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Summary

Shane and Ilya's daughter is turning five, and no one has ever brought them more happiness than she has.

Notes

please tell me if you encounter any mistake, english is not my first language

Today was Irina's fifth birthday, and the fourth she was spending with Shane and Ilya in Ottawa.

To say that Shane was crashing out was an understatement. He needed to make sure that everything was perfect for his baby, that this day will go down in history as one of the best birthdays, and even one of the best days of her life.

Irina Hollander-Rozanov was born in the fall but came into their lives on a bright spring day. Shane and Ilya felt overall complete—they had everything they had ever dreamed of: a lovely marriage, a home to call their own, a relationship that was no longer a secret—and would never be again—, a caring family both on the ice and out of it, a lovely pet, an amazing foundation that helped hundreds of people, and more money than they might ever need. But somehow, Irina was the missing piece in their lives.

When she arrived at their home, it felt right. The puzzle that was the Hollander-Rozanov family was finally completed.

Shane still remembers the moment Ilya proposed the name Irina to him. He was nervous and scared at the same time, as if Shane could ever say no. He explained how much the name meant to him, and Shane knew there was no other option. Of course he said yes—he had been thinking of suggesting the same name himself, but he wasn't sure whether doing so would cross a boundary.

She was one year old when they met her but was turning two a month later, so the celebration was discreet—they were still adapting to their life as a family of three. Only Shane's parents were invited, and they bought her a cake she adored. Shane cried when he saw how happy Ilya was with their daughter, as if he had been born to be the father of a little girl.

The next two birthdays were also nothing out of the ordinary, though they opened the celebrations a little bit more. The whole team was invited—because they were family, that was for sure. Even so, the gatherings remained small, they didn't want to overwhelm Irina, and she was still so young that she wouldn't remember much anyway.

Then, a month ago she asked for a celebration. A princess-themed party. The small celebrations were no longer going to be a thing, apparently.

They had been introducing her to the Disney universe, and they had their little ritual where they would watch movies every Wednesday and sometimes on Saturdays. She was only getting to know the princesses, but she was already obsessed with them.

“Who are you dressing up as?” Ilya asked her when they were having a meeting about the upcoming celebration. It was not really a meeting, more like the time between dinner and bedtime.

“Elsa!” She exclaimed excitedly. Who else could it have been?

“Are you sure you want to be Elsa? What about... Cinderella? Or Sleeping Beauty? I could go as your prince,” he insisted in his accented English. Shane knew that Ilya only wanted to wear matching costumes with their daughter to prove to everyone how awesome was the bond they had.

“Elsa is the one who makes ice. And when there's ice, we can skate. I want ice and Elsa.” Was her only answer, and her tone illustrated that the topic was not up for discussion.

Shane laughed but was recording everything in his head so he didn't miss anything. The party was going to be exactly as Irina wanted it.

She continued to describe her perfect birthday party, and they were telling her what was possible—a pink cake, a princess dress, a princess crown—and what was not—a unicorn, talking animals, a snowman named Olaf who could live with them forever, an ice castle. If they could give her an Olaf, they would because they were used to spoiling her rotten, but unfortunately it was not possible for them either.

“Are we really doing this?” Ilya asked Shane at night, after the meeting had concluded and Irina was put into bed with Anya by her side.

“Of course we are. If she wants a party and to be a princess, she will have it,” Shane answered as Ilya kissed his forehead and smiled, hugging his husband from behind. Shane knew, without having to look at him, that Ilya was smiling with his eyes closed while he pictured the party and the happiness that Irina would be radiating.

If there was someone who could love Irina more than Shane, it was definitely Ilya. Every time they were on the road and had to leave her with Yuna and David, he suffered, and Shane had seen him cry a limited number of times since they knew each other, but most of them had happened in the period after they had met her and later adopted her. Generally, when Ilya thought too much about her, he would burst into tears, and Shane was not much stronger than him. The whole process was exhausting for the both of them, and it impacted Ilya the most. Shane understood that, as Ilya was constantly struggling with his depression, the topic of family was triggering for him. The prospect of never having a family of his own with Shane, or it taking years although they were ready hurt him in ways he could not explain to anyone, not even his therapist.

“I don't think I was born to have family of my own,” he told Shane one night. It was 2 a.m., and they had spent the day celebrating the birthday of Arthur, Hayden and Jackie's son.

“Don't say that. Sooner than later we will have more kids than you could ever count running around and not letting us rest peacefully.” Shane tried to cheer him up, but it was no use.

When they found out about the existence of Irina, they fought to have her. Shane called everybody who could accelerate the process for them and made sure that any bad news was communicated to him first so he could be the one to tell Ilya.

