For the Rest of Our Lives

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/46899070.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Minor or Background Relationship(s)
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Troy Barrett, Harris Drover
Additional Tags:	Established Relationship, Slice of Life, Domestic Fluff, Self-Indulgent, love language: physical touch, They touch a lot, No Plot Only Vibes, Time Skips, Post-Canon
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-05-02 Words: 7,595 Chapters: 1/1

For the Rest of Our Lives

by sarantae

Summary

There are moments in life that make you stop and think “this is when my life begins.” For Shane Hollander that has happened a few times.

Notes

For the friends who trusted me, and believed me when I said a book with two half naked men on the cover was the best book I’d ever read.

See the end of the work for more notes

There are moments in life that make you stop and think “this is when my life begins.” Be in the big ways; at graduation, before starting your dream job, after quitting a job that made your life a living hell, or the small ways; finally breaking up with someone, taking that first step to becoming a better you, rearranging your bookshelf.

For Shane Hollander life has begun a few times. First, when he was drafted to the NHL. Second, when he and Ilya got to be together for real in secret. And finally, when they got to be together for real in the open as a married couple.

These are all moments where Shane had had to stop himself, had to steel himself and remember that now, that moment, “this is when my life begins.”

He didn’t think it would happen again.

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The Ottawa Centaurs are stoked to have Shane Hollander on their roster, and it takes a surprisingly short time for Shane to feel at ease on the ice with his new teammates. They try out new plays, new line formations and Coach Wiebe looks very satisfied whenever Shane catches him looking. Jokes fly in the locker room, because no matter how old and professional they all might be, they’re still men with foul mouths. But unlike the locker room in Montreal, Shane knows that these men have their best intentions at heart. So when Shane’s accused of sleeping his way to the top, with him going home with their captain and all, he just shrugs it off with a playful grin in Ilya’s direction. Ilya looks endlessly proud.

The first time Shane shows up to practice, he does so alone. Ilya had to go in earlier to attend a meeting, and while Shane would have been more than happy to come in earlier as well, to show good sportsmanship, Ilya made him stay in bed.

“Is your first season in a long time where you are not captain with captain’s duties. Enjoy it,” he’d said before kissing him goodbye.

Now Shane’s entering the locker room and the men in there go quiet. He recognizes a few of them. Barrett, Haas, Hayes, Boodram. They’re all looking at him with wide eyes, like they’re surprised to see him there. Which, to Shane’s surprise, doesn’t surprise him at all. He still feels weird wearing Centaurs colors.

“Oh, the new recruit!” Ilya’s voice is laced with humor as he walks through a door from the Coach Wiebe’s office. “Team, meet Shane Hollander. Hollander, meet the team.”

Shane gives an awkward wave. “I think they know who I am, Rozanov.”

“So sure of himself,” Ilya laughs. “What an ego.” And then he kisses him obnoxiously loud on the side of his head.

That sends the locker room into a fit of laughter, and one by one they come up to Shane, to shake his hand and to properly welcome him to the team. Most of the players were at their

wedding this summer, and those of the guys who weren't, congratulates him on his recent nuptials.

Practice goes smooth, and when Shane and Ilya are on the ice together, the rest of the team shout and hoot. There's a tense energy in the rink, a tense hum of excitement. When they're put on opposite teams for their end-of-practice scrimmage, the rest of the team falls back to let them have at it. It's exhilarating and adrenaline is pumping through Shane's veins when, after practice, Ilya pulls him aside, pushes his sweaty bangs back, and kisses him center ice. He slips his tongue in between Shane's smile, and pulls away before they can let it get out of hand.

"Good practice, Hollander."

"Thanks, Captain."

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After the first week of practice, and before the season kicks off, Troy approaches him with a shy smile. Even though he and Harris were at their wedding, and even though he helped coach at their summer camps, Troy has yet to warm up to Shane fully.

"Harris wants to do a Q and A with you whenever you have time."

Shane nods, still in his sweaty clothes. "Oh, sure. He's in office, yeah?"

Troy nods and lets him finish changing out of his practice jersey. He showers, changes into a Centaurs sweater that's a little too broad across his shoulders. He catches Ilya looking at him with a fond smile before leaving his stall to find Harris.

Harris looks surprised that he's turned up alone. "We're not attached to the hip," Shane points out when Harris beckons him in. Since he's been promoted, he no longer shares an office with Gen. This office has floor to ceiling windows with Chiron's dog bed tucked away in a corner overlooking the parking lot. It's empty.

"Troy took him for a walk," Harris explains, rising from his chair.

Shane nods, slightly disappointed. "Troy said you wanted to do a Q and A?"

"Yes! Perfect. Please take a seat."

