

wow, genetic

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by [ganseyyiiiii](#)

Summary

“Papa?”

“Yes, solnyshko?”

“Can I tell you something and you promise not to tell Dad?”

or, ilya reminds their son that genetics don't make a family, love does. and his dads love him very much.

Notes

Hi! This is my second ever fic so apologies in advance for any mistakes. Enjoy!

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

Chapter 1

“Papa?”

“Yes, *solnyshko*?”

“Can I tell you something and you promise not to tell Dad?”

Ilya glanced up in the rearview mirror. His son was staring out the window, most likely deliberately avoiding eye contact after a request like that. The afternoon sun streaming into the car made his wild blonde curls glow like a golden halo. Some of it was falling into his eyes. Shane was right, it probably was time for a haircut.

He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. Mikhail was only 12 but sometimes Ilya swore it was like there was an old man living inside his child, the way his eyebrows knitted together in such a serious expression as he continued to stubbornly look out the window instead of up at Ilya. Ilya wanted to reach back and smooth the wrinkle out, like he did with Shane.

“Depends on what it is,” Ilya said carefully. “Why don’t you tell me and we’ll figure out what to tell Dad together?” He directed his gaze back on the road, giving Mikhail the space to keep talking. It was something he did, their oldest, shyest child. Something about being in the car made him feel safe enough to have hard conversations. He’d told Ilya about his bad math grade in the car, had waited until they were in the car driving back from Yuna and David’s house to fess up that he was the one who knocked over the lamp, not Anya, had admitted to Shane in the car that, even though he loved his cousins, why did the Pike kids always have to be so *loud* and that’s why he spent the afternoon in the kitchen with Aunt Jackie instead of the backyard.

Shane thought it had something to do with not having to make eye contact in the car. Ilya thought it was being in an enclosed space together for an extended amount of time, no distractions. Maybe it was both.

Today, they were driving back home from Montreal after the last day of Irina Foundation hockey camp. Shane was in the car in front of them with Yuna and their middle daughter, Yelena. Based on the time, their youngest, Lilia, was most likely napping under the watchful eye of Grandpa David (and Anya).

Mikhail still hadn't spoken again. Ilya flicked his eyes up to the mirror. The boy had his lower lip between his teeth, gnawing at the dry skin. He would keep doing it until he bled, and then probably keep doing it some more.

Keeping his eyes on the road and one hand on the wheel, Ilya reached back and gently rubbed his son's knobby knee. "We have a little less than two hours until we reach home. Tell me, Mischa. I am sure there is nothing we cannot figure out together in two hours, *da?*"

Ilya watched through the rearview mirror as Mikhail released his lip from its trap and took a deep breath, in for four seconds, hold for four, and out for four, just like Shane had taught him.

"Will dad hate me if I don't play hockey?" He let out in one breath. Okay, maybe they needed to work on deep breathing some more.

"What, *malysh*? Of course not, your Dad could never hate you." Ilya responded immediately, but there were already tears streaming down his son's face, like letting that fear out had broken the dam holding back whatever fearful emotions had been brewing in him. God, he was so much like Shane, their little boy.

"But if I don't play hockey—"

"If you don't play hockey, nothing will change. Nothing. Not how much your Dad loves you. Not how much I love you. Not how much your sisters or your grandma and grandpa love you, nothing. We love you because you are you, *solnyshko*, not because you play hockey."

Mikhail rubbed harshly at his cheeks but the tears didn't stop. He'd always been such a sensitive child, tears welling up at the slightest provocation. Ilya wanted nothing more than to

pull over, climb into the backseat, and hold his baby in his arms. But that would make Shane pull over too and then Mikhail would clam up from the added attention of his sister and grandma.

So Ilya kept driving and tried to figure out the source of his little sun's tears. "Do you want to stop playing hockey? Or take a break? Either of those are okay, Mischa. No one will be upset with you."

Ilya and Shane (and Yuna) had talked about this, when Mischa first showed interest in playing hockey like his dads. They were on the same page of making sure hockey felt like a game, like *fun*, and never like an obligation to their children. And this week at hockey camp, just like all the other weeks and years Mikhail and Yelena had been playing, Ilya watched them closely for any signs of boredom or distress. But both had looked to Ilya like they were having fun, skating and falling and celebrating with their teammates. Mikhail's team had lost their end-of-week scrimmage, but only by one point and only because they'd had to play with a goalie from one of the younger teams since there was only one in their age bracket.

"No, I like hockey." Another snuffle.

"Did you not like playing wing? It was just for that game, Mischa. You will still play center on your home team." Ilya wouldn't have pegged his son for a hockey diva but well, he could be a drama queen sometimes. Something he definitely got from Ilya.

"No, Papa. Left-wing was fine." The tears had slowed on Mikhail's face but Ilya was no closer to figuring out the source. Maybe he just needed to let the car-silence work its magic. So Ilya didn't speak for a minute. Then another. And another.

Finally, Mikhail spoke. "I just, all week, everyone kept saying to me that I played just like Dad, that I'm going to be just as good as him when I get to the NHL. Even Scott Hunter—"

"Scott Hunter has dementia, don't listen to him."

"Papa!"

“Sorry, sorry. Keep going. What did your great-uncle Hunter say to you?”

“He said – when he was helping us figure out our plays for the scrimmage – he said that I saw the ice just like dad.” More sniffles, and more tears. Ilya was going to kill Scott Hunter.

“So what? You are sad because coaches compare you to boring Shane Hollander and not the great Ilya Rozanov? This is understandable. Your dad may be sad about it, but do not worry, I understand,” Ilya teased. He knew this was not what Misha was actually upset about.

When Ilya had gotten the call eleven and a half years ago, that his brother was dead, that his brother’s wife was dead, that his brother had an infant son named Mikhail and that Ilya was his only next of kin, Ilya had retired from professional hockey that season. It was three seasons earlier than they’d planned, before he could win a third cup with the Centaurs and with his husband, but it was the best decision Ilya had ever made. And so Ilya spent the next four seasons bringing their little sun to every game, holding him up against the glass so Shane could kiss him after a goal, bringing him down to the ice to help lift Ottawa’s third (and fourth) Stanley Cups.

So it wasn’t that. Mikhail had grown up with WAG Ilya and hockey god Shane as dads. It was every hockey-playing kid’s dream to be compared to the seven-time Stanley Cup-winning Shane Hollander. Every kid, including their son.

