

there's an endless road to rediscover

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by [isnt_that_wizard](#)

Summary

Hayden hated the guy. Hated him.

Hated his stupid, smug smirk and the myriad of insults he threw Hayden's way and the way he made fun of Shane like it was a funny game then looked him up and down like a piece of meat and his reputation of sleeping with everything that fucking moved and the memories of being slammed into the boards by him and quite literally everything about this Russian dickhead.

And he hated that he was now going to have to do everything in his power to learn how to tolerate Rozanov because Shane was inexplicably and hopelessly in love with him, and Shane was his brother in every fucking thing but blood, and Hayden was not going to keep being responsible for that sad puppy look on his face every time he realized how poorly they got along.

So far, Hayden sucked at it. Big time.

It bothers Shane that Hayden and Ilya don't get along, so Hayden is putting in the effort to try and see these redeeming qualities Shane claims the guy has. Over the years it becomes easier and easier, until one day, he realizes he doesn't have to actually try anymore.

or, 5 times Hayden realized he was starting to tolerate Ilya + 1 time they acknowledged they were actually friends now

Notes

okay!! my first hr fic!! and it's not even technically a ship fic, which is very weird for me, if you've ever read any of my other works. i really should have been finishing up a fic for a different fandom, but much like soooo many other people, the show really grabbed me by the individual neurons in my brain and has refused to let go, so. here we go!! almost 20k words of me forcing hayden and ilya to bond.

tbh their beef with each other is SO funny to me and i love their dynamic but i just think the concept of them slowly becoming friends/found family for each other is honestly way too good to pass up so i had to spawn this into existence. hopefully other people agree and you all enjoy?? (if you're coming from that tiktok comment i left where i mentioned this fic while

i was working on it, hopefully it doesn't disappoint! i was NOT expecting that many people to see and be interested in reading this plot lol)

anyway, enjoy, have fun, see you at the end!

title taken from hey, brother from avicii
(because they're LEARNING ABOUT EACH OTHER OKAY)

UPDATE: this fic has now been translated into Russian, which you can read here!!
<https://ficbook.net/readfic/019bcce6-22e4-7417-b79c-4032b523c2dd>

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

Much like pretty much everyone else in the hockey world, when he first saw the news that Ilya Rozanov had signed with the Ottawa Centaurs, he thought that someone had messed up big time. Genuinely one of his first thoughts was "*Well, that journalist is sure as fuck getting fired.*" But then another source was reporting the same thing, and another, and another, and the Boston Bears were releasing a statement about their amicable split with the long-time captain and the Cens released one welcoming him and Rozanov himself was putting out statements and posts about the move, and Hayden, much like everyone else, was left wondering what the ever living fuck had happened to make one of the top players in the entire league move to the shittiest team.

And then - And *then*. Then Shane came out as gay - and it would be a lie if Hayden said he hadn't wondered, once or twice - and he and Rozanov had suddenly started dropping the whole rivalry act between them and were being buddy-buddy with each other when they crossed paths at games or events and Jackie made one little offhand comment about how they must've been friends longer than anyone knew and it really didn't have anything to do with anything but then it was living in Hayden's head rent fucking free until he couldn't stop thinking about it and Shane's mysterious Boston Lily and the fact that *god*, it kind of made sense, didn't it?

Except no. No, the fuck it didn't.

It could not *possibly* make sense and his brain needed to shut the fuck up right the fuck now and why the *fuck* did Jackie need to go and say that and why the actual *fuck* would Ilya Rozanov sign with Ottawa, where Shane was suddenly visiting every damn opportunity he had.

He approached it with Shane the only way he really knew how, by making a joke about it - he wasn't expecting Shane to grow pale and serious and confirm that he was *in love with the motherfucker*. Hayden had actually felt sick, he thought.

Not because of the gay thing, obviously.

He was cool with Shane being gay. Who the fuck cared. Shane was his best friend - after Jackie, obviously. Shane was his captain and his confidante and his brother and an uncle to his kids and one of the people he trusted most in the entire world. Nothing would ever, *ever* change that. If Shane liked dick, then he liked dick. Whatever.

But Ilya fucking Rozanov's dick? *Jesus Christ.*

And look, Hayden didn't pretend to be a nice person by any means. He was a professional hockey player. He was perfectly content in the knowledge that he could be an asshole.

He's pretty sure that the only NHL player who *couldn't* make that same qualification was, in fact, Shane Hollander. Dude could barely bring himself to chirp half the time, too focused in on the game or aware of his public image to open his mouth to whatever he actually wanted to say. The only time he'd ever started a fight, dropped his gloves before someone else already had, was *after* a game was done, and he didn't even get an actual punch in against Scott Hunter before Taylor and Vaughn had already swept in to pull their respective captains apart. And yeah, Shane was a little shit who was funnier and sassier than anyone gave him credit for, and he definitely *could* hit you where it hurt or knock your lights out when he wanted to, but those moments were few and far between, in Hayden's experience. Shane was basically the nicest guy Hayden had ever met, let alone the nicest guy in the league.

So *how*, exactly, had he ended up with the guy who was notoriously one of the biggest *assholes* in the league?

Hayden hated the guy. *Hated* him.

Hated his stupid, smug smirk and the myriad of insults he threw Hayden's way and the way he made fun of Shane like it was a funny game then looked him up and down like a piece of meat and his reputation of sleeping with everything that fucking moved and the memories of being slammed into the boards by him and quite literally everything about this Russian dickhead.

And he hated that he was now going to have to do everything in his power to learn how to tolerate Rozanov because Shane was inexplicably and hopelessly in love with him, and Shane was his brother in every fucking thing but blood, and Hayden was *not* going to keep being responsible for that sad puppy look on his face every time he realized how poorly they got along.

So far, Hayden sucked at it. Big time.

But it wasn't like it was entirely his fault!

Rozanov took every opportunity he could to insult him! What was Hayden supposed to do? Just shut up and take it? Fuck that. Shane couldn't possibly expect them to suddenly like each other just because of the forced proximity. Hayden had hated Rozanov for *years*. He'd thought Shane had, too.

He felt a little guilty about it, sometimes. It couldn't have been easy, listening to everyone around you - listening to your best friends - shit-talk the guy you were secretly hooking up with, and then *falling in love* with, while you were sitting right there and couldn't say a word to defend him.

Not that Hayden thought Rozanov had any qualities worth defending. Well. He must have some - there's not a chance in the darkest pits of hell that Shane would be with him if there wasn't. But he sure as shit hadn't shown them to Hayden.

A glimpse or two, maybe.

He guessed it was pretty undeniable the way he smiled at Shane, all gross and *soft* - he knew that type of look because it was the same damn look he had on his own face whenever Jackie was in the same room. And he'd been completely and perfectly polite to Jackie the two times he'd met her; from the smug grin he'd shot Hayden when Jackie had announced that she liked him, he knew the picture perfect attitude had been entirely on purpose. And he'd been really good with the kids, which was one of the most surprising things Hayden had ever seen in his life. Plus there were the things he'd heard from Shane. Apparently Rozanov always kept his house stocked with ginger ale and ingredients for Shane's disgusting smoothies. Apparently he got along well with Yuna and David, cooking or playing card games with them, and was already in the family group chat. Apparently he'd gotten scared the first time he'd heard the call of a loon. Apparently Hayden needed fucking brain bleach because he'd accidentally learned things about Shane's sex life that he never in his goddamn *life* had ever wanted or needed to know about his best friend *or* about Ilya Rozanov. Apparently Rozanov made Shane laugh and feel safe and cared for, and apparently he loved him back just as hopelessly.

And then there was the other really big one. The one that had started Hayden's whole spiral *and* turned the hockey world on its head. The one that had him now sitting on Shane's couch on his day off, beer in his hand, watching a fucking *Centaurs* game for the first time since he literally could not remember when.

Because Ilya Rozanov was a fucking *Ottawa Centaur* now.

The game was. . . Not going well, exactly. Rozanov was playing like Rozanov. Shoving the other team into the boards, clearly throwing out chirps meant to throw people off their game, arguing with the refs, winning every face off. He was exactly what anyone would expect to see on the ice.

But the problem was, he wasn't just outskating and outplaying the *other* team - no, he was outskating and outplaying his own team, too. No one matched up. And as much as Hayden fucking hated it, he was man enough to admit how damn good a player Rozanov was - no one had truly *ever* matched up on the ice with Rozanov except for Shane. Everyone knew that.

But at least the guy had clicked with Boston. He'd led them to the playoffs several years, and even straight to the Stanley Cup once.

This was just. . . It was a goddamn disaster is what it was.

Ottawa's only saving graces were Rozanov, who had managed to score once - with zero help from his right winger Dillon, Hayden noted - and their new goalie this year, Wyatt Hayes. Hayden had heard some good things about the guy, though not much, considering Toronto had basically permanently stuck him on the bench his entire run with them.

"We're still watching the NHL, right?" Hayden sighed out, taking a long drink of his beer. "You didn't switch the channel to a college game while I wasn't looking?"

Shane fixed him with a glare that could probably kill a man. Joke's on him; Hayden was immune to that shit after all these years of being friends. He just stared back blankly.

On the TV, San Jose scored again.

Shane gave up first, turning back to the TV in time for the commentators to say something about how the goal must sting for the Ottawa captain, the camera zooming in on Rozanov's face as he spoke to his linemate, Boodram.

"Look, man," Hayden sighed, pulling himself further up from where he'd been sinking into the cushions of Shane's leather couch, "Second period's wrapping up. I say we just call it and play video games like we planned. It's literally the reason I came over, remember? The kids are with Jackie's mom, Jacks' out with Kelly, and *we* were supposed to have a boy's day."

Shane made a grumpy, scrunched up face, shaking his head, "There's still third period. They're only down by two. They might pull it back."

Hayden blinked at him.

"Dude, it's the *Cens*. They're gonna lose."

"Knock it off, Hayd."

Hayden sighed, falling back into his spot. He knew it had been useless.

"Fine." Then, just because he could, he tacked on, "But they're gonna lose."

Shane's jaw clenched, but then he looked down to his hands for a moment.

"I know," he mumbled.

Shit. Well, now Hayden felt guilty. Shane had that *look* on his face again. That stupid, sad puppy look.

“It’s fine, Shane. We can finish watching,” Hayden tried to walk it back. Shane was biting at the inside of his lip, and nodded, but the air felt heavy.

After a minute, he said, “It’s just that. . . It’s my fault, you know?”

“What do you mean?”

Shane scoffed, then gestured at the game. “He wanted to look at Canadian teams, but *I’m* the asshole who said Ottawa. Because it’s only two hours away and I wanted him close. He’s a fucking Stanley Cup winner, and now he’s stuck on the shittiest team in the league basically *starting over* because I wanted my boyfriend close to me, and he fucking agreed. If I hadn’t suggested it, he could’ve. . . I don’t know.”

Hayden watched as Shane seemed to deflate back into the cushions of the couch himself, crossing his arms over his chest the way he did when he realized he’d said more than he wanted to and now felt too vulnerable.

Hayden was quiet. He sat back up slowly, placing his beer can on the coffee table. Shane didn’t even look over at the fact that it wasn’t on a coaster. Next, Hayden reached for the remote laying between them, and he muted the game. Shane didn’t react to that either.

Okay. That was fine. Hayden could handle Shane going all quiet on him. He never claimed to be the best at it, but after years of being friends and sharing hotel rooms, he was used to rolling with most Shane’s needs and particulars. He prided himself on being someone who had never made Shane feel like he needed to act a certain way.

So Hayden moved his beer onto the coaster as he stood and walked to the kitchen. Shane hadn’t moved much when Hayden returned, but one of his hoodie strings had migrated into his mouth to be softly chewed on. Hayden held out the cold ginger ale as he sat back down, facing his friend. He wasn’t really expecting Shane to actually drink it, but it helped sometimes, when he had something cold in his hands.

Shane took it, then crossed his arms back over his chest, the can in his hand getting tucked into the crook of his elbow. He looked at Hayden.

“Okay, first of all, it’s not like *anyone* makes Rozanov do *anything*.”

Shane tilted his head a little at that, a hint of a smirk on his face. Hayden immediately reeled back, shoving at Shane’s shoulder.

“Oh- *Ew*, holy fuck. Shut the *fuck up*, oh my *god*. *Ew*.”

Shane allowed himself to laugh at Hayden’s expense for a minute before sobering back up.

