

visiting hours

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visiting hours

by [hollanov_1410](#)

Summary

"Papa just needs to give Daddy a bandaid. He has a small ouchie."

"Ouchie?"

"Just a little, itty bitty one." *Or maybe his brain was hemorrhaging*, but Ilya tried hard to shove that thought down.

Mila frowned. "I wanna give Daddy a bandaid."

"This is a special bandaid only Papa can give," Ilya said, thinking rapidly and coming up with very little. "You can give him a special Mila-only bandaid when we see him later. Okay?"

Mila nodded slowly. She swallowed her fruit snacks and looked at Ilya in the mirror. "You have to 'member to kiss his ouchie, Papa."

Ilya reached his hand back between the seats and held it there until her small fingers wrapped around his.

"I will kiss Daddy's ouchie."

Or,

Shane gets injured during practice. It is, to put mildly, a lot for his very attached husband and children to handle.

Notes

general disclaimer: this follows the same Hollanov dads universe from my other fics in [Our House](#), but they're all standalones so you definitely don't need to read any of them to read this one!! some general background that might add a little context:

- takes place abt 14 years post-TLG
- their kids are niko (12), max (9), and mila (3)
- they're both retired, but shane works as a skill development coach for the centaurs. please keep in mind i don't know anything about hockey lol. but according to my google deep dive, i envision this role to involve reviewing game footage, working 1:1 and in small groups with

the players on their skills, and just overall involves a lot less travel than when shane was a player 🙌

thank you for reading! xx

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

Ilya woke up to his phone alarm at full volume. The only setting that actually worked, which he knew from experience and Shane knew from years of being the one who had to shake him awake when it didn't.

He yawned and reached out instinctively, hand sweeping across Shane's side of the bed before his eyes were even open. Cool sheets. Empty.

He blinked awake, groaning. Through the bathroom door, the shower was already running.

Which itself wasn't anything unusual. Shane got up before Ilya almost every morning. It would be a concern if Shane didn't wake up first. It almost always meant something was wrong. Shane was sick, Ilya had been up with the kids. Pigs started flying.

Actually, Ilya couldn't remember the last time he'd woken up to Shane still asleep. Which wasn't fair, now that he was thinking about it. Shane saw Ilya at his most disgusting, drooling, snoring state every morning, and Ilya got to wake up to Shane fresh and smiling and already functioning? Rubbing it in his face?

Either way, it was just how it worked out. And usually Shane would at least squeeze something out of it before he got up. A kiss, his nose pressed into Ilya's neck for a moment, fingers dragged slowly through his hair on the way out of bed. Something small. Ilya usually surfaced to that, which he had maybe taken for granted until just now.

Ilya scratched his stomach, and lay there another moment just listening to the water. Then he got up, stripped out of his boxers, and padded into the bathroom.

Shane barely reacted when the door opened. Ilya pulled back the shower door and stepped in.

"Good morning," Ilya said cheerfully, crowding in behind him.

Shane wiped water from his eyes and shifted forward to make room. "I'm just taking a quick shower. I have to be out the door by—"

"—By 7:30, yes, I know," Ilya finished, kissing his shoulder and reaching for the bar of soap. "Just like every day. But you are forgetting, morning bird, is only 6:00."

"6:10," he mumbled, glancing at his watch.

"Ah. Sorry. Yes, you are definitely going to be late," Ilya said solemnly, working the soap over Shane's arms. "Should have showered at 4am."

Shane didn't respond. He just continued to rinse the shampoo from his hair.

Ilya watched his tense back muscles. His stiff motions, the way he was scrubbing away with much more force than usual. Ilya knew exactly why.

The Centaurs lost their home game last night. Badly.

A defensive collapse in the third that gave up three unanswered goals, and a critical turnover from a rookie Shane had been putting serious time into over the past few weeks. The exact read they'd drilled. The one Shane had broken down on video with him twice, frame by frame. He fumbled it completely and cost them the game.

Shane had come home exhausted.

And pissed.

He'd still read Mila her bedtime story and played a quick video game with Max and Niko. But by the time he got into bed, he was somewhere else entirely.

Ilya had tried to meet him halfway. He pointed out a few things Shane had done well, put a hand on his back, tried to draw him out a little. Shane had given him a few short responses, but ultimately, they had gone to sleep in relative silence.

And now, he was still miles away. Ilya could feel it from two feet away.

Ilya chewed at the corner of his cheek for a moment before stepping a bit closer to him in the shower. He lathered some soap on Shane's back, right over the freckles scattered there.

"You will do great today," he said casually. "I am worried for the poor rookie, though. I imagine he is shitting himself knowing he has to face your wrath today."

"You think I scare them?" Shane asked, a bit defensively.

Ilya didn't really know how to answer that. Well...yes. He was Shane Hollander, and if the legacy alone wasn't enough, the standards were. It was something they'd been joking about since Shane first joined the Centaurs as a player—back when Shane couldn't understand why the rookies were being so awkward around him until Ilya had to outright tell him they were simply in awe.

Ilya decided to choose his next words carefully, not unlike defusing a bomb. He knew Shane could usually roll with it, could even admit to being a little intimidating when pressed. But this morning was different terrain, and he was treading it carefully as he worked the soap lower down Shane's back.

"Well," Ilya said delicately. "I think they know you like to win."

Shane didn't say anything. Ilya took that as encouragement to keep going. That always worked well for him. "As any good hockey legend and best skills coach in the league would." He paused, scrubbing away. "They admire you. You are a role model. Maybe just a slightly terrifying role model."

Maybe it worked, because Shane didn't immediately refute it or tell him to fuck off.

Ilya watched the flex of Shane's back muscles as he rinsed the conditioner from his hair, wiped the water from his face. He kept his eyes on him. Wanting to find the knot and work it loose. Wanting to see him the way he looked when he was mellowed out, easy, fully present.

He leaned in and pressed his mouth to the back of Shane's neck. Then again, lower, lips brushing the top of his spine. "Maybe I can provide some stress relief," he murmured, hands finding Shane's hips, his cock pressing firm against him.

Shane's breath stuttered. For just a second, his body leaned back into it.

But then, just as quickly, he pulled away. "Ilya," he hissed. "Stop. I came in to shower."

He sounded genuinely irritated. Which, of the few words they'd exchanged since last night, matched the tone.

Ilya stepped back and said nothing. He knew he shouldn't take it personally. Shane was carrying stress going into practice today, and this wasn't about Ilya at all. He knew that.

But still. As he stared at Shane's back, Ilya felt the frown pulling at his mouth and didn't particularly try to stop it. Because why couldn't Shane just let him in. Games got lost. He wasn't even a player anymore, the loss wasn't his fault, and Ilya was standing right here and just wanted to help, and Shane wouldn't even look at him.

