

**it isn't hard to see with eyes closed, the love we made**

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# it isn't hard to see with eyes closed, the love we made

by [justhockey](#)

## Summary

It's perhaps the sweetest Svetlana has ever known Ilyusha to be. She has always been granted access to the more affectionate side of Ilyusha, the one that he rarely shows to anyone else, but it was never anything compared to *this*. This tenderness, this adoration, that he gives so freely to Shane. It's like her best friend is a completely different person right now, and she starts to wonder if maybe she was wrong earlier.

Maybe, instead of being too boring for Ilyusha, perhaps Shane Hollander is giving him the space to become something soft. Something without walls, or masks, or armour.

*(Or, 5 times people doubt their love for each other, and 1 time they are certain of it.)*

## Notes

Title from *Please Don't Go Home Yet* by Stephen Sanchez.

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

**one.**

David can't quite believe his life.

Just this morning everything was perfectly normal. He made breakfast for his beautiful wife, he did the crossword of the day, he got a good chunk of his latest puzzle completed. Everything was perfectly ordinary in the way that he prefers things to be. He likes routine, is the thing. Doesn't like to be caught off guard, or when plans change, or when he's surprised by something unexpected.

Some might say he's boring, but he doesn't mind. He likes predictability. He likes the safety of it. Which is why finding his son kissing a man - kissing *Ilya Rozanov*, of all people - has caught him rather by surprise.

They've talked about it, of course.

Shane had showed up with his thumbs in his pockets, a sickly expression on his face, and Ilya Rozanov standing at his back like a steady, silent bodyguard. And David had felt sick with guilt when he realised what his fleeing had done. He'd only meant to give them privacy - felt awful for finding out something his son clearly wanted to keep secret - but it became obvious pretty quickly that leaving the cottage in a rush had only scared Shane more.

So they'd talked it out. He and Yuna listened. They gave their support, obviously, because there's nothing on earth their son could do that would ever change their love him. Not being gay, or quitting hockey, or first degree murder. Not even dating Rozanov.

But that doesn't stop dinner from feeling awkward. Stilted in a way that even David - who's often oblivious to most social cues - notices.

"So, Ilya. How are your ribs doing?" Yuna asks as she drizzles vinaigrette over her salad.

"They are fine," Ilya says. "They are not sore anymore."

Shane nods his head. "They weren't broken or anything. Just badly bruised."

Ilya flashes Shane a brief smile, and David can't help but notice the way Shane blushes slightly, the way he averts his eyes as he tries to stop himself from smiling back.

David isn't sure how to feel about it all.

He's fine with his son being gay, of course. That didn't even really come as a surprise. He and Yuna had discussed it before, so they were mostly prepared for that part of Shane's revelation. It was the...other part, that had caught them by surprise. The *Ilya* of it all, that David is having trouble coming to terms with.

Because, well, everyone knows Ilya Rozanov's reputation. It's impossible to pay attention to hockey and *not* know. And while it's obvious that they care for each other in some way,

David wonders how exactly this is meant to last. It's one thing for them to be, god, *lovers*, but another thing entirely to be in a monogamous, committed relationship.

He doubts very much that the Rozanov everyone knows is capable of such a thing, even if he's currently planning on signing with Ottawa to make it possible.

*Saying* is one thing. *Doing* is another thing entirely.

David loves his son more than anything. Yuna is his wife, his soulmate, but their son is the true love of David's life. There's nothing he wouldn't do for Shane, nothing that he would choose over his child. He's watched Shane grow into someone a lot like himself - someone who is fastidious, and particular, and uncompromising. He and Yuna have worried many a times about how difficult his eccentricities might make it for Shane to fall in love with someone who can love him back in the right way.

And he's desperately worried that Shane going to get his heart broken by Rozanov.

"Scott Hunter is strong for such an old man," Ilya says, grinning brightly. "He only won the cup because he injured me."

Shane snorts, loud and a little obnoxious, but carefree in a way that David rarely sees his son. He watches as Shane juts his elbow out, digging into the uninjured side of Ilya's ribs.

"Shut up," he says. "He would have beat you anyway."

"Are you saying I am bad hockey player, Hollander?" Ilya asks, but his smile makes it clear that he's just joking around.

"Well we both know I'm better, so..." Shane trails off, shrugging his shoulders nonchalantly.

David expects a little pushback from Rozanov, even though it's obvious they're just winding each other up. But instead Ilya sticks out his tongue and blows a raspberry, making Shane laugh easily.

"Yes. Fine. You are best hockey player in the world. But I am *definitely* better than Scott Hunter. Do not even play with me about this."

Shane just rolls his eyes fondly, then looks back down to his plate of food. He pushes it around a little, stabbing his fork into his salad and shoving it into his mouth so he doesn't have to answer Ilya. Ilya frowns playfully at him, bumping their shoulders together.

"How are you feeling about the next season, Ilya? Do you think Boston will make another playoff run?" Yuna asks, smiling slightly as she glances between the two boys.

"Ah, yes," Ilya says. "I think so."

"Montreal will be tough to beat when Shane comes back stronger than ever," Yuna points out.

Ilya grins. "Yes, they are terrible without him."

Shane smiles at Ilya, but it's more reserved than the last one he offered up. And David isn't certain, but he thinks Ilya places his hand on Shane's leg under the table.

"I think this hockey talk can wait for when the season starts. It is summer, yes? What are your plans?"

"Oh, well..."

As Yuna launches into a detailed description of their itinerary for the summer, David watches his son. He watches the way he relaxes almost instantly, tension that David hadn't even realised he was carrying seeping out of him like sap from a maple tree. Shane lists sideways just slightly, his shoulder pressing briefly against Ilya's in what David recognises as a silent *thank you*.

The hockey talk was stressing Shane out, and Ilya noticed. He noticed even before David did. And he expertly diverted the conversation for him. Huh.

"We're also thinking about a trip to Alberta," David interjects. "I have family in Calgary, and we haven't been to Banff in years so we might make the drive."

"Oh god, do you remember that time we drove to Banff with Uncle Tommy? We had to stop so he could throw up, like, six times."

Yuna snorts. "He was so hungover he was basically comatose."

"*Hungover?* You told me was sick!" Shane cries out in disbelief.

Ilya bursts out laughing, and David can't help but laugh too. "Yeah, well, you were a pretty innocent kid."

"I was fifteen!"

"Oh moya lyubov," Ilya says, the Russian soft on his tongue even though David doesn't know what it means. "You were very oblivious. Very sweet and innocent."

"Oh fu-," Shane pauses, swallows the curse that almost slips out. "Be quiet."

