A New Kind of Season

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A New Kind of Season

by slec

Summary

Shane Hollander spent his career proving he could handle any hit, but thirty-eight weeks of pregnancy and a hyper-protective Ilya Rozanov are testing even his legendary endurance.

or

Hollanov is pregnant with twins

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1: Two Small Hollander-Rozanovs

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shane Hollander was a man who lived and died by his body's capabilities. He knew the exact tension of his hamstrings, the precise caloric intake needed for a playoff run, and the way his lungs felt at the end of a triple-overtime shift. He was a machine.

Currently, the machine was out of order.

At thirty-seven weeks pregnant with twins, Shane felt less like an elite NHL center and more like a planet that had developed its own gravity. Every movement was a tactical operation. Getting out of bed required a three-point turn.

Every movement was a tactical operation, a slow, deliberate choreography that had replaced the blinding speed of the ice. Getting out of the king-sized bed, their bed, required a grunt and a complicated, three-point turn that always made Ilya chuckle from his spot, already awake and watching him with soft, adoring eyes.

Putting on socks was a distant memory, a feat of athleticism he could no longer fathom, a small, frustrating hurdle that Ilya always navigated for him with a gentle touch and murmured, "Let me get that, my love."

He sat on the edge of their bed in the Montreal condo, staring down at his bare feet. He was wearing one of Ilya's oversized hoodies which is the only thing that still fit comfortably over the massive, tight swell of his stomach and a pair of soft joggers.

"Hollander. Stop staring at your toes. They are not going to move themselves into your shoes by telekinesis."

Shane looked up to see Ilya leaning against the dresser. Ilya looked… ridiculous. He was dressed for practice, his gear bag already by the door, but he was wearing a look of such concentrated, vibrating anxiety that he looked like he might vibrate through the floor.

"I can do it," Shane grumbled, reaching down. He barely moved six inches before his breath hitched. The twins—Lily and Jane, as they'd finally settled on because what is the best name other than the names that started it all. A sharp kick landed right against Shane's ribs, and another shove hit his bladder.

"Ow. *Jesus*." Shane straightened up, his face flushing.

In a heartbeat, Ilya was there. He didn't just walk; he moved with that predatory, efficient grace that made him the best in the world. He dropped to his knees between Shane's legs, his large, calloused hands reaching out to steady Shane's hips.

"Stay," Ilya commanded. "Do not move. You are like an overturned turtle. It is pathetic to watch." He smirked, clearly pissing him off.

"I am not an overturned turtle, Rozanov," Shane snapped, though there was no heat in it. He let out a long sigh as Ilya grabbed a pair of thick wool socks. "I'm just… heavy. Why are they so heavy?"

"Because they are mine," Ilya said simply, sliding a sock onto Shane's left foot with surprising tenderness. He leaned down and pressed a soft kiss to Shane's forehead. "They have my big Russian bones. And your stubbornness. It is a dangerous combination."

Ilya looked up then, his blue eyes searching Shane's face. The snark was there, but beneath it was a raw, terrifying protectiveness. Since the third trimester had hit, Ilya had become a different person. The man who used to chirp Shane relentlessly on the ice now spent his nights researching the best air purifiers for nurseries and threatening to fight any delivery driver who knocked too loudly on their door.

"You are pale today," Ilya murmured, his thumb rubbing the arch of Shane's foot. "Are you hurting?"

"Just the usual," Shane said, trying to sound brave. "Back aches. Hips feel like they're being pried apart with a crowbar. But the doctor said that's normal for twins."

Ilya's jaw tightened. He hated "normal." He hated that there was a physical process Shane had to go through that Ilya couldn't intercept, couldn't body-check into the boards, couldn't outplay.

"I am skipping practice," Ilya announced, moving to the other foot.

"No, you are not. You have a game tomorrow. Montreal will riot if their star center skips practice because his husband is 'pale.'"

"Let them riot," Ilya shrugged. "I will tell them my daughters require my presence. They will understand. Or they will be silent because I will look at them with my scary face."

"Ilya. Go to practice," Shane said, reaching out to cup Ilya's cheek. He felt the rough stubble against his palm. "I'm just going to sit in the nursery and organize the tiny skates again. I'll be fine."

Ilya hesitated, then leaned his face into Shane's hand. He closed his eyes for a second, looking less like a NHL superstar and more like a man who was profoundly, terrifyingly in love. "If you need anything—anything at all—you call the emergency line. Not the regular phone. The one that bypasses the trainers."

"I know, Ilya."

"I mean it, sweetheart. Even if it is toe cramps, I want to know. I love you." He leaned in for a kiss.

The condo was too quiet once Ilya left. Shane spent an hour in the nursery. It was a masterpiece of Ilya's neurosis. The cribs were identical, positioned exactly three feet apart. The shelves were stocked with bilingual children's books—Russian folk tales sitting side-by-side with Canadian classics.

Shane stood in the center of the room, his hand resting on the top of his belly. He could feel the twins kicking.

"You guys are running out of room," he whispered.

He felt a sudden, sharp pang in his lower back. It wasn't like the usual ache. It was a deep, thrumming heat that radiated around to the front of his pelvis. He gripped the railing of Lily's crib, breathing through his nose until it passed.

Braxton Hicks, he told himself. *The doctor said they'd get stronger.*

He moved to the kitchen to get some water, but his movements were sluggish. He felt heavy in a way that felt like lead. He pulled out his phone, hovering over Ilya's contact, then shook his head. Ilya would abandon the team in the middle of a drill, and if it was nothing, Shane would never hear the end of it.

He sat at the kitchen island, trying to focus on a scouting report on his laptop, but the words blurred. Another wave of heat washed over him. This one lasted longer. Forty seconds.

Shane looked at the clock. 11:15 AM.

He waited. Ten minutes later, it happened again. This time, he felt a sharp, stabbing pressure at the base of his spine.

"Okay," Shane whispered, his heart starting to rabbit in his chest. "Okay, girls. Are we doing this?"

He stood up, intending to go to the bedroom to find his phone, when it happened. A sudden, audible *snap* like a rubber band breaking inside him, followed by a warm, torrential rush of fluid that soaked through his joggers and pooled on the hardwood floor.

Shane froze. He stared at the puddle, his breath hitching.

"Oh, no," he breathed. "Ilya is going to lose his mind."

The next contraction hit barely a minute later, and this one wasn't a "wave." It was a sledgehammer. It forced Shane to his knees, his hands slapping against the cold floor. He let out a low, guttural groan, the sound echoing off the high ceilings of the empty condo.

He scrambled for his phone, his fingers shaking so hard he almost dropped it. He didn't call the trainer. He didn't call the doctor.

He hit the speed dial for Ilya.

At the Bell Centre, practice was in full swing. Ilya Rozanov was mid-sentence, arguing with a winger about a power-play entry, when the high-pitched, piercing "Emergency Only" tone blared from the bench.

The entire team went silent. They knew that sound.

Ilya didn't even look at the coach. He didn't take off his gloves. He sprinted toward the bench, vaulted the boards, and snatched the phone from the trainer's hand.

"Shane?"

"Ilya," Shane's voice came through, strained and tight. "You... you need to come home. Right now."

"I am coming. I am already moving," Ilya said, his voice dropping into a terrifyingly calm, focused tone. He was already unbuckling his helmet with one hand, tossing it onto the ice without looking. "Are you okay? Where are you?"

"Kitchen floor," Shane gasped. A sharp intake of breath followed. "Water broke. They're—*fuck*—they're coming fast, Ilya."

"Stay on the floor. Do not move. I am ten minutes away," Ilya said. He looked at his teammates, who were staring at him in shock. "Move!" he roared at them, even though they weren't in his way.

He ran into the locker room, gear clicking and clacking on the floor. He didn't even strip. He threw a heavy tracksuit over his pads, shoved his feet into slides, grabbed his keys, and ran.

The drive from the Bell Centre to the condo usually took fifteen minutes. Ilya did it in seven. He ignored red lights, drove on the shoulder, and at one point, drove onto a sidewalk to bypass a delivery truck. His mind was a singular, burning point of focus: *Shane. Shane. Shane.*

He burst through the front door of the condo, chest heaving. "Shane!"

"In here!"

Ilya rounded the corner into the kitchen. Shane was propped up against the base of the island, his face slick with sweat, his knuckles white where he was gripping the cabinetry.

Ilya dropped to the floor beside him, his large frame surrounding Shane instantly. "I am here. I have you. Look at me, Hollander."

Shane looked up, his eyes wide and blown out with pain. "They're... they're not waiting, Ilya. The pressure... it's too much."

"We go to the hospital now," Ilya said, his voice firm. He slid one arm under Shane's knees and the other behind his back.

"Ilya, you're still in your hockey pants," Shane wheezed, even as another contraction hit, making him cry out against Ilya’s shoulder.

"I do not care if I am in a tuxedo or naked, we are going," Ilya growled. He lifted Shane—all 200-plus pounds of him as if he weighed nothing.

The elevator ride down felt like an eternity. Ilya stood in the small space, his eyes fixed on the floor numbers, his arms tightening around Shane every time Shane whimpered. Ilya was vibrating—not with fear, but with a terrifying, kinetic energy. He looked ready to kill anyone who dared to slow them down.

"Breathe, Shane. Just breathe. Like the stupid class said," Ilya muttered, pressing his forehead against Shane’s. "Puff, puff, blow. Do the thing."

"I’m—I’m doing the thing!" Shane yelled, his voice cracking as a massive contraction peaked. "Just drive the fucking car, Rozanov!"

The triage nurses at the Montreal Royal Victoria Hospital had seen everything. They had seen car accidents, hockey injuries, and frantic parents. But they had never seen Ilya Rozanov, still half-dressed in NHL gear, carrying a pregnant man through the sliding doors while shouting in a mix of Russian and English.

"My husband! Now!" Ilya bellowed, his voice echoing in the sterile lobby.

A team was there in seconds. They moved Shane onto a gurney, and for the first time, Ilya had to let go. He looked lost, his hands hovering in the air as they began to wheel Shane away.

"Sir, you need to stay back—" a nurse began.

Ilya turned a look on her that had made seasoned enforcers back down. "I am going where he goes. If you try to stop me, I will remove this door from the wall."

The nurse blinked, looked at the size of him, and nodded. "Follow us. Fast."

The next few hours were a blur of fluorescent lights, the smell of antiseptic, and the rhythmic *thump-thump, thump-thump* of the twin heart monitors.

Shane was in the thick of it now. The contractions were coming one on top of the other, a relentless tide of pain that left him gasping. He was stripped into a hospital gown, wires trailing from his chest and stomach.

Ilya was a constant, solid presence at his side. He had finally stripped off his hockey gear, down to a sweat-soaked t-shirt. He held Shane’s hand with a grip that would have been painful if Shane weren't already in agony.

"You’re doing great, Shane," the doctor said, checking the monitors. "You're fully dilated. Lily is in position. Jane is right behind her. We’re going to start pushing on the next one."

Shane shook his head, his hair matted to his forehead. "I can't. I'm... I'm too tired. I can't do it."

Ilya leaned down, his face inches from Shane's. His eyes were burning. "Listen to me, Hollander. You are the Captain. You have played twenty-five minutes a night on a broken ankle. You have taken hits from Chara and kept skating. You are the strongest man I have ever known."

Shane gripped Ilya's hand, his breath coming in short, sharp bursts.

"These girls," Ilya whispered, his voice thick with emotion. "They are waiting for you. They want to meet their Dad. You do this for them. You do this, and I will never ask you to put on your own socks ever again. I promise."

Shane let out a shaky, wet laugh that turned into a scream as the next contraction ripped through him.

"Okay," Shane gasped, his eyes snapping open with a sudden, fierce clarity. "Okay. Let's go."

The room exploded into activity. The doctor took her position. The nurses coached Shane's breathing. And Ilya—Ilya stayed right where he belonged, at the head of the bed, a wall of strength for Shane to lean on.

"Push, Shane! Push!"

Shane groaned, the sound deep and primal, his entire body straining with the effort. He felt like he was being torn apart, like the world was narrowing down to this single, impossible task.

"I see the head!" the doctor called out. "One more big one, Shane!"

Ilya was shouting now, his Russian accent thick and heavy, cheering Shane on like he was coming down the wing on a breakaway. "Give it to them, Shane! All the way! Go, go, go!"

With a final, agonizing surge of effort, Shane felt a sudden, incredible sense of release. A second later, the room was filled with a new sound.

A high-pitched, indignant wail.

"Lily," the doctor announced, lifting a small, squirming, vernix-covered baby. "Lily is here."

Shane collapsed back against the pillows, sobbing with relief, but he only had a second to breathe.

"Don't stop, Shane!" the doctor warned. "Jane is right there. She's coming too!"

Ilya looked at Lily, then back at Shane, his face wet with tears he didn't even seem to notice. "One more, sweetheart. One more, *moya dorogoy*. You can do it. I am here. I am right here. *ya tebya lyublyu*"

The air in the room, which had been thick with the scent of antiseptic, began to settle. The harsh overhead lights had been dimmed to a soft, amber glow, casting long shadows across the room. Outside, the Montreal skyline was beginning to twinkle, but for Shane, the only world that mattered was the three square feet of space surrounding his hospital bed.

Shane felt a strange, disconnected sensation in his limbs—a mix of total physical depletion and a high-voltage buzzing of adrenaline. His skin was still damp with sweat, his hair a tangled mess against the pillow, but as he looked down at the two bundles nestled in the crooks of his arms, he felt a strength he hadn't known he possessed.

Now that the initial chaos had subsided, Shane had the chance to really *look* at them.

Lily, the firstborn, was already proving to be the "big sister" by a mere three minutes and half a pound. She was a tiny powerhouse. Shane traced the line of her jaw with a trembling finger. She had Ilya's high, sharp cheekbones—even as a newborn, the structure was there. Her hair was the most shocking part; it wasn't just a fine fuzz, but a thick, dark cap of silk that swirled at the crown, exactly like the cowlick Ilya spent every morning trying to gel down.