He felt himself getting more and more irritated as the silence stretched out. Maybe he *did* want Shane to see how pouty he was, actually. Maybe he wanted it to land. But Shane just had his back to him, standing under the water like Ilya wasn't even there, and they didn't have much time before the kids had to get up and then probably wouldn't get a moment alone again until tonight and—

"Just thought maybe you'd want to swap the stick up your ass for my cock instead."

It felt lighthearted in his head. Ilya was fairly convinced it came out lighthearted. But when Shane turned around, Ilya knew instantly that it had definitely not come out lightheartedly.

He was glaring at him, mouth pressed into a thin line, and the look on his face was not the one Ilya had been going for.

Shane stared him down for a few long seconds before opened the sliding shower door and getting out.

Ilya blinked at Shane as watched him yank a towel off the rack. *Fuck.*

Ilya turned off the water, regardless of the shampoo still sudsy in his hair. "Shane. Come on. You know I was joking—"

"Fuck off," Shane said flatly, wrapping the towel around his waist and walking out of the bathroom.

"Shane," Ilya started, grabbing a towel with a heavy sigh. "Come on. I can't even *joke* with you anymore?"

Shane ignored him, already heading into the walk-in closet.

Ilya watched as he stormed off, then followed him immediately. "Shane—"

"I'm trying to get ready," he cut him off.

Ilya scrubbed his hands over his face. "Oh my God," he groaned out. "*Shane*."

"What, are you going to be mad I don't drop your towel and suck your dick right now?"

"I just thought it might make you feel better!" Ilya cried out, waving his hands in the air. "I know you very well, Shane. It has worked in the past. Thought today would be the same. Clearly I was wrong."

"Well, sorry I actually have shit to get done today and I'd like to actually be in my head for it," he retorted, opening his top drawer.

Ilya stopped. "You think I have nothing to do today?"

Shane slammed the drawer shut. "Ilya. Stop. No. We're not doing this. Don't fucking start. Don't twist my words."

"You said it."

"I said I want to be present at work." Shane stepped into his boxers, not looking at him. "That's all I said."

Ilya stood there in his towel, water dripping off the ends of his curls onto the closet floor, watching Shane pull on his pants with short, stiff movements.

"You come home last night, you say nothing," Ilya continued. "You get in the shower this morning, you say nothing. I try to make you laugh, you tell me to fuck off."

Shane just shook his head and laughed bitterly as he buttoned his pants.

"What?" Ilya pressed. "Am I wrong? I know you are upset about the game, Shane, but you don't need to take it out on me."

"I'm not taking it out on you!" Shane's voice went up, then he caught himself. "I was trying to take five minutes for myself this morning to clear my head so I *wouldn't* take it out on you." He walked out into the bedroom, fuming, and Ilya stupidly followed.

"Is not the first time you have iced me out after you lose a game," Ilya said. He knew, even as he said it, that it wasn't entirely fair. It was something different now that Shane wasn't playing. There was a particular weight to being a skills coach—spending hours with someone, breaking it down on video, drilling the same thing until it was automatic, and then watching them fold on it when it actually mattered. That kind of loss didn't sit the same way a game loss did when you were on the ice. Ilya understood that. He just didn't always know what to do with the wall that came up around it.

"Me taking a fucking shower is icing you out?"

"You barely even said goodnight to me last night!" Ilya exclaimed. Which was maybe a bit over dramatic. "You were all smiles with the kids. You get to me, you shut down. Just

stewing."

"Because you're my husband and I thought I was allowed to let my guard down in front of you," Shane snapped. "Sometimes the guard coming down will show that I'm a little fucking disappointed and stressed."

"I gave you that! I asked how you were feeling, you said you didn't want to talk about it." And had said it a little bitchily, Ilya wanted to add.

"I didn't!" Shane yelled. "I still don't want to. There's nothing to fucking say. It sucks. I'm annoyed. Or I guess according to you, I'm an uptight asshole."

"I don't think that—"

"You've known me over half our lives, and you are just now realizing I maybe sometimes want some time to myself? What happened to 'you know me so well'?" Shane spat. "Or does that only apply when it comes to sex?"

The words were tumbling out of Shane, his breathing picking up. Which, Ilya was remembering, was probably exactly why Shane had wanted the space to begin with. He'd been trying to regulate, and Ilya had kept pushing until he couldn't anymore.

Ilya knew that. But Ilya also knew he was feeling useless, and like he'd misread the whole morning, and the combination of those two things was making him go somewhere a little colder than he intended.

Shane raised his eyebrows. "Nothing? Now you have nothing to say?"

Ilya just looked at him. He set his jaw and shook his head curtly. "No. I will give you what you want and shut up."

Shane stared at him, and Ilya saw the hurt flicker across his eyes. But it was masked quickly as something harder moved in behind it. Shane muttered something low under his breath that Ilya didn't quite catch, turned, and stalked off.

Any time he and Shane fought, it clouded Ilya's head for the rest of the day. Until they resolved it, he'd replay everything—what he said, what Shane said, getting angry all over again, then angry at himself for not just fucking apologizing and cutting the whole thing short.

But then again, why should *he* be the one to apologize? He deserved one too. Didn't he? He was still bristling even as he thought about it.

Mila was a good distraction, though. She always was. And she has so many little pieces of Shane in her that Ilya found it nearly impossible to stay in a hard mood when she was close.

He let her put makeup on him after breakfast, sitting very still while she worked. Her face was inches from his, the tip of her tongue just visible at the corner of her mouth as she applied the lip gloss. The same little furrow between her eyebrows that Shane got when he was focused. The same habit of chewing her lip when she was thinking.

When he was mad at Shane, Ilya thought, he was also somehow being mad at this tiny, oblivious, three-year-old version of Shane. Which was a very unfair position to be in.

And in the early afternoon, while they were grocery shopping, Ilya picked up the protein powder Shane liked and the specific brand of Greek yogurt that tasted like complete shit. The kids wouldn't even eat it when Shane hid it in their smoothies. They could tell every time and gag as soon as they took their first sip. Meanwhile, Shane could put down half a tub of it in one sitting, easy.

Ilya also stopped at the floral section.

He stood there for a moment, looking at the arrangements lined up along the refrigerated shelf.

"Which flowers do you think Daddy will like today, *malyshka*?" he asked Mila.

Mila was in the cart seat, kicking her feet. She leaned forward and studied the options, then pointed at a bouquet of baby's breath and carnations. "That one!"

Ilya smiled and grabbed it. "Good choice," he said. "And which flowers would *you* like today, Mila?"

Mila smiled bigger. She scanned the flowers again and pointed at a colorful mix of daisies and sunflowers. "Those ones, Papa?"

"Beautiful," he murmured, grabbing them and handing the bouquet straight to her. She took it with both hands and hugged it to her chest immediately.

"Thank you, Papa."

