

i find you every time, this little light of mine

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by [justhockey](#)

Summary

Shane is the steady ground he stands upon, the hand that guides him, the very air that he breathes. They're so entwined now, that Ilya is certain he would cease to exist if ever they were separated.

It's maybe becoming a problem.

Or, 5 times Ilya and Shane try (and fail) not to be codependent, and 1 time they just give into it.

Notes

Title from *Little Light* by Semler.

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

1.

Ilya's husband is the most beautiful person in the world.

He's never been happier than he is now. Every morning since they said *I do*, Ilya wakes up more in love than he had been when he fell asleep. He doesn't know how it's possible, how there's still room inside of his chest for that love to keep growing. Every day he thinks *surely I can't love him more than this*, and every day he is proven wrong.

His love for Shane is the biggest thing in every room that he walks into. It swells and expands to fit every crack, and crevice, and empty corner. There's no part of his life that isn't completely consumed by how much he loves his husband.

Shane is the steady ground he stands upon, the hand that guides him, the very air that he breathes. They're so entwined now, that Ilya is certain he would cease to exist if ever they were separated.

It's maybe becoming a problem.

Not for Ilya, of course. And not for Shane, either. They've spent over a decade loving each other from afar, and now they're making up for lost time. They'd stitch their skin together if they could, crawl beneath each other's ribs, burrow into each other's bones. Still, even now, it feels like they can't possibly get close enough to each other.

They haven't quite learned how to be apart again, and - quite frankly - Ilya never plans to.

Since the playoffs ended for both of them, since their wedding, since the honeymoon, they haven't spent more than an hour or two away from each other at any one time. If they go longer than a couple of hours without touching, Ilya starts to get an itchy, prickling sensation beneath the surface of his skin. And, as if by magic, Shane always appears shortly after to soothe it, like he was starting to feel the discomfort too.

They're a little worried, though, that not everyone will necessarily appreciate that. Namely, their teammates.

The Centaurs have welcomed Shane with open arms, both as the hockey legend *Shane Hollander*, and also Ilya's husband, Shane Hollander-Rozanov. It took a couple of team get-togethers for Shane to truly allow himself to settle in with them, to trust that they won't turn on him like the Metros did, but now it kind of feels like he's always been a part of their mismatched family.

With their first training camp just around the corner, though, they figure some ground rules need to be put in place. Or, *Shane* figures some ground rules need to be put in place, and Ilya simply does whatever his husband asks of him.

"I'm just saying, I think it's for the best."

"Sure."

“We’ll be at work, Ilya.”

“I know.”

“So we have to remain professional,” Shane insists.

And Ilya is listening - he swears - but he’s lying on his side in their bed, looking up at his very sexy husband who is wearing his very sexy glasses, and it’s just a little bit hard to focus.

“Are you even listening to me?” Shane asks, a single eyebrow raised as he looks down at Ilya from where he’s leaning back against the headboard.

“I’m listening, sweetheart,” Ilya promises.

“So what did I say?” Shane tests him, a smug smirk playing around the corners of his mouth.

“You were listing your stupid *hands off* rules for when we’re around the team,” Ilya groans painfully.

“They’re not stupid!”

Ilya suddenly feels too far away from his husband, even though there’s barely a foot of space between them. He wriggles around so he can place his head in Shane’s lap and still look up at him. The position makes Shane smile softly, and his hands instantly sink into Ilya’s curls so he can scratch his scalp exactly the way Ilya likes it.

“Fine, okay. Not stupid,” Ilya agrees. “I will be good at training camp.”

Shane narrows his gaze. “You promise?”

Ilya puckers his lips in search of a kiss. Shane rolls his eyes fondly, and leans down to give Ilya exactly what he’s asking for. He gives him one, two, three little kisses, and Ilya hums in contentment.

“I promise,” Ilya finally says.

Shane kisses him one more time, like he’s rewarding a dog for good behaviour.

Ilya gets where he’s coming from. Training camp, the arena, practices and games - those are their work environments. And while Ilya firmly believes he should be allowed to kiss his husband whenever he wants to, he does actually appreciate that they’re still professional athletes who need to act accordingly.

Unlike Shane, he isn’t worried about making the guys uncomfortable - isn’t worried that they’ll take back their support as easily as they gave it. But he does get why Shane has his reservations, and he (mostly) gets that keeping their hands to themselves is for the best.

He’s still allowed to hate it, though.

“Are we allowed to sneak off to the bathroom for-“

“*Baby*,” Shane laughs, shaking his head like he can’t believe how ridiculous his husband is, and also like he can’t believe how much he loves him.

“Is that a yes?”

Shane kisses Ilya again. He’s not sure if that’s a yes or no, but he doesn’t really care once he gets Shane beneath him.

They do well at first.

So well, in fact, that at one point Bood pulls Ilya to the side to check that everything is good between him and Shane.

The team has already seen them all clingy and in love at the wedding, and at one of Bood’s barbecues, and at a bar crawl they went on for LaPointe’s birthday. So this new, professional version of Ilya and Shane clearly comes as a little bit of a surprise. Once Ilya explains what’s going on, though, Bood stops looking so concerned and the team really gets down to business.

There’s no kissing, no hugs, no public displays of affection at all. Shane occasionally taps his stick against Ilya’s shin after a particularly good drill, or Ilya will pat Shane’s helmet after a stellar pass, but they manage to keep their hands to themselves.

They’re killing the whole *professional* schtick.

And if after the first day of camp they don’t even make it out of the car before Shane is climbing into Ilya’s lap, well. The garage door is shut. It’s no one else’s business but their own.

But by day three of camp, Ilya feels like he is vibrating out of his skin.

He remembers the years of All Star Games and NHL Awards ceremonies where he had to be in close proximity to Shane without ever being allowed to touch him. He remembers the foundation meetings, and the galas, and the press conferences, where all he ever wanted to do was hold Shane, kiss him, claim him in front of everyone.

Those had felt like torture, but this feels like a close second.

Because everyone here knows that they’re married, everyone knows that they’re in love. Shane had drunkenly sat in Ilya’s lap at Bood’s barbecue, and Luca had found them making out in a bar bathroom on LaPointe’s birthday. And yet Ilya still has to refrain. Still has to hold back from what he truly wants.

Ilya *could* just grab his husband and kiss him breathless - he *could*, but he won’t.

He wouldn’t ever push Shane’s boundaries, not about this. His husband’s comfort means more to Ilya than anything else, even his own, feral, uncontrollable desire to just *touch* whenever Shane is close, like Ilya still can’t quite believe it’s something he’s allowed.

So Ilya is good. He's *so* fucking good. He keeps his hands to himself, and keeps his flirting to the absolute minimum, even though he can't resist a, "*Looking good sweetheart,*" after an insane goal, and an, "*I love you most,*" as the team is filtering off the ice.

And even though Ilya's hands might be aching from all the time he's clenched them into fists to stop himself from reaching for Shane, it's worth it. All of it is worth it to keep him happy.

It's not even Ilya breaks the rules, in the end. He's exceptionally smug about that fact.

They whole has team has just gone through a bunch of warm ups on the ice, when Coach starts separating them into two groups for a scrimmage. Maybe it's luck, or maybe it's Wiebe already picking up on the insane on-ice chemistry between Shane and Ilya, but they end up being shuffled off to the right on the same team.

They're all skating around, waiting for further instructions, when Ilya catches the tip of his blade on the ice. He doesn't go down, but the motion makes his skate feel oddly out of place.