"She looks like she's already planning a lockout," Shane whispered, his voice a cracked reed.

Ilya, who hadn't sat down since they arrived, was hovering over the bed like a gargoyle made of muscle and anxiety. He let out a choked sound that was half-laugh, half-sob. He leaned down, his massive chest brushing against Shane's shoulder, and pressed a lingering, reverent kiss to Shane's temple.

"She has your mouth, Hollander," Ilya murmured, his thumb catching a stray tear on Shane's cheek. "Look. Even in her sleep, she is pursing her lips like she is about to tell the referee he is an idiot."

It was true. Lily had a tiny, bow-shaped mouth that already looked set in a pout of stubborn determination.

Then there was Jane. If Lily was the fire, Jane was the moonlight. She was slightly smaller, her skin a delicate, translucent porcelain. Her hair was the color of clover honey—Shane's hair—soft and sparse. But when she shifted, her eyelids fluttering, Shane saw the flash of the Rozanov legacy.

"Her eyes," Shane breathed as Jane squinted at the dim light. They weren't the dark, muddy color most newborns had; they were a clear, startling gray-blue. "She's going to have your eyes, Ilya. Cold as the Omsk winter."

"No," Ilya corrected softly, leaning down to kiss the bridge of Jane's nose with agonizing gentleness. "They will be like the ice at the Bell Centre. Perfectly clear. Perfectly beautiful."

Jane had a tiny dimple on her chin and fingernails so small they looked like microscopic seashells. When she let out a soft, rhythmic *huff* in her sleep, Ilya looked like he was going to vibrate right out of his skin.

A nurse entered the room quietly, carrying a clipboard. "I just need to check the babies' vitals and take Mr. Hollander’s blood pressure."

Ilya didn't move. He stood like a wall between the nurse and the bed. "Is it necessary? They are sleeping. He is sleeping."

"Ilya," Shane chided softly, though he secretly loved the protective display. "Let her do her job."

Ilya grumbled something in Russian—probably a complaint about hospital bureaucracy—but stepped aside just enough to let her through. However, he didn't stop watching. He tracked every movement of the stethoscope, every adjustment of the blood pressure cuff.

When the nurse moved to check Lily’s heart rate, Ilya’s hand shot out, not to stop her, but to hover near the baby’s head. As the nurse worked, Ilya leaned over and kissed Shane’s knuckles, one by one.

"You are shaking," Ilya whispered, his eyes fixed on Shane’s.

"Adrenaline," Shane said. "And I think I’m starving."

"I will get you everything," Ilya promised. "I will buy the cafeteria. I will hire a five-star chef to come to the recovery wing."

"Just a sandwich, Ilya. And maybe some of those grapes."

The nurse finished her checks and slipped out, promising to bring a meal tray. The silence that followed was heavy and sweet.

Ilya finally sat on the edge of the bed, mindful of the limited space. He looked at Shane, really looked at him, seeing the exhaustion etched into the lines around his eyes and the pale curve of his throat. A wave of raw, unfiltered emotion crossed Ilya’s face. He reached out, cupping Shane’s face in his hand, his thumb stroking over the stubble on Shane’s jaw.

He leaned in and pressed a slow, deep kiss to Shane’s lips. It wasn't the fiery, competitive kiss of their early years, nor the playful smirk of their public life. It was a vow. It was the kiss of a man who had finally found the thing worth more than any trophy or record.

"I didn't think I could love you more," Ilya whispered against his mouth. "I was wrong. You are a god, Shane Hollander-Rozanov," his blue eyes searching for Shane's. "I have never seen anything like what you just did. I am... I am so proud to be yours."

Shane leaned his forehead against Ilya’s. "We did it, Ilya. No more 'rivals.' We’re a team now. A real one."

"A very small team," Ilya joked, looking down at the twins. "With very loud rookies."

He reached down and gently scooped Jane into his arms for the first time. The sight was enough to make Shane’s heart ache—the most feared enforcer in the league, with his scarred

knuckles and massive biceps, cradling a six-pound infant like she was the most precious thing in the universe.

Ilya began to hum—a low, melodic Russian tune that Shane recognized as a lullaby Ilya's mother used to sing as he told him one time. As he hummed, he leaned down and kissed Jane's forehead, then turned to kiss Lily's cheek, then finally leaned over to press a soft, lingering kiss to Shane's shoulder.

"Lily and Jane," Ilya murmured, his voice thick with a new, terrifyingly beautiful responsibility. "Welcome to the world. Your Dad and I... we are going to give you everything."

Shane watched them, his eyes growing heavy as the exhaustion finally started to win. He felt safe. He felt whole. For the first time in his life, the Captain of Montreal wasn't worried about the next game or the next season. He was exactly where he was supposed to be.

"Ilya?" Shane murmured, his eyes drifting shut.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Don't let the nurses take them to the nursery. Keep them here."

Ilya's grip on Jane tightened just a fraction, his eyes narrowing as he looked toward the door like a sentry on watch. He leaned over and kissed Shane's temple once more.

"Nobody takes them," Ilya promised. "I am the goalie today. Nothing gets past me."

Chapter End Notes

This is my 1st time writing a hollanov fic so I hope you like it! This is inspired by a pic of hollanov with their cute kids that I saw on tiktok. The fic will contain different chapters about their life with the kids. If you want to request something you can just comment. Thank you so much!! Let's go to the cottage next ep ;]

Chapter 2: The Softest Kind of Chaos

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The transition from the hospital to the Montreal condo felt like a high-stakes tactical maneuver.

Ilya had spent the morning of their discharge vibrating with a restless, protective energy. He had vetted the car seat installation three separate times, glaring at the plastic clips as if he could intimidate them into being safer. When it was finally time to leave, he insisted on pushing the double stroller himself, walking with the slow, deliberate gait of a man carrying live explosives.

Shane, meanwhile, felt like he'd been run over by a fleet of Zambonis. Every step made his core protest, and the exhaustion was a heavy, physical weight in his bones. But as he watched Ilya maneuver the stroller through the hospital lobby—ignoring the whispers and the few paparazzi lurking near the exit with a terrifyingly blank "Omsk-style" stare—Shane felt a fierce surge of pride.

"I have the perimeter," Ilya muttered as they reached the SUV. "You get in. Slowly, Shane. Do not use your abs."

"I don't think I *have* abs anymore, Ilya," Shane huffed, leaning heavily on the car door.

Ilya was there in a second, his hand sliding behind Shane's waist to support his weight. He leaned in and pressed a firm, lingering kiss to Shane's temple**.** "You have them. They are just on vacation. I will find them for you later. For now, sit."

The condo was different now. It didn't smell like expensive leather and Ilya's cologne; it smelled like laundry detergent and the faint, sweet scent of new blankets.

As soon as they crossed the threshold, the silence of the apartment felt heavy. Lily and Jane were both miraculously asleep in their carriers, their tiny faces peaceful and oblivious to the fact that they were now in their permanent home.

Ilya set the carriers down in the middle of the living room and just... stared at them. He looked like a man who had won the lottery and was afraid to touch the ticket in case it dissolved.

"We are outnumbered," Ilya whispered, his voice hushed with awe.

Shane sat on the sofa, letting out a long, shaky breath. "Come here, Rozanov."

Ilya moved to him, sinking onto the cushion beside him. He didn't say anything; he just pulled Shane into his side, wrapping a massive arm around his shoulders. He tucked his chin

over Shane’s head and breathed him in, leaving a row of soft, grateful kisses along the crown of Shane’s head.

"How are you feeling?" Ilya asked, his hand dropping to rest on Shane’s thigh, his thumb rubbing rhythmic circles through the fabric of Shane’s joggers.

"Sore. Tired. Happy," Shane admitted, leaning his head on Ilya’s shoulder. "Look at them, Ilya. They’re actually ours."

They spent the next hour just observing. Now that they were in the natural light of their own home, the physical details of the twins were even more striking.

Lily had woken up briefly for a diaper change, and her personality was already emerging as a "force of nature." She had a tiny, powerful kick—"A winger’s legs," Ilya had noted proudly. Her dark hair was a wild, silk halo, and when she frowned, she looked exactly like Ilya during a post-game interview where the questions were particularly stupid.

While Jane remained the calm center of the storm. She was content to lie in her carrier, her pale blue eyes tracking the shadows on the ceiling. She had Shane’s delicate features, but her hands were long and elegant, her fingers constantly curling and uncurling as if she were testing the air.

"Jane is going to be the smart one," Ilya decided, leaning down to kiss Shane’s cheek. "She is calculating. She is watching us to see who is the weak link."

"It’s definitely you," Shane teased. "You’ve been home for twenty minutes and you’ve already checked their breathing fourteen times."

"I am a professional," Ilya countered, though he didn't disagree.

The "honeymoon phase" of their arrival lasted exactly until 2:14 AM.

The sound that woke them wasn't a cry; it was a synchronized, high-pitched alarm. Both Lily and Jane had decided, with terrifying coordination, that they were starving, wet, and deeply offended by the state of the world.

Shane tried to sit up, but a sharp spike of pain in his incision site made him gasp.

"Don't," Ilya commanded, his voice thick with sleep but his reflexes already firing. He was out of bed in a blur of motion. He didn't even turn on the main light, opting for the soft glow of the nursery lamp.

Shane watched from the doorway, leaning against the frame as Ilya navigated the chaos. It was a sight he wanted to bottle up: the most lethal scorer in the NHL, wearing nothing but grey sweatpants, standing between two cribs.

"Okay, okay," Ilya cooed in Russian, his voice a low, soothing vibration. "Lily, you are the loudest, so you wait. Jane, you are the smallest, you go first."

Ilya scooped Jane up, cradling her against his bare, tattooed chest. The contrast was staggering—the sheer bulk of Ilya's muscle against the fragile, porcelain-pale skin of his daughter. He leaned down and kissed Jane's forehead, whispering a soft "Shh, *moya rozochka*" as he navigated the diaper change with surprisingly steady hands.

"Need help?" Shane asked softly.

Ilya looked up, his eyes softening the moment they landed on Shane. "I have it. Go back to bed, Shane."

"I'm not going back to bed while you're doing a double-header solo."

Shane shuffled into the room, taking Lily from her crib. The moment the baby was in his arms, her screaming turned into a pathetic, wet whimpering. Shane sat in the rocker, tucked Lily against his chest, and felt that familiar, overwhelming rush of love.

"Look at us," Shane whispered, looking over at Ilya, who was now expertly burping Jane. "The two best centers in the league, defeated by twelve pounds of baby."

Ilya walked over, Jane tucked under his chin, and stood over Shane. He reached out, his hand cupping the back of Shane's neck, and leaned down to give Shane a deep, sleepy, and incredibly sweet kiss.

"We are not defeated," Ilya murmured against his lips. "We are just in the first period. We will adjust our strategy."

By 4:00 AM, the girls were finally settled back into their cribs. The condo was silent again, save for the hum of the white noise machine.

Shane and Ilya stood over the cribs, side-by-side.

"Lily has your ears," Shane whispered, pointing to the slight curve at the top of the baby's ear.

"And Jane has your dimple," Ilya added, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist from behind and pulling him back against his chest. He rested his chin on Shane's shoulder, his breath warm against Shane's ear. "They are perfect, Shane. They are the best things we have ever made."

Ilya turned Shane around in his arms, taking his face in his hands. In the dim light of the nursery, Ilya's eyes were shining with an intensity that made Shane's breath hitch. He kissed Shane—not with the fire of the ice, but with the tenderness of a man who had found his soul's anchor. "Go to sleep, Hollander," Ilya whispered, kissing the tip of Shane's nose. "I will stay awake for a bit. I want to make sure the air stays the right temperature for them."

"You're a maniac, Rozanov."

"I am a father," Ilya corrected with a proud, tired grin. "Now go."

Shane smiled, leaning in for one last, soft kiss before heading back to bed, knowing that as long as Ilya was on guard, their little rose garden was safe.

By the third day home, Ilya had established a perimeter that would put a secret service detail to shame. He had color-coded the hand sanitizer bottles, mapped out a "no-fly zone" around the nursery for loud electronics, and was currently vetting the guest list for the afternoon's visitors like he was preparing for a playoff series.

"Ilya, they are my parents. Not a scouting report for the Bruins," Shane said, watching his husband adjust the pillows on the sofa for the tenth time.

Ilya paused, a bottle of organic surface cleaner in one hand. He looked at Shane, who was currently draped in a soft cardigan, Lily snoozing against his chest. Ilya walked over, dropping to his knees by the sofa and pressing a soft, lingering kiss to Shane's jaw. "Your father has 'hockey hands,' Shane. They are rough. Jane is like a delicate Faberge egg. I am merely concerned about structural integrity."

"He's held babies before, Ilya. He held *me*."

"And look how you turned out," Ilya teased, his eyes dancing. He leaned up to press a quick, sweet kiss to the tip of Shane's nose before shifting his gaze to Lily. He reached out a finger, gently stroking the shock of dark, messy hair that made her look so much like a miniature version of himself. "Hello, Little Threat. Are you ready to meet the grandparents?"

When the doorbell rang, Ilya stiffened, his shoulders squaring.

Yuna and David Hollander didn't just walk in; they arrived with the organized whirlwind of a championship team. Yuna was carrying three bags of homemade Korean food, and David was carrying a box of "Baby's First Skates" that were clearly far too large for newborns.

"Where are they?" Yuna breathed, her face glowing.

She bypassed her son entirely, her eyes locking onto the two bassinets in the living room. Shane laughed, though it pulled at his healing stomach. "Good to see you too, Mom."

Yuna finally turned, pulling Shane into a careful, tender hug. Ilya watched from two feet away, his hands twitching as if he wanted to intervene, but he settled for stepping in to take the heavy bags of food from Yuna.

