

so much love to give

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so much love to give

by [ilyasleftnipple](#)

Summary

"Our love isn't earned, we've given it freely."

A year in Shane and Ilya's lives as they become parents to Charlie and Jack

Notes

this was supposed to be all fluff but somehow theres two and a half steamy scenes

if you felt something pls comment

if you felt like you hated it tell me that to

Chapter 1

Shane was running on the treadmill when his phone went off. He was about to ignore it, favouring to work out the tension he has been keeping throughout his body since losing game five three nights ago. Losing this game meant that the Ottawa Centaurs were now out of the playoffs. Ilya had been trying his hardest to work the tension out for him, but Shane knew how much a run helped. He glanced at the caller ID and saw that it was Tanya, their case manager.

Over the past year, Shane and Ilya had slowly been working on their foster licenses. Shane and Ilya maintained their competitive nature when it came to learning new skills and memorizing the information they needed. Shane learned how Ilya was a visual and auditory learner and how attractive he became when he was changing a diaper.

Shane hit the stop button on the treadmill and tried to get his breathing under control before answering. He wiped the sweat off and hanged his sweat towel behind his neck.

“Hello,” he answered as he headed upstairs from the gym.

“Hi Shane, how are you?”

“Doing great, with all things considered,” he answered honestly. When he was at Montreal, losing in the Cup semi-finals would have felt all-consuming. Instead, his team had rallied together to go over all the things that went well over the past eight months and celebrated all that they had accomplished.

“Yes, I was sorry to see that game,” Tanya said. Shane knew she was a Vancouver supporter so she can only be too sad. She moved the conversation along: “Is Ilya also around? This would be a great conversation to have with the both of you.”

Before Shane’s mind began running through every single worse-case scenario, he spotted Ilya on the deck overlooking their backyard and the river. Anya was prancing around the garden. “Yes, of course. Let me just put you on hold and I’ll go and get him.”

He did what he said and crossed the kitchen out to the deck. It was a warmer May day so Ilya was out there in loose basketball shorts and slides. Ilya turned when he heard the door open and wished Shane a good morning, and then, “Why are you stressed already?”

Shane shot him a glare. “Tanya’s on the phone, and she wants to speak to both of us, so it’s sort of hard to not think every worst-case scenario.”

Ilya wrapped him in a hug and Shane resisted the urge to point out that he feels sticky from his work out. “We asked for no placements until after the cup run, and now we are getting a call from her. We haven’t done anything to warrant a bad phone call.” Shane nodded and squared his shoulders in confidence. He pressed an open-mouthed kiss against Ilya’s exposed collar bone. “Alright, let’s go and find out what Tanya wants.”

Ilya steered Shane inside with a hand on his lower back and Shane found himself grounded in that touch. Shane turned on speaker and turned off hold. “Hi Tanya,” Ilya said.

“Hi Ilya, I hope you have had a restful break so far.”

“Oh definitely, but I still wish we would have a chance to beat Vancouver one more time this season.” Shane rolled his eyes because of course Ilya had to say something about the game where Ottawa beat Vancouver 5-0 in Vancouver. To their social worker, of all people.

Tanya laughed - thankfully - and said, “Well, one of our teams are still in the playoffs.” Shane applies pressure to Ilya’s foot before he can say anything else. “Anyways, I’m calling because I have a potential placement for you.”

Shane and Ilya looked at each other, in disbelief that it happened this quickly. They listened as Tanya told them about two brothers she had in their care. Charlie and Jack were thirteen and seven and were currently at schools in their district. Tanya had gotten confirmation that morning that their mother’s rights were being terminated and there was no longer any chance of reunification. For the past two and a half years, Charlie and Jack had been with three foster families before being placed in two different group homes. Their mother was sporadic with her allotted visiting and often showed up to them high. She loved her boys, but was unable to care for them and was unwilling to accept help with her addiction.

Ilya asked for some more information about what they boys are like.

Tanya explained that they are not doing well with the separation. “We have two different foster homes lined up, who can each take one of the boys, however, one is out of the district. I know that when we have discussed, you mentioned that you would like one child for your first placement, but these two boys just need a safe place where they can spend some time together.”

“You mentioned that there is no chance of unification, does that mean they are looking for a long-term placement that leads to adoption?” Shane asked. He and Ilya had had long conversations about what they wanted. They knew that with their schedule that they might not be the best candidates for adoption while they were both still playing full-time hockey, but Tanya had assured them that there were lots of flexible options within foster-care and adoption.

“Eventually, yes. However, their placement with you can either be a short-term one until we find a home where we can send both boys, or this placement with you could eventually lead to adoption as well. I am happy to work with you two, to sort out a long-term plan for them, but right now, we are looking at keeping them with you until the start of their summer vacation.”

Shane began running through their schedule for the next two months. It was quite stable as they begin to enjoy their well-deserved break and build up to their game changers hockey camps. This was the first year there will be satellite camps across the country. Ryan Price was running two weeks in Nova Scotia while Wyatt Hayes was doing two weeks with Shane and Ilya in Montreal and Ottawa, before hosting a week in Vancouver. This involved a lot of meetings, but those happen during the school day.

Shane gave a little nod at Ilya, communicating that he was happy with it if Ilya was.

“That sounds like a good place to start,” Ilya said. “We do have a long-weekend in June in Las Vegas, but I know we spoke about how Shane’s parents are qualified to baby-sit for us should we need it.”

“Yes, and I have that noted in this file as well.”

They spent longer on the phone sorting out the logistics. At some point, Ilya put on a pot of coffee and Shane sat down at the breakfast bar, taking down notes in his phone.

They got logistics in order and agreed to pick up Charlie, the thirteen year old the next day after school, and get his brother, Jack, the day after. Tanya was happy with this as she thought it would take Charlie longer to warm up to the pair of them (“He needs the stability the most. He has been shielding Jack from a lot of the realities of their mother, while fighting harder to keep them together.”).

The call ended and Shane burrowed his fingers in his hair and rested his forehead on his palms. Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane from behind and unwound his fingers. Pressing a kiss to the side of his jaw, Ilya could feel Shane relax.

“Are we ready for this?” Shane asked.

“No,” Ilya answered honestly. “But, if Hayden can do it, we’ll be fine.”

After a full day of getting things together, Shane and Ilya were on their way to the group home. They’d spoken with the woman — Hannah — running the home earlier that day, and had spent some time running some errands.

She’d made it clear she knew who they were, and clearer that they had money. They’d gone to Costco and gotten family-size boxes of the favourite cereals of the house as well as treats which the home’s budget doesn’t usually cover. They also stopped at the rink and grabbed some Centaurs’ swag in case that would be interesting. Ilya and Shane park around the back and take the back door, so they don’t see the rest of the boys in the home. Hannah had suggested they make this quiet so they don’t overwhelm Charlie, and they couldn’t agree fast enough.

Shane showed one of the workers which boxes they could unload from the back of the car, and then met Ilya inside. He was sitting down speaking with a boy who must be Charlie. He had two duffel bags sitting next to him and looking very shocked.

Shane walked in and sat down next to Ilya and held out his hand. “I’m Shane, it’s great to meet you.” Charlie shook it. Charlie was a lanky boy, with ginger hair and brown eyes. His arms and face were covered in freckles. “How was school today?” Shane asked

“Fine,” Charlie replied. Shane reminded himself that not only was Charlie a teenage boy, but that he also doesn’t trust easily.

“You are at my old school,” Shane tried again.

“Yes, you are everywhere,” Charlie said. Ilya laughed, shocking Charlie slightly.

“Really? Oh, I can’t wait to see that,” Ilya said. “Shane always gets so awkward when a big fuss is made about it.”

Shane was trying not to look put out, but he knew he did. Charlie snickered a little bit, so Shane counted that as a win.

Thinking back to what their books suggested and after brainstorming last night, Shane and Ilya explained the game plan to Charlie.

“So, I think you’ve been told that you are coming home with us tonight, and then tomorrow we can all go pick Jack up,” Shane said, and Charlie nodded. “We live about a ten minute drive and when we get home, we can show you around. We also have a dog, her name is Anya. There are two rooms for you to choose from. You and Jack can share or have your own rooms, depending on what you both want. We can eat some dinner, and then give you some alone time, we can watch TV, or go for a walk, or if there is anything else you want to do. Does that sound OK?”

Charlie nodded. Hannah came into the room and double checked that everything was ok. When they all nodded, they said goodbye. Shane and Ilya each carried a duffle bag and Charlie kept his backpack close to him. They opened up the trunk of the car and placed the bags inside. “Do you want to put your backpack in the back?” Ilya asked.

“No thank you, Mr. Rozanov,” Charlie responded.

“It’s just Ilya, and is OK, you keep it with you. Do you want to sit up front? Shane is boring driver so you will be safe.”

“I am not boring,” Shane said, for probably the sixtieth time that week.

Ilya opened the front door and Charlie hesitated before climbing in. “He is, and don’t let him convince you otherwise.” Charlie smiled and then Ilya climbed into the back seat. He slid across to the middle seat and stretched his legs out either side underneath the driver and passenger seats.

It was a quiet ride home, and Ilya knew that Shane wanted to talk to fill the silence, but won’t. When they got to their neighbourhood, Shane pointed out the bus stop, the house where Willa and Andrew lived, how his parents only lived ten minutes away. Charlie nodded, taking it all in. They parked in the driveway, rather than the garage and climb out.

Shane grabbed both big bags while Ilya grabbed their Costco grocery box. They got the door open and kicked off their shoes.

After putting the grocery box in the kitchen, Ilya met them in the hallway as they were heading up the wing where their old guest rooms were. Shane took over Charlie’s

introduction to their home, so Ilya just followed behind. He could feel the anxiety radiating off of both Shane and Charlie, but Ilya did not know how to make either feel better right now.

“Ok, here are the two bedrooms we current have set up. You can pick one and then Jack can have the other. This is the washroom you boys will share. We have a dresser and wardrobe here if you want to unpack. If you need help unpacking, we can help. We can do any laundry you need. There are toiletries in the bathroom, but if there are any you prefer let us know and we can pick them up for you.” Shane looked at Ilya and he knew that this was Shane’s way of asking him to jump in because he knew that he is rambling.

“Do you want some time to yourself, or do you want to see the rest of the house?”

Charlie looked like he wanted time alone but did not want to be rude. “We can leave you by yourself. We will just be in the living room and then we will make some dinner.”

Because he couldn't help himself, Shane said, “You can come down when you’re ready, and if we don’t hear from you we will come get you when dinner is ready. If you want to take a shower, you can. The door does lock and I can show you how it works if you need.”

Ilya pressed a hand to Shane’s shoulder, hopefully signalling that he needed to shut up right now before he gave Charlie way too much information.

“Yell if you need us,” Ilya said, and headed down the stairs. He felt Shane think about saying something before he eventually followed.

Dinner that night was awkward, with Charlie answering questions when asked but not offering anything more. At least, until Ilya asked, “Is there anything Jack would like before we go and get him tomorrow?”

Charlie thought before he said, “He really likes Oreos.”

“Come with me,” Ilya said, getting up from the table. Anya looked up, but settled back down when she only heard the garage door open when she realized that it wasn’t yet time for a walk.

“You haven’t finished eating yet!” Shane called after them. Ilya knew that it was because he wasn’t supposed to show the children where their cupboard full of treats was, but Ilya just wanted to bring some joy to Charlie’s evening.

“Will back in 2 minutes, I promise.” Charlie followed Ilya to the garage where they had a cupboard full of Ilya’s sugary sweets. They went past Ilya’s two summer sports cars to the back corner where there were two pantry cupboards installed against the wall. “Shane made me put a code on this because we have some friends children who always try and sneak in.” He showed Charlie the code as if he’s letting him in on a huge secret.

They opened the cupboard and it was full with bags of chips, Oreos from America, and some of the imported Russian goods. “What’s in there?” Charlie asked, pointing to the Tupperware

on the bottom shelf.

“Good eye, it’s my secret stash of Snicker bars. When Shane is very upset or stressed, I give him one and it cheers him up. Do you like them?”

Charlie nodded, so Ilya opened the box and passes him one. “Thank you,” he said.

“Of course. Now, let’s go finish dinner and don’t tell Shane about this stash, or else all my secrets will be gone.” Charlie smiled at him with what Ilya thought might have been his first genuine smile that day.

That night they were in bed, with Shane lying almost-naked against Ilya’s chest. Charlie had gone to bed at 8:30 after showering and finishing his homework. Once Shane was 100% sure Charlie was asleep, Ilya and Shane traded blow jobs. Ilya did not know why he thought that Shane would be any more relaxed than he was, but he seemed very content right now.

“How do you think today went?” He asked Ilya.

“I think tomorrow will be better,” Ilya offered. Shane nodded and burrowed himself backwards more into Ilya.

The next day they picked up Jack, who was much more excited about going home and seeing Charlie. They looked like brothers, but where Charlie was ginger and covered in freckles, Jack had blonde hair and a nice tan — much like Ilya. Jack also seemed very interested in hockey, asking lots of questions on the way home.

They got home and Shane headed back out to go and pick Charlie up. Jack was shown around the house and found the trophy room particularly cool. He was excited about having his own room and was more excited when Ilya said that they can paint it any colour he wants. Ilya made a note to tell Shane that they might be going to a home renovation store over the weekend. Jack was also ecstatic to meet Anya, who followed him around as he explored the house.

Jack came in and joined Ilya on the sofa and they got the Nintendo Switch turned on. Ilya hoped that since Jack was interested in hanging out with them, that Charlie might open up more too. They weren't talking much, Jack just seemed to be enjoying spending time in front of a TV. Ilya supposed that Shane had opinions about the boys’ screen time — if he was honest with himself, Ilya had opinions, too. But, right now it was about comfort.

Ilya heard the gates open so he pressed pause on the Switch and told Jack that Charlie is here. Jack ran out to the driveway and met Charlie outside. Ilya and Shane locked eyes overtop of the boys’ embrace and Shane gave him an uneasy smile. The ride home must not have gone well, but also, Shane’s perceptions of not well might just mean that Charlie answered all of his questions about his day and not said much beyond that.

Jack was excitedly telling Charlie about the Switch and what games he wanted to play. Charlie looked at Shane and Shane said, "Jack, we are just going to give Charlie a minute to put his school stuff away but I'm sure that he would love to come play with you shortly." Ilya gave Shane a look at then understood that something must have actually happened.

"Go put your stuff upstairs and come and meet us in the kitchen. We can make some snacks and come up with a plan, OK." Charlie nodded and ran off and then Shane started taking off his shoes and explaining. "So, it turns out that Charlie is really behind in his classes. There are a lot of missing assignments and he's passing the tests, but not excelling."

