The Hayden Pike Problem

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/76046921.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid, Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Hayden Pike & Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov, Hayden Pike, Jackie Pike, The Pike Children
Additional Tags:	Ilya is Hayden's #1 Hater, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, POV Ilya Rozanov, Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Fluff and Humor, Good Friend Hayden Pike, Ilya and Jackie are Besties, Ilya is great with kids, Everyone becomes a Centaur, Swearing, Established Relationship
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-19 Words: 4,969 Chapters: 1/1

The Hayden Pike Problem

by OikawaHajime13

Summary

Hayden Pike signs with the Ottawa Centaurs. And Ilya has...feelings about it.

Notes

Ilya's life is over.
He's going to retire.
No, he's not being dramatic.

I just love Ilya and Hayden's antagonistic relationship in the books, and had to write a 'what if' story about Hayden joining Ottawa.

Also, my child's random dinosaur knowledge has actually come in handy. I hope you enjoy this!

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya finds out about the trade on a Tuesday, which is already his least favorite day of the week.

He's in the kitchen making coffee when Shane walks in, phone in hand, looking like he's trying very hard not to smile.

"So," Shane says.

Ilya knows that tone. That's Shane's ‘I have news and you're going to hate it’ tone.

"No," Ilya says preemptively.

"You don't even know what I'm going to say."

"I know that tone. The answer is no."

Shane's trying-not-to-smile face cracks into an actual smile. "We got Hayden."

Ilya drops his coffee mug. It doesn't break—it's one of those thick ceramic ones that could probably survive a nuclear blast—but coffee goes everywhere, all over the counter, all over his shirt, all over the floor.

"*What?*"

"Hayden Pike. Trade went through this morning. He's a Centaur now." Shane is fully grinning now, the bastard. "Isn't that great?"

"No," Ilya says. "No, that is not great. That is opposite of great. That is terrible."

"He's a great player—"

"I don't care."

"—and you're going to have to deal with it, because he's your teammate now."

Ilya stares at the coffee spreading across the counter. He should clean it up. He's not going to clean it up. This is a coffee-on-the-counter kind of emergency.

"I'm retiring," he announces.

"You're not retiring."

"I'm retiring right now. Today. I'll call our agent."

"Ilya—"

"I've had good career. Very good career. Cup wins, Olympic medal, beautiful husband. Is good time to stop."

Shane crosses his arms, leaning against the doorframe. He's still smiling. He thinks this is funny. "You're not retiring because Hayden Pike is joining the team."

"Watch me."

"You're the captain."

"You can be captain. You were a great captain."

"I'm already the alternate—"

"See? Is perfect. You're already doing job."

Shane walks over and starts cleaning up the coffee with a dish towel. "You're being ridiculous."

"I'm being reasonable," Ilya insists. He's aware he's being the opposite of reasonable, but he's committed now. "Hayden Pike is... he's..."

"He's what?"

Ilya struggles to articulate the specific way Hayden Pike gets under his skin. It's not that Hayden is a bad person. He's actually probably a good person, objectively speaking. He's a good player, a good teammate by all accounts, a good father, a good husband to Jackie, who Ilya genuinely likes.

The problem is that Hayden Pike is annoying.

He's too cheerful. Too friendly. Too American in that specific way that makes Ilya's teeth grind. He tells bad jokes and laughs at his own bad jokes and does that thing where he claps people on the shoulder too hard and calls everyone "buddy" or "pal" or "friend." Plus, he still holds onto Hayden being the one to out them causing Shane to be treated so poorly by Montreal.

But Shane loves him.

They played together in Montreal for years, and Shane still talks about those years like they were the best of his life. Before Ottawa. Before Ilya.

Okay, that's not fair. Shane doesn't actually say that. But still.

"He's too much," Ilya finally says.

"Too much what?"

"Just... too much. Too much Hayden."

Shane tosses the coffee-soaked towel in the sink and wraps his arms around Ilya from behind. "You're going to be fine."

"I'm not going to be fine. I'm going to be miserable. Every day, miserable."

"You're so dramatic."

"I'm Russian. Is in my blood."

Shane kisses the back of his neck. "You'll survive. And hey, at least Jackie and the kids will be around more."