Harris gestures to a chair in front of a gigantic Centaurs backdrop. While Harris fusses about getting Shane ready, fastening a mic to his sweater, and adjusting camera settings, Shane's eyes drift to the framed pictures on Harris' desk. There's a signed picture of Scott and Troy from, and Shane guesses because he's yet to visit the place, the Kingfisher in New York. Next to it is a picture of Troy and Harris, also from the Kingfisher, and in it they're leaning against each other, laughing at the camera. There's also a picture of them from Shane and Ilya's wedding reception, Troy gazing at Harris with so much fondness in his eyes.

"Troy's a good guy," Shane says, watching Harris closely.

“He's the best,” Harris agrees, looking back at Shane through the camera lens. “Are you ready?”

Shane shakes the tension out of his shoulders, adjusts his position, touches his thumb to the gold ring on his fourth finger.

There is a sound from the doorway, and he notices Ilya leaning against the frame of the door, a playful smile on his lips.

“Come to spy, have you?” Harris chuckles, having turned around hoping it might have been someone else.

“No. Come to make sure he gets the answers right,” Ilya says, folding his arms over his chest. “Favorite animal? Dog. Favorite dog? Anya.” He pauses, eyes glinting with mirth. “Favorite hockey player? Ilya Rozanov.”

Shane laughs. He wonders if they should do a Q and A together, wonders if the hockey world is ready for two rivals-turned-lovers-turned-teammates to answer questions, to display their affection to the world. Since they announced their relationship, they’ve kept the details out of the media, and they’ve talked about whether or not they needed to share their story. Shane isn’t oblivious to the cruel and downright evil comments they still get, but he’s getting better at ignoring them, knowing he has the support of his team, of his friends, of his husband. Ilya told Shane that he didn’t want to share details of their private life, and Shane had felt relieved that they were on the same page about that. They both just wanted to *be* together.

“Funny,” Shane deadpans as Ilya takes a seat in Harris’ desk chair.

He stays quiet throughout Harris’ rapid fire questions that Shane expertly answers. When he’s asked about his favorite current hockey player he makes a dramatic pause, shoots a pointed glance at Ilya before looking back into the camera. “My husband.”

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Only on game nights do they wear their rings on chains around their necks, Ilya’s making a clinking sound whenever it falls against the crucifix already there. They make it a pre-game ritual to unclasp their chains, slip on the ring and clasp it back around their necks before they get dressed in their suits. After Shane’s first Centaurs game, which they win, they sort of forget about taking them off in the rush of celebrations and eagerness to get home, to be alone, to work off the remaining adrenaline of the win.

But in between games, Shane lets the chain sit bare against the hollow between his clavicles. He pretends he doesn’t know why, but the truth is he likes the way he looks with it. And so does Ilya. Shane’s caught him looking at it, the way it peeks out from his sweaters and hoodies and workout tees. He finds that he likes the weight of it, too. Likes the contrast of the warm gold against his pale skin. Likes the way it feels when...

“Shane,” Ilya breathes, taking him out of his head. Ilya’s tongue is gentle, softens the mark it’s left in the space between Shane’s neck and shoulder and catches on the chain, rolls it

against Shane's heated skin in a comforting gesture. He sighs, buries his hands in Ilya's curls and pulls him back up to his face for a heated kiss.

"Ilya," Shane sighs when he breaks the kiss only to get Ilya to kiss his neck, just below his ear.

It's a Monday afternoon, and Shane luxuriates in the realization that neither of them have anywhere to be before tomorrow. They had mandatory practice this morning, then they went and had lunch in town before coming home where they'd spent the early afternoon taking Anya on a walk. Coming home, they'd both had every intention of taking a nap, but it hadn't taken Ilya long to get restless. Now, as Ilya's nipping at the sensitive skin behind his ear, his body a comfortable weight on top of him, Shane shamelessly lets his mind wander. He thinks about the laundry they need to do, the next appointment they need to make with Ilya's psyciatrist. He thinks they might be able to try a new recipe tonight, the one with broccoli and cheese that Shane's mom had sent them a few weeks ago.

A quick, sharp pain in his ear makes him stop thinking about food. Ilya has bit his ear and is frowning down at him. He's shirtless and his crucifix is tangled up in Shane's thin chain.

"What?" Shane frowns back.

"*What* what?" Ilya huffs. He leans in, places a feathery kiss on Shane's forehead. "Where'd you go?"

Shane turns his head, receives a kiss to his temple, on his ear, down his neck where it lingers. He chuckles. "Thinking about cheese."

Ilya starts to laugh, letting himself down next to Shane, twisting his nipple to tease. Lying next to each other, Shane rubbing a soothing hand across his chest, the two of them laughing like it's the funniest thing in the world that Shane's thinking about cheese.

