

Baby Centaurs

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/78933036) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/78933036>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Luca Haas , Young (Game Changers) , LaPointe (Game Changers) , Holmberg (Game Changers)
Additional Tags:	Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Ottawa Centaurs (Game Changers) , Supportive Ottawa Centaurs (Game Changers) , Established Relationship , POV Outsider , Hurt/Comfort
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-02-05 Words: 11,028 Chapters: 1/1

Baby Centaurs

by [WriteSmart](#)

Summary

To be clear, Ilya is grateful the rookies aren't growing up the way he did in the NHL. Ilya took the hazing to the chin – humiliation rituals, beat downs, grueling practices to prove he could “hang” with the big guns on the team.

That being said, there's still some part of Ilya that balks at the request by the gaggle of rookies to watch *The Iron Giant*, a veritable children's movie at the team's latest movie night.

OR: Five times Shane and Ilya were the support system for the Centaur rookies they dreamed of having when they were younger.

Notes

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

To be clear, Ilya is grateful the rookies aren't growing up the way he did in the NHL. Ilya took the hazing to the chin – humiliation rituals, beat downs, grueling practices to prove he could “hang” with the big guns on the team. He weathered it with pride because at the time, he thought that that was what it took to be a man in hockey.

Now he knows better. Now he knows that a good team isn't born out of some psychotic trauma bond reminiscent of frat boy hazing nor a boy's club with a veil of silence over the locker room that allows truly heinous things to be said. A good team has each other's backs. Encourages everyone to play to their full potential and be themselves. Uplifts each other in the bad times and celebrates with each other in the good times.

That being said, there's still some part of Ilya that balks at the request by the gaggle of rookies to watch *The Iron Giant*, a veritable children's movie at the team's latest movie night.

“Come on man,” Holmberg is yelling as everyone else tries to shoot down the cartoon idea, “they even watched it on *Ted Lasso*. It's like my favorite movie ever.”

“Your favorite movie is a cartoon?” Dykstra asks.

“Yo don't clown on cartoons,” Boyle is quick to say, which descends into very heated chirping about what type of TV he watches with his kids.

Ilya settles down in the seat next to Shane and waits to see how this night will play out as the yelling gets louder and more aggressive in the face of something as sacred as the movie choice. Wyatt wants to watch another marvel movie, Chouinard has some action movie he wants to see, Bood is apparently watching through the Oscar nominations and is campaigning to watch some depressing three hour long art house film that only Barrett is semi okay with because Harris is also watching the nominations and he's behind.

In the end, they watch *The Iron Giant*.

When the rookies want something, they're quick to put up a united front. And with four voices against a divided team, they're able to win more battles than Ilya would like to admit. Also, Shane babies them any time they are outside the rink. Inside the rink, Shane will force the team to run bag skates until at least three people throw up. He'll drag anyone who had a bad shooting percentage out onto the rink before practice and make them stay late until they identify what's going wrong. He carries a tiny notebook on him in order to note down every tiny detail people need to fix in order to unlock their “full potential,” including Ilya which is insane because Ilya is the best hockey player in the league.

Outside of the rink, though, Shane says shit like, “let's just let them watch it.” And ends the debate everyone else was having.

Ilya lays back against Shane, ready to suffer through an hour and a half of a children's movie. But fuck the rookies. Why is Ilya so captivated by this iron giant alien? He's trying to beat

back tears watching the giant decide to sacrifice his life, squeezing the fuck out of Shane's hand who has that far away, thousand yard stare on that he gets when he's trying not to cry.

It's similar around the room except for the rookies who are openly and shamelessly weeping. Full body sobbing is coming from the quadruplets of Young, Holmberg, Haas, and LaPointe who are huddled together on the ground in front of the TV.

Something ugly in Ilya's chest rears its head at the scene. Ilya's been in this league for a decade now, and ten years ago, when he was new to the NHL, he would rather get all his teeth knocked out than cry in front of the boys. He shudders to think of the things that would have been said about him if it came to light that he sobbed publicly over a robot cartoon. And Ilya spent his career on a team that's been generally very supportive and decent, especially since he's come out. Boston was a "good" team to play on, and Ilya still wouldn't have dared request this movie, let alone shed a tear at it.

He swallows uncomfortably watching the rookies. There's a tangled mess in his chest of habitual fear for them, messy jealousy that they're comfortable enough in their team to cry, and pride that he's built a space this safe for the kids coming up through the ranks. There's this bitter teenager trapped against Ilya's beating heart that yearned for this a decade ago. Ilya wants to pull him out alongside that anxious, teenage version of Shane and plop them down into this rookie dogpile and say: *It's okay. You're going to be okay.*

But he can't do that. Time moves forward, always, pulling Ilya away from that scared boy who was half in love with a person he should have never been allowed to know, hiding his tears in his pillow after bad losses and dreams of his mom. Crying silently so his roommate never knew.

Since he cannot move back and fix what was broken all those years ago, all Ilya can do is ensure that these silly little rookies who insist on watching sad robot cartoons get to grow up in the space that he always dreamed about. Shane lays his head against Ilya's shoulder, and Ilya presses a kiss against the crown of his head. He'll do that for both of them.

This is stupid. Holmberg knows this is really, really, really stupid. But look, he met a girl at the bar a few weeks ago and they've been texting a bit. It's not anything super serious, but maybe he wants it to be serious? And now they're both in the same city for the first time in a month and a half and Holmberg kind of wants to see her. Scratch that, he really wants to see her. Their flight leaves early tomorrow morning, but that means he has all night.

He wants to make it nice for her. She's been hinting about moving on to the next level – read, in Holmberg's mind, sex – and now they have the chance to do just that. She travels all the time for work just like he does, so the opportunity to see each other will not crop up again any time soon. LaPointe said he'd hunker down with Haasy and Young for the night just to give him the space. The time is nigh.

Except, she just let him know that she doesn't have any condoms. Which is totally, completely fine except Holmberg doesn't have any either. None of the rookies do. How do none of the rookies have any? Are they not young and stupid and sowing their seeds?

"That's disgusting Bergy never say that again," Haasy was quick to deny as they watched him panic pace around the room wondering what he should do.

But either way, it seems like everyone was planning for this to be a sexless trip, so Holmberg is shit out of luck except for the fact that he knows two players on his team who are definitely, absolutely not missing the chance to fuck no matter what city they're in.

That's how Holmberg finds himself tiptoeing down the hall towards Shane and Ilya's room. He's not really sure why he's tiptoeing. He's absolutely allowed to be out in the hall at this hour, but there's just something about the whole situation that feels clandestine.