That's true. Ilya does love Jackie and the kids.

But still.

"I hate this," Ilya mutters.

"I know, baby," Shane says, and he's definitely laughing.

———————

The first practice with Hayden is exactly as bad as Ilya predicted.

Hayden shows up early—of course he does—with that big stupid smile on his face, and immediately makes a beeline for Shane.

"Hollander!" he shouts across the locker room, like they're long lost friends seeing each other for the first time in forever.

Shane lights up. Actually lights up, like…like a Christmas tree, and Ilya wants to die.

They do that thing where they hug and clap each other on the back too hard, and Hayden's saying something about "the old gang back together" and Shane's laughing, and Ilya is sitting in his stall lacing his skates and contemplating whether he can request a trade to literally any other team.

"Rozanov!" Hayden says, because apparently now it's Ilya's turn. "Good to see you, man."

"Yes," Ilya says flatly. "Is very good."

Hayden either doesn't notice the sarcasm or chooses to ignore it. "Gonna be a great season. Really excited to be here."

"Mm."

"Jackie and the kids are pumped too. She's been texting with you, right?"

"Yes," Ilya says, and his tone softens a little because he does genuinely like Jackie. "She sent me pictures of new house. Is very nice."

"Yeah, we got lucky with that place. Hey, we should have you and Shane over for dinner once we're settled."

Ilya would rather eat glass.

"Sure," he says. "Sounds great."

Shane is watching this exchange with barely concealed amusement, the traitor.

That night, Ilya flops dramatically onto the couch and puts his arm over his eyes.

"I can't do this," he announces to the ceiling.

Shane, who is in the kitchen making dinner, calls back: "Yes, you can."

"I can't. It's impossible. I'm going to die."

"You're not going to die."

"I'm going to die of Hayden Pike exposure. Is that a thing? It should be a thing."

Shane appears in the doorway, wooden spoon in hand. "He was perfectly nice to you today."

"That's the problem! He's always nice. It's exhausting."

"Most people would consider that a good quality."

"Most people are wrong."

Shane returns to the kitchen, and Ilya can hear him laughing. Laughing! At Ilya's suffering!

"You know what the worst part is?" Ilya calls out.

"What's the worst part?"

"You're happy about this."

Shane comes back into the living room, sits on the arm of the couch. "I am happy about it. Hayden's a great player and a good friend."

"You like him more than me."

"I married you, didn't I?"

"Maybe you made mistake."

Shane leans down and kisses him. "No mistake. But yeah, I'm excited to play with Hayden again. We had great chemistry on the ice."

Ilya makes a disgruntled noise.

"You're pouting," Shane observes.

"I'm not pouting. Russians don't pout."

"You're definitely pouting."

"If I'm pouting, is because I have good reason. My husband is abandoning me for Hayden Pike."

"I'm not abandoning you, you dramatic asshole. I'm playing hockey with an old teammate."

"Same thing."

Shane stands up, shaking his head. "Dinner's in ten minutes. Try not to die of Hayden Pike exposure before then."

"No promises," Ilya mutters.

———————-

The thing is, Hayden really is a good player. Ilya can admit that, privately, in his own head where no one else can hear.

He's fast, he's got good hands, and he reads the ice well. He fits into their system almost immediately, which is annoying because Ilya was kind of hoping he'd struggle for a few weeks.

And he does have good chemistry with Shane. On the ice, they move together like they share a brain, anticipating each other's plays, setting each other up perfectly.

Off the ice, they're constantly talking, laughing, reminiscing about Montreal.

"Remember that game against Tampa?" Hayden says in the locker room after practice.

"Oh my god, yes," Shane says. "When you—"

"—fell on my ass right in front of the net—"

"—and the puck bounced off your helmet—"

"—and went in!" They're both laughing now. "Coach was so mad."

"He was furious. But we won, so."

Ilya aggressively retapes his stick and tries not to listen.

"You okay there, Cap?" Bood asks with a smirk.

"Fine," Ilya says through gritted teeth. "Is fine. Everything is fine."

Two weeks into the season, Jackie texts him.

Jackie: Hey! We're finally settled in. Want to come over for dinner this weekend? Bring Shane!