"Cheese," Ilya barks, shaking his head on the pillow, his curls fanning out. "Trying to have sex with my husband, but he's thinking about cheese."

Husband. Hearing the word spoken still makes Shane's stomach flutter, and warmth spreads up his chest to his cheeks. He grins. "Sorry."

Ilya makes a dismissive sound, sits up and leaves the bed. Shane rises to his elbows, frowning as Ilya finds a discarded shirt on the floor. "Going somewhere?"

"Kitchen," Ilya shrugs and winks at Shane before leaving the room. "Have a man to feed!"

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They both take up hobbies as they navigate living together for real. Knowing they'll be by each other's side for the long haul, and not just for the summer, they realize that they don't need to be in each other's space at all times. Even during their summers at Shane's - their - cottage they would take hours for themselves to do their own thing, but they'd always end up

spending more time with each other than by themselves. But now, living together, going to work together, they both crave a little time apart.

So Ilya takes up photography. He's been having fun with his Instagram posts, and had enjoyed setting up shots of things that made him think of Shane, but now that he can just tell Shane about it, or even experience it with Shane, he starts to get more serious. He asks Gen about equipment, and buys himself a small Olympus camera that he brings with him on the road and on walks with Anya. Harris introduces him to his favorite editing software, and soon Ilya's Instagram is filled with soft colored shots of sights around their neighborhood, Anya, Shane's freckles, and most importantly the two of them together.

Shane gets really into reading. At first he gets into reading about hockey, all the memoirs and non-fiction books about various series he can find. When he discovers that working out to thriller novels on audiobook makes cardio a bit more durable, he's a lost case. When he eventually ventures into the literary genre, the first books he gets recommended are Fredrik Backman's *Beartown* series, and when it ends, he weeps for so long that Ilya can't help but record him. After that, and after Shane's allowed Ilya to post it on his Instagram, comments start recommending Shane books.

Having played for as long as they have, and having garnered as much respect and admiration from the league and their fans as they have, they don't worry about what their social media profiles say about them. They still give their all on the ice, they continue to make results for the Centaurs, and they're still professional when they're on paid time. So Ilya's amateaur photography account and Shane's book review blog becomes a downtime hobby, something they update as frequently as possible. Sometimes Shane will read aloud for Ilya, idly playing with his curls where Ilya's head is resting on Shane's chest, more often than not Shane's low voice lulling him to sleep. And Shane tries not to blush when Ilya talks him into posing ("Is just sitting on the floor, Hollander, not *America's Next Top Model*") in his underwear ("Private collection!"). Ilya makes him look very pretty, and once again Shane is struck by how good he looks with the gold chain around his neck.

"Can I post this?" Shane asks, showing the picture in question. It's a closeup of Shane, his long fringe falling into his eyes focused on something beyond the camera. His freckles prominent on his pale skin, tiny wrinkles around his slightly parted lips.

Ilya looks at him, stunned. "Really?"

"Yeah," Shane says, licking his lips. "I look kinda hot."

Ilya laughs, grabs Shane around his naked back and pulls him close. "Yes, my love."

That night, Shane reads him the last chapter of *A Wrinkle in Time*, and when he'd finished updating his recently acquired Goodreads account, he wraps himself around Ilya and falls asleep.

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When he first joined the team, Shane hadn't considered game days with Ilya. Hadn't considered a lot of things about becoming his teammate, really, beyond the fact that he'd get

to see him every day, which was something he'd wanted to for a very long time.

He hadn't considered going to pre-game practice, hadn't considered pregame naps, hadn't considered the pre-game tradition of arriving in suits.

The suits. Shane has seen Ilya in suits before, has helped him *out* of them countless times, so the sight of him in a suit shouldn't shake him this much.

But Shane's never seen him put it on, has never been in the same room when he buttons up his shirt, tucks the tail into fitted pants, seen him do a Windsor knot with deft hands.

Has never seen him so deliciously handsome and ready to leave.

Ilya laughs, shaking him out of his stupor. "You are drooling, Hollander. Is very unprofessional."

And then Ilya kisses him, hot and heavy, against the closet door where Shane is still picking out a shirt.

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On the bus when they're playing cities too close to fly, they rarely sit apart, one of them always keeping a seat for the other. Shane usually gets the window seat, Ilya preferring the aisle because that's how they wind down best - Shane in his head, content to watch the road, and Ilya holding court, joking around, his hand never leaving Shane's thigh.

On the late nights and long drives, when the bus is quiet and Ilya's head is resting on Shane's shoulder, Shane's fingers laced through Ilya's, he easily falls into a daydream where this is what they'll do for the rest of their lives. Traveling, always moving, heading for the next city and the next and the next, hands intertwined, together.