And their son, for all Ilya knew, *loved* hockey. He loved it in a way Ilya never really had. Ilya loved hockey because he loved *winning*, and hockey was what he was the best at. It could have very well have been ice dancing, or football, or boxing. But no, Ilya was the best at hockey. Mikhail, though, he loved hockey the way Shane loved hockey. Fluent in hockey stats, most comfortable on the ice (and a little awkward off it), Mikhail was obsessed with hockey to the point where Ilya often had to drag him from the rink after practice. So it wasn't that either.

“No, Papa.” Mikhail rolled his eyes at Ilya and huffed out a half-laugh, an exasperated look on his face at Ilya’s teasing. But it was fleeting.

“I just—” Mikhail let out a groan, like he was frustrated with his own emotions, aggressively scrubbing away the tears on his face again. Ilya didn’t like that, didn’t like that his son was angry at his own tears, at his own feelings. Ilya wanted his son (and his daughters) to cry whenever they felt like it and he would follow dutifully behind with a mop and tissues.

“Just what?” Ilya asked, no longer teasing, his tone soft and intent, the same tone he used to coax difficult things out of Shane when he’d bunched himself into knots over something.

“Just, what if I’m not really as good as Dad? And you?”

Oh. Of all the things that Mikhail could’ve said, Ilya wasn’t expecting that. Shane and Ilya had talked a lot about what it would be like to raise kids with hockey superstars for parents. They’d talked about keeping their children out of the spotlight, no posting them on public social media, deals with the sports press to not photograph the kids at games. They’d talked about not pushing hockey on their kids, about letting them try everything and choose whatever interested them the most. They’d talked about what would happen if their kids chose hockey but then decided it wasn’t for them, and how they’d support them in whatever choices they made. But they hadn’t talked about this, about what it would feel like for their kid to choose hockey, but play in the shadow of two giants.

But Mischa wasn’t just good at hockey, he was *good* at hockey. Every single one of the coaches comparing him to Shane this week was correct. He was fast, accurate, and sure on the ice, just like Shane. He was a playmaker in the making, just like Shane. Even bias aside (which to be honest was impossible), Ilya had no doubts Mikhail would play in the NHL, would play for Canada in the Olympics.

Pushing a tiny bit of parental jealousy aside that his Mischa wasn’t being compared to *him*, even Ilya could admit that Mikhail’s game was a lot like Shane’s. And it made sense. It was Shane who had laced up their son’s skates for the first time, had held his tiny hand and taught him how to move on the ice. Ilya doubted Mikhail even remembered, he had been only three and half. The skates had been a Christmas gift from, believe it or not, Cliff Marleau. They’d arrived four days before Christmas and Marleau had harassed Ilya to open them immediately and send him a video. That was how Uncle Cliff’s skates beat the three other pairs of skates Mikhail received that Christmas (from his Aunt Sveta, Uncle JJ, and “Guncle” Harris). Ilya still had that photo, Mischa on the ice in a little Rozanov Centaurs jersey and matching red toque, holding Shane’s index finger in his tiny hand, folded in his wallet.

It was Shane who'd taught Mikhail how to watch game tape, how to study other players and the way they telegraphed their next move, how to bring that knowledge to the ice. And while Ilya had taught their son how to take (and give) a hit safely, how to lace his skates properly, how to rally his team after a loss, it was Shane's game that Mischa emulated. Ilya couldn't have been more proud.

"Mischa, it has never mattered to us how good you are at hockey, how many goals you score or how well you skate. All we care about is that you are having fun. You are having fun, *da?*" Ilya reached back again for Mikhail's hand and squeezed. His hands weren't tiny or soft anymore. They were big and rough, hockey player hands.

"Yeah, I am, but – even if –"

"Even if you never score a goal again. Even if you quit hockey tomorrow, or next month, or next year. Even if you stop playing in juniors and go to university. Even if you stop playing after university. Even if you play in AHL for all of your career. Even if you play on shitty NHL team and never win a game. Even then."

"But what if–"

"But nothing. Mikhail Andreyevich Hollander, there is nothing in the world that you could do that would make your Dad and I stop loving you. Nothing." Ilya couldn't help the firmness that slipped into his voice, but he needed to make sure his kid was listening. "Sometimes our brains have bad days and tell us things that we know are not true, and that is okay. Because I will remind you every single time you forget."

"What about my—" his lip found its way back between his teeth but he was still looking right at Ilya. "What about my *other* father?" The tears had stopped now but the expression on his son's face still broke Ilya's heart.

"What? Your father, he—" Ilya was at a loss now. But it wasn't lost on Ilya how Mikhail avoided the word *real*. He had never asked about Andrei, even when Ilya and Shane had told him in no uncertain terms that it was okay to be curious, okay to want to know more about where he came from. But no, Mikhail had never shown interest. He was plenty interested in Russia, though. He loved the cartoons and sweets and tracing his cyrillic letters. He took

great pride in teaching his baby sister the Russian name for absolutely everything and telling his Dad that Russian was much more fun to learn than French.

So Ilya hadn't pushed. He was content in letting Andrei fade into a memory that only belonged to him, letting Mikhail be *Ilya's* son, just his.

"His brain was mean to him too, sometimes. And it made him do things that— that were not so good for him. But that does not mean he didn't love you. Your mother and father, they loved you so much. So much, that they made sure if anything happened to them, you would be safe." Ilya didn't know how much of that was true. Andrei and his wife had died of a drug overdose, that was all he'd been told. Before that, Ilya hadn't spoken to his brother in years, had no idea he'd gotten married, had a son. It wouldn't surprise Ilya if Andrei had been depressed, if that had contributed to his addiction. Genetics, after all.

Ilya wasn't sure if Andrei had loved his son. But Ilya thought about how much he loved Mikhail now, how much he loved all three of his children, like there were little pieces of his heart and Shane's heart stitched together and walking and dancing and laughing all around them. He thought of how fiercely their mother had loved both of them, Ilya and Andrei, like they were the most precious things on the earth. He even thought of Grigori and how he, in his own cold, hardened way, had loved his sons, had provided for them for as long as he was able.