Jackie: The kids have been asking about you

Jackie: The twins want to challenge you to a shootout in the driveway

Ilya's mood immediately improves. He loves Hayden's kids. Jade and Ruby are ten and obsessed with hockey, Arthur is five and obsessed with dinosaurs, and Amber is two and obsessed with stealing everyone's snacks. They're all adorable and funny and they think Ilya is the coolest person in the world, which shows excellent judgment.

Ilya: Yes! We would love to come

Ilya: Tell Ruby and Jade I can't wait to see them

Jackie: Perfect! Saturday at 6?

Ilya: We'll be there

Shane looks over his shoulder at the phone. "Dinner at the Pikes?"

"Yes. Jackie invited us."

"That'll be nice."

"I'm going to see the kids," Ilya says. "That's why I'm going. For the kids."

"Sure, baby."

"And Jackie. I like Jackie."

"I know you do."

"Is not because of Hayden."

"Definitely not."

"I'm serious."

Shane kisses his temple. "I know."

Saturday arrives, and Ilya spends an embarrassing amount of time picking out gifts for the kids. He ends up at the toy store for over an hour, debating between various options before settling on matching mini hockey stick sets for Jade and Ruby, a giant T-Rex toy for Arthur, and a plush bunny that plays music for Amber.

"You spoil them," Shane observes as Ilya carefully arranges the gifts in a bag.

"They're good kids. They deserve nice things."

"You know Hayden's going to be there, right? At his own house?"

Ilya glares at him. "I'm aware."

"Just checking."

They arrive at six on the dot because Ilya is nothing if not punctual. The house is nice—a big colonial in a good neighborhood, with a yard and everything. Very American. Very Hayden.

Jackie answers the door, and she looks great. She's got her hair up in a ponytail and she's wearing jeans and a sweater, and she gives them both huge hugs.

"I'm so glad you're here!" she says. "Come in, come in. Kids! Uncle Ilya and Uncle Shane are here!"

There's a thunder of small feet, and then all four Pike children come around the corner in varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Jade and Ruby arrive first, the ten-year-old twins moving in perfect synchronization. They're both wearing matching Ottawa Centaurs t-shirts—probably Hayden's doing—and their dark hair is pulled back in ponytails.

"Uncle Ilya!" they chorus together, and it's a little eerie how in sync they are.

"Girls," Ilya says, grinning. "You got so tall. Soon you'll be in NHL."

"That's the plan," Jade says confidently.

"We're already on the travel team," Ruby adds. "Coach says we're the best forwards he's ever seen at our age."

"Of course you are. You have good genes." He pauses. "From Jackie's side."

The twins giggle.

Arthur comes barreling in next, clutching a plastic stegosaurus and making dinosaur noises. He crashes into Ilya's legs with the full force of a five-year-old who doesn't understand the concept of brakes.

"Uncle Ilya! Did you know that the stegosaurus had plates on its back for temperature regulation and also maybe for display and they lived in the Late Jurassic period and—"

"Arthur, breathe," Jackie says, laughing.

Ilya crouches down to Arthur's level. "I did not know that. You're very smart. What's your favorite dinosaur?"

"T-Rex!" Arthur says immediately. "Because they're the biggest and the strongest and they have really big teeth and—"

"Like hockey players," Ilya says.

Arthur's eyes go wide. "Really?"

"Really. Very fierce. Very strong." He reaches into the gift bag. "Actually, I brought you something."

He hands Arthur the T-Rex toy, and Arthur's entire face lights up like Ilya just handed him the Stanley Cup.

"IT'S A T-REX!" Arthur shrieks, clutching it to his chest. "IT'S THE BIGGEST ONE I'VE EVER SEEN!"

"What do you say, Arthur?" Jackie prompts.

"THANK YOU UNCLE ILYA!" Arthur yells, already making the T-Rex attack his stegosaurus.

Then there's Amber, who Jackie is holding on her hip. She's two, with chubby cheeks and curly hair, and she's eyeing Ilya with the suspicious look that toddlers get when they're not sure if they remember someone.

"Amber," Ilya says softly, pulling out the plush bunny. "Look what I brought you."

