

## **We will always have each other**

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# We will always have each other

by [Blombus](#)

## Summary

On the screen, it was the playoff game between Boston and Metros. Everything looked normal, except for one thing. It was *that* game.

It was the game when Shane's body collided with Cliff Marlow. The replay of the impact echoed through the speakers, too loud in the quiet cottage. The next footage came in slow motion.

OR - their kids stumble upon the clip of the game when Shane got injured. It's the first time Ilya sees the footage.

Shane helps Ilya work through the emotions.

## Notes

I contemplated for a while whether there should be any explicit content in this story. In the end, it seemed like a way they would comfort each other.

► Warnings

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

Shane woke up well-rested. It was an unusual feeling, since after the last season, it felt as his body was thirty-eight going on fifty. He opened his eyes, slowly, realising he was resting his cheek on his husband's chest. He breathed in, letting the calmness of the morning settle in his bones.

He stayed there for a moment, listening to the steady thump of Ilya's heart.

It was their third day back at the cottage since the season ended. They did not win the Cup this year, but at least they made it high through the play-offs. They had a few injuries on the team, and knew this season was not for them.

It was probably their second-to-last season before retirement. They had an amazing run with Ottawa, across the last eight years, winning three Cups together—as a team. Shane could not ask for a better future.

But the last three seasons had been harder in a way Shane hadn't expected...and it wasn't exactly what was happening on the ice. Shane and Ilya were still the best players in the league; there were no questions about it.

The ice stuff was easy...predictable. But it was harder because they had kids now.

Outside of being married to each other and hockey, they were also fathers to the most beautiful five-year-old twins.

Misha and Alisa.

Mishenka and Alisochka, when Ilya got soft, which was pretty much every day.

They'd adopted them two years ago. It was a whirlwind of emotions from the moment they received the news that two little kids in Russia needed their help. From that single message, everything moved so fast that it stole Shane's breath, still thinking about it.

They received a call from Svetlana, who was approached in Russia by the priest at the old church Ilya used to attend with his mum when he, himself, was a kid. Someone abandoned their babies when they were three years old, at the church steps, bundled together in heavy coats. They were healthy and strong, but no one knew where they came from or who their parents were. Their mother left a letter explaining her story, and when Ilya read the words, Shane knew that they wouldn't stop until those babies were safe in their arms.

From that single, silent decision between them, things moved at lightning speed. Shane remembered signing paperwork with shaking hands, calmed only by Ilya's warm touch. They were interviewed by what seemed to be hundreds of different people, from background checks to home visits. It was lawyers, immigration officers, doctors...all while trying to prepare themselves to be parents, and purchase everything they needed to make their house in Ottawa *and* the cottage child-friendly and *child-proof*.

Thank God, they didn't have to do it alone. They had Shane's parents on their side...and no one, absolutely no one, could underestimate the force of nature that was *Yuna Hollander*.

Yuna had shown up with colour-coded folders, a spreadsheet, a list of phone numbers, and a look in her eyes that said *we've got you*. She hugged Shane and Ilya so hard that both nearly cried on her shoulder from gratitude and sheer happiness that it was all happening.

It had been the most stressful time of Shane's life.

It had also been the best.

Now their kiddies were five, about to start school, and Shane tried not to think too hard about that. His heart clenched every time he imagined them in little backpacks, stepping away from him and Ilya. Shane could not stomach the idea of them being all alone in the world, without them there. He loved them so much, and they just got them not that long ago...he wasn't sure if he was ready to share them with anyone else.

Trying to calm his brain, Shane turned to nuzzle deeper into his husband's chest. As predicted, Ilya had turned out to be an incredible father in the most infuriating way. He gave their babies his whole heart, like it was the easiest thing in the world.

The first time Shane saw Ilya with them, his knees buckled.

Misha had been crying because the airport was too loud and unfamiliar. He had a huge beanie, which almost completely covered his eyes, hiding him from the world. There were many strangers coming in and out of the tiny room at the Ottawa International Airport, where they were processing their immigration papers. Alisa had been frozen beside him, wide-eyed, her tiny hand locked around Misha's sleeve. Ilya had crouched down, spoken softly in Russian, and opened his arms.