He leaned in and kissed her little nose. "Of course, sweetheart." He set Shane's bouquet carefully on top of the carton of eggs and kept moving.

By the time they got to the car, Mila was halfway through a pack of fruit snacks. She had actually opened it and started eating it in the store before they'd paid. Something Ilya had no moral objection to whatsoever, but which stressed Shane out every time. Something about it not being technically allowed since they hadn't paid yet. Ilya was fairly certain, if they ran the numbers, that his willingness to let Mila break the law had single-handedly prevented thousands of meltdowns over the years.

"Hand one over to Papa, please," he said, outstretching his hand to her.

She dug around. "Red one, Papa?"

He smiled. Of course she remembered his favorite one. "Red is perfect."

She dropped one into his hand. He popped it into his mouth. "Mmm. Delicious. Thank you."

He loaded the groceries into the trunk quickly, careful with the flowers. He was in the middle of buckling Mila into her car seat when his phone started ringing. He cursed under his breath, got the buckle clicked, and pulled back to grab it from his pocket.

He looked at the caller ID.

Coach Wiebe.

His stomach dropped before his brain had fully caught up. He closed Mila's door gently and answered.

"Hi, Ilya," Coach Wiebe said. His voice was carefully neutral.

"What happened?" Ilya blurted out. His heart was starting to hammer.

"There was an accident during practice," Wiebe explained. "Shane took a hit. Medical checked him out, they're sending him to the hospital. They think it's a minor concussion. Possibly a fractured wrist."

Concussion. Concussion? Concussion. Shane has a concussion.

"Is he—" Ilya's voice didn't sound like his own. "Is he awake? Did he lose consciousness?"

"He's awake. He didn't lose consciousness. They think it's minor."

Minor. There was nothing *minor* about a concussion. And Shane had already had one before. It got worse each time, Ilya knew that.

His vision went slightly narrow at the edges. He blinked hard.

"He's being taken to Queensway," Wiebe said, before Ilya even had a chance to ask. "He's going to be completely fine, Ilya. He was alert. Fought the idea of taking him to the hospital. So he can't be feeling that bad."

That did help, a little. Of course Shane did.

Ilya pressed his free hand flat against the car door and looked through the window at Mila, kicking her feet, still eating her snack.

"I can be there in half an hour," Ilya said. "I just need to drop Mila at Shane's parents' house first. Can you let him know I'm coming? I don't want him thinking he will be alone for long."

"Of course. I already told him I'd be calling you. He knows you're coming. Drive safe, okay?"

Ilya nodded and quickly said goodbye. His mind was already running through a hundred different scenarios, none of them helpful. He got into the driver's seat on autopilot and started the car.

"Mila," he said as he pulled onto the road. "We are going to have surprise visit to Grandma and Grandpa's, okay? Doesn't that sound fun?"

Mila nodded. Then, with a gob of fruit snack still in her mouth—a habit Shane would've surely wanted Ilya to correct right now, but Ilya couldn't get himself to do it—said, "Daifuku?"

Ilya did smile a little. That was Mila's favorite treat lately, and Yuna and David had been great at keeping it stocked for her. Maybe a little too great at it.

"I am sure they still have some."

Mila cheered, wiggling a little in her carseat. "Papa, we help Grandpa finish the puzzle?"

Ilya got onto the highway. "I am just going to be dropping you off, Mila," he said. "I have to go help Daddy very quickly." He could barely think straight as he merged onto the highway.

Mila frowned. "Why?"

Uh. "Papa just needs to give him a bandaid. He has a small ouchie."

"Ouchie?"

"Just a little, itty bitty one." *Or maybe his brain was hemorrhaging*, but Ilya tried hard to shove that thought down.

Mila frowned. "I wanna give Daddy a bandaid."

"This is a special bandaid only Papa can give," Ilya said, thinking rapidly and coming up with very little. "You can give him a special Mila-only bandaid when we see him later. Okay?"

Mila nodded slowly. She swallowed her fruit snacks and looked at Ilya in the mirror. "You have to 'member to kiss his ouchie, Papa."

Ilya reached his hand back between the seats and held it there until her small fingers wrapped around his.

"I will kiss Daddy's ouchie."

Ilya got to the hospital in forty-five minutes, not thirty. Which was frustrating, because as soon as he dropped Mila off, he had driven in a way that would have made Shane cover his eyes. Rolling through stop signs, pushing well over the speed limit.

He barely got the car in park before he was barging through the hospital doors. It didn't take long before he was brought to Shane's room.

When he saw Shane propped up in the hospital bed, his first thought was that he looked pale. Maybe it was the overhead lights, or the white sheets pulling the color out of everything, making his freckles sit more stark against his skin. But he looked wrung out in a way that made Ilya's chest go tight.

Shane turned his head when Ilya came in. His face immediately broke into a smile when he saw him. "Hi."

Ilya crossed to his side fast. He wanted to pull him straight in, but his hands hovered uselessly when he got there, trembling slightly.

Shane made the decision for him. He reached out and took Ilya's hand.

Something unknotted in Ilya's chest the moment their fingers closed together. Shane's hand was so warm. Solid. His pulse was right there under Ilya's thumb, steady and even.

"Hi, *moya lyubov*," Ilya was finally able to say. His voice came out so quiet. Worried, maybe, that if he spoke any louder maybe it would make Shane's concussion worse or maybe rupture his eardrum or something. He lifted Shane's hand to his lips, pressing a kiss in.

"I'm okay," Shane said. Which did help Ilya remember to breathe. Hearing Shane actually say those words.

Ilya gingerly pushed Shane's damp hair back from his forehead. "Which idiot player is responsible for this."

Shane laughed, then winced slightly at the movement. "I'm worried if I tell you, you'll show up at their doorstep."

"Nonsense," Ilya tutted. "I would pay someone to show up. They do the dirty work. I stay home."

"Oh, so you'd hire a hitman. That's a lot better."

Ilya smiled softly. He kissed Shane's hand again, and let himself just look at him for a moment. He looked okay, actually. Not as pale as Ilya initially thought. Just tired. He probably wanted to shower more than anything—get out of his practice clothes, get the sweat and the afternoon off him. Ilya wanted to take him home and run him a bath and wash his hair and get him into something clean and soft, and then tuck him into bed. And then just lie there his head on Shane's chest until he could hear his heartbeat slow into sleep.

"Are the kids with my parents?" Shane asked.

"Yes. I dropped Mila off when I got the call," Ilya explained. "They will pick up the boys after school." He paused, thumb moving over the back of Shane's hand. "They don't know any details yet. I didn't want to worry them."

Shane nodded. "I'm sorry to worry you. I don't know how much Coach told you. I wanted to be the one to call, but the paramedics—"

"Do not apologize." Ilya leaned in and kissed him. He pulled back to brush his fingers along his hairline. "How is your head feeling?"