Ilya obliges him with nothing more than an adoring smile.

As the conversation continues, much lighter and easier than it had been before, David can't help but watch the way the two of them interact with each other. The way they seem to lean together like they're each other's centre of gravity. The way Ilya touches Shane's leg, or shoulder, or the back of his neck, and the way Shane doesn't even flinch away from it.

David doesn't think he's ever before witnessed a version of his son that doesn't instinctively pull away from physical contact.

And then.

David watches as, without even having to ask, Ilya takes all the tomatoes off Shane's plate.

The gesture almost makes David tear up.

Shane hates tomatoes. He hates the texture, the way they burst in his mouth, the way the inside is both slimy and crunchy from the seeds. He's always been hesitant to tell other people about his food aversions, though. Shane feels like it's another thing that makes him different. Makes him *other*.

But Ilya knows. He knows, and fixes the problem before Shane can even complain about it. No fanfare, no discussion. Shane doesn't even react, as if this isn't the first time Ilya has done such a thing.

And suddenly, most of David's worries fade into obsolescence.

Not all of them, of course. Because Shane is his son and he's going to worry about him for as long as he's breathing. Because Shane is not only a person of colour in an extremely white sport, but he's also gay in an extremely *straight* sport, and David can't even begin to imagine the kind of pressure that puts on him.

But, with one tiny, almost inconsequential gesture, David knows he no longer has to worry about Ilya Rozanov breaking his son's heart.

He's certain that Shane is safe with him.

He's certain that their love - however unbelievable it may seem - is very, *very* real.

## **two.**

Jackie loves Shane more than almost anyone. Not her husband, and not her kids, but he's definitely next on the list.

There's something about him that's just so...warm. So innocent, almost. Not in a childlike way, but. He takes everything at face value, which is both endearing and also a little bit concerning, given that not everyone has good intentions. He's a grown fucking man, obviously, it's not like she sees him as another one of her kids. And he's more mature than most of the hockey players she knows; he's kind, and honest, and well-loved.

But Shane is also reserved.

It's like he's always holding something back, like he's wearing a mask to stop anyone from seeing all of him.

It's makes the mom in Jackie want to protect him, even though she knows he doesn't really need it. Even though Shane is a lot fucking tougher than most people give him credit for, both in hockey and in life. It's just pretty hard to push that instinct to the side when she's confronted with Ilya Rozanov, of all people.

It's clear with the united front that they're presenting, that Shane is serious about Rozanov. But Shane is a serious guy. Serious about absolutely everything, from his meal plan, to his tape job, to the way he organises his bookshelf.

It's Rozanov that Jackie is worried about.

Her husband doesn't fucking help the situation, of course. He's behaving like an absolute menace, as if he's trying to make a point or something.

He picks and taunts and pushes Rozanov into retaliating, and Jackie is certain Hayden will have bruises on his thigh later, from how hard she keeps pinching him. But Rozanov keeps giving as good as he gets, and his reactive, brash personality is so opposite to Shane's that Jackie can't help but agree with her husband.

*What the fuck does Shane see in this guy?*

Obviously there's something, because when Shane isn't too busy reigning both Rozanov and Hayden in, he's looking at his boyfriend like he hung the moon or something. It's just hard for Jackie to see what Shane sees when she knows exactly the kind of guy Rozanov is, and he's proving every one of her preconceptions right every time he acts like an asshole tonight. Which, well, is constantly.

"I'm just saying," Hayden says, and Jackie really wishes he wouldn't. "If you hadn't been so selfish in the third then maybe--"

"-selfish?" Rozanov scoffs. "Pike, I am the best player on my team. You obviously don't know what that is like, but--"

"-oh *fuck you*, Rozanov. You're so full of--"

"Stop it!"

Shane's voice is loud and assertive as it cuts through the bickering. Rozanov's gaze shoots to him immediately, an apologetic expression quickly taking over his face. Hayden's argument instantly dies on his tongue, and the room suddenly falls into a painfully awkward silence.

Jackie watches as Rozanov - *Ilya*, she reminds herself - reaches a tentative hand out towards Shane. He rests it on his wrist, where Shane is leaning it on the table. Ilya looks like he's expecting Shane to pull away, but he doesn't. Instead, almost imperceptibly, Shane leans towards Ilya. He looks fucking miserable, and Jackie wants to slap both her husband and Ilya upside the head.

"I'll get dessert," Shane says, voice quiet and resigned.

He's barely out of the dining room before Ilya is standing, too, and rushing after him like a dog on a leash. It's almost endearing. Almost.

Hayden starts the second they're both out of the room.

"That fucking--"

"Stop it. Right now," Jackie warns him.

"But he--"

“-oh grow the fuck up, Hayden. You purposely keep trying to wind him up. Why?”

Hayden huffs, swivelling in his seat to face Jackie as he says, “Because he’s an asshole who’s fucking *brainwashed* my best friend, and I won’t have it.”

Jackie scoffs, her eyes rolling almost painfully far back into her head. She loves her husband, but he’s absolutely insufferable sometimes.

She knows how much Hayden loves Shane, how protective he feels of his best friend. And she gets it, of course, because she feels the exact same way. She’s doubting this just as much as he is, after all. But Jackie is at least willing to hear them out. She’s willing to give Rozanov a chance because Shane seems to love him, and when - *if* - Ilya fucks him over and breaks his heart, then she will be here to help him pick up the pieces.

But until that happens, she’s going to trust Shane’s judgment even if she doesn’t understand it. And her husband needs to do the same.

“Look - for whatever reason, Shane actually cares about him. You don’t have to understand it, you don’t even have to like it, but you *are* going to respect it.”

“Babe...” Hayden whines, taking Jackie’s hand and lacing their fingers together.

“Hayden, they’ve kept this secret for over a decade. They’ve hidden how they feel for longer than we have been together,” she reminds him.

It’s a startling thing to think about, that while she and Hayden were falling in love and starting their family, Shane and Ilya were having to hide their own love for each other. Even from themselves, for a while. It makes Ilya’s attitude, his defensiveness, a little bit more understandable.

Jackie thinks if she’d had to hide her relationship with Hayden for a decade, and then the second people found out she immediately had to defend it, she would be pretty pissy too.

“We don’t get to come into their home and make them uncomfortable in the one place they get to be themselves. Okay?”

She watches the flurry of emotions that pass over her husband’s face. Anger and frustration then, slowly, understanding, and maybe even guilt.

