

Someplace to go

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Someplace to go

by [paleredheadinascifi](#)

Summary

“You didn’t have, like, a favourite book growing up?”

It’s ridiculous, the way his heart starts beating in his chest like he is in danger. He knows he is not in danger — he is in bed with his husband. But his body feels like he is in danger.

Ilya shifts. “My mother read a lot,” he admits carefully. “She read to me.”

Or, Shane reads boring hockey books. Ilya doesn't remember the last time he touched a book. Shane asks *so* many questions.

Notes

If I told you I absolutely under no circumstances would write an HR fic because i simply don’t have time for an additional hyperfixation, please pretend you didn’t see this. Thank u love u.

The title of this is from the quote: “Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are” by Mason Cooley!

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

Ilya's favourite part of his and Shane's boring, old-person bedtime routine is the glasses perched on his husband's nose as he studiously flicks through whatever boring hockey book he is reading this week.

Shane has a routine, and Ilya likes being near Shane, so Ilya has sort of adopted his routine as a consequence.

They go to bed *so early* — so early it is embarrassing. Shane flosses every tooth, brushes his teeth for *precisely* two minutes, and smears mysterious, expensive creams and liquids onto his face. Ilya brushes his teeth for an amount of time that seems like a good amount of time, and watches Shane frown at himself in the mirror as he pats something under his eyes with one finger.

Then, Shane starts his Glasses Time. If you asked Shane, he would say it's his Reading Time, but what is most important is that it's his Glasses Time, also.

He gets into bed, shiny and smelling like lotions and mint, and he puts on his glasses and picks up his book. Ilya gets into bed beside him and scrolls on his phone until the allotted Glasses Time has passed, and he can roll on top of his husband for *Ilya's* glasses time.

Tonight, it seems Glasses Time might end early — Ilya has noticed the pages left in the book becoming sparse.

Indeed, Shane flips to the last page, closes the book, and lets out a breath.

"God, that was so good," he breathes. Nerd. "Have you read it?" Shane asks, turning the cover toward Ilya. It looks exactly the same as every book he has ever seen Shane read. "You should read it. It's like...life changing."

Ilya squints his eyes. "Your life has been changed by hockey book? This is sad, Hollander. You need better life."

"Fuck off. It's interesting. You'd probably like it."

"Interesting like New Yorker?"

Shane rolls his eyes. "It's more interesting than those games on your phone. Better for your brain. It's bad for your sleep, you know."

"Yes, I know. You tell me."

Shane places his boring book on his nightstand carefully, like it is something precious. Then he rolls back over towards Ilya, leaning on his elbow. "I don't think I've ever seen you read a book."

Ilya sighs dramatically. "Yes, you have caught me. I cannot read. My deepest shame."

Shane rolls his eyes. "Shut up. I'm serious. You don't like books?"

“What kind of person doesn’t like books? I am not monster. I like books.”

“But you never read them.”

“And you never eat delicious burger. Does not mean you do not like delicious burger. Just you are too busy eating food for rabbit instead. I am too busy having life to read boring hockey book.”

“Not all books are about hockey.”

Ilya gasps. “This is...what’s the word...*breaking news*, yes? You did not know this before?”

Shane huffs. “I’m just saying that *you* don’t have to read books about hockey. *I* enjoy reading books about hockey. Come on. What’s your favourite book?”

Ilya shrugs. “I don’t know. What is yours?”

Shane ignores his attempt to dodge the question. “You didn’t have, like, a favourite book growing up?”

It’s ridiculous, the way his heart starts beating in his chest like he is in danger. He knows he is not in danger — he is in bed with his husband. But his body feels like he is in danger.

Ilya shifts. “My mother read a lot,” he admits carefully. “She read to me. Her favourite was, uh,” he frowns as he translates in his head, “Little Humpback Horse. Book for children.”

Shane smiles. “She read it to you?”

“Yes. Lots.”

“What’s it about?”

“Little humpback horse.”

Shane laughs. “And?”