Shane tries to ignore the part of him that whispers that life is *lacking*, meant to have more. Because does he not have everything he's ever wanted? The love of his life by his side, playing a sport he loves? Ilya's hand flexes in his sleep and Shane pulls it closer, turns his head and buries his nose in Ilya's curls and shuts his eyes, letting the whispering feeling fade into the noise of tires against the road.

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The first time they play against Montreal, they lose, and Shane cries when they get home.

He's held it together for the post-game beers at Monk's, but the minute they step through their front door, he starts sobbing.

Ilya wraps his arms around him, holding him close as Anya circles their legs, whining for attention. Shane crouches, buries his face in Anya's fur, gets his breathing under control. Ilya sits down next to them, claps his thighs for Anya to come to him and let Shane breathe.

"The next one is ours," Ilya reassures, scratching behind her ears. "They are still a better team."

Shane sighs, wiping his cheeks. “We have a powerful starting line, I don’t understand. They played more angrily than usual.”

“They are scared. We have good players, we are the underdogs,” Ilya motions for Shane to come to him. “Everyone is scared of the underdog.”

Shane sits next to Ilya on the floor, letting Anya lick his fingers. “I want to beat them.”

For a minute he thinks he’s being unfair. The team had been his home, his family, for almost ten years. And Hayden and J.J. are still some of his closest friends even if there are long stretches of time where they don’t see each other. But then he remembers the team’s reaction to his and Ilya’s relationship, how they’d left him hanging without support when he needed it most, and how they’d treated him when he’d tripped on the ice, costing them a shot at the playoffs. He thinks he might be allowed to feel angry about that, and has to be allowed to feel the resentment coursing through his body.

Ilya takes his hand, kisses the back of it before letting it rest against his chest. “We will.”

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And they do.

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After their first season together, they cut their time short at the cottage to finally go vacationing in Europe, where they realize that not many Europeans actually follow the NHL. So they’re left alone and unbothered.

They go to Ibiza because Shane's curious about the gay beaches he’s heard of from Scott. They end up coordinating their trips, and Scott and Kip take them out on their first night there, and they lose each other in the throng of people on the street. They don’t see them again for the rest of their trip, Scott and Kip having to leave a few days later.

As Shane had expected, Ilya does thrive there, fits in there like here is all he’s ever needed to be. In the clubs and on the beaches they can’t stop looking at each other, at Ilya's darkening tan line above his waist, and Shane's red nose. Ilya ropes Shane into getting their ears pierced on their last day, as a reminder of their first of many European summers.

Having spent a week partying and lounging on Mediterranean beaches, they take a more sophisticated trip to Greece. After only a few hours of wandering the streets of Athens, Shane realizes that taking Ilya to Greece turns out to be both the worst and the best idea. Ilya keeps pointing out the phallus shaped trinkets in every store window, and Shane’s cheeks grow so red he has to pull down his hat to hide from Ilya’s teasing gaze.

They visit the Greek island of Corfu, go wandering in the old town, holding hands and Shane having to stop Ilya from petting all the stray dogs (“Relax, Hollander.” “They have fleas!”). They do all the touristy stuff, and spend more days by the beach, Ilya growing tanner, his hair lighter, and Shane's freckles growing darker and his hair curling in the salty water.

Ilya's brought his camera, capturing architecture, nature, the cozy cafes and eateries they visit, and Shane reading at every available moment. He lets his private collection grow, too. He's obsessed with the freckles across Shane's back, with the faint tan lines above the rise of his ass. Shane expresses his worry about the pictures being found, and Ilya doesn't push it away, but reassures him that he'll do anything in his power to avoid a sex scandal. And then he covers Shane's body with his own, and fucks him into the mattress.

At night they go dancing, Ilya attracting the attention of both men and women, but his eyes never leave Shane who's mostly manning their table, and sometimes indulging in a bit of jumping around and grinding, remembering the first time he saw Ilya in a nightclub like this. He pulls him closer, lets him know it's time to go.

They've rented a private house in the hills, and at night they lie with the backdoors open, gazing at the stars, fingers lazily running over wide expanses of naked and warm skin. The nights are warm, and they fall asleep on top of the bedcovers, but in the early mornings Shane will wake up to pull a thin sheet over Ilya's naked body before snuggling back into him, to chase sleep. When they both wake they have lazy and unhurried sex, Ilya drawing his favorite sounds from Shane's throat and mouth with his hands, tongue and lips.

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In the afternoons they Skype home to Troy and Harris who are dog sitting Anya, and Ilya goes all out with baby talk, and not for the first time Shane wonders *when* they're going to be parents.