"You look tired, Shane-ah," Yuna whispered, stroking his hair. "But you look... so happy."

Meanwhile, David Hollander was standing over the bassinets, his hands behind his back as if he were inspecting a new line of recruits. He looked at Lily, with her dark, thick Rozanov hair and Shane's straight nose. Then he looked at Jane, whose lighter, golden-brown fuzz caught the afternoon sun, her ice-blue eyes—the exact shade of Ilya's—tracking his movement.

"Big hands," David grunted, pointing at Jane. "Good for a goalie. Or a defender."

"Dad, she's four days old," Shane groaned.

David ignored him, looking at Ilya. The two men shared a long, silent look—a "hockey dad" to a "hockey dad." Finally, David reached out and clapped a hand on Ilya's shoulder. "Good

job, Rozanov. They look sturdy."

Coming from David Hollander, it was the ultimate blessing. Ilya actually flushed, leaning over to kiss the top of Jane's head as he picked her up to hand her to David. "She has the Hollander chin," Ilya noted, his voice uncharacteristically humble. "She is going to be very stubborn."

An hour later, the "quiet" family visit was interrupted by a knock that could only belong to professional athletes.

A handful of Shane and Ilya's Ottawa teammates—big, loud, and smelling of expensive aftershave—crowded into the foyer. They were carrying stuffed animals and team-branded onesies, looking entirely out of place in the soft, quiet atmosphere of the nursery-ready condo.

"Alright, let's see the new prospects!" one of the wingers shouted, only to be met with a terrifyingly sharp *"Shh!"* from Ilya.

The players froze. Ilya stood at the entrance to the living room like a sentry. "Hand sanitizer is by the door. Volume at a four. If you wake Lily, I will personally ensure your next practice is the worst of your life."

The teammates scrambled for the sanitizer.

It was a surreal sight: four of the toughest players in the league huddled around the sofa, speaking in hushed whispers.

"Holy shit, Hollander," whispered a veteran defender, looking at Jane. "She's got your dimple. That's uncanny."

"And look at the dark one," another added, pointing to Lily. "She's already got Rozanov's 'I'm going to ruin your life' stare. Look at those eyebrows."

Lily, as if sensing the attention, let out a tiny, imperious huff and stretched. Her long, delicate fingers—a trait she shared with Jane and Ilya—curled into a tiny fist.

"They're beautiful, guys," Hayden said, his voice actually softening. "Really. Congratulations."

As the afternoon wound down and the guests began to filter out, the condo returned to its peaceful, slightly messy state. Yuna had stocked the fridge, and David had finished a third "scouting report" on the girls' reach and grip strength.

Shane was exhausted, leaning back against the sofa cushions. Ilya moved through the room, clearing away empty tea cups with efficient speed. Once the door was locked, Ilya finally sat down next to Shane.

He didn't say anything for a long moment. He just looked at his family. He reached out and pulled Shane into his lap, mindful of his recovery, and tucked Shane's head under his chin.

"Your mother thinks I should be feeding you more soup," Ilya murmured, his lips brushing against Shane’s temple.

"My mother thinks everyone should be eating more soup," Shane replied, closing his eyes. "You did good today, Ilya. You only glared at the winger once."

"He was holding Jane too high. Her center of gravity was off," Ilya defended himself, though he was smiling. He leaned down and caught Shane’s lips in a soft, slow kiss that tasted like relief and deep, abiding affection.

They stayed like that for a while, wrapped in each other, while the two little girls slept. Lily, with her dark Rozanov crown and tiny Shane-nose, and Jane, with her golden Hollander fuzz and Ilya’s piercing blue eyes.

"They’re the best thing we’ve ever done, aren't they?" Shane whispered.

Ilya tightened his hold, pressing a final, fervent kiss to Shane’s forehead. "Not even close, Hollander. They are the *only* thing."

By six months, the physical differences between the twins were even more pronounced. Lily was a firecracker—her dark, Rozanov hair had grown into a thick, wild mop that refused to be tamed, and her dark eyes were always darting, looking for trouble. Jane, meanwhile, was the calm observer, her golden-brown hair soft and fine, her piercing ice-blue eyes watching the world with a "Hollander-esque" calculation.

The first crawl happened on a Tuesday morning. Ilya had spread a plush mat across the living room floor, and Shane was sitting on the edge of the sofa, nursing a coffee and watching the girls.

"She’s doing the thing," Ilya whispered, dropping to his stomach on the floor to get at eye-level with Lily. "Shane, look! The back legs are engaged!"

Lily was up on all fours, rocking with a fierce, focused intensity. She let out a frustrated little grunt—the same sound Ilya made when he missed a one-timer—and then, with a sudden, jerky lunge, she moved one hand forward. Then a knee. Then the other hand.

"She’s moving!" Shane cheered, leaning forward, his heart hammering. "Go, Lily, go!"

Lily didn't just crawl; she tackled the distance between her and Ilya’s discarded hockey glove with the speed of a winger on a breakaway. When she finally reached it, she let out a triumphant shriek and shoved the leather into her mouth.

Ilya was beaming, a look of pure, unadulterated pride on his face. He picked Lily up and pressed a series of loud, smacking kisses to her chubby cheeks. "My little champion! Best stride in the league!"

He then crawled over to where Jane was sitting, watching her sister’s antics with a tilted head. Ilya leaned down and kissed Jane’s forehead. "Do not worry, Jane. You are the

defensive strategist. You let her tire herself out, then you take the puck."

Jane responded by reaching out and grabbing Ilya’s nose. He laughed, a deep, warm sound, and leaned over to kiss Shane’s knee as he sat back on his heels. "We are in trouble, Hollander. They are mobile now."

At ten months, the condo became a training camp.

Jane was the first to stand. True to her nature, she didn't rush it. She spent three days studying the height of the coffee table, testing the grip of her tiny hands. One afternoon, while Shane was stretching his back—still mindful of the lingering tightness from the pregnancy—Jane simply pulled herself up.

She stood there, wobbling on her tiny, sturdy legs, her ice-blue eyes wide with the realization of her new perspective.

"Ilya! Look!" Shane hissed.

Ilya came sprinting from the kitchen, nearly slipping on his socks. He froze three feet away, his hands outstretched like a goalie waiting for a shot, ready to catch her if she toppled. "Stay... stay... good girl, Jane."

Jane let out a giggle, showing off her two bottom teeth, and took one shaky, uncertain step toward Shane. Then another. She looked like she was walking on a tightrope, her arms out for balance. When she finally reached Shane’s knees, she collapsed into his lap with a squeal of delight.

Shane scooped her up, burying his face in her neck, breathing in the scent of baby powder and home. "You did it, Janey. You're walking."

Ilya moved in, wrapping his arms around both of them. He pressed his face against the back of Shane’s neck, leaving a slow, hot kiss on the sensitive skin there before leaning around to kiss Jane’s nose. "She has the Hollander poise," Ilya murmured.

Of course, Lily couldn't let her sister have the spotlight for long. Seeing Jane getting all the praise, Lily scrambled to the coffee table, pulled herself up with a grunt of pure effort, and practically ran three steps before face-planting into a pile of laundry. She didn't cry; she just rolled over, looked at them, and started laughing.

"And Lily has the Rozanov 'all-gas-no-brakes' mentality," Shane laughed, reaching out to pull the dark-haired twin into the family huddle.

When the girls were nearly a year old, *Sports Illustrated* and *Vogue* collaborated for a special "First Family of Hockey" feature. Shane had been hesitant—he was still the private, guarded Captain—but Ilya had been surprisingly on board.

"They are beautiful, Shane. The world should see that we are winning," Ilya had said, punctuating the sentence with a soft kiss to Shane’s jaw.

The shoot took place in a high-end studio in Old Montreal. The girls were dressed in custom-made, miniature versions of their fathers' jerseys—Lily in Ilya’s #81 and Jane in Shane’s #24—paired with tiny designer leggings.

The photographer was a high-strung man who looked like he’d never seen a child in his life. "Can we get them to sit still? The lighting is very specific!"

"They are babies, not mannequins," Ilya snapped, his "scary Russian" persona flaring up. He stood behind the camera, arms crossed over his chest, looking like he was ready to body-check the photographer if he spoke to Shane or the girls in that tone again.

Shane moved into the frame, sitting on a velvet bench. He held Jane on his lap, while Lily was perched on his shoulder, her tiny hand gripping his ear for support.

"Ilya, come in here," Shane called out. "I can't hold both of them and look 'editorial' at the same time."

Ilya softened instantly. He stepped into the light, looking devastatingly handsome in a charcoal suit. He sat next to Shane, taking Lily from his shoulder.

The contrast was striking: the two most famous rivals in hockey, scarred and seasoned, holding two delicate, beautiful little girls. Lily, with her wild dark hair and defiant pout, looked like a tiny rebel. Jane, with her golden hair and calm, blue-eyed gaze, looked like a princess who knew exactly how much she was worth.

"Look at each other," the photographer instructed.

Ilya turned to Shane. The studio lights caught the silver in Ilya’s hair and the warmth in Shane’s eyes. In that moment, the cameras disappeared. Ilya reached out, his thumb stroking Shane’s cheekbone, and he leaned in to press a slow, tender kiss to Shane’s lips.

Click.

The resulting photo would go on to be the most famous sports image of the decade. It wasn't about the hockey; it was about the family.

As the shoot wrapped up, Ilya scooped both girls into his arms, carrying them toward the dressing room. He stopped at the door, waiting for Shane. When Shane caught up, Ilya leaned down and kissed his forehead.

"You did good today, Hollander," Ilya whispered.

"We did good, Rozanov," Shane corrected, reaching out to hold Ilya’s hand as they walked out together.

Chapter End Notes

While I writing the photoshoot part I keep on wishing that someone would do it because imagine the twins with their dads jersey??? PLEASE MY HEART.

Anyway I do hope that you enjoy reading this chapter. Thank you for the support. Your comments are deeply appreciated!!

Chapter 3: The Protocol for Fun

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If you asked Ilya Rozanov, the twins' first birthday was a celebration of life and joy.

If you asked Shane Hollander, the twins' first birthday was a logistical operation with a high probability of biological contamination.

Three days before the party, the kitchen island in the Montreal condo looked less like a breakfast spot and more like the headquarters for a G7 Summit.

Shane sat on a stool, wearing his noise-canceling headphones (no music, just silence to help him focus), staring at a color-coded binder. He was vibrating with a low-level, hum-like anxiety that Ilya recognized instantly.

"Shane," Ilya said, sliding a mug of tea onto the counter. "You have been staring at the 'Napkin Logistics' tab for forty minutes. They are paper. We buy them. People wipe mouths. Done."

Shane didn't look up. He adjusted his glasses. "It's not just napkins, Ilya. It's the flow of traffic. If we put the food station near the balcony door, the cold air will lower the temperature of the hot dishes, which creates a breeding ground for bacteria. Also, people will track mud in from the terrace. We need a designated shoe-removal zone with antimicrobial mats."

Ilya leaned against the fridge, crossing his massive arms. He was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt that had a stain on the shoulder from where Lily had spit up an hour ago. He didn't care. To Ilya, mess was just proof of life.

"Shane," Ilya said, his voice dropping into that warm, teasing register. "We are inviting hockey players. They drink out of each other's water bottles. They spit on the floor. They are gross. You cannot sanitize the Montreal Canadiens."

"I can try," Shane muttered, finally taking the headphones off. He looked exhausted. "I just... I want it to be perfect. I want them to have a routine. If the party disrupts their nap schedule, Jane gets overstimulated, and if Lily misses her snack window, she bites."

Ilya walked over, stepping into Shane's personal bubble. He didn't touch him yet—he knew Shane needed a second to switch from "Planner Mode" to "Husband Mode." He just stood close, letting his presence be a warm wall against Shane's anxiety.

"We will stick to the schedule," Ilya promised. "Nap at 12:00. Food at 2:00. Cake at 3:00. Chaos at 3:05. I will be the enforcer. Anyone who disrupts the schedule gets checked into the boards."

Shane finally looked up, a small, tired smile twitching at his lips. "You promise?"

"I promise." Ilya reached out then, his large hands settling on Shane's waist. "Now, stop worrying about the bacteria. I bought a bouncy castle."

Shane went stiff. "You did *what*?"

"A bouncy castle. For the living room."

"Ilya! Do you know how many germs are in those things? It's a petri dish of foot fungus and slobber!"

"It is brand new!" Ilya grinned, looking unrepentant. "I set it up while you were showering. Lily is already in it. She loves it."

Shane groaned, dropping his forehead onto the binder. "I hate you. I really, really hate you."

"No, you don't," Ilya laughed, leaning down to press a loud, smacking kiss to the top of Shane's head. "You love me because I make sure our children have fun while you make sure they survive."

On the day of the party, the condo was divided into zones.

Zone A (The Foyer): Controlled by Shane.

This was the Decontamination Chamber. Shane had set up a table with three different types of hand sanitizer (foam, gel, and spray), a box of masks "just in case," and a polite but firm sign that read: *PLEASE WASH HANDS BEFORE ENTERING. NO OUTSIDE SHOES*.

Zone B (The Living Room): Controlled by Ilya.

This was the Chaos Dome. The bouncy castle (which barely fit under the cathedral ceilings) was inflating with a loud hum. Ilya was inside it, testing the bounce integrity, while Lily screamed with laughter, throwing soft plastic balls at his head.

When the doorbell rang, Shane stiffened. "Okay. It's starting."

"Relax, *lyubov*," Ilya called out from the castle, his hair sticking up in every direction. "Let them in."

The first to arrive were Shane's parents. Yuna Hollander walked in carrying a massive container of sushi rolls, bypassing the sanitizer station because, well, she was Grandma.