In an instant, Misha had launched himself into Ilya, and Alisa followed, tucking her little body between theirs.

In that moment, Shane had swayed on his feet. His dad had caught him by the elbow, like he understood that Shane was about to fall apart. He wasn't sure if he had ever experienced this much love.

Initially, Alisa and Misha only knew Russian. Over the years, being married to Ilya, Shane understood most of the language conventions. He still found it hard to speak fluently, but he could easily communicate. They spoke at length about teaching them English, but still keeping Russian as the primary language in their house. They never wanted them to forget their culture. It also helped Ilya to feel less homesick. Unsurprisingly, the kids picked up their second language way too easily. Nowadays, their language is often just a mixture of both languages. Even Shane's parents picked up a few key phrases to help out as much as possible.

Shane was in the process of making plans to look for a Russian teacher, maybe they could homeschool them for a few more years. Before he could reach for his phone to start researching his idea, he was brought back to reality, feeling a shift from his husband. Ilya's voice rumbled against his hair, thick with sleep. "Is quiet."

Shane hummed, pressing a kiss to Ilya's chest. "Mmhm."

Ilya's hand slid up Shane's back, fingers spread wide, possessive and gentle at the same time. He didn't open his eyes...he just held Shane.

"Too quiet," Shane whispered.

"Suspicious," Ilya agreed.

Shane smiled against him. "Maybe they're—"

But then a soft sound of the door opening could be heard through the house. Shane and Ilya both froze, then grinned at the same time. Like clockwork. Shane looked up at the clock on the far wall, 6:30 am. That checks. Their babies did not like to sleep in, not even on holiday.

After the door closed, they could hear soft whispers carrying through the house. Shane shook his head. It was their kid's attempt at trying really hard to be sneaky.

Then something fell to the floor with a loud bang. Shane predicted it was Ilya's Hydroflask he left on the kitchen table last night. It was followed by an eerie sound of silence and a distinct *shhh* from Alisa. Shane and Ilya snickered. The pattering of two sets of little feet resumed, and in a few seconds, their bedroom door opened.

Two rumpled five-year-olds stood in the doorway. They wore matching pyjamas with hair pointing in a million different directions. Misha was holding his giraffe under his armpit, and Alisa had her rabbit by the ears.

Alisa whispered, loud enough for the whole county to hear, "Papa? Dada? Is it morning?"

"Yes, my love," Shane said softly. "It's morning."

"Dobroye utro," Ilya murmured, smiling. *Good morning.*

"Can we watch TV?" Misha asked, rubbing his eyes with his giraffe, a small present he got from one of his favourite people in the world, Uncle Harris.

"Please!" Alisa added, and Misha gave her a nod for remembering the manners.

Shane and Ilya chuckled.

They'd agreed TV would be a treat. They'd also agreed they were not going to become those parents who used screens as a babysitter every time their kids got loud. It wasn't easy, but they filled their time with all sorts of activities to keep them busy and playing. Both of them had researched the impacts of screens on kids' wellbeing. *Especially* Ilya. Initially, Shane thought he would be the over-controlling, protective dad...given his track record in life. But it turned out that Ilya was not far behind. In fact, they were both overbearing, helicopter parents who loved their kids with all their hearts.

Ilya pushed himself up onto one elbow, his hair just as messy as their kids'. It was eerie how closely they resembled each other sometimes. The only difference from the curls was the colour. They were jet-black—just like Shane's.

“Yes,” Ilya said, then narrowed his eyes, “But first, we need payment.”

Misha’s cute face scrunched up. “Payment?”

Alisa’s eyes went wide. “Like money?”

Ilya’s mouth twitched. “Da.”

Alisa sat back on her heels at the foot of their bed. “My piggy is at Babushkas.”

Ilya’s laugh was loud, “Of course is.”

