

baby steps

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baby steps

by [luminvies](#)

Summary

[“Can you tell the camera how old you are?”

“I’m four!” Shane exclaims proudly, turning back and holding up four fingers in two peace signs, wiggling them at the camera. “I’m going to be the best four-year-old hockey player ever.”]

“You were so cute,” Ilya croons, reaching one arm out to sling it around Shane’s shoulders and pull him into his side, Shane grumbling all the while. “I love it that you were so very small. Even the jersey is too big! Is so wonderful.”

“Again, I think that all children go through a phase where they are very small,” Shane says, but he’s smiling by the time Ilya pokes one affectionate finger into his cheek, driving into his freckles. “Stop that.”

Ilya reacts to videos of Shane playing hockey as a child.

Notes

purely self indulgent

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

Yuna, because she does best what all mothers like to do, waits until both Shane and Ilya are gathered in one place before utterly humiliating her son in front of his boyfriend.

Dinner at the Hollander's is a jovial event, hosted at least once a month now that both Shane and Ilya are based in Ottawa. It's a much easier feat because they've moved in together, so once they've finished nighttime practice, they hop into the car and drive over to the parents' house. Shane is glad to be there, with all of the people he loves most in the world, since his parents are pretty chill.

Well, they usually are.

"Look what I found today in the storage," Yuna says after they've finished eating, sliding a large, shiny object across the table. Shane, immediately recognizing it, groans and attempts to grab the thing from her, but she swats his hand away.

"Fuck, Mom, you can't show him that," Shane tries to protest, but she only fixes him with a look, causing him to settle back into his chair, chastised. Once she gets her mind on something, there's no use trying to get her to change it. She's like a boulder gaining momentum as it tumbles down a hill—swift, unstoppable, and intent on making an impact. Attempting to stop her would probably make things worse or tear his arms off or something.

"I can do whatever I want with my belongings in my home," she says imperiously, flipping the object over to reveal that it's a camcorder. It's old, the technology is clearly outdated, and Shane hasn't thought about one of these in decades, not since they all got phones.

"What is on here that Shane hates so much?" Ilya asks, immediately interested in the camcorder, if only because he'd seen Shane's reaction. Shane only shakes his head, aware of the memories stored on the device and embarrassed by them.

"Let's all go to the living room, shall we?" Yuna says, making her way to the wide-screen television. Shane regrets buying her the very expensive gift some Christmases ago.

Ilya drags him up by the elbow, and they follow her to the couch, where she's kneeling by the cables to hook the camcorder up to the television. Almost immediately, the screen flickers to life, showing a grainy screencap from a video taken in 1995.

Shane swipes one hand over his face, but not quickly enough to miss the way a smile darts across Ilya's face at the sight, his features lifting in obvious delight.

"Shane! It is you! As a baby!" Ilya says, tearing his fingers away from his eyes and pointing to the television with great gusto. Projected there is a blurry little figure of a toddler decked out in slightly oversized hockey gear, crouching before the ice.

"Yes, I remember," Shane says, irritated, "since I was there." He doesn't actually remember the scene in detail, obviously, but he remembers flashes of what it was like to start in hockey as a small child—namely, the clean scent of the ice, the panic his first time out on the rink, and a random recollection of drinking snack bar hot chocolate on the benches. He loved it

immediately and wanted little else to do with anything that wasn't hockey. He's lucky that his parents supported him from the beginning.

"I thought this would be some fun bonding time," Yuna says, straightening and settling into an armchair to the side of them. "There are some fun memories here. I know Ilya will have fun."

"Yes, I will," Ilya says.

"It's, I don't know, embarrassing," Shane says, staring at the blue blob on the screen. The Shane of the time is smaller than the gate into the rink. This Shane had so many dreams. He wonders what he would think of how he turned out.

"There is no point being embarrassed by things that have already happened," says Ilya, swinging his hands out in a wiping gesture as if shoving away Shane's humiliation. "You cannot change it. So there is no point. Yuna, play the tapes."