The bunny plays a soft lullaby when he squeezes it, and Amber's eyes go wide. She reaches for it immediately, making grabby hands.

"Bunny," she says seriously.

"Yes, bunny," Ilya agrees, handing it to her.

Amber clutches the bunny to her chest and then, to Ilya's delight, reaches out for him. Jackie passes her over, and Amber immediately pats Ilya's face with one chubby hand while holding the bunny with the other.

"Ilya," she says, which comes out more like "Ee-ya."

His heart melts completely. "Yes, is me."

"Okay, girls, your turn," Jackie says.

Jade and Ruby are trying to play it cool, but Ilya can see them eyeing the gift bag with interest. They're ten now, all long limbs and missing teeth.

"For you two," Ilya says, pulling out two wrapped packages.

The twins open them simultaneously—because of course they do, they do everything in sync—and both gasp.

"Hockey stick sets!" Jade says, examining the miniature sticks with professional interest.

"These are the same brand the pros use," Ruby adds, running her hand along the blade. "Just smaller."

"Of course. You think I give you cheap sticks?" Ilya says, mock-offended. "You're going to be great hockey players. You need proper equipment."

"We're already pretty good," Jade says confidently.

"Yeah, we made the AA team this year," Ruby adds.

"AA team! Very impressive," Ilya says, and he means it. "You must show me your skills sometime."

Both girls are grinning now, already practicing their grip on the sticks.

"Thank you, Uncle Ilya," they say in unison, which is slightly creepy but also endearing.

"You didn't have to do that," Jackie says, but she's smiling.

"I wanted to," Ilya says.

That's when Hayden appears from the kitchen, wearing an apron that says "Grill Sergeant" and holding a spatula.

"Hey guys!" he says. "Just in time. Burgers are almost ready."

Of course Hayden grills. Of course he has a novelty apron.

"Hi Hayden," Shane says warmly.

"Hi," Ilya says with significantly less warmth.

If Hayden notices, he doesn't show it. "Kids, why don't you show Uncle Ilya and Uncle Shane your rooms while I finish up dinner?"

"Yes!" Jade says. "Come see our hockey stuff! We have trophies!"

"And our sticks are signed by players from Dad's old team," Ruby adds.

That's... actually really sweet.

Ilya lets himself be dragged upstairs, Arthur trailing behind with Shane while Jackie carries Amber.

Jade and Ruby's room is first—shared, divided down the middle with hockey posters on one side and more hockey posters on the other side, just different players.

"This is my side," Jade says, pointing to the left. "Ruby's is over there."

"We each have our own space," Ruby explains. "But we share the trophy shelf."

The trophy shelf is impressive—various medals, ribbons, and small trophies from tournaments and competitions.

"You two work hard," Ilya observes.

"Dad says hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard," Jade recites.

Of course Hayden says that. Of course he's teaching his kids good values.

"Your dad is right," Ilya admits grudgingly. "Is good advice."

"Do you work hard?" Ruby asks.

"Every day."

"That's why you're so good," Jade says confidently, like she's solved a puzzle.

"Want to see my room?" Arthur tugs on Ilya's sleeve insistently.

"Yes, absolutely."

Arthur's room is dinosaur-themed, with a border of different species running along the walls. The T-Rex Ilya brought is already set up in a place of honor on his dresser, facing off against a stegosaurus.

"This is the best dinosaur," Arthur says solemnly. "Because Uncle Ilya gave it to me."

Ilya is going to cry. He's not, but he feels like he might.

"And this is my favorite picture," Arthur continues, pointing to a framed photo on his nightstand. It shows Hayden in his hockey gear, holding a much smaller Arthur on the ice.

"That's a good picture," Shane says, leaning in to look. "Your dad looks really happy there."

"He taught me to skate," Arthur says. "I fell down a lot."

"Everyone falls down a lot when learning," Ilya says. "I fell down many times."

Arthur's eyes go wide. "Really?"

"Really. Many, many times."

"But you're the best!"

"Now I am the best. Before, I was just boy who fell down."

This seems to delight Arthur immensely. He immediately makes the T-Rex attack his stegosaurus with renewed enthusiasm.

"'Lya!" Amber says from Jackie's arms, reaching out with grabby hands.

