It was the end of a decade but the start of an age

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It was the end of a decade but the start of an age

by goodlvckbabe

Summary

3 times Shane felt at home with the Ottawa Centaurs

Notes

After finally getting to my first whole series reread which included my 6th read of Heated Rivalry and my 3rd of The Long Game (and 3rd read of Game Changer love you baby <3) I felt inspired. I would SAY I feel like I should be embarrassed I'm writing fic for a dumb hockey book but in reality it's the first I've finished.

I'm also super happy to see a decent fic community for this series. Wouldn't have believed the random hockey romance arc I read in 2018 would lead to this but I couldn't be happier.

Also I made Shane autistic because I could <3 (ETA: This has now been confirmed by Rachel Reid so yay i feel vindicated)

Hope you all enjoy! Maybe I'll write more fics for these books soon.

ETA: At the start of this fic I have the team wearing their regular jerseys and I now know that hockey players don't wear their jerseys for practice so ignore that mistake.

1

“Ilya, I swear to god—”

“It’s so comfortable though! I think it suits me.”

“*Ilya*.”

Shane watched as Ilya left the locker room, going out to the rink and taking his practice jersey with him.

It was the first day of practice and his first time playing with Ottawa. He was looking forward to it. Sure, Ottawa had their reputation for being the worst team in the NHL, even with a strong lineup, but he knew he and Ilya could make the team better. And he and Ilya were finally on the same team, in the same city, allowing their decade long rivalry to finally be put to rest.

He just wished Ilya could take it seriously.

He’d met the team at their wedding. Not the perfect occasion to get to know your teammates properly. It had been nice to be around people who didn’t hate Ilya. Ilya told him that the team was its own kind of family. That wasn’t atypical for hockey teams but Ilya had no friends to speak of from Boston so maybe it was different. Between their two teams, only one of them was willing to drop him over their relationship.

This was their first impression of him while playing for their team and he had been over thinking it all week. His autism always made it hard to meet new people. Hockey always made it easier and once he’d gained a reputation for being good at it, first impressions had become easier. They probably weren’t dazzled by his hockey skills anymore, meaning he had to make them like him without it.

Ilya was definitely not helping by most likely already being on the ice in his jersey.

With a sigh, he picked up Ilya’s practice jersey and walked out to the rink.

They had shown up early so he could get his team photo done. He’d met a nice woman named Gen who congratulated him on his wedding before asking him to pose for his portrait. She was the first friendly face he had seen and his nerves had subsided at least a little.

Wiebe, Troy and Wyatt were the only people at the rink. Troy and Wyatt were both already on the ice warming up.

There was also a dog. Which was where Ilya had turned his attention to on the ice.

He put on his skates and went onto the rink, Ilya’s jersey still slung onto his arm and his own helmet in his other hand. He thought about throwing Ilya’s jersey at him but he was so distracted he might make him slip and fall. And Ilya of course still hadn’t put his helmet on, holding onto it in his free hand.

“Hollander! Put your jersey on!” Called out Wiebe.

He frowned and turned to where Wiebe stood in the sidelines. “I’m *trying*. Ilya stole it.”

“Okay so just put on the one you’re holding onto. It’s just practice, it’s not a big deal.”

Shane definitely felt like it was a big deal. But he knew Wiebe was as laid back as coaches could get. His old coach definitely wouldn’t let his team play with a dog before practice. Or wear someone else’s jersey for practice.

He looked back at Ilya who was now smirking, scratching the dog behind its ears. The dog seemed to be enjoying it. He looked at Ilya’s jersey, which was still slung over his arm.

Reluctantly, he slipped on Ilya’s jersey.

“Looks great on you,” Ilya said. He had stupid grin on his face and was finally giving him his full attention rather than the dog.

He rolled his eyes but still let Ilya peck his lips when he’d skated up to him.

“Whose dog is that?” Shane asked, nodding to the dog as he wagged his tail.

“Chiron, he’s mine and Harris’. And the team’s,” Troy said, skating to the two of them. Barrett was already in his full gear, ready to take their first practice seriously. Unlike *someone*.

Troy’s eyes flickered between the two of them. “Why are you wearing each other’s jerseys?”

“Happened by force,” Shane said flatly.