"There are quite a few stored on here," Yuna says with a sense of wistful nostalgia.

"Wonderful," Shane says drily.

"Wonderful," Ilya repeats seriously. "Play them all."

[The camera shakes a little in the beginning before smoothing out as the video begins playing, though the tape is still grainy. It's good enough quality that Shane is unmistakable here, even with his back to the camera. He's wearing puffy pants and a hockey jersey that's just a little too oversized on him, the sleeves ending halfway down his hands.

Shane glances back, his doe eyes large and set above chubby cheeks. His hair, cut smartly around the ears, flops just slightly above his forehead. His lips part.

"Are you scared?" Yuna's voice is somewhere beyond the camera but distinctive even through the camera quality and the years set between the time of recording and the time of watching, and she sounds happy. "There's nothing to be scared of, Shane. I believe in you."

Shane shakes his head slightly, taking a wobbling step toward the rink. "I'm not scared," he tells them.

"That's good," Yuna says soothingly. "Look, I think your teacher is coming."

An older man comes skating to the barrier, kneeling at his knees as he unlocks the gate. "Hello, Shane—it is Shane, right?" he says. "It's so nice to meet you. I'm Roger. Are you ready to get onto the ice?"

Shane nods his head determinedly, bracing himself forward even as he doesn't take another step. "Yes, please."

“Well then, Shane, why don’t you take my hands, and I’ll lead you right on out here, okay?”

Shane complies, fitting his small, gloved hands within the man’s larger ones, and carefully, he leads him onto the ice, where Shane almost immediately teeters to one side, hunched over his tiny skates. Hand in hand, the instructor starts to lead them away from Yuna and David in small, backwards strokes. Shane’s feet wobble as they glide along the ice, and his gaze is trained to the ground, but he doesn’t fall.

“Look at him go,” comes Yuna’s voice from behind the camera. “That’s my little hockey player. I hope he becomes famous one day.”

“Yuna,” David says reproachfully.

“What?”

“The kid’s four. He barely weighs enough to keep a helmet on his head. How would he handle a dream like that at this age?”

“Oh, but look at how he loves the ice already,” Yuna says wistfully, and they both go quiet, the video zooming in on Shane as he slides across the rink, his hands still in the coach’s embrace. But as if sensing them, he glances back, just barely visible above the rink’s barrier, and he lifts one mittened hand, a broad smile at his face, to wave at his parents.

It’s cute until he immediately loses balance, twisting out of Roger’s grasp and landing heavily on his butt with a shocked expression on his face. Behind the barrier, Yuna and David dissolve into laughter, the recording shaking even as she tries to zoom in on Shane sitting slumped on the ice.

“Oh, don’t you worry,” Yuna says, this time speaking to the camera with a voice still trembling with amusement. “You’ll get up again, Shane.”

The video cuts to black.]

“You are so tiny,” Ilya says, wonder in his voice.

“Not the current me, no,” Shane says. “I’m actually pretty tall if you’re going by average conventions.”

“You,” Ilya says again, pointing at the screen with vigor and fixing Shane with a dead stare. “Very small.”

“I was four!” Shane exclaims. “I think all four-year-olds come in that size.”

“Don’t talk about children as if you order them in the mail,” Yuna chides. “But yes, Ilya, he was such a cute toddler, wasn’t he? Flopping all over the ice.”

“Yes,” Ilya acknowledges with a tilt of his head. “Technique is, eh, questionable. This is one of the league’s most valued players?”

“I’d like to see you skating when you were four,” Shane grumbles, folding his arms over his chest and sinking further back into the couch cushions. When he cuts a glare at Ilya at his side, he’s met only with a charming smile, the kind that melts his frown back into a begrudging pout.

“You were so cute,” Ilya croons, reaching one arm out to sling it around Shane’s shoulders and pull him into his side, Shane grumbling all the while. “I love it that you were so very small. Even the jersey is too big! Is so wonderful.”