He makes it to their door with no one spotting him. Then he takes a deep breath, gathers his bravery, and knocks.

No one answers. Holmberg can hear them moving around inside. "Who the fuck is here," he can make out Shane's muffled voice asking. Ilya says something back in Russian that Holmberg has no hopes of working out. He's going to knock again when the door is pulled open.

Shane's shirtless as he peeks around the door frame. Holmberg just now realizes he did not think this plan through as much as he should have. Obviously, they would take the chance to fuck now that they stay in the same room, and Holmberg is the idiot interrupting them.

Shane and Ilya staying in the same room is semi-new. When they first joined the team, there was always this talk about staying professional and not letting their relationship affect the team that Holmberg never really understood. If his partner was on the team with him, Holmberg would absolutely be sleeping with her every night. And not even just sex – just literal sleeping with her. He loves to cuddle. He loves it so much that he's convinced all the other rookies that they should cuddle so he doesn't get touch starved and anxious.

But he supposes it must have been different for them. Ilya is always giving Scott Hunter shit about being old but to be honest, Shane and Ilya are also old. They're, like, ancient compared to Bergy. They must have come up in a different type of hockey where you weren't allowed to stay with your partner or have sex. The rookies all shudder when they hear the horror stories of the celibate playoff runs. That ritualistic denial of all pleasure and urges to somehow unlock a seemingly barbaric masculinity to win games just seems ridiculous. Instead, the rookies do yoga, meditation exercises, and glue themselves to Shane Hollander in the lead up to playoffs to make sure they are the best versions of themselves they could hope to be. It typically leads to all of them throwing up during some brutal conditioning he puts them through, but it's worth it.

The rookies just saw *Miracle* last year, so they're hip to skating until they feel like they could die in order to win games. They haven't recommended that movie yet at movie night because none of them are sure if it's offensive to Ilya, but maybe they'll try it out soon.

“Holmberg,” Shane says, leaning out of the room so he can look both directions for the rest of the rookie contingent. “Are you okay? Do you need anything?”

“It’s Holmberg?” Ilya’s voice booms out from the room. The door is pulled open even further to reveal an also shirtless Ilya. Holmberg thanks God there are no visible hickies or scratches on either of them. Maybe he got here right before they started. “Is he okay?”

“I don’t know, I just asked him,” Shane bitches back.

“Why don’t you ask him faster?”

“How could I ask him faster when I just got here?”

“You would know how to ask faster if you were fastest skater in the league.”

“I *am* the fastest skater – Wait. No stop. Holmberg what is it?” Shane turns away from Ilya and back to Holmberg.

Holmberg tries to stop his eyes from ping ponging back and forth between the royal couple of hockey. Then he has to remember why he’s even here. Right. Girl, condoms, etc.

“Hey guys. Sorry to bother you this late but I just have this girl coming over tonight, and I think I really like her, and she’s definitely expecting to have sex tonight. I’ve already booted LaPointe out of the room and all, but I just realized I didn’t have any condoms, and so I guess I wanted to see if you guys had any?”

Shane and Ilya just blink at him after he ends his ramble.

“You want condoms?” Ilya repeats back at him.

Holmberg blushes. “Yeah?” he says, unable to stop his voice from rising at the end like it’s a question.

“And you think we have condoms?” Ilya presses further.

Holmberg nods slowly. He’s starting to think he *really* didn’t think this through.

“Bergy,” Shane says, using that soft tone he gets when he’s trying to explain something to the rookies, “we’re married. We’ve been in a committed relationship since 2017. We don’t have condoms.”

“But what about –”

“I cannot get him pregnant,” Ilya answers. “I’ve tried really hard, but his birth control is too strong.”

The last word comes out like a wheeze as Shane elbows Ilya so hard in the gut he doubles over gasping.

“Sorry Bergy,” Shane says as his husband tries to get his breath back. “None of the rookies have any?”

“No,” Holmberg says, scuffing his shoes on the floor, unable to look up at the couple. This was so stupid of him. He’s so fucking stupid.

“Okay, then just go to corner store,” Ilya says once he’s recovered.

“Wait, is this girl just sitting in your room right now?” Shane asks at nearly the same time.

“No,” Holmberg is quick to say, “she’s driving over in like an hour.”

“Okay then. Enough time for corner store,” Ilya repeats.

He pulls at Shane, seemingly trying to end this conversation, but Holmberg doesn’t budge. Shane pushes Ilya away to get him to stop.

“What’s wrong? Why can’t you go to the store?”

There’s a tiny strip of carpet missing in front of their door. Holmberg stares at it. He should just go back to his room and cancel on her. This is so, so fucking stupid. He’s embarrassing himself in front of his captain, and it’s all for naught.

“Come on Holmberg,” Ilya prompts, “why not?”

“No, it’s fine. I can just not use any,” Holmberg tries to deflect.

“Now you’re going to make him give you the safe sex lecture,” Ilya groans, as Shane opens his mouth to start said lecture. He glances back at Ilya and rolls his eyes.

“Fuck off,” he says. “Holmberg, again, I ask: why don’t you just walk like 15 minutes to the corner store? That’s much easier.”

“It’s just,” Holmberg’s shoulders come up to his ears, “it’s just really dark around the hotel. And we’re right near those woods, and I don’t know this place at all, so it’s pretty tough to walk to the corner store from here.”

Silence. Holmberg can’t even tell what the husbands are thinking because he can’t bear to look up at them.

“You’re a hockey player, Holmberg,” Shane points out.

Holmberg shrugs. Yeah, he’s definitely going to go back to his room and figure something else out. They don’t even have to have penetrative sex. That would be totally cool and even really modern of him.

“You are scared of the dark?” Ilya asks.

Holmberg nods. It’s not stupid. It’s just that one time when Holmberg was really young, he was out camping with his parents. He got up in the middle of the night, thinking he didn’t

need a flashlight to go pee, and ended up walking too far from the tent. He wandered around in the dark for what felt like hours until he sat down and sobbed, certain every noise he heard was a monster coming to get him. His parents found him then; he was only a few yards away when all was said and done. But every time now that he's out in the dark alone, Holmberg's heart starts to race like it did that night. And the hotel they're staying in is close to the airport and not really near anything so it's really, really dark outside.

Ilya sighs, and Holmberg watches his feet walk away.

"What are you doing?" Shane calls.

Holmberg raises his head to watch Ilya chuck a shirt and then a pair of shoes at Shane. "We are going, obviously," Ilya says. "You will be thinking about sad rookie all night instead of how I should be fucking you unless we do this now."

