning. Quite frankly, he *loves* the fact that they're known for being attached at the hip. He loves that the world gets to see glimpses of the real Shane through the way he loves Ilya.

"No, no, don't worry, he'll be back in less than a minute. Guaranteed," Luca bets, as he takes a bottle of beer and - alarmingly - chugs it.

Young starts counting, *one, two, three, four, five*, and Ilya just waits patiently because he knows they're not wrong.

Right as he looks to the crowd of people in search of Shane, his husband suddenly appears in front of him, less than thirty seconds in. Shane isn't exactly unsteady on his feet, but he's a little less sure-footed than he usually is as he rushes towards a waiting Ilya.

Without a single hesitation, Shane throws himself at his husband. He sits sideways on Ilya's lap, arms locked around Ilya's neck.

"I missed you," Shane says, and then he kisses Ilya in front of everyone.

It's nothing too explicit, but it's slow and tender and Ilya can't resist slipping in a little tongue as he grips Shane's waist and holds him tight. Shane hums quietly, then he giggles when Ilya places one, two, three quick kisses on his lips, before finally pulling back.

Ilya is met with a smile so bright it's almost blinding.

"We won the Cup," Shane whisper-yells.

Ilya gasps, pretending to be surprised. "We *did*?"

It makes Shane laugh, and he leans forward and bumps their foreheads together. "I love you *so* much, baby. Have I told you that?"

Ilya's mouth twists into a smirk. Shane hasn't *stopped* saying *I love you* all night.

He'd said it first when they crashed into each other on the ice, after Shane scored the championship winning goal off of Ilya's pass. He said it again when they lifted the Cup together, and again when they kissed on the ice for the whole world to see. He'd even said it while Ilya was giving a live interview, Shane skating up behind him, kissing his cheek, and saying, "I love you," for everyone to hear.

Shane has said it roughly three hundred times in the hours since.

"You might have mentioned it once or twice."

Shane frowns.

"That's not enough times," he laments, sounding genuinely devastated.

His bottom lip sticks out in the cutest of pouts, and Ilya leans forward to kiss it.

"I love you," Shane says. "I love you, I love you, *I love you.*"

Ilya traces his thumb along Shane's freckles, down the side of his face, and across to his strawberry daiquiri-flavoured lips.

"I love you too, sweetheart," Ilya promises. "More than anything."

"Even more than the cup?" One of their teammates asks.

Ilya doesn't even glance away from his husband as he says, "Yes. Even more than that."

More than anything and everything in the whole world. And he can't wait to do it for the rest of his life.

End Notes

i'm a staunch believer in clingy, pathetic, down bad, loverboy ilya, but sometimes i think people forget that shane is equally as obsessed. like, that's his baby!!!

anyway, love u :)

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