"Okay," Shane said, reaching one hand up to meet where Ilya's fingers were lingering. "They think it's a grade 1. But they're going to do a CT scan, just to be safe."

Good. So Ilya wouldn't have to cause a scene at the hospital and push for that.

Ilya kept tracing over his hairline for a few more moments, then cupped Shane's cheek. He kissed his cheek, then again, slower.

"Is my fault," Ilya said quietly. "I was asshole to you, you almost die. Bad karma."

"I didn't almost die," Shane said with a tired smile. "And you weren't an asshole."

Ilya raised his eyebrows. "You must really be concussed then, because I definitely was."

"We just had a...mutual disagreement."

"You mutually responded to me being an asshole."

Shane huffed a small laugh, which loosened Ilya's chest a bit.

"I am sorry," Ilya said quietly, thumb brushing over his cheek.

"Me too."

"If you died, I would not be able to live," Ilya said. "The universe was giving me a warning. Making sure I am never fight with you ever again." He kissed Shane again. "And then our kids would be orphans, which would not be good. Hayden is their godfather."

Shane laughed weakly. "Hayden's Niko's godfather, and it's not like he's in our will. My parents would get custody," Shane corrected, because of course he had to. "But Hayden's already raised four kids. I'm sure he could handle three more."

Ilya patted his head. "That is the brain damage speaking." Though as soon as he said it, he recoiled a bit. He didn't even like joking about that. "Did you tell the doctors about your previous concussion?"

"Yes. And they have access to my charts."

Ilya nodded, eyes scanning over Shane. "And your postpartum preeclampsia?"

"Considering I did not just have a baby, no, it didn't cross my mind to tell them."

Ilya frowned. "They should still know. Maybe it has complications with this," Ilya said. "And Yuna told me once that you had bad reaction when you got your wisdom teeth pulled out—"

"Ilya." Shane reached out with his good hand and tugged gently until Ilya sat down on the edge of the bed. His thumb moved in slow, absent shapes on the back of Ilya's hand. "They

said it's a very minor concussion."

Ilya's eyes moved to Shane's other arm, the wrist in a brace. "And your wrist. How bad?"

Shane looked down at it and raised it slightly. "It's a scaphoid fracture."

Ilya's heart rate picked up. "Scaphoid? That sounds serious."

"It's just the name of the bone," Shane said, and Ilya couldn't tell if he'd already known that or had asked the doctor or had looked it up on his phone the second he'd had a free minute.

"They already took X-rays. It'll need a minor surgery."

Ilya's eyes went wide.

"*Minor*," Shane repeated. "Like, thirty minutes, Ilya."

"Thirty minutes is not zero minutes." Ilya's heart was going fast. "Does it hurt?"

"Not as bad now. They gave me some pain meds."

Ilya nodded. There were about fifteen other questions running through his head—recovery time, restrictions—but he figured if he started working through all of them right now, he might upgrade Shane's concussion to a grade two in the process. So he let them sit.

"Okay. Minor."

Shane smiled. He tilted his head slightly toward the empty space beside him in the bed.

Ilya didn't need to be asked twice. He maneuvered himself in carefully, trying to make himself as small as possible. The bed was definitely not designed for two grown men, but they made it work.

Ilya laid his head on Shane's shoulder and laced his fingers through his good hand.

"This is okay?"

"This is very okay," Shane assured, closing his eyes.

Ilya hummed softly. After a moment, he lifted his head just enough to press his lips carefully to Shane's forehead.

Just like he had promised Mila he would.

Shane was right, as always. The surgery was quick. Local anesthesia only. It took just under an hour once he got wheeled out—Ilya had timed it.

He had called Yuna and David while he waited, ran them through the update, told them they could all come over as soon as Shane was out of surgery. He'd been put on the phone with all three of the kids at some point, each of them with a different set of questions, each of them needing a slightly different version of it's okay, he's fine, you'll see him soon. By the time Shane came back from surgery, the hour had gone faster than Ilya expected.

Later, when Yuna texted Ilya that they'd just pulled up, Ilya slipped out of Shane's room to meet them in the hall. He had a fairly clear picture of what would happen if he just let three kids who hadn't seen their father since this morning walk in without any kind of buffer.

Not that he didn't trust them to be gentle.

Except he kind of didn't.

He made it to the front doors of the hospital just as Yuna came through. She was holding Mila's hand in hers, her other hand on Max's back, Niko trailing a half step behind with his hands in his pockets.

Ilya crouched down just in time. Mila dropped Yuna's hand and barreled into him. He caught her with an *oof* and stood, hoisting her up against his chest. He kissed her cheek, then held his free hand out as Max and Niko caught up.

Max crowded into his side. Ilya ran a hand through his curls, which were impressively disheveled.

"Is Dad okay?" Max immediately asked.

"Yes, sweetheart, he is fine. His head and wrist just hurt a little, that's all," Ilya promised, kissing the top of his head. He met eyes with Yuna, who was now rubbing Niko's back. "Thank you for watching them on such short notice."

Yuna pulled Ilya into a hug. Ilya bent to meet her. "Of course," she said. "David's just parking. He'll be right up."

Ilya nodded, then looked over at Niko. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, eyes wide but not moving any closer.

Ilya reached out and rubbed the back of his neck. "Are you ready to give your father a big hug?"

Niko nodded.

Ilya smiled. "Do you want to practice on me first?" he asked lightly, letting go of his neck to spread his arm open.

Niko's face did something complicated. But he did step in and hugged him, which was possibly the most half-hearted hug Ilya had received from him in recent memory. But he would take it.

After giving the kids the rundown—gentle, quiet, no sudden movements—they all headed to his room. When they opened the door, Shane was propped up on his pillows, sipping water. He looked up when they came in, and his whole face cracked open into a grin.

"Dad!" Max was already across the room before the word was fully out of his mouth, then caught himself right at the edge of the bed, stopping short, remembering.

Shane pulled him in anyway, got him sitting on the bed, and kissed his cheek. "Hi, baby." Then kissed him again, just because.

Mila had been squirming in Ilya's arms since the door opened. By the time Shane had his arms out, she was already halfway out of Ilya's grip, both arms reaching, fingers grabbing at the air between them.

Ilya set her down carefully on the bed. "Be very still, Mila," he reminded her, firm and quiet. "No wiggles."

She listened, remarkably. The second she was settled against Shane's she just—melted. into him like she'd been deflated, tucking herself into a small ball on his lap. Shane kissed the top of her head, and she didn't even move. "I've missed you," Shane said gently.

"M'ss you, Dada," Mila said, her voice wobbly as she pressed her face into his neck.

"You smell like sweat," Max said as he readjusted his spot on the bed, wrinkling his nose.

Shane scoffed and pressed another kiss to the side of his head. "Well, you would too if you spent the afternoon in a hospital."