He goes down onto one knee, dropping his skate and gloves on the ice beside him. He's halfway through untying his lace so he can do it all over again, when a familiar pair of Bauer skates glide into his sight. Shane stops on his edges, spraying Ilya with snow.

Ilya looks up at his husband with a raised brow. "Can I help you?"

Shane scrunches his nose. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just re-tying my lace. Why?"

"Nothing," Shane answers quickly. Then, "I thought something was wrong."

Ilya can't help the grin that spreads across his face. "Ah, so you were worried about me."

Shane scoffs. "No," he insists, but Ilya knows he's lying.

Now that they're married, a new addition to their relationship is just how protective Shane is of Ilya.

It's always been there, of course, right since the very beginning. It was in the way Shane handled the media during their first All Star Game, when they asked verbose, complex questions that stretched Ilya's grasp of the English language. When he pressed Ilya for honesty on the roof in Vegas, and in the hotel room, too. When he text and text, and then finally called after Ilya's dad died, and when he refused to leave Ilya alone even when he was thousands of miles away.

It was in the way Shane did everything to protect their secret, and to protect Ilya from the consequences of it. From *Russia*.

So it's not exactly *new*, but it comes out in different ways now. Ilya gets to see it a little more up close and personal now that they're together 24/7.

It's Shane walking on the outside of the sidewalk, and holding the car door open for Ilya, then putting a hand on his head when he climbs in so he doesn't bump it. It's the way Shane steps in to shield Ilya from journalists' invasive questions about Russia, or the way he always has a spare hoodie on hand because he knows Ilya runs cold.

It's Shane sliding up behind Ilya at the bar when they were on their honeymoon, and wrapping an arm around his waist to show everyone Ilya is taken.

It's in this: the furrow of his brow and the scrunch of his nose, as he skates over to check if Ilya is okay. That he isn't hurt and hiding it.

"You were worried," Ilya claims. "You loveeee me."

"Fuck off," Shane snorts.

He rolls his eyes, quickly looking away from Ilya because they both know that if he doesn't, he'll kiss him.

It makes Ilya a little bit insane, the way that Shane loves him. Now that they're allowed, it's big and loud and all consuming. But even before, when they still had to hide, Shane never let Ilya feel anything less than completely adored. And it's so fucking precious to Ilya, that he gets this version of Shane - the version who is clingy, and bitchy, and affectionate, and mean. He gets every side of him, because Shane never has to hide around Ilya.

And here, down on one knee in the middle of the ice, Ilya feels so overcome with love that he simply can't help himself.

"Hey, Shane?"

Shane reluctantly looks back, a barely concealed grin on his face before Ilya even says anything. But then Ilya is taking the chain from around his neck, pulling it off over his head, and holding up the ring on the end of it.

"Will you marry me?" He asks, his eyebrows wiggling up and down.

Shane giggles, loud and bright, and his cheeks fill with colour. "Get up, you loser."

"Come on, Hollzy, don't leave your man hanging," Wyatt taunts.

"He's baring his heart over here," Troy adds.

Shane laughs again, shaking his head in disbelief at Ilya's theatrical antics. It's clear he doesn't mind, though. He's not mad at Ilya for breaking their rules. Instead, he leans down, cups Ilya's face between his hands, and kisses him on the forehead.

"I'd marry you a million times over," he whispers, just for Ilya to hear.

They win the scrimmage.

After that, it quickly becomes a sort of routine. Shane - who swears he's not superstitious even though he wakes up at the same time, wears the same brand of socks, leaves the house at the same time, and eats the same meal before every single game - keeps kissing Ilya on the forehead.

And before their very first game together as Centaurs - and, more importantly, as *husbands* - Shane kisses Ilya's forehead in the tunnel, before they head out onto the ice to the sound of thunderous applause.

They beat Montreal 4-1.

2.

Ilya's body aches.

They're only a week into the season, and he's already bruised to fuck. It's not uncommon, but it feels a little worse this season than it ever has done before. It feels *targeted*. It's not every team, not every player, but the hits feel bigger and more personal this season. The slurs hissed in quiet tones, behind gloved hands, when they're battling in the corner and no one else can hear - they're *definitely* personal.

It's...whatever. Ilya isn't particularly bothered by it, and while he's convinced Shane is gonna drop the gloves with someone before the month is out, he's handling it well, too.

Mostly, they don't care because no one else's opinion on their relationship matters to them. Ilya had expected it to take Shane a while to get to that place, but he arrived there pretty damn quickly. He's unflinching in the face of people's judgement - mostly, though sometimes he curls up against Ilya and just needs to be held - and he's unwavering in his love for Ilya.

He feels so fucking proud of his husband that he couldn't burst.

The bus taking them from the Admiral's arena to the hotel is rambunctious. The Centaurs' season has only just begun but they haven't lost a game yet, and beating Hunter in his own barn always a little extra kick to it. Once upon a time, Ilya would be itching for a night out in New York - especially on the first road game of the season - but tonight, all he wants to do is get into his hotel room and-

Fuck.

Or, *not* fuck, as the case may be. Because-

"Shane, sweetheart, are you sure-"

"I'm sure," Shane answers, before Ilya can even finish asking the question.

He's leaning back against the headrest, but he turns to his left so he can look at Ilya.

Ilya's pouting. He knows he pouting, and he knows it makes him look childish, but he just can't help himself. *Anyone* would pout if their loving husband told them he didn't want them to sleep together anymore. This feels like an especially cruel and unusual punishment.

“We already broke the no PDA at work rule,” Ilya reminds him.

Shane laughs. He raises his hand and brushes his thumb along Ilya’s pouty bottom lip. “Exactly. Which is why we can’t break another.”

“But we’re the ones who *made* the rules, so technically-“

“If the guys can’t bring their partners on road trips...”

Ilya briefly bites down on Shane’s thumb, then groans when he releases it from between his teeth. “I know, I know. But their partners aren’t also their teammates,” Ilya says. “And they’re not as hot as you.”

Shane laughs again. He leans forward, their noses bumping as he rests his forehead against Ilya’s. They’re in the middle of the team bus, surrounded by their friends-slash-colleagues, and yet Shane is still being so sweet it makes Ilya’s teeth ache.

He doesn’t ever want to pull away. He doesn’t ever want to be any further from Shane than he is right in this moment.

“We can do one night apart.”

Ilya whines. “But it’s not one night, is it? Because it’s tomorrow night, and the night after, and-“

“-then we’re back home, and you get me alllll to yourself.”

“But what about the roadies that are longer?”

Shane takes Ilya’s chin between his fingers and insists, “Baby, we’ll survive.”

And he’s looking at Ilya with those big, brown, bottom eyes of his, so what exactly is Ilya supposed to do? Argue? No, thank you.

They follow their usual routine when they arrive at the hotel. Their gear bags aren’t their problems on roadies, they have an incredible team of staff to worry about all of that, and their other bags are already in their rooms, so all that’s left to do is head on up to sleep.

“You coming out tonight, Cap?” Young asks, his entire body almost vibrating with leftover adrenaline from the came.

“Not tonight,” Ilya bows out.

“Ohhhh, I see,” Wyatt says, “you and Hollzy have...plans.”

“No, they’re in separate rooms, remember?” Luca points out.

Wyatt snorts. “Yeah, sure. We’ll see how long that lasts.”

“I’m going to *sleep*,” Ilya says, “and you fuckers should, too. We’ve got an early flight tomorrow.”