“Is fairy tale. About ugly magic horse.”

“Wow. I’ve really been missing out on these Russian fairy tales, huh?”

“Is stupid boy with clever, ugly horse. My mother liked it because it is about having good heart. She liked kind things. She was kind.”

“Like the horse?”

“Sort of,” he agrees, but it feels wrong to equate his mother with the ugly horse. She was not the ugly horse. “But she was beautiful also,” he finds himself needing to say, even though Shane knows this. “And smart. And kind.” He lets out a breath. “I think she worried I would be like my father,” he says aloud, as the thought hits him.

“Unkind?”

“Yes.”

“You’re not.”

“I know. But I am not as kind as my mother.”

“You don’t think so?”

Ilya smiles. “I am asshole, no?”

Shane shakes his head. “You can be. But you’re not. Not really.”

Ilya hums. “Well, I am too beautiful to be ugly horse.”

Shane smiles. “That’s true.”

“And I am too smart to be stupid boy.”

“If you say so.”

“But I suppose that is my favourite book. If I have to have one.”

Shane hums. “Did your mother read often?”

“Oh, yes. Always. Always, always reading. She would read to me every night. Was escape, I think.”

Shane hums again, and Ilya knows he’s in for another question. “You stopped reading after she passed?”

He hadn’t really thought about it like that before, but he supposes he did. It was something that was hers. Theirs. He doesn’t remember deciding to stop, but it had seemed obvious that it would die with her.

“Maybe,” he says. “Yes.”

Shane runs a hand through Ilya’s hair, and Ilya lets his eyes fall closed at the feel of it. He smiles at the press of Shane’s lips to his forehead. “My favourite book is The Game by Ken Dryden,” Shane whispers.

Ilya snorts. He opens his eyes to Shane smiling at him, like he knows what he is doing. “Of course.”

A few days later, after Lotion Time and before Glasses Time, Shane anxiously hands Ilya a package.

He knows what it is before he opens it. His heart feels, again, like it is in danger.

“Everyone should own their favourite book,” Shane says quietly, like he’s not sure if Ilya will want this.

Ilya doesn’t know if he will want this, either. Still, he opens the package. For the first time in so many years, he holds the book in his hands.

Ilya sniffs. He forces the tremor out of his hands. “Thank you,” he says, and he means it. He means it, even if he’s still not sure if he wants it — even if his body feels like it is in danger.

“Is it how you remember?”

He nods. “Yes.”

It is. It’s exactly the same, but less well-worn.

Shane nods his head once, and Ilya knows how hard he would have tried to find the perfect one. How much he would have cared about making sure it was right.

Still, Shane puts on his glasses and picks up his book, and lets Ilya stare at the book in his hands.

It feels like he is holding a grenade in his hands as he flips through the pages — like something might jump out and destroy him with every turn of the page.

He swallows, tracing the words with his finger.

He thinks it would be nice to read it, to say the Russian words out loud for Shane to hear. He wants to. He wants to share this thing that was his mother’s with Shane, but his heart is beating so fast, and something is squeezing his throat.

If it were anyone else here to witness it, he’d be mortified as hot tears stream down his cheeks at a *children’s book* — but it’s Shane. Shane, who doesn’t mention it, just lifts a hand to squeeze Ilya’s thigh in non-acknowledgment acknowledgement.

Just holding the book in his hands, he feels like a child again. He’s seven, his tired head resting against his mother’s shoulder. The scent of her perfume. The warmth in her voice.

He turns and buries his face in Shane’s neck. He breathes him in, in, in.

Shane doesn’t mention it, or the children’s book that now sits on his bedside table, untouched.

Ilya eyes it each night for weeks, waiting for it to feel less like a grenade decorating their bedroom and more like a children's book.

On a regular Tuesday night, almost a month after he first touched it, he reaches for it again.

Shane pretends not to notice, his nose buried in his boring hockey book.

Ilya sucks in a deep breath and opens the book. He starts on the first page and flips through it. Instantly, his mother is right there again — closer than she has been in years. He's holding her in his hands.