“But you get my fucking point, Shane. Rozanov is the biggest asshole I’ve ever met - Yeah, yeah, it’s all an act, whatever, don’t interrupt me - I’m *trying to say* that you’re not dating a guy who doesn’t know how to say no. You said yourself that he wanted to look at Canadian teams. You might have suggested Ottawa, but if he’d hated the idea or hadn’t actually thought it through, then Rozanov would’ve just told you to fuck off. Right?”

Shane was still quiet, staring down at his lap like a petulant child. Luckily Hayden had plenty of experience with that. He shoved him in the shoulder, a little harder than strictly necessary, but it got Shane to look at him.

“*Right?*”

Shane shrugged. “Yeah. I mean, probably. But Ottawa was closest.”

Hayden rolled his eyes, “And have you considered the fact that maybe your boyfriend wanted to be just as close to you as you wanted him to be?”

Shane grew a bright pink in the face, “Of course. I know he does.”

God, sometimes Shane was stupid.

“Great. So it sounds to me like Rozanov knew exactly what the fuck he was doing. Dumbass. Sounds to me like the guy is fucking in love with you, and *you* were more important than picking moving to a winning team. If you weren’t, he would have just said no when you suggested it.”

Shane let out a deep breath, and then after a moment, gave a slow nod. Thank god.

“And fine. Yes. It’s like he’s starting over. The Centaurs *suck*, dude. I do *not* want to be him right now. But Boston sucked ass, too, when he got drafted. But I don’t know if you remember the year I threw a pity party at my house because Boston ended up winning the Cup? Montreal was shit, too, when we started. It’s like you said. Maybe they have a chance of turning it around.”

Hayden doubted it. Boston and Montreal might have been in the pits of hell back when they’d all been drafted, but at least they’d had a past of being winners. Ottawa did not have that same history. Not a single banner in their rafters. They hadn’t made it to the playoffs in so long Hayden couldn’t even remember the last time. The team was basically just surviving with their head right at the water line, never dunking under long enough to actually drown but also never coming up long enough to stay treading water, let alone swim. So maybe Hayden was just saying shit for the sake of saying it.

But Shane was perking up across the couch, no longer watching the game Hayden had muted with quite as much devastation in his eyes, so he’d take the win where he could. Shane unraveled himself from his tight posture, popping open the tab on the can of ginger ale and taking a drink before placing it on a coaster next to Hayden’s beer.

Then he turned to Hayden with a smug smile that had Hayden regretting everything before his friend even spoke.

“You know that was the nicest thing you’ve ever said about him, right?”

Hayden groaned, falling back onto the couch. "Ugh, I know. Never tell him. And never fucking repeat it. I feel gross, like I need to brush my teeth or something."

Shane laughed again, then gestured down the hall, "You know where the bathroom is, man. Pretty sure your spare toothbrush is still in there. Wait. Actually, Ilya might have figured out that it's yours, so maybe don't use it."

Fucking hell, Hayden felt sick.

"Shane, what the *fuck*, bro."

"I'm kidding! Mostly. Maybe grab a new one from the hall closet just in case."

"I hate you, and I *hate* your terrible fucking boyfriend."

"Hayd. . ." Shane sighed, but it was in that tone where he obviously wasn't taking Hayden seriously, which. Rude. Hayden was completely fucking serious. He'd been keeping a toothbrush at Shane's place basically the entire time they'd known each other, and vice versa, and now his best friend wasn't even protecting it against sabotaging acts of malcontent by evil Russians? Was *nothing* sacred anymore?

He'd protect Shane if Jackie ever wanted to fuck with him like that.

Well.

Okay, maybe not.

But that had way more to do with the fact that Jackie would have had a very, *very* good reason to ever mess with Shane and that he trusted his wife's judgement above all things and

absolutely nothing to do with the fact that he was maybe just the tiniest bit scared of her.

Shane was still laughing at him, and Hayden reached over to shove him, which only earned him more laughter.

“I’m gonna kill Rozanov, I’m not even joking anymore.”

“Bullshit.”

And Shane was right, too, because Hayden couldn’t even touch the dude off the ice anymore because he was Shane’s goddamn boyfriend and he made the guy ridiculously happy and now Hayden just had to live with that. Stupid.

“Let’s just watch the game,” Hayden grumbled. He resisted the urge to quite literally let out a ‘boo’ and toss the remote at the screen the way he might have a year ago when the cameraman gave another close up of Rozanov on the ice, if for no other reason than the way he could see the smile that spread across Shane’s face when he caught sight of the other man, decked out in red and black with that dumb logo on his chest.

Jesus. Ilya Rozanov had really signed with the Ottawa Centaurs. All for Shane.

Fine. Hayden could give him this *one* singular redeeming quality.

• • • • •

“Here.”

The pill bottle rattled angrily on the table where Jackie had slammed it down in front of him. Hayden winced a little at the sound.

Across the table, a bag of frozen peas hit the table with a similar angry noise, the thud echoing in the otherwise quiet dining room. At Rozanov's questioning look, Shane glared.

"Ice is for adults. Adults who don't play hockey like an idiot."

Hayden had only gotten the chance to *start* smirking before Jackie was smacking him on the shoulder, fixing him with a glare dark enough he wouldn't be shocked if another bruise magically sprouted somewhere on his body from the force of it. So he quietly just reached out for the pain meds in front of him instead, shaking out a couple into his hand and tossing them back, swallowing them down with a sip of the water Jackie had also provided him with.

He did not look over at Rozanov. Even if he was sort of dying to see the image of him with a bag of peas pressed against his jaw.

The air in the dining room was heavy. Almost deathly so. Jackie and Shane had moved to stand at the head of the table, shoulders pressed together, mirror images of each other with their arms crossed over their chests and glowering faces. The only sound was the crinkling of Rozanov's bag and the slight creak of the wooden chair underneath Hayden as he shifted, trying to stretch out his leg to stop the way his hip was aching.

"Either of you want to remind me what the plan was for tonight?" Shane eventually said, his tone like steel.

"He fucking started it," Hayden accused instead of actually answering the question.

"Hayden--"

"Eat shit, Pike, I did not--"

"Ilya, shut the *fuck* up."

Both of them snapped their mouths back shut, turning their fuming gazes away from each other and onto Shane at the harshness of his tone.

It had been like this pretty much since the game had ended. Before that, technically.

Shane had been glaring at the both of them since the second they'd been released from the penalty boxes. He hadn't spoken a word to Hayden at all, not during the rest of the game, not during his usual captain congratulatory win speech and short game debrief, and not while they were undressing in the locker room after. He hadn't even looked Hayden's way before leaving entirely, and Hayden hadn't been sure he'd see him at the house or not. Jackie had been pretty much the same, waiting for him by the car with a glare and a look that told him *'we'll talk about this later'*.

And now he and Rozanov were basically in fucking time out, nursing their injuries.

It *wasn't* Hayden's fucking fault.

"You were provoking him, and you fucking know it," Shane pointed a finger at Rozanov, and Hayden huffed smugly. Damn right he'd been provoking him. Dickhead wouldn't stop running his mouth the whole goddamn game.

"Shut up, Hayden," Shane snapped. "You're a fucking adult. What, you can't handle a couple taunts anymore?"

"Hey-"

"Shane specifically asked you both to knock it off. *Months* ago," Jackie interjected. "And correct me if I'm wrong, but you both promised to actually try to *get along*. Yes?"

Hayden and Rozanov both grumbled.

“Yes or no?”

“Yes,” they both answered her.

“Then I don’t give a fuck if you’re on the ice or not. Throw each other into the boards to your heart’s delight and whatever legal checks you want, but what the *hell* are you two doing throwing punches?”

Neither of them answered her this time.

Shane let out a deep, frustrated sounding sigh.

“All I wanted was to play the game, and then do dinner altogether after. You literally both agreed to that.”

Again, they both stayed silent.

“God, you guys are such assholes.”

Hayden ran his tongue over where his lip had been split by Rozanov’s fist. He’d gotten the blood cleared off, but there was still a lingering metallic taste as he tried to soothe the ache. His cheekbone and under his eye was aching, as were his ribs, and his hip from where he’d fallen down onto the ice. His only solace was the fact that Rozanov would have a nice, multi-colored bruise on his face of his own, and plenty of other aches and pains where Hayden had gotten him just as good. He wished he could have gotten in a few more hits, except Shane had skated over a little too quickly, and neither of them were quite dumb enough to keep throwing hits as soon as they caught a glimpse of the 24 on his jersey.

“Seriously?” Jackie asked. “Neither of you have *anything* to say for yourselves?”

They ended up being saved, quite literally, by the bell. Jackie sighed, patting Shane on the arm and murmuring something to him before exiting the room, going to answer whoever was ringing their doorbell at this time of night. Shane seemed to deflate a lot more when it was just him in the room with them, looking less pissed off and more like they'd beaten up *him* and not each other.

Fuck.

"I just don't get it," Shane shook his head.

Fuck.

When Jackie returned, she had two bags of takeout in her hand, labeled with the logo from their favorite Japanese place. It smelled heavenly, reminding Hayden that he hadn't eaten since before the game. Rozanov clearly perked up across the table as well. But Jackie bypassed them both, handing one of the bags over to Shane, who took it with a small smile. There was clearly enough food for all of them, but Jackie just turned to them with another glare.

"Shane and I will be upstairs, watching a movie. When you two want to remember how to act like fucking adults, you're welcome to join us."

And then they were left alone, the sound of Jackie and Shane's footsteps and the smell of takeout trailing away. The kids were all spending the night at their grandparents'. Because the adults were supposed to get together and have dinner after the game, hang out, keep it a chill night. So much for that. Hayden risked a glance at Rozanov. He looked as rough as Hayden felt. Pained and pale, sitting awkwardly in the wooden chair, a glare on his face but looking decently chastised at the same time.

This was ridiculous.

They were in their mid-20s. And they were sitting in the same spots where Hayden sat down his twin daughters when they threw temper-tantrums. They'd *literally* been put in time-out. Hayden was a *dad*. He didn't get put in time-out. Especially not with Ilya fucking Rozanov.

What the hell?

Damnit. Jackie had probably done it on purpose. To get him to be the bigger person and apologize. Which was *stupid*, because he might have been the first to drop his gloves, but he did *not* start it.

He didn't need to apologize for shit.

Hayden crossed his arms over his chest with a huff. Across the table, Rozanov was pointedly ignoring him.

The exact positions he'd seen Ruby and Jade in a million times.

Fucking fuck.

Stupid parenting. He didn't *want* to be the bigger person. Rozanov was quite literally the *bigger* person. This should be *his* job.

But Hayden was tired and hungry and sore, and he had thrown the first punch. So.

Fine. Fine, fine, fine.

Damnit.

Hayden shoved his chair back from the table with a scrape, ignoring the way Rozanov stared at him with a raised eyebrow as he stalked to the kitchen. He made his way to the freezer, pulling it open and digging around until he found what he was looking for under the various easy dinners and freezies they had for the kids.

He wrapped the soft-sided ice pack in a towel, then returned to the dining room table, where Rozanov hadn't moved. He plopped it down in front of him, then pulled the bag of peas from his hand.

Rozanov grunted at him, which Hayden chose to take as a thank you. By the time Hayden returned to his seat, Rozanov had the ice pack pressed to his chin gently and was watching him with calculating eyes. Hayden stared back, waiting to see if his peace offering would earn him anything back.

It did not.

"You're a dick," Hayden said.

Rozanov rolled his eyes, "Yes."

Then, after another minute, Hayden admitted, "I shouldn't have punched you."

Again, Rozanov said, "Yes."

What the *fuck*?

"Are you kidding me? That's all you have to say?"

"What do you want me to say, Pike?"

"I don't know, how about '*I shouldn't have punched you either, Hayden, sorry about that*'."

Rozanov shrugged, dropping the ice pack before rubbing at his nose, “I am not sorry. You hit first.”

Hayden rolled his eyes hard enough it made his injured cheek ache a little. “You *deserved* it. You’re such a - I might not have been first pick, but I was drafted by the NHL just like you, asshole. I earned my fucking spot. And I love my life with Jackie and I love my *four* kids, and I don’t need you making me feel like shit about *any* of that every chance you get, dickhead.”

Rozanov went quiet, clenching his jaw, then wincing. Hayden rolled his eyes, then shook the pain med bottle that was still in front of him in offering. Rozanov shook his head.

Right. Rozanov didn’t really do pills of any kind, unless he didn’t have a choice. Shane had mentioned that to him, after the announcement press conference for The Irina Foundation.