He gets a jumbled chorus of bitching and moaning in response.

Ilya just flips them off, then takes his husband’s hand and pulls him along towards the wall of elevators. They’re on the same floor, at least, so it’s not like they’re too far apart. And like Shane said, it’s only a few nights. Ilya can totally handle that. *He can*.

They elevator chimes as it arrives, and they both step into it. Just as the door starts closing Choui rushes forward to try and catch it. But, in retaliation for his god-awful music choices in the locker room today, Ilya waves at him through the gap as he lets the doors slide closed.

Shane snickers. “You’re mean.”

“Hmm. Yes. But you like me anyway.”

“Oh, do I?” Shane taunts.

Ilya tugs on his hand, turning Shane so he’s facing him, and he goes so easily. Always pliant, when Ilya manhandles him. Slowly, Ilya starts to back Shane up, up, up, until he’s pressed against the wall, caged in by Ilya’s arms on either side of him.

There’s barely an inch of difference in their heights, but Shane still manages to look up at Ilya through his lashes with those devastating *fuck me* eyes. Ilya can’t resist. He leans down and steals a kiss, slow and tender and just filthy enough to hint at what’s on offer, if only Shane was willing to break their rules just a little.

Ilya’s husband melts, his game-weary body sagging against Ilya’s as he fucks Shane’s mouth with his tongue. Shane is so responsive, so eager, and his hands slide up Ilya’s stomach and chest, over his shoulders, and around the back of his neck. Shane tugs on Ilya’s curls, holding him close as they kiss and kiss and-

Ilya steps back, right before the elevator *dings* and the doors slide open.

They’re both breathless when they step out onto their - thankfully empty - floor. Shane’s room is to the right, and Ilya’s is to the left, and the thought of walking in opposite directions right now makes Ilya feel nauseous.

“Are you gonna invite me into your room, Hollander?”

“It’s Hollander-*Rozanov*,” Shane corrects him, with a smirk and a gentle shove to his sternum, “and you play dirty.”

“Yes, I do,” Ilya admits proudly. “Did it work?”

For a moment, Shane looks torn.

He *wants* to share a room, Ilya has no doubt about that, but he’s still trying to cling onto some semblance of “professionalism”. Ilya’s not entirely sure why - it’s not like they’re ever

inappropriate while at the rink, not like they're ever really *unprofessional* at all - but he understands that it's important to Shane. Understands why he feels the need to be completely beyond reproach.

Shane shakes his head. He grabs the tie Ilya is still wearing and tugs on it, pulling Ilya close enough for him to kiss again.

Then he says, "No. But good try."

"Shane--"

"Goodnight, Ilya. I'll see you in the morning."

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Ilya asks, gripping Shane's waist as he starts pulling away.

Shane smiles and kisses Ilya again. "Like I could *ever* forget," he says softly, his eyes glistening with affection. "I love you, baby. Better?"

"Hm. Yes. I love you, too."

In his room, Ilya flops onto his bed and groans far too dramatically considering how thin these hotel walls are.

He's got a bruise the size of a small country on his ribs, in tonight's game Scott fucking Hunter had the absolute *audacity* to tell Ilya he "*checks like he's getting old*", and Ilya's perfect, sexy husband is sleeping in a room down the hallway, instead of pressed along Ilya's back like he's supposed to be.

For such a great start to the season, Ilya is pretty fucking cranky.

He can't wait to play Montreal again; he's gonna drop the gloves with the first player who looks at him wrong, for what they've done to Shane.

Because it's not just the heartbreak of leaving behind the team he wanted to retire with, or the devastation of realising he was being abandoned by the people he thought were his friends, it's also *this*; the way he hesitates to trust a good thing, the way he's always waiting for the day the Centaurs decide Shane and Ilya are too much and turn their backs on them.

It's never going to happen. Ilya knows it, and Shane will too, eventually, but for now, it fucking sucks that he's still bracing for impact.

Ilya drags himself through his nighttime routine, his only motivation being that the sooner he goes to sleep, the sooner he gets to wake up and see his husband again. He washes and moisturises his face, brushes his teeth, and coats his bruised ribs in the cream Terry gave him. Then Ilya finally crawls into his cold, empty bed - the first time he's been alone in one in months - and checks his phone one last time.

Shane💕:

Goodnight, my baby. I love you❤️

Ilya:

Goodnight, sweetheart. I love you more❤️

Ilya is smiling as he plugs his phone into charge, and flicks off the bedside lamp. He can do this. Just eight-or-so hours and then they'll be curled up together on a plane, on their way to North Carolina.

It'll be easy. No trouble at all.

Two hours later, however, Ilya is still wide awake. He's tossed and turned, and tossed again. He's tried sleeping on his left side and his right side, and his stomach and his back. He's tried to the right side of the bed, and the left side of the bed, and right down the middle. He's even tried jerking off, to no avail.

Unfortunately, no matter what he does, there's a distinct lack of *Shane* that simply will not allow him to sleep.

He huffs as he checks his phone for the hundredth time. Barely five minutes have passed since the last time he looked. In fact, it genuinely feels like time is somehow going backwards.

It would be selfish, to get out of bed and sheepishly knock on Shane's door. He knows that. It's why he's spent the last two hours talking himself out of it. Shane is probably fast asleep, dreaming about Ilya's cock or something equally delightful, and the last thing he needs is Ilya disturbing him.

Seven minutes later Ilya is raising a fist to knock on Shane's door.

He only does it quietly, so that way if Shane really is asleep it won't wake him up. But not even ten seconds after Ilya knocks, there's the sound of muffled footsteps behind the door.

When it swings open Shane is standing there, squinting against the bright light of the hallway. He's wearing a pair of boxers and one of Ilya's hoodies, and his glasses are perched on the edge of his nose.

"Hey, sorry, I just--"

"Oh, thank *god*," Shane grumbles.

He reaches a hand out, fists it in Ilya's t-shirt, and drags him inside.

The second the door is closed behind them, Shane is stepping forward and burrowing into Ilya's arms like he's trying to find a way beneath his ribs. As Ilya holds him tightly he hears Shane sigh, and feels all the tension in his body draining out of him. Ilya's body does the same, though, and he relaxes for the first time since they parted ways.

Ilya keeps holding him tightly with one arm, while he moves the other upwards so he can cradle the back of Shane's head. Ilya feels a puff of warm air against his skin as Shane nuzzles his nose into Ilya's neck.

"I missed you," Shane mumbles.

"Missed you too," Ilya says, kissing the top of his head. "You couldn't sleep either?"

Shane doesn't speak, he just shakes his head. The lamp beside his bed is switched on, and his book is open, splayed face down on the nightstand like he'd been reading when Ilya knocked on the door.

It's a strange comfort to know Shane was struggling with the sleeping arrangements as well. Ilya doesn't want his husband to be cranky and sleep deprived, but it's nice to be reminded that he's as insane about Ilya as Ilya is about him.

"Can I sleep in here?"

Shane nods again. "Yes, please."

They make their way over to the bed, where all the sheets are rumpled and the pillows are skewed, like Shane had been tossing and turning as well. They crawl in beside each other and Shane flicks off the light. In the darkness, Ilya reaches for Shane, and Shane wriggles closer closer *closer*; until Ilya can make out his features and smell his toothpaste.

He closes the last bit of distance between them and bumps their noses together. Shane hums softly, and threads their fingers together beneath the sheets.