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The first night they get back from Europe, Ilya's worn out and the next day he's experiencing a low so great he stays in bed all day. Shane drives out to get Anya from where Troy and Harris now live in a cozy house with a big backyard for Chiron and Anya to run about.

Shane lets Anya ride in the passenger seat, telling her that "Dad's upstairs" when they get back home. Anya runs to Ilya, and he cuddles her to his chest, and they let her sleep in the bed that night.

The next morning, they eat homemade apple pie for breakfast and Shane tells Ilya how proud Troy had looked when he'd handed it to him the night before.

"I think he might have a crush on you," Ilya says, teasing, in an attempt to regain control of himself. But Shane sees how his eyes are tired and exhausted.

"I think he might be very much in love with Harris, but whatever you say," Shane says lightly, and reaches over to wipe a bit of stray cream from Ilya's mouth.

Sucking his thumb into his mouth, he grins as Ilya pushes away the plate to reach for Shane. Their kisses taste of sugar and coffee. When they break apart, Shane clears Ilya's hair out of his eyes.

"It's okay not to be okay."

“I know, *moy lyubimyy*.”

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Working with Ilya on the same team is a dream come true.

Shane has always admired Ilya’s skill and has always known he’s deserving of every praise he gets from the media, the fans and the other players in the league. He’s witnessed Ilya’s skill in person, multiple times, and shouldn’t really be surprised that he’s competent in their field.

But seeing Ilya at team meetings, taking charge of the team, arguing with the coaches about plays, is an entirely different experience. Shane has been staring at the concentrated frown on Ilya’s face as Coach Wiebe explains a new play, a power play that will put Ilya, Shane, Troy and Luca on the ice at the same time, and feels his pulse kick a notch when he realizes how powerful that is.

Ilya's frowning like he disagrees, like he thinks the play is too unrealistic and will never happen in a million years because it’s too good to be true.

“No,” he says when Coach Wiebe has finished talking and the room is full of excited buzzing from the team.

“No? Why not?” Wiebe stares at Ilya like he can’t quite believe he’s disagreeing.

Ilya explains he’s too worried the play will fail. “We’re too similar, we play the same, we need balance, yes? Where is the balance, all I see is power. Too much power.”

“There’s no such thing as too much power, Rozanov.”

“There is, this line is too powerful, will break the dynamic we have on the line in the first place. This line is good for practice, for fun, but not for winning actual games,” and Wiebe says he’s thought of that, but that he’d still like to see the play in a game, to try it out, to get a feel of it, to give the fans what they’ve been dreaming of *dammit*.

And through it all, Shane cannot take his eyes off ilya, off the focused heat in Ilya’s eyes, off the way Ilya leans forward in his chair, crosses his muscular arms on the table and makes a gesture with his hand that tells Shane he’s well and truly frustrated with Coach Wiebe.

Shane forgets all about tactics and decency around their teammates when he stretches his legs, finds Ilya's calf and gets a momentary reaction, a mere flicker of Ilya’s eyes in his direction.

“I think we should try it out, we won't know if it’s any good before that,” he mediates, and Shane knows when Ilya sees the look in his eyes, his dilated pupils, the slight flush of his neck, because Ilya leans back slightly, the side of his mouth turning op, the frown in his face relaxing.

“No one likes a kiss ass, Hollander,” Ilya scoffs, and the team laughs. “But okay we will try.”

Coach claps his hands and the team filters out into the locker room. Shane lingers by the door, and is not all too surprised about Ilya's arm finding its way around his shoulders as they walk out together.

“I know what you are thinking,” Ilya whispers, smug as always, no trace of frustration left. “You want to fuck your Captain.”

They stop at Shane's stall and Ilya leans into him, crowding him up against the wall.

Their teammates are being loud, no one paying them any attention, at this point very used to them having moments like this. Shane still looks both ways before wrapping his arms around Ilyas neck, pulling his face down.

“I want to fuck my husband,” he sees the way Ilya’s pupils instantly dilates before he kisses him, way too soft and quick for the words he’s just spoken. “But for now I have to do my job.”

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With a lot of other things in their relationship, they don’t really talk about it until one of them blurts it out.

The possibility. The process. The logistics.

One night they’re at home, having just gotten back from babysitting Hayden's bunch in Montreal, it comes out in fits and starts, neither of them admitting to the fact that it’s something they want. Now? But they’ve just begun experiencing the joys of being a couple in public, would they really want to change that so soon?

“Maybe wait a few years.”

Ilya's not done ravaging Shane in European cities yet.

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“Why is Barrett calling me?”

Ilya shrugs and continues to play around with Anya on the floor.

“Hello Troy,” Shane cringes at how stiff his voice sounds, Ilya snorting out a laugh, but has soon forgotten about his own awkwardness when he hears the panic in Troy’s voice.