Maybe they had some of the liquid kid’s stuff in one of the bathrooms. But Rozanov would probably turn that down, too, just on principle. Too manly to admit he needed it.

“Fine,” Rozanov finally said. “You are right, I pushed too far. Was unfair.”

Hayden nodded. “Thank you.”

“Next time we fight, we will make sure there is no dinner date on the calendar.”

Hayden would deny to anyone the way a laugh stumbled out of his mouth.

“Jesus Christ, you really can’t be nice for even two seconds, can you?”

Rozanov shrugged, “Only when people deserve it.”

Hayden narrowed his eyes at that.

“Look, man, you don’t like me - fine. You think I’m a bad hockey player - fucking *fine*. But let’s be serious. You gotta back off. At least a little. Shane asked me to try, so I’m fucking trying. You’re not making it easy.”

Rozanov raised an eyebrow, “You are not making it easy, either, Pike. You also have insulted me many, many times.”

Hayden huffed, leaning back in his chair. Yes, he had. That’s what came with the territory of having to unlearn 10 damn years of hating a guy.

“Yeah, well. Where’s the middle ground, then?”

Rozanov stared at him, a contemplative look on his face.

Then, “Like you said. Shane asked us to try. And we both love him, yes?”

Hayden let out a deep breath, nodding. “Yeah. He’s - He's like a brother to me.”

Rozanov nodded. “Then for Shane, we do our best. I still do not like you, you do not like me. I chirp you, you chirp me. Fine. But we will both relax, and no more fights. Agreed?”

This was the most civil conversation he and Rozanov had ever managed to have.

“Agreed. If nothing else, I don’t think either of us can afford to sleep in the doghouse tonight.”

Rozanov looked confused, “What is. . . doghouse?”

Hayden snorted, “It means if we don’t get upstairs and act like we’ve fixed all our problems, Shane’s gonna send you back to the hotel tonight and not even feel guilty about it.”

Rozanov paled at the thought, and it was only Hayden’s high level of maturity and self-restraint that kept him from outright laughing at the guy. He pulled himself up from the chair once again, only wincing a little at the way it tweaked his sore muscles and bruises, jerking his head in silent instruction for Rozanov to follow him. Hopefully it wouldn’t take too much for them to beg forgiveness from their respective significant others, and just from Shane’s general good graces.

Hayden honestly had no fucking clue whether or not he and Rozanov would be able to keep their agreement. He hadn’t been kidding when he’d told Rozanov he wasn’t making it easy. He had been, for the most part, exactly what Hayden had expected he’d be like all these years. At least in Hayden’s experience. But Rozanov was right; they did have a middle ground. So they could keep working on it. For Shane’s sake.

Maybe Hayden should get himself a punching bag, though. Just in case.

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He was waiting for it. For the words to fall from Shane’s mouth telling him he never wanted to see him again. For Rozanov’s fist coming towards his face. He was expecting it.

Deserved it.

Holy fucking shit did he deserve it.

Hayden wouldn’t blame them for even a moment. Hell, if they wanted to kill him he’d probably go get a knife from their kitchen himself.

His mouth still tasted fucking disgusting. He'd thrown up after he'd seen his phone this morning. Then again before getting in his car to come over here where he'd have to admit to Shane and Ilya what had happened. He wanted to puke again now, sitting here across from his best friend in the world whose face looked blank and completely fucking numb, save for the tears welling in his eyes. And to make things even worse, Rozanov's face looked just as completely blank. And Hayden had always thought the guy was kind of hard to read, but not like this. Not when he had been expecting the fury and rage he'd seen across from him on the ice so many goddamn times.

Rozanov had always hated him, he'd made that perfectly clear. He'd never hidden it from his face when Hayden was in the room, when he'd done something the Russian found annoying. Hayden knew exactly what Ilya Rozanov looked like when he was debating punching Hayden in the face. And he knew what he looked like when someone had just hurt Shane and he was trying to hold himself back from protecting him.

Hayden had just done something that deserved *both*. And yet now Rozanov wasn't even fucking looking at him at *all*.

Oh god, he really was going to puke again.

He had fucked up so bad. He knew that. He had known that from the second he woke up and saw the thousands of notifications on his phone and the panicked, wide-eyed look on Jackie's face.

Hayden's hands were shaking, and he clenched them together between his knees to try and stop it.

Shane opened his mouth, but nothing came out before his jaw snapped back shut.

Anya was laying on the floor between all of them, absolutely oblivious. Hayden wished he was her right now.

Fuck, Shane was never going to talk to him again.

He had fucking *outed them*.

On some shitty birthday video for some dickwad named *Brad*.

There was a pounding in his head. He had watched the video back so many times this morning that it was probably permanently painted on the inside of his eyelids. He would never ever get it out of his mind. He'd watched it until Jackie had physically taken his phone from his hand, reported dickwad Brad's Twitter account, deleted his FanMail account, and turned off all of his notifications. Hayden had kept their secret for *years* and now he had fucking *outed them* because he was a colossal *idiot* and every other bad thing Ilya Rozanov had ever said about him.

He really, really hoped Rozanov just got it over with and punched him soon. He deserved it.

Or that one of them would just *speak*. Before he literally puked onto their nice floor and their dog and gave them another reason to hate him.

He was *never* going to forgive himself for this.

Hayden was about to beg Shane to say something again, but in the end, Rozanov beat them both to it.

"It is okay," he said quietly, and Hayden would have bet money his mind was playing tricks on him, if it weren't for the way Shane's head was spinning to look at Rozanov just as fast as Hayden's was.

"What?"

"It is okay," Rozanov repeated, his jaw tense but his face a little less blank as he looked at Hayden. "You have been a good friend. Kept our secret for years. This was an accident, and it

is our fault for not being more careful.”

His voice held a sincerity Hayden wasn't sure he'd ever heard the man use with someone who wasn't Shane or the kids at the summer camps. His heart felt like it was going to beat out of his fucking chest.

“Ilya's right,” Shane said, voice cracking with emotion. “Of course we don't hate you.”

Hayden blinked harshly, his vision of the both of them going blurry. *Fuck.*

What the *fuck*?

They weren't supposed to do this to him. They weren't supposed to be nice about it. Fucking *Ilya Rozanov* wasn't supposed to be nice about it, wasn't supposed to reassure him.

“So how bad is it?” Shane asked, and Hayden could hear the way his friend was trying to steel himself, to keep his voice even and calm. Hayden's fucking fault.

“Bad,” he admitted weakly, blinking some more until he could look at him again. “The video is fucking everywhere.”

He cringed as he explained the public response when Shane asked what people were saying, and he saw the way Rozanov's jaw flexed in response, finally showing some of the anger Hayden had been expecting. Yet it was still the only tell the guy had as he set a calming hand on Shane's back, looking at Hayden again.

“What are your teammates saying?”

“Mostly the same thing,” he cringed again. The nauseated feeling kept swirling in his stomach as the conversation progressed, having to keep admitting all of this to them,

watching Shane start to spiral, trying to force himself to keep it lighthearted and watching Rozanov do the same so that Shane didn't completely freak.

He made eye-contact with Rozanov again, as Hayden threw out a lame joke about it being a top-tier kiss that Shane mostly just ignored. Rozanov gave him a weak smile, though, like he was almost grateful for the attempt. He wasn't really sure what to think of that.

Both of them turned their eyes back to Shane as their attention turned to the upcoming playoffs.

"Jesus Christ, what are we going to do? Fuck, what does J.J. think? Oh, god."

Hayden felt like puking a little bit again. "Yeah, you're gonna have to talk to him. He's, uh. Not into it."

J.J. had been one of the only text chains that Hayden had actually forced himself to open this morning, prior to Jackie putting his phone on lockdown, and he pretty quickly wished he hadn't. He couldn't exactly blame J.J., exactly, for being upset with him, or about the fact that Shane was kissing *Rozanov* - god knows what his attitude had been about that - or that he'd been straight up lied to by them both, but still. Some of the things that J.J. had said. . . Fuck, Hayden thought it would probably be best if he *never* told Shane about it.

"He'll come around. It's a shock, I get it. I don't expect everyone to understand, but J.J.'s one of my best friends," Shane determined, though he was doing that thing where he sort of just looked past Hayden rather than directly at him, like he didn't fully believe what he was actually saying. But Hayden nodded anyway, because he needed to be supportive. And he needed to believe that J.J. *would*, almost just as badly as Shane did.

"He's not too happy with me either right now," Hayden admitted as he stood up, though that was putting it mildly. Then, getting down to the crux of the issue, he added, "I think his feelings might be hurt for being left out, y'know?"

Rozanov took these words in, as well as Shane's immediate claim of the blame, with a sour look on his face. Rozanov had always preferred J.J. over Hayden, he'd had no illusions about

that, but he could still only imagine the words he had to share about J.J. right now. Or the rest of the Voyageurs, if he'd been able to see what Hayden's phone looked like. Or literally anyone else on the internet.

Though frankly, Hayden really wouldn't mind seeing Rozanov get his hands on that motherfucking asshole Brad. He'd be the first in line to help bury the body, that's for damn sure. Maybe they could put him under the ice and play a game afterward, pride tape galore on all their sticks.

Hayden almost laughed to himself at the thought, tempted to share it with Rozanov, but the Russian had both his hands on Shane now, rubbing up and down his arms in a soothing gesture. Hayden could see a sheen of sweat on Shane's forehead, the clench of his jaw, that blank, numb look still on his face but the fear and rage and freaking devastation in his eyes.

The fear and rage and devastation that *Hayden* had put there.

God, why didn't they hate him? *He* hated himself right now.

Anya was near his feet now. Did this dog *want* to get puked on? Reaching down to pet her again was a risk on his stomach, but she was just so soft, and it was comforting.

"I should go," he whispered. "I've fucked your day up enough as it is. Don't need to keep hanging around and making it worse, right?"

Shane turned to him, eyes watery.

"Hayd-"

Hayden just shook his head.

"No, it's. Fuck. I'm so fucking sorry, you guys. Seriously. I can't - I'll literally spend the rest of my life making this up to you, I swear," Hayden's vision was blurry again and his voice cracked on the words. The next thing he knew, he had an arm full of Shane, his best friend gripping tight around his shoulders. Hayden was helpless to do much but hug him back, swallowing back hard so he didn't end up crying against Shane's shoulder.

Rozanov was watching them both, Anya now up in his lap, cradled against his chest. Hayden still didn't know how to read that look on his face. He hoped that maybe, even if Shane left the room right now, Rozanov probably wouldn't punch him in the face. He'd been the first one to absolve Hayden of the situation, after all, even if he hadn't deserved it. And maybe it had been entirely for Shane's benefit, but *still*. He'd fucking done it, hadn't he?

Hayden took a deep inhale as Shane's arms gave him a squeeze. He could pretty much name off the top of his head the number of times he and Shane had actually *hugged* outside of stupid bro slaps of congrats during or after games. His wedding, when the kids were born, when Shane had come out to him. It just wasn't something they did all that often. But *fuck*, Hayden was changing that. Shane gave good fucking hugs.

"I forgive you, Hayden," Shane said against his shoulder, the words mumbled but still ringing out clear in Hayden's ears. "Seriously, man, don't blame yourself, okay? Ilya and I will - We'll be fine."

Hayden just nodded, no clue what the hell to say to that.

"You're my best friend."

"Fuck, dude," Hayden mumbled weakly before letting out a laugh. Shane pulled back, and both of them took a deep breath.

Rozanov nodded to him in goodbye, still mostly buried in the dog's fur, which Hayden returned before following Shane back towards the front door.

"You were supposed to hate me."

Shane scoffed, the most lighthearted Hayden had heard him since he'd had to break the news. "Jesus, Hayd. I'm sorry. Did you want us to try again? You can come back in and start over."

Christ, he's been spending *way* too much time around Rozanov and his attitude.

Hayden couldn't even be mean back to him right now. Not when he'd just blown up their entire fucking lives.

"Thanks for not hating me."

Shane was looking at him like he'd grown three heads.

"Call me if you guys need anything," he tacked on as he stepped out the door. "Literally, Shane. Like, anything. I'll give you my first born."

"You and Jackie don't even remember which twin was born first."

"We'd figure it out for you."

"Oh my god, Hayden. Go home. I promise we'll call if we need anything."

"Okay. Remember I love you, dude."

Hayden prided himself on the way Shane was rolling his eyes at him because it was the most normal Shane thing he could be doing right now. Normal Shane was good. Normal Shane meant that Hayden hadn't fucked up for life.