"Shit," Ilya said. Shane sent him a look and Ilya responded, "Yes, language, I know, but boys are doing their own thing." He waved his hand behind him, motioning to the rest of the house where the boys were. "Did the teacher say anything?"

"She wasn't the most helpful." Shane never liked speaking badly about people. Except Roger Crowell, who was objectively the worst. "She was just like talking past him to me while I was sitting in the car. She basically said that she knows there have been lots of changes, but that doesn't excuse missing homework. Which, I disagree, but ok. He was sitting right there, and she had the audacity to say that she had been waiting for him to be in a long-term placement, as if she out of anyone was suffering the most in this situation."

Ilya rubbed Shane's back as he felt him getting physically upset about this teacher. "She said that he has until the end of the month to do a huge package which is in his backpack. So I figured that we would update Tanya about this teacher, and then maybe we can go through this packet tonight and then maybe come up with a game plan. Like maybe we spend an hour each night with him working on something from the packet?" Shane looked incredibly unsure and Ilya couldn't think of anything better.

"That sounds like great plan. I will not help with English though," Ilya said, hoping the self-deprecating joke would land.

Shane huffed out a small laugh, but said, "Your English is great, we are just lucky that he doesn't need my help with Russian."

Ilya kissed him quickly on the lips and they went to the kitchen. Charlie was sitting at the counter with a very thick packet in front of him.

"Wow, that's huge!" Ilya said. "Are they allowed to do this?"

"I guess so," Shane said. "OK Charlie, first and foremost, we know this isn't your fault. There have been so many changes happening for you this year, that of course homework isn't your first priority." Charlie nodded at that and looks reassured. Shane gave Ilya a look, who nodded, so he continued. "To be honest, we still don't think it should be your first priority at this moment in time."

"So, Shane and I were thinking we could look at this tonight with you and come up with a plan. Does that sound ok?"

"Yes, thank you."

Charlie looked so relieved Ilya just wanted to hold him and tell him that everything was going to work out. Instead he said, “Of course. Now, what would you like as a snack?”

“Do you have any strawberries?” Shane looked in the fridges and muttered something to himself — knowing Shane, probably a reminder to always have strawberries in the fridge.

“Yes! How about you go get play a game with Jack, he has been waiting all afternoon for you to come in. And when you are ready, come back here and you guys can have some.”

Charlie went into the living room and Ilya could hear Jack and Charlie talking about their days with Mario Kart starting up in the background. He tried to listen, but Shane was flipping through the packet.

“This is so much,” Shane said. “And I don’t think I know anything about geology.” Ilya looked over his shoulder at a diagram of a volcano that needed labelling.

Ilya realized there was a very different problem. He could label the volcano. If only it was in Russian...

They got into a routine. Ilya dropped the boys off at school, combining the trip with walking Anya. Shane and Ilya usually spent the morning doing off-ice training. Even though it was the off season, Shane liked to keep up his fitness and routine and Ilya liked watching Shane get sweaty. After lunch, they had work to do for the Irina Foundation before Shane left to pick the boys up. After school, Charlie usually showered and sat at the dining room table to do homework, while Jack played outside in the garden with Anya. Anya loved having someone to chase around and to play fetch and tug-of-war with.

When Charlie needed help with his homework, it usually involved watching a YouTube video and reading through a textbook chapter, but they got it done. Ilya and Shane both felt like they are repeating the seventh grade, but it was overall going well. Shane does not like Charlie’s teacher, but there was not much they can do about that.

Over dinner, the boys were becoming more talkative. Jack seemed incredibly comfortable around them, but Charlie was still quite reserved. They knew that he had trust issues and this situation was still temporary, but he was opening up to them. After dinner, Jack usually joined Shane or Ilya on a walk with Anya.

The weekends were harder. The boys spent a lot of time playing video games — usually of the Mario variety — because they did not ask to do anything. Shane and Ilya had taken them for a couple of short walks around the hills of Gatineau with Anya, so Shane is happy they are at least moving.

There were a couple of teething problems — both literally and figuratively. Charlie needed reminding about deodorant, so much they keep one by the door and in the car for him, just in case. They also had to do Jack’s flossing for him, and began checking after he brushed in the morning.

(Ilya couldn't get the hang of flossing another person since he barely had to do it for himself, so he practiced on Shane. There was a lot of back and forth, including, "I can't believe I let you put this mouth on my dick, there is so much build up," and "If you want this mouth ever one that dick again, shut up." The threat didn't have the same rigour as Shane would have liked, since there was currently floss stuck in his front bottom teeth.)

They had been expecting Charlie to be protective over Jack, but he was happy to let Ilya and Shane parent. They had had to remind Charlie once that he didn't have to anymore, after one scene at dinner where Charlie was telling Jack to eat his vegetables. But offering security is one thing Shane and Ilya knew how to do, and they were damn good at it.

It had been five weeks of this, and coming up in the distance they knew was there weekend away in Las Vegas. They hadn't spent much time away from the boys outside of school hours, except for the two hours they'd been at pride (Tanya had come to take them out for ice cream and check in with how they were doing while they went and walked in the parade). About Las Vegas, Ilya and Shane had spoken with Tanya, and she said that she would give the boys the option of either staying at Shane and Ilya's house with Shane's parents, or finding them a temporary placement for the weekend. Ilya really did not like the second option, so he was hoping that spending the afternoon with David and Yuna one Saturday would go well.

It had been a long week at school, with Charlie struggling with the math unit. As they were getting ready to leave, Shane could tell that Charlie was stressed out about school, having spent the morning working on his homework. He and Ilya were not the best at explaining mathematical concepts so he suggested he bring his math homework with him to David and Yuna's. "My dad used to help me with my homework all the time. All I ever wanted to do was play hockey and he would sit with me to make sure that I knew how to do everything."

Charlie nodded and grabbed his backpack. "And he will help me?"

"Of course," he said. "And, this is for you to get to know my parents. If you, or Jack, ever want to leave, let either Ilya or me know, and we can come home. No questions asked."

"Ok, thanks Shane." That was another thing that had changed over the past five weeks — Charlie was still warming up to them, but was getting comfortable enough to actually call them by their names. He was, Shane thought, still too polite for a thirteen year old, but of course wasn't going to point that out.

Jack came flying down the stairs at that moment without trousers on. Ilya was standing at the top of the stairs holding a pair of shorts. "Jack, come on, you must wear clothes."

Jack was standing there with Anya, who had become his best friend. "You can't catch me," he said. Shane gave Charlie a wink and then scooped Jack up over his shoulder. Jack squirmed as he laughed.

"Alright you stinker, let's put some shorts on and then we can all head out." Ilya came down the stairs and Jack climbs into the shorts Ilya was holding out, still laughing.

They all put their shoes on and Shane noticed how much Charlie had to squeeze into his sneakers.

Once they were loaded into the car, Shane looks into the rearview mirror at the boys, with Anya seated between them. “Should we go to the mall tomorrow and get you boys some more clothes? Or shall I go this week and pick some up for you?”

“Can I go with you?” Charlie asked.

“Of course,” Shane responded. “Jack, would you like to come shopping?”

Jack responded exactly how Shane expected with a loud “No!”

“Inside voices,” Ilya said, “or else Shane will lose his hearing and become even more like an old man.” Both the boys laughed at that one. Since having the boys, Shane had been more and more in awe of Ilya’s ability to decrease the seriousness of situations and diffuse tension, while never undermining their objective as parents.

They arrived at Yuna and David’s and Anya was yapping, waiting to be let out. Jack laughed as he petted her, and Shane opened his door. Anya ran to the front door with Jack hanging close to Charlie. This was new, Shane observes. Usually, Jack was happy to take things head on, and was usually fearless with Anya by his side. Charlie stuck close and they walked up the steps together. Shane opened the door and yelled that they have arrived.

Shane kicked off his shoes and everyone followed suit, and eventually followed him into the kitchen. Ilya pointed out the photos of young Shane on the mantle, as well as the ones of Ilya and Shane throughout the years that Yuna put on display after their relationship was announced. (Shane had thought it was interesting that Yuna put them up the afternoon before she hosted book club with Jenny and other women from the neighbourhood).

In the kitchen, Yuna had some berries out on the counter and offered some to the boys. Both Jack and Charlie looked too shy to take them, so she just introduced herself and pointed to the back garden... where there was now a trampoline.

“You got a trampoline?!” Ilya said, way more excited than both the kids.

“Yes, and it cannot take the weight of two 200 pound men and two growing boys, so be careful,” David said, walking through the back door. “And that be careful is for the more dangerous of my two sons.”

Jack giggled and said “Oooh you’re in trouble.” Shane cracked at that and laughed too, with Charlie following suit.

“Oh my god, look at his face,” Yuna said. Ilya looked so put out, and then it morphed into fondness when he looked down at Jack's smile.

“Alright, let’s go give this a go, then,” Ilya said. He started heading outside with Jack and Anya in tow.

“Do you want to go outside too?” Shane asked Charlie, who shook his head. Charlie was still wearing his school backpack and was shuffling awkwardly. Shane could feel his parents watching this interaction, and he wanted it to end.

“How about we do 15 minutes of math, and then go and join the others outside?” Charlie nodded and Shane counted that as a win. “Dad, can you take a look at this, I don’t understand graphs.”

“You never did,” David responded.

“Hey!”

“It’s a good thing you’re good at hockey,” Yuna said, kissing his cheek on her way past.

The rest of the visit went well. David and Charlie ended up sitting at the table for two hours, but they ended up talking more about geology. David eventually got one his nonfiction books about rock formations across the globe and Charlie offered information about an active volcano in Guatemala he wanted to see in person.

Jack and Ilya ended up on the trampoline for nearly an hour, and they both came in with huge smiles on their faces before raiding the fridge.

“Shall I start cooking dinner?” Yuna asked, and everyone nodded in response.

In the week leading up to Vegas, Tanya spoke with the boys and they chose to have Yuna and David look after them. After they got back from Vegas, the boys still had one week of school left before summer vacation and then the placement would be reevaluated.

During the school day on the last Thursday before the trip, Shane was packing their suitcases while Ilya was buying some last minute supplies for the boys before picking them up from school. He grabbed some swim shorts since David mentioned that they could go to a pool one day, maybe. He also picked up all the boys’ favourite snacks, so hopefully they wouldn’t need to be stocked up in a while.

When they all got home, Shane’s parents were already there and Shane had moved their suitcases downstairs. They were going to drive themselves to the airport, and pick up Troy, Harris, and Wyatt on the way.

Shane went over everything with everyone, while Ilya double checked Shane had packed some lube (essentials!). They all said goodbye and then they were off.

“It’s weird not having them on the front of our minds,” Shane said, holding Ilya’s hand over the console.

“I know. I did not think we would be this used to it,” he responded, stroking his thumb over the back of Shane’s knuckles. “We should probably talk about summer.”

“I want to keep them,” Shane said, surprising himself even with how much conviction he spoke with.

“Of course, I mean. Do we still stay with Hayden for the week in Montreal? Are we allowed to take them to cottage? Do we have the right-sized life jackets for jet skis?” Ilya really liked envisioning how much their summer would change if they were allowed to keep the boys with them.

“We are not letting them drive jet skis!”

Ilya was offended at the accusation. “Of course not! We would drive them, but we would have to take turns so they can each win at least once! You won’t drive fast enough.”

They pulled into Wyatt’s driveway where he heads toward the door.

“We’ll see who the winner is this weekend,” Shane responded, because of course they have been nominated for the same award. Sometimes, Shane begrudgingly thought the league believed they could ignite their rivalry so badly they would divorce.

“Have you two started fighting already?” Wyatt asked, as he climbs in the backseat. “Is this really how you are going to spend your weekend away from the kids?”

“Of course not,” Shane grumbled.

“No, we plan on doing something else with our mouths instead,” Ilya said.

“Gross,” Wyatt muttered, as Shane turned bright red.

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Once they landed in Las Vegas, Ilya entered captain mode as their team went to collect their bags. Harris was filming them all walking off the plane, hanging their suit bags over their shoulders. Zane was already giving out his social itinerary for the next 48 hours, but all Shane could think about was going back to their hotel room.

Which was where they are now. They were kissing against the hotel door, and it did not take long for Ilya to hike Shane up off the ground so he could grope Shane’s butt.

Ilya squeezed harder, and predictably, Shane gasped and threw his head against the door. Ilya started sucking on the pulse point under Shane’s jaw and then carried him over to the bed. He put Shane on the end of the bed.

Ilya pulled Shane’s shorts down to his ankles and then climbed between his legs, throwing Shane’s knees over his shoulder, where his legs were now restricted by the shorts around his ankles.

Ilya started kissing up the inside of Shane’s thigh and Ilya looked up at him. He was rock hard and his eyes were already glazed over. He had maybe 10 seconds before Shane got impatient. Ilya brought the head of Shane’s cock into his mouth, tonguing the slit. Shane sighed

in relief, and Ilya let it go and began sucking on his balls, bringing one into his mouth at a time.

“Come the fuck on,” Shane grunted.

Ilya chuckled and removed his mouth altogether. He reached into his back pocket where he had put a lube packet on their way back from the airport and tried to open it quietly. He went back kissing, licking, and nipping at the inside of Shane’s thighs. He felt Shane squirm, due to the lack of contact on his dick.

Ilya took Shane’s dick into his mouth, and also pressed a finger into him. He was always amazed at how quickly Shane always accepted him and started opening Shane up.

“Hurry up,” Shane said. Ilya wordlessly slips a second finger in, purposefully avoiding Shane’s prostate.

“Why? Are you in a rush?”

“Yes, we have dinner with your fucking—aah” Ilya hit that spot, “team, Rozanov.” Whenever the Centaurs got in the way, Shane was always quick to remind Ilya that it was *his* team causing all the problems.

“Ahh yes, how could I forget,” Ilya hummed, as he slowly pumped his fingers in and out. He added a third, making sure Shane’s rim remained loose and drew a ball into his mouth. He started sucking on it, laying his tongue flat against the underside, as his fingers started hitting Shane’s prostate. Shane was making sounds that he probably wasn’t even aware of anymore and Ilya smiled and withdrew his fingers and pulled his mouth off Shane’s sack.

“Wha—“ Shane began to ask, but a slight nip to Shane’s inner thigh shut him up.

“You have two options, Hollander, listen carefully.” Ilya sat back on his heels, still in between Shane’s thighs and trapped by his ankles. “I can suck you off and you can come in three seconds, and that is it,” Shane looked like he was about to agree, when, “or, I can plug you up, keep you stretched open during the meal, and then when we get back here, I can slide right into you.”