“Again, I think that all children go through a phase where they are very small,” Shane says, but he’s smiling by the time Ilya pokes one affectionate finger into his cheek, driving into his freckles. “Stop that.”

“Did baby Shane have freckles, too?” Ilya directs the question to Yuna, who jumps out of the armchair to return to the camcorder.

“Not to fret,” she announces. “There are more videos.”

“Yay,” says Ilya. Shane rolls his eyes.

[This video takes place at the same hockey rink. Shane seems excited to be there, jumping and twisting around as much as his skates will allow and peering over the barrier into the ice. He’s wearing the same pants and a different, also oversized hockey jersey, but this time he has a helmet atop his head. It seems to be a little too big, the visor slipping around his eyes, but the camera still picks up his wide, beaming cheeks.

“What are you doing, Shane?” Yuna asks behind the camera.

“I’m going to play hockey,” Shane says, drawing out the word *hockey* so that it curls along his tongue. He twists his torso around so that his arms flap around him in his excitement. “On the ice. In my skates.”

“And how long have you been playing hockey?” Yuna says.

“Ummmmm,” Shane says. He appears to be thinking very hard, tapping a fat finger against his chin. “Three.”

Yuna stifles a laugh. “Three what?”

“Three,” Shane begins, and then he becomes visibly distracted when an older skater similarly decked out in hockey gear glides by on the ice, furiously skating down to the end of the line. “Whoa.”

“Can you tell the camera how old you are?”

“I’m four!” Shane exclaims proudly, turning back and holding up four fingers in two peace signs, wiggling them at the camera. “I’m going to be the best four-year-old hockey player *ever*.”

“You aren’t already the best?”

“I don’t think I am yet,” Shane says somberly. “Josh is really good, and he doesn’t fall as much.”

“That just means you have more experience bouncing back.”

Shane thinks about it for a moment. “Yeah. It’s my favorite thing in the world.”

Yuna pretends to gasp. “Your favorite in the world? I thought I was your favorite thing in the world!”

“Oh!” Shane looks shocked, his eyes going wide. “You are. You and Daddy. But… hockey is really fun.”

“I know it is,” Yuna says soothingly. “You can like both. And maybe you’ll like hockey enough to be the best player in Canada, how does that sound?”

Shane brightens, and he nods vigorously, the helmet also sliding down his face with his motions. “I will be the best ever, and then you can tell all your friends that I’m the best.”

“I already tell them that,” Yuna says, her smile audible in her voice. “You make me so proud.”

“Okay,” Shane says, visibly distracted. He’s looking to the side, his mouth slightly parted. On the rink, the teenaged hockey player from before weaves through cones, chasing a puck with his stick. “I’m gonna go now.”

“Say bye to the camera before you leave, Shane.”

“Bye-bye,” Shane says, flashing his mother one last cheeky smile before tottering off on his skates, trudging through the stadium until he touches down on the ice, taking to the frozen surface with an ease absent from the last video.

“Off he goes,” Yuna says proudly, and then the video cuts out.]

“And then he never came back,” Yuna sighs, pretending to wipe a faux tear from her eye. “Sons never look over their shoulders when they leave their mothers.”

“I was two hours away, and now I literally play for Ottawa,” Shane says, affronted. “I’m currently in your home.”

“Waste of my genes,” Yuna mourns.

“You were very cute,” Ilya says, which just about sums up everything he has said in the past fifteen minutes. When it comes from his mouth in particular, though, it sounds less like a compliment and more like a teasing remark. Shane doesn’t know what it is. Maybe it’s just his face.

“But maybe you are not the best,” Ilya adds. He waves a hand, his face contemplative. “Second, maybe, if you consider me.”

“I’ll revoke your Canadian citizenship, Ilya Rozanov,” Shane huffs, grabbing the pillow out from behind his back and chucking it with all his might at the other. Ilya wards off the blow with two crossed arms, emerging with an incredulous expression on his face.