His stomach settled a bit.

"Love you, too," Shane waved as he shut the door. Hayden let out a deep breath, nodding to himself as he climbed back into the car.

Even though that had gone better than he'd expected, even though he wasn't leaving with a black eye or less teeth than he'd come with or a best friend he'd never see again, the drive home still passed in a blur. Hayden couldn't tell you how he'd gotten from point a to point b, how he'd managed to park the car back in the driveway or unlock the front door or step inside his own house. The whole fucking day felt like one big fever dream.

God, he really hoped it was. Maybe he'd gotten his shit majorly rocked at the last game he'd played and this was all just some elaborate coma dream.

Yeah.

That would be good.

A cruel fucking prank for his brain to play on itself, but. He could live with having a fucked up mind if it meant that he hadn't *actually* just been responsible for shattering an 11-year long secret via a damn birthday message.

"Oh god, I'm gonna pass out," Hayden mumbled to himself as he threw his car keys onto the entryway table.

Jackie appeared out of nowhere next to him, one hand on his shoulder as she watched him with wide, concerned eyes. "Are you serious or just being dramatic?"

Hayden didn't have the energy to glare at her, just leaned into her touch and let his body fall against the closed door for support, thumping his head back into it.

“So,” Jackie sounded tentative in a way he hasn't heard her in a long time. “You're alive, at least. That's good, right?”

Hayden sniffled.

“Oh, shit. Fuck, babe, are you about to cry? Oh, Hayden. Shane just. . . He'll need some time, you know?”

Hayden shook his head.

“The motherfucker *forgave* me,” he laughed out wetly. His heart was racing again. “They should literally hate me - if I was them, I'd have probably killed me, and then they were just so *nice* about it, what the actual *fuck*.”

Jackie stroked a hand through his hair and then down the side of his neck, laughing quietly, “Hayden. . . Baby, that's a *good* thing.”

Hayden nodded, rubbing at his eyes. “I know, I know. I’m just. You know?”

Jackie gave a sympathetic hum, leaning in until her forehead bumped the corner of his jaw. He felt a little bit better, just having her touch him. He always did.

“Even Rozanov was nice about it,” Hayden told her, still not entirely convinced he *wasn't* having some sort of hockey injury induced coma dream.

“That explains this, then,” and then Jackie was straightening up and holding out her phone to him, a text message open on the screen.

Ilya R.: i am assuming your husband shut off his phone. please give him your phone when he is home. i want to tell him something.

Well, fuck. Was this when Rozanov finally unleashed on him? Had he just been waiting until Shane didn't have a front row seat to it?

Cool. That's cool. It's fine. There were literally no visions in his head of Rozanov taking that same plan of how they'd theoretically bury Brad's body and using it on Hayden instead. None at all.

He took Jackie's phone from her.

Jackie: *Hey, it's Hayden.*

Ilya R.: *oh good. i wanted to tell you that i agree with shane. you are forgiven. you may be terrible hockey player but you have been good friend to shane and we know you would not purposely send that video.*

Ilya R.: *also i watched it and you are also truly terrible at delivering birthday messages. will be best for everyone if you never offer fanmail again*

Oh, what the *fuck*?

Hayden blinked down at the messages, as if they would change if he kept staring.

Rozanov had reached out to his wife specifically so he could tell Hayden that he *forgave* him?

Jesus, Hayden had fucked them up so bad that Rozanov was becoming a different *person*.

And yet. Hayden couldn't deny the way that everything in him felt settled once again, the same way it had after Shane had hugged him and told him the same thing.

Maybe it was just the comforting knowledge that he wasn't going to wake up in the middle of the night to Rozanov trying to kill him in his sleep. Maybe it was the chirps he'd thrown in, like not a damn thing had changed and he still hated Hayden's guts - just not for *this* reason. Maybe it was because this finally gave Hayden some insight into what Rozanov had been thinking that whole time he'd been at their house.

Whatever it was, Hayden felt himself breathe just a little bit easier as he read the texts one more time. He smiled down at Jackie's phone as he typed out a response.

Jackie: *Thanks, Ilya.*

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Hayden: *Let it be known I'm doing this with a figurative gun against my head*

Rozanov 🙄: *your wife knows she can text me herself if she needs something, yes?*

Rozanov 🙄: *i would not deny her*

Rozanov 🙄: *we spoke just this morning about recommendations for next book club*

Right. Because that was still a thing.

Jackie had started the book club forever ago, mostly as an excuse to get together with the other Montreal WAGs outside of game days to drink and gossip - when he'd pointed this out to her, it earned him a slap on the arm and an insistence that they do read the books, "*fuck you, Hayden*" - and apparently, pretty much the day after Hayden had accidentally outed them, Rozanov had gotten an invite into the group. Thankfully, the WAGs had been a *lot* more welcoming and understanding of it all - the secrets, the fake parts of the Hollander-Rozanov rivalry, the overall Shane-being-gay thing, etcetera - than the actual team had. Even with the fallout of Shane tripping and the press blowouts and the less than amicable split with Montreal as Shane signed himself with the Ottawa Centaurs, Ilya Rozanov had remained an integral part of the Montreal WAGs monthly book club.

Hayden: Jackie's busy.

Rozanov 🙄: what does your beautiful wife need?

Hayden: Watch it, dickhead.

Rozanov 🙄: she is too good for you.

They'd been together since they were 20; Hayden didn't need *Ilya* to point that out to him.

Rozanov 🙄: deserves better than mediocre, 14th best hockey player on team

Fucking asshole. At least he'd moved up a slot, since Shane had left.

Hayden: Shut the fuck up, Rozanov. Seriously. We need a favor.

Rozanov 🙄: what is wrong?

Hayden: Jackie's mom took a bad fall. Her neighbor ended up calling an ambulance because they're pretty sure she broke her hip. Jackie is going to stay overnight at the hospital with her, but I've got an afternoon practice in a few hours and the game against Minnesota tonight.

Hayden: We need someone to watch the kids, and normally we'd ask Shane since you guys aren't playing tonight but since he's in LA with Rose, Jackie wanted me to ask you instead.

Hayden: So.

Hayden: Any chance you'd be willing to drive to Montreal and take care of the kids tonight?

Hayden: Jackie's kinda freaking out.

Rozanov 🙄: *of course.*

Hayden blinked down at his phone.

Rozanov 🙄: *any chance to corrupt the pike children to lifetime centaurs fans*

Hayden: *Fuck you, Rozanov.*

Hayden could hear Jackie on the phone with the hospital in their bedroom down the hall where she was trying to pack a bag, her voice strained and pitched in that way it got when she was trying not to panic. Ruby and Jade were fighting over a doll in the living room, which probably had Arthur's eyes going wide as the poor kid tried to shrink himself into the couch cushions because his little boy was just about the gentlest soul he'd ever seen, and he could only hope Amber was still down for her nap like she was supposed to be.

He rubbed a hand across his forehead and down his face, trying to take a breath to calm himself. He knew asking *Rozanov*, of all people, had been a stupid fucking choice. If he didn't have to play tonight, he could just stay with his kids and take care of his wife and everything would be *fine*.

Rozanov 🙄: *fucking relax, pike. i will babysit your small hockey team tonight. tell jackie that i will be hoping her mother heals quickly.*

Hayden found himself blinking down at his phone once more.

Rozanov 🙄: *i will be there in one hour.*

Hayden: *Wtf it's a two hour drive.*

Hayden: *Rozanov, I swear to god, if you make it here in under two hours Shane is going to kill both of us.*

Hayden: *Rozanov, wtf answer me*

Hayden: *You better not fucking crash, Shane will literally kill me and then I'll find you in hell and murder you again myself, asshole.*

Hayden shoved his phone into the pocket of his joggers, desperately trying to unclench his jaw.

Fucking Rozanov.

Only he could manage to still make Hayden's blood start to boil while technically doing a nice thing for them.

Christ.

"Fuck," Hayden whispered to himself, running a hand through his hair as he tried to take stock of his surroundings. It sounded like Jackie was off the phone, but the twins were still arguing. Good news, he didn't hear any noise coming from Amber's room, and his phone notifications had stayed otherwise clear during his conversation with Rozanov, meaning there wasn't anything popping up from the team to throw yet another wrench in his day before practice and the game tonight.

Okay, so, one thing at a time.

His first instinct was to turn towards the bedroom, to check on Jackie and pull her into his chest until the tension in her shoulders and the shine in the lower lids of her eyes that had been there since they'd gotten the call about her mom went away. He wanted to make sure she had everything she'd need in the overnight bag she was packing and throw out some stupid joke to see her smile, even if just for a second.

But there was another screeching sound from one of his daughters that had him spinning in the opposite direction, towards the living room where his eldest three were pretty much exactly where he'd expected them to be.

"Ruby! Jade!" he sighed out, exasperation on his tongue as he swooped down between them and grabbed the doll away from where they were practically playing tug of war with it. It was one of those ones that was meant to look like the kid it belonged to, and the kicker was, it was freaking *Amber's*. The doll had been a gift from Jackie's sister for Amber's fourth birthday, but the twins had decided that anytime Amber was down for a nap or not playing with it, it was free reign for them to use in their new favorite game of playing "mommies".

And holy fucking shit, these eight-year-olds were *not* good co-parents.

"I will lift the ban on how many times a day you can watch Moana if you both knock it off."

Immediately, the shouts of protest and attempts to climb up his body to get the doll back ceased.

"Just for today," he clarified with a pointed finger at Ruby, as soon as he saw that spark in his daughter's eye. Jade was already starting to scramble away from him towards the remote.

"Christ, Jade, you're gonna hit your head, babygirl, slow down."

"Sorry, daddy," she responded, with the tone of a girl who was not at all sorry and likely hadn't even actually heard a word he said. He was going to be in so much trouble when these two hit their teens.

"I'm going to get Pua!" Ruby announced as Jade set up the movie, running off to their shared bedroom to grab the stuffed pig that sat in their comfy corner nook.

"Girls, I mean it. This is just for today," he warned.

Then, he added under his breath, "Also because mommy and I won't fucking be here."

Ilya probably deserved to be tortured with *Shiny* playing in his head on a loop for hours. He hadn't done anything to Hayden to particularly make him angry, lately, but, like. Karma for all the years he'd spent slamming him into the boards, or whatever.

Hayden sighed, turning to where Arthur had himself squished into the cushions of the large sectional, eyes just watching the whirlwind of his sisters, Chompy the Alligator held tight against his chest. He took a seat next to his son, relishing in the way that Arthur immediately leaned into his side. God, his chest ached with how much he loved these kids.

"Hey, bud," he lowered his voice. "You wanna stay out here and watch the movie with your sisters or do you and Chompy want to go to your room and color for a little bit?"

He and Jackie had learned that their only son tended to respond better when they could give him clear, structured options, rather than the whole wide world of decisions. It was especially important for him when things had just been too loud or overwhelming for the commonly quiet, reserved little boy, which Hayden could tell the disagreement between the twins had clearly been for him, if the clutch on Chompy was any indication.

"Stay here," Arthur responded, matching Hayden's quiet volume, his wide eyes already locked on the screen where Moana's grandmother was beginning to tell the legend of Te Fiti.

"Sounds good, kiddo. Love you," Hayden said, dropping a kiss into Arthur's dark brown hair before standing again. The twins both received a kiss as well, and then he finally made his way across the house into the main bedroom that belonged to himself and Jackie.

He watched as Jackie exited the walk-in closet with a sweater in her hands, folding it loosely before dropping it in the duffle bag on the bed. Then, she almost immediately pulled it back out, followed by another sweater. She rearranged where her toiletry bag was positioned, then put the first sweater back in the bag, and just tossed the other one back in the direction of the closet. Hayden could see the way she was biting the inside of her cheek. It didn't seem she'd even noticed him yet.

"Jacks," he whispered, moving to her side. She stilled some of her fidgeting as he tucked her under his arm, but still was moving things around in her bag, pulling half the things out of it and dumping them onto their dusty rose colored quilt.

"Roz is on his way," Hayden said gently, stroking a hand down her hair. He could see the way some of the tension eased from Jackie's shoulders.

"Oh, thank god. Good. I swear the kids listen better to him than either of us for bedtime."

"Because he's a fucking pushover who bribes them with extra stories," Hayden rolled his eyes, strictly on principle, but frowned when Jackie just kept throwing random things back into her bag and didn't even call him on swearing.