So he must have. Andrei must have loved his son, this little angelic gift he'd been given. It would be impossible not to. He'd loved him enough to name him *Mikhail*, one who is like God. He'd loved him enough to pay whatever he'd had to to make sure if anything happened to him, Mikhail would be safe with Ilya.

Mikhail was back to silent, back to staring out the window. "Does that make sense, *solnyshko*?"

"Yes," was all Mikhail said. But the tears were back. Ilya felt like his heart was about to explode from grief.

Fuck, Shane would have been better at this, would have known what to say from all his books and blogs and podcasts on raising adopted children. Ilya racked his brain for what to say. He knew there was something else bothering Mikhail, something more than being

nervous about not playing well. Ilya thought back to how this conversation had started. *Can I tell you something and you promise not to tell Dad?* So it had to do with Shane, had to do with being compared to Shane, and it was something Mischa was afraid to let Shane find out. And if he was bringing up Andrei, maybe it had something to do with being adopted. Ilya glanced at the clock. They still had over an hour before reaching home, so he tried again.

“What is it that you’re really upset about? Does it make you feel bad to be compared to your Dad?” Ilya was pretty sure the answer to this was no. Mikhail glowed under praise, especially from his teachers and coaches. So he was at a loss as to what about this was bothering his son.

“Sometimes,” the response was so quiet, Ilya almost didn’t hear it over the car engine and air conditioning. He could tell admitting this hurt Mikhail, that it was something he was scared to reveal. But why?

“That’s okay,” Ilya responded, remembering the thing Galina told him about how it is important to validate feelings, to show that feelings aren’t wrong. “Do you think you know why?” Another Galina trick.

He was looking down at his hands now, picking at the blue nail polish his sister had put on the night before. Ilya braced himself for the fight that would erupt between the two siblings this evening when she would discover Mischa had ruined her “most perfect manicure.”

Mikhail took another deep breath. And then the dam really broke.

“What if all that makes me like Dad is that I’m good at hockey like him and so what if one day I’m bad at hockey and then what if Dad doesn’t love me anymore?” Mikhail choked out in between sobs before dumping his face into his hands.

“Oh *malysh* no, no that will never happen I promise you.” Ilya reached back again for Mikhail’s leg, resigned to keep his arm in this position for the rest of the drive. It was like he used to do when Mischa was a baby and the only thing that would stop him from screaming the entire drive was to suck Ilya’s thumb in his mouth. “Cmon, hold my hand.” And his son did. And it was wet with tears.

Ilya stared into the rearview mirror until Mikhail finally met his eyes before continuing. “If you woke up tomorrow and forgot how to skate, your Dad would still love you as much as he does this very second, as much as he did the minute he got to hold you for the first time. I promise you, Mischa. How much your Dad loves you, it has never had anything to do with how well you play hockey, and it never ever will.”

More sniffles. And a nod this time, *good*. But Ilya knew he hadn’t hit on the biggest part of Mikhail’s teary admission.

He and Shane had *also* spent a lot of time talking about what it would be like for their kids to grow up in a family where not everyone was biologically related in the same way. Even though he’d legally been adopted in Canada by Shane and Ilya, Mikhail was only blood-related to Ilya. Yelena had been adopted in Canada as a newborn from a young Korean-Canadian woman they’d been connected with through an agency, two months after Mischa’s fourth birthday. They’d planned to stop their family there, but six years later when they got a call that Yelena’s birth mother had given birth to another daughter, well that’s how little Lilia joined their family. So Yelena and Lilia were biologically half-sisters, and even though they were Korean-Canadian, they looked like Shane.

“And you know, hockey is not the only thing that makes you like your Dad.” Ilya added. “You both hate the big light in the living room, both take *so* long in the shower, both love nattō.” Ilya semi-feigned a disgusted shudder at that and Mischa let out a little laugh, for real this time. *Better*.

“What else?” Mikhail pressed, and he squeezed Ilya’s hand a little.

“Well, you’re both so stubborn, and you both get grumpy when you’re sleepy.” Mikhail rolled his eyes again but he held onto Ilya’s hand.

“You and Dad both like to wake up early, before anyone else is awake.”

“Because it’s so quiet, when everyone is still sleeping,” Mikhail explained, as if Ilya didn’t already know.

“Yes, you both like when it is quiet. You both love to read, and you both need glasses.” That one got a disgruntled huff out of Mischa. He hated wearing his glasses, even though two of his teachers, the school nurse, and an optometrist said he needed them for reading.

“You and your Dad are both very organized. You have a system for how you like your things and you don’t like it when other people mess it up. Neither of you like surprises or when plans change. That used to make you so upset when you were small, when your routine was changed. Your Dad too.” Mischa was quiet now, but he was still gripping onto Ilya’s hand, still looking at him through the mirror.

“You both show people you love them in the same way, by doing little things for them to make them happy. Like how you remember Lena’s water bottle every day, even when she forgets. Or when you save the pickles from your sandwich for me to eat. That’s another thing! You and Dad both don’t like pickles!”

A real giggle escaped Mikhail and Ilya let out a breath he felt like he’d been holding since his baby started to cry. Mikhail let go of Ilya’s hand and wiped at his face again, softer this time.

“See, *solnyshko*. You are like your Dad in so many ways, not just hockey. You know,” Ilya said softly, “my mama, your Grandma Irina, once told me that, when someone loves you, a piece of them stays stuck inside you forever. So they are always with you, they never really go away. And your Dad, he loves you *so much*, so that means there is *so much* of him in you, always.”

Mikhail was quiet for a moment, considering. “Does that mean there’s a piece of me in you and Dad too?” he asked quietly, and instead of the old man, Ilya saw a tiny, six-month old baby swaddled in a blue hospital blanket staring up at him, too small and precious for this world.

“Yes of course. I carry all of you with me all the time,” Ilya tapped his chest, “right here.”

Mikhail just nodded, looking out the window again. But the tears were gone, and so was the furrow in his brow. He looked calmer now, more like a 12 year old boy. But Ilya needed to make sure he understood.

“Genetics do not make a family, Mischa. Love does. And you are so, so loved. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Papa,” Mikhail responded. And then, the furrow was suddenly back. “Papa?”

“Yes, *solnyshko*?”

“What are genetics?”