"Kiss me?" He pleads so politely.

So Ilya kisses him. There's no intention behind it, they're both far too exhausted for that, but the kiss is slow and sweet like honey, and they both smile into it.

"We tried," Ilya murmurs. "Now can we please room together from now on?"

Shane nods instantly. "Yes. Definitely. I can't sleep without you, you've ruined me."

Ilya chuckles, and kisses the tip of Shane's freckled nose. "That was my plan."

From the moment Shane stuck his hand out for him to shake in a dreary Saskatchewan parking lot, Ilya has wanted him. He might not have known back then that they'd end up here, but he thinks his heart did. He thinks they were always destined for this. There's no world where they don't find each other, no world where they don't fall in love.

Damn right, Shane is ruined for anyone else; there's not a chance in hell Ilya would let another man get close to his husband. He'd burn the whole fucking world down first.

"Turn over," Shane says, nudging Ilya. "Wanna spoon you."

Ilya steals one more kiss, then he obeys his husband's command. He rolls onto his other side, then sighs as Shane's arms wrap around Ilya and tug him back into his chest. He rests his hand over Shane's, where it's possessively pressed against his stomach, and slips his fingers into the gaps between Shane's.

His husband kisses Ilya on the back of his neck, then squeezes him tightly.

"Love you," Shane mumbles. "Say it back."

"Love you, sweetheart. Sleep well."

They're almost late the next morning because Ilya has to rush back to his room to pack. When they finally drag their exhausted asses downstairs and the team sees them both arriving together, they let out a cheer.

Money definitely exchanges hands, but Ilya is too tired to quiz them about it. He falls asleep on Shane's shoulder on the plane to North Carolina.

They never sleep in separate rooms again.

3.

It all started in the locker room, as so many terrible ideas do.

They're winding down after a morning practice, all changing slowly like they have nowhere better to be today. Which, fine, sure, the guys can do whatever they want, but Ilya would very much like to take his husband out for lunch, and unfortunately he takes the 'last guy in the locker room' thing very seriously.

So Ilya is sitting in his stall as Boob distracts Shane for the millionth time - his husband is dressed in a pair of Ilya's sweats and nothing else, currently - and Wyatt keeps trying to convince Luca to draw his own comic strip, and LaPointe is *still* talking about the girl he met in LA last month.

With the end of the regular season almost in sight, and the Centaurs sitting firmly in a playoff spot, the conversation naturally shifts to weddings. Everyone knows hockey players get married between the months of June and August - and they try and schedule their babies then, too - so invites to bachelor parties and weddings start showing up in everyone's mail around about now.

Ilya's already had four, and Shane has had seven. He's not gonna inspect those numbers too closely.

"Is anyone else going to Samsonov's bachelor party?" Barrett asks the room.

A chorus of *me's* fills the room, including Ilya and - slightly more reluctantly - Shane. It's gonna cut into their cottage time during the off season, unfortunately, but Sammy is a notoriously good guy around the league, and has been really vocal in his support for Ilya and Shane since they were outed, so the least they can do is show up for him.

“At least it’s not a destination bachelor party,” Wyatt says. “Last summer I went to one in Finland. Why the fuck would you have a bachelor party in Finland when you’re from Nebraska?”

The room laughs, and then Bood says, “Mine was downtown because Cassie vetoed the Vegas suggestion.”

“As she should, you’re shit at poker,” Shane chirps him.

Everyone laughs, and it makes Shane’s smiler brighten. Ilya can barely drag his eyes away.

Shane has settled in so easily over the last few months - this team is his, now, more than Montreal ever truly was. Because they love him, and accept him, and they don’t shun him when he isn’t perfect (he’s always perfect, thank you very much) or wince when he’s affectionate with Ilya.

They love his chirps, too, and finally, *finally*, there are people other than Ilya who know that *The* Shane Hollander is an asshole, because this room is safe enough for him to show that side of himself.

It’s fucking great.

“Fuck off, Hollzy,” Bood laughs. “What was *your* bachelor party like?”

“Oh, we didn’t have one.”

The room goes silent.

One by one the whole team turn to look at Shane and Ilya, their brows furrowed and mouths slightly agape.

“What?” Ilya asks.

“You guys never had bachelor parties?” Luca asks, horrified.

“...obviously not? Or you guys would have been invited?”

This team genuinely are his friends. Not just colleagues, not just people that he tolerates in a professional capacity. For Ilya, who has always been short on family, they feel like that to him. Other than Cliff and Sveta, they would have made up his entire bachelor party. If he’d had one.

“But - but *why*?” Young questions.

Shane shrugs, swaying slightly to bump his arm against Ilya’s.

“I mean, it was all pretty chaotic,” Shane explains. “We got outed, and then there was the playoff stuff, and then we got married pretty quickly. There wasn’t really time for that kind of stuff.”

Ilya would have loved a bachelor party. Would have loved to go out with his fiancé and their friends, getting drunk, getting to celebrate the start of the rest of his life with the man he has loved since he was eighteen years old. Not a last night of freedom, but the last night before he entered the family that wanted him.

But with everything else, it didn't even really cross their minds.

For Ilya and Shane, getting married was the most important thing to them; everything else was just noise.

"We just wanted to get married," Shane says softly.

And Ilya - well. In his opinion, he shows great restraint. Because instead of carrying his husband out of there like a caveman, he simply leans over and kisses him.

Shane hums softly, leaning into the kiss instead of pulling away from it. They don't kiss at work, aside from their forehead kiss ritual, so it makes Ilya's chest feel fizzy that Shane is allowing it. No shame, no hesitation, just Shane publicly loving his husband.

"Right, yeah, no. That's great, guys. Love wins, and everything," Choui says. "But you still need bachelor parties."

"I don't think that's neces--"

"So, what I'm thinking is..." Bood interrupts, and begins to explain, in detail, his plans for them.

And honestly, Ilya doesn't hate the sound of it. There's talks of going downtown, visiting a few bars, maybe some pool or karaoke, and the guys all hanging out together. It sounds like a good plan, something both Ilya and Shane could enjoy.

Ilya glances to his right to get an idea of how Shane is feeling about it, and is thrilled to see Shane nodding along as Bood, and Wyatt, and the rest of the guys throw out ideas for their better-late-than-never bachelor party. It's starting to sound like something that could actually make it out of the locker room, when-

"And of course we'll have to pick names out of a hat."

"Sorry - what?" Ilya asks.

"To do decide who's going to which party," Luca attempts to clarify. It just makes Ilya more confused.

"What do you mean?" Shane asks, suddenly leaning forward in his stall.

"Well you can't have joint bachelor parties!" Troy laughs. "So you'll take turns picking our names out of a hat to see who goes to which party."

And that is - no. No thank you. Not an option. Ilya is expected to let his very talented, very famous, very beautiful husband go out on the town, getting drunk, without Ilya there to fend

off any unwanted attention? And even worse, *Ilya* is supposed to go out without Shane? *All night?*

Shane is listening with an equally horrified expression on his face, as he slowly starts shaking his head.

“No, I think - I mean,” he pauses, and reaches for Ilya’s hand to hold. “I think we’d rather do a joint thing, y’know?”

Ilya nods.

LaPointe makes a painfully loud buzzer sound as he pretends to slam his hand down on one.

“Wrong answer!”

“Boooooo!”

“You can be apart for *one* night!”

So...now Ilya is sitting in a bar surrounded by half of his friends, and his husband is somewhere else. Somewhere different. Somewhere *not* glued to Ilya’s side.