Hayden sighs, leaning forward to rest his forehead on Jackie’s shoulder. She takes the hand he isn’t holding and scratches the hair at the nape of his neck. Her husband is a good man, she’s never once doubted that, he just needs a reminder to be *nice* sometimes.

“Fine,” Hayden eventually grunts. “I’ll behave.”

Jackie kisses him on the forehead. “Thank you,” she whispers. Then, “I’m going to the bathroom. If they come back before me, be nice.”

She’s been to Shane’s house enough times to know it inside and out by now. She quickly takes the path to the closest powder room, not considering that she has to pass the kitchen

until she hears quiet voices coming from inside it.

She knows she shouldn't - knows it's rude, and invasive, and definitely a breach of Shane's hard fought for privacy - but she can't help but pause by the partially open door. She tells herself it's just for a quick second, just to make sure Shane is okay and that they aren't arguing.

It's the kind of thing a good friend would do, after all.

"Please don't be angry at me, kótik," she hears Ilya say. He sounds absolutely devastated.

Shane sighs. "I'm not angry at you, Ilya. I'm just...angry. In general."

It's quiet for a moment, so - figuring she's already invading their privacy by listening in - Jackie bravely pushes the door open ever so slightly, just enough to peer through the gap in it.

She's surprised by the scene in front of her. The way Shane is wrapped up in Ilya's arms, his face burrowed in Ilya's neck like he's trying to hide from the world. Like Ilya is his safe place to land. One of his hands is holding the back of Shane's head, and the other is gently rubbing his back, and they look like nobody else in the world exists but them.

"It's not fair," Shane says.

"No," Ilya agrees. "It's not."

"I just. I love you *so* much, and I wish he could see that. I wish he could understand. But - it feels like he's mad at me for loving you."

Jackie winces at the confession, wishing Hayden could hear what his stubbornness is doing to his best friend. He thinks he's protecting Shane, but really he's just hurting him.

"Oh, Shane. Moya lyubov." Ilya pulls back, holding Shane's face in his hands so he can look at him. "Hayden is not mad at you. He loves you. He just doesn't understand."

Shane sighs, bows forward until he's resting his forehead against Ilya's chin. Ilya kisses him sweetly.

"He doesn't need to understand, he just...needs to stop doubting us. Me, at least, even if he doesn't trust you."

They're quiet again for a moment, Ilya moving his hands to Shane's shoulders as Shane squeezes him tightly around Ilya's waist.

Then, hesitantly, Ilya ask, "And what happens if he doesn't? Stop doubting us, I mean."

Shane pulls back so quickly it's a wonder he doesn't give himself whiplash. Jackie isn't quite sure what Ilya said to warrant such a reaction, but clearly Shane can read his boyfriend very easily. He's frowning sadly, tangling his hands in Ilya's curls as he leans forward to place a chaste kiss on his lips.

“Ilya, baby, *nothing* happens. Even if he’s never okay with this, it won’t change us. *Nothing* will change us, okay?” Shane insists. “I love you, and you love me, and that’s not going away.”

Ilya sighs, seeming instantly relieved at Shane’s words. Then he melts into Shane, their arms winding around each other as they hold on for dear life.

The sweetness of it is overwhelming. Unbelievable, almost. To witness what they’re like when no one else is watching, when their relationship doesn’t have to be a performance, almost steals Jackie’s breath. They’re loving, and tender, and patient with each other. They read each other so effortlessly, and understand each other so easily.

They love each other. They love each other in the life changing, irreversible way that soulmates do.

She can see it now, as clear as day.

Slowly, so she doesn’t make a sound, she backs away from the door and heads down the hall to the bathroom.

She shouldn’t have stopped to listen in, shouldn’t have cracked the door open to witness them in the act of caring for each other, but she can’t bring herself to regret it. Not now that she finally understands them. Not now that she knows just how real what they have is.

When she sits back down, there are four slices of cherry pie waiting on the table.

“Thank you,” Jackie says. “This looks great.”

“It’s my dad’s recipe,” Shane explains.

“Wait, you made this?” Hayden asks around a mouthful of pie.

Jackie understands his surprise: it tastes absolutely fantastic. Sweet and tart, with light, flaky pastry. It’s better than the pies they get from their favourite bakery.

Shane grimaces at her husband’s lack of table manners, but shakes his head. “No, actually Ilya made it.”

“Wow, really?” Jackie asks. “It’s fucking incredible.”

Ilya grins proudly. “Thank you, Jackie.”

As Shane and Ilya briefly get caught up in conversation, Jackie leans towards her husband.

“They’re good together,” she whispers. “Don’t ruin this for them.”

**three.**

Shane is Rose’s best friend.

Like her actual, genuine, best friend in the entire world. She'd known their romantic relationship wasn't working out almost instantly, but she loved him and his company so much that she'd stuck it out in the hopes that they could iron out the creases.

As it turned out, the creases were the fact that Shane was gay, and it wasn't something Rose could - or would ever *want to* - smooth out. So breaking up and becoming friends instead? Well, that was just about the best thing that could have happened for Rose. It's hard to find real friends in her industry, where everyone is competing against each other and always trying to get one up on somebody else.

She's impossibly grateful that she gets to have someone as wonderful as Shane in her life.

Which is why, when Shane quietly confesses on a late night phone call, that the guy he's seeing, dating, in love with - apparently - is *Ilya Fucking Rozanov*, well. She promptly takes a flight to Montreal and shows up on his doorstep.

They're both sitting cross-legged on either end of Shane's couch, facing each other as she listens to Shane share the details of his decade-long forbidden affair. It's scandalous, quite frankly. The kind of thing books and movies are made of. The kind of gossip Rose would normally love to hear about, if only it didn't involve her very dearest friend.

As a lifelong hockey fan, Rose knows Ilya Rozanov's reputation. *Everyone* knows his reputation, in fact. Even a few of Rose's acquaintances from the industry have hooked up with the infamous playboy. And while, admittedly, the rumours around his conquests have faded away in recent years, it doesn't mean she trusts the womaniser. Especially not with Shane's heart.

"Wait," Rose silences him. "You're telling me he moved to Ottawa for you?"

Shane nods, smiling almost shyly as his cheeks turn pink. Jesus. That's something, she supposes. A positive sign. But really, how could a guy like Rozanov suddenly change every aspect of his personality and want to settle down with a guy as steady, as *good*, as Shane? And how could Shane want him back?

Loving Shane is easy. Loving *Rozanov*, though? That's what really has Rose baffled.

"It was difficult, hardly ever seeing each other. That last year he was in Boston was hell."

"And he was - I mean. You guys were, y'know, exclusive?" It's the politest way to ask that Rose could think of.