"Shane-ah!" she beamed, kissing his cheek. "Where are the birthday girls?"

"In the... bouncy thing," Shane sighed, taking the food. He immediately checked the temperature of the containers to ensure food safety standards were met. "Mom, please tell me you didn't bring the spicy kimchi. Lily will try to eat it."

"I brought the mild one," she winked.

Then, the team arrived.

It was like a stampede of buffalo entering a library. The noise level spiked instantly. Shane stood by the sanitizer station like a TSA agent.

"Price, shoes off," Shane commanded, pointing to the mat. "Gallagher, sanitizer. Two pumps. Rub for twenty seconds."

"Jeez, Cap," Gallagher laughed, but he obeyed. "Is there a metal detector, too?"

"Don't tempt him," Ilya roared from the living room, emerging from the bouncy castle with Jane tucked under one arm like a football and Lily clinging to his leg.

Ilya was the counter-balance to Shane's rigidity. He encouraged the chaos. He let the teammates toss the girls (gently) into the air. He let Lily chew on a (clean) hockey glove.

Shane spent the first hour hovering. He walked around with a pack of wet wipes, surreptitiously cleaning surfaces after people touched them. He watched Jane closely, checking for signs of sensory overload.

Jane was sitting on the floor with a set of wooden blocks, frowning at the loud music. Shane swooped in instantly.

"Too much noise, Janey?" he whispered. He picked her up, pressing her face into his neck to block out the visual stimuli. He carried her to the quiet corner he had designated—a tent filled with pillows and low light.

He sat there with her for ten minutes, just breathing.

The curtain of the tent pulled back. Ilya's face appeared. He wasn't smiling his manic grin anymore; he looked soft, concerned.

"Is she okay?" Ilya whispered.

"Just a bit loud," Shane said. "She needs a reset."

Ilya crawled into the tent—which was a tight squeeze for a 6'3" Russian hockey player. He sat next to Shane, wrapping his long arm around Shane's shoulders and kissing Jane's head.

"You are a good dad, Shane," Ilya murmured, kissing Shane's temple. "You noticed before she even cried."

"I know the signs," Shane said simply. "I know how it feels."

Ilya squeezed him tighter. "Stay here for five minutes. I will go make sure Lily hasn't punctured the castle. Then we do cake."

The Smash Cake ceremony was the part Shane had been dreading the most.

Hypothesis: Two babies covered in frosting = sticky residue everywhere = ants = disaster.

Reality: It was worse. And better.

Shane had laid down a plastic tarp (Ilya called it the "Dexter Kill Room" sheet; Shane called it "sensible floor protection"). The high chairs were positioned in the center.

"Okay," Shane announced to the room. "Please do not use flash photography. It startles Jane."

Ilya placed the cakes down. Lily looked at the confection with predatory focus. Jane looked at it with suspicion.

"Go!" the team cheered.

Lily didn't just smash the cake; she annihilated it. She drove her face into the frosting, came up gasping for air, and laughed a maniacal, sugar-fueled cackle. Then, she reached out with a frosting-covered hand and grabbed Ilya's shirt.

"Yes! Good hit!" Ilya cheered, not caring about his designer t-shirt. He laughed, grabbing a napkin to wipe her eye, but mostly just letting her be messy.

Jane, on the other hand, touched the frosting with one finger. She looked at the sticky substance. She looked at Shane. She held her finger out, silently demanding to be cleaned.

"I got you," Shane said, immediately wiping her hand with a wet wipe. "It's gross, right? Sticky textures are the worst."

Jane nodded solemnly and accepted a small fork Shane offered her. She ate her cake like a civilized human being.

Ilya looked over at Shane—who was frantically wiping frosting off the high chair tray before it could drip—and smiled. He walked over, ignoring Shane's "Don't touch me, you're sticky" glare.

Ilya grabbed Shane by the back of the neck and pulled him in. He smeared a streak of vanilla frosting right onto Shane's nose.

"Ilya!" Shane gasped, scandalized.

"Happy Birthday to us," Ilya grinned. Before Shane could wipe it off, Ilya leaned in and kissed the frosting off Shane's nose.

The room erupted in hooting and hollering. Shane turned bright red, but he didn't push Ilya away. He let out a breathless laugh, his need for order crumbling just a little bit in the face of Ilya's overwhelming affection.

By 7:00 PM, the guests were gone. The bouncy castle was deflated (a sad pile of vinyl in the corner).

The girls were bathed, scrubbed pink, and finally asleep in their cribs.

The living room was a disaster zone. There was wrapping paper everywhere. There were crumbs. There was a lingering smell of damp hockey players.

Shane stood in the middle of the room, holding a trash bag. He looked at the mess, and his hands started to twitch. The urge to clean, to organize, to sterilize was overwhelming.

"Shane."

Ilya’s voice was soft. He came up behind Shane and gently took the trash bag from his hands. He tossed it onto the floor.

"No cleaning tonight," Ilya said firmly. "We hired the cleaners for tomorrow morning. Remember? It is in your spreadsheet."

"I know," Shane said, his voice tight. "But it’s... messy, Ilya. It’s chaotic."

"It is a happy mess," Ilya corrected.

He stepped around Shane to face him. He took Shane’s hands—which were dry from washing them twenty times that day—and rubbed his thumbs over the knuckles.

"You survived," Ilya whispered. "Nobody got sick. The schedule was only off by eleven minutes. And the girls were so happy."

Shane let out a long breath, his shoulders finally dropping. "Did you see Jane with the blocks? She stacked them by color."

"I saw," Ilya smiled. "She is her father’s daughter. And Lily... Lily tried to bite Gallagher."

"Also her father’s daughter," Shane retorted.

Ilya laughed, a low rumble in the quiet room. He pulled Shane into his arms, wrapping him up completely. Shane buried his face in Ilya’s chest, breathing in the scent of him—cake, sweat, and comfort.

"Thank you," Shane mumbled into Ilya’s shirt.

"For what?"

"For the bouncy castle," Shane admitted. "And for... handling the people. And for eating the piece of cake that fell on the floor so I wouldn't freak out."

"I have a five-second rule," Ilya shrugged. "You have a zero-second rule. We balance."

Ilya tilted Shane’s chin up. He looked at him with that fierce, intense love that always made Shane feel like the only person in the world.

"You are the best planner, Shane," Ilya whispered. "But now, the plan is to go to bed. And maybe sleep for twelve hours."

Shane leaned up, meeting Ilya for a slow, tired, grateful kiss. "That," Shane said, "is the best idea you've had all day."

If the birthday party was a tactical operation, Christmas was a siege.

The dust from the birthday confetti had barely settled when the calendar flipped to mid-December. For Shane, this meant a transition from "Event Planning Mode" to "Inventory Management Mode." He had a spreadsheet for gifts, a color-coded schedule for family visits, and a strict budget that he knew Ilya would ignore completely.

It began on a Tuesday. Shane came home from practice to find the living room furniture rearranged. The sleek, modern Italian sofa had been pushed against the wall, and in the center of the room stood a tree that could only be described as *aggressive*.

It was a Balsam Fir, but it looked like it had been wrestling bears in the forest before Ilya found it. It scraped the twelve-foot cathedral ceilings. It was wide. It smelled overwhelmingly of sap.

Ilya was standing on a step ladder, shirtless, holding a staple gun.

"Ilya," Shane said, dropping his gym bag. "What is that?"

"It is the *Tsar* of trees," Ilya declared, looking down with a beaming, sweaty grin. "I found it at the lot. It spoke to me. It said, 'Ilya, I am strong enough to withstand two toddlers.'"

Shane walked over, eyeing the behemoth. "It's not symmetrical. Look at the left side. It lists."

"It has character!" Ilya defended, climbing down. He wiped his hands on his sweatpants and immediately stepped into Shane's space, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist to trap him. "And I am anchoring it to the wall. I read a statistic about toddlers tipping trees. This tree will not move. It is solid. Like me."

Shane sighed, trying to fight the smile that was threatening to ruin his stern expression. "It's going to shed needles everywhere."

"We have a vacuum," Ilya dismissed, leaning down to nuzzle his nose against Shane's neck. "Stop worrying about the needles. Worry about the ornaments. I bought new ones."

Shane pulled back, suspicious. "What kind of ornaments? We agreed on the Silver and Gold theme. Elegant. Minimalist."

Ilya's eyes sparkled with mischief. "The theme is 'Joy', Shane. Come. Look at the bag."

That evening, the decorating began. It was a battle of wills.

Shane had laid out the "approved" ornaments: silver baubles, glass icicles, and white lights.

Ilya dumped a shopping bag onto the rug that contained: a neon green pickle, a glittery dinosaur, a Santa Claus riding a motorcycle, and enough multi-colored lights to signal an

aircraft carrier.

"Ilya," Shane said, holding up the pickle. "Absolutely not."

"It is tradition!" Ilya argued, sitting on the floor with Lily in his lap. "You hide the pickle. Whoever finds it gets good luck. Jane needs luck. She is too serious."

"Jane doesn't need a pickle, she needs a savings bond," Shane muttered, though he placed the silver baubles higher up on the tree, out of reach.

The decorating process was chaotic.

Lily was an agent of destruction. She would wait for Shane to place a delicate silver sphere, then she would army-crawl over, snatch it, and try to throw it at the cat.

Jane, true to her nature, sat quietly with the box of hooks. She was organizing them by size.

"Look at her," Shane whispered, nudging Ilya. "She's sorting the hardware. She's definitely mine."

Ilya laughed, reaching over to press a kiss to Shane's shoulder. "She is organizing the ammunition. She is definitely mine."

In the end, the tree was a compromise. The top half was Shane's: elegant, silver, symmetrical. The bottom half was Ilya's: a riot of color, flashing lights, and yes, the pickle, which hung front and center because Ilya refused to hide it.

Ilya stood back, wrapping his arm around Shane's waist. The room was glowing with the warm, chaotic light of the tree.

"It is a mess," Shane noted, leaning his head on Ilya's shoulder.

"It is a masterpiece," Ilya corrected. He turned Shane's face toward his, kissing him deeply in the glow of the lights**.** "It looks like us."

Two days before Christmas, Ilya announced a crisis.

"We do not have enough gifts," Ilya said, standing in the nursery while the girls slept. "I counted. Lily has four. Jane has four. That is an unlucky number in some cultures. We need five."

"Ilya," Shane whispered, "They are one. They played with the wrapping paper more than the blocks on their birthday. They don't need more."

"I saw a drum set," Ilya whispered back, his eyes wide.

"No."

"And a tunnel. A pop-up tunnel. For agility training."

The trip to the mall was a tactical extraction mission. Shane drove. He had the list. He had the map of the mall.

"We go in through the north entrance," Shane briefed Ilya in the car. "We hit the toy store, we get the tunnel, we leave. We do not stop for pretzels. We do not stop for the pet store."

"Roger that, Captain," Ilya said, saluting.

They failed immediately.

They stopped for pretzels because Ilya said he was "faint with hunger."

They stopped at the pet store because Ilya wanted to show Jane the puppies through the window.

And then, they passed the Santa Claus photo booth.

The line was long. The kids were crying. The Santa looked exhausted and his beard was crooked.

"Absolutely not," Shane said, steering the stroller away. "That is a logistical nightmare. The wait time is forty-five minutes. Jane will melt down. Lily will bite Santa."

Ilya looked at the line, then at the girls. He nodded. "Agreed. That Santa has weak energy. I will be Santa."

"You are not being Santa," Shane laughed. "You'd be a terrifying Santa. You'd interrogate the children about their work ethic."

Ilya grinned, leaning over the stroller handle to nip at Shane's ear. "I would be a generous Santa. I would give you everything on your list, Hollander."

"My list just says 'Sleep'," Shane retorted, blushing.

They left the mall with the tunnel, the drum set (Shane lost that battle), and a giant plush horse that Ilya insisted Jane needed for "equestrian development."

Christmas morning started at 5:00 AM.

Lily woke up and chose violence. She stood in her crib and rattled the bars until Ilya stumbled in to rescue her.

Shane followed a few minutes later, carrying Jane, who was rubbing her eyes and clutching her security blanket.

The living room was magical in the pre-dawn light. The tree glowed. The pile of gifts was obscene.

"Okay," Shane said, sitting on the floor with his coffee. "One at a time. We savor the moment."

Ilya ignored him. He tore into a box. "Look, Lily! A drum!"

He set up the baby drum set. Lily hit it once, scared herself with the noise, and then hit it again harder. She shrieked with delight.

"Oh god," Shane groaned, rubbing his face. "What have we done?"

Jane, meanwhile, had ignored the toys entirely. She had found the empty cardboard box from the plush horse. She climbed inside it. She sat down. She looked happy.

"I told you," Shane pointed out. "The box. Every time."

Ilya sat amidst the wrapping paper debris, wearing a Santa hat. He looked tired, messy, and incredibly happy. He reached behind the tree and pulled out a small, flat box wrapped in silver paper.

"For the Planner," Ilya said softly, sliding it across the rug to Shane.

Shane opened it. Inside was a vintage watch—sleek, understated, and engraved on the back. *Time is ours.*

Shane felt a lump in his throat. He looked at his wrist, then at Ilya. "Ilya. This is... this is too much."

"You check the time constantly," Ilya shrugged, moving to sit next to him. "Now you look at something beautiful when you stress about the schedule."

Shane leaned forward, cupping Ilya’s face. He kissed him—slow, deep, and full of gratitude. "I love it. Thank you."

"I have one for me too," Ilya grinned, pulling out a matching watch, but his was flashy and gold. "So we match. But I have more style."

Shane laughed against his lips. "You’re ridiculous."

The holiday season ended not with a bang, but with a quiet ritual that Shane insisted on.

On New Year's Eve, the team was having a party downtown. Shane and Ilya stayed home.

"Toshikoshi Soba," Shane announced, setting a pot of water to boil. "It’s a Japanese tradition. Year-crossing noodles."