He watched Shane’s eyes, making sure Shane was OK as this was something they had not done before. Shane’s face scrunched, as he tried to get his brain to work. Ilya sucked a hickey onto Shane’s inner thigh and pulled away when he created a small bruise.

“What’s it going to be, Hollander?”

Shane shot him a wicked grin, and Ilya smiled.

After the meal, and after the drinks the team shared in the hotel lobby with other NHL players all in town for the awards, Ilya and Shane were standing against the back wall of an elevator. There were two business men in suits to their right, three San Jose players that have ignored them all evening, and one couple that looked way too old for Vegas. There were four

different floor buttons pressed, with Shane and Ilya's room being on the last one. When the older couple got out on the seventh floor, Ilya moved his left hand from the bottom of Shane's back lower until he brushed against the base of the plug.

He heard Shane suck in a breath, but Ilya kept his gaze forward. If he remained nonchalant about this, Shane would enjoy it more. He kept his hand hovering over the base until the Sharks players exited. Left with just the business men who weren't paying them any attention, Ilya finally pressed the base of the plug, no doubt caused it to shift inside of him.

Ilya's own cock was beginning to swell in anticipation. The two business men left and Ilya manages to hook the tip of one of his fingers around the ledge of the base through Shane's trousers, now flicking the plug back and forth inside Shane. He hoped this movement caused it to move against his prostate, and from the glazed over look in Shane's eyes and his deep breathing, Ilya believed he was accomplishing what he wanted.

The elevator dinged one last time and Ilya pulled his hand away. One, because he knew that they aren't the only ones on their floor, and two, because he was a kind husband and wanted Shane to actually be able to walk to their room.

Shane let out a breath and led the way back to the room. Ilya wanted to torment him while he tried to unlock the door, but he could see that the elevator is about to open and as much as Ilya knew Shane liked fantasizing about his exhibitionism, he would never do it in actuality. Shane finally got the door open so Ilya followed him and closed it.

"I'm going to wash my hands, but when I get back, I want you naked on the bed, on your back, and I want you to pull your knees to your chest." He looked at Shane to make sure he was ok with it, and then kissed him. It got too heated again so he sent Shane on his way. He went into the bathroom to find the lube in the toiletry bag. Ilya did not know if Shane remembered there was a large mirror facing the bed, but he could image the look of surprise on Shane's face when he realized he can see how pretty the plug looked inside of his hole.

Fuck. Ilya turned the water on cold and splashed some on his face. He knew neither of them were going to last long, so he was going to make this good. He dried his hands and patted the spare water droplets off his face, so Shane did not realize how far gone Ilya also was in this moment. Shane found enjoyment in holding off for as long as Ilya does, but the fun of that would be taken away if Shane knew he wouldn't have to last long.

Ilya wandered into the bedroom still fully clothed, and breathed out a sigh at the sight of Shane. He followed the instructions perfectly. Shane's gaze looked to Ilya, but Ilya shook his head. "Look at yourself in the mirror. Look how open you are for me." Ilya turned on the lamps beside the bed. "Look how well you've kept yourself prepared." Ilya turned off the major overhead lamp and Shane looked even more beautiful in the light glow of the room.

Ilya stood off to the side, watching Shane's face as he kept his gaze concentrated on the mirror. He watched as Shane's dick twitches and precome released onto his abs. That was it, Ilya could not wait any longer. He took off his shirt and Shane's eyes glanced over. If Ilya was not so turned on right now, he would make a joke about how Shane couldn't keep his eyes off of him.

Ilya somehow managed to take off all his clothes and then pressed himself over Shane, keeping his knees pressed to his chest, and forever grateful he loved yoga so much. Ilya finally kissed Shane and they both moaned into each others mouths. Ilya reached down and played with the plug for only a second before pulling it out and placing it on the bed.

Ilya reached over and lubed up his cock and finally entered Shane. Shane breathed out a huge sigh of relief and his head fell back against the pillow. Ilya hooked both of Shane's ankles behind his neck, and then moved his left knee outward, deepening the angle.

"How do you want it, Hollander? Do you want to come on my cock?" There was always something about hotel rooms, and using each others' last names, that reminded them about what it was like before. It was incredibly sexy and Ilya could already feel his orgasm building in his lower stomach.

"Shut up, Rozanov." Shane gave him a challenging look and Ilya took it. He started jackhammering into Shane, and wrapped his hand around Shane's leaking cock. He didn't even need to move it, the motion from pounding into Shane was more than enough.

"I'm going to come," Shane ground out. Ilya nodded and as soon as Shane tightened around him as he orgasmed, Ilya's own erupted out of him. He slightly rutted into Shane as he came inside of him, and it took everything in him not to crash down on top of Shane. He slowly pulled out and lied down next to Shane.

"Jesus Christ," Shane muttered.

Ilya laughed at that, and quipped, "No, just Ilya Rozanov."

"Jerk," Shane said, and shoved his shoulder. There was no real force behind it, and the 'jerk' held no meaning once Shane rolled over to start lazily making out with Ilya.

Two weeks later they were at the cabin on the lake and the first order of business was swimming lessons.

"I might not be able to teach you math, but I can teach you how to swim," Shane declared when applying sunscreen to Charlie's back. Charlie laughed.

"It's a good thing you are a good hockey player," Charlie joked back, repeating the joke that's been made at Shane's expense several times before. Shane laughed anyways.

"Alright, the other two should be down in a moment but we can head out and find the floaties." They dutifully went to the garage and pulled out the flotation devices, as well as the lifejackets for all four of them. Shane promised that if they can do front crawl and float, they can go out on the jet skis later in the afternoon.

Back on the grassy beach, Ilya was there with Jack, who was covered in sunscreen. "Is there any left in the bottle?" Shane teased.

"No!" Jack exclaimed.

“I told you not to tell your-Shane.” Ilya looked as surprised as Shane did at the fact that Ilya nearly referred to both of them as parents, as fathers. The boys were too busy laughing to take notice of the existential moment Shane and Ilya were having. “Ok, we can do this in one of two ways. We can either wade in, or we can put you boys in life jackets and you can jump off the dock.” Shane was glad that even Ilya’s silly option included safety precautions.

Feeling brave, both boys said jump. Shane was surprised that a thirteen year old boy would willingly wear a life jacket, but he wasn’t going to question it. It seemed like Charlie sometimes enjoyed being treated like a child since he hadn’t been able to be one for years.

Shane made sure they fit correctly by lifting the shoulders up to the ears of both boys. All four of them walked onto the dock that the boys weren’t allowed on without supervision. “OK,” Shane said, preparing to let the boys know that they will get into the water, but was rudely interrupted by Ilya cannonballing into the lake, completely soaking Shane with lake water.

“Rozanov!” Shane screeched.

“Ooh he’s mad,” Charlie said, “he used your last name!” The three of them were too busy laughing to care about Shane’s shock. Taking it in stride, Shane himself cannonballed in, spraying the boys on the dock. *There, that’ll make them quiet*, Shane thought fondly. When he surfaced, they were still laughing. It was one of those moments, where Shane was in the water with his husband and his children, and looked at the lakehouse, and he reflected on the life he built for himself.

Of course, that reflection didn’t last too long because Jack seems to have absorbed Ilya’s spirit and ran into the lake off the dock. Shane barely had enough time to go over to him where he floated to the surface with a huge smile on his face.

“Ready, Charlie?” Ilya asked.

Charlie nodded and slid in a bit like a noodle, but Ilya was right there when he surfaced. Ilya grabbed hold of the back of Charlie’s life jacket while he made sure he was all good.

They spent an hour teaching the boys front stroke and how to float, with a break for some water and more sunscreen for Charlie.

Charlie picked it up very easily, and him and Shane swim quite a bit out into the lake. Shane could see Charlie getting tired so they headed into shore before they pushed it too far. Ilya had Jack floating on his back, with one hand supporting him while trying to teach him backstroke.

Charlie went over to Jack and they started chatting while standing in the water and Shane swam over to Ilya. Ilya brought one hand around Shane’s shoulders and pulled him into his side. Shane went easily and wrapped an arm around Ilya’s waist.

“We did that, huh?” Shane said, his chest pounding with so much love he feels like it could explode.

In response Ilya dropped a kiss to Shane's head.

They spent a week uninterrupted at the cottage. Shane spent the morning's finalizing the camps with everyone involved, and everything was all ready to go. Ilya could see Shane sitting at the dining room table one evening, after the kids have gone to bed, illuminated by the glow of his laptop.

He turned back around and looks up at the stars. For some reason, Ilya always felt closest to his mother, Irina, when they were at the cottage. It might be because of the open air and the brightness of the stars, or, it was because this is where his home was built. Not necessarily in the four wooden walls or on the grassy shore, but in Shane's heart.

He was staring up at the stars when he heard the doors open. He turned around expecting to see Shane, but instead it was Charlie.

"Hey Charlie," Ilya says. Charlie looked unsure, probably because he should be in bed, but Ilya got the feeling that there was a reason that Charlie came outside.

Ilya went and sat on the outdoor couch and Charlie sat next to him. Not quite leaning into him, but certainly closer than he would have been two and a half months ago.

Shane had once said that he thought that Ilya and Jack were more similar, because they had the same rambunctious spirit. Ilya had always thought Charlie and him had more in common — both happy to be quiet, both needing to grow up too young.

Ilya looked at him and said, "Is where I feel closest to my mother." It surprised him to admit that out loud, to Charlie of all people. He supposed he shouldn't put these big feelings on a teenager, but Charlie surprised him.

"Do you miss her?"

"Everyday. Somedays I miss her more than others. She loved swimming, and would have loved to be here today and teach you. Is when I see so much love around me that I miss her most." Ilya surprised himself with his honesty, but it was one of the promises he made to Shane when he first arrived here nearly 10 years ago.

"I miss my mom sometimes," Charlie said. Ilya went very still and let the quiet of the lake blanket over them. "She used to bake us cookies on the first day of school, but never packed our lunches. She always said that she would teach us how to swim, and how she'd take us to the river to learn. But she started disappearing for longer and longer. I miss who she was before she started using drugs, but I don't miss who she became."

Ilya wasn't sure what to say, they were big feelings for someone far too small. Unlike Ilya, Charlie found someone he can talk to about them. "Parents are complicated. We expect them to be gods, but they are just people."

“You are a good parent,” Charlie said earnestly. Ilya felt his heart grow three times, threatening to push out of his chest.

“You are a good son. And a good brother. Jack, Shane, and I are very lucky.” Ilya raised his arm and Charlie slid underneath and rested against Ilya’s chest.

Ilya looked up at the stars and it looked as though one winks at him. Ilya never felt like he was doing the right thing with the boys, but part of him thought that was his mother’s way of telling him he did tonight right.

He sat still as Charlie fell asleep, getting more uncomfortable by the second, but not wanting to move and risk waking up the boy sleeping on him. He waited, knowing that Shane will come out eventually. Right now, Ilya was happy letting the sounds of the lake keep his heart safe.

The first day of camps was more hectic than normal. Not only did Ilya have a Shane so stressed he might actually snap, he was also trying to get two young boys dressed for camp. During the Montreal camps, the boys had spent a lot of time with Pike children and Jackie, while Shane and Ilya were coaching, but in Ottawa, they were hosting beginner sessions in the mornings.

Neither Shane or Ilya were coaching the beginners, instead they were being led by Leah and Zane. It was about one hour of learning to skate and then a thirty minute break with a snack, and then two hours of off-ice drills and games being led by some Junior B and Junior A players. In the afternoon, David would be spending time with the kids doing whatever they wanted — Ilya hoped it involved a long walk with Anya.

Jack was super excited, but Charlie looked apprehensive. “If you don’t enjoy it, either of you, you don’t have to go back,” Shane reminded them. “I’d like you to try and do the full morning today, but if you don’t want to go back tomorrow, that is fine.”

“Yes daaadd,” Jack said sarcastically, and then the whole car froze. Shane could not help but replay that moment in his head, Ilya felt his heart grow another three sizes as he watched the man he loved become a father figure to two boys who needed one, and Charlie and Jack both looked incredibly unsure about whether or not that was ok.

Somehow, Shane of all people pulled it together. “Well if you act like that, you won’t go at all. I’m already the best hockey player in Canada, there is no point in anyone else trying.”

It was like the tension is cut by a stick as the boys started laughing, and jeering at Ilya waiting to see how he responds. Ilya was just so in love with this man that he did not quite know when his brain will accept that this was all real and actually his.

Jack had the best time at camp, but Charlie asked Shane if it was actually ok to stop after the second day.

“Of course,” Shane responded. “You’ll just be spending more time with my dad.”

“Do you think he will take me to the pool?” Charlie asked.

Shane was surprised, but masked it well. He was happy that Charlie was at a point where he could ask for things he wanted. “If that’s what you want, that’s fine with me and I’m sure he will be more than happy to take you.” He sent a quick text to his dad and David confirmed that everything sounded okay to him. “If you want, we can look into formal swimming lessons or even swim team in September.” It was becoming easier to plan for a future with the boys.

Charlie looked shocked but nodded. “Can we also go to the nature museum over the weekend?” Shane was not surprised by this, as David had mentioned it to Shane yesterday after dropping the boys and Anya off.

“This weekend might not work, but we can definitely go before school starts.” Shane made a very big mental note to make sure that happens. One of the first things they learned in foster classes was to not make promises that you can’t keep.

“We could save it for Monday afternoon, after Tanya visits,” Ilya suggested, walking into the room. They always liked planning something after the visits as it was a safety-net of sorts for the boys.

“Where are we going?” Jack asked.

“Nature museum,” Charlie said, excitedly.

“That’s boring!” Jack said.

“No it’s not,” said Ilya. “There are dinosaurs, and there are bugs, and I think there are even some creepy-crawlies we can make Shane hold.” Ilya grinned evilly, and Jack copied him exactly.

The rest of summer was quite uneventful. The start of the school year was also uneventful. It was the kind of boring Shane appreciates. They got into a new routine with training having started back up.

During the last weekend of September, Shane sent the boys up to their rooms to put all their laundry in the bin in the bathroom while him and Ilya shared a coffee in the kitchen.

After thirty minutes, the boys still hadn’t come down and Shane couldn’t shake a gut feeling that something was up.

“I’m going to check on them,” he finally announced and headed upstairs. He started taking them two at a time when he heard Jack crying and Charlie trying to shush him. He got to the landing and saw shards of ceramic all over the bathroom, with Jack nursing a bleeding face, holding a face cloth to it. Charlie was picking up the pieces of the sharp sink pieces with his hands.