Shane laughs, thankfully not at all offended. "Yes. Very much so. We're both kind of possessive," Shane confesses. "There's no one else for either of us."

Rose nods, even though she's still struggling to wrap her head around all of this. It's just, Shane - her sweet, kind, lovely friend - and Ilya goddamn Rozanov, make absolutely no sense. On paper, they couldn't be any more misaligned. She knows they have the charity together, but-

“Oh my god,” she gasps. “The charity! Was that all so you could-“

“*No!*” Shane insists. “It’s all real. The work we do is genuine. It matters to us. It just...started because we wanted to change the narrative.”

“I can’t believe this,” Rose mutters, mostly to herself. Then, to Shane, “So, who knows?”

Shane is an exceedingly private person. Barely a shred of his real personality makes it into the media, which is why she was so blown away by him when they first met. To learn that the guy who had seemed so stoic and serious and hockey-brained, was actually funny, and opinionated, and so fucking likeable, had seriously taken Rose by surprise.

Even if this whole relationship with Rozanov *didn’t* need to be kept completely secret, she doubts Shane would be shouting about it anyway. Rose can’t imagine that many people know, and so she’s honoured to be one of them, even if she doesn’t get why the hell they’re together in the first place.

“Um, not many people. My parents, Hayden and Jackie, Ryan Price and his boyfriend, Fabian - but that was mostly by accident - and, uh. That’s it.”

Rose’s jaw drops. “You know Fabian Saleh? Oh my god, Shane-“ she quickly stops herself from fangirling. “No. Nope. We can talk about that later. Right now, we’re talking about you.”

“There’s not much else to say.” Shane shrugs. “He’s my boyfriend. We love each other. End of story.”

She gets that. She does. She’s also someone who takes her privacy very seriously. But she’s gonna need more than that if she’s got any chance of understanding this.

She’s happy for Shane, of course she is.

Rose has never been able to get his expression out of her head - the one that was written all over Shane’s face when he admitted to her that he was gay. It broke her heart clean in two, the shame and sadness and *hurt* that he wore like they were familiar to him, like he had been carrying them for such a long time. It was truly devastating, and in that moment Rose genuinely worried that Shane might never let himself love another man.

So of course she’s glad that he’s accepted himself enough to fall in love with a man, she just worries whether that man could ever love him back. At least in the way that Shane deserves to be loved: patiently, and selflessly, and entirely.

“Shane, I love you. I’m happy for you, I promise. But...*Rozanov*? Are you sure that-“

Rose is interrupted by the click of the front door opening and closing, and quiet footsteps padding along the hardwood floor. And then-

“Shane? Shane, sweetheart, are you home? I missed you.”

The accent is easily identifiable, and, even if it hadn't been, the way Shane's entire face lights up makes it exceptionally clear who just walked into the house. Rozanov.

He appears in the doorway to the living room, looking happier than he had done when he won the Stanley Cup.

But the wide grin on his face slowly falls when he sees that Shane isn't sitting alone. His eyes widen, and his skin turns a ghostly shade of white as he takes in Rose, sitting ramrod straight on the couch. His gaze snaps to Shane, an apology instantly falling from his lips.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I thought - I thought you would be alone. I didn't-"

"Ilya..."

"Sorry. I'm - I'll go. Sorry, I just. Charity stuff, you understand?" He says to Rose, trying to cover for them. "Is not important. I'll-"

Shane stands up, rushing towards Ilya with his arms outstretched and a smile on his face. Ilya moves backwards, but when he bumps into the wall he's stuck with nowhere else to go. Ilya looks back at Shane in disbelief, his whole body flinching when his hands come to rest on Ilya's shoulders.

"I didn't mean to," Ilya whispers, so sadly that Rose can't help but hurt for him.

He's trying to protect their secret for Shane's sake, not his own, and that immediately endears him to Rose.

"Ilya, baby, it's fine. It's okay. Rose knows, okay? I told her," Shane comforts him, his hands rubbing up and down Ilya's arms as Ilya looks over Shane's shoulder at Rose.

For lack of anything better to do, she smiles and waves at him.

Ilya's eyes flicker back to Shane's. "She knows?" He asks, half hesitant and half hopeful.

Shane nods his head. "Yeah, I told her. That's - I mean. It's okay, right?"

Rose watches in real time as Ilya's entire expression and demeanour shifts. He goes from uncertain, afraid, as if his entire life is about to collapse around him, to standing tall and smiling wide, touching Shane's face with reverential hands.

He calls Shane something in Russian, and while Rose doesn't know what he says, she knows that Shane likes it. She watches as his body lists forward, leaning into Ilya and winding his arms around his waist, then shuddering as Ilya's arms come up to wrap around Shane's back. It kind of blows Rose's mind a little, honestly, given how resistant to physical contact Shane has always been with most other people.

She's never seen him this - this *soft* before.

"Of course it is okay," Ilya says gently. "I'm so happy for you. So proud of you, Shane."

“I know I should have asked you, but-“

“She is your friend and you trust her, yes? It is okay. Is always okay if you want to talk about us.”

Shane leans in again, and Rose suddenly feels like she very much is *not* supposed to be here. Is not supposed to be watching this. Because Shane tilts his head upwards ever so slightly, and Ilya immediately meets him for a kiss. It’s not anything graphic or even particularly intense, but the tenderness of it makes Rose avert her eyes.

It’s too sweet, too loving, for anyone else to bear witness to.

“You’re not supposed to be here until Friday,” Shane says.

“I couldn’t wait that long to see you,” Ilya confesses, and Rose believes every word of it without question. “I will have to leave very early tomorrow, but it is worth it for a few hours with you.”

“Thank you,” Shane whispers. “I missed you.”

Rose doesn’t mean too. She really, really tries to hold it back, but she can’t help the sneeze that reminds Shane and Ilya that she’s still here. Still watching their little reunion.

They both startle, but Shane doesn’t pull away from Ilya like Rose - knowing how uncomfortable PDA’s make him - had expected him to do. Instead he laughs. Not the awkward kind that you do when you’re trying to hide that you’re uncomfortable, but a real, genuine laugh. It makes Ilya smile at him, leaning down to press a kiss to Shane’s temple. Then Shane laces his fingers with Ilya’s and tugs on his hand.

“Come on,” he says. “I guess I should properly introduce you guys.”

As if that grants her permission, Rose stands up from the couch and meets Shane and Ilya halfway. She holds out her hand towards Ilya and, after only the briefest hesitation, Ilya reaches out to shake it.