"Oh, fuck off. You would be just as bad. You love them."

Ilya sighs again, upping the drama. "It's such a burden to bear."

"Are you guys really going to come?" Holmberg asks.

Ilya shoves Shane out of the door and pulls the door close behind him. "Only because you look so sad and pathetic," he answers.

Holmberg will take it. He pads after the husbands down the hall as they bicker about something, switching to Russian so he doesn't understand them. They ride the elevator down and then step out into the night. The second they're far enough away from the hotel lights that they have to squint into the dark to see, Ilya's arm settles across Holmberg's shoulder. The couple has dropped back to walk on either side of him, like crossing guards. Holmberg knows he should probably feel embarrassed about this, but he's mostly just grateful.

"Not so bad, right?" Ilya asks.

"Right," Holmberg answers, his heart rate slowing now that he can feel his two teammates on either side of him.

It's a ten minute walk to a little corner convenience store sitting alone on the side of a veritable highway. Shane holds the door open for him and Ilya as they walk inside, causing the bell on the door to ring and the cashier to glance up at them. He looks bored with his magazine open and the store empty.

"We should get snacks," Ilya calls out as Holmberg makes a beeline towards the back of the store where the condoms are.

"We aren't eating trash," he can hear Shane call back.

Standing in front of the racks of contraceptives, Holmberg realizes he has a bit of choice paralysis, and also that he's never actually had to *buy* condoms. He's always just taken them from friends and teammates. He blinks dumbly at the options and then snags the most regular looking Trojan pack and prays that this is what people typically buy.

He meets Ilya and Shane at the checkout. Ilya has nerd gummies, potato chips, coke, and ginger ale on the counter being rung up. Holmberg adds the condoms and resolutely does not look at either of them.

“Don’t joke,” Shane orders as Ilya opens his mouth. Holmberg holds his breath, but Ilya rolls his eyes and closes his mouth.

They get rung up, Shane bagging everything and then playing a game of keep away from Ilya to keep hold of the bag, even though Ilya tries to insist he should carry it for his husband. All Ilya succeeds in is stealing the nerd gummies from Shane. Then they’re back out into the night.

“Think this will be tweeted about?” Shane asks.

“By that guy?” Ilya asks through a mouthful of nerd gummies. “Maybe.”

Holmberg holds out a hand and Ilya passes him some. He then hands one singular candy to Shane who accepts it with a quiet nod. Ilya looks far too pleased about that.

“You like this girl, Holmberg?” Ilya asks, glancing at Shane to see if he has to dodge another elbow for being nosy.

“Yeah, maybe,” he answers. To be honest, now that Holmberg has the condoms, he’s starting to think that this is a bad idea again. A pit of anxiety has opened in his stomach. Fuck, now there’s no reason for her not to come. Not that Holmberg didn’t want her to come, but just like, now she’s actually going to be coming. Oh my God, she’s going to come to Holmberg’s hotel room, and they’ll meet again, and what if she hates him in person?

“Bergy, listen,” Ilya says, “all you have to do to impress this girl is when you are between her legs, there’s this thing that you can do with your tongue. Everyone loves it even –”

“If you say, ‘even Shane’ I will kill you,” Shane deadpans.

Holmberg chokes. Oh my God what if he’s bad in bed. He hasn’t even considered that. He wants her to like him. He wants her to like him so bad.

“Hey,” Shane says, placing a hand on Holmberg’s back, snapping him out of his spiral, “are you good?”

“Yeah, just like, I have to have sex with her now.”

“You don’t have to do anything, Bergy. Even with the condoms. You never have to do anything you don’t want, and you are always allowed to change your mind.”

He sounds like one of those people that comes to colleges to do consent lectures. Holmberg was only at college for two years, but he sat through enough of them playing in the NCAA. It’s bizarrely comforting to hear Shane repeat those same words. God, he only went to two years of college before going pro. He didn’t even declare an official major before he dropped out.

“What is actually wrong, Bergy?” Ilya asks. “You are so tense. Like a spring.”

“She’s just,” Holmberg sighs, “so fucking smart. She’s an art history major and she travels to like help art collectors. She’s starting her PhD, man. I don’t know. She’s older than me too, and I don’t have anything to offer her. I’m just a dumb fucking hockey player and she’s beautiful and smart and funny, and if I’m bad in bed then there’s really no reason for her to ever see me again, and I think I really like her.”

They’ve stopped walking. Holmberg can see the glow of the hotel down the street, but his breath is coming so fast, and his heart is pounding so hard that he thinks he might die before they make it there, and for once it’s not because of his fear of the dark. Maybe dying would be better than disappointing Maggie. His ears are ringing so loud it takes him a moment to realize someone is saying his name.

“Holmberg, you’re okay,” Shane is saying, rubbing at Holmberg’s shoulder.

“Am I?” he croaks out.

“Yes, you are. You are not just a dumb hockey player. You’re funny, charismatic, sweet, she’s going to be lucky to see you tonight.”

“But what if she doesn’t think I’m smart enough to be with her?”

“Do you listen to her?” Ilya asks.

“What do you mean?” Holmberg scrunches his brow.

“When she talks about art, do you listen?”

“Oh my God, yes. She tells me all these things about like color theory and dynamic motion, and she explains what all these paintings mean. It’s so interesting, but I don’t have anything to say back to her.”

Ilya shrugs. “She probably likes that.”

“What do you mean?”

Ilya glances at Shane. Then he says, “Look, when I started dating smart, beautiful, boring, second best hockey player in the league” – “Hey” – “I was worried I wasn’t interesting enough for him. I was just hockey player who could barely even speak English and he knew everything about every hockey game ever, and birds, and sensible cars, and so many other things. I didn’t know what to do.”

“Ilya,” Shane says, voice so soft.

Ilya sucks in a deep breath. “I learned, though, that he had his things, and what he wanted was for me to be present in the conversation, and ask questions, and care about the things he cared about, just like I had things I cared about that he would listen to. You don’t have to be completely equal, Holmberg, you just have to be compatible.”

Shane is looking at Ilya with big, wet eyes. Holmberg kind of wants to cover his own eyes to give them privacy. Shane takes Ilya's hand in his and gives it a squeeze. "Yeah," Shane says, "you just have to be compatible."

Holmberg nods, squaring his shoulders. He'll never know if they're compatible or not unless he sees her tonight. And he wants to be compatible with her so badly.

"Okay," he says, "I can do this."

Ilya slaps him on the back, "atta boy," he calls.