“He doesn’t want to get married.”

Shane’s thoroughly confused. “What? Wait, did you... what?”

“I haven’t asked yet. But I’ve been wanting to propose to Harris for a long time, a really long time really, but... I’d been thinking about doing an on ice proposal after a game, but then... shit.”

“Okay, what happened? Did he tell you he didn’t want to marry you?”

That got Ilya’s attention, his eyes immediately panicking. Shane thinks his loyalties might be conflicting. He’s been Harris’ friend longer, but the mentor-like bond he has with Troy is borderline parental.

And if someone ever hurt him... Shane tries not to think about that.

“Can I put you on speaker, Ilya’s here.”

“Oh, sure... Sorry, I didn't think you’d be together but of course, you’re married and-”

“Troy,” Ilya says, stopping Troy's nervous rambling.

“We were watching TikTok, and a video of Sirota’s proposal came on and then Harris physically shuddered and groaned, and I asked him what was up. And then he said he’s not into public proposals.”

Troy goes quiet and Shane can tell Ilya’s trying not to laugh by the way he’s hiding his face in Anya’s fur.

“Troy, you know, not everything about your life has to be public,” Ilya’s voice is laced with laughter. “Not every big decision you make has to be made with an audience.”

Troy sighs. “I know that, but I just... can’t help but think that I want to be there for others like me, like us. Someone who's scared, someone who needs the courage to be out, like us. I want to be brave for them, too, you know.”

Ilya's eyes soften as he looks up from Anya, his grin softening to a fond smile. “I know,” he says quietly, like he’s lost in thought.

Shane wonders if he’s remembering the day Scott kissed Kip on TV, a moment so monumental for all queer players in and out of the league, monumental for the two of them.

“Maybe talk to Hollander about proposing. He did good,” Ilya grins at Shane. “Even if he did steal my idea.”

Shane huffs out a laugh, and Troy chuckles on the other end before going quiet.

“That’s actually why I called, I, uh, wanted some ideas I guess?”

Shane’s heart skips a beat, eyes flicking to the phone screen. He can’t help but feel gratitude and a little pride. Since day one, Troy has been welcoming and friendly, but he’s still very much Ilya’s friend and protegee.

“I think the most important part is that it has to come from the heart. Make it sincere. Take him to a place that has some kind of meaning to the both of you.”

While Shane talks to Troy about proposal ideas, Ilya gets up from the floor to sit next to him on the couch. When Shane hangs up the phone, Ilya takes his hand with the wedding band

and touches it to his lips.

“I love you,” he says.

“I love you, too.”

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And then it finally happens.

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They win the Stanley Cup.

If there had been any poetic justice in the world, they would have beaten Montreal in the Second Round, but New York had seen to that.

So they face Scott in the Conference Finals. It’s his final season, and while Shane feels bad about robbing him of his last chance of a Stanley Cup ring, he only feels it for a second.

When they beat Seattle in the Finals, it takes a moment to sink in. Ilya’s pass to Shane lets the puck bounce once, twice on his stick before Shane gains control of it, and with a slapshot he sends the puck right into the net. Shane hasn’t won the Cup since his time with Montreal, Ilya not since his time with Boston, but when the buzzer sounds and the crowd goes wild, it all suddenly hits. They’ve won it *together*.

He’s only alone on the ice for a mere second before he’s being stormed by his team, his family. Shane isn’t sure how he’s still skating, how his knees haven’t given out under the weight of Troy and Luca and Bood and at least three other team members trying to embrace him.

And then Ilya’s face is the only thing in his periphery, him having pushed the others off Shane to get to him. They push off their helmets at the same time, and before they know it, they’re kissing, and there are hoots all around them, people clapping their backs and ruffling their sweaty hair. When they break apart, there are tears on Ilya's face and Shane has no idea whose they are.

Later, they hoist the cup and drink champagne from it in the locker room, and it doesn’t escape Shane that Ilya's grip on the cup is tight.

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They’ve been playing for the Centaurs together for some seasons now, both of them in their mid thirties, and they’ve just won the Stanley Cup. And for some reason, that makes Shane think about retirement. About the possibilities retirement could open for him.

It’s not that he’s remotely close to putting his skates away, but he saw how their teammates’ children were watching from the stands, saw how elated and proud their dads hoisted them onto their shoulders to raise them with the cup, and Shane wants that.

Wants a little body in a Centaur jersey more than he wants another Cup.

Ilya's the first to say it though, and say it he does.

When they wake up, naked, tangled in each other, extremely hungover ("No more shots!" "One more, one more!"), Ilya turns his head into Shane's sleep mussed hair and says it, his voice rough with sleep and leftover alcohol.

"I want a child with you."