“I’m Rose Landry. It’s nice to finally meet you,” she greets him, polite like her momma taught her to be.

“Yes. You are the beautiful woman who my boyfriend had sex with.”

Shane chokes, but Rose bursts out laughing. Hell, maybe - despite her best efforts - she’s going to like this guy after all. He’s funny. Surprisingly, he has a similar kind of humour as Shane does. Both blunt with it, even if that bluntness is for different reasons.

“Yes, that would be me,” she confirms, still grinning as Ilya lets go of her hand.

“He is mine now, just so you know,” Ilya warns her, but he’s smiling too. A lot warmer than Rose would have thought him capable of before this meeting. “I love him too much to share him.”

“*Ilya*,” Shane hisses.

He whacks Ilya’s chest like he’s trying to silence him, but his cheeks are blushing and he’s trying - and failing - to hide his smile. He burrows his face in Ilya’s bicep, and it’s abundantly clear to Rose that Shane *likes* this. He likes Ilya being possessive of him, likes knowing how much he is loved by Ilya.

And my god, is he loved.

Rose can’t believe she ever doubted it. It’s as clear as crystal, as she stands here looking at them. Looking at the way they look at *each other*.

“What?” Ilya asks. “She is very beautiful, Shane. I have to make sure she knows.”

Shane rolls his eyes, fond but exasperated, as he says, “She knows, you idiot.”

“Ah yes. She is the one who told you that you are gay,” Ilya remarks. “Thank you, Rose Landry. I owe you my life.”

Shane whacks him again, and Ilya laughs, and Rose can’t help but laugh as well. They seem so connected, so in tune with each other. It’s like they both can read the other’s mind. Like they can anticipate what each other will say or do before they even know it themselves.

They settle back down on the couch together, Shane melting back against Ilya’s chest, and Rose subtly watches as they play with each other’s fingers, as they finish each other’s sentences, as Ilya kisses Shane’s ear and Shane kisses Ilya’s knuckles.

Rose smiles the whole time.

#### **four.**

Svetlana misses her Ilyusha.

Having him in Boston for so many years had been a dream. He managed to remind her of all the best parts of their home in Russia, without any of the unwavering rigidity or the impossible expectations.

He’s felt like freedom to Svetlana since they were just kids.

He would stand up for her against the assholes who always had something to say about her hair or skin colour, and he played hockey with her without ever going easy because she was *just a girl*. Once, he even broke a boy’s nose because he slipped a hand under Sveta’s skirt. People quickly learned that they if they messed with her, they would have a Rozanov to deal with.

She loves him, is the point. So much that, for those brief moments between hearing about Ottawa’s plane almost crashing and hearing that her Ilyusha was safe, she thought she might just die.

And now, with all the distance between them, she misses him so much that it aches like a phantom limb sometimes.

So when he's in Boston for a game, and has a whole day off before they jet to the next city, she steals him away for a couple of precious hours. She can't help it. His teammates will survive a day alone in Boston without their captain, but Svetlana isn't sure if she could survive much longer without seeing her best friend.

He hasn't seen her new apartment yet, so he wanders around the place to get a feel of it, looking out of the floor-to-ceiling windows with a look of approving awe on his face. Even his nicest place in Boston was never as fancy as this.

"Sveta, you are far too successful for me now," Ilya teases her. "I cannot compete with this. You are too good."

"Oh, Ilyusha. I have always been too good for you," she fires back.

He laughs, loud and bright, and my god has she missed him. Missed *this*. She has a Russian colleague, and an old college friend who grew up in St. Petersburg, but neither of them are her best friend. And it's nice to talk in her native language, nice to laugh and joke without worrying that someone will find her too abrupt, or too mean, or too much.

"You are too good for everyone, my dear," Ilya tells her, as he pulls her in for a hug and kisses the top of her head.

"Drink?" She offers as she pulls out of his arms.

Ilyusha nods. "Please. Whatever you are having."

"Vodka?"

He scoffs, and it makes Svetlana smile. "Anything that isn't alcohol."

She makes them both a coffee as Ilyusha takes a seat at the dining table. She places the mugs down on the table, then takes the chair across from him. She pulls one knee up to her chest, and then fixes her best friend with the look that she knows will get him talking.

He scowls under her attention, taking a sip from his mug of coffee but hissing when it burns his tongue. Sveta smiles at his misfortune, and Ilyusha flips her off with a grin.

"Why are you staring? What do you want?" He asks. "I'm not fucking you."

It's Sveta's time to scoff, waving away the suggestion with a flick of her hand. "Of course not. You have *Jane* for that. You are neglecting me now."

*Jane*, she says, even though she knows his mystery woman is actually a mystery man.

He hasn't told her, of course, but she figures that's the only thing that makes sense. One of Ilyusha's favourite things to do to bore Sveta to tears, was always telling her about his

exploits, and so the fact that *Jane* has been a secret for so long makes no sense. Unless, of course, *she* is actually a *he*. Ilyusha tells her everything, after all. Or, *almost* everything.

When she brings up the anonymous lover, it's impossible not to notice the way Ilyusha's eyes light up in a way that Svetlana hasn't seen since his mama died. But there's a sadness there, too. A loneliness perhaps.

"This mystery person...are you sure they are good for you?" Sveta asks as she sips her coffee.

Ilyusha shakes his head. "*Person, they,*" he repeats. "You can say *man*, Sveta. I know you know."

She shrugs her shoulders. "I didn't want to rush you into telling me if you weren't ready."

She already knew that Ilyusha was bisexual. She'd seen him and Sasha sneak off together once, and had followed simply to ask why she was being left out. The question was answered pretty quickly, though, when she saw the two of them kissing. She never mentioned it to either of them. She knew how important of a secret it was for them to keep, and she didn't want either of them to ever feel afraid.

Her Ilyusha deserves to come out on his own terms.

"It's just...complicated," Ilyusha says. "He-"

"-wants to keep it a secret?"

Ilyusha nods. Then shakes his head. "We both do," he explains. "But. But he said it was okay, now, if I wanted to tell you."

Svetlana feels her eyes widening in surprise. Whatever she had been thinking, she hadn't expected that.

She's been worried for a long time that Ilyusha's mystery lover, whoever he may be, simply isn't good for her best friend.

Ilyusha is affectionate, and tactile. He has so much love to give and, other than Sveta, no one has ever wanted it from him. Not any of his family except Irina, and not any of the girls he used to hook up with him, who only ever wanted her best friend for his body and for the accolades of bedding an MHL player. He deserves to love and be loved out loud, and this man clearly cannot give him that.