And he isn’t very happy about it.

Sure, the night is objectively great. Great bars, and great drinks, and great food, and great friends. Ilya *should* be having a wonderful time, and - if he says so himself - he’s doing a fantastic job of faking it for the guys, who put so much effort into it all.

But Ilya just wants to be with his husband. Either here at the latest bar, with everyone together, or just at home, curled up on the couch watching *The Summer I Turned Pretty*, with his head in Shane’s lap and Shane’s hand in his hair. Either would do, as long as Shane was with him.

Ilya finds that nothing is all that much fun without his husband by his side.

He knows they get called codependent, okay? He’s not oblivious. Even Galina has gently suggested it a couple of times. But - don’t they have a right to be? They already spent too many years apart, too many years convincing themselves it wasn’t anything serious, because loving each other had seemed so impossible.

Sometimes, Ilya doubts there’s anyone in the world who could comprehend the love he and Shane have for each other.

The sacrifices they have both made, all the things they have risked and lost and had taken from them, all for loving each other - it would take them days to name them all. And still, they would both do it all over again. There’s no universe, no version of them, that wouldn’t make the exact same choice to be together.

Most people can’t fathom the kind of love it takes, to be willing to risk everything for it. Most people never *have* to. There’s no one else in the locker room - not even Troy - who has

genuinely had to prepare for the fact that they might lose everything they've ever worked for, because of the person that they love.

So, yeah. Ilya and Shane are a little codependent, but it's because of how fucking hard they fought to get here.

So as Ilya sits in a bar nursing a tumbler of vodka that he's barely touched, while his friends all tear up the dance floor, he just wants his Shane. He slips his phone out of his pocket to check the time, when he sees a message waiting for him.

Shane :

You're down the street from me.

Ilya:

????

Who is this?

Are you a stalker??

Shane :

Fuck off.

I checked your location.

Ilya:

So you are stalking me

Shane :

Baby.

Ilya:

The guys here are very distracted

Shane :

Yeah. Same here.

Ilya:

They probably wouldn't even notice if we left

Shane :

Ten minutes?

Ilya:

Ilya doesn't bother saying goodbye to the guys. He wasn't lying when he said they're all distracted, either dancing, or drinking, or trying to pick up girls. He sends a quick message in the group chat so they don't think they've lost him, and then he flees as quickly as possible.

It's Saturday night in downtown Ottawa so the streets are busy as he wanders along, but four minutes after he sent his final text his eyes lock on Shane in the distance.

He's doing the same thing as Ilya was, meandering through the crowd with wide, searching eyes. His hair is sweaty from the heat of whatever bar he just escaped from, his cheeks are flushed, and the top three buttons of his shirt have been undone since the last time Ilya saw him when they were leaving the house.

He looks so good Ilya wants to eat him.

"You come here often?" Ilya calls out.

Shane flinches, his brows furrowing for a brief moment, until he spots Ilya. Then the smile that crosses his face - it's like a rainbow after a rainstorm.

He moves like he does when he's got a breakaway on the ice - focused, single-minded - and he doesn't even slow down when he reaches Ilya. He crashes into him, arms instantly locking around Ilya's waist as Ilya drapes his over Shane's shoulders. He burrows into Ilya's neck and sniffs the sweat on his skin.

He shudders out a breath, then whispers, "Hi, baby. I missed you."

"I missed you, too," Ilya says.

Shane pulls back just slightly, tilting his chin up and puckering his lips, silently asking for a kiss. Ilya closes the gap between them and kisses him - only chaste while they're in public, but there's a promise hidden in the press of their lips.

"Did you tell the guys you were leaving?" Shane asks.

"I sent them a message, you?" Ilya takes Shane's hand and tugs slightly, and they start walking aimlessly.

"I told Harris. He said he'd let everyone know."

"They're gonna make fun of us tomorrow, aren't they?" Ilya sighs.

He's absolutely certain bets were made about tonight.

"We lasted three hours," Shane says. "I think that's pretty impressive."

Ilya snorts. It had felt closer to three days than three hours.

He just doesn't understand why he would *want* to do anything without Shane. He's Ilya's husband, of course, but he's also his best friend. There's literally no one he would rather spend time with.

They'd gone along with this whole night for the sake of the guys (and because they're competitive fuckers, so when Dykstra said, "*Don't bother; they'll never agree to it,*" Shane and Ilya had taken that personally), but it's only reinforced what they already knew: everything is better when they do it together.

"Yes, sweetheart," Ilya agrees. "We were very brave."

"Can we go home now?"

Shane fixes Ilya with his big, brown eyes, and Ilya is helpless to do anything except agree. Whatever his husband wants, whenever he wants it.

"Yes. Can we watch *The Summer I Turned Pretty*?"

Shane giggles, bringing their joined hands up to his mouth to kiss Ilya's knuckles. "Yeah, baby. Of course we can."

They end the night wrapped in each other's arms, exactly where they belong.

4.

"For the record, I think this is a terrible idea," Ilya announces.

"Yes, thank you, Ilya. You've been telling me this for days now," Farah sighs, her voice tinny as it rattles through the speaker phone.

Ilya and Shane are hiding in their rental car in the parking lot of the fancy hotel the NHL awards are being held at. They're not staying here tonight - they've got a room at the *Venetian* so they can escape later - but they were supposed to be inside five minutes ago. Neither Ilya nor Shane feel particularly inclined to move from where they are, though.

"Farah, we just don't understand why--"

"I know you've talked about this with your mom, Shane."

"Well, yes. But we still don't like it," Shane says.

He reaches his hand across the console and rests it on Ilya's thigh, squeezing him like Ilya is Shane's own personal stress ball.

"You don't have to like it, you just have to do it."

Shane turns his head to look at Ilya, rolls his eyes, but then dutifully replies with, "Yes, Farah."

"Fine," Ilya huffs.

They're hockey superstars, they just won the Stanley Cup for the second and fourth times, respectively, and they're about to walk away from this awards ceremony with the Hart, Art Ross, and Rocket Richard trophies between them, and yet they're sat here, sulking about what their agent is telling them to do.

It's embarrassing, honestly.

The idea had been for Ilya and Shane to work the room separately tonight. Sit together for the actual ceremony, sure, but then diverge as they schmooze and sweet-talk all the people the NHL has deemed important enough to be here tonight.

In theory, Ilya gets it. The point is to remind everyone that Rozanov and Hollander are two individuals when it comes to hockey, and not just some kind of two-for-one package deal now that they're married (even though they *are*). They get talked about during broadcasts and in the media like they are one entity, *HollanderandRozanov*, instead of two different players, with different playing styles and different strengths.

It's not always good for their brand, apparently, being seen as interlinked. Farah and Yuna don't want them to lose their individual identities within their marriage.

And again, in theory, that sounds great.

But the best thing Ilya has ever done is become Shane's husband, and he knows without a doubt that Shane feels the same about marrying Ilya. And they've still retained their individual personalities - the fans still see Ilya as a menace and Shane as the golden boy - it's not like being married has changed them; they just get to be more honest about themselves, now. They get to show more of who they are without feeling so afraid.

But, when Farah and Yuna team up...well. There's not really much point in trying to fight back. So, separate it is.

"I don't want to," Shane mutters as they finally make their way inside the venue.

Ilya squeezes his hand in a show of solidarity. "Me either, bug. But we can leave early, right?"

"Farah said no sooner than ten thirty."