Wyatt showed up — Shane could swear out of nowhere — with a grin. “Oh that’s adorable. Harris needs to get a shot of this.”

“Yes, I agree,” Ilya grinned.

Shane was definitely red as a tomato now, trying to keep his expression hard. “Let’s not get Harris.”

“Harris got promoted, remember?” Troy said. “We have a new girl as our social media manager. Kayla. But, I think regardless he’ll want to get pictures. He’ll think it’s cute and probably ask Kayla to post them.”

He didn’t hold back his sigh as Ilya laughed. “Don’t worry, people are going to love it,” Ilya said, bumping their shoulders.

He decided to not argue. The public was still growing used to their relationship. Homophobes have at least to have given up on bombarding them. He’d mostly dealt with Montreal fans commenting on him going to Ottawa, as if it confirmed that he had tripped on purpose.

There was the smallest part of him that worried about what the team would think of their relationship. He knew as far as NHL teams went, the Centaurs were probably the most pro-queer team, maybe right after the Admirals. He knew they kept the rainbow tape on their sticks at the last Pride Night, their way of showing support for Troy. But whenever he tried to think positively about it he could only think about what he had left at Montreal. Hayden and J.J. had been the only ones to show up to their wedding and he quietly wondered if it was only because he was marrying Ilya.

Harris did love them wearing each other's jerseys and got Kayla to take plenty of pictures of them during warmups. He insisted that people were going to love it, something about the excitement of another glimpse into their relationship. They had done well at keep it mostly private but Shane wasn't against the occasional post here and there. He and Ilya had both agreed they never had to justify their relationship too anymore, not after eleven years.

The rest of the team showed up slowly. They casually greeted Ilya and welcomed Shane to the team. Shane quietly did his best to place the names of everyone.

Bood had grinned at him a slapped him on the back, saying that with both him and Ilya on the team now their chances of the Stanley Cup had increased more than they could imagine. Shane wasn't about to argue with that. Bood also asked him to not try to take his alternate captain role 'too quickly'. Shane had just smiled and assured him that he only had eyes for the captain position which got a yell from Ilya.

When Dykstra showed up he gave whistle. "You guys do remember we were at your wedding, right? You don't need to put your names on each other."

"But it's very cute," Bood said with a grin.

"It's adorable. You should keep it for the first game."

He was definitely bright red again. "I'll make sure that definitely does not happen."

Despite the hard look he tried to keep on his face, he couldn't hold back a smile.

His eyes went to find Ilya. He saw Chiron following Ilya as he did laps around the rink. One of the kids — Luca Haas? — was following behind. Shane realised they were racing around the rink.

He realised he was staring. But somehow, he didn't care.

"When you're done making heart eyes at the hubby, you should probably start warming up," Bood said, nudging his arm lightly. "Don't need to pull anything."

He pulled his eyes away from Ilya and turned to his teammate. Bood had a good natured grin on his face. Dysktra had started stretching. Tanner was shooting pucks at Wyatt at the net. Troy had joined Ilya and Luca in their race, staying closer to Chiron. Harris stood at the sidelines with Gen and Kayla. They were all taking photos, Harris on his phone, showing Kayla the process, and Gen with an expensive looking camera. Other players were warming

up together or stretching independently. Coach Wiebe called words of encouragement from the sidelines.

Shane couldn't stop his grin as he started his own warmups.

2

It was nights like this where Shane was glad he had ditched the diet he had been on last season.

Bood was having a BBQ night. Ilya had told him that it was something he did all the time. Shane couldn't complain. The team felt closer knit than Montreal ever had.

He'd had the chance to meet the other players' partners. They were as welcoming as the rest of the team. It was nice to not be stared at whenever he was with Ilya. He was trying to not think too much about All Stars and how awkward that might be.

"I need you guys to settle a debate with my family," Harris said, sitting on a deck couch across from where they were sat together. Wyatt and his wife Lisa took up a separate couch together.

"I tried to stop him," Troy said, following Harris and flopping down onto the couch with him.

Harris ignored him and leaned over his lap. "I just wanted to ask, Ilya, did you switch to Ottawa for Shane?"

Shane blinked at Harris, then looked at Ilya who had an easy smile on his face.

"I did actually, yes." His arm was already around Shane's shoulders so he emphasised his point by squeezing him lightly.