Shane took in the situation, and put it together pretty quickly that Jack must've climbed up on the sink and fallen down, bashing his face and the sink at the same time. He was confused why Charlie was telling him to be quiet.

"Charlie, stop. Don't move." He picked Jack up, who started crying hard. He clinged onto Shane and he could feel his shirt getting wet. Shane carried him downstairs and set him on the kitchen counter, where Ilya was shocked. "I'm going to go check on Charlie, but can you please make sure his face is ok. We might have to go to the hospital." Shane did not wait for a response from Ilya before rushing up the stairs to go and get Charlie.

Charlie looked like his whole world has crashed around him, and he did not know how fix it. Shane just wanted to tell him that everything is ok, but he was not sure if that will be enough to fix what someone else broke.

"Ok, I have slippers on so I'm going to bring you to the other bathroom and make sure there aren't any cuts or slivers in you." Charlie nodded and Shane picked him up with ease. The minute Charlie got set on the counter of the vanity, he started to cry.

"Please don't send us back, it was an accident, Jack just wanted to grab his toothbrush, and, and, and—" a sob racked his body and Shane just held him.

"Oh, sweetheart." Shane had never been good with words, and instead just held Charlie as he cried, letting him take out the past years of emotion onto his shoulder. Charlie started calming down so Shane moved back to look him in the face.

"We love you. We love both of you." Shane wiped the tears away from Charlie's face as they silently fell. "Accidents happen, I know that. Your- Ilya knows that. We're the adults, we can help with these situations, and make sure neither of you get more hurt."

"I just—" Charlie hiccupped, "I just don't want you to be so mad you send us away."

"Sweetheart—"

"I wanted to do everything so we can stay here."

"Charlie, you don't have to do anything to stay here. Our love isn't earned, we've given it freely. You two boys have a home here, with us, in this house. We don't care if we have a broken sink, we care that we have two happy and healthy boys."

Charlie started crying again and reached out for Shane. Shane just held him and patted his hair, like his mum used to do for Shane. He could still hear the kitchen sink running downstairs over Charlie's crying, meaning that Jack must still have been bleeding.

Shane pulled away and looked at Charlie in the eyes. He had calmed down, a lot. "I'm just going to look at your hands and feet to make sure they're ok." Charlie held out his hands, which had a few scrapes but overall looked ok. The feet were all good, too. There were still a few tears escaping from Charlie's eyes every few seconds, but he looked much better.

“How about we go downstairs, get you a glass of water, and see how your brother is doing, yes?” Charlie nodded and hopped down off the counter. They walked downstairs and in the kitchen, Jack had stopped crying, but Ilya was holding an ice pack up to his face.

“Is it bad?” Shane asked.

Ilya nodded. “I think we have to go to the hospital.”

Charlie looked devastated. “No, if we go to the hospital it gets put on file, and—” Charlie started crying and that got Jack going again. “Jack’s fine, aren’t you?”

Jack started nodding frantically.

“Sweethearts, everything is going to be ok. The hospital is going to make sure Jack’s face is ok, and—”

“No!” Charlie was getting upset. “You don’t understand. If they think you’ve hurt us, they will take us away.”

“Charlie,” Shane said, trying to push down his own worst fears that Charlie was voicing at the moment, “this was an accident. Accidents happen. Everything will be OK.” Charlie did not look convinced.

“You think we will let people take you from us? We are two big hockey players? No one would dare.” Ilya’s suggestion was absurd enough that it seemed to distract Charlie enough for him to self regulate. Shane thought if it came down to it, Ilya wouldn’t let anyone take these kids.

Shane pulled Charlie close and looks at Ilya, and mouthed, “Should we tell them?”

“About tomorrow?” Ilya mouthed back. It actually took three times for Shane to understand, but then he nodded. Over the past couple weeks, they had been speaking about changing the arrangement from a short-term foster placement to one where they were on track to adoption. They knew it would be a long process, even taking up to eighteen months. It would offer all of them more security.

“Ok, we really need to get going to the hospital, but we have something to tell you.” The boys looked at Shane and Ilya.

“We want to make this permanent. Tomorrow when Tanya comes, we were going to all chat with her about this. To see if you want it too.”

“Permanent?” Jack asked.

“Like adopt?” Charlie said. Jack looked wildly at Shane and Ilya.

“If that is what you boys want, we want it. We know you are ours in our hearts, this would just make it official.” Ilya’s straightforward way of telling people he loves them always swept Shane off his feet.

Jack started crying. “Oh sweetheart,” Ilya said, rocking him back and forth. “We don’t ha—”
“My face hurts.”

“Shit— shoot,” Charlie started laughing at Shane swearing, “lets get to the hospital.”

Ilya carried Jack to the car, while Charlie grabbed shoes for Jack and headed outside as well. Shane found his phone and grabbed the paperwork binder and they drove to the hospital. He felt slightly guilty about it, but he texted Lisa to see if she was working. Lisa met them in the ER and took them straight to a private patient room.

Ilya took the ice pack off his face and Lisa looked at it. “I’m not actually allowed to do something until the social worker arrives. We’ve paged the hospital one, but I’m assuming your own case worker is on their way?”

“Yes, Tanya is coming,” Shane said. Charlie was perched on the end of the bed. Lisa was asking about the hockey camps and the boys were shocked to find out she was Wyatt’s wife.

There was a knock on the door and a man entered. He introduced himself as John, the hospital’s social worker. “I do need to be here while Dr. Hayes examines him, and take pictures for any legal information.” That scared Ilya, who had never quite gotten over his feelings towards the police.

Lisa went to examine Jack, but John wanted Ilya to move away. “I can’t have you near the boy when he’s being examined.”

“But why?” Shane asked.

“Don’t argue,” Ilya said, ignoring every instinct and extracting himself from the bed where Jack was currently sitting. The last time Ilya remembered feeling this uneasy in a hospital was when he visited Shane after he got knocked out by Cliff Marlow. “I don’t like this either,” Ilya whispered, “but we have to cooperate so nothing bad happens.”

Lisa was explaining what she was doing, as she first completed a neuro exam and cleared. She then looked at the inside of his mouth, which was where most of the blood came from.

“It seems like his teeth punctured his gums, but he doesn’t need stitches. If it was any deeper, then it would have been a lot worse.” She looked at the nose and sighed. “So it seems like the nose has broken, and has almost certainly set by now. I’d like to do one set of imaging to see if it’s actually going to impair his breathing, because if it’s just cosmetic, I’m not going to recommend surgery to fix it at this age.” John nodded and Lisa charted all this. “Are you in pain?” Lisa asked.

“My mouth hurts but everything else is fine.”

“Did you hit any other body parts when you fell?” Lisa asked.

“Allegedly fell,” John said. Ilya shot him a look, but Josh wasn’t looking at them.

Shane looked at Charlie and Jack's faces, and could see them making the decision of whether or not to lie. It broke his heart to think that these boys will go through such lengths to protect what they had. "Tell the truth," Shane said.

"My elbow and knees hurt," Jack eventually said. Lisa looked at them and cleans them with some antiseptic.

"These are just artificial," Lisa said. "They might bruise over the next couple days but it isn't anything to worry about." Shane nodded, as if the motion will eventually convince him that it was in fact ok. "So, I'm going to send in a req for the imaging of his nose, and someone will come to get you within the hour to get that done, OK?"

"Thank you so much," Ilya said.

"Of course." John took one of the chairs and Ilya and Shane looked at each other, not quite knowing what to do. Shane got a call from Tanya so stepped outside to take it.

Ilya did not like John, but he knew he couldn't say anything. Charlie instead said, "You're going to look like Papa with a wonky nose"

Jack giggled and looked up at Ilya. "Is a handsome nose," Ilya defended.

If his voice was a bit thick because Charlie called him Papa for the first time, then no one had to know.

John was replaced by Tanya, and John left once he created a copy of his chart for Tanya's file. Tanya and Charlie were chatting while Jack rested his head with an ice pack against his nose.

"Charlie called me 'Papa,'" Ilya said to Shane. Shane turned and looks at him with joy his eyes. "It was incredible."

Tanya let Ilya go to X-Ray with Jack while Charlie and Shane sat with Tanya. She was asking about the start of the school year so far. Charlie turned to Shane and asked, "Have you told her yet?"

"Told her what?" Shane asked.

"About adopting us."

Tanya didn't look too surprised. "So cats out the bag, I suppose." Shane rubbed the back of his neck. This was not how he wanted this conversation to go. "I think we should chat properly when Ilya gets back, but we want to make this permanent."

Tanya smiled widely. "Shane, this is fantastic. This is obviously going to be a long process, but I'm so happy that you two have made this decision."

As a family, they were still navigating what things look like for them. They were still most frequently called Shane and Ilya by Charlie and Jack, but every now and again, they threw out a 'dad' or a 'papa' here and there. They told the boys they love them more now, but tried not to smother them. The boys came to a couple of the exhibition games and were excited about regularly attending throughout the season. They were allowing the boys to come to the home games if they didn't have school the next day.

They had a mellow thanksgiving before they got ready for the season to start. Their season opener was against New York, which meant that it wouldn't be an easy game to win. It also means that there would be lots of press as the shadow of the Cup's semifinals hangs over them.

The boys were intrigued by Shane's opening game day tradition, but accepted it quite easily. David and Yuna got them Rozanov and Hollander jerseys to wear.

While they were not longer actually famous rather than just hockey famous, whenever they did something "news worthy," it usually got picked up by the wider news circuit. For that reason, and with conversations with Tanya, they decided to shield Charlie and Jack from the public. They weren't going to hide their boys, but they were definitely not going to be dragging them out in front of the media.

Because playing hokey was their job, the boys would be with Yuna and David during the game, and would most likely be put to bed by their grandparents. Charlie started calling David, 'Granddavid' and that caught on very quickly with Jack. Yuna thought it was delightful, and Ilya couldn't be happier.

"You better win," Charlie said, as they say goodbye ahead of their pre-game skate. Jack nodded in agreement.

"I'll do better. I'll get a season scoring record," Ilya said, and they all laugh.

"You mean, beating my record, the best scoring record in the history of the league? In that season where I got 12 more goals than anyone else ever?" Everyone laughed at Shane's cockiness.

"Papa, maybe you need to find something else to be good at," Jack said, very mischievously.

Ilya theatrically gasped. "I am the best hockey player in Canada!"

"Second best," Shane sung.

"I will score a hatrick tonight, and then you will all be quiet."

Ilya didn't score a hatrick. But Shane did.

Since they were officially moving towards adoption, it meant that they can take new roles in Charlie and Jack's life. For Ilya, this meant enrolling them in therapy. Jack went once a month, and Charlie went twice. Each appointment was punctuated with ice cream, during which the boys shared as much or as little as they wanted.

It also means that they do after-school activities, which is hectic. Charlie and Jack both swim, and Jack also wanted to take on hockey. Charlie also wanted to learn an instrument, but didn't know which one. He eventually settled on Piano, which Shane was secretly grateful for. It meant they could buy him an electric practice keyboard that came with headphones.

It also meant the boys were both taking French in school. Attending school in Ottawa basically meant that you are raised bilingual, but previously the boys were not encouraged to spend time on it outside of class. Even Ilya has started learning it, having found a source where he can learn French from Russian, but since the season was in full swing, and Ilya was in fact the captain, this meant that he couldn't commit nearly as much as he needed to when learning a new language.

Their childcare arrangements were set for the road trips the team was taking, with David and Yuna taking on an important role in that. The boys hang out a lot with the other team children. Charlie was the oldest by a couple years, but he found ways to interact with the younger kids.

When it was time for the first family skate, Jack was so excited. He loved that Shane and Ilya played hockey and could not wait to hang out on the ice. Charlie could skate, but wasn't much interested beyond that. Whereas Ilya was in the thick of it, often with Jack and a bunch of other kids chasing him around the rink, Charlie skated around the edge with Shane and alternating teammates who were spending time with them.

Harris eventually came over and introduced himself properly to Charlie. "I need to take a picture of you and the other one for socials," Harris told Shane.

"And you're telling me so I can go and get him?"

"Exactly!" Harris laughed loudly like he always did. "I'll hang out with Charlie here while you go and extract him."

Shane nodded and started chasing Ilya around the rink, who seemed to be doing everything to avoid Shane, even using children as shields. At one point, Ilya was behind the net, while Shane was in front of it.

"Come on fastest skater, come and get me," Ilya taunted. Shane was watching Ilya's eyes and knew that Ilya was going to try and fake Shane out so Shane just went in the direction and they end up colliding. They went down on the ice and everyone looked at them.

"Rozanov! You have one of the most expensive contracts in the NHL and this is how you act?" Wiebe yelled as he skated over, with a smile on his face.

"Why me?"

“Who else?” Shane said, laughing as rolled over and got up. He reached out a hand to Rozanov who stood up, and then surprised Shane again by spinning him around and dipping him into a kiss. A chaste kiss, but it still made Shane’s heart flutter.

Half the people were whistling cat-calls while the rest exclaimed how gross it was. Shane could feel his face go bright red the minute he was back upright. He looked up and saw that most of the attention was on them, including Harris who had his phone up.

“Alright lets get a PG photo of the two of you,” Harris said. He took a couple and then, “Jack, Charlie, why don’t you go stand in there.”

Jack and Charlie stood in front and Shane put one hand around Ilya’s waist and his other on Jack’s shoulder. Ilya copied him and Shane gave the camera a huge smile.

He couldn't wait to get that photo printed.

November was incredibly hectic. They were away for a nine-day long road trip and the boys were waiting for Shane and Ilya to return home. They have FaceTimed with them a couple of times, and Yuna always told them that they’ve been behaving.

Apparently Charlie had a falling out with his friend from school, but wouldn't tell Yuna or David what happened. Charlie also finished level eight of the Red Cross swim meaning that he was officially allowed to start swim team, and Shane wished he could’ve been there for it.

After finishing their last game on the west coast, winning against LA 4-3 and were heading back to the hotel. “I wish we were going back tonight,” Shane said to Troy, who was sitting next to him on the bus. Ilya was somewhere near the back making fun of the rookies with Zane.

“Me too, but we wouldn’t get back until like 6am so I get it,” Troy said in return. “Did it get harder when you were engaged to be apart?”

Shane wasn’t expecting that question. “Kind of, but it was more because we had agreed to come out that summer. The anticipation of being free made it harder. Being engaged just felt right.”