Ilya's heart does something complicated. "Hi, Amber."

"Up!" she demands.

Jackie laughs. "She's been talking about Uncle Ilya all day. Do you mind?"

"No, is fine," Ilya says, taking Amber carefully. She's warm and solid and immediately pats his face with her small hands.

"'Lya," she says again, satisfied.

"Yes, is me," Ilya says.

Amber grabs his nose.

"She does that," Jackie says apologetically.

"Is okay." Ilya doesn't mind. Amber is looking at him with big, curious eyes, and then she leans forward and rests her head on his shoulder like she's known him forever.

Shane is watching Ilya with that soft expression he gets sometimes, the one that makes Ilya's chest feel tight. He pulls out his phone.

"What are you doing?" Ilya asks suspiciously.

"Taking a picture. You look—" Shane's voice catches slightly. "You look really good with her."

"Shane—"

"Just one picture. Please?"

Ilya sighs but doesn't move. Amber is playing with his collar now, completely content.

The camera clicks.

"Okay, kids!" Jackie's voice calls from downstairs. "Dinner's ready!"

There's an immediate stampede for the door, Jade and Ruby thundering down the stairs with Arthur right behind them, all of them moving with the kind of reckless speed that makes Ilya wince.

"They're going to break something," he mutters, still holding Amber.

"They're fine," Shane says, taking his hand. "You're good with them, you know."

"They're good kids."

"They are. And you're really good with good kids." Shane squeezes his hand. "Come on. Let's go eat Hayden's annoyingly perfect burgers."

"They better not be perfect."

"They're definitely going to be perfect."

Jackie takes Amber back, and they head downstairs.

The burgers are, in fact, perfect.

Dinner is chaotic in the way that only a meal with four kids can be. Amber is in a high chair, alternating between eating mac and cheese with her hands and throwing pieces on the floor. Arthur keeps interrupting with dinosaur facts.

"Did you know that velociraptors were actually really small?" he announces mid-conversation. "Like, turkey-sized!"

"That's very interesting, buddy," Hayden says patiently.

"And they had feathers!"

"Eat your burger, Arthur," Jackie says gently.

The twins are more focused, but they keep exchanging glances with each other, clearly working up to something.

"So," Jade finally says, looking at Ilya. "Uncle Shane said you might be able to help us with our hockey."

"If you have time," Ruby adds quickly. "We know you're really busy."

Ilya glances at Shane, who's trying very hard to look innocent.

"What kind of help?" Ilya asks.

"Our coach says we need to work on our positioning," Jade says. "And our passing."

"We're forwards," Ruby explains. "We play on the same line."

"Like you and Dad used to," Jade adds, looking at Shane.

"We want to be that good," Ruby says. "Where you just know where the other person is going to be."

Ilya feels something shift in his chest. These kids are serious about hockey. Really serious.

"That takes a lot of practice," he says.

"We practice every day," Jade says.

"Every single day," Ruby confirms.

"Even when it's raining," Jade adds.

"T-Rex doesn't like rain!" Arthur interjects. "Because it makes the ground muddy and then he can't run as fast!"

"That's nice, honey," Jackie says, wiping Amber's face.

Ilya looks at the twins, at their eager, hopeful faces. "Okay. I can help."

Both girls light up.

"Really?" Ruby asks.

"Really. We can work on positioning, passing, reading the play. All of it."

"That's amazing!" Jade says.

"Thank you so much!" Ruby adds.

Hayden is looking at Ilya with an expression that's hard to read. "Ilya, you don't have to—"

"I know I don't have to. I want to." Ilya shrugs. "They're serious about hockey. Is good to help serious players."

"More!" Amber announces, banging her sippy cup on the high chair tray.

"That's really generous of you," Hayden says, and he sounds genuinely touched. "The girls have been working so hard, and having someone like you help them... that's incredible."

"Is not incredible. Is just skating around, showing them some things."

"It's more than that," Jackie says softly. "It means a lot. To all of us."

Ilya feels uncomfortable with the gratitude, the way they're all looking at him like he's doing something extraordinary.

"Stegosaurus had plates for temperature regulation!" Arthur announces. "Not for fighting!"