Harris seemed to love that answer. "I knew it! That's actually pretty cool."

Troy snorted. "Says a lot since Ottawa was such a disaster when you joined."

Ottawa was still a disaster in some ways but Shane liked to think they were becoming much less of one. Between himself, Ilya, Troy and Wyatt, the team had seen a massive improvement in the last few years. The team was at least not on a complete losing streak and they had won three of the the seven games they had just played. Not great but not terrible.

"What can I say, love makes you do crazy things," Ilya said.

Shane snorted, straightening himself up. "Could you believe this guy once said he has loved me since we were seventeen."

"Yes but I said that when I thought I was going to die."

"You still said you meant it."

A smile crossed Ilya's lips. A sweet one that held all of their love in it. "Guilty."

"Wait," Wyatt cut in. "Okay, look, I've been avoiding asking but how long have you two actually been together? Knowing you switched for him makes it at least three years but I doubt you'd switch that quickly."

They looked at each other. They didn't really mind telling friends how long they had been together but it was always hard to explain.

"What are we calling together?" Shane asked. "Because there's not really a straight answer — don't," he added pointedly before Ilya could make a joke about it not being straight at all.

Troy and Harris looked at each other while Wyatt glanced questioningly at Lisa, who was staring at them with a raised brow.

"Okay, I usually don't care about this kind of thing but now I'm interested too," she said.

"Me too," Troy said. "I guess loosest terms possible since I honestly don't want to know the super personal details."

"Me either. Just, you know, whenever things between you two started. Not what, just when," Harris said.

They looked at each other again. Shane shrugged and Ilya was the one to turn back towards them.

"Well, if we're just going by an actual relationship, it's been four years," Ilya said.

Shane nodded. "But if we're not, it's been eleven years"

"What!"

Dykstra, it had turned out, was close by and close enough to hear their conversation. He had been with Bood while Bood BBQ'd some new steaks. Bood was staring at them too, knuckles white around the spatula, clearly having heard the words as well.

"*Eleven years*? Are you fucking joking?" Dykstra went on, loud enough that everyone at the party, and probably some neighbours too, had definitely heard.

Before either of them could say anything, Wyatt had stood up and was standing with his hands around his mouth. "Alright everyone, pay up!"

Shane sat with his mouth hanging open. He looked at Troy and Harris who both had stunned looks on their faces. The looks seemed to be from learning how long they had been together and not from whatever Wyatt was doing.

"Sorry, are we missing something?" Ilya asked, Shane realising most of the team was pulling out their wallets.

“Oh, they had a stupid bet on how long you’ve been together. Wyatt was the closest,” Troy said, and as he said that he pulled out his own wallet. “*Eleven fucking years*. Jesus Christ.”

Shane furrowed his brows at him. “Now I want to know how long you thought.”

“Wyatt had guessed ten. Everyone thought that was too crazy of a number since you guys would’ve been rookies. I guessed five, which is around what most people thought. Mostly because of the All Star game where you guys played together.”

The All Star game in 2017 was the popular theory on the internet too — not that Shane looked, Rose had eagerly told him about it. Considering his own mother had thought the same, he couldn’t knock it as a solid theory.

“Nick and Tanner guessed two so don’t put yourself down too much,” Harris said then looked back at the two of them. “Sorry about this.”

Maybe it was because everyone seemed so disappointed, maybe it was because of the gleeful look on Wyatt’s face, or maybe it was because something like this would’ve never happened with the Montreal team; Shane burst into laughter.

He was bent over his lap, trying so hard to get control of himself. But he couldn’t stop. The team had really put on a bet on how long they had been together and it was somehow the funniest thing he had ever heard.

“Sorry,” Shane gasped out when he had finally gotten control of himself. “Sorry to disappoint you.”

“Oh no, it’s great. Clearly an interesting story there,” Troy said after he had settled back into his spot.

“No apologies necessary for me,” Wyatt said as he counted his money, sitting back with Lisa who rolled her eyes. “I had only put in my bet to be different. But really? Since your rookie year? That’s crazy.”

“Technically it was before it,” Ilya said.

Harris shook his head. “You know that if you ever tell the public that it will just change their whole perception of you guys, right?”