"I literally don't care. Whatever works right now." She paused, then leaned over and kissed him hard on the cheek. "Thank you. Seriously, Hayd. God, I can't believe I didn't even think about the fact that he'd be available today."

Hayden just pursed his lips a little and didn't respond to that, instead reaching over to pull her bag out of her hands before she could completely empty and repack it yet again. He grabbed the soft throw blanket that Jackie loved from the foot of the bed, stuffing that on top, then zipped the bag shut. Jackie leaned against him, tucking her head onto his shoulder and slinging her arms around his waist.

"Your mom's gonna be okay, babe," he pressed a kiss into her hair.

Jackie let out a deep breath. "Yeah. Yeah, no, I know. They even let me talk to her a little when I was on the phone with the hospital again. She's fine. I'm just. . . freaked. Can't believe this happened, you know? I'm used to *you* getting injured, or like, Shane or someone - hockey injuries. Not like this."

Hayden nodded. Jackie loved hockey, but she had always *hated* the inherent risk of injury that came with it. Told him that it broke her heart a little bit every time Hayden came home with so much as a bruise. But it was to be expected, and she'd learned to live with it, they all had. Someone else in the family getting injured like this wasn't something that Jackie knew what to do with, especially being faced with it as her mother was now getting older and still living on her own.

They stood there a few minutes longer, Hayden just holding her close and stroking a hand through her hair, until Jackie pulled away with a sigh.

"I should go."

He ducked down to press a quick kiss to her lips. "Yeah. Go say bye to the kids, I'll get the car packed for you."

It took an hour and a half for Ilya to arrive. Hayden had to check his watch to be sure; the kids all about lost their minds once Jackie tried to leave, wanting to go with her and see their grandmother, and Amber had woken up and wanted a snack and then got upset that the others had started the movie without her, and the twins were arguing over which of them got to cuddle the stuffed Pua on their lap, and Hayden still hadn't actually gotten his stuff together for practice yet. In short, the Pike house was chaos as usual.

And Hayden would absolutely *not*, even under duress, admit to any sort of relief he might have felt when he pulled open the front door to see Rozanov standing there.

"Half hour early is nothing, do *not* tell Shane," Rozanov threatened, pointing a finger into Hayden's face.

Hayden only rolled his eyes, moving out of the way to let him into the house, "Trust me, I have zero interest in getting involved in whatever gross fighting foreplay you two get up to. I deal with it enough just being in the same room with you guys, I'm not going out of my way to text your damn husband about it while he's on vacation."

Ilya's face scrunched up, "It's not a *vacation*."

Hayden didn't have the energy for this, "Dude, he's spending half a week in LA at Rose Landry's Malibu beach house for her birthday. It's a damn vacation. Also - Shane fucking

married you. Stop being a jealous bitch.”

“I’m telling mom!” came Ruby’s voice from down the hall.

“Narc!” Hayden called back, receiving only giggles in reply.

“It is a miracle you are still able to afford anything, if your children tattle on your language like this,” Rozanov smirked, following him further into the house, but Hayden just ignored him. “Hello, little Pikes!”

Immediately, Rozanov was swarmed by Hayden’s children, which Hayden of course did nothing to stop, but the man didn’t seem even remotely upset about it, letting out a deep, pleased laugh as Ruby and Jade both latched onto him on one side, Arthur clung to his leg, and Amber got swung up into his arms and settled onto his hip. He wobbled a bit with the force of all of them - as someone who was frequently a victim of his children’s tackle, Hayden honestly couldn’t help but admire Ilya’s ability to stay upright, since it usually took out everyone who wasn’t him or Jackie - but just kept grinning, nodding along as all four of them began rambling at him like they hadn’t seen him in over a year.

It had literally only been two weeks, and they’d talked to him and Shane on FaceTime four days ago.

Hayden was going to gladly take their distraction, however, to finish up with everything that needed done. Once he’d gotten the kids all settled back down after Jackie’d left, he’d had the sense to at least do his game bag first, so that was ready to go and already in his car for when he needed to leave for practice soon.

Afternoon practices before a game didn’t used to be a thing. They’d get there early, or have an optional skate in the morning, sure, but they didn’t have an actual, full fucking practice. Hayden wasn’t entirely sure Theriault hadn’t basically lost his mind at this point. Everything was starting to look a little less like the NHL and a little more like a man who had seen the bag skate scene from *Miracle* one too many times.

Yet another effect of losing Shane from the team.

Hayden tried to shake the thought by focusing on doing some quick tidying of the kids' rooms, then finishing up a pile of dishes from lunch. He knew everyone thought - well, *knew* - that Jackie did most of the work around the house. And with the kids. It wasn't exactly a lie. Hayden wasn't even *home* half the time.

But he was not a shitty husband, nor was he useless or a deadbeat, or whatever other shit people liked to throw at him when they heard that Jackie was a stay-at-home mom of four. They split the responsibilities where they could and when they could, and he loved his career, but nothing had *ever* been more important to him than Jackie and their babies. He knew how to take care of his damn house, his kids, and his family. So he could do the damn chores. Especially when Jackie already had enough to worry about with her mom.

She'd probably laugh in his face if he texted her that honestly, doing these chores was going to be the most relaxing part of his day.

Hayden let the sounds of his children's laughter pull him back into the living room like a siren's song once he was done, the clock telling him he needed to get a move on. He'd have been able to delay his arrival at practice to wait for Ilya if he'd needed to, and he'd already texted J.J. to give him a heads up that he might be late, but with Rozanov getting here early, he didn't really have an excuse for sticking around.

"Kay, I gotta head out," Hayden informed the room, though he aimed it mostly towards Ilya, who was lounging on the couch, Amber tucked under one of his arms as she brushed through the hair of her doll. He deserved an award for the fact that it didn't make him nauseated anymore to see the man just making himself comfortable in *Hayden's* house. The twins and Arthur were all spread out in various positions on the floor, and it appeared that Moana had been started over on the TV *again*.

Jesus, it was round three and they hadn't even managed to finish the damn movie yet. Hayden would bet a year's salary that this time, they'd started it over with the insistence that if Rozanov was going to watch with them, then he couldn't just start in the *middle* - let it be known, he and Jackie weren't raising any movie heathens in this household.

"I will enjoy watching your shitty team lose tonight," Rozanov snarked with a dismissive wave of his hand, and Hayden felt an instinctive spark of defensiveness in his chest, but he

didn't even bother with a comeback.

A year ago he wouldn't have hesitated chirping right back in Ilya's smug face, but Hayden couldn't deny that even he was having a much harder time painting the Voyageurs in the same positive light he used to. How the fuck could he, after everything that had happened with Shane? After his coach and majority of the team still treated it like even uttering his best friend's name was like some sort of crime? When everyone except him and J.J. refused to acknowledge aloud that yeah, they were a much worse fucking team since Shane had left them for Ottawa?

But Hayden was still under contract. And even though he hated it right now, Montreal had been his home since he was a rookie.

"Yeah, good luck getting the kids to pause Moana long enough to even catch the first period," he said instead, rolling his eyes but with a twinge of genuine sympathy to the words.

Rozanov only grinned, however, "We will enjoy watching Moana, yes, everyone? Is my wedding music, after all."

Hayden frowned at him in question, but Ruby and Jade were set off in a fit of giggles, and even Arthur was smiling from where he was moving to climb into Ilya's lap.

"Okay," he said, dragging out the word a bit. "That's - Whatever. I need to leave or Coach'll have my ass. You know the routine for dinner and bedtime and shit, but give Jackie a call if you need, and I'll head home as soon as the game's done "

Rozanov waved him off once more, dismissing him in his own damn house *again*. Dick. At least he didn't call him out for swearing like Shane always did.

"You four little monsters," Hayden playfully growled, moving around the room to plop a smacking kiss onto each of their heads, "daddy loves you more than anything, okay? I'll see you tomorrow. Be good for Uncle Ilya."

He rushed through whatever last things he needed to a chorus of goodbyes and good luck and "*I love you too, daddy*" from his children. He didn't really register the noise of surprise that rang out underneath it all or the way Rozanov had been staring after him as he left the house. In fact, it wasn't really until Hayden was already in his car and down the street that it hit him at all.

Well, fuck.

Be good for Uncle Ilya.

That's what he'd said, wasn't it? *Uncle Ilya.*

To this day, he was the only one who *hadn't* called him that. He grumbled about it and made jokes and had once even tried bribing the kids to get him to *stop* calling him Uncle Ilya.

And now it had just slipped out. On the day when it had been *Hayden's* damn idea to ask Rozanov to babysit the kids.

And he didn't even feel, like, gross about it. It had just come out of his mouth because that's what he fucking was to them. The guy who came over with presents and crappy jokes and painted their nails and let them stay up too late. He'd been in their lives for almost three years now. Uncle Shane's husband.

Uncle Ilya.

And somewhere along the line, Hayden had just. . . *accepted* that. Grown used to it.

Oh, god. How was this his life now?

Why was this his life?

This was Shane's fault.

Hayden was so glad that Rozanov had had an armful of kids when he'd left the house because he was absolutely sure that he was going to get a book's worth of texts from the guy making fun of him for finally calling him that.

At least Hayden had told him that it had been Jackie's idea for him to babysit. He'd never live it down otherwise.

Yep, he'd been right. Doing chores was *definitely* going to have been the most relaxing part of his day.

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There had been a time when Hayden and Jackie had been listed in the number two spot on Shane's emergency contact list. With his parents still living in Ottawa and not always traveling to away games, Shane needed *someone* else to be able to be there if something ever happened to him while he was on the ice. Hayden and Jackie had just made sense to be those people, until Yuna and David could make it there. It had never really been necessary, thank god. Most injuries Shane *had* gotten over the years had been minor enough not to send him to the hospital, so it has really only been a couple courtesy calls here and there, and even then, they could usually just pull Hayden from the locker room if they needed to.

The only time it really had been close to necessary had been the hit Shane took from Marlow back in 2017, and thankfully Yuna and David had been *at* the game for that one.

Of course, in recent years, the Pikes had gotten bumped from their spot on the list. Yuna and David had been, too. It wasn't a secret to anyone, these days, who the number one call should *always* be for anything concerning Shane Hollander. God pity the fool if anyone ever thought it a good idea that Ilya Rozanov find out something about his husband from a secondhand source.

Which is exactly why, when they'd been out running some errands and Shane had started complaining of stomach pains bad enough that Hayden didn't even bother taking him home and instead went straight for the hospital, he had called Ilya on the drive there, rather than waiting until the nurses did it for him. Shane had even ended up being glad for it, too, having his husband's reassuring voice in his ear and then his face at the hospital.

Hayden, however, was beginning to entirely regret his decision. Because now he was stuck in a hospital waiting room watching the man attempt to wear a trench in the damn floor, mumbling to himself in Russian, ignoring every word Hayden tried to say. It had only been 30 minutes since they'd taken Shane, and Hayden was about ready to kill him. And if the way the nurses and the security guard by the door kept eying him were any indication, he wasn't the only one.

"Roz, man, you gotta sit down," Hayden said, not for the first time. Ilya, also not for the first time, ignored him.

Hayden let out a deep breath, shaking his head with an eye roll. He pulled out his phone, looking through his recent texts. He had a message waiting from Jackie, asking him to give her an update when he heard something new about Shane, which he responded to with a red heart emoji and a thumbs up, and then he opened up the chat he'd made with Shane's parents, reading back the most recent messages.

Mrs. Shane's Mom (Yuna): *We appreciate you keeping us updated, Hayden. I'm glad you were with him.*

Hayden: *Of course.*

Mr. Shane's Dad (David): *Has Ilya made it there yet? I haven't heard anything back from him yet, and I'm starting to get worried.*

Hayden: *Yeah he got here a few minutes ago. Shane's been chill since we got here, so pretty sure Shane's doing more to calm HIM down than the other way around right now tbh*

Mrs. Shane's Mom (Yuna): *That sounds about right. Please tell Ilya to give us a call when they take Shane in for surgery.*

Hayden: 👍

Hayden looked up from his phone, back to Ilya pacing and frowning and running a hand through his hair, and then back to his phone. He debated with himself for approximately three seconds, then tilted the phone up and aimed it towards his friend's husband.

Hayden: [video.mp4]

Hayden: *Any tips on how to get your son-in-law to relax before someone comes to sedate the big scary Russian?*

Hayden: *I'm only half kidding. I think one of the nurses might be seriously considering it. Not even sure I'd stop him.*

It only took a minute before a response came through.