Yuna came up and brushed a hand over Shane's temple, which Shane didn't even try to hide the relief of. "Oh, sweetheart."

"It's okay, Mom."

She cupped his cheeks anyway, and he didn't mind that either. He could smell the lavender hand lotion she had used her whole life, and it was grounding despite the headache still throbbing behind his eyes. "Did you tell them about your previous concussion?"

"Yes, Mom." Shane's eyes slid sideways to Ilya, who was standing there with the widest grin he'd had on his face since walking through the door. "What would I do without the two of you helicoptering over me."

"We are copilots," Ilya chimed.

"Well, land the plane, please," Shane said. "I've had worse, after all."

Yuna gave his cheek a little smack. "Don't joke about that."

Mila took that as an invitation and pinched his cheek too, giggling breathlessly.

"Ow," Shane said, just to hear her laugh harder.

Shane noticed Niko was shifting a little beside Yuna. He had barely said anything when he got in, which Shane was expecting. It's how Niko got sometimes, when he was scared or couldn't name his feeling.

Niko's breathing was also a little jagged. Shane caught it almost immediately—the way his chest was moving too carefully, the way he'd gone very still in a way that was different from his usual quiet. Shane shifted Mila carefully and held out his hand. "Come here, honey."

Niko looked at him for a second. Then he sat down stiffly on the edge of the bed. Shane reached out and pulled him in until Niko's weight was leaning against his side, and Shane felt the tension in him.

Shane put his hand on his back and moved it in slow circles. He ducked his head close. "I'm okay," he said quietly, just for him.

"I know," he mumbled.

Shane smiled and kept his hand moving. "I know it's scary to see, though."

Niko didn't answer. But he nodded, just barely. And then, slowly, the remaining rigidity started to go out of him, and he leaned in. Shane pulled him the rest of the way until Niko's head was on his shoulder and his breathing had evened out.

Yuna's hand ran through Shane's hair again. "When are you scheduled to get your CT?"

"Couple of hours, they said."

"I tried to get them to move it up," Ilya said. "They would not. Very corrupt system."

"We're at a hospital, Ilya. There are people a lot worse off than me."

"Yes, yes," Ilya sighed. "But none of them are my husband."

Max tilted his head back to look at Shane's face. "Are you going to lose your memories?"

Shane blinked. Max didn't look particularly scared when he said it, just genuinely curious, which somehow made it more alarming. "No, honey. Where did you hear that?"

"What's the date?"

"January 16th."

Max nodded, satisfied. Then held up four fingers. "How many fingers?"

"He has mild concussion, Max, he is not blind," Ilya said.

Shane counted them off anyway. "Four."

Mila shoved her hand in Shane's face, fingers splayed. "How many fingers, Daddy?"

"Three."

She folded one down fast, giggling. "Wrong! It's *two*."

"Oh, dang." Shane clicked his tongue, then kissed her nose. "Looks like I have to practice my counting, huh?"

She nodded, settling her head back down in his neck. But then her head immediately snapped back up. "Wait! Daddy!"

"Hm?"

"Papa got you flowers," she squeaked, sitting up straighter. "I picked 'em, Daddy."

Oh shit. Ilya had completely forgotten about those. He was in such a rush to get to the hospital, he forgot they were still in the car. And all the groceries. The disgusting yogurt. Oh God, the car probably smelled terrible.

Shane looked over at Ilya and smiled. "Is that so?"

"Was supposed to be a nice surprise." Ilya shrugged. "Or apology gift, maybe."

Shane's smile went a little softer. He leaned forward slightly, and Ilya quickly caught on. He met him halfway and kissed him.

"Ugh, stop," Max groaned.

Yuna laughed and ran her fingers through Max's hair. "I think your dad has had quite the day. Let him have a moment with the man who sped across the entire city to get to him."

Mila pushed Ilya a little bit from her position on Shane's lap, frowning. "No."

The hospital allowed one overnight visitor. Which, Ilya learned after what could generously be described as negotiation and less generously as attempted bribery, was apparently a firm rule.

Shane was *adamant* that nobody needed to stay at all. But, of course, that was shut down without hesitation by his parents and Ilya. It was ultimately Yuna who stayed, which Ilya—despite wanting nothing more than to fold himself into that hospital bed and not leave Shane's side—knew was the right call. The night at home with the kids would be hard enough with one dad missing, let alone two.

Leaving Shane for the night was tough. Mila cried and wouldn't calm down until Shane reassured her, three separate times, that he would call before bedtime. Niko kept stalling, and Max had to be practically peeled off of Shane.

So now Ilya was back at home, sitting at the kitchen table with pizza and three very unhappy kids.

"We should've brought Dad some," Niko muttered, picking at the pepperoni on his slice without eating it.

Ilya exhaled slowly. Niko had been in a mood ever since they left the hospital. Which Ilya understood. Ilya had known this side of him since he was a toddler, and had watched it sharpen as he got older. He also knew that when Niko went like this, the window for the right words was very narrow. Sometimes there wasn't one at all. Niko would stay unhappy until things resolved themselves on his own terms, and no amount of careful handling would move that timeline.

"Pizza probably wouldn't feel too great for him right now anyway," Ilya said, pouring a little more ranch onto Max's plate. "He has his hospital food. Nutritious. Maybe tomorrow after school, we bring him something special to eat, yes?"

Max frowned. "I don't want to go to school tomorrow."

"It's Tuesday tomorrow, *malysh*," Ilya said with a small smile. "And you have your show and tell project, remember? You have been very excited about that."

Max looked down at his plate. His brows pulled together slowly, and then his chin started to wobble. "I don't wanna go."

It was breaking Ilya in half. He reached over and brushed the curls back from Max's forehead, letting his hand rest there for a moment. "We will talk about it in the morning, okay? Let's just eat right now."

"I'm not going either," Niko said, flat and final. He put his slice down on the plate and leaned back, arms folding over his chest.

Ilya breathed out slowly through his nose before meeting Niko's gaze—glare, more accurately.

"My stomach hurts," Niko continued. "And I think I might have a fever. So I can't go."

Ilya stared at him for a long beat. Niko looked back, completely steady, daring him to challenge it.

Ilya knew exactly what he was doing. And he also knew that if he called him out on it—or, worse, pointed out that if Niko *was* genuinely sick, then a hospital visit probably wasn't in the cards either—he would be starting a fight he had no energy to finish tonight.

He reached over and filled Niko's cup with more water. "Well. Better stay hydrated, then."

Mila was picking at her slice beside Ilya, methodically peeling off the cheese in long strings the way she always did. Deconstructed pizza, Shane always called it. Ilya could almost hear him say it.

He reached over and dabbed a bit of sauce from Mila's lips with a napkin. She immediately squirmed away, whining high-pitched. "Papa, *stop*."

He put the napkin down. Tried to brush her hair back from her face instead, which she almost always leaned. But she shoved his hand away from that too, without even looking at him.