Troy nodded. Shane was looking at his face, trying to figure out what Troy wanted to speak about. “I’ve got the ring.” Shane wasn't surprised at all. “I have this idea where I decorate the house in Christmas lights, and then as I’m showing him around, we go to the back garden where there is, like, a romantic gondola with lights all around it.”

Shane’s brain was catching up. Why would Troy put a gondola in his back- ahh. “Do you mean gazebo?”

Troy blushed and nodded. “He always talks about having one, and setting up a reading nook where he and Chiron can sit in the summer.” Shane swooned slightly, thinking about how much effort Troy was putting into the proposal.

“So, you want to build an entirely new structure and cover the whole property in Christmas lights, without Harris noticing?” He couldn't help but think that that was so much work. But then again, he'd spent a thousand dollars on electric candles and nearly four hours lighting them and arranging them around the living room. Troy nodded, bashfully. “You know we'd all help you, right?”

“I guess,” Troy responded. Troy had grown a lot over the past four years since joining the Centaurs, but from what Shane knew about him from Ilya and from experience, he still had trouble believing that his teammates would do stuff for him.

“I'm sure we could come up with a reason for Harris to be away. Maybe we could invite him and Chiron on a walk with Anya and the boys, and then I'm sure we could make the rookies help decorate. Obviously bring one of the wives, maybe Selena and Caitlin to make sure it actually looks pretty.”

“Whose proposal is this?” Troy asked, and Shane chuckled. “Like, I know you've done this before, but it was just Ilya.” At that, he heard Ilya let out a loud laugh and they turned to look at what is going on at the back of the bus. Ilya was standing on two arm rests across the aisle and was laughing at something the rookies have done or said. “I mean, you probably could have written on a pizza box and that man would have said yes.”

“You're not wrong,” Shane said, and then smiled wistfully as he remembered. “He was supposed to propose, actually.” Troy's neck snapped and looked him, kind of in disbelief that Shane was actually sharing this. He was much more shy about their relationship, and valued their privacy more than Ilya.

It didn't seem like Shane was going to say anything else, so Troy asked, “Really?”

Shane leaned his head back and nods. There was a loud round of laughter again and Shane smiled. “We'd only been doing this for like 2 weeks and we were at the cottage. He said he'd cover my dock in candles and ask me to marry him.” Troy looked a little bit shocked at that. “This was way back when he was still playing for Boston, and all of our plans were for when we retired.”

“But, I beat him to it.” Troy wasn't surprised, everything seemed like a competition between them sometimes. Troy waited for Shane to tell him how he did it, but he was done sharing information. “You know, you are going to need a photographer there, or else Harris might make you do it again if there isn't photo evidence.”

Troy smiled at that, “Already on the checklist.”

When they got back to the hotel and grabbed their hotel keys, the rookies and younger team members were getting ready to go out. “Don't go getting too crazy,” Ilya yelled at them. “We are leaving at 9am and we are not missing our flight home.”

There was a round of people calling Ilya boring, including Shane who took this opportunity to point out that Ilya was also boring sometimes. Ilya just shook his head and hugged Shane

from behind before dropping a kiss to his cheek.

The more senior members of the team got into the elevator and pressed the two buttons for their floors. Shane was leaning against Ilya, clearly very tired. They got into their room and Shane started taking off his suit immediately. He stripped down to his boxers, and found the toiletries bag, in the time it took Ilya to take off his tie, belt, and cufflinks. Ilya was getting undressed as he watched Shane wash his face through the open bathroom door. It shouldn't be as arousing as it was, it was just Shane washing his face, but Ilya supposed that it doesn't take much for Ilya to find this man sexy. It never did.

Shane switched to brushing his teeth as Ilya focused on unbuttoning his shirt and finish undressing. Shane stepped out the bathroom and found his book and climbed onto his side of the bed, beginning to unwind from an incredibly long day and hard game. Ilya went into the bathroom, and somehow managed to pee with his half-hard boner. He brushed his teeth and headed out into the main room. He turned off the overhead light after noticing that Shane has turned on the lamp next to the bed.

Ilya plugged his phone into the charger and climbed into bed next to Shane. Shane's book was about a volcanic eruption in Washington State and it sounded quite boring. Shane let go of one side of the book, and Ilya slid underneath his arm. Ilya tried to follow along about Mt. St. Helens, but it was boring and he was in bed with his nearly naked husband and this was their last night without kids for a while.

Shane was trying to read his book, but Ilya started leaving kisses and grazing across his chest. Shane's dick was excited, but he thought he might actually be too tired to do anything. He closed his book and looked down at Ilya. Ilya rolled on top of Shane and started making out with him lazily. Shane could feel Ilya's length harden against his thigh, but Shane doesn't do anything about it.

Ilya's hand started to move towards his waistband, but Shane placed his hand over top of Ilya's, stopping anything before it started. "I really want to," Shane said.

"I know," Ilya replied, because of course he does. He loved any opportunity to point out how hard Shane gets for him.

"No, like I really want to, but I think I might actually be way too tired to do anything."

Ilya chuckled into his neck and murmurs into his ear, "I can do all the work. You just lie there, no work out." There was no reason for the suggestion to be so sexy, but Shane was so turned on by it. The thought of Ilya being so into him, and needing his body so much, that he will let Shane just be pampered by him at the end of a very long day, and an even longer trip. This wasn't even the first time Ilya's proposed this; especially now that they travel together. Half the time, Shane took him up on the offer, the other half, they kept making out and cuddled until they fell asleep.

Ilya sucked the pulse point below Shane's jaw and there went the last of his resolve. He moaned and Ilya began digging in, taking Shane as his meal. It was moments like this with

Ilya that felt so primal. So good.

Ilya removed both of their boxers and played with Shane's dick and balls before lubing up his hand and jerking them both off together. Shane's arms were hooked behind Ilya's shoulders, keeping him close as he moaned into Ilya's mouth. His breathing sped up as he chased his orgasm. Shane began lightly thrusting up into Ilya's hand, enjoying the drag of the underside of Ilya's cock against his.

Ilya tutted and Shane thought about how he might throttle him. What could he possibly make fun of Shane for doing right now. "I'm doing all the work. You can't even stay still when you want to."

Shane opened his mouth to say something back, but at that point, Ilya swiped his thumb across the slit in the head of Shane's dick, sending a jolt of pleasure right to his balls, and very effectively shutting him up.

"Close?" Ilya asked.

Shane nodded, keeping his mouth pressed closed, hyperaware that his teammates were in the rooms all around him. Ilya sped up his hand movement and Shane came all over his chest and even felt some up to his neck. He let go of Ilya, who leaned back and started jerking off in front of Shane.

Shane leaned back against the pillows, with what he is sure is a goofy smile, and just watched his beautiful husband chased his release. When it came, he leaned back over Shane and shot it across Shane's torso, creating quite the mess across his tan skin.

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's mouth, before getting up and going to the bathroom. He came back with two damp facecloths and began wiping down Shane's chest and spent cock. Shane felt very melty at the moment and knew that the minute Ilya's arms are around him, he would fall asleep immediately. And that happened less than two minutes later.

December was more hectic than November. The month started with a three day road trip, which was thankfully their last multi-day trip of the year. Shane meanwhile was trying to get everything in order to make sure Christmas was great.

It came to a head when in the second-last week of school before breaking up for the winter holidays, Shane got a call from Tanya on a Wednesday afternoon. Ilya was at a therapy session with Galina, which was why he couldn't be reached.

"Hi Shane, I need you to meet me at Charlie's school."

Alarm bells started going off in Shane's head, as he began to think through every scenario. "What happened?"

"There has been a fight, and I'm afraid I don't know more than that."

Shit. “Ok thanks Tanya, I’ll reach out to Ilya and meet you there.”

He started driving, knowing that Ilya’s appointment ended in three minutes. He got a call back from Ilya and answered it before the first ring can finish.

“What’s wrong? I have call from Tanya and you.”

“Charlie’s been in a fight,” Shane said, not quite believing it as he says it.

“What? Fight?”

“Yes, so I don’t know what we should do. I’m on my way to meet Tanya at the school but we also need to get Jack, and Jack has hockey as well. Ah shit, I have Jack’s hockey bag in my car.”

“I get Jack, and if you are not done, I go to Charlie’s school and grab the bag out of your car. I have the key. If you are done, we meet at home.” Shane let out a breath of relief at having a plan set in place. “Is he hurt?”

“I don’t know. Tanya didn’t tell me anything.” Shane realized how miserable he sounds.

“He is OK,” Ilya said, “Tanya would have told us.”

Turns out, Tanya did not tell them because she too didn’t know. Charlie was sitting in the office covered in mud, and his eye was bright red with a bruise blooming around it. He was clearly been trying not to cry, but there were a couple of tear tracks down his cheek.

Shane went over and opened his arms, and Charlie hugged him. A sob racked him, and Shane held him tighter, Charlie’s face pressed up against Shane’s chest.

“What happened?” Shane asked Tanya.

“I still don’t know. The other boy is in with the principal at the moment.”

The secretary was looking at Shane curiously. “Why hasn’t he gotten an icepack. Or has his wound been cleaned?” Shane did not know who he was calling it a wound, but it got the secretary moving. Shane sat down, with Charlie sitting between him and Tanya. “What happened, sweetheart?”

Charlie looked at him, extremely unsure. “It was Phillip.” Phillip was Charlie’s friend that he’d had a falling out with while they were away last month. “He’d just stopped hanging out with me one day and pretending I didn’t exist, and when you were away, he started calling me names. And then today—” he hiccupped, “today he said they were playing soccer on the field and I should join.” Charlie sounded so miserable and Shane could just imagine how hopeful he was to have his friend back.

“Is that when this happened?” Shane was never very eloquent, but he hoped that ‘this’ covered everything that was happening on his face.

“Well, we went over to the group of Phillip’s new friends and they kicked the ball to me and I missed so I had to run into the little wooded area to get it. And then Phillip said some mean things and I just- I just wanted him to shut up,” Charlie said. “So, I pushed him on the chest so he would get away from me and I could leave.” That seems like a minor reaction, Shane thought. “And then he kicked me and I landed in the mud, and when I tried to get up, he- he- he kicked me in the side of the face.” It took everything in Shane not to gasp. This wasn’t just a boy lashing out on the playground, this was a violent attack.

“Is that all?” Shane asked, hoping that it is. He looked over and Tanya was writing this all down.

“He pretty much left me alone. Well, after he kicked some dirt onto my face and spat in my hair.” Shane was seething with anger, but was trying desperately to keep it in check so he could keep comforting Charlie.

“Oh sweetheart.” He pulled Charlie into his side and Charlie leaned into him. The secretary finally returned with an ice pack. Shane held it gently against Charlie’s face and thanked himself that Ilya wasn’t here, who would have knocked on that principals door the minute he saw Charlie’s face.

Eventually the principals door opened, and Phillip came out with a woman who must be his mum. Phillip muttered a half-hearted apology before leaving. The principal called them in.

He introduced himself as Mr. Friday. He shook Tanya and Shane’s hands.

“I’m going to start this meeting by letting you know that Phillip has been sent home early for his actions.” Shane made a mental note that the school day ends in fifteen minutes, so not much of a punishment. “We have a zero tolerance policy for violence, and I’ve been told that Charlie started it by shoving Phillip, so I am going to file a suspension for two days until the weekend.”

Shane looked at Tanya who does not look happy, but stayed silent. Charlie looked heartbroken.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, “but this is unacceptable. That boy has been tormenting Charlie for weeks and—“

“None of that has been documented,” Mr Friday interrupted.

“I told Mrs. Halladay but she said that Phillip didn’t know what those words meant,” Charlie spoke up. Shane was surprised, but he was also upset that Charlie didn’t tell him any of this. He reminded himself that Charlie was used to handling these situations without anyone in his corner.

“I haven’t heard any such reports. What is this supposed name-calling?”

Charlie looked at Shane. He nodded, hopefully, encouragingly. Charlie stilled looked uneasy as he said, “He’s been calling me a slur for gay people.”

Shane was shocked, and hurt, and ready to burn this school to the ground.

“Are you gay?” Mr. Friday asked.

“What the—“ Shane stopped himself, “That is a completely ignorant question and not at all important. What is important is that you have a child going around using slurs against other students.”

Mr. Friday looked shocked, but he took control of the situation. “We still have a zero-tolerance policy for violence.”

“I understand that,” Shane said, “but my son was assaulted under your care, and it seems like the boy who did it, has been ‘punished’ by being let go from school early.”

“Let’s not throw around the word assault,” Mr. Friday said.

“How about battery?” Shane responded.

“That’s enough,” Tanya said. “Mr. Friday, a two day suspension for Charlie is only going to take him out the classroom and set him behind. There is no need to punish him more than how you’ve punished Phillip. We are also 10 days away from the winter holidays, Charlie would be missing out on crucial bonding experiences with his classmates.”

Shane was not happy. He knew that Tanya was trying to make this easier for Charlie, and he supposed that is more important than being right, but he believed this school wasn't a safe place for Charlie.

Mr. Friday agreed and lets them go. Outside, Tanya finished her report while Charlie got in the car. Shane shot Ilya a text that he’s about to head home and Ilya let him know that he grabbed the stuff out the car and will see them after Jack’s practice.

“I don’t like that man,” Tanya said to Shane, “unofficially, of course.”

Shane smiled at that. “Why didn’t you—“

“I wanted to punch that man, if I’m honest with you. But there is only so much we can do. You and Ilya should hear before Christmas when your court date is.”

Shane looked at her in shock. “This soon?”

“You filed quickly, your lawyer is good.” Good, Shane thought, she costed a lot. “If Charlie had that suspension on file, it would have been brought up in court. Charlie would have to live through that again, maybe even answer questions about it publicly, and it would slow down the proceedings. I know that you knew about the falling out, it was in your last monthly update. And while you and I understand why Charlie didn’t confide in you about the slurs, the judge might not.” Tanya reached out and rested an arm on his bicep. “I’m on your side.”

He nodded, feeling much better about the situation.

Instead of going home, they went and pick up take-n-bake pizzas and ice cream from the grocery store for dessert. They got home and Charlie went to shower and work on some homework, while Shane worked on documenting this experience. Ilya and he had had conversations about potentially moving the boys into a private school closer to home, where some of the other players' kids attended, but they weren't able to do it until the legal proceedings were underway and the judge signed off. They also hadn't brought it up to the boys because it wasn't something they could even act on.

"Do you want to play fortnight?" Charlie asked.

He didn't, but Shane followed him into what they now called the family room. It was where their gaming consoles now lived, as well as the fu ball table. Shane sat on the couch, and Anya climbs up next to him. Charlie got it set up and passed him a controller.