Mrs. Shane's Mom (Yuna): *Poor Ilya! David and I will have to discuss cutting our trip short to be there with them while Shane is recovering.*

Mrs. Shane's Mom (Yuna): *Hayden, do NOT let anyone drug him. That is not funny.*

Not helpful right now, Yuna.

Mr. Shane's Dad (David): *Sorry, kid. Normally I'd say Anya or getting some vodka in him, but since neither of those are really options right now, you might just be out of luck until he can actually see Shane again.*

Also not helpful.

Mr. Shane's Dad (David): *Do you want one of us to try giving him a call?*

Yes. Absolutely he did.

But *no*. Hayden was a big boy. He could handle calming down *one guy* who he'd known for years now. Or something. Probably. Whatever.

Hayden: *No, that's okay. I think they should be almost done, so maybe I can just distract him until then or something. Thanks, though.*

Hayden took another deep breath, pocketing his phone once more.

“Rozanov,” he tried. “Rozy. Rozanov. *Ilya*. ”

That finally got the guy to at least look at him, though he didn't stop the back and forth.

“Shane's gonna be fine,” he stressed, his tone getting a little pushy, and he only earned a glare in response. So he continued, “It's a laparoscopic surgery. Shane was awake and responsive before they took him back. You talked to him. *He* told you he was fine, the doctors told you he was fine.”

“Emergency surgery is not *fine*. ”

Hayden bit his tongue for a moment. “Yeah, okay. But it's appendicitis, dude. Shane isn't dying. You heard them - they would've waited longer usually, but they had an opening. They do this shit all the time. He's going to be fine.”

‘Big scary Russian’ really wasn't that much of an exaggeration. Hayden had gotten used to the fact, over the years, that Ilya Rozanov was a fucking softy when he wasn't destroying people on the ice, but goddamn, his glare must still be intimidating as fuck for people who weren't used to it.

“Why are you so calm, Pike? I thought Shane was supposed to be like a brother to you.”

Hayden, very wisely, did not rise to the bait, keeping his own voice as calm as he could rather than matching Rozanov's venom. “He *is* like a brother to me. But again, we both heard the diagnosis, got to speak to him beforehand, and Shane is an extremely healthy 32 years old athlete. Doctors said there should be no risk involved. Believe me, I was a hell of a lot less relaxed going through this with two five-year-olds.”

That gave Ilya pause, and he looked at Hayden properly for the first time in a while.

“Ruby and Jade. . ?”

Hayden nodded, sighing, “Yeah, man, within, like, an hour of each other. Fuck anyone who doesn't think twin telepathy connections are real. Plus it was way more of a close call than this ‘cause the lady at their daycare wouldn't listen to them complaining about how bad their tummies hurt until they were literally crying. By the time Jacks and I got them to a hospital, they were both at risk of rupture, and they had to do one of those open surgeries instead.”

Ilya looked, rightfully, appalled. Hayden and Jackie had certainly both lost their shit at the time. A lawyer had been involved.

“That’s not the point,” Hayden quickly waved away his concern, because while the love Rozanov had for his kids genuinely was touching and appreciated, it has been years ago now and it was probably the last thing any of them needed if Ilya got riled up about them *and* Shane right now. “Point is, *this* wasn’t a close call like that. Because I am a very good friend and don’t listen to Shane when he says he just needs to sleep it off. So can you fucking relax?”

He had, in fact, just ushered Shane into the car and let him ramble about how it must’ve just been something he ate, nodding along and fully letting his best friend believe they were on their way back home right until Hayden had taken the exit towards the hospital instead and it was too late for Shane to do anything about it. Then he called Ilya.

Finally, Rozanov released a long, deep breath, and moved to collapse in the chair next to Hayden. There was absolutely no grace to it, his legs sprawled out in front of him and his chest deflating as he slouched in what was surely an uncomfortable position, like a marionette whose strings had just been cut.

“You need me to get you a cup of tea or something?” Hayden asked, dry and dull, an unimpressed eyebrow raised in Rozanov’s direction. “Would some chocolate calm you down?”

Ilya just glared at him, shifting until he was sitting further upright in the seat. He crossed his arms over his chest, the same way a child throwing a fit might, and Hayden resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

“You are being an asshole,” Ilya pouted angrily - literally *pouted* - and Hayden found himself gaping at him for a moment.

“What the fuck are you- *You’re* making a scene in a waiting room!” Hayden hissed, trying to keep his volume low.

Rozanov scoffed, gesturing aimlessly in the direction of the doors leading back to the patient and operating rooms, “My husband is in surgery, Pike!”

“I am aware of that! But you need to chill! Jesus Christ, man. They’re probably almost done at this point. What the fuck are you wiggling out about so bad?”

Ilya sputtered, gesturing again towards the doors, then muttered something in Russian, and then deflated back into the chair once more. Hayden watched him carefully, but it seemed that Ilya had already lost the steam of the anger he’d just been throwing Hayden’s way. Now he just looked. . . well, Hayden wasn’t even sure what.

Hayden unclenched his jaw, relaxed his shoulders, and took a breath.

Okay.

He could handle this. He was a grown-ass man. He'd been married for 12 years, had four well-rounded children. He could deal with some damn emotions. He could.

"Look," he started, after another minute or so. He kept his voice calm, quiet. "I get it, okay? If it was Jackie, I'd probably be stressed out of my mind, too. God knows I was when it was the girls. But I promise Shane's gonna be fine, okay? Appendectomies are super common. You guys'll go home tonight, and he'll be back on the ice in a couple weeks. We talked to the doctor about it before, so I know you know all that. Yeah?"

Ilya sighed, and then nodded.

"Great. So, do you want to actually talk about why you look like. . ." Hayden just sort of waved his hand up and down at Ilya.

For a minute, he didn't think Rozanov was going to bother responding to him. He'd just been staring at the tiled floor in front of them, eyes looking practically glazed over. Hayden kept watching him. Then, finally, Ilya took in a shaky breath, looking up at Hayden.

"The last time Shane was in the hospital. . ." Ilya's jaw clenched, and he turned his head away.

It wasn't hard for Hayden to remember. It had fucking *sucked*. He'd broken Cliff Marlow's nose over it. He had no clue what condition Shane was in until the game was over. He'd camped out in the waiting room with Shane's parents until he was allowed visitors.

"I was. . . I was not allowed. To be worried for him."

Oh. Oh, shit.

Fuck.

Of course.

Now Hayden felt like complete shit. He hadn't thought of it. It had crossed his mind, once - when he'd made the connection of who Boston Lily really was. He'd wondered, at the time, if anyone should maybe text her, and then so much later realized that Lily was *Rozanov* and he'd been on the damn ice when it happened. But he'd never thought about this part. He'd never thought about the fact that while he'd considered breaking into Shane's phone to text Lily, no one actually fucking had.

And *of course* no one was bothering to update the captain of the goddamn rival team on the condition of the player one of his had hurt. Rozanov had needed to finish out the game, same as Hayden. Except there was no camping out in the waiting room afterwards for him. There were no updates from Shane's parents. And Hayden remembered - Ilya had been, what at the time felt, *weirdly* concerned about Shane, when he went down. But like everyone else, he'd just chalked it up to respect for a fellow player getting his bell rung.

And now - it's been *years*. It was another year and a half before Hayden even found out about their relationship after that, and so much has happened since then, and - he's never even thought about it.

What that must have been like.

Jesus.

"Shit, man," Hayden let out, and Ilya huffed out something akin to a laugh in response, then hummed, a sad, almost self-deprecating sound.

"I visited him, next day, but it was only-" Ilya just gave a shrug, shaking his head. Five minutes, if Hayden's memory served correctly. A courtesy visit from another captain. That's all he would've gotten. "I was fucking terrified that night. Knowing nothing. I felt like-" Ilya rubbed a hand over his chest. "Even now, when I spoke to him and held his hand, and I can wait here, I still feel terrified. Only difference is I don't have to hide it."

Hayden looked down to his lap. “Okay, you’re right. I’m an asshole.”

Ilya let out another laugh next to him, this time more genuine. Hayden glanced at him out of the corner of his eyes as Rozanov shifted, fishing his phone out of his pocket.

“Say it again please, I was not recording.”

“Oh, fuck you, Roz,” Hayden rolled his eyes, not bothering to hold back the urge to jab his elbow into Ilya’s side.

“I want to show Shane when he wakes up. Breaking news, Hayden Pike finally admits to world he is an idiot.”

“First thing Shane is going to see is your black eye if you don’t shut the fuck up.”

Ilya rolled his eyes, hard, as if that didn’t just increase Hayden’s desire to punch him, but he dropped his phone onto his lap anyway.

After the moment sobered back up, Hayden shook his head with a sigh.

“I don’t know how you guys did it, man. All those years.”

Ilya had a mirthless sort of smile to his lips. “I fell extremely in love with him.”

“Yeah, well, I figured out *that* part.”

Ilya didn't offer him any further explanation, though, and Hayden didn't ask for one. He knew the basics, of what their relationship had once been, what it had eventually become, and obviously how they'd ended up where they are now. But beyond that, it wasn't really any of his business. Shane had told him what he wanted about their relationship. Hayden was lucky he got to know anything at *all*, that he *still* got to know things, even after he'd accidentally outed them.

He was really, *really* glad that Shane still trusted him. That for some reason, even *Ilya Rozanov* sometimes trusted him. Hayden didn't take the time to second guess himself before reaching out to clap Ilya on the shoulder, trying to give the other man some sort of reassurance. Rozanov didn't acknowledge it, but he didn't pull away either.

Hayden lost track of the amount of time they remained sitting there, quiet between them. Other people flitted in and out of the waiting room, nurses called back patients or families. No one spared them another look, now that Ilya wasn't trying to challenge the Mariana Trench in the tile. The chairs were uncomfortable as fuck. Ilya was bouncing his leg, Hayden was biting at the inside of his lip.

"Mr. Rozanov?"

Both of their heads snapped up, and Ilya was scrambling up to his feet only a moment later. Hayden didn't know if it was quite necessary for him to be showing why he still held one of the top two all-time records for fastest skaters in the NHL right now, but he wisely kept his mouth shut as he followed.

"How is he?" Ilya asked.

The doctor gave a calming smile, clearly used to this type of reaction.

"Your husband is great," she said. Ilya's shoulders deflated with relief, and even Hayden, for all his posturing, felt himself relax. "There were no complications, and he did wonderfully. We've got Mr. Hollander set up in a room now, and the anesthesia is beginning to wear off. Would you like to see him?"

“Please.”

Neither the doctor nor Ilya protested when Hayden moved to follow, so he made his way down the hallway with them down to the room they had Shane in. He looked pretty good, considering. A little pale, and he had an IV sticking out of his arm, but he was blinking at them when they walked in, mostly just looking like Shane on a normal day when he'd just woken up.

Ilya rushed to his side, taking his hand and bringing it to his mouth to press a kiss to it. Normally, Hayden would give him shit for that, fake a gag or something, but. He couldn't really do that after Ilya had gone and laid his heart bare in front of him, could he?

Fuck, that wasn't fair. How was he supposed to fight back when Rozanov threw out a comment about how Hayden wasn't allowed to hold Jackie's hand because it would lead to another baby?

No, fuck it. He wasn't going to feel guilty about this. Rozanov got a pass to be all gross with his best friend in front of him *today* and *today* only. And *maybe* when they won their next Stanley Cup. But that's it.

“How are you feeling, sweetheart?” Ilya asked Shane gently, running a hand through his hair. Clearly when the doctor had said that Shane was just waking up, she'd meant it, because for a few seconds, Shane only blinked at Ilya like he wasn't really seeing him.

“*Ilya*,” Shane then smiled dopily. Yeah, that checked out. “Wha' happ'n'd?”

Hayden came up on the other side of the bed, “They stole your organs, dude.”

Ilya shot him a glare, but Hayden only grinned shamelessly as Shane turned to look at him, the smile on his face faded to a look of sheer astonishment.

“Where they go?” Shane whispered with wide eyes. “I wan’ ‘em. Ilya, they can’ do that. Got’a giv’em back.”

Hayden covered his mouth to stifle his laugh.

“You have all your necessary organs, Shane,” Ilya tried to soothe, shooting daggers at Hayden. “Is okay, *moya lyubov*. Right, Pike?”

"Nah, dude, I'm pretty sure they stuck 'em in a jar."

Shane was looking back and forth between them, as much as he could with how groggy he was and how slow he was moving.