Once they get back into the hotel, Shane pulls the condoms out of his bag and hands them to Holmberg, then he drags Ilya to the staircase where Holmberg can hear them sprinting up the echoing stairs, laughing and giggling. He smiles to himself. He loves that his teammates are in love.

He pulls out his phone.

Can't wait to see you tonight! Maggie's written.

Me neither 🥰 Holmberg answers. Then he takes the elevator up to his room. Time to find out if they're compatible.

Shane sometimes struggles to figure out his role in the Centaurs. He's glad Ilya is captain, and thinks he more than deserves it, and it would be wild to come in in his first season and demand the A from Bood. But Shane's been captain for years now, and he can't seem to just turn the instinct off.

So, he notices things. He notices Wyatt's pregame routine, and ensures he has enough time to complete it. He notices when a team is close to cracking the code on their power play and goes to Coach Wiebe to talk about changing some things. He notices when chirping from other teams turns into downright hate speech and he has to intervene to protect his players and keep them from getting game changing penalty minutes.

That's why he notices when LaPointe starts to have a downturn in his game. It's small at first, just some little stumbles on the ice. But they keep mounting up, building and building and building until he fucks up so bad that he puts in two own goals in one game off of bad rebounds and terrible positioning. They lose by one.

The locker room is subdued after that. Everyone showers quietly and then slips out with some halfhearted "good games" on the way. Ilya already has plans on what to do to raise spirits tomorrow, but right now, they both just want to go home and forget about this loss. Ilya ends up leaving the locker room first – he's picking up Svetlana from the airport – while Shane ends up lingering, talking to Coach Wiebe and a few of the other guys.

He thinks he's alone after waving goodbye to everyone when he hears a loud snuffle. There's no one in the immediate locker room, and Shane doesn't hear any showers running. But when he walks back around the corner to where the shower heads are, he finds LaPointe sitting on the ground with his knees pulled up to his chest, a puddle of water slowly draining at his feet.

Shane has one single moment to spare a thought at how disgusting it is to sit on a shower floor before LaPointe looks up, catches sight of Shane, and immediately starts crying.

"Aw, fuck," Shane mutters to himself.

He approaches LaPointe slowly, waiting to see if he tells him to fuck off and leave. The anger never comes. Shane instead squats down next to LaPointe and pulls him into a hug, averting his eyes to give him as much privacy as possible. The kid moves easily, allowing Shane to manhandle him against his chest. Shane lets him cry it out, chest heaving, and tears soaking into his collar.

When he finally starts to calm down, Shane says, "come on. Let's get off the floor."

LaPointe's legs are basically useless, and Shane has to get his hands under his armpits and haul him up off the floor. He stays plastered to Shane as they walk back into the main locker room until Shane deposits him on the bench in front of his locker.

"Towel off and get dressed," Shane orders him. "You'll feel a little bit better."

LaPointe nods miserably, snagging his towel and giving himself a cursory pat down. He pulls on his clothes before he's fully dry and once again, Shane is suppressing his instinct to shudder at what a horrid sensation that must be.

Dressing seems to take all of LaPointe's energy because he crashes back down to the bench once he's done.

"Come on," Shane says, tugging him back up, "we can't wallow in this forever."

"Why not? I fucking suck."

"You don't suck LaPointe. You just had a bad game. It happens to all of us."

LaPointe's face is a mask of utter dejection, face crumpled, eyes red and watery. He's only 19 years old, and he just put on one of his worst performances of his career in front of tens of thousands of people. He'll turn on the news in the morning and all the commentators will be talking about is how he should be benched, or traded away, or should just give up right now. There's no forgiveness for anything in this league. You could be the greatest player in the world, top scorer, Conn Smythe winner, Stanley Cup champion, and after one bad game people will come out of the woodwork screaming and crying that you're washed and should never play again.

Shane knows. He's lived it a hundred times before as has everyone in this league. You're only ever as good as your last game.

But, as LaPointe points out, “I’ve been terrible for weeks. I don’t know what the fuck is wrong with me.”

He’s hesitating on defense, Shane could say. He’s not trusting himself nor his other defenseman. He’s playing the player instead of the pass, allowing for easy tap-ins instead of forcing the harder shot. He was a stay-at-home defenseman in lower leagues and now he’s being asked to step forward and fill in space on the offense, so he’s over thinking everything that’s happening, losing some of his basic defensive fundamentals. He makes one bad pass early in the game and he gets so caught up in his head about it that he never makes another good pass again.

That’s not going to help him, though. Instead, Shane says, “well why don’t we work together on it then? Whatever you think you’re struggling with, we can solve it together.”

“Really?” LaPointe asks. The rookies get this look of awe on their face when Shane offers advice or help. It made him shift uncomfortably when he was first on the receiving end of it, but now he just smiles and pats the top of his rookie’s head.

“Yeah, kid. Why don’t you come in early tomorrow and we can start.”

LaPointe nods, head bouncing like a bobblehead. “Thanks, Holly,” he says.

“Now go home to your roommates who are no doubt about to send out a search party and forget about everything for one night.”

“Aye, aye, captain,” LaPointe says.

He waits for LaPointe to stand and gather up all of his belongings, and Jesus, would it kill any of the guys to keep an organized locker? Then he walks with him out into the parking lot. LaPointe promises he’s okay to drive, and Shane watches as the car pulls away. Then he gets into his own car and heads home to Ilya and their visiting guest.

And so, thus begins Shane’s extra training with LaPointe. Shane is categorically not a defenseman, but he’s played enough hockey, watched enough hockey, debated enough hockey with his mom that he can point out some things for LaPointe. Also, the kid’s biggest struggles have been when he pushes forward, so Shane can be very helpful in that regard.

They cut all the way back down to the basics. LaPointe is embarrassed at running through drills he did when he was a kid until Shane tells him that he does them too. Sometimes, Shane explains, even at the highest level, players just need a reset. Skating drills, passing drills, conditioning. They watch tons of film together, scouting upcoming games and what LaPointe will need to work on, and analyzing the things they both did, good or bad, in previous games. LaPointe is so eager through their training. He carries around a little notebook with him, penciling down things Shane says, concentrating so hard he catches the tip of his tongue between his teeth. They do yoga together, breathing exercises, anything to build up LaPointe’s confidence.

He even starts following some of Shane's superstitions. Ilya raises an eyebrow at Shane when he watches LaPointe put on and tie his skates the same way Shane does. Shane shushes his husband with a smile, and Ilya gets the message to indulge their rookie.

Eventually, word gets around that LaPointe is getting extra training and some of the other players start showing up too. Shane still puts most of his attention towards LaPointe, but this communal training alleviates any lingering embarrassment LaPointe has had. Now it's not just him singled out, it's the whole team coming together to get better.