Ilya groans. He doesn't have time to complain again, though, because they step through the door and the night swallows them whole.

They sit beside each other for the ceremony, Shane's hand warming Ilya's thigh until they have to get up to collect their awards. Each time, Ilya bends to kiss Shane or Shane bends to kiss Ilya - just a sweet peck, on the lips, or cheek, temple, nothing more than what a room full of NHL players and affiliates could handle. They feel eyes on them, of course, beyond just the cameras; they're being observed, being judged, but it doesn't matter. Not anymore.

Afterwards, though, once all the awards have been presented - the Art Ross to Shane, the Hart and Rocket Richard to Ilya, this time - they have to split up.

Ilya hates it instantly.

These award shows are already bad enough; the fellow players are mostly fine, but it's the donors and investors and owners that turn the whole thing into a drag. But now Ilya isn't just being asked about his hockey, his season, his accolades - he's being asked about his Shane.

Which, don't get him wrong, Shane is Ilya's most favourite subject to discuss. He could talk about him for hours without even pausing for breath. But it's the undercurrent of the questions that have Ilya gritting his teeth and clenching his fists in his pockets.

"Where's the wife?" Someone jokes.

"The old ball and chain has set you free for the night, eh?"

"I bet this season has been so...difficult."

"I'm surprised you managed to perform so well this season."

"Who'd have thought a team like yours would win the cup?"

Ilya wishes he was on the ice so he could drop his gloves. He'd honestly prefer for them to just say what they're really thinking - no careful words, no sugarcoating it, no dreadful attempts at decorum.

What they're thinking is, *I can't believe the fags won the cup*. Everyone knows it, they're all just too cowardly to fucking say it out loud. So they dress it up in fancy vocabulary and underhanded remarks, while Ilya is supposed to just stand here and smile, and not say a goddamn thing about it, lest he look confrontational or difficult, or like he's *embarrassing the league*.

He thinks about how Shane must have felt this way for his entire career - the way he had to be perfect so, in their eyes, he could 'make up' for the fact that he isn't white. And now he has to do the same because he is gay, because he loves Ilya.

The thought makes Ilya suck on his teeth as he struggles to take a full breath.

God, he needs to find him.

He glances around the room in search of Shane, completely ignoring whatever the latest multimillionaire donor is saying to him. Ilya catches the briefest glimpse of Shane, just his back as he turns a corner and flees out of sight down a hallway.

Ilya waits two minutes, then he not-so-politely excuses himself from the conversation and follows after his husband.

As he rushes down it Ilya recognises the hallway, and he recognises the bathroom door, too. He has been here before. They both have.

Shane is gripping the sink, head dropped low between his shoulders, when Ilya slips into the bathroom behind him. Ilya watches as his shoulders go tense and he stands up straight,

quickly trying to gathering himself for the sake of whoever just walked in. The mask is already back in place when he looks up into the mirror, but it instantly slips away when he realises that it's Ilya.

Shane sighs. "Hey, baby."

"Hey, are you okay?" Ilya asks as he closes the distance between them.

Shane turns around, perching on the edge of the sink as he faces Ilya. And Ilya doesn't hesitate, he just slips his arms beneath Shane's and winds them around his waist, pressing their chests together. He feels the way Shane relaxes at Ilya's touch, the way he leans into like it's exactly what he has been searching for.

Shane drops his forehead onto Ilya's shoulder and turns his face into Ilya's neck. He presses his nose against Ilya's skin and just...breathes, for a moment.

"Mm. I'm better now," he answers quietly.

"Rough night?" Ilya asks. Shane nods, and sweetly kisses Ilya's fluttering pulse. "You need me to fight anyone?"

It makes Shane giggle, and the sound loosens the knot in Ilya's chest. *He's okay*, Ilya thinks.

"Alright Rocky, keep your gloves on," Shane teases, and Ilya pinches his waist.

Shane laughs, trying to squirm away from Ilya, but Ilya just holds on tighter. Shane's hands trail along Ilya's biceps, over his shoulders, and up into his curls. He scratches Ilya's scalp with the tips of his fingers, and Ilya's knees wobble like he's made of jelly.

"Has it been rough for you too?" Shane asks softly.

Ilya hums in confirmation. "I think I'd prefer it if they just called me a slur," he says. "It would save all the unnecessary conversation."

Shane snorts, his hands briefly tightening in Ilya's hair. "The other players haven't been too bad, though. Right?"

"Yes, most of them are fine," Ilya agrees. "Camden saved me from talking to some asshole earlier, and Hunter shook my hand so that was fun."

Shane raises a brow doubtfully. "*Really?*"

"Yes. I have never touched an ancient artefact before. Was very exciting."

Shane tries to glare but it doesn't last for very long. His mouth twitches like he's trying to hold back a laugh, and when Ilya pokes Shane in the side it slips out of him.

He uses Ilya's hair to pull him in for a kiss. It's deliciously slow, and filthy, and Ilya feels it all the way down to his toes. Still, every single time they kiss, it feels like a defibrillator shocking Ilya back to life. It feels like finding his purpose, like finding his *home*.

“Do you recognise this bathroom?” Ilya asks, his lips still hovering over Shane’s.

He pulls back a little so he glance around the room, and Ilya watches for...*that*. The moment Shane’s mouth drops open in recognition. Shane looks back to Ilya, his eyes wide.

“Is this...”

“Yep.”

“God, you were such a fucking asshole that night!” Shane grumbles, slapping Ilya’s chest with the palm of his hand. “You got me hard, made me suffer all night, fucked me, and then fucking kicked me out! *And* you didn’t kiss me!”

“Hey, you didn’t kiss me either!”

Shane scrunches his nose up and Ilya leans in to kiss it.

“Don’t be cute when I’m mad at you,” Shane pouts.

“I apologised for that night,” Ilya reminds him. “You can’t be mad at me for something that happened nearly a decade ago.”

“Yeah, well. Maybe I need you to apologise again.”

“Oh really?” Ilya asks.

He kisses Shane again, then makes his way along Shane’s jaw and down his throat. Ilya tugs on the collar of his shirt, pulling it down so he can suck a hickey into his husband’s skin. Shane whimpers, his ankles hooking around the back of Ilya’s thighs to drag him closer, and his hand fisting in Ilya’s curls to hold him in place.

Ilya’s pulls back a little to check Shane’s skin, and, satisfied, with his work, he kisses the mark and then re-covers it with the collar of Shane’s shirt.

When Shane’s eyes flicker open they’re glassy, his pupils blown wide, and he looks about ten seconds from dropping to his knees on this filthy bathroom floor. Ilya can’t help but grab his chin and kiss him again, until he feels Shane’s hips slowly start to grind on him.

“Let’s go.”

“Hm?”

“Back to the hotel,” Ilya explains.

“It isn’t ten thirty,” Shane reminds him.

Ilya places his hand on Shane’s knee, slowly moving it up up up, until he cups Shane’s dick, hard beneath the stretch of his trousers. Shane whines, bucking up into the touch.

“No one will notice.”

“They definitely will,” Shane pants.

“Do you care?”

“...no. Let’s go.”

They collect themselves, then slip out of the bathroom and sneak away without anyone noticing them. They hold hands, laughing uncontrollably as they make a run for their rental, feeling very much like two kids who just got away with doing something they shouldn’t have.

When they arrive back at their hotel, Ilya makes sure to kiss Shane until he is breathless.

5.