“Yuna! My husband is abusive!”

“This is not the person I raised Shane to become,” Yuna says, shaking her head.

Shane snatches the remote control off the coffee table and presses play on the next video, knowing it’s the only way to shut them up.

[This video is short, and instead of taking place at the rink, it’s shot at what looks to be a kindergarten. Students of similar age to Shane mill about in the background, outfitted with colorful backpacks and metal lunchpails. Shane smiles expectantly at the camera, now a little older.

“What is today, Shane?” Yuna asks him from behind the camera.

“It’s the first day of school,” Shane recites obediently, his hands tucked behind his back politely.

“Did you like it?”

Shane thinks for a moment before nodding his head vigorously, eyes wandering to the sides of his vision. His tiny freckles are just barely visible with the sunlight washing over his face, illuminating the spots. “It was fun,” he says. “We had nap time and we drew and we did worksheets.”

“Oh?” Yuna says. “What did you do?”

“We were talking about what we want to be when we get old,” Shane says, turning to unhook his backpack from one of his arms and rifle through the pockets so he can produce a

crumpled piece of paper, holding it up to the camera. In barely legible writing, it says, *I want to be a hookey player*. “I said I wanted to play hockey.”

“Very nice, Shane. I’ll make sure to tell your dad.”

“Can we go home now?” Shane says, hurriedly shoving the paper back into his bag so he can beam at Yuna expectantly. “I have practice later.”

“Sure, hon,” Yuna says affectionately. The video ends.]

“What I’m gathering from this is that your mother loves you very much,” Yuna says.

Shane grins despite himself. She catches it, smiling back at him, eyes creasing in the corners. He hadn’t realized how many wrinkles she’d taken on until this moment. Part of him wishes that in all of these videos, Yuna had shown herself too, so that it wasn’t just his child self that was immortalized but both of them together.

“It is sweet,” Ilya says. When Shane looks to his side, the other is staring intently at the screen caught in a blurred capture of Shane, his smile up at his mother still visible even among the smear. Ilya’s face softens when he catches his stare and turns to him, his lips curving at the edges as he grabs Shane’s hand and squeezes it. They’re both thinking of the same person. It would be difficult not to.

A couple of years ago, Shane would have been more worried about Ilya and would have turned off the television entirely, but now that they’ve spent more time as a family—including Ilya—he knows that as much as Ilya misses Irina, he loves Yuna and David almost the same amount. It’s the people that sustain love who are important, dead or alive, and all Shane wants is for Ilya to be surrounded by as much love as he can possibly give him. He thinks they’re doing pretty well.

“Irina must have been a wonderful woman as well to see you succeed so much in hockey, even if you were young,” Yuna tells Ilya, smiling at him. “It takes a lot of love and devotion to fulfill your child’s dreams to the fullest. I would have loved to meet her.”

“I wish you could have,” Ilya says. He turns back to Shane. “She would be very entertained by these videos, too. She would also think that you are very small. And your hockey is so-so, but that is okay because—”

“Because I was five!” Shane bursts.

“—Because of that, yes. But actually, you are lucky I am not more like her, because she would have paused the video and printed out the screenshot to put it in a frame and keep it in the house. See? It could be worse.”

“Nightmare fuel,” Shane says, knowing in reality that he would have enjoyed every second of that if it meant getting to experience how it is to be loved by the same woman who loved Ilya into the person he is today.

“I can do it in her stead, if you like,” Ilya says, affecting a look of sincerity and placing one hand on his chest. “I think that baby Shane would look cute on our dresser.”

“He can’t watch us all the time!” Shane says, affronted. Ilya winks at him, and Shane slaps him on the arm. “Stop giving yourself ideas.”

“You are the one giving me the ideas,” Ilya points out, gesturing to the television once more. “I would be very flattered if I were you.”

“I’m not flattered,” says Shane. “I feel as though I’m being observed in an enclosure.”