“Hay- Hayd. Hayd,” Shane pawed at his arm.

“Yeah, buddy?”

“You gotta get ‘em back fr me. ‘Kay?”

Hayden couldn’t stop his laugh from escaping this time, but he nodded dutifully.

“You got it, Shane.” Hayden paused. "Wait - do you think it's an option to, like, actually take your appendix home? Like, it's *his*. He should be allowed to have it."

Shane was nodding along like Hayden was an absolute genius, still a wide-eyed look on his face. Ilya let out a deep, deep sigh, “You are an idiot. Stop torturing my husband.”

Hayden rolled his eyes, but he was still grinning. “Fine, fine. I’ll go call Yuna and David and update Jackie.”

He took one glance back to his loopy best friend and his husband as he began to exit the room, and he found Rozanov pressing another kiss to Shane's hand, whispering something to him that Hayden couldn't hear. Shane had already calmed from the missing-organ panic Hayden had sent him into, and was now staring back at Ilya like he was just about the only thing in the world that existed. Under anesthesia like this, there was a chance that to Shane, he was.

The sight of it made Hayden smile, as he slipped out the door and pulled his phone from his pocket. He could hardly believe it himself, but he was glad that neither he nor a hospital staff member had ended up killing Rozanov.

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Hayden couldn't help but think back, sometimes, to the first time he and Ilya had been left alone in a room together. The fateful dinner where Shane had invited him and Jackie over to properly meet Ilya Rozanov for the first time. They'd really managed to fuck that dinner party up, he and Ilya both. Looking back now, he remembered the way the distrust had been simmering under his skin, convinced Ilya was playing some sort of game with his best friend's heart even as he'd watched the way they'd been looking at each other, even when he'd heard in Shane's voice how much the evening meant to him when he'd extended the invitation.

Hayden remembered the meaningful, warning look Shane had given him and Ilya both when he'd announced that he and Jackie were going on a tour of the house. And then Hayden had been an asshole, and Ilya had been an asshole back, and Hayden had fucking shoved him, and then Shane yelled at them both.

Obviously, they'd come a long way. Because Hayden had just been left alone in a room with Ilya Rozanov once again, and there was no hesitation on Shane's part, no warning look from Jackie telling him to behave. The two of them had been all smiley and relaxed as Jackie slung an arm through his, announcing she was taking him down the kitchen to get coffee - and Shane could definitely use it, Hayden thought. He looked happy, over-fucking-joyed, but damn exhausted. And now Hayden was sitting in a cushioned rocking chair, not feeling even an ounce of the resentment or distrust or general annoyance he'd once felt for the other as he watched Ilya gently pace back and forth on the other side of the room, the same overjoyed look on his face that Shane had.

His eyes were transfixed on the little bundle snuggled into his muscled arms, and Hayden couldn't blame him. He sure as hell hadn't been able to take his eyes off Ruby and Jade anytime he'd held them in his arms, nor Arthur, nor Amber. Still couldn't, some days, but especially when they were this tiny, only weeks home from the hospital. Hayden had thought, before, that he'd seen the moments when Ilya Rozanov was at his happiest. His and Shane's wedding day. The Centaurs winning the Cup. But this - Ilya wasn't just happy. He was *at ease*. Fully in his element. Looked like this was exactly what he was meant to be doing with his life - standing in this cozy nursery, ring on his finger and baby in his arms, living in his and Shane's Ottawa mansion, still both at the height of their careers and with an overflowing trophy room down the hall, prominently featuring their newest Stanley Cup win, to prove it.

And fuck it all, Hayden was fucking happy for the guy. After eight years of knowing him as nothing more than the asshole on the Bears and then seven more of knowing him as the guy Shane was in love with, somewhere he'd stopped being those external labels and just become Ilya, and Hayden could honestly say he was fucking happy for him.

It was surreal to him, all of this.

"I take it she's not letting you guys sleep yet?" Hayden inquired quietly, so as to not wake the napping infant in Ilya's arms.

Ilya paused the quiet humming of some sort of lullaby Hayden didn't know to 'tsk' at him, "My Emiliya is a perfect little angel."

Hayden snorted, rolling his eyes.

"Dude. You and Shane have that whole new baby glow, or whatever, but you guys look like shit."

Ilya glared at him, but it held zero of the usual Rozanov effect that Hayden was used to, completely and utterly dulled by the fact the rest of him was looking rumpled and soft in Ottawa Centaurs sweats and a loose black tank top, his curly hair literally bobbing up and down as he rocked his daughter in his arms. Pretty hard to look threatening like that. Plus Hayden had just grown decently immune to it over the years.

Mostly.

Ilya was still an asshole, after all.

“I’m not saying that I looked any *better* when I had infants, calm down. I’m just saying that it probably wouldn’t have killed you if you’d agreed to let Shane make you a cup of coffee, too.”

Hayden was sure that Shane was getting stories from Jackie about how lucky they were that they could even *drink* coffee. Jackie had breastfed all four of the kids, and while she *could’ve* been drinking coffee, and had even gotten it cleared with the doctor, she didn’t want to risk it, just in case. Shane and Ilya were facing no such risks.

Ilya waved one hand at him, “Is fine.”

Emiliya still fit perfectly in the crook of his arm, safe against Ilya’s forearm, no risk of falling or even be disturbed. Hayden’s heart clenched at the sight.

Fucking *babies*, man.

“God, she’s fucking cute,” Hayden smiled, leaning forward in the rocking chair to get a better look at her. Ilya beamed at his words, glancing at Hayden for just a moment before his attention was taken entirely by his daughter once again.

Without taking his eyes off her, he informed Hayden, “You should know - Shane is joining Jackie in crusade against swearing. He hit me on the shoulder when I swore in front of her yesterday - in *Russian*.”

“Wha- Shane swears just as much as I do, what the hell!”

“Shh!” Ilya reprimanded, though he was laughing a little bit. “And not true. Shane does not swear in front of your children.”

Hayden rolled his eyes. “She’s like two days old, she’s not gonna remember. And even if she does, she’s gonna remember that I’m calling her *cute*, so, like. Maybe Shane needs to calm down.”

“I will tell him you said so,” Ilya smirked. Emiliya let out a small coo in her sleep, taking both of their attention. Ilya cooed right back at her, a sound Hayden had surely never heard from the Russian, but he wisely didn’t say anything.

“It’s okay, *malyshka*. We will say no more bad words. Would you like to say hello to your Uncle Hayden?” Ilya whispered to her with an easy smile, and before Hayden could even react, he was bending down, passing over the infant girl. Hayden gave a happy huff of disbelief, immediately moving to accommodate Emiliya, cradling her softly against his chest. She was so *tiny*, wrapped up in a soft, blush red blanket, embroidered with a little Centaurs logo in the corner, and she didn’t even wake up as she was shifted between them.

It wasn’t his first time holding her. He and Jackie were on the short list of people who were allowed to visit now that Emiliya was home, and Hayden had made a pitstop by the house to drop off a gift about a week and a half ago - it was an easy thing to do now, living so close again. Shane had let him hold her for a few minutes then, after standing over his shoulder like a guard to make sure Hayden washed his hands for five minutes straight. Hayden hadn’t made fun of him for it; he’d been the same way with all his kids. Hayden was glad he’d gotten a chance to hold her then, because Ilya had been taking a nap at the time, and Hayden had basically cried the second Shane had passed her over. Ilya probably would have laughed him right out of the house.

Even now, looking down at her little sleepy face, Hayden’s eyes were stinging a little bit.

Holy *fuck*, he was holding his best friend’s kid in his arms.

He’d never, *ever* complain about how much Shane spoiled his children again.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Hayden greeted softly, smiling down at the infant girl. Ilya settled down on the small ottoman a little ways away from the rocking chair, resting his elbows on his knees as he watched them, his own smile still on his face.

"So I'm Uncle Hayden now?" he asked with a teasing grin. It was only fair; Shane was Arthur *and* Amber's godfather, and Ilya had officially been Uncle Ilya to the kids for years now.

"Was Shane's idea. Don't get used to it," Ilya responded, but there was a shade of pink seeping onto his cheekbones that made Hayden think that they probably hadn't had an official discussion about it at all. He grinned even wider.

"Whatever," Ilya crossed his arms. "Cuddle my baby before I take her back."

Hayden laughed, trying to keep himself quiet so as not to disturb the little girl in his arms. He gazed down at her, at her tuft of dark hair peeking out from her impossibly small hat and her scrunched little nose and her soft little cheeks. After four kids, Hayden could pretty confidently say that there was nothing more perfect in this world than holding a baby in your arms.

“She’s perfect. You guys did good,” Hayden whispered, still looking down at Emiliya.

“We did not do anything,” Ilya frowned. “Hard as I try, is still impossible for Shane to get pregnant.”

Hayden scrunched his nose in disgust, “Gross, man. Jesus. I still don't want to hear that kinda shit about you two. God. I just - Damnit, Rozy, you know what I meant. It's just, like. A thing you say when people have a baby. Like congratulations.”

Ilya was smiling now, though, as Hayden rambled, like he knew exactly what Hayden was talking about and was just amusing himself now. Fucker. Hayden rolled his eyes.

At least now he knew that parenting wouldn't change him.

“Yes,” Ilya said, eyes back on his daughter. “She is gorgeous. She will look just like Shane, I think.”

Hayden had known from the start that Shane was technically the biological father, after a friend of theirs had offered to be their surrogate. Neither himself or Jackie had asked too much or questioned the decision; Shane had briefly mentioned that Ilya had some concerns about genetic traits that could be passed down from his side of things, and that had been that. It didn't matter, of course.

"Heard she was already giving Shane a hard time with the diaper changes, though," Hayden grinned. "Only seven weeks old and already stressing him out with being messy? That's all you, man."

Ilya laughed, sounding pleased. “Much harder to complain about if I accidentally put a dish in the wrong spot in the dishwasher when covered in baby. . . Everything.”

“Right?” Hayden laughed back. “Dude, I think after the twins Jackie actually apologized for ever complaining that she thought I was messy.”

Of course, he actually *was* messy, and Jackie still *did* complain, but he really had gotten a lot better about it all after the small army of messy children needed cleaning up after and he experienced first hand what it was like to be on the other side of it. The twins were 12 now, and he *still* felt like he was fighting a battle everyday to get them to clean their rooms.

Emiliya let out a small whine, wiggling and fussing in Hayden's arms at the sudden noise of their laughter disturbing her. Hayden instinctively went quiet, going about rocking his arms a little to calm her, and Ilya sprang into action as well, letting out a soothing sounding hum as he reached over, stroking the back of his finger across her forehead and down her cheek.

“We're sorry, *moy malen'kiy tsvetochek*,” Ilya whispered, and Emiliya relaxed almost immediately under her father's touch.

“Do you want her back?” Hayden asked quietly, recognizing the look on Ilya's face as once he'd often worn himself when his babies were so close, *right there*, and yet still too far away when not in his arms.

But Ilya shook his head, stroking a finger over his daughter's face once more.

“Yes, but. Is okay. I do not want to disturb her again.”

Hayden hummed. Then, after a minute, he couldn't help but blurt out, “You guys are going to be amazing dads.”

He lifted his eyes off his niece to find Ilya blinking at him. Hayden felt his face grow warm, all of the sudden. He might have grown used to Ilya after all this time, but that didn't mean they just randomly blurted out nice things to each other. Fuck.

“*You* are an amazing dad,” Ilya responded.

Hayden blinked at him.

“I have always thought so. Even when. . .” Ilya shrugged, brushing some of his curls off of his forehead.

“When we actively wanted to kill each other?” Hayden grinned.

Ilya got a sour look on his face, “I did not want to *kill* you.”

“You and Shane are both terrible liars. Literally how did you keep a secret relationship going for 10 years? You gave me a death glare every time you saw me. You subtweeted me all the time. You hated me, and my team, and my amazing hockey skills. Now I'm Uncle Hayden.”

“You have zero hockey skills. Zero.”

“Gee. Thanks, Captain.”

Ilya rolled his eyes so far back that if he'd been one of Hayden's children, he'd have told him they were going to get stuck that way.

“You hated me, man. It's cool. I hated you, too. Still do, most of the time.”

“Now who is lying?”