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

For the first time in his life, Shane Hollander wished he had never played hockey, had never been a professional hockey player. If this was the kind of grief playing in his shadow caused his baby, his first baby, Shane would return every Stanley Cup in a heartbeat to make it all go away.

or, Mischa tells Shane how he's feeling, and Shane considers burning down the internet (as a preventative measure)

Chapter Notes

And here's part two! Enjoy! (I adjusted the tags a bit to add more characters but all the content warnings are the same).

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

All these years later, Shane still hated being in Montreal. The skyline made him tense, the Voyageurs colors everywhere made his stomach turn. By now, sixteen years after the unceremonious non-renewal of his contract (which Ilya still referred to as his "gay exile"), there wasn't anyone still playing for Montreal that had been on Shane's team. Hayden and Jackie had moved out of the city and into the suburbs after Hayden's retirement, now enjoying their empty nest. JJ and his wife lived in a fancy high rise but Shane had never actually seen it, preferring to lure his friends to the Ontario countryside with promises of fresh air and overly-excited children.

Nowadays, the only reason Shane found himself in Montreal was for the week of their summer camps (and the occasional Irina Foundation event). Thankfully, Shane was now driving in the direction of Ottawa, towards the cottage. As a professional hockey player, he'd spent the better part of his life on the road, flying from coast to coast, sleeping in hotel rooms and team buses more often than his own bed. And he'd done it with little to no complaint. Maybe it was old age, but Shane couldn't stand to be away from home anymore. Hotel rooms were exciting for the first few days (and nights, especially nights), but after a week of unfamiliar sheets and harsh overhead lighting, Shane was itching in his own skin.

Or maybe it was that he finally had a real home to get back to, not an empty apartment filled with throw pillows and abstract art someone else had chosen for him, but one filled with color and laughter and toys and books and children's hockey gear, a home where his husband made dinner every night and Shane had his vegetable garden and there were careful pencil marks on the wall next to the stairs marking the growing height of his three children.

One of the said children was currently fast asleep in the backseat, head resting comfortably on her grandma's shoulder (who was also napping but would deny it immediately if anyone pointed it out). Yelena was eight, a fact Shane still found a bit unbelievable, but she'd been prone to naps since she was small. Out of their three kids, Yelena had been the best sleeper. She'd started sleeping through the night incredibly young. It had worried Shane at first, but the doctors (and Ilya, and his mom, and Jackie, and Lisa, and the many websites and forums he consulted, just to be safe) assured him it was completely normal. The habit had continued into childhood. Yelena could fall asleep anywhere, in any environment. She used to fall asleep at Centaurs games despite the roaring crowd, swaddled to Shane's chest. Once, when she was five and at an Irina Foundation camp in Ottawa, Shane had found her fast asleep on the cold metal bench behind the home goal, entirely unbothered by the raucous slamming of pucks and children against the plexiglass. It was a habit Shane was convinced Lena had somehow picked up from his mother who, ever since Shane could remember, had never been able to sit through an entire movie without dozing off on the couch. And now the pair were snoring softly as Shane drove them home.

Mikhail had been the opposite, often waking up only an hour after being put down, wailing until someone picked him up and rocked him back to sleep. The doctors had told them it was likely due to the several days he spent alone in the hospital after his parent's death. That wasn't even counting how neglected he might have been before. They hadn't been sure exactly how long Mikhail had been alone in that apartment after his mother and father died, a day, maybe two at most, until a neighbor grew concerned and investigated. Just the thought made Shane's heart ache, like someone was wringing the muscle out in their hands. He felt the telltale pinprick of tears in his eyes and blinked them away. *Mischa is fine*, Shane reminded himself, breathing steady. He is healthy and happy and probably reading the Crosby biography that was due to the library tomorrow.

This was also the longest stretch he and Ilya had been away from baby Lilia. She'd been born just after their camps ended two years ago, and last year Shane and Ilya had split the week in Montreal, three days for Shane and four for Ilya. Lilia had been born premature and spent weeks in the hospital before they could bring her home. Shane considered those two and a half weeks the most terrifying time of his life, up there with the near-crash of the Centaur's plane in 2021 and the week Ilya spent alone in Moscow sorting out Mikhail's adoption. Lilia was fine now, a little small for her age but a perfectly healthy, beautiful toddler. Still, Shane had felt a bit sick at the thought of leaving his tiny baby (who was decidedly no longer a tiny

baby) for a whole week. But Lilia hadn't seemed to mind. She was excited to see her dads' and siblings' faces, of course, when they FaceTimed every night (and every morning, and sometimes in the afternoon), but they only held her interest for a few minutes before she was back to her favorite pastime of cuddling Anya's giant head in her tiny lap or giggling with her best friend, Grandpa David.

So yes, Shane Hollander hated Montreal, and he couldn't wait to get home.

—

Yelena (and Yuna) woke up as Shane pulled into their driveway. This was Yuna's car and the plan was for Yuna to drive the 20 minutes back to her house while the kids took baths here, and then meet back at Yuna and David's for dinner and to finally pick up Lilia and Anya.

What wasn't on the agenda was Shane getting nearly tackled to the ground by his son.

"Woah!" Shane huffed as the wind was knocked out of him, barely out of the car. He tried to get a look at Mikhail's face but it was buried in his jacket. He still had his backpack on, hockey stick and bag forgotten in the gravel drive, skinny arms squeezing tight around Shane's middle.

"Why is Mischa being weird?" Shane heard Yelena ask as Yuna pulled her out of the car. Shane just gave his mother a shrug as she led his daughter into the house.

Ilya was standing by his car, unloading their bags from the trunk. He came around and picked up Mischa's things. Shane gave him a questioning look, as in '*what the hell is up with our kid?*' Ilya returned with his own patented parenting look, '*everything is okay. we'll talk later, when they're distracted.*' Shane just nodded, and Ilya took the bags inside.

"Hey buddy, let's put this down, yeah?" Shane said softly, and he carefully unwrapped Mikhail's arms from around him just enough to slip his backpack off and set it on the ground before hugging his son properly, tightly and with the pressure evenly distributed across his torso, like he knew Mischa liked.

Mikhail didn't hug Shane back this time, but that was okay. Ever since he was small, he liked to be held like this, arms tucked against his own chest and wrapped up in Shane like a cocoon, even now as an "almost teenager." Shane tried and failed to remember the last time he collapsed into his parents' arms like this. It had to have been at least 10 or 15 years ago. He hoped Mikhail never stopped.