“Perhaps,” Yuna says, skipping to the next video and hitting play.

[They’re in a car, David behind the wheel and Yuna in the passenger seat. She’s training the camera on the backseat, where Shane sits strapped into a booster car seat. He’s wearing his hockey gear with his short stick and his helmet gathered on the seat beside him. Despite the bright light streaming through the car windows, albeit streaky when the camera shakes with the road’s ministrations, Shane’s eyes are half-closed.

“Hello little Shane,” Yuna says warmly behind the camera. “How was practice?”

“Good,” Shane says sleepily, the word a little slurred as he tilts his head back against the cushion. His pink mouth opens into a small yawn, his arms folded into the oversized jersey going stiff as he stretches.

“Just good?” Yuna asks when it becomes apparent that he’s not going to say anything else. “You don’t want to tell Mommy anything else?”

“Hockey is fun,” Shane murmurs, the words barely audible. “I like it lots.”

Yuna stifles a small laugh. She pans the camera over to David. “Doesn’t he, hon?”

“We watched him chase himself nearly to death all over the rink today,” David tells the video, eyes sparkling humorously as he drives them forward. “I thought for sure he’d give up, and then he’d just pick himself up again. I think he expended enough energy to last five years.”

“Well, he’s falling asleep now,” Yuna says, fixing the camera on Shane once again. Half-asleep, he somehow looks even smaller than in the other videos, his stubby legs dangling off the edge of the car seat. “I don’t think we can get him to bed before eleven tonight if he sleeps all through the afternoon.”

“Oh, just let him,” David says fondly. “He’s earned it.”

On the screen, Shane blinks blearily as he tries to pick out what his parents are doing, but he's fighting to keep his eyes open. His head keeps falling forward sharply, only for him to jerk it back up confusedly.

"I want a grilled cheese when we get home," he mumbles. "With soup."

"You're going to fall asleep straight into your bowl, hon," Yuna says.

"Will not."

"I think so."

"I won't."

"You haven't even finished your yogurt drink because you're so tired."

Surprised, Shane looks down at the tiny bottle he'd stored between his legs and picks it up, downing the last dregs and showing the plastic to the camera. "Just did."

"And now you can't stay awake."

"Can too."

Yuna says, "If you can make it all the way home without falling asleep, I'll make hot chocolate too," but Shane is already asleep, his head tilted to the side against the seat, hair falling into his eyes. The emptied bottle clatters to the floor, the thin plastic letting out a tinny sound. He looks happy, his forehead smooth and clean, his plump lips parted in a partial yawn, his cheeks awash with the faintest freckles.

"Guess I'm off the hook," says Yuna, and then the video ends.]

For the first time since they put on the videos, Shane can't read the expression passing over Ilya's face, but it doesn't leave, settling into the cracks. Shane looks at him for a long moment, unable to parse him.

Oblivious to it, Yuna sighs and gets to her feet, tossing the remote control onto the couch between them. "I'm old now, so I have to get ready to go to bed, but feel free to stay down here as long as you want. If you're still here when we go to sleep, make sure to lock up on your way out, okay?"

"Sure thing, Mom," Shane says, flashing her a quick smile as she stops to briefly squeeze his shoulder before heading out of the room. "Goodnight."

"Night, Shane, Ilya."

Ilya turns to murmur a quick goodbye before she's gone completely, her footsteps dissipating into the rest of the house. He shuffles closer to Shane, collapsing the distance between them entirely to pull Shane into his weight by the shoulders, turning him into his chest and pressing a kiss onto the top of his head.

Confused, Shane obeys. "Is something up?" he says, his eyes trained upward but still unable to see Ilya's face in whole. Mostly, he can only see his childhood self asleep on the screen, paused in the middle of a snore.

"No," Ilya says. One hand moves across Shane's back to find its way to his front, where he mindlessly runs his thumb on Shane's cheek. "These videos are very cute. I like them a lot. It makes me wish that I met you when we were young."