Ilya sat at the kitchen island, watching Shane cook. Shane moved with precision, chopping green onions, preparing the dashi broth. It was the one time Shane didn't use a spreadsheet; he cooked from memory.

"Tell me the rules," Ilya said.

"You eat the long noodles to symbolize a long life," Shane explained, plating the bowls. "And you have to finish them before midnight to break off the bad luck of the previous year."

They sat on the floor of the living room, using the coffee table. The girls were asleep. The only light came from the Christmas tree (which Shane had agreed to keep up for one more day) and the city lights outside the window.

They ate quietly. The broth was warm and savory.

"Long life," Ilya said, lifting a long noodle with his chopsticks. "With you. That is the goal."

"That's the goal," Shane agreed, clinking his chopsticks against Ilya’s.

When they finished, they moved to the balcony. It was bitterly cold—minus twenty degrees—but they wrapped themselves in a heavy duvet Shane had dragged from the bed.

They stood there, huddled together, watching the fireworks explode over the Old Port in the distance.

Ilya stood behind Shane, his arms wrapped tight around Shane’s chest, his chin resting on Shane’s shoulder. Shane leaned back, letting Ilya’s warmth seep into him.

"We survived the first year," Ilya whispered into the cold air. "We kept them alive. We kept them happy."

"We did," Shane said. "And we kept us alive, too."

Ilya turned Shane in his arms. The wind whipped around them, but in the circle of Ilya’s arms, everything was still. Ilya looked down at him—the Planner, the Strategist, the love of his life.

"Happy New Year, Shane," Ilya murmured.

"Happy New Year, Ilya."

They kissed as the clock struck midnight. It wasn't a desperate kiss, or a hungry one. It was steady. It was the kind of kiss that promised decades of messy trees, 1-ply napkins, loud drums, and quiet noodles.

"Next year," Ilya whispered against his lips, "I teach them to skate backwards."

Shane laughed, burying his face in Ilya’s coat. "Next year. Let's just get through the hangover first."

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas!! I just finished watching the last ep. and it made me feel so happy but at the same time so saddd because really?? 20207? how am I supposed to wait for that looongggg.

Chapter 4: The Friction Coefficient

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The "Terrible Twos" did not arrive at the Hollander-Rozanov household with a polite knock. They arrived like a blindsided body check in open ice—sudden, breathless, and leaving Shane wondering which way was up.

At three-and-a-half years old, Lily and Jane had evolved. They were no longer stationary objects that could be swaddled and contained. They were mobile, verbal, and possessed a terrifying amount of agency.

For Ilya, this era was a comedy special. He found their defiance hilarious. He loved that Lily had a left hook and that Jane could stare down a stranger until they walked away.

For Shane, this era was a sensory and logistical siege.

The guest bathroom had been repurposed. It was no longer a place for guests; it was the Potty Training Command Center.

Shane sat on the edge of the bathtub, his elbows on his knees, staring at the small, plastic training toilet that looked like a miniature throne. It was 10:00 AM on a Saturday. According to the spreadsheet taped to the mirror, this was "Deployment Window Alpha."

"Okay," Shane said, his voice steady but his eye twitching slightly. "Let’s review the data."

Jane stood in front of him. She was wearing a t-shirt and nothing else. She looked at the toilet with deep skepticism.

"The toilet," Shane explained, using his 'Coach' voice, "is part of the system. We consume hydration. The body processes it. We expel the waste into the receptacle. It is a closed loop, Jane. It’s efficient."

Jane stared at him. Her golden-brown hair was pulled back in a tiny ponytail that bobbed when she shook her head.

"No," Jane stated.

"Why no?" Shane asked, trying to remain calm. "It’s hygienic. Diapers are... inefficient. They are damp. Don't you dislike the texture of dampness?"

Jane considered this. She looked at the toilet, then back at Shane. "Book."

"You want a book?"

"Read book. Here." She pointed to the floor.

"We can read the book *on* the potty," Shane negotiated.

"No." Jane sat down on the bathmat, crisscrossed her legs, and opened her book about farm animals. She had effectively called a timeout on the ice. She wasn't refusing to learn; she was refusing the *conditions* of the lesson.

Shane ran a hand through his hair, letting out a long, ragged sigh. He checked his watch. They were twelve minutes behind schedule.

Suddenly, the door banged open.

Lily burst in. She was naked. Completely. She had managed to escape her diaper, her pants, and apparently social norms in the living room. She was shrieking with laughter, running in circles like she had just scored an overtime winner.

"Free!" Lily yelled, spinning until she hit the wall, bounced off, and grabbed the roll of toilet paper, unspooling it across the room.

"Lily! Protocol!" Shane lunged, trying to catch her, but she was greased lightning. "We do not run naked! We sit! We sit on the potty!"

"No sit! Run!" Lily cheered, throwing the toilet paper into the bathtub.

Shane sat back down on the edge of the tub, surrounded by unspooled paper, a stubborn intellectual reading on the mat, and a nudist sprinter. The chaos was loud. It was messy. It was completely out of his control.

And for Shane Hollander—the man who organized his spice rack by pH level—it was paralyzing.

Ilya found them like that five minutes later.

He had been at the gym (or "The Temple of Iron," as he called it) and had returned to a suspicious silence in the living room. He tracked the noise to the bathroom.

Ilya leaned against the doorframe, taking in the scene. He was wearing a tight grey hoodie and sweatpants, looking annoyingly fresh and put-together.

He saw the toilet paper. He saw Jane reading calmly in the wreckage. He saw Lily trying to climb the towel rack. And he saw Shane.

Shane was sitting on the floor now, knees pulled to his chest, head resting on his arms. He wasn't crying, but he had gone into "Shutdown Mode." The noise, the mess, the failure of the plan—it was too much.

Ilya didn't laugh. The amusement vanished from his face instantly.

He walked into the room, stepping over Jane without disturbing her. He scooped Lily up mid-climb with one arm, clamping her to his side like a football before she could protest.

"Lily," Ilya said, his voice low and firm—the voice he used when a rookie was acting up during a drill. "We do not climb the towel rack. We are not monkeys."

Lily went still, sensing the shift in authority. "Papa?"

"Hush," Ilya commanded gently.

He set Lily down in the hallway. "Go find your pants. If you find them in two minutes, you get a sticker. Go."

Lily scrambled away, mission-oriented.

Ilya closed the door partially, creating a buffer. He knelt down on the bathmat next to Shane.

Shane didn't look up. "I can't do it, Ilya. I can't logic them into using the bathroom. It doesn't make sense. Jane understands the theory but refuses the application. Lily is just... anarchy."

Ilya didn't offer advice. He didn't say "it's just a phase."

Instead, he moved into Shane's space. He sat behind Shane, spreading his legs to pull Shane back against his chest. He wrapped his massive arms around Shane's waist, locking his hands together over Shane's stomach. He buried his face in the crook of Shane's neck, breathing in the scent of his stressed-out husband.

"You are spiraling, *lyubov*," Ilya rumbled against his skin. "I can feel you vibrating."

"I have a schedule," Shane mumbled, leaning back into the solid, warm weight of Ilya. "We are forty minutes behind."

"Throw away the schedule," Ilya whispered, pressing a kiss to the side of Shane's neck. "They are two. Their bladders do not know how to tell time."

"But if we don't have a routine—"

"Shh." Ilya tightened his hold, rocking them slightly side-to-side. It was a grounding motion, a physical tether to bring Shane back to the present. "You are the Captain. But sometimes, the captain needs to go to the locker room and let the Assistant Captain take the shift."

Shane turned his head slightly, his cheek brushing against Ilya's jaw. "You want to take the potty shift?"

"I was born for the potty shift," Ilya declared, nipping gently at Shane's earlobe. "I have no shame. I will sing songs. I will bribe them with chocolate. I will sit on the floor and let them put stickers on my face if they pee."

Shane let out a breathy, reluctant laugh. "You'd spoil them."

"I will motivate them," Ilya corrected. He shifted, turning Shane in his arms so they were face-to-face.

Ilya’s blue eyes were bright and full of that intense, singular focus that always made Shane’s heart stutter. Ilya reached up, his thumb brushing a smudge of stress-sweat from Shane’s temple.

"You are doing good job, Shane," Ilya said softly. "Jane reads books because of you. Lily is brave because of you. But right now, you need to go to the kitchen."

"The kitchen?"

"Yes. Go organize the pantry. Line up the cans. Make the labels face forward. Restore your order."

Shane felt a wave of gratitude so strong it almost knocked him over. Ilya understood. He didn't just see the stress; he knew the antidote. He knew that Shane needed to control *something* to feel safe again.

Shane leaned forward, capturing Ilya’s lips in a kiss that was desperate and grateful. He gripped Ilya’s hoodie, pulling him closer, needing the friction, the heat, the reality of him.

Ilya hummed into the kiss, his hands sliding up Shane’s back to hold his neck, deepening the contact. For a moment, the toilet paper disaster and the toddler screams faded away. It was just them—the Planner and the Force of Nature—balancing each other out.

"Okay," Shane whispered when they broke apart, their foreheads resting together. "I'll go organize the pasta."

"Good," Ilya smirked, pecking him once more on the nose. "Send the naked one back in here. I will handle negotiations."

Thirty minutes later, the pantry was a work of art. The pasta boxes were arranged by height. The spices were alphabetized. The world made sense again.

Shane stood in the quiet kitchen, brewing a pot of tea. He could hear noises coming from the bathroom down the hall.

"Yes! Jane! The Eagle has landed!" Ilya’s voice boomed. "High five! Sticker for you! Sticker for Papa!"

Then came Lily’s voice, singing a song that sounded suspiciously like the Russian National Anthem but with lyrics about "poo-poo."

Shane smiled, leaning against the counter. The tension in his shoulders had dissolved.

Ilya walked into the kitchen ten minutes later. He looked disheveled. He had a sparkly star sticker on his forehead and another one on his cheek. He looked exhausted and triumphant.

"Report," Shane said, handing him a mug of tea.

"Jane utilized the facility," Ilya announced, taking the tea. "She required a negotiation regarding the toilet paper texture, but we reached an accord. Lily sat for three seconds, which

is a personal best."

"And the stickers?" Shane asked, reaching up to touch the gold star on Ilya's cheek.

"Casualties of war," Ilya shrugged.

He set the mug down and stepped into Shane, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist again. He was in full "Clingy Ilya" mode now that the crisis was over. He rested his chin heavily on Shane's shoulder, his whole body slumping against him.

"I missed you," Ilya mumbled, as if they hadn't been in the same house the whole time.

"I was twenty feet away, Ilya."

"Too far," Ilya complained, nuzzling into Shane's neck. "I need recharge. Shane-battery."

Shane laughed softly, turning in his arms to hug him back. He ran his hands up Ilya's back, feeling the solid muscles, the warmth that radiated off him like a furnace.

"Thank you," Shane whispered. "For taking the shift."

"Anytime, Captain." Ilya pulled back just enough to look at him. "But next week? We go to the ice. No more bathroom. I need to see them in skates. I need to see *you* in skates."

"The ice," Shane agreed, feeling the familiar thrill of the game and the partnership settle in his chest. "Next week, we skate."

The local community rink in Montreal usually smelled like old sweat, rubber mats, and stale popcorn. But today, the dressing room was surprisingly quiet.

That was because Ilya Rozanov had rented the entire facility.

"Ilya," Shane said, standing in the middle of the empty room, holding a tiny duffel bag. "You rented the ice for two hours? It's a Tuesday morning. It costs a fortune."

"It costs money. We have money," Ilya dismissed, dropping a massive bag of gear onto the bench. He looked like a kid on Christmas morning—eyes bright, energy vibrating off him. "Besides, I do not want strangers watching them. If Lily falls, she has dignity. If Jane cries, she has privacy. It is VIP treatment."

Shane rolled his eyes, but he couldn't hide the small smile tugging at his mouth. "You're spoiling them. They're going to expect private ice every time they lace up."

"Good. They are Hollander-Rozanovs. They should have standards."

The process of gearing up two toddlers was less like getting dressed and more like wrestling with wet noodles.

Shane sat Jane on the bench. At three-and-a-half, Jane was serious about the process. She watched Shane lay out her gear: white shin pads, white elbow pads, white helmet with the intensity of a pro analyzing a game tape.

"Okay, Janey," Shane said, his voice calm and focused. "Sock first. Then the shin pad. We have to make sure it's tight so it doesn't slide, okay?"

Jane nodded solemnly. "Tight."

Shane worked with efficient, practiced movements. He was the Captain, after all. He checked the straps twice. He made sure the socks were pulled up without wrinkles that could cause blisters. He wasn't panicking; he was executing. He wanted her comfortable, and he wanted her safe.

"Is that okay?" Shane asked, tugging on the shin pad. "Does it pinch?"

"Good," Jane decided, patting her knee.

On the other side of the bench, chaos reigned.

Lily was vibrating. She was currently wearing one shin pad, no socks, and her helmet was on backward. She was trying to climb Ilya like a tree while he attempted to tie her skates.

"Lily, stop moving or you will have wobbly ankles!" Ilya laughed, catching her by the waist and planting her back on the bench.

"Ice! Ice! Papa, go ice!" Lily yelled, kicking her legs.

"We go to ice when you have pants on," Ilya countered. He looked over at Shane, breathless and grinning. "She has the spirit, Shane. She is ready to hit someone."

Shane looked over, eyebrows raised. "She's ready to hit *you*. Fix her helmet, Ilya. It's sitting on her eyebrows. She can't see."

"She uses echolocation," Ilya joked, but he dutifully adjusted the helmet, snapping the cage shut.

Once they were fully geared up, they looked ridiculous and adorable. Tiny jerseys over bulky pads, helmets that made their heads look giant, and sticks that were cut down to knee-height.