Svetlana doesn't blame him for it, of course. No one should ever be forced to come out of the closet. But she thinks, if this guy wanted to, then Ilyusha wouldn't be opposed to it.

She thinks maybe *Jane* is holding him back.

"You obviously can't tell anyone."

"*Obviously,*" Svetlana says, rolling her eyes.

“Promise you won’t hit me?”

“Why would I - Ilyusha, who *is* this guy?”

He sighs, deep and rumbling, as he rests his elbows on the table and drops his head into his hands. She’d move to comfort him, but she doesn’t think he needs that. Right now, he just needs a minute to compose himself. A minute to work up the courage to tell Svetlana about someone who is obviously very important to him.

Silence surround them for a minute or two, and just when Svetlana becomes convinced that Ilyusha has changed his mind, he begins to speak.

“Jane - my boyfriend - is actually *Shane*. Shane Hollander.”

Svetlana doesn’t exactly know *what* her face is doing, but she’s certain it has never done it before.

She’s in...god, disbelief doesn’t even *begin* to describe how she’s feeling right now. Shocked, stunned, fucking *astonished*, perhaps. She doesn’t even think the word exists yet for the way she is feeling. It’s like a bomb has been dropped on everything she thought she knew.

Shane *fucking* Hollander? Ilyusha can’t be serious. It’s not even possible.

But then she looks at her best friend - at his wide, fearful eyes, and his flushed cheeks, and the way he is nervously picking at his fingernails like he used to do when he was small, and Sveta just knows. She knows this isn’t a joke, or a prank. This is real. Ilyusha is dating actual hockey god Shane Hollander.

No, not just dating him. He’s *in love*.

Well. At least now it makes sense why it’s been such a big secret, even if literally nothing else about it makes even the slightest bit of sense. Like, Shane Hollander? Really? What is her Ilyusha even thinking?

“Sveta,” Ilyusha says softly. “What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking I’m surprised,” Svetlana tells him, which is just about the understatement of the century.

Ilyusha nods like one of those bobble-heads. “Right. Surprised. Of course.”

“Shane Hollander,” Svetlana sighs his name. “God, you don’t do things by halves, do you?”

She smiles at her best friend, stretches her open palm across the table in offering. Ilyusha moves so quickly to take her hand that he almost knocks his cup of coffee over. But he relaxes the moment their fingers lock together.

“So you’re not mad?”

Svetlana frowns. “Why would I be mad?”

“I don’t know. Because I didn’t tell you for so long?”

It takes her back a little, seeing Ilyusha being so unsure. So uncertain. Ilya Rozanov is the most confident person Sveta has ever met, bar absolutely none. He’s always been so self-assured that it sometimes comes across as arrogance. And while Svetlana knows better than anyone that the real Ilyusha is not the same as the Rozanov that the world sees, he’s also not *this*, either. Not shy, or unsure of himself.

She’s not sure that she likes it. Worries that Hollander’s influence - however far it reaches - might not necessarily be a good thing.

“Ilyusha,” she says, as gentle as she ever allows herself to be. “Of course I’m not mad at you. I understand why you kept it quiet, I just don’t understand why...”

“Why, what?”

“Why *him*.”

Svetlana doesn’t say it to be cruel. She admires Hollander as an athlete, and thinks the work he does with Ilyusha for the Irina Foundation is absolutely remarkable. She has no doubt that he’s a good person, she just doesn’t think he’s good *for* Ilyusha. It’s not personal, it’s just... she doesn’t see how this could possibly work. How it could possibly be something that lasts.

Hollander is too rigid for her carefree best friend, too particular and fussy and persnickety. Not a lot of his personality seems to make it into the public domain - for obvious reasons, Svetlana figures - but what she *does* know about him is that he likes routine. He likes *boring*, and Ilyusha is anything but boring.

It’s not a criticism of Hollander, because there’s nothing wrong with that, she just can’t imagine the Ilyusha she knows settling down with somebody like that.

“He is perfect, Sveta,” Ilyusha says, with a dopey grin on his face that she’s only ever seen before when he was texting *Jane*.

“I’m sure he’s great, but-“

“He is boring,” Ilyusha announces. “He is boring, and fussy, and always has to put his right sock on before his left. He puts his cold hands and feet on me in bed, and he goes to sleep *so* early, and he eats boring, terrible food.”

As Ilyusha lists all of Hollander’s apparent character flaws, he’s smiling like the cat that got the cream. He has hearts basically bursting out of his eyes, and the fondness is so apparent in his voice that Sveta can hardly believe what she is hearing. What she is seeing. You would think he was naming all of Hollander’s achievements, instead.

He doesn’t see any of the things he is saying as bad, at all. He loves them. Loves Hollander. *Shane*.

“He is perfect,” Ilyusha concludes.

Svetlana finishes the last dregs of her lukewarm cup of coffee, taking a moment to figure out what to say next. She supports Ilyusha in everything, even this. And if this is what he wants she will have his back until it falls apart, then be here to put him back together when he shatters. She's about to open her mouth to say so, just as Ilyusha's phone starts to ring.

He picks it up from the table, such a wide smile taking over his face that Sveta instantly knows who is calling him. Ilyusha puts his finger to his lips to shush her, flashes her a wink, and then answers the phone. On speaker.

"Hey baby, how's Boston? I miss you," is the first thing Hollander says.

"Hello moya lyubov," Ilyusha greets him sweetly. "I miss you, too. Boston is fine. Good. I'm with Sveta."

"Oh, that's great! I'm so glad you have enough time to catch up with her," Hollander says, and he's so earnest that Svetlana can't help but smile. "Do you want me to leave you to it? I don't want to steal any of your time with her."

Ilyusha scoffs. "You can't steal what belongs to you. All of my time is yours, kótik."

It's perhaps the sweetest Svetlana has ever known Ilyusha to be. She has always been granted access to the more affectionate side of Ilyusha, the one that he rarely shows to anyone else, but it was never anything compared to *this*. This tenderness, this adoration, that he gives so freely to Shane. It's like her best friend is a completely different person right now, and she starts to wonder if maybe she was wrong earlier.

Maybe, instead of being too boring for Ilyusha, perhaps Shane Hollander is giving him the space to become something soft. Something without walls, or masks, or armour.

"I don't have long, anyway. We have practice in an hour."

"Then I will make this quick. Do you remember how you said it would be okay if I told Sveta about us?"

Svetlana hears Shane's intake through the phone.

"Yes. Are you going to?"

Ilyusha looks shy when he admits, "I kind of already did."