"What, younger than eighteen?" Shane teases. "You can't really get any more junior than that."

"No, I guess not," Ilya says. He sounds a little distant, but that could just be Shane, though he has a growing concern that something has happened, or Ilya is thinking through something that he'll soon let him in on. He always does. "We were already very young. Maybe too young. It would have been too much to go through that at that age."

"Go through what?" Shane says, shifting a little so he can get a better picture of Ilya's face. "What are you talking about?"

"You already had such big dreams when you were five," Ilya says. "But I do not think that any of them included anybody like me."

"Ilya," Shane says. Above him, Ilya is staring straight ahead, gaze trained at the television. His gentle touch on Shane's cheek doesn't leave, but it does still.

"It is endlessly complicated," Ilya says softly, "to love a man."

Shane merely looks at him, his throat feeling too thick to speak.

"I look at you on the screen and think that I have ruined his dreams in a way that he will never expect," Ilya continues. He still hasn't looked down at Shane, his face awash in the pale light of the television, stark against the damply lit room. "He loves hockey so much. You still do. But we cannot undo what it means to be you and me, cannot undo Montreal, Boston, Ottawa. Or Crowley. I do not want to. I will never give you up while you still want me. But he is so pure that it makes me sad."

"I love you, you know that?" Shane says. Ilya nods almost imperceptibly. He doesn't need to be told it to know it, not anymore, but Shane likes saying it. "I could never have stopped myself from loving you, I think. If this is what it means to be ruined, then I'll follow you all the way to hell. Sure, when I was a kid, I didn't expect any of this, right? But I don't think anybody would. That wouldn't have stopped me from realizing that I'm gay. That kid on the screen was gay even when he didn't know it and pretended to like Susie from homeroom. If he was pure then, then I'm still me now."

Shane swallows, bringing one hand up to rest his fingers against the sharp cut of Ilya's jawline, finally coaxing his gaze back to him. "You're right, I loved hockey with everything that I had, and I still do. My heart is big enough to love the sport and you and take all the cruelty from this world without caving in. When I was little, all I cared about was making it big, but now the thing I care for most in my life is you. You are everything, and you are hockey, and you are my future, and with every day, you become more of my past. I don't think my dreams have gotten any smaller. If anything, I think they're still growing the longer I'm here with you."

Ilya bends down so that his face is buried in Shane's hair, eyelashes fluttering closed in the light. "I would have never dreamed this in Russia," he says heavily, each word a stone flung into the endless blue depths. "I didn't think that I could. Do you remember that you once asked me if loving each other felt as though it was killing us?"

Slowly, Shane dips his head. Ilya presses a kiss against the top of his head, speaking right into his skin. "It's like living," he says. "It's like stepping into every new day, looking for you."

"I'm here," Shane says. He squeezes one hand on Ilya's arm, then points to the screen once more. "I think he would be happy to know that I could find a home in somebody who loves hockey as much as he does. I think that's all he cares about, even if he didn't know he would find someone like you. I'm glad I did."

"I am happy we found each other," Ilya whispers. He squeezes his arm tightly around Shane, pulling him in tightly enough that he can't dream of letting go. "You are the best thing to happen to me."

There is nothing that Shane could want more than this. Maybe not even hockey. Maybe for him, his entire life has always been about love, whether he loves hockey or whether he loves Ilya. Especially because he loves Ilya.

"But I am going to get these videos from your mother, and then I am going to print out photos and put them around our house," Ilya continues.

Shane tenses. "No you are not. I forbid it."

"It's not my fault that I love you so much," Ilya teases, and Shane sighs. He supposes Ilya is right. Neither of them is mistaken for all of the sordid details, the debauched affairs, the secrets buried deep into hotel bedsheets, but they can take responsibility for the free fall, for loving each other so deeply they can bet a lifetime on it.

End Notes

he's my baby girl i've never felt so deranged about a character

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