Shane subtly shifts closer, a steady presence against his side, but otherwise continues reading his book.

Ilya reads about the stupid boy and his useless brothers and his ugly horse. He used to love this, he remembers. Listening to his mother's voice — discovering new universes together. He loved all these stories. He had read his way through the children's section of the library before his tenth birthday. He had wanted so much to be like his mother.

Reading was his mother's, and then it was theirs, and, for a moment, it had been his. He had been just like her.

But he wasn't supposed to be like his mother.

He wasn't allowed to be.

To his father, to his brother, he wasn't supposed to be that soft. He wasn't supposed to be that kind. He wasn't allowed to be.

But Ilya had never been scared of that. He loved that about his mother.

After the accident, Ilya was terrified of being like his mother for a different reason.

He was terrified of being that sad. He was terrified that whatever was inside her that made her that sad might be inside of him, too. That if he let himself be all the good things of her, he might be the bad things, too.

He didn't know how to keep the good things without keeping the bad — how to keep all her blessings without keeping the curse.

It wasn't sound logic — it was the logic of a twelve-year-old with nowhere to put his grief. Stuffed and shoved into some faraway place with the stupid boy and the ugly horse and the forgotten sound of his mother's laugh.

He hid it so well that he'd never had a reason to even look for it — to see it from the eyes of someone who faced the curse and learnt to live alongside it.

And then, of course, all these years later, who else but Shane Hollander would find it in the cracks and crevices he makes a home in.

“I can read it to you?” He asks.

Shane, who had not turned the page of his book once this whole time, closes it and drops it on the bedside table.

“Please,” he says.

And so he does. He drops his head against his husband’s shoulder, and he reads the words his mother read to him again and again and again. He does the voices she would do, and Shane laughs at all the places small Ilya once did.

With the same warmth under his cheek and his mother’s words bouncing against the walls of their bedroom, it’s the closest he thinks he’ll ever get to saying, “Shane, meet my mother. I know you will love her, like I love her.”

“Did you know they write gay hockey porn books?” Ilya asks a few nights later, his freshly unpackaged Kindle in hand.

Shane, who is reading a boring, non-sexy hockey book beside him, raises his brows over the top of the pages. “So I’ve heard.”

“They are very good,” Ilya says. “Everyone in these books is gay.”

“You’re reading hockey smut?”

“Yes,” Ilya confirms. “I have app that tracks the books I read. I sent you friend request. You did not see it?”

“Ilya,” Shane says carefully. “Is it private or public?”

Ilya frowns. “I don’t know. Does it matter?”

“Everyone’s going to see you reading gay hockey smut!”

Ilya tsks. “There is nothing wrong with gay hockey book, Hollander. There is lots wrong with boring hockey book. Your hockey book is not sexy. My hockey book is sexy.”

“Oh my god,” Shane breathes. “I’ve created a monster.”

But half an hour later, Shane’s hair tickles Ilya’s chin as he reads the gay hockey smut aloud, the boring hockey book abandoned on the bed.

“Aw,” Shane sighs dreamily. His head had become progressively heavier as Ilya read.

“They’re in loveeee.”

Ilya smiles. He turns and presses a kiss to his hair. "They are in love like we are in love," he says. "And Elijah is so, so sexy, like me. And Coen is so good at hockey, also like me. You think they wrote this book about me?"

Shane swats at him, but he's mostly asleep, so there's no effort behind it.

"Keep going," he says. "They're gonna kiss."

"Say sexy hockey is better than boring hockey," Ilya demands.

Shane sighs. "They're completely different things."

"You have to."

Shane sighs again. "Sexy hockey is better than boring hockey. Keep going."

Ilya grins and presses another kiss to the top of his head. He loves this. He loves catching up on all the books he has not read. He loves reading aloud to his husband. And some day, sometime soon, he'll love telling their children about The Little Humpback Horse, and the woman who gave Ilya every good thing about him.



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End Notes

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