He dropped his hand to his lap and leaned back in his chair and let out a long, slow breath.

After dinner, Ilya did his best to indulge the kids and distract them. He set up a blanket fort in the living room—consisting of seemingly every blanket they had in the house, fairy lights threaded through the sheets, the lights dimmed. They all helped build it, which was half the point. Distraction, distraction, distraction.

Ilya got popcorn going while they argued about what movie to put on. By the time it started they were all underneath the fort, buried in blankets. Mila and Niko on their stomachs. Max sitting beside Ilya with his feet dropped in his lap.

It was a good enough entertainment, and it bought Ilya some time. Enough that he was able to get a load of laundry started while the movie played—he knew Shane would want to come home to clean sheets tomorrow. They were about forty minutes in when his timer went off. He shifted the popcorn bowl to the floor and got to his knees.

"Where are you going?" Max asked.

Ilya looked at him. Max's dark eyes were wide and still a little red at the edges from earlier, tracking Ilya like he might disappear if he looked away too long.

"Just switching the laundry."

Max looked at him.

"Do you want to come with me, Maxie?"

Max was on his feet and at Ilya's side before he had finished the sentence. Ilya smiled and steered him towards the laundry room.

"Do you want to pour the detergent in?" Ilya asked, grabbing it from the top shelf.

Max nodded. Ilya handed him the bottle, and Max leaned over the washer and tipped it carefully into the slot, tongue just visible at the corner of his mouth.

"How much?"

"Just a little more," Ilya murmured. "Good job."

Ilya pulled the laundry out of the dryer, Max helped drag pieces out and drop them into the basket with great purpose. He stopped when he got to one of Shane's old Metros crewnecks. Faded, soft from so many years of washing, something Shane still reached for constantly around the house.

Ilya watched Max go still when he pulled it out. Ilya kept moving, setting a few more things into the basket, then nodded toward it. "Nice and warm from the dryer, yes?"

Max nodded, still looking at it.

"Maybe you should wear it," Ilya suggested, easily. "Keep you cozy."

Max looked at it for another second. Then he tugged it over his head. It swallowed him completely—the hem just above his knees, the sleeves hanging well past his hands. He pushed them up, getting them to his wrists.

He did seem a little more settled once it was on. His shoulders dropped a smidge.

Ilya smiled. Tried to think for too long about how one day, it wouldn't be so big on him.

About halfway through the movie, Ilya got a FaceTime call on his phone. Shane.

He smiled and Niko paused the movie. "Is it Dad?"

"It is," Ilya said, answering the call. Shane's face immediately lit up the screen.

They all crowded closer to Ilya. Mila climbed onto Ilya's lap and tried to grab the phone, and Ilya gently kept it out of her way.

"Hi guys," Shane cooed. "I miss you."

"Daddy, come home," Mila whimpered.

"I will, baby," Shane reassured. "Very soon. Have you all been good for Papa?"

Ilya almost laughed. He ran a hand through Max's hair. "They have been missing their dad," he said. "Understandably."

"I thought you shouldn't be on a screen if you have a concussion," Niko said, frowning at the phone. "Should you even be FaceTiming?"

"I can for short periods of time, bud, it's okay. Doctor-approved," Shane reassured. "What movie have you guys been watching?"

"*The Incredibles*," Max said. Then, without even a breath in between: "When will you get to come home tomorrow?"

Shane smiled at his failed attempt to change the subject. "I'm not totally sure," he said. "But probably by late afternoon. What scene are you at in—"

"Daddy, what about my bedtime story?" Mila interrupted, making another attempt to take the phone.

"You have Papa to read you a story," Shane gently reminded her, readjusting in bed. "You love Papa's stories. And you love reminding me that he's better at them."

Her lower lip jutted out. "You have to read to me, Dada."

Ilya chuckled. "I have been dethroned."

"Papa can FaceTime me when it's story time," Shane said. "That way, you get both of us. Deal?"

She nodded, sniffing.

"What do you want to read tonight?"

She thought for a second. "Hungry Catapillar."

"You shouldn't be reading and stuff, won't it hurt your brain more?" Niko said.

"I think *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* will be okay," Shane reassured. "Besides, I could probably recite in my sleep at this point."

"Can you read it now, Dad?" Max asked.

"Don't you want to finish your movie?"

"Daddy, read *now*," Mila said with conviction.

Ilya readjusted her on his lap. "Daddy might not be feeling up to it right now."

Shane leaned back and smiled. "No, it's okay. I'll read now. Watch, I don't even need the book."

They all leaned closer to the phone. Shane took a sip of water and cleared his throat.

"In the light of the moon, a little egg lay on a leaf..."

He went all the way through from memory, voice steady and even, not missing a single word. A testament, one of many, of how attentive a father Shane was. The man had read their kids their favorite books so many times he had it memorized down to the punctuation, concussion and all.

Ilya was grinning just as big as the kids by the last line.

Mila's bedtime routine was, to put it generously, a complete fucking disaster.

Shane had told Ilya was feeling exhausted and may not be able to stay up much longer, so Shane had FaceTimed just before Mila's bath to say goodnight to everyone. Which, to an outside observer, could have been mistaken for someone about to ship their husband off to war for the next seven months. There were tears. A brief but intense struggle over who got to hold the phone. An even more intense struggle over who got to technically say goodbye last to Shane.

And now, as Ilya was undressing Mila in the bathroom, she was wailing as if she had been the one who just had a concussion and surgery.

"Mila," he murmured, crouching down to her level and setting his hand in the water, moving it slowly through the bubbles. "*Malyska*. Look. Bubble party, see? Just like you like. You can pick the bath bomb."

She looked at the bath with red-rimmed eyes. Then her face crumpled completely. "No," she garbled, pressing both fists against her eyes hard enough that Ilya winced watching it. "Dada pick."

It was killing him. He gathered her up against his chest as she cried, one hand moving slow and steady up and down her back. "I know you miss Daddy," he said quietly into her hair. "He is so good at bath time, isn't he?"

She nodded, hiccuping. "'S good."

"The best," Ilya agreed, kissing her cheek as she cried into him. "Daddy is just resting right now. Nothing exciting. Very, very boring. But what will we be doing tomorrow, hm? Do you remember?"

She cried harder and garbled out, "Visit."

"Yes," he said. "Smart girl. We will be visiting Daddy."

She dropped her head back into the crook of his neck, and he felt the warm wet of her tears against his skin. "I wan' Daddy now."

Ilya pressed his lips to the top of her head and held them there. "I know, *malyska*," he murmured. "I know you do." He rocked her slowly, just for a moment, just to let her feel it. "Is not easy."

Eventually, after a lot of coaxing and promising a big bowl of ice cream afterward, he got Mila in the tub. She tried to twist away when he went to wash her hair, and he decided this was going to be a shortened bath tonight. Very shortened. She was one wrong word away from attempting to waterboard herself out of protest.