"Very cool, buddy," Shane says, ruffling his hair.

The conversation moves on, but Jade and Ruby keep grinning at Ilya across the table, already planning their training sessions in whispered conversation. Arthur continues his dinosaur commentary. Amber throws more mac and cheese.

And Ilya realizes, with some surprise, that he's actually enjoying himself.

Dinner is actually nice, which Ilya resents only a little bit.

The burgers are good—Hayden is an annoyingly competent griller—and Jackie made potato salad and there's corn on the cob and it's all very wholesome and American and family-friendly.

The kids chatter throughout the meal, Jade and Ruby talking over each other about their hockey team, and Arthur occasionally interjecting with dinosaur facts. Amber bangs her sippy cup on her high chair tray. Jackie asks about the season, and Shane talks about the team's prospects, and even Ilya finds himself relaxing a little.

After dinner, the kids want to play hockey in the driveway—of course they do, they're hockey players' kids. Hayden sets up a mini net, and Jade, Ruby, and Arthur take turns shooting on Shane, who gamely plays goalie despite not having any equipment. Amber toddles around the edges, occasionally trying to grab sticks.

Ilya stands with Jackie, watching.

"They love you," Jackie says.

"I love them," Ilya says honestly. "They're good kids."

"They are." She pauses. "Hayden's really happy to be playing with Shane again."

"Yes. I can tell."

"He talks about you too, you know. Says you're a great captain."

Ilya glances at her. "He says this?"

"All the time. He's actually kind of nervous about living up to your expectations."

That's... unexpected.

"He's good player," Ilya admits. "Very good."

Jackie smiles. "You should tell him that."

"Maybe," Ilya says, which is not a commitment to anything.

———————

The next week, Ilya has an idea.

It's possibly a bad idea, but it's an idea nonetheless.

He waits until after practice, when most of the team has cleared out. Hayden's still in the locker room, and Ilya approaches with something hidden behind his back.

"Pike," he says.

Hayden looks up, surprised. Ilya doesn't usually seek him out. "Hey, Cap. What's up?"

Ilya pulls out four small jerseys—kids' sized Centaurs jerseys. Different sizes for different ages.

"For Jade, Ruby, Arthur, and Amber," he says gruffly. "Thought they might like."

Hayden's face does something complicated. "Ilya, you don't have to—"

"I know I don't have to. I want to. They're good kids."

"They really are." Hayden takes the jerseys, looking down at them, clearly noting that Ilya got the sizes right for each kid. "They're going to lose their minds over these. All of them. The twins especially—they think you're the coolest person on the planet."

"They're very smart girls."

Hayden laughs. "Yeah, they are. And Arthur's going to wear his every single day." He looks up at Ilya. "Thank you. Really. This is... this is really nice of you."

Ilya shrugs, uncomfortable with the gratitude. "Is nothing."

"It's not nothing." Hayden hesitates, then says, "Look, I know we're not, like, best friends or anything. But I'm glad we're teammates. You're a hell of a captain, and I'm looking forward to winning with you."

Ilya doesn't know what to say to that. Hayden is being sincere and genuine and it's deeply uncomfortable.

"Yes," he finally says. "Will be good season."

"Yeah." Hayden grins. "Even if you do hate me."

"I don't hate you," Ilya says automatically, then realizes that might actually be true. "You're just... very Hayden."

"I'm sorry?," Hayden laughs. "Can't help it."

"It's okay. You make Shane happy and you help the team."

Hayden laughs again, and Ilya finds himself almost smiling.

Almost.

He turns to leave and just as he's about to reach the door, he hears, "Why the fuck do these say Rozanov on the back. Fuck you, Ilya."

This time, he does laugh.

That night, Shane finds him on the couch, scrolling through his phone.

"You gave Hayden's kids jerseys?"

"How do you know that?"

"Hayden told me. He was really touched."

"Was just jerseys."

"With your name on them."

"So?"

Shane sits down next to him. "You're an asshole but I think you're warming up to him."

"I am not."

"You are. You like him."

"I don't like him. I tolerate him. Is different."

"You gave his kids jerseys with your name on them."

"To make him mad. Plus, I like his kids. And Jackie. Hayden just... comes with them."