But one day it happened. The previous year they had won their first Stanley Cup with the Centaurs and were ready to win it again, but when they received the call that the baby that

they had matched with was looking for a foster home, they left everything and ran to their home to get it ready for her.

Ilya went crazy preparing everything. He was overly concerned, and the whole house was now childproof. He called Svetlana to ask her for her help picking up clothes and the decoration, and Shane did the same with Rose. Both girls helped them choose the color to paint the room and the furniture. Shane and Ilya were perfect together—except when their tastes collided.

“Welcome to your new home, baby Irina.” Ilya loved to talk to their baby. Since the moment they had met her, he was constantly explaining everything to her, even when she couldn’t understand him. Apparently his accented voice soothed her, as she seemed fixated on him every time he talked. “You would love it here. Your dad and I put a lot of effort into it, so you better like it, *malyshka*.” The way he held her did things to Shane’s stomach. It put something bigger than butterflies in it. “This is your dog Anya, she will be your best friend. She sleeps in her own bed or with me and your dad, but you can borrow her whenever you need her. This is your living room—here we will watch hockey matches. Your team is the Ottawa Centaurs, by the way, that is not up for discussion.” Ilya held her at eye level, and she just babbled.

“Don’t overwhelm her yet, *lyubimiy*.” Shane kissed him, and Ilya’s eyes were shining, not even when he had won the Stanley Cup both with Boston and Ottawa had they shined that much.

“We need to make sure she is being educated well since baby” was his only answer, and he continued to show her the whole house, explaining the use of every room. “This is your dad’s and papa’s room. You can come in any time you want.”

He had put her down on their bed, and they spent almost an hour just watching her while they smiled. Her straight blond hair was barely noticeable, and it was not very long, but it was long enough to comb it. Shane would have to learn how to braid hair.

Since then, everything has gone smoothly. Sadly, the Centaurs didn’t win the cup, but they were not mad at their captain or Shane, they understood that they had higher priorities, and were happy for them and their baby.

The trouble they had had more to do with the fact that they clearly were first-time parents. Everything Irina did or didn’t do had to be asked to either Google, Yuna, or Hayden.

Ilya loved calling Hayden in the middle of the night to ask him if random things Irina did were normal or not, and Hayden could not complain—he was happy for them, but he also still felt guilty about the video. Even years later.

Ilya enjoyed making him miserable more than anything.

When they were on the road, the baby stayed with her grandparents, and it was as if their heart was left in Ottawa when they were somewhere else, and sometimes it felt as if their bodies were not going to function without it.

Ilya called Yuna and David every night, making sure that there was not a day where their baby would not hear his goodnight. Shane spoke to her as well, but Ilya grabbed her attention the most.

Shane thought that the relationship they both had would make him feel out of place, or it would make him jealous, and he was really scared of that, but that was not the case. At all. He loved observing their dynamic and how a girl that was two years old seemed to help Ilya cope with his depression. The bad days were still there, and they will not go away just because their life felt complete now, but Shane knew that everything went beyond that—she was what made Ilya understand that not because the family he was born into was a disaster and did not feel like home, he was not meant to form a family of his own, one that would pick him and be there for him every day.

Irina was speaking more and more every day, and they were teaching her both French and Russian, but she seemed to love one more than the other.

She picked up Russian very quickly, and as she was growing up, she started calling it her “secret language” with her Papochka, giggling every time she understood a joke Ilya had made in his native language. They loved to gossip in Russian, and Shane knew that it was those small moments that made Ilya’s days and weeks more enjoyable. She had a noticeable accent, but they loved it. It was very characteristic of her.

The first quote she learned was also the first quote Shane had learned back in the day when Ilya had confessed his love for him: “Ya lyublyu tebya”. Nobody had taught her that, but it was a phrase that was constantly uttered in the Hollander-Rozanov household, so it was only a matter of time before Irina learned how to use it, the meaning behind it, and how it made Ilya and Shane physically melt on the spot.

Now every time Ilya was feeling overwhelmed, she would talk to him in Russian, and his face would light up like a Christmas tree.

They loved each other so much that some days he couldn’t believe how lucky he was to have them in his life. Despite everything they had suffered when their secret had come out, the outcome was so sweet. He couldn’t believe now that he was willing to postpone these experiences until he was done with hockey for good.

“I think I’m going to retire,” Ilya told Shane one day out of the blue.

“What?” Shane jumped. He thought that they were living the dream: they were finally out, they were living together, they played on the same team, they were building a life together, and now they had a wonderful daughter and a pet that they loved immensely.