"Did something happen?" Shane near-whispered, the fluffy hair on Mikhail's head tickling his nose. He was going to be so tall, taller than Ilya maybe. He was already big for his age. Shane made a mental note to make sure he was eating enough for the growth spurts that would inevitably keep coming.

Mikhail didn't respond, not really. He shook his head and made a sound into Shane's chest that sounded close to a *no*. Well, that was obviously a lie. So Shane tried again.

"Do you know what's upsetting you?" Again, no words, just a little shrug in Shane's arms. And then a snuffle. He could feel his shirt getting wet. *Shit*. It'd only been two hours since Shane had last seen his son, but then again he hadn't seen much of him today at all, having been preoccupied with coaching the younger kids team. But Ilya said everything was fine, so they must have talked about it in the car. Okay.

"Did you and Papa talk about it?" That got Shane a nod. Good. "Do you wanna talk to me about it too?" A long pause, then another nod, and a shaky deep breath. Still no words, but that was fine.

"Okay, we can talk. Now?" Head shake, *no, later*. "Later is good too. How about a walk after dinner, just you and me?" Shane rubbed his hand in big, firm circles across Mikhail's back, the same way he used to do when he'd carry him against his chest, trying to soothe the crying baby back to sleep.

That got Shane a response. "Okay," Mikhail breathed out, still hiding his face.

Shane leaned down and kissed the top of his head. "I love you, Mischa." He mumbled something close enough to *I love you too* into Shane's shirt. Shane slowly unwrapped his

arms from around his son, holding onto his shoulders for a second just in case Mikhail was a little unsteady on his feet.

Shane didn't force him to meet his eyes yet, just kept his voice soft, "Why don't you go inside and take a shower? You can use our bathroom. We've got plenty of time before we need to leave for dinner."

That got Mikhail to look up at him, a small smile on his face. His cheeks were tear-stained, nose red, and he'd been chewing on his lip. Shane's heart ached again. But there was no use pressing the issue now. They'd talk this evening, when Mischa was ready.

"Okay? I'll get your bag. Go, before your sister uses all the hot water." That was a lie. Shane had gotten an extra large water heater installed at the cottage after Yelena was born, so they never ran out of hot water, even when Shane *and* Mischa took extra long, extra hot showers. But Ilya insisted it was important for character-building, to instill the fear of cold water, so Shane played along.

Mikhail nodded seriously at that before dashing into the house. Shane watched through the large windows as he took the stairs two at a time before disappearing down the hallway that led to his parents' bedroom. Shane chuckled to himself, gathering the remaining bags from Yuna's car. Mikhail hadn't stopped in his own room for fresh clothes, which meant he was going to dig through Shane's closet for something to wear that was way too big for him. Shane was pretty sure half his old Centaurs t-shirts were in Mischa's room anyway.

Yuna was coming down the stairs as Shane exited the garage, having deposited all the kids' hockey gear and the extra camp equipment in their designated bins. He could hear Ilya in the kitchen.

"Lena is in the shower. I'm going to head back and help your Dad with dinner," Yuna said as she slipped on her shoes.

"Okay, thanks Mom. We'll be over in a couple hours."

"Is everything okay?" Yuna asked, taking her keys from Shane.

“Yeah, just – big feelings, you know,” Shane shrugged. He wasn’t sure what had happened in the car, but this wasn’t a breakdown, and the look Ilya had given him told Shane that there wasn’t anything immediate to worry about.

“Probably just the intensity of camp catching up to him.”

“Yeah, probably.”

Yuna smiled softly and rubbed Shane’s arm before grabbing her purse and heading out the door.

—

Shane found Ilya in the kitchen, emptying the dishwasher they’d run before leaving for Montreal last week. He stopped when Shane walked in, shutting the machine door with his foot before leaning back against the counter. Ilya looked tired, and Shane knew he probably looked the same. Running these camps could be exhausting, especially as they’d grown over the years. More coaches’ schedules to coordinate, more children to corral. But it was also one of the most fulfilling things Shane had ever done. He loved watching how much young kids could improve with just a week of dedicated attention. He loved that he, his husband, and some of their best friends were creating a new generation of hockey players, boys and girls, that took inclusivity and diversity in their locker rooms as a given, not something they needed to fight for or dream of. And Shane knew Ilya felt the same. So being a little tired was worth it, to make hockey a little better for their kids. And it was especially okay because they had the whole next month to spend at the cottage before Mischa and Lena started back at school in September.

“He’s showering in our room. We’re going to talk after dinner.”

“Good, that is – I told him he should talk to you. He cried a lot in the car.” Ilya stated. He had a far away look in his eyes, like he was remembering how much Mischa used to cry when they first brought him home. Shane was remembering it too, remembering the echoing wails and sleepless nights and how, one time, Ilya had come home from the store to find Shane

huddled up on the ground, rocking a screaming Mikhail back and forth in his arms as Shane sobbed too because he couldn't figure out how to get their new baby to finally feel safe.

"What happened?" Shane asked, trying and failing to shake the memory loose.

"He asked me not to tell you, wants to talk to you himself," Ilya explained, eyeing Shane carefully, like he knew exactly what secret, never verbalized feeling this would bring up in Shane.

Shane tried to keep his expression neutral but he couldn't help the twinge, felt deep in his heart. He didn't feel it often, almost never now that Mikhail was older, and he'd talked through it extensively with his therapist, parsing out the feeling until Shane could recognize and dismiss it as unfounded and untrue. But still, sometimes, it crept back in like an old, aching wound.

Maybe there really was something to it, something about shared blood. Maybe it was unconscious, not anything either of them would be able to recognize, but as the outsider, Shane was particularly attuned to it. Maybe something about sharing blood with Ilya made Mikhail feel closer to him, more connected, safer.

But no, no that wasn't true. It had never been true and it never would be. Shane had read about this before, that it was perfectly normal for kids to sometimes be drawn to one parent over the other for whatever reason, and for it to switch on a dime. It had nothing to do with blood relation, nothing to do with some inherent, indescribable, deeper connection to one parent over the other. It was just kids being kids.