Getting her into her pajamas was just as much a battle. She shoved his hands away when he tried to pull the top over her head, pushed at his face with both palms when he got too close. One of them caught him hard enough across the cheek that he had to stop and take a breath.

"Mila," he said quietly. "I know you are upset. But please do not hurt Papa."

Which made her burst into fresh tears instantly. He sat down on the floor and pulled her into his lap, gathering her against his chest and rocking her. She wailed into his neck, her whole body shuddering with it.

"I wan' Daddy," she blubbered, breath hitching between sobs.

So did he, Ilya thought, not for the first time tonight. He continued rocking her and pressed kiss after kiss to her damp hair. "I know, sweetheart," he whispered. "I know you do."

She kept crying.

Today had felt like a million days long.

A few minutes later, still with no signs of the cries slowing down, Ilya heard footsteps at her door.

"Can't you calm her down?" Niko said from the doorway, his voice carrying the same sharp edge it had at dinner.

Ilya closed his eyes for half a second. Niko didn't mean to sound this hostile; Ilya knew this. He was struggling in his own right now. But, God, the last thing Ilya needed right now was to also be the target of Niko's frustration.

Ilya met his eyes, a little pleadingly. "Niko," Ilya said calmly. "That is not helping."

Niko's expression didn't shift. He stepped further into the room. "Let me try."

Ilya's arms tightened around Mila instinctively. She had already been pushing him away all night, and he at least wanted to be able to settle her right now. "I've got it."

Mila sobbed harder against his shoulder. "Want Daddy," she choked out again.

Niko crossed the rest of the room and reached for her anyway, fingers closing around the sleeve of her pajamas. "Give her to me."

"Niko."

But Mila was crying, and Ilya's head was pounding, and before he fully decided to do it, he was letting Niko take her. He sat there on the floor and watched Niko pull her up into his arms, watched him lean in close to her face.

"It's okay, Mila," Niko whispered, his voice suddenly not having that sharp edge anymore. He bounced her in place, and Mila tucked her face into his neck and wrapped her arms around his neck. "Don't cry."

She wiped her nose on his shirt. Niko grimaced slightly, but didn't pull away.

Mila's back arched as she cried out a garbled *daddy* for what must have been the 1000th time that night. In the past hour, maybe. Ilya pressed the palms of his hands into his eyes, hard enough that he saw stars for a moment, and just sat there on the floor, listening to Niko shush her.

Max came in just a few moments later, brow furrowed. "Are you okay, Papa?"

Ilya probably did look a little insane, he realized. On the floor, still holding Mila's pajama top, hair completely disheveled, hands pressed into his face. One step removed from fetal position.

He dropped his hands and looked at Max. He managed a nod and what he hoped passed for a smile.

"We need to call Dad again," Niko said, matter-of-factly, still bouncing Mila.

"He is asleep," Ilya said, keeping his voice even. Yuna had texted him ten minutes ago to let him know.

Niko looked at him over Mila's head, not moving his gaze. "She needs him."

Ilya understood what was underneath that. Niko couldn't say *he* needed him, so he was saying it this way instead.

Mila's cries pitched up suddenly. She arched back further in Niko's arms, enough that Ilya instinctively shot forward to reach for her. But Niko pulled her back in.

"We can call Dad again?" Max asked, eyes wide.

"No," Ilya repeated, over the sound of the cries. "He is asleep, he needs rest. We will see him in the morning."

"We need him now," Niko pressed, glaring with a lot of intensity for a kid who was still in middle school. He absently wiped Mila's nose with the back of his sleeve.

Ilya felt dangerously close to crying himself. Max staring up at him so expectantly from inside Shane's crewneck. Niko looking at him like he was the last person on earth he wanted to be dealing with right now. Mila inconsolable and heavy in Niko's arms.

He took a breath and got to his feet. He looked around the room, grabbed Mila's stuffed bunny, and handed it to her. "Look, sweetheart," he murmured. "Is Arnold."

She pushed it away without looking at it.

He exhaled. Maybe what he needed was a life-size cardboard cutout of Shane for exactly these situations—for the unexpected nights when he wasn't home, and the whole house immediately turned into a warzone. He was fairly certain those were sold on Etsy. He was

going to look into that. He would be a little offended if there were Shane Hollander ones available and not ones of him, but that was a separate issue.

He tried thinking of the next best idea. "We can listen and watch Daddy."

Mila looked at him, and so did Niko and Max.

Ilya pulled out his phone and scrolled back a few days to a video he'd taken without Shane knowing—Shane flat on his stomach on the living room floor, reading a book, completely unbothered while all three kids ran their toy cars up and down his back like he was a race track.

He stepped closer and turned the phone toward them and pressed play.

Their own giggles came through the speaker first, high and overlapping. Then Shane's voice, even and unbothered, telling them to go a little higher, between the shoulders, he needed a proper massage. Which made all of them on screen dissolve further as they ran the cars all the way up his back.

Mila's crying slowed. She watched the screen with wet eyes and a hiccuping breath, going quieter by degrees. Max had his hand wrapped around Ilya's forearm, leaning in close, watching intently.

When it ended, Ilya pulled up another one. From earlier this week, on the rink. Shane was carrying Mila on his hip, and then he dug his blade into the ice and dragged a hard, sharp stop, sending a spray of white shooting straight toward Max and Niko. They both shrieked and stumbled backward, laughing too hard to stay upright. Mila clapped from the safety of his arms. Max begged him to do it again. Shane pretended to consider it, waiting just long enough, then dragged another hard stop and buried them in ice all over again.

All three of them were smiling as they watched. Mila's breath was still hitching, and Ilya kept his hand moving slow and steady on her back, but she was watching the screen now instead of crying into it. So that was something.

Before Ilya fully registered how much time had passed, he was already five videos in. At some point, they had all migrated to the floor, the four of them huddled together around the phone, shoulder to shoulder as Shane's voice carried through.

Ilya barely slept that night. Of course, with Shane in the hospital, he knew that would probably happen. But it was partly because his bed had been occupied by all three kids, none of whom had any concept of personal space under normal circumstances and had apparently decided tonight was not the night to start.

So when the sun came through the curtains, he was already awake. Niko's leg thrown over his, Max curled against his back, Mila sprawled face-down across his stomach.

He sat up slowly, careful not to jostle any of them, and looked at the three of them. None of them looked particularly well-rested either. Which tracked, given that he'd been up almost every hour with them. Mila had a nightmare and cried when Shane wasn't the one there to cling to, Max kept whispering things to Ilya every time he woke up, and Niko nudged Ilya awake to say his stomach hurt.

So. School was not happening today.