It makes something clench in Shane's chest.

He never had this. When he joined Montreal, he was the all-star rookie. The oncoming tide that announced that things were about to change. He was taking starting spots and all the glory, everyone knew it, but it still sat uncomfortably with the guys who had been there for years and years. They had to watch some young gunner steamroll in, and they weren't particularly motivated to help him learn how to crush everyone around him.

So, Shane did a lot on his own. He came early and stayed late on his own, practicing his backhand or his slap shot until his fingers cramped. He watched film on his own, pouring over every minute of his games to learn how to get better. And he had to talk to the coach alone, asking what he could do to improve without the guidance of a strong captain. Shane knew he was too much, that he had always been too much. Even Theriault eventually grew tired of the eager rookie routine, answering Shane in clipped sentences, clearly wanting to be over and done with their conversations.

Shane needed someone to mentor him. He craved it with every fiber of his being, and when it didn't come, he forged his own destiny on the ice and became eons better than anyone else could even dream of being – except, of course, for his beautiful husband.

But that wasn't fair, and he doesn't want that for LaPointe. These kids deserve someone who believes in them enough to stay late and come early for them. It's what Shane deserved when he was freshly 18, obsessed with his archrival, and thrown into the deep end of the NHL with no life raft.

There's a privilege now in getting to rewrite that story for someone as eager and dedicated as LaPointe. Shane gets to be the one to change this. He gets to make sure there is someone there for LaPointe to lean on when everything becomes too much.

And it pays off. When they win a complete shut out against the Admirals, with LaPointe playing the best defensive game Shane's ever seen, he beelines towards Shane to celebrate. Shane catches the teenager in his arms, cheering and whooping. He feels Ilya next to them, wrapping an arm around them both.

LaPointe has tears in his eyes when he says, "thank you."

Luca Haas had thought he had been in love. Benji was hot, smart, well-traveled, and good in bed. He said he could see himself falling in love with Luca like they were in some scripted reality TV show and Luca fell for it hook, line, and sinker.

Now he's standing at the bar watching Benji stick his tongue down some other guy's throat. What's worse is that he actually might cry watching it happen. It's so stupid. He knew there were red flags with their relationship. Benji was cagy, flighty, prone to melodramatic stretches of time where he refused to pick up Luca's calls. There were enough red flags that Luca hadn't introduced him officially to the team even though Ilya pestered him loudly every day about it, and Shane pestered him quietly and even more persistently.

Something cold tightens in Luca's chest. Benji moves his hands to the guy's waist and tugs him closer. Luca doesn't understand how everyone else isn't freaking out. His boyfriend is fucking cheating on him right now, right in front of everyone. The world should be falling apart. There should be neon signs and wailing and someone to pet Luca gently on the head and tell him it will be alright.

"Can I get you anything," Luca looks up at the bartender. He's got that nice customer service face on that makes Luca almost believe he somehow knows that he's having a shit night and is being particularly nice to Luca because of it.

"Yeah," Luca makes a bad decision, "a jack and coke, please."

He has one, two, three, four, more than he can count, drinks. The night starts coming in flashes of light: Benji on the dance floor grinding with a different guy, someone up against Luca's shoulder asking him what his name is, the burn of a shot and then the sticky splash of a drink dropped at his feet, the coolness of the bathroom wall as Luca leans his hand against it while staring at a mirror that revolves in slow, lazy circles. The lights are pulsing, there are hands everywhere on Luca. It's sweltering, sweaty, sticky.

He bursts out of the club door and into the cool night. The world continues to tilt alarmingly to one side and sways back the other way. Fuck the club. Fuck Benji. Fuck drinking.

The spinning of the world winds its way into Luca's stomach. He imagines his intestines pulsing to the same beat as the music, shivering and shaking, the alcohol roiling in a disgusting wave through his digestive track. He sort of makes it to a trash can in the street before he starts heaving.

The bile in his throat burns hot and acidic. His head hurts with each retch.

When he's done, he stumbles back against the brick wall of the building. It's rough through the thin material of his shirt, grounding him. Puking has brought some clarity back into his fuzzy head. He needs to go home.

He fumbles with his phone, his vision swimming. He can't find his Uber app. Should he hail a taxi? Do people still do that? Biking is out of the question and it's a long, long walk home.

A trickle of fear edges into the drunken haze of his mind. How is he going to get home?

The only thing he can find is his iMessage. He clicks on the first conversation and then hits the call button. It only rings twice before Shane is asking, “hello? What’s up?”

“Shane,” Luca slurs. “I don’t know how to get home.”

His fingers are numb. His teeth feel numb too. He clacks them together just to see if he can feel anything. Nothing. Why are his teeth numb?

“Luca, where are you?” he comes back to Shane asking.

“The club you guys took me to for my birthday. I don’t know the name. I don’t know where it is.”

Luca can hear whispering on the other end of the line. He’s back to thinking he wants to cry. This has been the worst night ever and now he’s no doubt waking up his captain and his husband.

“Don’t move,” Shane orders, “we’ll be right there.”

Luca doesn’t think he could move even if he tried. The rough brick wall is so nice to lean on. There’s no reason to try to stumble away into the night. Fuck Benji. This is all his fault. Him and the jack and cokes, tequila shots, lemon drop shots, and whatever drink was poured into his mouth by some guy on the dance floor.

A car pulls up to the curb in front of him. Luca blearily raises his eyes and forces himself to focus on Shane and Ilya jumping out of the car and beelining towards him. They’re both in comfy clothes – Ilya in black sweats and an old band tee, and Shane in an oversized Boston sweatshirt. They race up to him, concern obvious across their faces even to Luca. The guilt is sharp and bitter on his tongue.

“Are you okay?” Ilya asks, reaching him first. He pets a hand across Luca’s forehead and raises his head up to see him more clearly.

“Fine,” Luca slurs.

“Are you sure?” Shane echoes his husband.

That’s when Luca starts to cry. He hears both of them make little cooing, sympathetic noises as he’s pulled into their chests.

Luca doesn’t even think his feet touch the floor as he’s herded into their car. There’s water for him and a protein bar that even looking at makes him want to throw up again. His head is hurting more now from crying, and he just wants to go home, though he doesn’t know what home he means – Switzerland, the apartment, some other place he’s been desperately searching for even though he thinks he’ll never find it.