“I don’t want to miss important steps in Irina’s life.” Ilya shrugged as if it were unimportant, but Shane knew this man like the palm of his hand.

“You want to be a stay-at-home dad?”

“Yes, but no. I can work from home on foundation. I can manage hockey camps—” He was enumerating with his finger, and Shane could feel how he was feeling defensive.

“I’m not judging, I’m just saying. You are a great captain. I didn’t think that you would retire this soon.” It was true that raising a kid while being constantly on the road was difficult, but they had an amazing support bubble.

“Well, hockey was my dream. Playing it. But I don’t want it anymore. I don’t want to miss important time with my daughter.” They were on the couch watching a game. Anya and Irina were in the latter’s room, sleeping. So Shane took advantage of the solitude to kiss his husband deeply. Those moments were more and more uncommon between them when their daughter was in the same vicinity. Before her, they were used to touching each other and kissing, and well, feeling each other quite often—hands under shirts or underpants. Kissing and biting each other’s bodies with the hopes it would lead to something else, something involving the bedroom and them naked.

But that was no longer the case. Now they could only steal innocent kisses in the kitchen in the morning instead of having sex first thing in the morning. They would touch each other under the shirt when they were watching a hockey game or Irina’s cartoons, but it was only with the sole purpose of feeling the other closer, not with a second intention. They loved having their daughter, but their dynamic had changed inevitably. Their intimacy had morphed as well.

“I will support any decision you make.” Shane kissed Ilya’s jaw. Now that he was touching him, he realized how tense his husband really was.

“I talked about this with Galina, and she told me I should speak to you first. Not because I want approval but because we share everything—a team, a house, a daughter. A whole life”

“I understand that you want to spend more time with her. I just want to know that you have thought this through. I don’t want you to regret this decision in the future.” Shane knew hockey meant more to him than to Ilya. Ilya had been very clear about that when he changed Boston for Ottawa all those years ago, but Shane still felt guilty about that decision, even though life was perfect for them and they had landed on an amazing team where they felt safe together.

“Never in life thought I would get to experience this. Us. Never thought I would love someone like I love you, that I would want to spend my life next to anyone. But now that is a reality, I want to do things right. Galina says that is because I never experienced a normal family dyn— something”

“Dynamic?”

“Yeah, that. The thing is I don’t want to be like my dad. I want to be like yours. I don’t want to miss important moments in her life when there is possibility that I can be there. Hockey was my life. Until you became my life. Until she became my life.” His eyes were watering now. Shane knew that it was not really a decision for Ilya. And if it was, it had already been made.

“It was a pleasure to have you as my captain,” Shane murmured and kissed his lips softly. That made Ilya break down.

It was not that he was regretting his decision, it was more like hockey was their entire lives. It was what put them together in the first place. Because of hockey they were there, for better or worse.

That year, the one where their daughter was turning five, was officially the last year with Ilya as a hockey player. He had already communicated his decision to the coach, and after they had won the cup last year, he told the team. They all were extremely upset, he was technically the first to retire, and as Troy said to Ilya that day, he was the best captain the team had had in decades. It was with him in charge that they had managed to win three cups, and with him in charge that the team had gotten closer to each other than ever.

Before Shane arrived at the team, they were a family, unlike any other team Shane had seen before, but after their relationship had gone public, they had shown how tight their love for each other was. Now Ilya was not running away from them as soon as their break started or the playoffs were over, leaving for Montreal or hiding inside of his house with his secret boyfriend. He had nothing to hide anymore; he could stop acting suspicious or mysterious.

He finally had friends, and he was a damn good friend. Everyone who had the privilege to be loved by Ilya Rozanov was lucky.

Every day he showed the team photos of his daughter, he laughed with them about things she had in common with their kids, and they organized play dates for them. He talked to them about Shane—with Shane right there—and how great a player he was and how lucky the Centaurs were for having him; how tired they were after the away games, or how they had woken up early and did everything together.

They were well aware of Shane's obsession with the birthday party and had witnessed his constant meltdowns during the planning process.

For the birthday, Ilya and Shane had ordered a huge cake—it was a two-tier pink cake with shiny decorations. They had asked Amber, Jade, and Ruby Pike their opinions, and they all designed it. It was a bit extravagant, but Irina loved it, and that was what mattered.

They had also rented an inflatable castle, and Rose's gift was a full princess-themed outfit with all the accessories included. Irina loved spending time with her, and they were used to visiting her whenever she was at her home in Michigan, far from the paparazzi. Same with Ilya's best friend.

Since neither Ilya nor Shane really knew anything about makeup, clothing, and hairstyles, they appreciated Svetlana and Rose for covering that part for them.