He understood it, honestly. If it had been his mother in that hospital—if she had even made it to a hospital, if there had been time—he would not have been able to focus on anything outside of being at her side. Nothing else would have felt real enough to matter. It made sense that nothing else felt real to them right now either.

Getting them out the door later that morning was considerably easier than the night before, carried entirely on the promise of seeing Shane. Ilya stopped at the café they all liked on the way to the hospital and told them to pick something, and pick a treat for Shane. They deliberated seriously and landed on the spinach feta danish Shane always liked. Then Max told the cashier, unprompted and in full detail, that they were bringing it to their dad in the hospital, and she threw an extra half a dozen of them. Ilya tried to stop her. She did it anyway. He left her a large tip and apologized for his son trauma dumping on her at 7am.

The drive to the hospital was smooth, much smoother than the day before. Checking in was quick. They walked fast down the hall, and somewhere between the elevator and the corridor all three kids had broken into a near-sprint.

Niko got to the door first. Beat Max by a step.

He pushed it open.

Shane's whole face lit up the second he saw them. "Oh my God—"

All three of them converged on the side of his bed at once. Max got there first, arms going around Shane before he'd even fully registered landing. Then Niko, leaning in over him. Ilya lifted Mila and she reached out immediately, blueberry muffin crumbs still on her hands, fingers grabbing for Shane's collar.

"Look at this," Shane said, grinning, pressing a kiss to the top of each of their heads in turn. "You're all here."

Ilya set Mila down carefully against Shane's side, watched her wrap both arms around his neck and press her face into him. Shane kissed her hair.

"Dad," Niko said, settling onto the edge of the bed. "We brought the pastry you like."

Ilya held up the box and opened the lid toward him. "Take a look."

Shane laughed. "Really keeping that place in business, huh?" He kissed Niko's head. "Thank you guys. That was very sweet."

Max was already up on his knees, peering over the edge of the box. He pointed to the bottom row. "Take that one first, Dad. It's the biggest."

Shane hummed, and Ilya grabbed that one with the napkin.

"I didn't know you were bringing all of this," Shane said, taking a bite. "Mom just went downstairs to pick up some breakfast for all of us."

Ilya shrugged. "That is your fault. You should have expected this by now, after 14 years of marriage."

For the next few minutes they were all crammed into Shane's bed, Max and Niko talking over each other, filling him in on everything he'd missed. Shane ate his pastry and listened and asked questions and got a few crumbs on Mila's head, which he brushed off and kissed without breaking the conversation. She was getting heavy against his side, eyes drooping, too comfortable in his arms to fight it for long.

There was a knock at the door a few minutes later. The doctor came in, took one look at the situation, and smiled. "Full house this morning, I see."

Shane patted Mila's back. "Full package."

"Are you a doctor?" Max asked.

Niko looked at him. He was on his second danish. "He's in a white coat, Max. Of course he's a doctor."

"I am. I'm Dr. Peterson." He moved toward the bed, pulling out his penlight from his coat pocket. "Can I borrow your dad for a few minutes?"

"Can Dad go home?" Max asked. "Is his brain fixed?"

"His brain is healing very well," Dr. Peterson assured. "He should be able to go home very soon."

"How soon?" Niko pressed.

Shane let out a low sigh. "Guys. Maybe let him do his job first."

"Can I do the stet..stethoscope?" Max asked.

"Max, is not a toy," Ilya said.

Dr. Peterson unhooked it from his neck without missing a beat and looped it over Max's. "Sure. Want to help me check your dad's lungs?"

Max's face lit up. He put the earpieces in with great focus, leaned forward, and pressed the chest piece against Shane's sternum.

"Big breath," Max instructed.

Shane complied and inhaled deeply.

Mila stirred at the movement. She blinked, looked at Max with the stethoscope pressed to Shane's chest, and reached for it with both hands. "I wanna be doctor."

Shane caught her hands before she could yank it straight off Max's ears. "Alright, alright. Too many cooks in the kitchen."

"We're not cooking," Max said. "We're doctors."

Ilya eventually took the stethoscope from Max and handed it back to the doctor. "Let's all let the nice Dr. Peterson do his job."

Dr. Peterson chuckled. He got out his penlight and quickly assessed Shane's pupils. The kids all watched, dead silent.

"Everything looks great," Dr. Peterson said after wrapping up the rest of the exam and checking Shane's cast. "Still having a headache?"

"Not as bad as last night. Just tired."

Niko straightened up from his spot on the edge of the bed. "So he can go home? So that he can sleep in his own bed?"

Dr. Peterson smiled. "We just want to wait for the labs to come back, but he should be good in the next hour or two."

Mila grunted and burrowed back into Shane's neck. Shane rubbed her back without looking down.

"Can you print out the aftercare instructions?" Ilya asked. "I took notes yesterday, but I was a little...scattering brained. Want to make sure I did not miss anything."

"Sure thing. They'll be in the discharge papers. Main things will be to keep screens limited for the next 24 hours. And dim lighting."

Ilya smiled. "The lighting will not be a problem. I do not think we have turned on an overhead light in our house since before we moved in together."

After the doctor said goodbye and pulled the door quietly behind him, Shane looked down at the kids. "Do you guys want to sign my cast?"

All three of them lit up. Including Mila, who had been about thirty seconds from falling asleep and suddenly had a great deal of energy again.

Ilya reached into his bag and produced a marker and Sharpie—something he'd always managed to have on him since having kids. Along with whatever Duplo lego piece Mila had dropped in there at some point and the permanent layer of crumbs that had just become part of the bag's ecosystem.

They descended on the cast. Niko wrote his name in careful block letters. Max drew what appeared to be a hockey stick. Mila scribbled a lopsided heart.

"Daddy, we didn't finish *The Incredibles* last night," Mila informed Shane as she colored away, her voice a little sleepy.

"Uh oh. You can finish when we're home, okay?"

"We finish now?"

"The doctor said no screens, Mila," Niko said, capping his marker.

Ilya saw in real-time Mila's face crumple a bit. He clapped his hands together and scooted his chair even closer to the bed. "How about Papa tells you all a story? I am good enough entertainment."

Mila nodded.

Ilya started, lowering his voice conspiratorially, launching into something about three very brave children saving their very tough dad from a dragon.

They were all exhausted from the night before, so Ilya wasn't entirely surprised when they started falling asleep. Mila went first, face tucked into Shane's neck. Then Max's head grew heavy against Shane's arm until it dropped completely. Then Niko, who lasted the longest, had his head eventually tip down onto Shane's shoulder.

Then Shane.

Mouth slightly open, snoring softly.

A thin line of drool at the corner of his lips.

End Notes

my google search history for this fic was crazy 😂 do NOT look up "scaphoid fracture surgery" in google images (idk what i was expecting tbh)

also i would like to thank an anon on tumblr for sending me a message about this exact scenario, you really enlightened me and this was fun to write.

anywayyy, thank you so much for reading!!! 💖

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