Shane stood up, dusting off his knees. He felt that familiar tightening in his chest—not anxiety, but the weight of responsibility. This was *hockey*. This was the thing that defined him, defined Ilya, defined their entire lives. And now, he was handing it to them.

"Okay," Shane said, looking at his girls. "Listen up. The ice is slippery. You're going to fall. That's part of the game. When you fall, what do we do?"

"Get up!" Lily shouted, punching the air.

"Check for injury," Jane whispered.

Shane laughed, a startled sound. "Well, yes. Both. Let’s go."

Stepping onto the fresh sheet of ice—Zamboni-ed to perfection just for them—felt like coming home. The cold air hit Shane’s face, sharp and clean, clearing out the fog of the "terrible twos" instantly.

He glided out first, backward, watching his family.

Ilya lifted Lily over the lip of the boards and set her down.

As soon as her blades touched the ice, Lily took off. She didn't know how to skate. She knew how to run. She churned her legs like a cartoon character, arms windmilling.

"Whoa!" Ilya yelled, skating after her.

Lily made it five feet, caught an edge, and went down hard on her stomach. She slid across the blue line, laughing maniacally.

"She’s got no fear," Shane noted, watching Ilya scoop her up. "And no technique."

"Technique is for later!" Ilya called out, spinning Lily around. "Passion is for now!"

Then there was Jane.

Ilya lifted her onto the ice next. Jane stood there. She looked down at her feet. She looked at the expanse of white. She felt the lack of friction.

And she froze.

She didn't move a muscle. Her knees locked. She gripped her stick with white-knuckled intensity and stared at Shane with wide, betrayed eyes.

"It’s okay," Shane soothed, skating over to her. He didn't rush her. He stopped in front of her, crouching down so he wasn't looming. "It feels weird, right? Like you can't push off."

Jane nodded stiffly. "Slippery."

"It is. But that’s the secret, Janey," Shane said, his voice dropping into that serious, coaching register he used with rookies. "You don't fight the ice. You use it. Bent knees. Lower your center of gravity."

He tapped her shin pads. "Bend here."

Jane bent her knees slightly.

"Good. Now, don't try to walk. Push out. Like a V."

Jane watched him demonstrate. She tried it. One tiny push. She glided three inches.

Her eyes went wide. She looked at Shane, a small, dimpled smile breaking through her concentration. "Moving."

"You're moving," Shane confirmed, pride swelling in his chest like a physical ache. "You're skating, Jane."

After twenty minutes, the girls were flagging. Toddler stamina was intense but short-lived.

Ilya had dumped a pile of pucks at one end of the rink and was letting Lily just whack at them. She wasn't aiming; she was just enjoying the noise of the stick hitting the ice.

Shane skated over to the bench where Jane was taking a water break. She sat on the ledge, kicking her heels against the boards.

"Good shift, Captain," Ilya said, gliding up to Shane. He stopped with a sharp spray of snow, looking effortless and beautiful in his track jacket. His cheeks were flushed red from the cold, his hair windblown.

"She's cautious," Shane said, watching Jane. "She overthinks it. She wants to understand the mechanics before she commits."

"She is you," Ilya said simply.

Ilya leaned his stick against the glass. He moved closer to Shane, invading his personal space in that casual, possessive way he had. He crowded Shane against the boards, boxing him in with his arms.

"And Lily is a maniac," Shane added, nodding toward the other end of the ice where Lily was currently lying on her back, making a snow angel.

"She is me," Ilya agreed, grinning.

Shane looked up at him. The rink was silent except for the hum of the compressors and the distant sound of Lily singing to herself. It felt private. Intimate.

"Thank you," Shane said quietly.

"For what? The ice?"

"For this," Shane gestured between them. "For making sure they have this. I was... I was worried I'd be too hard on them. That I'd try to make them perfect too fast."

Ilya shook his head. He reached up, his gloved hand cupping the back of Shane's neck, his thumb stroking the sensitive skin there.

"You are not hard on them, Shane. You take them seriously. Kids like to be taken seriously. Jane likes that you explain the physics. I just treat them like puppies."

Shane huffed a laugh. "Puppies with knives on their feet."

"Exactly."

Ilya tilted his head, his eyes dropping to Shane's lips. The cold air made everything sharper—the heat of Ilya's body, the smell of the ice, the look in his eyes.

"Kiss me, Hollander," Ilya murmured. "Before the monsters come back."

Shane didn't hesitate. He grabbed the front of Ilya's jacket and pulled him down.

The kiss was cold lips and hot breath, a clash of temperatures. It was the kind of kiss they used to steal in empty corridors and dark corners, but now, it was out in the open, on center ice, surrounded by the life they had built. Ilya pressed into him, a heavy, grounding weight, and Shane felt that familiar anchor settle in his gut. *I'm here. We're here.*

"Papa! Captain!"

They broke apart, breathless.

Lily was skating—well, shuffling rapidly—toward them, waving her stick like a weapon. "Puck! Do puck!"

Ilya laughed, resting his forehead against Shane's for one second longer. "Duty calls."

"Go get her, Tiger," Shane whispered, patting Ilya's chest.

Ilya spun around, skating backward. "Okay, Lily! 2-on-1! You and me versus Papa and Jane! Let's go!"

Shane pushed off the boards, skating over to collect Jane. As he took her hand and led her onto the ice to face off against his husband and his wild-child daughter, Shane thought: *Yeah. This is the dream.*

The comedown from a toddler hockey practice was a physical event.

By the time they got back to the condo, the adrenaline had crashed. Lily fell asleep mid-chew on a chicken nugget in her high chair. Jane managed to stay awake long enough for a bath, but she was silent, her blue eyes heavy and slow-blinking as she watched the bubbles pop.

Getting them into bed was less of a struggle and more of a rescue mission. Shane carried Lily; Ilya carried Jane. They deposited the girls into their cribs (which they were rapidly outgrowing) with the gentle reverence of bomb disposal experts.

"Goodnight, monsters," Ilya whispered, backing out of the nursery.

When the door clicked shut, the silence in the penthouse was absolute. It was 8:30 PM, but it felt like midnight.

Shane walked into their master bedroom and face-planted onto the mattress, not bothering to take off his jeans. "I can't feel my legs. Being bent over on the ice for an hour guiding Jane...

my lower back is destroyed."

Ilya followed him in. He didn't complain. He just stripped off his shirt, tossed it into the hamper (making the shot perfectly), and climbed onto the bed.

He crawled over Shane, straddling his hips to massage the tension out of Shane's lower back. His large, warm hands worked the knots with practiced efficiency.

"You are old man," Ilya teased softly. "You need foam roller."

"I need a new spine," Shane groaned into the duvet. "And maybe a drink."

"I will get you water. Hydration is key." Ilya leaned down, pressing a kiss to Shane's shoulder blade through his t-shirt. "But first, we talk. Debrief."

Shane rolled over, dislodging Ilya, who happily collapsed onto the space next to him. Ilya immediately wrapping an arm and a leg around Shane, pinning him down. He rested his head on Shane's chest, listening to his heartbeat.

"Debrief," Shane agreed, running his hand through Ilya's hair. "Lily is a hazard. We need to get her a helmet with a full cage, maybe padded walls for the rink."

"She is spirited," Ilya defended sleepily. "She likes the speed."

"And Jane..." Shane paused. He stared up at the ceiling, a small frown creasing his brow. "Jane was so careful. She wouldn't move until she understood the physics of it. She's so... serious, Ilya."

"She is you," Ilya said again. He propped himself up on one elbow, looking down at Shane. The bedside lamp cast a warm, golden glow over Ilya's face, softening the sharp angles. "And that is a good thing."

Ilya traced the line of Shane's jaw with his thumb. "Did you hear what she called you?"

Shane blinked. "What? When?"

"On the ice. When you were showing her how to stop. She looked at you, she nodded, and she said, 'Okay, Captain.'"

Shane froze. "She... she called me Captain?"

"Yes." Ilya's grin was slow and blindingly bright. "Not Dada. Not Daddy. Captain."

Shane covered his face with his hands, groaning. "Oh god. That's terrible. It's so impersonal. It sounds like I'm her boss, not her father. I'm raising a soldier, Ilya."

"No, Shane. Look at me."

Ilya pulled Shane's hands away from his face. His expression was fierce, the same look he wore when he was defending a teammate.

"It is not impersonal. It is the highest honor. Jane watches. She sees how the team looks at you. She sees how *I* look at you. You are the leader, Shane. You make the plan. You make us safe. You tell us where to go."

Ilya leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a whisper.

"To Jane, 'Captain' means 'The one who knows the way.' It is love, Shane. It is just... respectful love."

Shane felt a lump form in his throat. He thought about Jane’s serious little face, the way she trusted him to hold her up on the slippery ice.

"Captain," Shane tested the word. It felt heavy, but good.

"And I am just Papa," Ilya laughed, flopping back down onto Shane’s chest. "I am the one who throws the snow. I am the entertainment. You are the authority."

"You're not just entertainment," Shane corrected, tightening his arm around Ilya’s shoulders. "You're the heart, Ilya. If I'm the Captain, you're the... I don't know. The engine."

"The superstar," Ilya suggested.

"The mascot," Shane countered.

Ilya bit Shane’s chest gently through the shirt. "Rude."

They lay there for a long time, the city lights of Montreal filtering through the sheer curtains. The exhaustion was settling in, a heavy, warm blanket.

Shane thought about the day. The chaos of the locker room, the smell of the disinfectant wipes, the sound of Lily’s laughter echoing off the glass, and Jane’s small, determined hand gripping his finger.

He looked down at Ilya, whose eyes were fluttering shut.

"We’re doing okay, right?" Shane whispered. "Even with the chaos?"

Ilya didn't open his eyes. He just snuggled closer, practically trying to merge his molecules with Shane’s.

"We are winning, Captain," Ilya murmured. "We have the lead. We just need to play defense until they are eighteen."

Shane smiled, closing his eyes. He pressed a kiss to the top of Ilya’s head, inhaling the scent of his husband—shampoo, ice, and home.

"Okay," Shane whispered into the dark. "Good game, Rozanov."

"Good game, Hollander."

And tangled together in the center of the bed, the Captain and his Superstar finally drifted off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

We're near the end!! Honestly I might do a series of hollanov being dads because they're just so freaking great of being one. I do hope that it is canon yalls.

Chapter 5: Good life, isn't it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The alarm clock on Shane’s side of the bed didn't get a chance to go off.

Shane’s eyes snapped open at 5:15 AM. The room was dark, the Montreal winter pressing against the windows in a sheet of black and grey. Beside him, Ilya was a sprawling, warm mountain of blankets, breathing deep, rhythmic breaths that usually lulled Shane back to sleep.

But not today.

Today was Game Day.

It wasn't a playoff game. It wasn't the Olympics. It was the South Shore Timbits League Season Opener.

Shane slid out of bed, his feet hitting the cold hardwood. His brain immediately began running through the checklist he had finalized the night before: *Skates sharpened (3/8th hollow for Jane, 1/2 for Lily). Sticks taped (white for Jane, black for Lily). Nutrition plan (oatmeal, berries, scrambled eggs).*

He walked into the hallway. The condo was silent, but it felt charged with electricity.

He paused at the door of the girls' room. It had changed over the years. The cribs were gone, replaced by twin beds. The nursery decor had evolved into a chaotic mix of Lily’s dinosaur posters and Jane’s neat, organized shelves of hockey trading cards which were sorted by team.

They were still asleep. Lily was sprawled sideways, limbs hanging off the mattress, blankets kicked onto the floor. Jane was tucked in tightly, lying on her back, looking peaceful and disciplined even in unconsciousness.

Shane’s chest tightened with a sudden, overwhelming wave of affection—and terror.

They’re going to be on the ice. With other kids. With referees. With people watching.

A warm hand landed on his shoulder. Shane didn't flinch; he leaned back into the solid chest that appeared behind him.

"You are vibrating, Captain," Ilya’s sleep-rough voice rumbled in his ear. "It is 5:30. The game is at 9:00. Why are we awake?"

"Prep time," Shane whispered, covering Ilya’s hand with his own. "I need to check the gear bags again. I think I forgot the extra laces."

Ilya chuckled, burying his face in Shane's neck, his stubble scratching gently. "You checked the bags last night. And the night before. And at 2:00 AM when you went to pee."

"This is different, Ilya. It's the Opener."

"Come," Ilya whispered, steering him away from the door. "Let the monsters sleep. If Lily wakes up now, she will burn all her energy destroying the living room before puck drop."

By 6:30 AM, the kitchen island was set for the "Pre-Game Meal."

Shane treated this breakfast with the same seriousness as a Stanley Cup final meal. He had calculated the protein-to-carb ratio.

"Shane," Ilya said, leaning against the counter with a coffee. "They are five. They do not need 'optimal glycogen stores.' They need toast."

"Toast is empty calories," Shane muttered, slicing strawberries with surgical precision. "They need sustained energy. Lily crashes in the third period if she has too much sugar. I've tracked it."

"You have a spreadsheet for their sugar crashes?"

"Obviously."

The sound of small, thumping feet interrupted them.

Lily burst into the kitchen. She was wearing her pajama bottoms and her new hockey jersey —the red one with the Timbits logo. She had put it on over her pajama shirt, and it was backwards.

"Game day!" Lily screamed, raising both arms.

She looked exactly like Ilya. The dark, messy hair. The wild eyes. The pure, unadulterated enthusiasm for violence and speed.

"Good morning, Rocket," Ilya beamed, scooping her up. "You look dangerous."

"I'm gonna score a hundred goals!" Lily declared, kicking her legs. "And hit people!"

"No hitting," Shane corrected instantly, pointing a strawberry knife at her. "No checking in Timbits. It's non-contact, Lily. If you hit someone, you go to the box."

"I like the box!" Lily countered. "It's where Papa goes!"