Shane shrugged. “Can’t be any more than we already have.”

“Yes but he also took about seven years of it to realise he is gay,” Ilya said, poking his hip affectionately.

Troy and Harris laughed. “Really Shane?” Harris asked.

He rolled his eyes and glared at Ilya before looking back at the couple. “To be clear, it wasn’t a self-hatred thing. More that I’m just a complete idiot thing.”

Harris shook his head as he laughed. “Don’t worry, Shane. We’ve all been there. I had a huge crush on a nurse when I was in hospital. Took me way too long to figure out why he was my favourite.”

“For me it was a guy on my junior team,” Troy said. “Unfortunately we didn’t have an epic love story. He became a dentist.”

“His loss,” Ilya said.

“He’s straight and married. Plus, Harris has a better ass.”

They all laughed at that. Shane excused himself to get a new beer.

There was a cooler near the back doors, a few meters away from where Bood was BBQing. He glanced at him and Dykstra as he straightened up, ice cold beer in his hand.

“Sorry for getting you guys to lose the bet,” he said.

Bood looked over his shoulder at him. “Don’t be. Clearly a very interesting story there.”

He was going to deny it but really, that would be a lie. His and Ilya’s love story was way too interesting. That was why, for now at least, they were keeping the intimate details to themselves. Ilya had joked about Shane including it in his eventual autobiography Shane had absolutely not thought about writing when he retired.

“Well, consider yourself blessed with the knowledge,” he said.

Dykstra shook his head and took a sip of his beer. “Stupidest part of it is that now that we know it actually kind of makes sense.”

He looked back at Ilya where he still sat with Troy and Harris. Wyatt had left to talk to Luca and Tanner while Lisa was talking to one of the other player’s wife. He hadn’t had a chance to catch her name or figure out who she was married to yet.

“Trust me, none of it made sense to us.”

Dykstra slapped his back. “Well, either way, we’re happy the whole thing got you on our team.”

He smiled. “Me too.”

3

The first game against Montreal had been a thorn in Shane’s side for the past few weeks.

After you spend ten years on a team and have a bad breakup with them, Shane wasn’t sure at all how to navigate facing them for the first time.

He didn't speak to any of the Montreal players outside of J.J. and Hayden. J.J. had finally gotten over his relationship with Ilya and had about halfway warmed up to him. He was probably close to being on Hayden's understanding of their relationship. Which could best be described as; utterly confused by it but accepts the fact Shane was happy.

He knew leaving the team was the best decision for him. Ottawa had a better culture to it, he remembered Ilya once telling him that. They definitely handled losses better than Montreal ever had. Wiebe especially handled it better than Theriault.

"Was it hard? Playing against Boston for the first time?" Shane asked as they got ready to leave the locker room. Much to Shane's disappointment, they were at an away game. He could already hear the boos once he stepped foot onto the ice.

Ilya gave a shrug. "Sure. But I also didn't leave on bad terms. I told everyone at the start of my last season I was going to find a different team. So it was… easier."

He gave a nod. He never heard Ilya talk about any friends he'd had from Boston, other than Cliff. But they weren't really friends anymore from what Shane could tell. He knew Boston's roster had changed enough for it to no longer be weird and the worst thing about playing against Boston was the crowd at away games.

As far as he knew, Montreal's roster was the same, save for a few rookies. A team full of people who hated him, in an arena that hated him.

Not the most ideal circumstance.

Maybe Troy would be better for this conversation.

Troy was also still in the locker room talking to Wyatt. He realised Wyatt would be a good person to ask too.

He left Ilya as he began to tape up his stick, walking over to the two,

When Troy saw him, he gave him a sympathetic look."You're worried about the game, aren't you?"

"I— yeah. I am. Or I guess who we're playing."

"I get it," Wyatt said. "I mean, I was just the backup goalie and didn't like any of the guys on the team but, you know, it was still hard."

He remembered why he cared more about Troy's opinion. He gave Troy a pleading look.

"It sucks," Troy confirmed. "Especially since we had to play against them during Pride Night. But before that and with Kent… there was a lot of anger on both sides and it sucked. Especially since Kent was… well, he said something homophobic. It's why Roz punched him with no glove."

He remembered vaguely Ilya punching Kent during one game. He hadn't thought much about it since he knew Kent probably deserved it.