When they pull into a driveway, Luca is surprised to see he’s at Shane and Ilya’s house. The car gets put into park and both husbands get out. Luca is just thinking about how he wants to

curl up and sleep in the back seat when his door opens, and Ilya pulls him out. He helps him walk up the stone steps and up the stairs to a guest room that Shane is getting ready. Ilya guides him into a shower, helps him towel off, and dresses him in soft clothes before gently pushing him into bed. It's like Luca's a little kid again getting carried from the car to his room by his dad. If he had any tears left in him, he would cry again for how much he misses his parents.

A hand on his forehead, a whispered, "good night," and Luca falls asleep.

Luca wakes up with a horrible taste in his mouth, cotton in his head, an ache in every inch of his body, and the distinct realization that he is going to throw up. He successfully makes it to the bathroom at the very least, heaving and spitting into Shane and Ilya's guest toilet.

Once he's done, he cleans up as best he can, and uses the lone toothbrush sitting out on the counter to brush the vomit taste out of his mouth. Then, he slinks downstairs.

Ilya and Shane are in the kitchen, banging around and bickering as they put together what looks like breakfast. Shane turns on a blender and Luca would rather take a hundred pucks to the head than ever hear that sound again.

Ilya looks up and nudges Shane when he sees Luca. Shane switches it off immediately.

"Good morning," he calls brightly. It is a truly terrible thing to be the only one hungover in a group. You feel like a dead fish that's been scraped over pavement while everyone else is chipper and happy.

"How's your head?" Ilya asks.

"No complaints," Luca has the wherewithal to quote the last episode of RuPaul he was watching with Ilya, making him crack up. Luca manages a half smile and collapses at the table, dropping his head into his hands.

"We have pancakes, bacon, eggs, and smoothies when you're ready," Shane informs him. Luca raises a thumbs up.

"Would you like everything greasy and salty?" Ilya asks. Luca gives another thumbs up.

He listens to the gentle commotion of the kitchen, unable to pry his head off the table. Shane and Ilya talk about practice, their upcoming game against Toronto, how Anya is the best dog in the world, the newest episode of *Succession*. It's sort of soothing to listen to. Luca's just starting to think that he could fall asleep like this when a plate thunks down next to him.

"Sit up," Ilya commands, "eat. You'll feel better."

Luca groans but obeys. The husbands let him get through way too much bacon, two pancakes, and half his eggs before they start interrogating him.

“So, our rule when we’re called in the middle of the night is that you have to tell us what happened,” Shane says.

“And there’s bonus points if it’s embarrassing,” Ilya says, stabbing his fork through a stack of pancakes and shoveling an enormous bite into his mouth. But Shane and Luca look on with horror.

Luca pushes around the eggs on his plate, the nausea returning, though that might also just be from watching Ilya eat.

“After practice yesterday I saw Benji posted on his stories that he was at that club, so I thought it would be nice if I went to surprise him since we haven’t had a lot of time to go out lately. Then when I got to the club, I realized he wasn’t with friends, and that we weren’t as, well, exclusive as I thought.”

“We will kill him then, yes?” Ilya asks, looking at Shane who nods.

“No,” Luca hastily denies, “it’s fine. I was being stupid thinking that it was more than it was.”

“How long were you together?” Shane asks.

“Like a year. And I mean he said we were together and that he didn’t want me sleeping with anyone else, so I guess I thought that meant *he* wasn’t sleeping with anyone else.”

“Luca,” Shane sounds so sad for him.

“Little, baby rookie doesn’t deserve that,” Ilya agrees. “We will find you much better man.”

“Much better,” Shane agrees.

“We can do like Shane’s mom used to do and set you up on dates. But we will be more successful because we will bring you men and not women.”

“Fuck off. She didn’t know.”

“It will just be good to beat her at his.”

“He’s only saying that because he’s 0 and 4 in monopoly games,” Shane explains to Luca as Ilya crosses his arms over his chest and pouts.

Luca smiles at the display. He often gets asked what’s the hardest part about being on the Centaurs. He knows the really salacious gossip rags just want once for a Centaur to say something like, ‘being with a married couple distracts us too much and that’s why we lost a game.’ The media is frothing at the mouth to find some drama with Shane and Ilya playing for the same team. In reality, the hardest part about playing with Shane and Ilya is being horribly, painfully, devastatingly aware of just how single you are.

They’re so in love. Even when they fight, they’re sickeningly in love. Luca might have had a bit of a crush on Ilya in his tween years, but now when he closes his eyes and dreams about

the two best hockey players in the league, his dreams revolve around the idea that he could find someone who loves him even half as much.

He wants it so badly. That's why, he thinks, he let himself be led astray for so long by Benji. If only the sheer force of wanting could turn his relationship into the perfect partnership.

Back when he was 12 and just realizing he was gay, Luca believed that he would have to bury that side of him to be able to play hockey. He was prepared for a lonely existence in this world that he loved so much even though it hated him. Shane and Ilya, and Scott and Kip and Troy and Harris, have changed that for Luca. He's swimming in the wake of men who were brave enough to charter the first path through the swells of homophobia in the NHL.

But he's still fucking lonely.

"Luca," Ilya says, cutting him out of his morose thoughts, "you are okay. You are young. Your person is still out there."

"Yeah, and until then you always have us and the other rookies horrific attempts at setting you up on dates," Shane adds.

"Well, they didn't introduce me to Benji. I did that on my own," Luca points out.

Ilya reaches across the table to squeeze Luca's hand.

"You will be okay," Ilya repeats. "You have your whole life ahead of you, baby rookie. You are only 20 years old. You are a child bride. You are a great hockey player, a great artist, anyone would be lucky to have you, and you have all the time in the world to find them. You will one day find someone as good as Shane because you deserve it. "

Shane blushes red even as he smiles sappy and sweet at Ilya. It's really tough to look at after being cheated on.

But as Ilya force feeds him more pancakes, and Shane coaxes him onto the couch to watch hockey highlights, and Ilya calls the other rookies to come and crash in their house, Luca feels something release in his chest.

Ilya's right. He has all the time in the world, and he just has to focus on being happy as he is now. He doesn't need to force this fairytale story with just anyone; he will find his person. And in the meantime, he's not completely lonely, he mentally amends. He has had so many people who love him since coming to the Centaurs, and Luca wouldn't trade this team for anything.

Each year on March 19th, Ilya and Young go down to the cemetery together to celebrate Young's dad's birthday. They light two candles, one for Young's dad and one for Ilya's mom.

Young brings carrot cake, his dad's favorite, and Ilya brings vodka, and they sit on a bench in the middle of the grounds. It's quiet, and peaceful, and not where either of their loved ones are buried.