Ilya’s eyes are hurting from all the bright flashes of the camera, and he squints even behind the Ray Bans that are perched on the end of his nose.

He loves his mother-in-law dearly, but Yuna and Farah becoming friends might be one of the worst things that has ever happened to him. He hates photoshoots, it’s why he never used to care all that much about sponsorships, but now the brand deals and endorsements that they’ve managed to score for him in the past year seem never ending. He’s grateful, of course - the more visible he and Shane are, the more untouchable they become to the league - but it doesn’t mean he has to like it.

What’s even worse is that Ilya is currently in New York, while Shane is already at their cottage.

They were going to come to New York together for a bit of a city break, then go to the cottage for a few weeks, and *then* go on vacation at the end of August. That had been the plan, anyway, until Yuna and David had assumed Shane would be staying in Ottawa. They’d just got back from their own three-week vacation to Cancun, and were thrilled to be home with Shane and Ilya.

“We’ve all been so busy, we’ve hardly seen each other. It’ll be nice, being at the lake together, and Ilya will be joining us soon.”

They could have corrected her, could have told her Shane was actually planning on going *with* Ilya, but she and David had seemed so excited to finally get some downtime with their son, that Ilya had just encouraged Shane to go with them.

“It’s only a few days,” he’d said.

He is thoroughly regretting that decision now.

Today hasn’t been *too* unbearable, because he’s been kept so busy with the photoshoot, but last night was the first full night he’s spent without Shane in a whole year, so Ilya had barely gotten a wink of sleep. In fact, he’d spent the entire night lying flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling and missing the 200lb Shane-shaped blanket that usually sleeps on top of him and makes him sweat.

He'd ended up getting maybe an hour of sleep right before dawn, but then his alarm had woken him and the day had begun.

Ilya has been invited to a part tonight by one of the other semi-famous celebrities involved in the campaign, and while there is absolutely no part of him that feels compelled to attend an event full of so-called 'influencers', he's considering attending just so he isn't stuck in his hotel room alone.

The breeze as he walks into his air-conditioned hotel is a welcome relief as it cools on his sweat-slick skin. Summer in New York is truly something else. It's hot and humid, the air so sticky that it lodges in the back of his throat and settles heavy on his lungs. It's busy and loud, and Ilya loves it here, but he misses the fresh air at the cottage.

He misses his husband.

Ilya taps his foot to the tune playing in the elevator as he rides up to the fifteenth floor. He slips his phone out of his back pocket to check for messages, and while there's a painfully high number waiting for his attention, none of them are from Shane. So he sighs, sliding his phone back into pocket just in time for the elevator doors to open, and he steps out onto his floor.

Ilya's head is starting to ache as he slots his keycard into the scanner and pushes open the door to his room. He wants to take some painkillers, facetime his husband, and then try to nap - in that exact order.

But when he steps into his hotel room, something is different.

As Ilya toes his own shoes off, he notices a pair by the door that don't belong to him. There's a jacket draped over the desk chair, and a bag dropped on the floor that he didn't bring.

And as he turns the corner, there - standing in the middle of the room, like a figment of Ilya's most wonderful dream - is Shane.

"Hi, baby."

Ilya can't speak, he can't find the words. He just drops his bag on the floor and rushes forward. Shane meets him halfway; he wraps his arms around Ilya's waist and briefly lifts him off the floor. When Ilya's feet are back on solid ground, he grabs Shane's perfect face in his hands and kisses him.

It's barely been twenty four hours, and Ilya has missed him more than he knows what to do with.

"I missed you," Ilya mumbles as he presses kisses to Shane's lips, and cheeks, and nose, and freckles. "I missed you so much."

Shane laughs, saying, "I missed you, too," as he allows Ilya to cover him in kisses.

The exhaustion that has been tugging at Ilya's seams suddenly lets go, the tension unspooling like just a few minutes in Shane's presence is enough to recharge Ilya's batteries. Suddenly it

doesn't matter that he's running on zero hours of sleep, after a 6am call time and a nine-hour day, because the only thing that currently matters is the way Shane's hands are gently rubbing Ilya's waist beneath his t-shirt.

He closes his eyes and rests his forehead against Shane's, refusing to let go of his face.

"It's been too long," Ilya complains.

"I know." He can hear the smile in Shane's voice.

"Eighty-four years, maybe."

Shane snorts, his nose nudging against Ilya's. "I knew I shouldn't have let you watch *Titanic*."

"It's a good movie, Shane!"

"Please don't start."

"They should have made a movie about the Carpathia, too. Now *she*-"

Ilya doesn't get to finish his sentence, because suddenly he is being lifted by Shane's huge biceps, carried over to the bed, and dumped unceremoniously onto the mattress. The impact heaves a grunt out of Ilya, and he looks up at Shane with wide eyes as he stands over him.

Not bothering to walk to the other side of the bed, Shane kneels on the mattress and crawls over Ilya. He flops down, snuggling into Ilya's side with his head on his shoulder, and a leg thrown over Ilya's waist. He rests his hand on Ilya's sternum, just above his heart, and Ilya brings his hand up to lace their fingers together.

"I didn't sleep last night," Shane says. "The bed is too empty without you, I hate it."

"Me too, sweetheart. I don't like being away from you."

"Let's just never do it again, okay?" Shane murmurs around a yawn.

"I like that idea a lot."

Shane hums as he presses his nose to Ilya's throat and breathes deeply. Every night he falls asleep like this, either on Ilya's chest or clinging to his back, with his face burrowed against Ilya's neck.

Ilya has forgotten what it feels like to fall asleep without Shane's breath on his skin.

"Sleep time. We can order room service for dinner."

"Okay," Ilya agrees. "Love you."

"Love you more."

Greece is glorious as the sun is setting.

Santorini is a beautiful little island, with its white-washed buildings, and sandy beaches, and gentle ocean breeze. The sky is a watercolour painting as it fades from blue, to orange, to red, to purple; it looks like a whole other world, like something from a fairytale. The air smells like sea salt and wildflowers, and there's a peace here that sinks beneath your skin.

It's the perfect place for a wedding.

Well, technically it's a vow renewal, one year on from the first time they said *I do* (or second, if you count when the Pike kids married them, and Ilya absolutely does).

The hotel they chose for their venue is small and secluded, close enough to the shoreline that Ilya and Shane can hear the water lapping onto the beach from their hotel room. They booked out the whole place for their wedding party, because they wanted to make sure the ceremony was completely private and intimate.

Not that anyone here on the island cares who they are, but it's still nice - having that freedom to exist without worrying about who is watching them, who might be taking pictures. There's no performance here. This isn't for the league, isn't for all the eyes that have been on them all season, just itching for another scandal, or problem, or reason to hate on them.

This is just for them. For each other. For the love that they share, and the life they are building together.

This is all so different from their first (legal) wedding, which is kind of the entire point. That had been haphazard, thrown together in just a few short weeks - "*We didn't even have chairs, Shane!*" - and while they were so blissfully happy on that day, it was...a lot.

They were still reeling from the fallout of being outed, from both Montreal and Ottawa crashing out of the playoffs, and from all the speculation and accusations and rumours. Shane had just signed with the Centaurs, too, and it had felt like the whole world was watching them.

Ilya loved their wedding, truly, because he got to marry the love of his life and that's the only thing he really cared about. Everything else was just details, entirely superfluous to the rings on their fingers and their signatures on the marriage licence.