Shane is grinning. "You're such a softie."

"I'm not soft. I'm Russian captain. Very tough."

"Very tough," Shane agrees, kissing him. "The toughest. That's why you spent an hour at the team store picking out the perfect jerseys for two ten-year-olds, a five-year-old, and a two-year-old."

"How do you know it was an hour?"

"Equipment manager told me."

Ilya groans. "I hate everyone."

"No you don't."

"I hate you."

"No you don't."

"I hate Hayden Pike."

"No," Shane says, still grinning, "you really don't."

And the worst part is, Shane might be right.

The next game, Ilya scores a goal—a beautiful one-touch from Shane's pass—and as he's celebrating, Hayden crashes into both of them, yelling something enthusiastic and incomprehensible.

Ilya's first instinct is to be annoyed.

His second instinct is to notice that Hayden set up the play that led to Shane's pass.

His third instinct is to grudgingly admit that maybe, possibly, having Hayden on the team isn't the worst thing in the world.

"Great goal, Cap!" Hayden shouts, clapping him on the helmet.

"Yes," Ilya says. "Good play, Pike."

Shane is laughing at him again.

Later, in the locker room after the win, Ilya's phone buzzes. It's a picture from Jackie: all four kids wearing their Rozanov jerseys. Jade and Ruby are in the center, each holding mini hockey sticks in shooting poses like they're about to score. Arthur is between them, holding up his T-Rex and making it wear a tiny jersey that Jackie must have made. And Amber is in the front, sitting on the floor with her jersey hanging down to her knees, clapping her hands and grinning with her four teeth showing.

Jackie: They haven't taken them off since Hayden brought them home

Jackie: Thank you so much ❤️

Ilya shows the picture to Shane, who makes an "aww" sound.

"Shut up," Ilya says.

"I didn't say anything."

"You were thinking it."

Across the locker room, Hayden catches his eye and gives him a thumbs up. Ilya nods back.

It's not friendship. Not exactly.

But it's something.

And maybe, possibly, eventually, Ilya can learn to live with that.

Two months into the season, the Centaurs are doing well. Really well. They're second in their division, and a lot of that is due to the chemistry between their top two lines.

Ilya still finds Hayden annoying. He's too loud, too cheerful, tells too many bad jokes, and has an inexplicable obsession with high-fiving that Ilya will never understand.

But he's also a good teammate. He works hard, he shows up, and he genuinely cares about winning. And he makes Shane happy, which Ilya has to admit is worth something.

Plus, his kids are great.

Ilya has started a tradition of bringing them small gifts after every home win—hockey card packs for Jade and Ruby, dinosaur figurines for Arthur, board books for Amber. Jackie sends him thank-you texts every time, and the kids have started making him drawings, which he keeps in his locker.

"You know," Shane says one night, as they're getting ready for bed, "you and Hayden are actually kind of friends now."

"We are not friends."

"You literally got coffee with him yesterday."

"He asked me about hockey training for the twins. Was informational conversation."

"You talked for an hour."

"Had a lot of information."

Shane just looks at him.

"Fine," Ilya says. "Maybe we are... friendly. But not friends. Never friends."

"Whatever you say, baby."

"I'm serious."

"I know."

"I still find him annoying."

"I know that too."

"But he's..." Ilya struggles for the right word. "Acceptable."

Shane laughs. "High praise from Ilya Rozanov."

"Is the best he's going to get."

"I'll let him know."

"Don't you dare."

But Shane is already texting, and Ilya knows it's a lost cause.

His phone buzzes a minute later. It's from Hayden.

Hayden: Acceptable! I'll take it 😂

Hayden: Thanks for the coffee, man. And for all the help with the twins. You're a good guy.

Ilya stares at the message for a long moment.

Then he types back:

Ilya: You're welcome. See you at practice.

He pauses, then adds:

Ilya: Your family is coming to dinner tomorrow. You can come too.

Shane reads over his shoulder and grins. "Look at you, making friends."

"Shut up," Ilya says, but he's smiling.

Just a little.

End Notes

Comments and Kudos are always appreciated.

Note: I apologize for making Hayden American! I will make sure to say he's Canadian in all future fics 😬

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!