So Mischa going to Ilya first with his big feelings was fine, and Shane would never begrudge his child for it. Logically, he knew it was okay, and that this feeling was irrational and transient, as long as—

"I didn't do anything to upset him, did I? I know I wasn't able to pay as much attention to him today but I thought that—"

“No, no *moya lyubov*, no.” Ilya was in front of him in an instant, gathering Shane’s hands in his and kissing their tangled fingers. His eyes were boring into Shane in the way he did when he needed Shane to really internalize what he was saying. “It was nothing you did, I promise.”

Shane closed his eyes and sighed, letting his head drop, lightly knocking his forehead into Ilya’s. Ilya kept their hands together and tilted his head forward a bit so their noses brushed. “I know how much it tortures you to see them hurt, I know *lyubimyy*. But he’s okay, we talked a lot in the car and he’s okay. I reminded him how much we love him, how much you love him, and how that will never change.”

Ilya stepped even closer and untangled one hand to tilt Shane’s head up so he could look him in the eye. The intent stare was still there, deep blue eyes, same as Mikhail. Shane regretted, for maybe the millionth time, that they did not have any pictures of Ilya from his childhood.

“I think it would help him, to explain how he is feeling to you, and to hear that all again, but coming from you. And he asked me to let him tell you himself.” Yeah, Ilya definitely knew about the twinge. No matter how deep Shane banished it, no matter that he’d never said it out loud to Ilya, Ilya knew. He always knew Shane.

Ilya smiled softly, and Shane was once again struck by how lucky he was to have ended up with Ilya Rozanov as his husband. Ilya was a natural father and had known, definitively, that he wanted children the second Shane broached the topic for the first time. They hadn’t even been married yet, and Ilya was sure. It had taken Shane some more thinking (and spiraling) before he knew for sure too. It wasn’t that Shane didn’t want a family of his own, he really did. He just hadn’t been sure if he had it in him, with all of his own shit going awry in his head, if he could give a child 100% of himself all the time, like they deserved.

It had been Jackie who talked some sense into him. She explained, in her patient, mothering way, that no one could possibly give 100% to anyone, even their own child (and especially more than one). That’s what partners were for. Somedays it was a 50-50 split. More often it was 60-40. Sometimes it was 90-10. And on the days when neither parent could give enough, well that was what grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins and friends were for.

That had made Shane sure, that if he was going to have a family with anyone, it was going to be Ilya. There was no one else Shane could trust enough to make up for his 90%, to be there always, steady and constant.

Ilya reached up with his free hand and smoothed out the furrow in Shane's brow that he hadn't realized was there. Shane tried to relax, relishing the warmth of having Ilya so close. "He enjoyed camp though, right? I mean, he had fun?"

"Yes, he had fun. After he finished crying, he spent rest of car ride talking about *you know who*," Ilya said, a little conspiratorially as he wiggled his eyebrows at Shane.

Ah yes, Shane knew exactly who *you know who* was. Ronan Drover-Barrett was one year older than Mikhail, and their son was undeniably besotted with them.

Ilya sighed dramatically and fluttered his eyelashes in a bad impression of a lovesick teenager. "*Ronan said they liked my book and Ronan showed me how to braid their hair and Ronan and I switched sandwiches at lunch because they know I don't like ham and—*"

"Okay, shhh, I get it. I have eyes too, I saw it myself." Shane whispered, glancing over at the stairs, as if there was any way Mischa was out of the shower so quickly. He rolled his eyes at Ilya, but he wasn't really exaggerating. Over the past year or so of hockey practices and Centaurs games and backyard barbecues, Shane had, more than once, caught Mikhail gazing at Ronan like they were the only person in the room. It was sweet.

"Hmm, Drover-Barrett family will have to pay high dowry for the eldest Hollander son. He is catch, you know!"

"Who the hell pays dowries anymore, Ilya?" Shane questioned, looking at his husband like he was crazy. Then after a second, because he couldn't help himself, "And why wouldn't we also pay a dowry?" Shane didn't know the particulars of how dowries worked, but Ronan identified as non-binary and used they/them pronouns, so maybe they would not want to be called the bride in this highly fictional wedding Ilya was cooking up in his head.

"Ah yes, you are very correct, wise husband. I will consult ancient texts to determine how many goats we must trade." Ilya was grinning now, clearly very much enjoying his little bit and that Shane was, albeit reluctantly, playing along.

“Okay village elder, you do that. In the meantime though, we should get changed and head over soon. I miss our baby.” One mention of Lilia was enough to send Ilya into action. He kissed Shane loudly on the cheek before turning out of the kitchen.

“Me too. I will check on them upstairs. You sent Mischa to our bathroom, so he is probably still in there.”

Ilya started up the stairs, taking them two at a time just like his son, and pulled his phone out of his pocket. “Children! Your Auntie Sveta is calling, wants to hear all about camp! Whoever is done with bath quickest gets to talk to her first!”

Shane just smiled to himself and finished unloading the dishwasher.

—

Dinner with the grandparents was an uncharacteristically calm affair. Usually, Mischa and Lena would devolve into bickering five minutes into the meal, with Ilya chiming in only to rile them up further and Lilia (with her impressively advanced language skills – everyone said so, not just Shane) chattering excitedly from her seat as if she was an equal participant in the wicked fast conversation between her older siblings.

Tonight though, Yelena was practically falling asleep into her chili bowl. Mikhail spent most of dinner pushing food around his plate and giving one-word responses to his grandparents’ gentle questions about how he liked the last few days of camp and if he was excited to start Grade 7. Lilia, for her part, was largely quiet too. As disinterested in her dads she had seemed over the phone, she was uncharacteristically clingy tonight, and insisted on spending all of dinner in Shane’s lap (but Shane was not complaining).

Usually their most squirly child, Lilia now rested calmly in Ilya’s arms, playing with his necklace, as he chatted with Yuna in the kitchen about their barbarous new HOA president in Ottawa. Yelena, who had insisted on starting a puzzle with her grandfather, was now asleep with her head in his lap in the living room. Mikhail had disappeared.

Shane gave Ilya a questioning look and he just nodded his head toward the back door.

Mikhail sat on the back porch steps, chin resting on his knees with Anya dutifully stationed at his side. Shane held up Anya's leash.

"Ready for our walk?"

—

"Try holding it with these two fingers," Shane repositioned Mikhail's fingers so he was gripping the flat rock with his thumb on top and index finger on the edge.