Ilya laughed so hard he nearly spilled his coffee. Shane glared at him. "See? This is your fault. You've glamorized the penalty box."

"It is a place of reflection," Ilya defended, kissing Lily's cheek.

Then, Jane entered.

If Lily was the entrance music, Jane was the anthem. She walked in quietly, wearing her robe tied neatly at the waist. She rubbed her eyes, climbed onto her stool, and looked at the spread of food.

"Morning, Captain Dad. Morning, Papa," Jane said.

Shane's heart did that familiar flip-flop every time she called him that. "Morning, Janey. How'd you sleep?"

"Good," Jane said. She looked at the oatmeal. "Is this for energy?"

"Yes," Shane said. "It helps your legs stay strong."

Jane nodded and picked up her spoon. She ate methodically. She wasn't eating because she was hungry; she was eating because the Captain said it would help the game.

"Are you nervous?" Ilya asked her, sitting down next to her and stealing a strawberry.

Jane paused. She looked at her hands. "A little."

"Why?" Shane asked gently, leaning across the island.

"The other kids," Jane whispered. "They swarm. They don't know positions."

Shane and Ilya exchanged a look. It was the most astute analysis of Timbits hockey ever spoken.

"You're right," Shane said. "It's chaos out there. But that's why you have to be smart. You read the play. You find the open ice. Let them swarm the puck, and you wait for it to pop out."

Jane's eyes lit up. "Gap control?"

"Exactly," Shane beamed. "Gap control."

Ilya groaned, dropping his head onto the counter. "She is five. She should not know gap control. She should know 'skate fast and have fun.'"

"Fun is winning," Jane said simply.

Ilya lifted his head and stared at Shane. "You did this. You cloned yourself."

At 7:30 AM, it was time for the Sticks.

This was a sacred ritual in the Hollander-Rozanov house. Shane sat on the living room floor, his tape bag open. The girls sat cross-legged in front of him.

"Okay," Shane said, holding up Lily's stick. "Black tape. Thick overlap. For grip."

He worked rhythmically. *Zip. Wrap. Zip. Wrap.* The sound of the tape coming off the roll was the soundtrack of his life. He finished the blade, smoothed it down with a puck to melt the wax, and handed it to Lily.

"There," Shane said. "That's a goal-scorer's tape job."

Lily grabbed the stick and immediately slashed the air. "Whoosh!"

"Watch the lamp!" Shane warned.

Then, he picked up Jane's stick.

"White tape," Jane instructed. "Like yours."

"Like mine," Shane agreed.

He taped it differently. Thinner strips. Smoother finish. He taped the knob at the top exactly how he did his own—a small bulb for better handling.

When he finished, he didn't hand it over immediately. He held it, looking at the tiny piece of composite wood. He looked at Jane, whose ice-blue eyes were fixed on his hands.

"This is your tool, Janey," Shane said softly. "You take care of it, it takes care of you. Keep your stick on the ice."

"Stick on ice," Jane repeated.

She reached out and took it. She didn't slash the air. She set the blade down on the rug and tested the flex, leaning her small weight into it.

Ilya was watching from the sofa, his phone out, recording silently. He zoomed in on Shane's face—the focus, the love, the absolute reverence for the moment.

Shane looked up and caught him. "Stop filming."

"Never," Ilya grinned. "This is history. Their first official hockey game."

By 8:15 AM, the foyer was a war zone of jackets, boots, and gear bags.

Shane was checking the list one last time. "Water bottles? Check. Mouthguards? Check. Neck guards? Lily, where is your neck guard?"

"It was itchy!" Lily yelled from inside the coat closet.

"I don't care if it's made of cactus, you wear it," Shane commanded, diving into the closet to retrieve her.

Ilya stood by the door, holding the heavy gear bags. He was wearing his team jacket—Ottawa Centaurs—but he had taped over the logo with a piece of masking tape that said *COACH DAD*.

He looked at Shane, who was wrestling a squirming Lily into her parka. Shane looked stressed. His hair was messy, his cheeks were flushed, and he was muttering about traffic on the Champlain Bridge.

Ilya set the bags down. He walked over to Shane, who had just succeeded in zipping Lily up.

"Shane."

"We're going to be late, Ilya. The warm-up starts at 8:45. If we're late, they miss the skate-around, and Jane needs to feel the ice before the game or she gets anxious."

Ilya didn't speak. He reached out, grabbed the lapels of Shane's coat, and pulled him in.

The kiss was firm and grounding. It cut through the noise of Lily shouting and the rustle of nylon coats. It was a reset button. Shane melted into it instantly, his hands coming up to grip Ilya's wrists.

"We have plenty of time," Ilya whispered against his mouth. "Look at them. They are ready."

Shane pulled back and looked.

Lily was bouncing near the door, stick in hand, vibrating with excitement.

Jane was standing by the bags, eyes closed, taking deep breaths like she was visualizing the game.

"They're ready," Shane agreed, a small, proud smile breaking through.

"And you?" Ilya asked, brushing a thumb over Shane's cheekbone. "Are you ready, Coach?"

Shane took a deep breath. He looked at his husband—his partner, his chaos, his heart.

"Yeah," Shane said. "Let's go play hockey."

Ilya threw the door open. "Alright, monsters! To the rink! Let's go Hollander-Rozanov!"

"Go! Go! Go!" Lily screamed, charging into the hallway.

Shane grabbed Jane's hand. "Walk, Janey. Save the legs."

Jane nodded. "Saving legs."

They marched to the elevator, a unit of four. The Opening Face-off was approaching, and the Hollander-Rozanov line was hitting the ice.

The smell of a hockey rink is distinct. It is a mix of frozen humidity, Zamboni exhaust, stale coffee, and rubber mats. To Shane Hollander, it smelled like oxygen. To Ilya Rozanov, it smelled like work.

But to Lily and Jane, it smelled like *adventure*.

They walked into the South Shore Community Arena holding hands. They were a striking pair: Lily in her black gear bag, dragging it loudly across the floor, and Jane carrying hers with two hands, walking in a straight line.

"Can we get hot chocolate?" Lily asked immediately, spotting the concession stand.

"After the game," Shane said, steering them toward the locker rooms. "Hydration first. Sugar later."

"But I need sugar for speed!" Lily argued, quoting Ilya from three years ago.

"Nice try, lawyer," Ilya laughed, patting Lily's helmet-covered head.

The hallway was crowded with parents and kids. Heads turned as they walked by. It wasn't every day that two NHL legends walked into a community rink for a Timbits game. There were whispers—*"That's Rozanov," "Look, it's Hollander"*—but Shane and Ilya ignored them. They weren't legends today. They were just the guys carrying the extra juice boxes.

Timbits hockey is less of a sport and more of a herding exercise.

Locker Room 4 was packed with fifteen five-year-olds, thirty parents, and enough gear to outfit a small army. The noise level was deafening.

Shane walked in and immediately scanned the room for their assigned spots. He found two empty stalls in the corner.

"Base camp," Shane pointed.

He lifted Jane onto the bench. She sat quietly, waiting for instructions.

Ilya lifted Lily, who immediately tried to stand up on the bench to see over the partition.

"Sit, Monster," Ilya commanded gently, handing her a skate.

The dynamic in the room shifted as the other parents realized who was in the corner. A nervous dad next to Shane dropped a shin pad.

"Uh, hi," the dad stammered. "Big fan."

Shane smiled, his "Media Captain" face slipping on easily. "Thanks. Which one is yours?"

"That one," the dad pointed to a kid who was currently licking the glass of the door. "He plays defense. I think."

"Defense is key," Shane said seriously. "Good foundation."

While Ilya helped Lily jam her feet into her skates ("Push! Push like you are crushing a grape!"), Shane focused on Jane.

This was the moment. The lacing of the skates.

Shane knelt in front of Jane. He pulled the laces tight, feeling the familiar bite of the wax against his fingers.

"How’s the tension?" Shane asked.

"Good," Jane said. She looked at him, her blue eyes serious. "Captain Dad?"

"Yeah, Janey?"

"What if I forget the plan?"

Shane paused. He looked at his daughter—this tiny, serious creature who carried the weight of the world just like he did.

"You won't forget," Shane promised. "But if you do, just look at the bench. I’ll be right there. And Papa will be screaming very loudly, so you’ll know where we are."

Jane smiled, a small, dimpled thing. "Okay."

Five minutes before ice time, the volunteer coach—a nice guy named Steve who looked terrified—clapped his hands.

"Okay, team! Uh, let’s listen up!"

The kids ignored him. Two of them were fighting over a water bottle. One was crying. Lily was trying to tape her own stick and had taped her glove to the shaft.

Steve looked at Shane helplessly. "Uh, Mr. Hollander? Do you... do you have any words?"

The room went silent. Every parent and every kid looked at Shane.

Shane stood up. He wasn't wearing a suit; he was wearing a dad-jacket and jeans. But when he stood, he was the **Captain**. The posture was automatic.

"Okay, listen up," Shane said. His voice wasn't loud, but it projected perfectly.

The kids stopped moving. Even the crier sniffled and looked at him.

Shane looked around the room, making eye contact with the five-year-olds.

"Today is the opener," Shane started. "The other team is going to be swarming. They’re going to chase the puck like a beehive. Do we want to be bees?"

"No!" Jane said firmly.

"No," Shane agreed. "We want to be smart. If you see the puck, go get it. But if your teammate has the puck, get open. Find the quiet ice. And when you shoot..."

He paused for dramatic effect.

"Where do we aim?"

"The net!" a kid yelled.

"Specifically?" Shane pressed.

"Five hole!" Lily screamed, jumping off the bench.

Ilya burst out laughing, clapping his hands. "Yes! Five hole! Always five hole!"

Shane sighed, smiling. "Okay, sure. Five hole. But mostly, just have fun. If you fall down, you get up fast. We don't lay on the ice unless we are hurt. Are we clear?"

"Yes, Captain!" a few kids chirped.

"Alright," Shane nodded. "Helmets on. Let’s go."

The walk from the locker room to the ice was short, but it felt momentous.

Shane walked behind Jane, watching her small shoulders in the oversized jersey. Ilya walked behind Lily, who was skipping in her skates.

They reached the gate. The ice was fresh, gleaming under the harsh arena lights. The Zamboni doors were closed. The smell of cold air hit them.

Ilya leaned against the wall next to Shane. He bumped his shoulder against Shane’s.

"Good speech," Ilya whispered. "A little technical with the 'quiet ice' concept, but solid."

"They need to know the fundamentals," Shane murmured, watching the girls line up at the gate.

"They need to not eat the snow," Ilya corrected. "That is the fundamental."

The referee which is a teenager who looked bored, blew the whistle.

"Alright, Timbits! On the ice!"

Shane watched as the gate opened.

Lily didn't hesitate. She launched herself onto the ice. She didn't glide; she attacked. She took three hard strides, wobbled, corrected herself, and then did a loop around the face-off circle, raising her stick in the air.

Jane stepped on second. She was careful. She pushed off with her left foot, then her right. She bent her knees. She tested her edges. She glided to the blue line and stopped, turning to look back at the bench.

She found Shane immediately.

Shane gave her a thumbs up.

Jane nodded, turned back to the play, and got into position.

Ilya let out a shaky breath next to Shane. Shane looked over. Ilya’s eyes were glassy. He was gripping the top of the boards with white knuckles.

"Look at them, Shane," Ilya whispered, his voice thick with emotion. "They are really doing it."

Shane reached out, covering Ilya’s hand with his own on the dasher board.

"They're doing it," Shane agreed.

Ilya turned his head, looking at Shane with an intensity that made the rest of the arena fade away.

"I want to freeze this," Ilya said. "Right now. I don't want them to get bigger."

"They have to get bigger," Shane said softly. "Otherwise, they can't make the NHL."

Ilya laughed, a wet sound. He leaned in, ignoring the parents around them, and pressed a hard, fierce kiss to Shane’s temple.

"I love you, Captain."

"I love you, Papa," Shane replied. "Now, watch the game. Lily is about to go offside."

"There is no offside in Timbits!"

"Tell that to Lily," Shane pointed.

On the ice, Lily was currently standing inside the opposing team's net, trying to talk to the goalie.

"God help us," Shane laughed.

"Game on," Ilya grinned.

Timbits hockey is less about "positions" and more about "magnetism." Wherever the puck went, ten small children followed it in a chaotic, stick-clacking clump.

Shane and Ilya stood behind the bench. Steve the Volunteer Coach had wisely ceded control to the two NHL legends.

The first shift was a disaster.

Lily was faster than everyone else, but she kept outskating the puck. She would sprint to the other end of the ice, realize the puck was still at the red line, and scream in frustration.

Jane refused to enter "The Swarm." She skated on the perimeter, watching the clump of kids with a look of mild disgust, waiting for the puck to pop out. It never did.

The buzzer sounded for the line change. The girls came to the bench.

Lily slammed the gate shut. She was fuming. Her face was bright red, her dark curls plastered to her forehead under the helmet. She looked exactly like Ilya after a bad call in the playoffs.

"Stupid puck!" Lily yelled, throwing her gloves on the bench. "It’s too slow! It’s not listening to me!"

Ilya started to move toward her, but Shane put a hand on Ilya’s chest.

"I got this," Shane murmured.

Shane knelt down in front of Lily. He didn't tell her to calm down. He didn't tell her it was just a game. He met her energy.

"Hey," Shane said, his voice sharp and focused. "Eyes on me."

Lily looked at him, her chest heaving, her bottom lip trembling with rage. "Dad, the puck is broken."

"The puck isn't broken," Shane said firmly. "You’re just faster than it. You’re the fastest skater out there, Lily. That’s a weapon. But right now, you’re using it wrong."

Lily sniffled. "I am?"

Shane reached out, grabbing the cage of her helmet with both hands. It was a grounding gesture—the same way he used to grab Ilya’s face during a timeout.