Svetlana is holding her breath along with him, as they both wait for Shane's response. She's preparing for the worst, preparing to snatch the phone from Ilyusha's hand and give Hollander a piece of her mind. But then-

"Oh, baby," Shane says, so fucking gentle it almost makes *Sveta* want to cry. "How did it go? Are you happy?"

Ilyusha meets Sveta's gaze, and it's impossible to miss the tears gathering in his waterline as he smiles. His cheeks are flushed pink, not with embarrassment but with - quite simply - *love*.

“I am so happy, sweetheart.”

“Good. *Good*, Ilya. I’m so glad. So happy that you got to tell her.”

And Svetlana can quite literally *hear* the honesty in his voice. She can hear the affection, and adoration, and *love*. It’s impossible to miss it. Impossible to miss the way Ilyusha brightens at the sound of Shane’s voice, at merely just the mention of him.

Maybe, just maybe, the version of Ilyusha that she thought could never fit with Hollander isn’t the truest version of him at all. Maybe Shane gets to see a side to her Ilyusha that even Svetlana has never been privy to. And maybe that would hurt, if it didn’t make her best friend so incandescently happy.

“I won’t take up any more of your time with her,” Shane says. “But I’m so happy for you, baby. I love you. Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Svetlana gasps as tears spring to her eyes. *He said it in Russian*. His accent isn’t perfect, but it’s as close as she’s ever heard a non-native speaker get. It’s clear how much effort he’s put into getting the words right - how much time has taken to tell Ilyusha that he loves him in his own language.

“Ya tebya lyublyu, Shane. I love you. So much.”

Their goodbye is brief, but Svetlana collects their empty cups and heads over to the dishwasher to give them a moment of privacy anyway. When she returns Ilyusha’s phone is back on the table, the screen dark, but he is smiling almost smugly as he watches Sveta take her seat again.

“So. You still think he is not good for me?”

“Oh, fuck off, Rozanov.”

Ilyusha laughs, and Sveta rolls her eyes, but she’s never been so happy to be wrong.

## **five.**

Troy knows that Rozy’s mystery girl is actually Shane Hollander.

He’s known since Troy came out to his captain, and his captain came out right back to him. Which, honestly, was one of the weirdest talks of his life. Rozy had shut the conversation down as soon as Troy mentioned Hollander, of course, and Troy didn’t press it. But he’d known.

Which is why he’s not entirely sure if he likes Shane Hollander anymore.

The guy is a legend of course, no one in the league comes close to his talent except for Rozy, and he’s basically Canada’s sweetheart. All-round nice guy, if you ask literally anyone. Kind, and fair, and charitable. Absolutely nothing at all to complain about. And he’s pretty fucking hot, too. He’s sure Harris would agree.

But Troy sees the way Ilya is fading.

He sees the way the spark he's always carried inside of him seems to be burning out, like he's no longer got the energy to keep it lit anymore. He's a great friend, an amazing hockey player, and an even better captain, but lately Rozanov just seems *tired*. It's like he's just going through the motions, surviving instead of really living; it's a difficult thing to watch. And he wants to know what the fuck Hollander is doing to cause it.

Or, even if he's not the cause of it, what the fuck he is doing to *stop* it.

Because if Troy can see it, and Ilya's partner can't, then there's something seriously fucked about that. Or, even worse, if Hollander *can* see it, but he doesn't care enough to do anything about it, then Troy is going to be pretty fucking mad.

His captain deserves better than someone who can't prioritise him.

Ilya hasn't been quite as bad lately. Not since their plane almost crashed, and they went on a winning streak that has propelled them into a playoff spot, but still.

Rozy's exhaustion doesn't seem like the regular, run-of-the-mill, season's end kind of exhaustion. It's like it permeates right down into his bones - like it's part of him. And Troy isn't sure what he's supposed to do about that.

He's tried to talk to Ilya, but he's not exactly the kind of person who opens up easily. And while he's considered messaging Hollander on instagram and giving him a piece of his mind, Troy knows that's an absolutely terrible idea. So. He doesn't know what other options are left.

Maybe he'll just leave it until after the playoffs.

They're in Montreal right now, for their last matchup of the season before they meet each other in the playoffs in just a few short weeks. And the fact that they're even going to the playoffs is a fucking miracle, so Troy doesn't really want to fuck with that if he can help it. He's not particularly superstitious, but his captain being pissed at him for overstepping isn't something he really wants to deal with. That can't be good for team morale.

Troy chews the side of his thumb in frustration as he wanders the halls of the Bell Centre. He's desperately searching for the Centaurs equipment manager because his preferred stick tape appears to be missing, but he can't find Dale anywhere. He's considering turning around, heading back to the locker room and just making do with a different kind of tape, when something catches his eyes.

Something that Troy *definitely* isn't supposed to see.

Because there, slotted into an alcove in an offshoot of the main corridor, are Rozy and Hollander. They're so close that their entire bodies are pressed together without an inch of space between them.

Hollander has one hand tangled in the chain that Cap always wears around his neck - the one that now has a ring on it, as well as his Russian orthodox cross, Troy had noticed not too long ago. Hollander's other hand is gently holding Ilya's face, his thumb brushing back and forth over Ilya's cheek, as Rozanov's arms wrap around Hollander's waist. It's intimate. Too intimate for Troy to be intruding on. But.

He watches anyway. Just for a moment. Just because he can't seem to look away.

"I miss you," Rozy says. "Anya misses you too."

Hollander laughs, his thumb and finger moving to pinch Rozy's chin and shake it back and forth gently. "I miss you too, baby. Both of you."

"Three weeks is too long. I can't do it again."

"I know. I know, Ilya. But it's not long now, right? Then we get all summer together. We won't have to hide soon."

He watches as Rozy's entire face somehow softens and lights up at the same time. And Troy realises quickly that Ilya's sadness, his loneliness, is absolutely *not* because of Hollander. It's clearly when he is *away* from him. Because Troy's captain looks deliriously in love as he swoops in and steals a kiss from Hollander.

Then Hollander - Shane - laughs, and kisses the mole on Rozy's cheek, and then his nose, his forehead, and his lips once again. And Ilya...Ilya fucking *blushes*.

Figuring he's seen more than enough, Troy backs up, tip-toeing away so as not to alert the happy couple of his presence.

And a little while later, when Rozy drops down in his stall beside Troy, he looks as happy as Troy has ever seen him. Like he's floating on cloud nine. Like Ilya's mood the last few months had simply been a figment of Troy's imagination. Because there's not a trace of loneliness on his face right now; not a single hint of sadness in his eyes.

"Are we ready to destroy them?" Cap calls out, and all the Centaurs cheer. "Let's make them cry!"