The panic Shane feels is dumb, because hadn't he just been thinking the same?

"A child in a Centaurs jersey," Shane replies, speaking his deepest desire into the quiet bedroom.

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The details of raising a child as two active NHL players are scarce to come by.

Once more, there is no precedent for two members of the same team to have a child together. So the first thing they do is discuss the logistics of it all. What it would mean to be away and busy for long periods of time during the year, what it would mean to have and raise a child during future playoffs, how they would avoid getting social services on their necks if they end up failing this whole parenting thing. That last one is mainly Shane's concern.

"We will ask Harris to babysit on long practice days and away games. He will have Anya too, a baby is no problem."

"But what if he wants to come on the road with Troy?"

"Then you have parents, yes? Parents love grandbabies."

It takes Ilya to blow him until Shane relaxes enough to stop talking and start sighing. His deepest wishes spill out of him, of how much he wants to have a child with Ilya, so much that it keeps him up at night sometimes, of the warmth in his chest when he imagines a small hand wrapped around his thumb, around Ilya's thumb, a small hand pulling their long hair and Ilya's playoff beard. He almost starts crying then, but stops himself before embarrassing himself as Ilya's working his dick.

After, when they're clean and cuddled up, Ilya with his phone in hand, aimlessly scrolling through Instagram, but mostly reading through the comments on Fabian Salah's announcement that he is to be married to Ryan Price, Shane tucks himself closer to Ilya's side.

"If everything was possible, how would you want your child to look?"

Ilya frowns and shrugs. "Do not care."

"Really?"

“Really.”

They’re quiet for a bit, then Ilya puts away his phone and wraps his arms around Shane, arranges them so they’re chest to back before he nuzzles the back of Shane’s head, peppering kisses along his shoulders.

“Actually. That is a lie. I would want our child to have your freckles.”

“Really?” Shane parrots.

“Really.”

Shane is lulled into a comfortable snooze before saying “and I’d want them to have your curls.”

Ilya smiles against the nape of his neck.

“Would be a dangerous combination. Our child would melt the hearts of everyone they meet.”

Shane realizes then, with a jolt that makes him pull away and turn around to face Ilya, that they’ve avoided using personal pronouns for this kid they’re planning to have.

Shane, close to falling asleep, mumbles. “We’d do right by them, yeah? Our kid?”

“How do you mean?” Ilya’s fingers brush through the fringe Shane’s trying to grow out.

“About... stuff, you know. Their identity, their choice of partner. Partners.”

The silence is heavy between them, until Ilya speaks.

“Yes,” Ilya says, kisses Shane on the frown between his eyes. “Our child can have as many boyfriends and girlfriends and partners as they’d like. We will be good parents, support them in everything. Even if they pick your number.”

Shane laughs and shoves Ilya away, only to turn around and slot himself back in Ilya’s embrace. He doesn’t tell Ilya this, but he wouldn’t mind a toddler sized jersey with Ilya's number on it. He’d pick that for himself if he could.

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Time passes as it so often does.

They go to Fabian and Ryan’s quiet ceremony in Ross Harbour and watch them tie the knot. Shane has never seen Ryan smile as much as he does that day, all his teeth showing, and afterwards Fabian sings at the reception where Ilya drags Shane out onto the makeshift dance floor to waltz.

They go on what they hope to be their last trip to Europe as a childless couple. They catch each other looking wistfully at couples with kids, twining their fingers and dragging the other

along when they've been staring too long.

One day at practice just before Christmas when there's quiet conversation in the locker room Troy comes in with a badly concealed smile on his face. He sits down next to Shane, wordlessly holds out his hand where a silver band sits on his fourth finger, and Shane knows.

"Yeah?" Shane asks.

Troy nods. "He- We... I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden he was there, kneeling."

Ilya, perceptive as always, comes rushing over, drags Troy up from his seat and pulls him into a crushing hug. "Fucking finally."

Shane joins the team in a roaring cheer.

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Time passes, and Shane's at once surprised and not at all surprised that they've been in each other's lives for almost 20 years.

∞

On a Wednesday afternoon, the name of their caseworker lights up on Ilya's phone while they're lounging around with Anya, throwing toys for her to fetch and bring back. Picking up the phone, Ilya instantly pushes the loudspeaker and Shane sits up from where he's lying on the floor.

"Yes?" Ilya speaks and throws Shane a nervous look. Shane reaches for his hand and brings it to his own pounding chest.

"Well guys, I hope you've got your paternity leave sorted," their caseworker says over the phone, and they both stop breathing. "We've got a little one for you."

Ilya's the first to break, and Shane has to take over the rest of the conversation. Anya, instantly aware of her dad's emotions, rushes to Ilya's side, yipping for his attention which he immediately gives, sobbing words in Russian that Shane's too distracted to understand.