"You’re leaving the puck behind because you want to score the goal before you even get it," Shane explained. "You have to lead it. You have to be patient. I know you want to go fast, but if you wait for the puck, you can take it all the way."

Lily blinked, processing this. "Wait for it?"

"Wait for it," Shane nodded. "And stop chasing the clump. You know where the puck is going to go? Behind the net. Go there. Be a shark. Wait for it to come to you, *then* attack."

Lily’s eyes widened. "Be a shark?"

"Be a shark," Shane smiled, a small, conspiratorial grin. "You ambush them. Okay?"

Lily took a deep breath. She nodded. "Okay, Captain Dad. Shark mode."

Shane leaned forward and pressed a kiss to her sweaty forehead through the cage bars. "Go get 'em, kid."

While Shane was handling the fire, Ilya was dealing with the ice.

Jane sat on the end of the bench. She wasn't sweaty. She looked pristine. She was staring at the ice, her stick resting perfectly across her knees. She looked defeated.

Ilya sat down next to her. He didn't loom; he slumped down so he was lower than her.

"Bad shift, Janey?" Ilya asked softly.

Jane sighed, a heavy sound for a five-year-old. "I can't get the puck, Papa. They are everywhere. It’s... messy."

Ilya looked at the swarm of kids on the ice. "It is very messy. It is garbage hockey."

Jane looked at him, surprised. "Yes. Garbage."

"But Jane," Ilya said, nudging her shoulder with his. "You are trying to solve a puzzle. Hockey is not a puzzle. Hockey is a fight."

Jane frowned. "Dad says use gap control."

"Dad is right," Ilya admitted. "But sometimes, you cannot think your way through. Sometimes, you have to just... go in."

Ilya reached out, tapping her white shin pads with his knuckles.

"You are waiting for the perfect lane," Ilya told her. "It will not come. You have to make the lane. You are strong, Jane. You are big. If there are three kids in your way, you push through them."

Jane looked scandalized. "Push?"

"Not with hands," Ilya corrected quickly. "With legs. You drive. You take space. Don't ask for the puck, Jane. Take it. It is yours. You are a Hollander-Rozanov. We do not ask permission."

Jane looked at the ice. She watched the swarm.

"Stop thinking," Ilya whispered, leaning close to her ear. "Just feel it. Be a little bit of a monster. Just for five minutes. Can you do that for Papa?"

Jane looked at Ilya. She saw the mischief in his blue eyes—eyes that matched hers. She felt a spark of permission.

"Be a monster," Jane whispered.

Ilya grinned. He grabbed her helmet and gave it a playful shake, rattling her brain. He kissed her cheek loudly. "That’s my *malishka*. Now go. Make a mess."

The buzzer sounded. Third period. Last shift.

The announcer called out, "Last shift! Let’s go, Timbits!"

Shane and Ilya stood at the gate.

"Go!" Shane shouted.

Lily launched herself onto the ice. But this time, she didn't sprint blindly. She skated hard to the corner—behind the net—and stopped. She waited. She was the shark.

Jane stepped on. She looked at the swarm of kids battling for the puck at the blue line. She hesitated for one second. Then, she lowered her head. She bent her knees. And she drove straight into the pile.

"Look at her!" Ilya grabbed Shane’s arm, squeezing hard. "She went in!"

Jane emerged from the pile with the puck. She had actually done it. She stumbled, corrected her balance, and looked up.

She saw open ice.

She saw the net.

And she saw Lily.

Lily was screaming, banging her stick on the ice behind the goal line. "Jane! Jane!"

Jane skated. She carried the puck over the red line. A kid tried to poke-check her. Jane didn't stop; she just skated through him.

"Pass!" Shane yelled from the bench. "Head up, Jane!"

Jane looked up. She saw Lily popping out from behind the net to the front—the "Five Hole" spot.

Jane swept the puck across the ice. It wasn't a perfect pass—it bounced a little—but it landed right on Lily’s black tape.

Lily didn't think. She didn't wait. She just whacked it.

The puck slid slowly, almost casually, between the goalie’s pads.

Goal.

The arena erupted.

Lily threw her arms in the air, dropped to her knees, and slid across the ice in a celebration she had definitely watched Ilya do on YouTube.

Jane skated over to her. She didn't slide. She stopped, reached down, and hugged her sister.

Shane and Ilya were losing their minds on the bench.

"Did you see that pass?!" Shane was yelling, shaking Steve by the shoulders. "That was a saucer pass! She's five!"

"And the finish!" Ilya roared, jumping up and down. "She went five hole! I told her! Five hole!"

As the girls skated back to the bench, they were beaming.

Lily crashed into the gate. "Did you see?! I was a shark! I waited!"

Shane scooped her up, lifting her high in the air. "You were the best shark I've ever seen. You waited perfectly."

Jane came in next. She looked at Ilya. She looked sweaty, her hair messy, her jersey tucked in wrong. She looked happy.

"I made a mess, Papa," Jane breathed.

Ilya dropped to his knees. He pulled her into a crushing hug, burying his face in her neck.

"It was a beautiful mess, Janey," Ilya whispered, his voice thick with pride. "The best mess."

The buzzer sounded. Game over.

Shane stood there, holding Lily, watching Ilya hold Jane. He looked at the scoreboard (which didn't keep score, but said *FUN - FUN*).

He looked at his husband. Ilya looked up, his eyes shining with tears.

They didn't need to say it. They both knew.

This was better than any Cup. This was better than any gold medal.

Shane reached out his free hand. Ilya took it, squeezing tight.

"Hollander-Rozanov line," Shane said, smiling until his face hurt. "First star of the game."

"First star," Ilya agreed.

The adrenaline of Timbits hockey has a half-life of exactly thirty minutes.

By the time they got back to the locker room, Lily had crashed. She sat on the bench, half-undressed, staring at the wall with a glazed expression, a juice box hanging loosely from her hand.

Jane was methodically taking off her equipment. She placed her elbow pads in her bag, then her shin pads.

"Good game, Janey," Shane said, kneeling to help her with her skates. "You played the right way."

Jane looked at him, her cheeks still pink from the exertion. "I was a monster, Captain."

Shane smiled, unlacing the knot. "You were a controlled monster. That’s the best kind."

Ilya was wrestling Lily out of her jersey. "Up, arms up. You smell like a wet dog, *Little Threat*."

"I smell like victory," Lily mumbled, quoting something she had definitely heard Ilya say to the media.

They packed the bags. The smell of the rink—that sharp, cold scent—clung to their clothes. It was the scent of their past, and now, it was the scent of their future.

As they walked out to the parking lot, the Montreal winter greeted them. Snow was falling gently, large flakes drifting down to coat the windshield of the SUV.

"Hot chocolate?" Lily asked sleepily as Ilya buckled her into her car seat.

"We promised," Ilya agreed. "Drive-thru. Double whipped cream."

Ten minutes later, the back of the car was silent.

Shane looked in the rearview mirror. Both girls were asleep.

Lily was slumped sideways, a small chocolate mustache on her upper lip, clutching her stick like a teddy bear.

Jane was asleep with her head tipped back, her mouth slightly open, her hand resting protectively on her own knee.

The car was warm. The windshield wipers swished rhythmically—*thwump, thwump*.

Shane drove with one hand on the wheel. His other hand rested on the center console.

Ilya reached out and took it.

He didn't say anything. He just interlaced their fingers, squeezing tight. His thumb rubbed over Shane’s knuckles, tracing the tendons.

Shane glanced over. Ilya was looking out the window at the passing grey landscape, but he was smiling. It wasn't his media smile. It was a soft, private smile that reached his eyes.

"You okay?" Shane whispered.

Ilya turned his head. "I am perfect. Did you see Lily's celebration? She has no shame. She is magnificent."

"She's going to get suspended by the time she's twelve," Shane predicted, though he was smiling too. "And Jane... she really passed it, Ilya. She had the lane, and she passed it."

"She is a playmaker," Ilya murmured. "She sees the ice like you."

They drove in silence for a while, the weight of the morning settling comfortably between them.

"They are getting big, Shane," Ilya said suddenly, his voice quiet.

Shane tightened his grip on the steering wheel. "I know. The jersey was almost too small for Lily. We have to size up next year."

"Not just the jersey," Ilya whispered. "The life. They are people now. They have thoughts. They have style."

Shane looked at the rearview mirror again. "Yeah. It goes fast."

Getting two sleeping five-year-olds from the car to the condo was a logistical feat that required non-verbal communication.

Eye contact. Nod. Go.

Shane took Jane. Ilya took Lily (and the stick).

They carried them up in the elevator, the girls dead weights in their arms. They deposited them into their beds, pulling off boots and snow pants with practiced gentleness.

Shane pulled the duvet up to Jane's chin. She shifted, sighing in her sleep. "Monster..." she mumbled.

Shane kissed her forehead. "Sleep tight, monster."

In the other bed, Ilya was carefully prying the hockey stick out of Lily's grip. She held on tight for a second, then let go. Ilya placed it against the wall, then leaned down to kiss her cheek.

They backed out of the room, leaving the door cracked open just an inch.

The living room was silent. The afternoon light was fading, casting long shadows across the floor where they had taped the sticks that morning.

Shane walked into the kitchen and started to unpack the gear bags. He needed to do something. He pulled out the tiny jerseys, the wet socks, the under-armor. He started hanging them on the drying rack he had set up by the vent.

"Shane."

Ilya’s voice was right behind him.

Shane turned. Ilya was standing there, still wearing his *COACH DAD* jacket. He looked intense.

"Leave the laundry," Ilya said.

"It’ll smell if I don't air it out," Shane argued weakly.

"Let it smell."

Ilya stepped forward, crowding Shane against the counter. He wrapped his arms around Shane’s waist, burying his face in the crook of Shane’s neck. He let out a long, heavy sigh, his whole body slumping against Shane.

"Clingy," Shane murmured, but his arms came up immediately to hold Ilya, his hands tangling in the hair at the nape of Ilya’s neck.

"I am emotional," Ilya muffled into Shane’s skin. "My babies played hockey. I am allowed to be clingy."

"You're allowed," Shane agreed, resting his cheek on Ilya’s head. "You were great today, Papa. You gave them courage."

Ilya pulled back. He looked at Shane. His blue eyes were searching, scanning Shane’s face like he was looking for a specific answer.

"Shane."

"Yeah?"

"We have two hands," Ilya said.

Shane blinked. "What?"

"We have two hands," Ilya repeated. He held up his hands. "One for Lily. One for Jane. But... when we walk, my hands feel full. But my heart..."

Ilya paused. He took Shane’s hand and placed it flat against his own chest, over his heart. It was beating fast.

"I missed holding a baby today," Ilya whispered. "I looked at them on the ice, so big, so fast. And I missed the bundle. I missed the smell of the head."

Shane went still. He stared at Ilya.

"Ilya... are you saying..."

Ilya nodded. He stepped closer, pressing his hips against Shane's.

"I want another one," Ilya whispered. "Or two. I don't know. But I look at us, Shane. We are good at this. We make good people. Why stop?"

Shane's mind raced. He thought about the sleepless nights. The diapers. The chaos. The noise. The spreadsheets he would have to make.

But then he thought about Jane's hand in his. He thought about Lily's laugh. He thought about the way Ilya looked holding a tiny, fragile thing against his massive chest.

"A tie-breaker?" Shane whispered, his voice trembling slightly.

"Or a goalie," Ilya grinned, tears forming in his eyes. "We need a goalie to complete the line."

Shane let out a breathy laugh that turned into a sob. He wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck, pulling him down.

"You're insane," Shane said, his forehead resting against Ilya's. "Our life is already a zoo."

"It is a garden," Ilya corrected. "And there is room for one more rose. Maybe a wild one. Maybe a quiet one."

Shane closed his eyes. He imagined it. A baby carrier at the rink. Another pair of tiny skates. Another smile in their home.

"Okay," Shane whispered.

Ilya froze. "Okay?"

"Okay," Shane said stronger, opening his eyes. "Let's expand the roster. But I get to pick the name this time. "

"Fine," Ilya agreed instantly, beaming like the sun. "We name him *Puck*."

"Absolutely not."

"We will negotiate," Ilya laughed.

He picked Shane up then just lifted him off the ground like he weighed nothing and spun him around in the quiet kitchen. Shane laughed, holding on tight, feeling the dizziness and the joy and the sheer, impossible luck of his life.

Ilya set him down but didn't let go. He cupped Shane’s face, looking at him with a reverence that made Shane’s knees weak.

"*Ya tak sil'no lyublyu tebya, moya lyubov*," Ilya whispered (I love you so much, my love). "Thank you for my life."

"I love you too," Shane whispered back.

He kissed him.

It was a kiss that tasted of hot chocolate, cold ice, and the promise of a future that was just getting started.

Shane leaned back against the counter, still wrapped in Ilya’s arms. He looked around the kitchen at the tiny jerseys drying by the vent, the empty mugs on the counter, and the silence of the hallway where their daughters slept. He looked back at Ilya, who was watching him with that steady, endless warmth.

Shane let out a soft, contented breath, resting his forehead against Ilya's.

"Good life, isn't it?" Shane whispered.

Ilya smiled, pressing a final kiss to Shane's temple.

"The best," Ilya agreed.

Chapter End Notes

FINALLYY this is the last chapter. I'm kinda sad that this is the end (at least for now) because I love writing hollanovs as dads like they're just good at this. Thank you so much for reading this fic I really do appreciate it.

If you're interested I have another hollanov fic that I'm currently writing and it's a band au and I'm also planning to write a lot more hollanovs fic.

Again thank you so much and hope to see y'all on the next fic <3333

End Notes

This is my 1st time writing a hollanov fic so I hope you like it! This is inspired by an ai generated pic of hollanov with their cute kids. The fic will contain different chapters about their life with the kids. If you want to request something you can just comment. Thank you so much!! Let's go to the cottage next ep ;]

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