It started in Young's first season on the Centaurs. He was freshly 18, then, playing like most rookies do, which is to mean, see-sawing back and forth between cocky, trying-too-hard and dangerously insecure. Shane was still in Montreal then, and Ilya is embarrassed to admit he was a little withdrawn from the team at that time. Maybe that's why it took him too long to realize that Young was struggling.

By March, the team was in their mid-season slump. They were getting better, especially with Ilya now captaining them, but it felt impossible to believe that they would one day be good enough to sneak into the playoffs. Ilya revolved through his days feeling inspired by moments of brilliance from the struggling team, frustrated at the moments they completely fell apart, and apathetic to everything that was going on around him.

He wanted to see Shane. He wanted to not have the entirety of a team on his shoulders. He wanted to lay down and sleep for four days to see if that would shake off the tiredness hanging around his shoulders like an ugly shroud.

And then, he walked into a supply closet looking for extra pens and notebooks for film and discovered Young sitting on the ground crying.

That had been an unpleasant surprise. Ilya's impression of Young outside of hockey had been that he was a goofy, over-excitabile, typical frat boy type. Him and the other rookies got along like a house of cards – house on fire, Shane would correct – and we're always out way too late with their slightly fatalistic desire to have a good time. Ilya tries to remember when his body was young enough to do all of that partying and still make it fresh to practice in the morning (not that he would ever admit to anyone he was getting slightly old.) Even with all their losses, all the struggling that comes with a player's first NHL season, Ilya doesn't think he had ever seen Young look even a little upset. Hell, the kid smiled when they conditioned, egging people on to try to beat him, which Ilya was always too quick to jump on to prove he's still the fastest skater in the league – fuck you, Shane.

But that day, Ilya barely recognized the red eyed, tear stained boy curled up on the floor.

They both stared at each other, each embarrassed by the intrusion. Five, ten years ago Ilya probably would have slunk away and pretended nothing happened to save them both the awkwardness, but now he's learning how to approach difficult emotions head on.

He says his thanks to Galina, his therapist, and his years of unlearning a damaging, masculine, stoicism forced onto him by both hockey and his family.

"What's wrong, Young?" he had asked, lowering himself down to the floor next to him instead of running away, "why does the baby Centaur cry in a random closet?"

"It's my dad's birthday," Young had answered. He was picking at his nails when he said it; a bad habit Ilya is trying to break in him, so he stops shredding the skin there until it bleeds.

“And you are sick for home?”

Young shook his head. “He died two years ago.”

“Ah,” Ilya says. Of course, then he understood. Even though the grief has had a longer time to turn into scar tissue, Ilya still feels this same sadness when his mother’s birthday passes. He can sometimes go days, weeks without feeling her absence, and then the calendar will tick over to some particular day and all of the sudden, Ilya is 12 years old again standing at her graveside begging her to please come back to him.

“I thought I was going to be fine, but then all of the sudden after practice it just hit me. I had this moment where I panicked because I hadn’t texted him happy birthday, and then I remembered that he’s dead.”

Young’s breath caught on the last word, like he still couldn’t quite believe it was true.

“Would it help if you went home?” Ilya asked.

Young shook his head. “We leave for our game in a few hours. I should have gone home earlier, but I didn’t think I would need it.”

“You can skip the game,” Ilya had told him, rubbing at Young’s back.

“I can’t,” Young had said, miserably, “I just started getting good minutes. He would want me to play, I know that.”

“Okay,” Ilya said, continuing to rub circles on his spine.

“It’s just,” Young went on, “I’m not home. I can’t go see his grave, and I just keep thinking about my mom alone in the house.”

He then proceeded to start sobbing again, hands shaking, cheeks wet and flushed. Ilya had squeezed tightly at his shoulders as he buried his face in his hands.

“Aw, solnyshko, it’s okay. He is here with you. And I am sure your mom understands.”

“How do you know?” Young croaked.

Ilya stroked the back of his neck, then took a deep breath. “My momma is buried somewhere I can never go back to right now. I hope, every day, that that might change, but for now, she is forever stuck somewhere else. But even though I can’t go see her, I know she is with me. She is there to celebrate my wins, mourn my losses. She helped guide me to Shane and to this team. And I know, more than anything, that she would be proud of anything I did, just like I am sure your dad is proud of you.”

Young looked up at Ilya with big, wet eyes then. He was so young sitting in that dark closet crying over his dad. Ilya was so much younger when his own mother died. God, he misses her. Young sniffled, wiped at his nose and eyes. “Thank you,” he whispered.

But Ilya wasn't satisfied with that. He had pulled Young up and out of that closet and led him out to his car. Young had followed like a lost little puppy at Ilya's heel. He loaded the kid up and took off to the store.

"What would your dad like for his birthday?" he asked as they perused the aisles.

Young was quick to lead them to the bakery section, picking out a carrot cake frosted with cream cheese. Ilya grabbed a bottle of vodka and paid for them both at the checkout. Then they got back into the car and drove off. Young hadn't asked any questions until they got to the cemetery.

"He's not here," Young had said, but Ilya waved him off.

"It is still a nice place to sit. It's a place to remember people."

They found the bench that day. Ilya sat crossed leg on the hard metal and cracked up the vodka and the cake. They drank directly out of the bottle and devoured the carrot cake with their hands, ripping off chunks and eating it just like that in the quiet space, licking at their sticky, cream cheese covered fingers.

"Tell me about him," Ilya had said once they were a few drinks in.

"Oh man," Young had said, "he was so funny. He was always making my mom and I laugh. She used to say he should go do stand up, but then he said he would want to save his best material for her only so he'd be a terrible comic. He could tell these stories that would just mesmerize a whole group of people. He was the life of the party no matter where he was, and could always, always make people feel better. He's the type of man I want to be."

"You are like that."

Young swallowed.

"He was the reason I started playing hockey. He loved Lightning, but when I started playing, he would joke that he would be happy to see me anywhere except with the Panthers. I think he would have loved to see me here. He would have especially loved the team. I think if he was still alive, my mom and him would have moved up here to be with me for my first few seasons, but she can't bear to leave him."

"I understand," Ilya said, "it's hard to be so far away."

"When he was diagnosed with lung cancer, he always used to say that it was some big ironic prank because he never even smoked. One of the last things he did when he was still able to speak was make my mom laugh."

The tears came again, his jaw trembling as they fell. Ilya pulled him close so he could lean onto his shoulder and held him through it.

That was their first time they went together to pay their respects to their parents hundreds and thousands of miles away from home. Now, they go back every year to the same spot. They swap stories of their parents, Ilya telling Young about the sound of his mother's voice when

she read to him and how she used to dance in the kitchen, and Young talking about his first hockey game with his dad and how they used to go to the drive-in movie theater together.