“Just because my kids and wife warmed up to you-”

“Jackie is my *bestie*, excuse you-”

“Oh, fuck off, Rozy,” Hayden laughed, even though he knew it was entirely true. Ilya rolled his eyes again, and this time, he did reach out his arms, silently asking for Emiliya back. Hayden stood to make it easier, giving his niece one more smile as he passed her over to her father. Ilya let out another cooing noise, whispering to her in Russian with a wide grin before turning to set her in the beautiful, carved bassinet near the wall. Ilya leaned down against the rim, reaching down to brush his hand over her head.

Hayden couldn't help but grin to himself. He'd talked to Shane about this already, both when he'd seen him the other week and during the middle-of-the-night text conversations they'd been having when Shane was trying to soothe Emiliya back to sleep and about ready to cry himself.

“Can't believe how much you love her already?” Hayden asked, only the lightest hint of teasing in his voice. It was a rhetorical question, really; on the day that Shane and Ilya had come over for dinner to tell him and Jackie about their plans to become parents, they'd already been able to tell how deeply in love the two of them had fallen with their unborn child.

He'd teased Shane, the first time they'd talked about whether he wanted kids, about how he'd never be the cool parent, only the responsible one. Boring. He had to wonder, sometimes, if he'd accidentally hurt Shane's feelings with that. He was the responsible uncle, too, but the kids still fucking adored him. And Shane surprised them with gifts or trips to get ice cream and made them giggle like no one's business because Hayden's best friend was still secretly one of the funniest people they knew. Shane *could* be boring or strict and he followed the routine, but those weren't bad qualities. And Hayden was absolutely positive that Emiliya had won the dad lottery with both her parents.

Hayden wasn't expecting for the way Ilya's eyes shined when he looked back at him.

Fuck. Oh, shit.

Look, he was used to Ilya Rozanov being in his life at this point. He was used to being chirped and the deadpan jabs that didn't even faze him anymore. Hayden was used to knowing *way* too much about Shane's sex life. He didn't blink at the frequent dinners popping up on their shared calendar - run, of course, by Jackie - that made it feel like they were all living in each other's pockets even more than it already did. He was used to Uncle Ilya.

But he was *not* prepared to deal with Ilya Rozanov *crying*.

Fuck.

“Uh-”

Ilya shook his head, wiping at his face as he stood straight up, turning away from the bassinet. “Sorry. Shit.”

“You okay?” Hayden asked awkwardly, sticking his hands in his pockets, then pulling them back out to cross his arms over his chest.

Ilya nodded, but didn't say anything more for a while, the nursery falling quiet as they both stood there. Sound trickled in from the kitchen downstairs, Jackie and Shane's voices chattering back and forth and intermixed with laughter.

"After my mother died," Ilya eventually spoke, his voice quiet and tight, "I did not have any real family. My father was an asshole. My brother. . ."

Hayden frowned as Ilya looked away for a moment, shaking his head again. Hayden had picked up bits and pieces about Ilya's family over the years. He'd spoken out about his mother with their work for The Irina Foundation, but everything else he'd learned was what Shane had given up in private, offhanded remarks.

"Shane was first person who was family to me. Then David and Yuna, of course," Ilya smiled. Hayden just sort of nodded. "I didn't think I would have a family again, after my mother's death."

Ilya's voice sounded strained again, his eyes getting watery again in the same way Shane's always did when he was obviously about to cry but refusing to actually let himself. His gaze wandered back down to his sleeping daughter. Hayden took a couple steps over to him, resting a hand on Ilya's shoulder.

"You guys are going to give her an amazing family, Ilya," he whispered. Ilya looked at him for a moment.

"No- Well, yes. Of course. But that is not what I'm trying to say. I never want her to feel like I did, and we will make sure she always has a family with us, and with Yuna and David. But *you* will give her an amazing family, too."

Hayden swallowed hard.

"Yeah, man," his voice cracked as he looked down at Emiliya. "Of course. Whenever she needs."

Ilya gave him a twisted sort of smile, like he wasn't quite sure what to make of Hayden. He turned towards Hayden, dislodging the hand he had on Ilya's shoulder, only to mirror the position and place one on Hayden's. He looked Hayden right in the eyes, practically piercing him right in the soul with his gaze.

"You and Jackie have been family to Shane for a long time. You are brothers. He loves you both, and the kids, very much."

Now Hayden was gonna cry, *damnit*. What was even *happening*?

"But over the last few years - and I swear, Pike, if you ever repeat this, I will kill you. I am Russian, I know how - you two have been family to me as well. I'm very grateful for that. Shane, Emiliya, and I, we are very lucky to have you all."

Hayden broke their eye contact with a few rapid blinks.

"Shit, Roz, what the fuck is wrong with you," Hayden complained, using the sleeve covering his forearm to wipe at his eyes. "You can't just *say* stuff like that."

Ilya let out a laugh, and Hayden shoved at him.

"No, seriously, what the hell? Do you have any idea how much energy I've put into hating you all these years? How often I've complained about you being an asshole? Seriously, you gave me a complex about my passing skills because I couldn't tell if you were serious when you complimented them. And now you're just going to be the first one between us to admit we're *family*?"

He was gonna punch him in his stupid, smug face, Emiliya sleeping next to them or not.

"Like I said, you are not allowed to repeat."

“Of *course* I’m not going to repeat it, do you think I’m insane? I’ve never even called you my friend to Jackie or Shane, Jesus *Christ*. Fuck.”

He waited about two seconds longer, glaring at the smile Ilya was giving him, before giving in and pulling him in for a hug. It wasn't long and consisted of a few manly slaps to each other's backs, but nonetheless, it was a damn hug.

“You're our family, too," Hayden admitted, clearing his throat over the words. Ilya was on the verge of tears once again as well, which made him feel a little better about his whole reaction to the impromptu conversation. Ilya gave him a nod, which Hayden returned, and they both took a step back from one another, standing a respectful, normal, bro distance apart in the nursery once again.

"Never speak of this again?" Ilya suggested.

"*Gladly*," Hayden snorted, shaking his head.

Ilya grinned, then checked on his daughter once more, "We should let her sleep. Go find our spouses.”

"For the record, I *do* still fucking hate you," Hayden cleared his throat.

Ilya huffed, then schooled his face into a satisfied, cocky smirk. The one that usually had Hayden gearing up to throw a punch if he needed. "The feeling is still very mutual, Pike."

Hayden followed him out of the nursery, still feeling raw and, despite their flimsy declarations of mutual disdain, like he needed to pull Ilya into another hug, which was a feeling he wanted to shake off as soon as possible. They might be friends or family or whatever the fuck they were now, but they did *not* have a hugging relationship.

No, sir. Didn't matter how many damn years it's been, that was a step too fucking far. Hayden was not going to start going around *hugging* Ilya fucking Rozanov.

When they made it to the kitchen, Jackie was sitting on a stool on one side of the large kitchen island, Shane standing and leaning against it on the side opposite from her, both with a mug of coffee in their hands. Anya was laying practically on top of Shane's feet, dozing off. Apparently the poor girl had been a bit of an attention hog since the baby came home, cuddling up to one of them as soon as she got the chance. All three of them turned to look as Hayden and Ilya entered the kitchen. Shane, of course, immediately took in their slightly red-rimmed and still watery eyes, and the air of nonchalance they were both trying to put on. Perceptive motherfucker.

“Jesus, what happened? What’s the matter with you two? Is Emiliya okay?” Shane was clenching his hands around his mug like he was on alert, looking back and forth between them like he was scared of the answer. Hayden just let out a wet laugh, scrubbing over his face one more time.

Ilya moved into his husband’s space, pressing them close together as he wrapped an arm around his waist and dropped a kiss onto Shane’s lips. It only earned him a skeptical look from Shane in response, even as Shane easily returned the embrace.

“What did you do?”

“Mila is asleep. We’re fine, *moya lyubov*.”

“I don’t trust you.”

Hayden moved behind where Jackie was sitting on the kitchen barstool, wrapping his arms around her hips and tucking his chin over her shoulder. Her dark brown hair smelled like honey where it was tickling his nose, and it made Hayden smile. He pressed a quick kiss to the side of her neck, causing her to squirm and slap at his hand, all the while Shane and Ilya were still bickering just a little ways away, Ilya now showing him that Emiliya was indeed fine by turning on the fancy video baby monitor on the counter.

“You guys good?” Jackie whispered, leaning back into his embrace.

“Ilya’s a bitch, and I love our niece,” he whined into her shoulder, and he received in return the laughter of his wife and a pat on his hand.

“Did he hit you?” she teased, her tone indicating that she honestly couldn’t care less and didn’t believe the answer was ‘yes’ for even a second.

“With fucking *emotions*. Asshole.”

“My poor baby,” Jackie just laughed. Hayden ignored her.

He made eye contact with Ilya across the room. They gave each other a brief, subtle nod. Hayden wasn’t entirely sure whether it was another mutual agreement to keep their conversation quiet, a mutual understanding, or maybe it was honestly just a moment of real respect and care for each other.

Ilya pulled away from Shane, stealing his coffee mug off the counter and taking a long drink, much to the protest of his husband, who immediately called him an asshole, tripping over Anya in his attempt to take it back. Ilya, of course, caught him before he could actually fall. And Hayden just laughed.

It did still irk him, some days. Ilya’s stupid, smug smirk and the myriad of comments he would still throw Hayden’s way, even if they were dulled and weaker and came from the same place he ribbed Hayes or Bood or Barrett, or even Marlow still. He still felt a little defensive, at times, at the way Ilya would make fun of Shane like it was a game and follow it up with a suggestive look, even if he knew damn well it was their disgusting version of foreplay and Shane made fun of him right back because they might be married, but they were still competitive as fuck. Rozanov was probably still the biggest asshole in the league, though there were some rookies these days definitely attempting to give him a run for his money.

It also irked him, most days, that he really *didn’t* have to learn how to tolerate Rozanov anymore. Didn’t even have to *try*. He wasn’t searching for those redeeming qualities Shane claimed the guy had, anymore. Sure, there were some that Shane talked about that Hayden

still hadn't really ever seen, and some that he *definitely* never *wanted* to see, but, yeah. Fine. Most of everything he'd known about Ilya Rozanov before finding out about him and Shane had in fact been an act. He actually *was* a nice person, and he *was* pretty damn selfless when it came down to it, and he was fucking excellent with kids, and he *was* - Hayden struggled with this one - funny, and he was completely fucking perfect for Shane.

And goddamn it, Hayden didn't have to tolerate him. He was fucking friends with the guy. Ilya Rozanov had become someone he considered *family*.

God. What the hell?

Now that pissed him off.

When did this become his life?

And why was he so content with it?

Stupid.

Stupid Shane and his stupid rivalry and his stupid inability to actually keep it a rivalry and his stupid heart falling in love with the guy and his stupid determination for Hayden and Ilya to actually get along with each other.

And Hayden couldn't even give him shit about it! Because he and Ilya had agreed to never fucking talk about it!

Stupid.

Hayden released a long sigh, hugging Jackie a little tighter, reveling in the feeling of her in his arms, in how much he loved her. He kissed her once more, this time near her temple, as

she informed the other two, “Ruby and Jade were asking when it’s their turn to meet the baby, by the way. The pictures are *not* satisfying them anymore.”

“As soon as Ilya and I are running on more than 3 hours of sleep at a time, they’re number one on the list, I promise,” Shane laughed out. “But five kids in the house is *way* too much right now.”

“Damn straight,” Hayden agreed.

Shane pointed at him with a glare, “Swear jar.”

“Wha- You- Dude, she’s *upstairs!*”

He turned his pointed finger to the baby monitor. “Swear jar.”

Ilya and Jackie were both cackling. And even as he started arguing with Shane, Hayden cracked a smile, too. He might not be sure when this had become his life, but here they all were, nearing mid-thirties, living their dreams, all of them *parents*, standing around the kitchen together and laughing. Hayden was going to fucking enjoy it.

End Notes

THEY'RE RELUCTANT FAMILY TO ME OKAY

they both HATE it and will literally never acknowledge it ever again :))

i went back and forth on a baby name for them so long but emiliya means rival in russian which seemed like exactly the type of thing ilya would find both hilarious and meaningful and talk shane into naming their daughter. HOLLANOV GIRL DADS.

if you got this far, thank you so much for reading!! i really hope that you enjoyed this fic and the dynamic i gave hayden & ilya, and the glimpses we got of hollanov and hayden/jackie in the background. i had a lot of fun playing around in this sandbox, so i'm hoping more inspo strikes me at some point and i can write some more fics for them. if you have thoughts, want to chat, etc, please leave a comment below! or come yell at me on tumblr @isnt-that-wizardd

thank you again for reading! love you all <3<3<3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!