Troy shakes his head, and grins, then he follows his captain into battle.

**+one.**

The vibes are absolutely fucking electric as the Centaurs stumble into a bar after their first game of the season. Their first win, too.

Destroying the Voyageurs 6-1 on home ice is about as good of a start to their season as they could possibly get. They're all on cloud nine after beating Hollander's old team - after showing them exactly what happens to homophobes who step onto their ice, and exactly what they're missing out on after throwing Hollander away like he's not a generational talent.

Luca Haas still can't believe this is his life. That he gets to do his favourite thing in the world for a living. And that he gets to do it alongside some of the best players who have ever lived - the players who Luca used to have posters of on his wall when he was just a kid in Denmark, who could only dream of this - still blows his mind.

Rozanov *and* Hollander on his team? Man, he can't fucking believe it.

He slips into the booth between a last minute Latvian call-up, Kalniņš - Kally - and Troy. Rozanov slides in across from Luca, pulling Hollander in after him and placing him firmly on his lap. Shane rolls his eyes at the gesture, but he doesn't pull away, he simply leans back against Rozy's chest and relaxes into his husband's arms.

Luca grins. He loves seeing them together.

He remembers the Ilya of last season, who was withdrawn and sad and looked a lot like Luca did in his very first year in Canada, when he missed home more than anything in the world. Clearly his Captain was also missing home last season - he was missing *Shane* - because this version of Rozanov is happier than Luca has ever seen.

He has his husband sitting in his lap, and they just earned a massive win, and life is really fucking good.

"You all owe us both drinks," Rozy says, pointing his finger at each of them in turn. "Lots and lots of drinks."

Bood scoffs in disagreement. "Why *both* of you?"

"Yeah, Roz, it was Hollzy here that scored the hatty," Dykstra says, patting Hollander's arm until Ilya knocks his hand away with a glare.

"Because I am your captain and also his husband," Ilya says, as if that makes his argument airtight. "He played good because I sucked his dick good before the game."

"*Ilya*," Shane hisses, slapping his hand over his husband's mouth to silence him, as everyone else either laughs or groans.

Rozy clearly licks Shane's hand, because he grimaces and pulls it away quickly, wiping Ilya's saliva off onto his jeans. He juts his elbow backwards, aiming for Roz's ribs, but the Captain just laughs loudly and presses a smacking kiss to Shane's cheek.

"That, and I am the reason he is on this team."

"God, don't say that. They'll accuse us of tampering next," Hollzy huffs.

And while Luca knows both Ilya and Shane love and respect their careers enough to never break the rules, the sentiment still remains true: Hollander wouldn't be a Centaur if Rozanov wasn't one. He came here to be with his husband, and the entire team is going to spend the rest of their careers being grateful for that.

With the two best players that have probably ever lived on their team, they're not just playoff contenders. They're going to win the fucking cup.

"Fine. You get two drinks each, because you made my job easy tonight. Make 'em count," Wyatt concedes.

"That's what I'm talking about Hayesy. That's why you're my favourite."

"Ilya, you can't say that!" Shane scolds, and Ilya does a great job of pretending to look thoroughly chastised.

"Oh, I am sorry kótik. *You* are always my favourite, of course."

Everyone groans again, but it's an affectionate expression instead of a disapproving one.

They've known from the very first moment training camp started that the Captain and his husband, are, well, weird about each other. They're kind of obsessed, honestly. Luca genuinely wouldn't be surprised if they'd both had trackers implanted in their teeth like that old *Spy Kids* movie. They always seem to be touching each other or watching each other, and even when they're not, they still know where the other is at any and all times.

They're clingy, and possessive - Luca couldn't look either of them in the eyes for a week after they both showed up covered in scratches and hickeys - and probably a touch codependent, but Luca absolutely loves it.

"Are they *always* like this?" Kally leans over to ask, and Dillon and Holmberg both burst out laughing.

"Yes. Yes they are," Wyatt confirms, as he and Harris get up to fetch their drinks.

Shane blushes under the attention, but he doesn't shy away from it. He seems even more confident now, than he did in all the other seasons he's spent in the league. It's like finally being allowed to be open with Ilya has brought out a new side of him. And even though the way they were forced out of the closet was horribly unfair, they've both taken it in their stride.

The love they have for each other is absolutely palpable.

It's in the way they look at each other, and touch each other, and treat each other. It's especially in the way they talk about one another when the other isn't around, like the sun rises and sets with their husband. Like there's no one on earth that matters more. It's fucking adorable, honestly, though Luca would never dare say that to either of them for fear of getting bag-skated as punishment.

Luca had been surprised when they were first outed - that two of his idols were queer like him, and that they loved each other despite everything going against them - but the moment he saw them together, he knew they were the real deal.

The whole team did.

Their love for each other shines out of them both like sunbeams, brightening everything and everyone around them.

He's never even seen them fight. Not properly, at least.

They're competitive as hell, and will argue until they're blue in the face over who is fastest, who made the best shot, whose goal was the prettiest. And when Priya, their new social media intern, asks them the 'Question of the Day' to post online, they almost always give different answers to each other just to be contrary, and then bicker about it anyway. But the team has never seen them genuinely unhappy with each other.

They always show up to arena together, hand in hand, and they always leave together, too. Even if one of them has a physio appointment, or wants to run extra drills for a while, or is talking to their sports psychologist, the other always waits. They're inseparable, joined at the hip, happier than any married couple Luca has ever known.

As Kally begins to chat to him about tonight's game, Luca watches them out of the corner of his eye. He notices Ilya whisper into Shane's ear; Shane shakes his head at first, but Ilya says something else, then kisses the shell of his husband's ear, and then his neck, and finally Shane appears to give in.

Shane slides off Ilya's lap and then out of the booth, and Ilya quickly follows. He pulls out his wallet, throws down a wad of cash, and then grins.

"I am going home with my husband," Ilya announces. "You were incredible tonight, and I am very proud of you. You deserve to have fun, but please be sensible. Do not get too drunk. Get home safe."

"And don't drive," Shane interjects.

"Yes, listen to my very smart, very handsome husband: do not drive," Ilya repeats. "And also do not call us unless you are dying. We are going to be very busy."

"Boooooo!"

"You're gross!"

"Go home!"

Ilya blows them all a kiss, then grabs Shane's hand and drags him through the bar. Luca can't help but watch in awe until they've both disappeared through the door.

One day, Luca hopes he gets to have something as beautiful as Ilya and Shane have built together.

It's like they were made just to love each other.

End Notes

love you :)

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