They played the game for 45 minutes until Ilya and Jack arrived home. Jack ran into the room and sits there, petting Anya, telling both of them about his day, while also watching intently the screen. Ilya came and stood in the door way, and shot Shane a smile. Shane got distracted enough that he got shot.

"I still have it," Ilya said, "this time I distract you on video games rather than the ice."

Shane huffed and threw his controller onto the couch next to him and stood up. Ilya opened his arms and Shane walked into them. He let his husband hold him. "To the kitchen," Ilya said. They walked hand in hand to the kitchen and when they got there Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya again.

"His face looks bad." Ilya said, into Shane's hair.

"It is." Ilya started running his fingers through Shane's hair. "I argued with the principal."

"You did?" The surprise was evident in Ilya's voice. Shane hated disappointing anyone, particularly authority figures.

Shane recounted the full afternoon, Ilya mumbled disagreement and squeezed Shane tighter whenever he wanted to comfort his husband. When Shane told him about their court date coming through the mail soon, Ilya held Shane arms lengths apart so he could see his face. "Really?"

"That's what Tanya says." Ilya's smile took over his face, and he gave Shane three quick kisses. Shane was smiling against his lips.

They get their family court summons and their hearing was set for early March. If Ilya understood correctly, they got a hearing, then waited again and everything was confirmed in another hearing.

The news about the hearing came days before Christmas, when the boys were finally out of school. They've been spending lots of time as a family of four, often taking Anya out on the

trails. One morning, Ilya spent in the garden with Jack and Charlie while they built a snowman. It let Shane confirm a few things for Troy's proposal and finish off the arrangements for Christmas.

Ilya was outside, where he could see Shane in the kitchen in front of laptop. His gaze was drawn away from Shane when he heard Charlie scream at Jack. He looked over, and could see that Jack knocked the middle section off of the snowman that Charlie was working on.

"Jack, apologize to Charlie and then we will all help him fix it." Ilya never liked having to discipline the boys, but sometimes it was necessary. With two brothers, it was necessary on a regular basis, in fact. Ilya thought it would feel more unnatural than it did, but he supposed that captaining several NHL teams helped prepare him more than he thought it would. Shane had also made him read several parenting books.

Jack muttered out an apology and stalked over the Anya, who was trying to eat the snow. Ilya felt bad, but he knew that he did what he was supposed to do. He helped Charlie lift the head of the snowman onto the snowman's body and went over to Jack and showed him how to throw snowballs to make Anya catch them.

They were outside for another 30 minutes before Shane called them in for lunch. Ilya made sure all their snow gear was hanging up properly since they were going back out later with Chiron and Harris for a long walk and probably hot chocolate.

Charlie was telling them all about this rock in Stanley Park, and how it was one of three rocks like that in the world. Ilya made a note of it in his head, and maybe they could justify going out to the west coast over the summer. They had been hoping to take the boys to the All Star weekend, but they weren't allowed to pull them out of school and it wasn't even confirmed that Shane and Ilya will both be selected. But, of course they would be.

They finished eating and Shane confirmed with Harris they they'll meet downtown. Ilya was impressed with how sneaky Troy and Shane have been about this whole proposal, but Ilya also couldn't wait. He'd seen the group chat updates with all the lights that the players have ready to go in their trucks to start decorating once Troy and Harris left, as well as Nick, Stephens, and Frank's ladders. Evan was in charge of getting a Gili Suit for Gen to wear over top of her snow gear, so that she could hide in the bushes along the base of the patio to take photos of the proposals.

Ilya and Shane were both doing their best to give nothing away to the boys, because if they thought anything was weird, then they would start asking questions and that absolutely could not happen. They loaded up the car, Anya not thrilled about having to be in the trunk, but she would be fine once Chiron is back there with her.

They drove out to the arena, where they were meeting Troy and Harris. Troy told Harris that he was going to do a work out and a long physiotherapy session afterwards, and with everyone in on the plan at the arena, it was an easy enough lie to tell to Harris.

Harris came over, his snow gear, a toboggan, and Chiron in tow. They opened the trunk, threw in the sled, and Chiron climbed in. Harris climbed into the back seat with Charlie and Jack.

“Should we film another ‘Riding with Roz,’” Harris asked.

“What’s that?” Charlie asked.

“Your dad used to take me driving around and I would film him.” Ilya could see Harris figuring out how much to tell the boys about his dangerous driving habits. Not that Ilya thinks they’re dangerous, everyone else was just boring. It was also nice seeing how quickly everyone close to them accepted them as parents.

“People watch that?” Jack asked. Harris laughed loudly.

“Well, I would ask him questions at the same time.” A glance in the rearview mirror told Ilya that Jack wasn't convinced by its entertainment value. “Here, let’s do one now, you can help me come up with questions.” Ilya knew he doesn’t have to remind Harris that this would not be going online.

Harris got out his phone and must’ve hit record because he was introducing the segment. “Helllloooo Cen’s Fans! We are back with another Riding With Roz. Rozanov is in the drivers seat, Hollander is in my seat,” Shane gave a wave, “and I’m in the back here with Jack and Charlie who are going to help me come up with some questions.”

“So first question, where are we going today?”

“Are going on a walk in Quebec,” Ilya responded, easily.

“And what car are we in today?”

“We are in a Mercedes SUV, very reliable, big for the whole family.”

“And what colour is it?”

“Blue,” Ilya said, and because he knew when to be a shit for the camera, “Give me better question.”

“How many stop signs did you drive through last week?” Charlie asked. Shane whipped his head to look at Ilya and the whole car started laughing.

“Truth will out,” Harris taunted.

“None, of course,” Ilya responded, with a big smile. They were coming up to a stop sign so Ilya did a long slow and complete stop. “Always full stops.”

“Sure,” Shane said. “And this is what he always does, boys?”

Jack giggled, clearly about to give Ilya away. “Of couuuuurse.”

They all laughed, knowing it’s not true.

“Next question,” Ilya responded gruffly.

“How many times did it take you to pass your drivers test?” Harris asked, knowing the answer.

“Canada, right away.”

“In Canada, you just had to walk into the office and trade it in,” Shane so helpfully reminded him.

“How many?” Charlie asked.

“Four,” Ilya responded, very quietly.

“I don’t think the camera heard that,” Harris said.

“Hmmp,” was the rough sound that Ilya made, before getting obnoxious. “I passed! And you know how many Harris, so stop being—” Ilya searched for an appropriate word, “stop being buttface.” Jack started laughing hysterically, and it seemed like Shane couldn’t hide his laugh long enough to scold Ilya for calling Harris a buttface.

“Maybe we will have to a segment where we test how well you know road signs,” Harris said. “We could call it ‘Road Rules with Roz.’”

“Not sexy,” Ilya said. Shane squeezed his thigh, clearly signalling him not to take it further. Not that he would with his — his! — kids in the car.

“Like that one, what does that one mean?” Harris pointed to a yellow sign with black stripes.

Ilya couldn’t think of the English word. “Means to watch for other cars.”

“You mean, what you should always be doing when driving,” Shane asked redundantly, rubbing his thumb against Ilya’s outer knee, taking any real bite out of the sentiment.

“He tries,” Jack said. “He stopped before we hit the red car yesterday.”

“Excuse me!” Shane said.

“You weren’t supposed to tell him!” Charlie said. Ilya was going to be in so much shit.

“I didn’t say that you could not tell him, I told him that maybe we have secret. About how close that red car got to us.” Ilya really hoped he was saving that. He knew that he would never keep any really important secrets from Shane, they’d both had enough secrets to keep over the years.

Harris was clearly finding this delightful, still holding his phone camera up. Ilya was so happy that this wouldn’t see the light of day.

After the walk, they stopped at a Starbucks where Harris offered to buy them all cake pops.

“I don’t think you’ll like the snowman one, Jack, it has peppermint in it,” Shane said, knowing that Jack does in fact not like peppermint.

“But I want a snowman,” Jack said.

“Look, if you get a chocolate one it’s got chocolate on the outside,” Shane said. It was very hard to reason with a petulant seven year old, but he’s had lots of practice.

“I’m going to get a chocolate one,” Harris said, “we could match.” Jack considered it, but still looked unsure.

“I will get chocolate, too,” Ilya said. That was what it took for Jack to agree. Shane smiled gratefully at Harris.

Shane and Harris went up to the counter and when Harris dropped the cake pops off at the table, Troy was texting that they needed about one more hour until everything is ready. Shane had no idea if he had an hour left in him, but it was time to persevere. He brought the two hot chocolates over the table and went back to get the adult drinks. He tried not to look at either Ilya or Harris’ drinks with disgust. He goes went and got his decaf Americano, content with the simplicity of it.

Harris and the boys were talking about school, about apples, and about everything, while he and Ilya just watched on. Shane knew that Harris is great with everyone, and he knew that the boys are becoming more and more comfortable by the second, but it felt so good to be watching it all unfold in front of them.

Shane and Ilya were in bed, lazily making out when Ilya’s phone rings.

“Leave it,” Ilya said, kissing down Shane’s neck.

“Let me just check if it’s important,” Shane replied. He reached out for the phone from underneath Ilya and saw that it was a FaceTime from Harris. Shane bolted up and answered it, before realizing that Harris (and probably Troy) were going to see them both shirtless. With Ilya sat in Shane’s lap. In bed.

Harris’ hand was on the screen, showing off the ring. It was a very nice ring, Shane noted.

“Congrats!” Ilya said. Harris put his hand down and Troy was standing behind Harris, his face appearing over Harris’ shoulder.

“Thanks for all your help,” Troy said.

“Of course, did it go well?” Shane asked.

“It was perfect!” Harris said, Ilya chuckled as Troy hides his bright red face. “We got home and there were all these lights, and then Troy had built me a gazebo! He got me to look out of the Gazebo and when I turned around, he was there on one knee!”

“Did you say something romantic?” Ilya asked, making Troy blush harder.

“He did! It was so sweet! I was kinda just there in shock, so I forgot to respond,” Harris says, still with the biggest smile on his face.

“Yah, I was shitting bricks for a good minute before he said something.”

“Took Shane three yeses to notice I would marry him,” Ilya said. Shane pinched Ilya’s side, which caused Ilya to shift closer to Shane.

Troy looked between them before pleading, “Please tell you guys didn’t pick up when you were in the...middle of things.”

Christmas morning started early for Shane. He heard whispers outside of the bedroom door.

“Let’s just wake them up,” Jack said.

“They said that we should only go in in emergencies,” Charlie responded.

“Nooo, they said we could go and get them if we needed anything. And I need to open some presents.” Jack would make one hell of a lawyer one day.

Ilya must’ve felt Shane shift, as his arms pulled him tighter to him. “Good morning,” Ilya whispered in Russian.

“Good morning,” Shane responded.

“I really think we should go in,” Jack said. Shane could feel Ilya chuckling behind him.

“Slept badly, I could not wait for them to wake up,” Ilya confessed in Shane’s ear. Shane smiled at the confession and was struck again by how much he has loved watching Ilya become a parent.

“How long do we think it will take them?” Shane asked.

“Not long, Charlie’s going mushy,” Ilya responded.

All of a sudden the boys stop talking. And then, “Did they say something?” Jack asked.

Everyone was very quiet before the door gently opens and in a loud whisper, “Dads?”

Ilya groaned, flipped onto his back, and said, “Is early. Do you have school?”

Jack walked over to the edge of the bed and stood on it. “No, it’s Christmas!”

“Is it?” Ilya asked. “Is December 26 today,”

Shane rolled his eyes but smiled. Ilya could never not torment someone.

“Stop being silly,” Charlie said. With a very teasing tone went, “This is our first proper Christmas, don’t ruin it before it starts.”

“Low blow, Charlie,” Shane said, and opened his arms. Jack jumped on top of his torso and Shane let out a groan. “I think you’re too big for Christmas, Jack,” Shane said.

“Never!!!” Jack yelled, much too loudly in the morning, but there was no reason to correct, it’s Christmas. Shane looked past Jack and saw Charlie sitting on the edge of the bed between their feet, legs crossed and facing the rest of them.

“Presents?” Charlie asked.

Shane laughed. “How about you two go and put your dressing gowns on, and we’ll come down and make some coffee and a fire, and then we can do presents.” They boys rushed out, and Shane looked sideways at Ilya. “Merry Christmas,” he said, giving Ilya a kiss.

“Merry Christmas, my beloved,” Ilya responded in Russian. “Time to go make mess!” Shane groaned and Ilya hovered over him giving him a kiss.

Shane and Ilya were sat on the sofa watching Jack and Charlie open their presents. Ilya wanted to spoil them rotten, and Shane hadn’t stopped him. In fact, Ilya had to stop Shane a couple times. Both the boys had birthdays coming up in March, so anything they didn’t buy them now, could wait a couple months.

They were only letting them unwrap their presents from Santa, and they would do the “family gifts” when Yuna and David arrived later in the morning for brunch.

Shane was sporadically taking pictures and videos of them opening their presents. He was extremely happy with how much they both seemed to be enjoying what they were being given.

When they were done, they cleaned up the wrapping paper. Shane leaned against Ilya, who had an arm thrown over his shoulder. They watched as Charlie flipped through one of the books he was given and what Shane thinks was Jack deciding what lego set he was going to build first.

“What was your favourite present, Charlie? I already know Jack loved his socks and underwear the most.” Ilya simply could not help himself.

Jack gave Ilya a look and Charlie and Shane both laughed at it. Charlie then leaned over to Jack and whispered something in his ear. Jack nodded and got up and said, “We need something from upstairs. We will be right back.”

They ran up the stairs, and Shane asked Ilya if he knew what they are doing. “No idea,” he responded. Shane cuddled backwards into Ilya, and closed his eyes. “Don’t fall asleep, they might not forgive you.”

Shane laughed. “Don’t worry, this coffee is doing what it’s supposed to.”

They boys came downstairs and have a box wrapped in newspaper. They dropped it in their laps. Across the top of the newspaper they've written "To: Dads" and "From: Charlie and Jack (your sons)." Shane's heart already could not take how cute this is.

"Look, it is us," Ilya pointed out. They had used the sports section and there was a picture of Shane jumping against Ilya celebrating his goal.

"Open it!" Jack demanded.

They flipped it over where the corners of the present are and Shane ripped one open. It was the back of a frame, so Ilya flipped it over and removed the rest of the paper with the hand not behind Shane.

It was a photo of them from the family skate, Shane and Ilya in the back, with their hands on Charlie and Jack's shoulders. They looked like the family they were. His eyes got watery.