But afterwards, in the months that followed, it became clear that there were things they would have changed and different choices they would have made. They wanted a real venue, with a colour scheme, and fancy chairs that have ribbons on the back, and a proper first dance with a song that actually matters to them.

So Ilya had suggested they do it all over again, and Shane had agreed far quicker than Ilya could have expected.

After they won the championship together back in June - for the very first time in franchise history - Ilya had also suggested that they have their Cup days here, so they could have it at the wedding. Hockey was the reason they found each other, after all.

Surprisingly, it was Shane who turned that idea down.

"The day is about us, not hockey," he had said, with such sincerity that tears had sprung to Ilya's eyes. Then he carried Shane upstairs and fucked him about it.

So now they're in Santorini, sitting outside as the last rays of sunlight slip beneath the horizon, surrounded by all of their favourite people.

Yuna and David are here in Greece, with Shane's favourite cousin and his wife. Sveta and Rose are sitting so close together that Ilya can't tell where one of them ends and the other begins. Pike and Jackie, his much better half, are here - though they left the kids with his parents for the week - and so are J.J., and Cliff, and Connors. Even Farah and her fiancée made the trip.

And of course, aside from the handful who couldn't make the dates work, all of the Centaurs and their partners are here, too. Including Wiebe and his wife, Terry, their team doctor, and Logan, Ilya and Shane's favourite janitor from the rink.

Ilya couldn't ask for anything more than this.

It's a little overwhelming, even, to be surrounded by so many people who are here because they love and support him and Shane.

Ilya has spent so much of his life feeling alone. When his mama started getting sick when he was young, Ilya felt the loneliness creeping in, and for a long time it never left him. Not after she died, or after he moved to Boston - not even on the nights he spent on the ice in front of thousands, or in packed-out nightclubs, or warming someone else's bed.

The first time Ilya truly felt the weight of that loneliness lift, was when Shane whispered, *"I love you, too."*

Now even on Ilya's worst days, when the dark cloud hovering above him tries to seep into his bones, he knows that he never has to face anything alone again. He has his Shane, and his in-laws, and so many friends that this hotel barely even fits them all.

Ilya is so surrounded by love that he can't remember what it feels like to long for it.

Ilya is sitting on a couch that surrounds a fire pit, with Shane draped over his lap as he twirls one of Ilya's curls around his finger. He's got a mojito in one hand, and Shane's thigh in the other, and his heart feels so full that it might burst.

Most people have started making their way back to their rooms in preparation for the busy day tomorrow, but there's still a handful of them sitting around the fire. Everyone is talking, getting along nicely, their laughter being carried away by the breeze, and for a moment Ilya feels like he might cry.

He presses a kiss to the underside of Shane's jaw, just because he can.

"You okay, baby?" Shane whispers. He brings his hand up to Ilya's face, brushes his thumb along Ilya's bottom lip.

Ilya kisses Shane's thumb. "I'm perfect, bug. Thank you."

"For what?"

"Everything. Loving me, marrying me - *again*. Just all of it. Our whole life."

Shane smiles so fondly, his brown eyes flickering like liquid amber in the firelight, and he leans in to press a kiss to Ilya's forehead. Ilya closes his eyes to savour the kiss, and when he opens them again Shane is still watching him. Still smiling.

"Thank *you*," he says. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too."

"What are you lovebirds whispering about?" David asks, interrupting their moment.

Shane pulls away from Ilya just enough to turn and look at his dad. Ilya follows his gaze, and finds everyone watching them with smiles on their faces. All the people who love them, just happy that Ilya and Shane are happy.

"I don't think you want to hear the answer to that, Mr Hollander," Pike says, and everyone chuckles quietly.

"Are you both excited?" Lisa, Wyatt's wife, asks.

Ilya opens his mouth to answer, but Shane beats him to it. "Yes. Very. We can't wait."

They have vows this time, ones they wrote themselves. They don't get to hear each other's until tomorrow, standing at the altar that overlooks the brilliant blue of the Mediterranean Sea, but Ilya had stolen Sveta, Cliff, Bood, and Luca away just this morning, and read his to them as a practice run.

If the volume of tears cried was any indication, then Ilya has absolutely hit it out the park.

So yeah, he can't wait to stand up in front of all their friends and family, while he tells Shane how he is Ilya's entire world. How he makes the dark days brighter, and the heavy days easier to carry. How loving Shane has changed Ilya in the most wonderful of ways, and how he has completed Ilya's soul by loving him back.

"I'm just glad we'll get to sit down this time," Cliff jokes.

"And please tell me Harris isn't picking your first dance song?" Sveta says. "Because if he is--"

"Okay, okay," Ilya laughs. "We get it."

If that had been the only wedding they ever got, then Ilya could have died a happy man. But he's so fucking excited that he gets to marry Shane again. And maybe next year, and the year after that, too.

Maybe they'll renew their vows every year, just to remind everyone what a perfect, handsome couple they are.

Shane yawns, his hand coming up to cover his mouth, so Ilya leans in and kisses the back of it.

"Bed?" He suggests. "I heard tomorrow is a pretty important day. You might want to get your beauty sleep."

Shane rolls his eyes, but he's grinning the whole time. He nods in agreement, then stands from Ilya's lap and stretches as Ilya climbs to his feet beside him.

"Early night for us," Ilya announces.

"I bet this is your first night apart in ages," Rose says, and Shane and Ilya both freeze.

Shane frowns. "What."

"It's the night before your wedding!"

"And...?"

"Dude, it's tradition!" Hayes says.

"You can't see each other until you meet at the altar tomorrow," Yuna explains. "It's bad luck."

Ilya scoffs.

Bad luck? Seriously? Ilya fell in love with his rival - a *man* - and proceeded to have a decade-long situationship before he locked *The Shane Hollander* down. They spent three years together in secret. Ilya survived an *almost* plane crash. They got outed, they got benched, they risked their entire careers to be together, and these people are worried about bad luck?

There's not a thing on this earth that could ever come between them.

"We've already been married for a year," Ilya says, because that's far easier to verbalise, "and in love for ten more. We don't need luck."

"So? It's still your wedding." Jackie insists. "You have to follow tradition!"

"I'm not going to sleep unless he's in bed with me," Shane says, plain and simple and to the point. "Night guys. Love you. See you tomorrow."

And then he takes Ilya's hand and pulls him along, ignoring the protests of their friends and family. No room for arguments, no pretence that they might consider spending the night apart.

Why should they?

They've long since accepted that they're obsessive and clingy and infatuated with each other. They know not everyone understands it - how could they? No one else has ever lived the life they have. No one else has ever lived the *lie* they had to. But Ilya doesn't see how loving someone this much could ever be a bad thing, when they have both waited so long to live their lives like this: open, proud, *together*.

They walk back to their room hand in hand, giggling like the teenagers they never really got to be.

That's maybe one of Ilya's favourite things about being in love with Shane - every single day reminds him of what it felt like to be seventeen, and mesmerised by the pretty boy with freckles.

Ilya tugs on Shane's hand, drawing him close so he can kiss those perfect freckles. As he looks at Ilya, Shane's eyes flare with heat, and joy, and love, and it steals the breath from Ilya's lungs. They're going to go back to their hotel room and make love, and then tomorrow they will wake up and marry their childhood sweethearts for the second (third) time.

How could Ilya ask for anything more? He just wants this - over and over again - in every universe, in every life.

"I love you."

"I love you more."

"I love you most."

End Notes

this one ran away from me but it was so fun to write :) love u guys soooo much btw.

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