“I don’t think anything like that is going to happen,” Shane amended. “Mostly, it’s just going to be awkward. They’re still convinced I tripped on purpose.”

Wyatt rolled his eyes. “Then fuck them. Most of them weren’t even at your wedding so if they can’t get over you and Roz being together, that’s their issue.”

He nodded slowly, looking towards the doors that lead to the rink.

Ilya approached him and squeezed his shoulder. “Ready to go?”

He looked at Ilya for a moment then back to the doors. Maybe it was in his head but he could already hear booing. Maybe an echo of ‘fuck Hollander’.

He was the starting centre for this game. Wiebe asked if was sure he wanted to start for this game. Honestly, as anxious as he was he did just ultimately want to get it over with.

He grabbed Ilya’s hand and nodded at him. They hadn’t held hand while walking to the rink before. But people were already going to be looking at them, might as well give them a reason.

Luca and Tanner were on his line. He had tried not to be too disappointed to have Tanner on his line, he remembered Ilya complaining about him for ages. But Luca was pretty good. He reminded Shane of a young version of himself in some ways.

There was booing when he entered the rink. Maybe it was because he had expected it but it didn’t cause as much dread as he had worried. They were still doing warmups so he took the chance to wave at Hayden and J.J. They had both waved back while a scattering of the other players glared at him.

It was then he realised that a lot of them may have never been the friends he had thought they were.

When it was time for the game to start, Luca gave him a sad look. The booing had only increased when it was time to get into positions.

“It’s okay,” he said.

“It’s not fair,” Luca argued.

“No, it isn’t. But I don’t think I care anymore.” He was surprised with himself that he had meant it. The booing wasn’t easy to hear but he definitely didn’t miss the team anymore. It took coming here to really realise that.

When he bent down for the first face off, and saw the cold glare from the All Star rookie, he reminded himself why he had left the team.

Hayden and J.J. weren’t on the kid’s line. Instead it was Comeau and another new player. Comeau’s eyes were fixed on him coldly. Shane was still feeling bitter with how he had treated him after their final loss so he decided against playing nice.

This used to be his arena, he used to be loved. And it all got taken away because people cared too much about who he had loved for god knows how many years. Were they all even worse stressing about?

He made sure to win the face off.

Ottawa ended up winning the game 3-2. They had gone into overtime and Ilya was able to score the winning goal. Shane had helped after he was sent out during the power play.

He was able to crash into him in a hug for about two seconds before Bood, Wyatt, Troy and whoever else was there joined in. He was so excited, he didn't even care Drapeau was definitely glaring at him.

"You play good on this team," Hayden said when he made it to him for the handshake.

He smiled. "Well, you know, I am just good in general."

"Yeah, that's true," he smiled. "The team definitely sucks less."

He snorted. "Thanks. Now go on, I want to get to everybody quickly so no one breaks my hand."

The next few handshakes went by quickly, most of his old teammates not even looking at him. The few that did glared at him. One rookie managed a smile and properly shook his hand. He muttered something that sounded like a congratulations on getting married. He moved on quickly, letting Shane sit on what the words could've meant for a second.

J.J. was last, smiling at him with his new jersey with a fresh C on his chest. He shook his hand and slapped his shoulder. "You and Rozanov play way too good together. It's unfair."

"Lucky for the league we're both centres."

He laughed. "Right. I don't want to even imagine what things would be like otherwise.

When the team was back into the locker room, everyone was celebrating. They couldn't spend too long doing so since they had a flight to Tampa they had to go straight to. They were on a winning streak so far and they had no intention to break it.

When they were in their suits walking to the bus, Shane turned to Ilya as they held hands. "Is it crazy to say I'm almost glad we got outed."

Ilya laughed, throwing his head back slightly. "Yes, probably. I am sure I could have found another way to get you onto this team."

"No, I don't think you would've," he said honestly. He had been keen to stay with Montreal until retirement. But that had been when the plan was to keep things secret until retirement. Then he had proposed and had convinced himself everyone would be okay with a married couple playing for different rival teams.

He would never be happy they were outed but what he was glad to get was the chance to find a better place for himself.

When he stepped onto the bus, he looked at the new family that he had gotten and smiled as he and Ilya found their seats.

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