"Dad's crying!" Jack pointed out.

"Thank you, sweethearts," Shane said. Shane glanced at Ilya and saw that there are unshed tears in his eyes as well.

"How did you do this?" Ilya asked, mainly wanting to make sure Jack hadn't stolen a frame from somewhere in the house and they hadn't noticed.

"Harris helped us when we at practice," Charlie said. It must've been when they had a late practice scheduled and Harris did the school run for them.

"Come give us hugs," Ilya said. The boys came and they had an awkward family hug. It only got better when Anya jumped in the middle, demanding everyone's attention.

Going back to school is tough on Charlie. It was so clear to Ilya. After picking him up from swim practice, Ilya asked him about school.

"It's fine."

"Is that boy still giving you trouble?"

"No." God, were all teenagers this talkative? Ilya knew the answer was probably yes, but he wanted to hear about his son's day.

"You don't need to talk to me, but do you talk to Annie about this?" Annie was the boys' therapist.

"Yes."

"Ok, that's good. I like talking to my therapist about work," Ilya said, hoping that Charlie would say something longer than one word.

“What else do you talk about?” Ilya was not expecting that.

“My mother,” he responded.

“I talk about mom too.” Ilya gripped the steering wheel. This was not where he meant the conversation to go when he was doing a casual mental health check-in. “I get mad when I think about how she left us. How she loved drugs more than us. I get mad when I think how things are better without her. I get sad because who thinks their life is better without their mom.”

Ilya glanced at Charlie. He did not look upset, just in a vent-y mood. Ilya did not quite know what to say. It took him a while to realize that his mom didn’t commit suicide because she wanted to leave him, but because she wanted everything to just stop. His feelings about his father were more complicated. He, too, felt guilty about how he liked his dad better when the Alzheimer’s meant he was no longer lucid.

“Do you think that’s messed up?” Charlie asked.

“I don’t think so. Brains are funny.” Ilya did not know what else to really say. He really did not want to insult Charlie’s mother so he hoped for the best. “Your mum was ill. And being sick makes things hard. I am sad for you, because you had to take care of Jack for so many years by yourself. That was too much for you.”

“Jack does not remember her. I think that is easier.”

Ilya knew addiction was a complicated subject. But he found it hard to think about that when this mother has caused so much for her son. For his son.

“Perhaps,” Ilya said. “Are you happy now?”

“Yes.” Charlie said it so matter-of-factly that it caught Ilya off-guard. “Are you going to tell me that everything happens for a reason?”

“Do you believe it?”

“No.”

“Then I won’t. You’ve been hurt a lot, and I am happy you are in our family now. We cannot take away that hurt, but we make sure it doesn’t happen again.” This was a vow Ilya took as seriously as the ones he made to Shane.

Two weeks later, they had a Sunday afternoon that they need to spend at the mall getting the boys some new shoes.

“I don’t want to go shopping!” Jack said.

“Me neither,” Shane admitted, “but you need new running shoes and I can’t buy them without you there.”

“Can we get ice cream afterwards?”

Shane was about to say yes, when Ilya surprised him, saying, “We can stop at the grocery store and get some for after dinner.” It was a compromise that Jack doesn’t notice so they took it as a win, and the four of them head to the car.

Buying shoes did not take very long. Charlie was looking between Converse and a pair of runners for school, so Shane asked, “Do you want both? The converse for everyday and the runners for gym?”

“Really?”

Sometimes Shane got the idea that Charlie and Jack did not quite understand how much money they have. Or maybe, it was that they don’t get why Ilya and Shane want to spend it on them.

As they were walking through the mall, they passed a store with lots of fluff and stuffed animals in the window. Jack stopped walking, and looked inside. “What’s build-a-bear?” Jack asked.

“It’s a store where you get to make your own teddy bear,” Shane said. Shane gave Ilya a look, asking if they should take the boys in. Ilya nodded. Shane knew that Ilya had a stuffed animal when he was little that his mum had given him, but his dad got rid of his and his brother’s childhood toys when he got his promotion and started hosting more dinners. Ilya gave a slight nod in the direction of the store, and they lead the boys in.

The boys and Shane spoke with one of the workers and Ilya started looking around. Shane looked over and saw Ilya looking at the dress-up options for the bears. Oh — he was holding up a Centaur’s uniform you can dress them in.

Shane slide next to Ilya, and Ilya looked for the boys. “They are just choosing which bear they want.” Ilya saw them picking them out, discussing between the two of them the merits of each animal.

“Are you making one?” Ilya asked. Shane looked over Ilya’s face, looking for the messages that Ilya had stopped hiding from him years ago.

“We could each make one?” Shane suggested. He almost thought that this kind of experience would offer Ilya some closure about his father’s trespasses against him. Ilya looked unsure, as if the suggestion was silly. “I might make the grizzly bear, to match your tattoo.” That got a smile out of Ilya who nodded.

“Alright Hollander, build me a bear!”

They went over to Charlie and Jack who have chosen a monkey and a dog and Shane asks for the dark-brown bear. Ilya took a look over the options and picks up a black tuxedo cat.

They all went over to the stuffing machine, and the worker let the boys each have a go pressing the peddle. The boys each were given a little stuffed heart, and all four of them

needed to kiss the hearts before they got put inside of Jack and Charlie's bears. The boys got sent over to start looking for clothes while their bears got stitched up. Shane checked that they are OK, and then saw Ilya watching intently as his cat was filled. Shane reached over and grabs two gingham hearts. He kissed one of them and handed it over to the worker who placed it inside the cat. Ilya took the other one and repeated the gesture, and it got put in the grizzly bear.

They all got given their bears back, and Shane and Ilya headed over to the dressing table. Shane grabbed the Centaurs jersey and looks around until he found some matching black shorts. He started looking at the shoes with Charlie, and— "Ilya, look!" Shane held up a pair of skates.

"Are you making papa?" Jack asked.

"Yes," Shane laughed, "isn't he a scary bear?"

Jack giggled and shook his head. "Papa's not scary, silly."

"They have a curly wig over there," Charlie said, mischievously. "And I don't think Papa's seen it yet."

"Go grab it for me, I'll put it on and surprise him." Charlie did, clearly enjoying being on the "scheme." Shane put his bear into the box and went back over to Ilya. "Having fun?"

"There are too many options. Maybe I will also have no creativity and put mine in Centaur's jersey too."

"You're going to regret saying that," Shane promised, "just wait until you see my bear in all it's glory. Besides, who would your bear even be?"

"You, Hollander." Ilya still used his last name when he is fond/exasperated/fondly-exasperated with Shane. "You have always reminded me of a kitten." And there went Shane's feet from under him.

Ilya was healing his inner child inside a random mall in a city he moved to for Shane, and he's still grounding himself in reminders of him.

Ilya, of course, did not let Shane ruminate on it for long, and said quietly, "Maybe I will leave my bear naked, it is my favourite outfit on you."

Shane's jaw dropped, and lightly smacked Ilya on the chest. "We are in public."

"And our boys are debating black vs red shoes, we are fine." Shane shook his head.

"Just get the jersey and they have skates over there," Shane said, in a final attempt to get control of the situation.

"They do?!" Ilya's face was overtaken by one of his rare, unguarded smiles, and Shane knew this was the right choice.

Later, they were at home, eating Oreo ice cream on the sofa, watching Zootopia. “That bear looks like yours,” Charlie said.

“I have not see your bear yet, Shane,” Ilya said. “Is he handsome.” The boys started giggling. “Go get him!”

Shane made an exaggerated old-man groan as he picked himself up off the sofa. He went over to the door and grabbed the white boxes their bears were sent home in. Taking a peak inside one of the boxes, he saw the top of the dark blonde curls of the wig, with the bear ears poking through.

“Ready?” Shane asked.

“Always.” Shane pulled the bear out, in all its curled glory and Ilya started laughing, the boys not far behind. “That’s amazing! Looks just like me! Is very handsome bear.”

Shane caught his gaze and they sent smiles back to each other. Shane could feel his eyes crinkle, still happy they could surprise each other after all this time.

“Wait until you see the freckles I put on mine!”

After the All Star weekend, Ilya and Shane spent their All Star break preparing for family court. Their lawyer looked over all the paperwork and confirmed everything was order. They had statements from teachers, from friends and family, from Yuna and David, and from them. “Alright,” she said. “This is going to be sent off today and I’ll see you next week. It will be just you, me, the boys, and Tanya in the room. You will be asked a couple of things, if I’m looking at the file correctly, most likely about the hospital visit, maybe your careers, and maybe Charlie’s fight with school. Tanya will give a statement. You will have the chance to read out your statement. And then the judge will ask Charlie and Jack if they want to join your family.

“After all that, they will adjourn the hearing. It’s then just a case of processing the adoption on the courts’s end. It really depends, sometimes it takes a week, and other times it takes a couple months. Because the boys had already been in care for two years before coming to your family, that helps because it’s already established in the courts that reunification isn’t happening.

“Does that all sound good?”

“That sounds great,” Shane said. Shane loved their lawyer. They didn’t have to have one since they were doing a public adoption, but it made everything more seamless.

She reached out to shake both of their hands. “I’ll see you next week.”

That night, they explained to the boys the proceedings. “You will be asked if you want to be adopted by us and if there is anything you want to say about this whole situation.”

“Do we have to?” Charlie asked.

“Of course not,” Shane responded. “We will tell them how much we want you to be our sons, officially, and they just make sure you want the same thing.”

“I think I’ve always wanted to speak in court,” Charlie said. “I could say something important.”

“Maybe you could be a lawyer,” Ilya suggested.

“Maybe you could tell them how much we want to live with them, even though Papa’s farts are super smelly.” Ilya gasped at Jack’s suggestion, and Shane was laughing too much to tell them not to talk about farts at the dinner table.

Jack looked so pleased with himself, as he loved to make the people around him laugh.

“They are not that bad!” Ilya said.

“And you think that makes it ok?” Charlie responded.

“Is it everybody vs. Papa tonight?” Shane was still laughing, partly from the joy that the quiet boys who arrived ten months ago were now teasing their Papa so unguardedly.

“You want this forever,” Charlie said.

Ilya gave him a huge smile. “Yes, I do.”

Ilya woke up to someone opening his bedroom door, the nightlight shining in. (The nightlights were motion-censored additions made when they were getting ready for the home visits. Anya really didn’t like them, and Ilya did not love that the light woke him up when Anya went to get water in the middle of the night.)

“Jack?” Ilya asked. Jack came into the room and walked to Ilya’s side of the bed. Ilya could see that he had been crying so he scrambled to turn on the bedside lamp. Jack started crying harder, and Shane stirred next to Ilya. “What’s wrong?” Ilya reached out for a hug, but Jack shook his head.

“No, I’m wet.” He started really crying then. “I’m so sorry! I tried to clean it.” Ilya looked down and saw that Jack’s PJ shorts are soaked around the crotch.

Shane piped up, “You take care of Jack, and I’ll go clean up.” Ilya nodded and they both got out of bed. Ilya did not think, he just picked up Jack and hugged him, ignoring the wetness around his waist.

“Shh shh, you’re ok. Accidents happen.” Jack clinged onto Ilya’s neck and Ilya bounced him around the room. “Let’s go get you washed up.” Ilya took Jack into the ensuite and turned on the shower. Jack wasn’t letting go of Ilya, so Ilya climbed into the shower in his boxers, while Jack was still fully dressed in his wet pajamas. He eventually got Jack out of his PJs after he let Ilya put him down momentarily. He wanted to be picked up immediately, so Ilya washed him with a facecloth to the best of his ability.

The shower lasted maybe two minutes before Ilya climbed out. He wrapped Jack in a towel and wrapped one around his own waist.

“What’s got you so upset, sweetheart?” Jack just clinged to him, clearly calming down a bit. “We aren’t upset or angry about you wetting the bed. Accidents happen.”

Finally, Jack said, “I had a bad dream, and I woke up and everything was wet.”

Ilya combed a hand through Jack’s hair. “Do you want to talk about the dream?”

“No, it wasn’t real.”

“Yes, but sometimes they mean real things.” Jack didn’t look convinced, but let Ilya put him down.

Shane was in the doorway. “I’ve got everything ready to go in the wash tomorrow and the mattress is drying. Maybe he can sleep with us tonight?”

“How does that sound Jack?” Jack nod. “Ok, your Dad will get you dressed and I am going to go get changed too. Shane grabbed one of their old hockey shirts and replaced him in the bathroom. Ilya found some loose boxers and put a shirt on as well. He came back into the room and Shane was lying on his side of the bed, arm outstretched, with Jack lying against it. Anya was lying at Jack’s feet, clearly trying to help make him feel better. It must have been working, since Shane hadn’t told her to get off.

Ilya climbed in on the other side. “Alright Jack, I hope you have warmer feet than your dad.”

Jack giggled, but clearly wasn’t back to his previous self as he didn’t put his feet immediately against Ilya.

“Are you sure you don’t want to tell us about the dream?” Shane asked. “When I have bad dreams, it helps to talk about them. Papa’s a great listener.” Ilya’s heart cramped, as he knew the nightmares Shane had were about Ilya in a plane crash. The few times they hadn’t flown together in the past five years still made Shane incredibly anxious.

With the small amount of light coming in from the hall, Ilya could see that Jack is debating saying something. Eventually, “In my dream, they didn’t let us come home with you.” Ilya could see Shane’s face collapse in sadness, and Ilya was sure that his must look similar. “The judge said no, and then Tanya grabbed us and we had to leave. We didn’t even say goodbye.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” Ilya said. He had no idea what he could say to make this better. They knew they’ve filled in all the paperwork properly, and everything was in order, but the judge could still decide that Ilya and Shane shouldn’t be parents.

“There’s a lot that can happen,” Shane said, “in court,” he clarified. “There is no reason for them to say no. We will go, and we will tell them how much we want you and Charlie to be our sons. We are going to tell them we know you don’t like peanut butter, even though Charlie loves it. We are going to tell them how smart you are, how you will be a better hockey player than your father,” Ilya made a ‘harumph’ sound but did not fight it since Jack

finally cracked a smile, “we are going to tell them how much Anya loves you because you play soccer with her in the afternoons. Granddavid and Sobo are going to tell them how much their trampoline has been used and how they are the luckiest grandparents in the world to spend so much time with you. You fit in this family, and there is no way a judge won’t be able to see that.”

Ilya was so in love with this man. Shane used to be so unsure of himself and his place in life, and parenting has completely transformed him. Shane was made to be a dad. He was made to be Charlie and Jack’s dad.

“Ok?” Shane asked. Jack nodded. “We love you, very much Jack.”