He tried tossing a rock again, and again it sank with an unceremonious plot. Mikhail let out a frustrated groan and stomped his foot a little. "This is dumb!"

"Yeah? Your Papa said the same thing when he couldn't do it either," Shane responded calmly before tossing his own stone and watching it skip four times before sinking into the water.

They'd ended up by the lake, in a pebbly area where Shane had once, many years ago, unsuccessfully tried to teach Ilya how to skip rocks. Ilya had been terrible but insisted that the rocks were Canadian and therefore did not respond well to his Russian touch.

It'd taken about 10 minutes to reach this spot and Shane had stayed mostly quiet the whole way, hoping the silence would prompt Mikhail to start speaking. It didn't. He spent most of the walk with a dour look on his face, like Shane was forcing him into this. Anya had trotted along beside them, oblivious to the gloomy mood.

God, he was so much like Ilya sometimes. In taking failure at simple things like skipping rocks as a personal affront, and in taking his emotions as a personal affront too.

Shane watched the ripples in the lake from where his stone landed dissipate. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mikhail reach down for another rock. But instead of flicking it across the surface of the water, he chucked it into the lake as hard as he could.

“That’s just not how you do it at all.”

“I don’t want to play this stupid game!”

Shane had to force himself not to laugh. It wasn’t funny, not really. But it was like looking at a mini Ilya, the way Mikhail crossed his arms over his chest with a huff and glowered at the water like it had insulted him, lips set in a comically perfect frown. He was even wearing one of Ilya’s old Raiders shirts, the baggy clothes making him look smaller and younger than he was.

“Okay. Do you want to tell me what you wanted to talk about instead?” That earned Shane a signature Rozanov glare, as if he’d just tricked Mikhail into a new topic of conversation.

“No,” Mikhail huffed, back to looking at the lake like it offended him.

“Do you want to go back to the house?”

Silence. And then, so quiet Shane could barely hear it, “I don’t want to make you sad.” Mikhail met Shane’s eyes, finally, and there was something so earnest in his expression, so serious and yet so childlike at the same time, as if hurting Shane terrified him to his core.

“Oh baby, it’s okay. You can tell me anything, even if you think I will be sad. I want you to tell me what’s upsetting you, please?” Shane wanted to fold Mischa back up in his arms, wrap him up in blankets and carry him like he was a baby again, so nothing could ever get past Shane to hurt him. But Mischa wasn’t a baby anymore, something had already hurt him, and Shane needed him to keep talking, so he resisted the urge to smother his kid in kisses and carry him all the way back to the house.

Shane watched Mischa pick up another rock and grip it in his fist. He took a deep breath, waited, and then breathed out. And then again, just like they practiced. And then he flicked the stone across the water and it skipped once, twice, before sinking. Then he started to talk.

“One of the other boys, in the locker room this morning, he wouldn’t believe me when I told him that Lena was my sister. He said we didn’t look like brother and sister.”

Shane had never felt homicidal towards other people, not really, and certainly not towards a child. But he was starting to get why Ilya sometimes threatened to punt kick kids from the other team at Mischa’s peewee games.

“But then Ronan came over and told him he was being ignorant and that obviously we were brother and sister because both of our jerseys said Hollander,” Mikhail continued in a matter-of-fact tone. Shane didn’t miss how his face lit up when mentioning Ronan.

“Ignoriant? Do you mean ignorant?”

“Yeah! Ronan said it means he was being a stupid idiot.”

That had Harris Drover written all over it. “That’s not exactly–”

“And then they– they, um,”

“And then they what?”

“Uh, they kicked one of his pads across the room – but please don’t get them in trouble they were just sticking up for me!” Mikhail rushed out the second half of the sentence in one breath, looking at Shane with wide, pleading eyes.

Shane tried (and this time failed) not to laugh a little at that. Kicking a teammate’s gear across the room wasn’t exactly the kind of locker room behavior they were trying to

encourage but he'd let this one slide. And okay, Ronan was definitely Troy Barrett's kid. "Is that what upset you? Not Ronan kicking the pads, I mean what that kid said about you and Lena?"

"No, he was just being um, what was that word?"

"Ignorant."

"Yeah, that. So I wasn't mad at him, because he just didn't know. And plus he said sorry later and gave me half his banana." Mikhail tried another stone. He got two skips again before it sank into the lake.

"That's nice of him," Shane responded. He handed Mikhail a larger, flatter stone. But he didn't toss it yet, turning it over in his hands and rubbing at the smooth surface.

"Yeah. But then..." he trailed off as he tossed the stone. Three skips this time.

"But then, um, when I was getting more water later, I heard Uncle Troy and Uncle Wyatt talking. And they were talking about me – but I don't think they saw me! – and they were saying my shot was good. Uncle Wyatt said he couldn't believe I made that wraparound shot – You know! The one yesterday!" Mikhail looked at Shane for confirmation that he'd seen the shot, as if Shane hadn't shaken Ilya by the shoulders and cheered so loud his throat hurt when he'd seen it. Shane just nodded, smiling, and Mikhail continued.

"Uncle Troy said of course I made it, that I'm Shane Hollander's son. And that made me feel good, that they thought I was like you." He glanced at Shane again, eyes bright.

"But then we lost the game. And one of the other kids, Sophie – I don't think she was trying to be mean because she was laughing and she's actually really nice and she helped me line up my rainbow tape – she said that she thought we were for sure going to win because we had a Hollander on our team."

Shane kept quiet, tucking his hands into his pockets and looking out at the shimmering water painted gold from the sunset, giving his son the space to keep talking at his own pace.

“I think I just– I started thinking about– like, what if I do play in the NHL? But then I miss a shot, or lose a game, or lose the cup, and then everyone will know it’s not real, that I’m not *really* your son, that Shane Hollander’s *real* son never would’ve played like that?”

Mikhail had been quiet and somber for most of the evening, having exhausted all his big feelings in the car with Ilya. But now there were slow, silent tears falling down his cheeks as he stared down at his feet.

The twinge deep in Shane’s body that had been silently throbbing all evening suddenly split open into a canyon of pain, with rivers of blood and tears for rain. For the first time in his life, Shane Hollander wished he had never played hockey, had never been a professional hockey player. If this was the kind of grief playing in his shadow caused his baby, *his first baby*, Shane would return every Stanley Cup in a heartbeat to make it all go away. Because it killed Shane, it killed him, to think that anyone could joke or question or imply that Mikhail wasn’t his son. As if his kids’ names weren’t tattooed on his heart, as if not sharing DNA meant anything when Shane could hardly breathe when his babies cried, as if Mischa and Lena and Lila weren’t fragments of his own soul.