The anniversaries still hurt, but it's better with someone to share them with you. And when they're done, they go back to Ilya's house where Shane gathers the rest of the rookies, and any members of the team who are free, and they have one big family dinner.

Ilya loves this part too. Shane presides over the team, yelling at anyone who walks in with their shoes on and makes a mess, and Ilya gets to watch his beautiful husband be in charge. The year that Holmberg uncorks a bottle of champagne and accidentally sprays their kitchen ceiling as Shane stares at him in utter disbelief is a memory Ilya will treasure forever – or at least until that stain gets painted over.

Young, Ilya notes, appreciates the relief of being with his boys who take on the burden for a day of being the loud happy one so he can mourn his father in peace. It's something sweeter in a hockey team than Ilya has ever seen before. But, he thinks, this is what it's meant to be a team.

They've just finished showering when the knock comes. Ilya's curls are dripping water and Shane has barely gotten his breath back, sore and satiated in the most pleasant way. He doesn't get up at the sound, letting Ilya go see who it is.

Shane just barely picks his head up in time to see Ilya get bowled over by four overexcited rookies shoving their way into their room. Then they freeze.

"Oh my God it smells like sex in here," LaPointe shrieks, covering his eyes and nose with both of his hands.

"It's like walking in on my parents fucking," Holmberg agrees.

"Yes, so why the fuck are you here?" Ilya snaps, shoving at the little group of rookies and throwing himself back on the bed.

The rookies all exchange glances. Then, having come to a silent agreement, they all point at Luca.

"Um," he starts, "you said if we won all of our games on this road trip and all of us scored you would have a sleep over with us."

"We did?" Shane asks.

"Yeah. Right before we left the dinner you guys hosted before the road trip. And LaPointe scored in this game so that means we won all of our games, and everyone scored."

Shane has a very vague recollection of that conversation. He would never admit to not trusting in his team, but he also made that bet after two glasses of wine and with the slight assurance that it couldn't possibly happen. He should have known the team's been getting good enough to start believing in the impossible.

"Ugh," Ilya groans, no doubt also remembering.

"You don't have to," Young says. Then all four of them turn on their puppy dog eyes, and Shane has to stifle a laugh at the incongruous image of four, big professional hockey players giving them pouty faces.

"No, we are coming," Ilya says. "But we go to another room."

"Oh my God, yes. I'm already traumatized," Holmberg says.

"Hmm, never mind then maybe we should just –" Shane starts but gets cut off by four shrieking yells. "Okay, okay," he laughs. "We're coming."

They're mostly dressed in pajamas, which is good enough to follow the rookies down the hall to their room. After a little negotiating and rearranging, Ilya and Shane take one bed and the rookies drag in an extra mattress from Haas and Young's room. They also take the remaining mattress in the room they're all staying in and drag it onto the floor, grabbing every blanket and pillow they can find to create a soft nest big enough for all of them to sleep in.

It's very sweet even though Shane will be ensuring they put it all back in the morning.

They make popcorn in the microwave, warm up cookies, and give Shane ginger ale and Ilya vodka.

"We want to watch *Bottoms*," Young tells them as they get all their snacks ready.

"I didn't know they made a movie about you, Shane," Ilya says. Shane swats him hard on the thigh as everyone giggles.

"You'll love it," Luca promises.

The movie is very funny. Ilya and Shane both cackle out loud with the rookie quartet. Privately, Shane thinks, there's something so sweet about the rookies putting on a movie about queer people without making a big deal about it. It's also a reminder of just how much things have changed for Shane in the last few years. It's a good thing, but also feels sort of like a punch in the gut when he realizes just how miserable it was hiding so much of himself on the Voyageurs. He never even knew what he was missing back then. Now, he mourns for that poor, stifled kid.

There's more giggling and whispering when the movie ends. Shane didn't have many sleepovers as a child, but he imagines this is what it must have been like as a teenager, staying up too late and consuming far too much sugar. They talk some hockey, but it descends into gossiping about the league. The rookies know way more than Shane gives them credit for. Apparently, there's a whole web of rookie-to-rookie communication between teams

that gives them a good insight on the drama. Ilya sits with his jaw dropped as the rookies draw them a diagram of a whole love hexagon between players and girlfriends on the Kings.

Eventually, the night wanes and the boys start dropping off one by one until it's just Shane and Ilya left awake.

"The babies are asleep," Ilya coos at the nest of limbs and hockey boys beneath them.

"Shh," Shane hushes, "we can't wake them."

Ilya snickers, but quiet enough to not be heard. Then his face gets this serious edge to it when he says, "it's so different from how we were."

"Yeah," Shane agrees, "but better, I think."

"Much better."

"I'm glad they have us," Shane whispers.

Ilya nods. "We have adopted them," he says, making Shane giggle again.

He shifts closer to his husband, laying down so he can put his ear against Ilya's heartbeat. That soothing *thump-thump* has been one of the few constants in Shane's life. Decades he's had it, and decades more he wants it.

"Do you ever think about actually having our own?" Shane whispers to the quiet room.

"Kids?"

"Yes."

"All the time," Ilya answers.

Shane turns to look up at him, propping his chin up on Ilya's sternum. "Really?"

"Yes. Ever since I saw you with the better Pikes. Do you ever want them?"

"I never thought about it until we got married. But now I can't stop thinking about it."

Ilya beams, the smile lighting up his whole face. He brushes Shane's hair back and kisses his forehead.

"But not yet, I think," Ilya says. "Still too much hockey to play."

Shane chuckles. "No, definitely not yet. We still have to raise our current children."

Ilya laughs too, leaning over to check on the rookies again.

"They will be very sore tomorrow from sleeping like this."

"Eh, it's their own fault."

“Should we sneak back to our room so I can fuck you again and see if you get pregnant the old-fashioned way?”

That sends a shiver down Shane’s spine that he will be exploring at a later date. But for now, he says, “no, we can’t. They might wake up without us and Holmberg is scared of the dark.”

“Ugh, fine. But only because I love them.”

Shane leverages himself up to kiss Ilya softly.

“Goodnight,” he whispers, settling down against Ilya.

“Goodnight. Ya tebya lyublyu,” Ilya whispers back.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! At this point I'm writing fics to just talk about all of my thoughts in sports, including how the media and leagues treat rookies. Also, starting to realize my writing exists in an alternate universe where all of my favorite professional athletes are actually super chill and kind, but oh well.

Anyway, comments and kudos are always super, super appreciated!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!