"No adult make-up. Remember that," Shane warned Rose when she arrived at the house the morning of the birthday. He loved that Irina could connect with her most feminine side whenever she was with Rose, but she was still Shane's baby, and babies should not wear adult make-up.

"I know. I bought her kid's make-up that washes off easily. Although the dress was custom-made just for her, and the shoes were also designed specially for my beautiful niece." She showed Shane a beautiful light blue dress that matched the one Elsa wore in Frozen 2 and

shoes that were pretty, but for him, they looked exactly like the ones Svetlana had sent Irina two months ago.

While Rose would be dressing her, Shane was finishing the cake he had made himself. It was not as perfect as the one Ilya had picked up the day prior, but he was decorating it with all the love he felt for his daughter, and in the end, that cake was just for the three of them. He had even made a small cupcake that was dog-friendly so Anya could feel included.

“How is that cake doing?” Ilya appeared from behind Shane, squeezing his ass and kissing him on the neck.

“Hey, pervert.” Shane turned around to kiss him on the mouth. His hair had to be tied up, as he was working in the kitchen, and leaving it untied would be unsanitary.

“I need to go pick up Svetlana at the airport in thirty minutes. Irina is getting ready with Rose. We should take advantage of time we have.” He continued to kiss him on the neck.

“I can’t leave my cake unattended. Sorry.” He giggled a little when Ilya kissed the spot that tickled him.

“Boring boring Hollander”

“It’s Hollander-Rozanov, may I remind you. And had been for a while now.”

“I love you. And I love the family we have. I love how happy you made me. I am so happy today,” Ilya whispered. Shane knew how happy Ilya was. From the moment they had woken up, entangled together with their dog and daughter between them, Shane could see how Ilya was radiating happiness. “I want more. More kids.”

“I don’t think our princess would be very happy about that. She got used to the princess treatment.” Shane continued decorating his cake, he was now trying to draw a crown, but it was futile. He was no baker. Ilya's hands and lips continued roaming his body from behind.

“Only children are known for growing up without any sense of humor. They are boring.”

“I’m an only child.”

“Yeah, I know. I said it with knowledge on the matter.”

Shane pushed him off him. “You are not as funny as you think you are.”

“But I am funny. And you want to know why, is because I am not an only child.”

He continued kissing Shane’s neck and mocking his cake while Shane tried to look unbothered, but he couldn’t deny the effect that Ilya had over him. Fifteen years later, and he still couldn’t control himself or his own feelings whenever he was around him.

The party went amazingly. Shane was so glad to see the people that he loved all in one place—but most importantly the people who loved his daughter spending quality time with her and making her so happy. She played all day without stopping, they barely stopped her to ask her

for pictures. “Papochka, I’m busy right now, I can’t have pictures.” Her face was sweaty and red from running and laughing nonstop, her light blue dress was dirty, and her hair was disheveled.

“Solnishka, we would only steal you for ten minutes. Do it for me and your dad.” They knew that the pictures wouldn’t be the most sophisticated or neat, but they would encapsulate the joy of her fifth birthday and how happy she was living with them. They were destined to be together as a family, and Shane could not wait for them to expand it. He was excited for the prospect of arriving at home after an away game and seeing the faces of his husband and daughter—or daughters, in plural—.

He knew that Ilya’s mental health would still have its ups and downs, he would have to make sure that he had a routine that would replace hockey in his life and not make the change so abrupt for him. Ilya would tag it as unnecessary saying that he had everything under control, and that his daughter was enough for him to have his own feelings under control, but Shane knew better.

He would win at least three more cups alongside the centaurs. He would be Bood’s assistant captain until he retired, probably in around six more years, or until his body forced him to stop. He knew it was drastic, but hockey was half of his life, and he refused to let it go so freely.

Shane had everything he had ever dreamed of. And looking back, he was terrified by how determined he had been to postpone that part of his life until retirement. He wouldn’t trade Ilya’s kisses after a win for anything in the world; or getting to wake up next to the love of his life every day, not only two days every two weeks; or the weekends at his parents, eating with his whole family, enjoying board games after an amazing lunch or dinner; the weekends with the Centaurs and their families, enjoying Bood’s BBQs; taking Anya for a walk every morning; and most importantly, enjoying these moments with his daughter, every birthday with her, watching her get old, and learning new things. Observe a human being learning a bunch of languages because she wants to communicate effectively with everyone around her, being able to hug her after a long day because she was that solid ground that Shane and Ilya needed frequently.

Shane was lucky. And he knew that his luck was never running out, not with Ilya and Irina Hollander-Rozanov by his side.

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