When, after what seems to be hours, Shane hangs up the phone, he's instantly wrapped in a tight embrace. Ilya's arms are tight around him, and Shane's too stunned to do anything but breathe him in, his hands clutching at Ilya's shoulders.

After some time Ilya pulls away, tears streaming down his face. Shane gently cups his cheeks, wiping them with his thumbs. "Oh baby, my baby," he murmurs. Ilya releases another sob and squeezes his eyes shut. Shane kisses his wet eyelids, tasting the salt from his tears of joy.

"*Papchka*," Shane teases and instantly starts to cry himself. For a few minutes they're both a mess of crying and laughing, still tightly wound together standing on the floor in their living room.

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The time between then and now stretches and happens in the blink of an eye. Shane's parents go with them to the adoption center, and they're met by their caseworker. Ilya hasn't stopped fiddling with the chain around his neck even though his other hand is gripped firmly in Shane's. They're walked through the procedure, and are told their girl is healthy and perfect, to which Ilya replies "of course she is, look at us." Shane squeezes his hand, tries to let him know he thought it was an appropriate joke to make.

They're led to a bright room in pale yellow colors, and it's only fitting that the sun starts shining then, its rays falling onto the floor, crawling to a curly haired girl sitting up with the help of an employee at the center. She's playing, holding onto blocks, slamming them against each other, not paying them any attention.

When the door shuts behind them, she stops and looks up at them with big eyes, a blabbing sound escaping the pacifier in her mouth. Ilya's the first of them to move, to crouch down slowly, a smile splitting his face. He holds out his hand, as if to shake her chubby one, and she immediately grips onto it, pulling his hand to her in what looks to be a firm grip. Ilya chuckles.

"Gentlemen, meet Maya."

Maya . A sigh escapes Shane, and he unfreezes from where he's been standing, a stuffed otter in his firm grip. He crouches next to Ilya, holds out the teddy bear for her to take. She looks at it curiously, but then her pacifier falls from her mouth when she starts to laugh the most perfect little laugh that Shane has ever heard.

They watch her, aware that their caseworker is still in the room with the other employee. Maya has a strong grip as she shakes the poor otter. It reminds Shane a little of the way Anya treats new toys.

"She has your freckles," Ilya says softly after a while, only meant for Shane to hear. Shane looks at him, their eyes meeting in a mirrored expression of so much affection and tenderness it almost makes Shane look away.

"And your curls."

A wet laugh escapes Ilya as he swipes a hand over his face. Maya's large eyes look at them, the otter tight in her hands, and then she starts laughing again.

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The moments in life that make you stop and think "this is when my life begins" are plentiful. It's happened to Shane a few times over the years, in small and in big ways.

And it's about to happen again.

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The final season they play, they don't win the Stanley Cup, but they make it all the way to the Finals where they play against Luca, who'd been traded to Los Angeles a few seasons ago, in the Centaurs home arena.

It had been neck to neck all through game seven, but Luca had assisted a goal in overtime and when the buzzer sounded to end the game, something inside Shane stilled. All around him movement and sound explodes, but Shane stays where he is, not sure what exactly he's waiting for to happen.

The ice is a mess of movement, of people hugging and shouting and celebrating, and when they line up to shake hands, Luca pulls him into a hug, thanking him for everything Shane has done for him in the past. The league knows that both Ilya and Shane are retiring, so it's no wonder that the rest of the Los Angeles team hug him and thank him with the same energy. When Bood retired last year, they made Shane alternate captain, and now he's reaping the effects of a long, successful career.

As Shane takes a final round of the ice before joining the rest of the team in their loss, Ilya finds him, skates with him, letting the standing ovation wash over them as they wave their goodbyes.

Once upon a time, Shane didn't know who he was without hockey. But over the past ten years, since marrying Ilya, he'd started to know, to form an idea of who he want's to be.

In the chaos of it all he sees Maya. Now, on the ice wearing a Centaurs jersey, her small hand in Harris' as he helps her not to fall. Ilya's already by her side, tears falling from his eyes, and he gathers her up, kisses her face until she giggles. She doesn't mind his scruffy beard as he holds her close, eyes turned towards the ceiling, his mouth moving silently.

Shane feels the power of this moment, as it takes his breath away, chokes him up. He watches Maya gesture wildly with her arms, telling a story to Ilya who's freely crying, tears falling into his beard. The back of Maya's jersey reads "Daddy 81", and that gets Shane moving.

When Shane joins them, they're a blurry picture. And he knows the world is watching when he kisses his daughter, kisses his husband, and thinks his life has just begun.

End Notes

Kudos and comments are much encouraged and appreciated!

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