“Group hug,” Ilya whisper-yelled. Jack finally calmed down, and Ilya just watched as he fell asleep. Ilya watched his face, to make sure that it didn't change, as if daring the bad dreams to show up again.

Once Ilya was confident that Jack was fine, he looked over to get one more glimpse of Shane before he fell back asleep. Shane was, surprisingly, still awake and looking back at him.

“You are a great dad,” Ilya whispered. It was a complete understatement.

“I couldn’t do it without you,” Shane whispered back. “You were made for this. I’ve known that since our first All-Star game where we played together.”

Ilya felt his heart turn into a puddle. “Why then?”

“You were in the pool and just playing with the kids, and you knew exactly what to do.” Shane was smiling wistfully, and Ilya did not ruin the moment by pointing out that Shane probably liked it so much since Ilya was half-naked. Ilya never realized how much Shane paid attention to him before they were together, and these admissions always made his heart do something funny. “Anyways, we should probably get to sleep.”

“Yes,” Ilya responded, his heart still not quite recovered from Shane's admission, “school tomorrow.”

Shane smiled over at him. “School tomorrow.”

Ilya watched Shane close his eyes and burrow into the pillow. He fell asleep quickly, and Ilya felt at peace knowing that his life is better than he could have ever expected.

The first hearing was on the Thursday before Charlie’s fourteenth birthday, which Ilya did not like the timing of. They were spending the week in court and then Shane and Ilya were away until late Saturday night for an away game in Chicago. Ilya knew in his heart that there was no one else he would rather do this with than Shane, but sometimes Ilya thought about how it must be so much easier for the dads on the team, who had wives to pick up the slack whenever they were away.

They have dressed up very nicely for court. Ilya and Shane both were wearing suits, and the boys have on some nice pants and button up shirts. “Jack, please put on your nice shoes. I know they aren’t as comfortable, but we will bring your sneakers to change into afterwards,” Shane said.

Ilya himself was slipping on his nice leather shoes, excited to dress up for something that wasn't a hockey game. He was also very excited about the suit pants that Shane was wearing.

Shane locked the door while Ilya headed towards the car with the boys. Shane jogged down the last couple steps, eager to get out the cold.

“Wait,” Charlie said, “let’s take a picture.” He set up his phone (a Christmas present) on one of the plant pots, and they took a few self-timer photos.

“Ok, let’s get going,” Ilya said. “Time to make you ours forever.”

Family court was intense.

So far they’d been asked about their relationship, their marriage, and their careers. Ilya was trying not to get anxious, but the judge didn’t seem too impressed with their plans for childcare while they were away for hockey. Their lawyer pointed out that the state frequently allowed two working parents to adopt children.

Next, came the hospital incident. It turned out for how far John had a stick up his butt, he wrote very nice things in the report he submitted. He noted that both boys were cared for deeply and could see that the boys were willing to do anything to protect what they had. He also noted how Shane urged Jack to tell the truth about his further injuries, putting the health and wellbeing of Jack ahead anything else.

The school incident didn’t get brought up, which made Shane relieved. The judge said that he’d read over the statements he’d been given, and invited Tanya to read hers.

Tanya’s was very matter of fact. She spoke about the logistics and operational aspects of Shane and Ilya’s relationship. She also highlighted the ways in which they’ve gone above and beyond for the boys, as well as what their future plans were. Tanya pointed out that their careers have never gotten in the way of being parents.

Then, it was Shane and Ilya’s turn to read out their statement.

“We’ve known Jack and Charlie for ten months,” Shane began. Ilya had asked him to read out most of the statement, never liking to speak for long periods in English. “They came into our home last May, and everyday since, we have dedicated ourselves to becoming the best fathers we can be for them.”

Ilya just watched as Shane poured their hearts out on paper.

“We’ve made vows to each other, but we are here make vows to Charlie and Jack,” Ilya continued. They turned to look at the boys. “We promise that you will always have a home

with us, and Anya, and any other pets your dad lets us have. We promise to support you, in whatever you want to do in life. We promise to embarrass you at your high school graduation, and to make you eat your vegetables. We promise to protect you, to keep you safe, to help you love freely. We promise to love you. Every single day.” Ilya finished, having a hard time focusing on the paper.

“Thank you, Your Honour,” Shane said. Ilya could hear how thick his voice has become.

They were supposed to say anything else so Ilya looked at the boys, held out his hands, gesturing at each of them, and then covered his heart.

“Thank you,” the judge said. “Charlie and Jack, is there anything you want to say?”

“Yes... Your Honour...?” Jack said. God, he was so freaking cute, Ilya thought. Charlie pulled out a piece of paper and Ilya wondered when he wrote what’s on the paper.

“We met our dad’s last May. We knew about them before, because they are the first and second best hockey players. It changes weekly who is the best.” The few people in the room laughed. Charlie nodded to himself and continues. “Growing up, I had to take care of myself and my brother. Now, we have not one, but two people who take care of us. We also have lots of other people, our dads’ friends, our Sobo and Granddavid, Anya barks if we get too close to the road. We have so many people who love us now, and we are so thankful.”

Ilya could feel the tears in his eyes.

“We love our dads,” Jack said. “They have a snack cupboard, a trophy room, and jet skis.” Ilya chuckled at that, clearly Jack has his priorities. “If they had none of it, we would love them just as much as we do.

“They chose to—“

“This is my part,” Charlie whispered.

“Oh, right.” Jack thrust the paper back at him.

“They chose to love us. And we chose to love them. A lot of kids don’t get to pick their families, but I’m sure they would pick ours if they could. I would pick this family today, tomorrow, and everyday forward.”

Ilya could feel the tears rolling down his cheeks, he wiped them away and fought the urge to go and hug his boys. If this judge couldn’t see these boys are theirs as much as Shane and Ilya belonged to them, then he was an idiot. Ilya risked looking at Shane, who was also crying. He was mouthing something to the boys, which Ilya guessed was “I love you.” Ilya did the same before they looked back at the judge.

The judge was giving nothing away.

“There is a lot of love in this room,” he said. “Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander, Charlie, Jack, you are a beautiful family. I am granting approval for adoption proceedings.” Ilya could feel the relief flood his entire system. “Congratulations, we will see you all soon, boys.”

They got their adoption date incredibly quickly. It was set for the end of the month, right before the Centaurs headed to the playoffs. Their lawyer suspected the judge had already approved the adoption, and the hearing was an official proceeding to make sure no major red flags came up.

After speaking with the boys, they said they wanted to change their names. They had decided to hyphenate, “Rozanov-Hollander.”

(“They decided the put the best hockey player first,” Ilya said. “I think they just wanted you to be first at something,” Shane returned.)

The paperwork was ready to be filed alongside the adoption certificates, which they would be getting at court. They were going to make it a small affair, but the boys had wanted to invite lots of people. They had decided to go to court with the four of them, and head back to theirs for a party. It had helped that they had the weekend off ahead of playoffs starting. This included the Centaurs team, and many of the other staff. Yuna and David were invited. The Pikes and JJ were on the list. Rose and Svetalena were invited, even though they had only met the boys briefly on FaceTime. Some of the families from swim and hockey were also coming. Zane had offered to grill, but they’d decided to cater it once they realized that upwards of fifty people would be in attendance.

There was so much going on, but it all faded into the background once they were in court.

It was just them, an officer, the stenographer, and the judge. Tanya was supposed to make it, but had sent a message earlier saying that she’d had a work emergency.

Ilya and Shane sat on either ends of the table, with Jack and Charlie between them.

It was quite a boring ceremony, if Shane was honest, but it was also heartwarming.

“Shane Hollander, do you wish to adopt Charlie and Jack?”

“Yes, Your Honour.”

“Ilya Rozanov, do you wish to adopt Charlie and Jack?”

“Yes, Your Honour.”

“Charlie and Jack, do you wish to be adopted by Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov?”

“Yes, Your Honour.”

“Yes, Your Honour.”

“I declare you a family.” He banged his grovel, and they all get themselves into a group hug. Shane let a few tears fall from his eyes as he held his full and complete family close.

They signed the paperwork, got given the paperwork they needed and they were allowed to leave. The officer took a photo of them with the judge, and they walked out the room.

“I love you all,” Ilya said. “Let’s go home.”

10 years later

“I can’t believe we raised a lawyer,” Ilya said out loud to his family. Shane, Ilya, Jack, and Caroline, Charlie’s girlfriend, were all sitting inside Convocation Hall at McGill University, waiting for Charlie’s graduation ceremony to start.

“What am I? Chopped liver?” Jack asked.

Jack has just finished his first year of university. Turns out, he was a genius. After skipping a grade and entering the gifted kid stream, he was now studying biology with hopes of becoming a cancer researcher.

“No, of course not,” Shane said, “only when you don’t call us.”

“It happened once, and you got proof of life, like, 6 hours later.”

Ilya grinned, remembering how exactly he had to distract Shane from the fact they hadn’t heard from their eighteen year old in three days. Their new eighteen year old who was at university in a province where the legal drinking age was eighteen.

(Shane was on the treadmill downstairs, running to get his frustration out. He knew that his kid is probably alive and healthy, but how hard was it to send a one word text letting him know that he was alive. It didn't even have to be a text, it could be an emoji!

Ilya came downstairs to the gym and was watching Shane run. “Are you trying to run to Montreal?” Ilya asked.

Shane did not dignify that question with a response. He only turned the treadmill up faster. Ilya walked up to the machine and looked at the speed.

“I run faster.”

Shane did not need the reminder. Even though Shane was objectively healthier, even at forty-four, Ilya was always the faster runner, much to his frustration.

Ilya pressed the speed button, until Shane was in an all out sprint. “Last time, you could only run this fast for 3 minutes.”

“What last time?” Shane gitted out, focusing on putting one foot in front of the other.

“LA.” Shane swallowed. That day in the hotel gym was seared into his memory. Maybe etched onto his soul. “I wonder if you’d last longer now.”

Shane did not quite know if Ilya meant at this pace or in bed, but he knew for sure there was plenty of teasing material on each.

Ilya pressed the stop button, walked across the gym, dimming the lights, and then sitting down on the floor with his back up against the wall. Shane tracked his movements while the

machine slowed down, before eventually going over to where Ilya was sitting. Shane sat to his right.

“You are sitting wrong.”

Shane gave a look. “After 25 years, have you seriously run out of things to say so you are now criticizing how I sit?”

Ilya returned the look. “No, I mean in LA you were sitting across from me.”

“Oh,” Shane said dumbly. Ilya looked at him with so much heat in his gaze.

“There are so many things I wish I did to you in that gym,” Ilya said.

Shane decided that his interest is piqued and took the bait. “Like what?”

Ilya pointed at the various equipment they had around the room as he explained his various fantasies. “Once, I thought about bending you over the bench. I would have played with your ass for hours, before finally sliding into you. You came untouched.”

Even after all these years, Shane got incredibly hard, incredibly quickly around Ilya. If Ilya noticed, he did not care.

“In another, I put your ankles in the TRX.” Shane tried to figure out the logistics of that position. “You were on your back, and I could spread your legs so wide. I’d make the handles a little higher than necessary so your ass was off the floor. In that one, we both came across your chest. You were covered in come, and I spent my time cleaning you up with my tongue.” Ilya’s finger was moving around Shane’s bare torso, mimicking the route his tongue would take. Ilya was only touching him with a finger tip, but Shane could feel some precome leak out of his cock.

Ilya started kissing up the side of his neck until he got to his ear. Ilya tugged on the earlobe gently with his teeth. Shane moaned and he could feel the ghost of Ilya’s lips against his jaw.

“Do you want to know my favourite version?” Ilya did not wait for the answer because he didn’t even need to ask the question. “In my favourite version, you don’t wait for me. You just climb onto my lap and decide that I’m yours.” Shane took a moment for his brain to catch up and he looked over at Ilya. Shane decided that if this was Ilya’s fantasy, he was going to make it real, 25 years later. They might not be 19, but Shane was going to make sure Ilya knows he was his.

Shane climbed onto Ilya’s lap, and started making out with him. It got heated quickly and Shane started grinding their crotches together.

“Your are doing it wrong,” Ilya said.

Shane was indignant. “What do you mean wrong?!”

“Is my fantasy,” Ilya said, as if he’s supplied the answer to all of the world’s problems.

Shane sat back, separating their crotches and ready to whine about the lack of friction on his cock.

“Of course, I do not know how quickly you get hard around me, so I am surprised.” Shane shot him a look. He would never not be teased about that. “I reach into your shorts and start stroking your cock.” Shane waited for him to finally touch his cock, but his hands remained on Shane’s hips.

“What next?” he asked, impatiently.

“You come.” Ilya smirked. “My fantasies were very realistic. I knew you would not have lasted long. I was handsome boy.”

“Seriously?” Shane asked. “That’s it?”

He was sitting on his husband’s lap, as hard as a tree, and Ilya was telling him it was over.

Ilya looked up at him and rested a hand on his face. “I have new fantasies now.”)

Eventually, the national anthem played and they all stood up to start singing it. Ilya messed up one of the lines and Jack nudged him. Ilya shot him a look and continued singing. Everyone had a complicated relationship with national pride, especially in Canada. For Ilya, this country gave him a husband and children, and for that he would be forever grateful.

The song ended and the march began. As the academics traied in Jack whispered, “You coached the Canadian team to Olympic gold and you don’t even know the words to the national anthem?”

Ilya thankfully didn’t have to come up with a witty response because, “Be quiet, your brother’s about to come in.”

The graduating law class came in and Ilya began looking for Charlie. He saw him, sticking out due to both his red hair and his height. Their sons were both taller than Shane by their sixteenth birthdays, much to Shane’s upset at being the butt of several short jokes.

Shane was taking what Ilya is sure are 200 pictures of other people’s children, but he was too proud right now to care.

Charlie had just finished a very long 7 year higher education journey and landed a law position in a sports law practice in Toronto. Specifically one that advocated for players who faced discrimination in sports. The firm also allowed him to take on two pro-bono human rights cases at a time. He made the decision after his History BA thesis about Japanese internment in Canada. He’d written it to learn more about Shane’s heritage as a Japanese Canadian, which had led to conversations about toxic masculinity, racism, and homophobia in hockey.

Charlie was towards the back of his graduating class, due to his — their! — name starting with ‘R.’ The ceremony was quite boring if Ilya was honest, but when Charlie walked across the stage, they all clapped louder. Caroline even whistled which surprised Ilya.

Not only had they raised their children to be competent and compassionate, they were brilliant and kind. Ilya could build a life for them with Shane, but it was even better watching them do it for themselves.

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