And the worst part was, Mikhail was right. People would say those exact things. Maybe not his teammates or his coaches, maybe not even the press or the commentators, but definitely anonymous faces on social media. Because they didn’t know them, because they were *ignorant*. Shane needed to kill the internet.

Shane couldn’t help but think of the trip that had preceded his gay exile from Montreal. The online chatter had been horrific. It was an occupational hazard, getting torn apart on the internet by people hiding behind usernames and anonymizing profile pictures. He’d dealt with it for his entire career. But after the video of him and Ilya had leaked, after the trip, the attacks had gotten so personal. The journalists and commentators didn’t say it outright, but the internet had no qualms. Even racial attacks, which Shane had been lucky enough to avoid for much of his career up until that point, now seemed fair game. It was as if, if they were going to openly hate him for being gay, they might as well throw his race in there too.

The thought of Mischa experiencing even a fraction of that cutting, personal animus from people who had no idea who he was and how hard he worked, well it made Shane want to

grab his son, march to the bottom of the lake, and build them a house there where nothing could ever hurt him again.

Mikhail's hands were fisted at his sides. Shane reached out and took his left hand, unfurling his fingers and holding it lightly. He used his free hand to gently wipe the tears off his perfect face.

"I'm going to be honest with you, because you're a big kid now and I think you can handle it. People are probably going to say things like that, maybe things that are even worse. They'll say it because they don't know you, because they don't have to say it to your face or because they're hiding behind screens, because, for some sad reason I will never understand, it makes them feel better to hurt someone else. Because they're ignorant stupid fucking idiots." Shane knew he shouldn't be cursing in front of his 12 year old son, but all rules had exceptions.

Shane did his best impression of Ilya's intent *listen to me* stare. "But they'll be wrong. I'm telling you now Mischa — and I'll remind you every time you forget — you are *my* kid. My first baby. I knew it from the first time I saw you. Papa sent me a picture of you, sleeping on his chest, and I knew then that I would love you more than I'd ever loved anything in the world, because you were *ours*. You're a part of me, a gift I didn't deserve."

Shane was crying now too, but he didn't move to wipe his face. He kept one hand in Mikhail's, the other one cup his cheek. For once, Shane forced him to keep looking at him, needing Mikhail to hear exactly what he was saying.

"I love you, Mischa, and you will always be *my* son. If you quit hockey tomorrow, if you played shitty hockey for the rest of your life, you would be my son, and I would still love you as much as I did the first time I held you, as much as I do right now. Hockey isn't what makes you my son," Shane moved his hand from Mikhail's cheek to tap once over his heart, and then placed his hand over his own heart, holding it there. "It's something special, lives right here, and it's never going away. Okay?"

Mikhail's tears had stopped, his eyes glistening like the surface of the water. He sniffed once, and then in a whisper, "Okay, Dad."

Shane pulled him in for a tight hug, rocking them back and forth a little. He buried his nose in Mikhail's too-long hair, inhaling the achingly familiar scent of the curl cream he and Ilya

shared. Everything was going to be okay.

—

They started the walk back to house and Shane's heart felt lighter at the slight skip in Mischa's step.

“Dad?”

“Yes, bud?”

“What are genetics? Papa said to ask you.”

Chapter End Notes

I am aware that it is impossible for Anya to still be alive in the year of 2037 if Ilya adopted her in 2021-ish. Good thing this is fiction and I Don't Care!

Once again, disregard my math. I think the timeline I worked out is Shane joins the Cens in 2021-22, they win cups in the 21-22 season and 23-24 season. Mischa is born sometime in the fall of 2025, he's adopted in the spring of 2026 and that's Ilya's last season (he's 35 and had planned to retire at 38 but this is better). Ilya spends the next three seasons as WAG-in-chief with baby Mischa swaddled to his chest. Shane and the Cens win two more cups in 27-28 and 28-29. Shane retires at the end of the 28-29 season, age 38 (two years ahead of schedule but again, this is better). Just pretend this makes sense, okay? I needed Shane to win more cups with Ottawa than he did in Montreal.

I also want to add that I, myself, am not adopted. So I'm not writing this from a place of personal knowledge. I am, however, a former gifted kid and therefore am intimately familiar with the double edged sword of loving to be praised for my achievements and being absolutely terrified that one day it'll all stop and I will disappoint everyone in my life. So there's that!

I don't have any more ideas for another chapter but if anyone else does, please share! I would love to write more about Shane and Ilya as parents or about any of the Hollander

kids. Thank you for reading and for all your kind words, it really means a lot to me!

Chat more on Twitter [@ganseyyiii](https://twitter.com/ganseyyiii)!

End Notes

Thank you for reading, I hope you liked it! Far into the future fics aren't usually my thing but Hollanov is special to me.

Author has no idea how hockey works for 12 year olds, or how international adoption between Russia and Canada works, so please suspend disbelief. Also please pretend there are no mistakes in my math when it comes to retirement timelines, how many cups the Cens/Shane won, and the ages of all the Hollander kids. I think it should work out to Mischa being 12, Yelena is 8, and Lilia is 2, but I could've fucked that up.

I have ideas for a second part to this fic where Ilya tells Shane about this talk and Shane has his own internal crisis about it before talking to his kid and everything is so fine so lmk if you like this and maybe I'll write the part 2! — PART TWO COMING SOON BY POPULAR DEMAND (omg all the comments you guys are so kind i could die)

Also! adding here because a few people asked, I chose the name Mikhail because one of my best friends in middle school was Russian and named Mikhail so it was the first Russian boy's name that came to mind. I chose Yelena because I liked it and I thought it would be kinda sweet if they named their first daughter a Y-name as an homage to Yuna. And Lilia because Lily. The kids all have Hollander as their last name so I think Shane would want something in their names to reflect Ilya as well. Sue me I think Shane and Ilya would look fondly on those pseudonyms (but I know others have different opinions and that's fine too!).

Comments are so appreciated or DM me on Twitter [@ganseyyiiiii](#), even if it's to tell me this is kinda shit!

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