Shane bit his lip. Their kids were too smart for their own good. They knew exactly what happened when their piggies stayed at Shane’s parents’ place...they came back mysteriously heavier.

“It’s not money I need,” Ilya said, voice dramatic.

Misha frowned. “No?”

Shane could not handle the cuteness in that little face. Shane smiled at his husband’s antics.

“No, moy lyubov’.” Ilya opened his arms wide. “Just cuddles.”

Alisa smiled widely, “Oh. That’s easy.”

Shane barely had time to inhale before both children launched themselves at their bodies. Misha dove across Shane’s legs, and then started his climb, using Shane’s shirt as anchor points. “Ow,” Shane wheezed, laughing.

Alisa flopped right onto Ilya’s chest with a little squeak. Ilya made a pleased noise under Alisa’s hair. “More,” he demanded.

The kids sighed, as if it were a chore. Shane and Ilya chuckled, enjoying the moment of cuddling with their babies. After a few seconds, Alisa lifted her head. “Okay, so can we watch TV now? *Pozhaluysta*, Papa.”

Ilya tapped his chin, considering for a second. “Nyet. I think I need more payment.”

Alisa’s voice was full of betrayal. “What? But I already paid! I gave you all my cuddles!”

Ilya’s expression went wicked. He said something in Russian Shane didn’t catch, something that made Alisa squeal, and then he rolled right out of bed and tackled both kids at once onto the mattress, careful but fast. Alisa shrieked. Misha howled with laughter. Ilya blew raspberries into Alisa’s belly, laughing so hard that she was snorting.

Shane laughed, grabbing her little toes to tickle her.

“This is tax,” Ilya shouted in between raspberries.

“Meeee too, Papa!” Misha yelled, gasping. “Me too!”

Shane's whole world was filled with the sound of their giggles. *This*. This was it. This was the thing Shane had never known he was missing until he had it.

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Eventually, they stumbled to their living area. Anya was sleeping on the couch, enjoying the sunlight that poked through the windows, undisturbed by the loud noises from their kids. By now, she was used to it, and would be right there playing with them...in about two hours. She needed her beauty sleep.

The kids launched themselves onto the couch under the blankets, putting their teddies so they could all watch along. Shane noticed they were both vibrating with anticipation. *Jesus*, this TV thing was becoming crack for them.

Shane shook his head, filing in the back of his head that he needed to chat to Ilya about their TV rules. Maybe, they needed to give in a little; he didn't want them to obsess over something as normal as *watching TV*.

He grabbed the remote and stood in front of the TV. "What are we watching?" he asked.

"Your games!" Misha shouted immediately.

"What?"

Alisa nodded very seriously. "Dedushka showed us yesterday on his computer. There was a game when you were on different teams."

Ilya froze halfway to the kitchen. "He did what?"

Misha turned towards Ilya, sitting on his knees, body hanging off the couch. "He said you were... were..."

"Rivals." Alisa finished

"Yes! Like enemies."

Shane shook his head. The kids grew up seeing them play together all the time. They were pretty much permanent fixtures at their games, sitting with the rest of the Centaurs clan. They've never mentioned to them that they used to play for other teams. It wasn't that they were hiding that part of their life; it just never really came up in the conversation.

Ilya looked at Shane. He was surprised, but also amused. Of course, their kids wanted to watch hockey instead of cartoons.

Alisa then added, "But you secretly loved each other!"

Misha nodded vigorously, then swapped to Russian. "Dedushka said you were enemies, and then you fell in love. Is that true?"

Ilya walked back to the couch and ruffled Misha's hair. "Dedushka really said this?"

Alisa nodded. "He said it was romantic. Like a movie!"

Ilya turned to Shane, "Your dad is a sap."

"What is sap?" Both kids asked at the same time.

It was Shane's turn to speak. It always took him a second to recover after the kids threw a bombshell at him. He was not mentally prepared to step the kids through the nature or the timeline of their relationship, so instead he focused on teaching them about English idioms. "Sap is a person who likes emotional or romantic things."

"Oh, I want to be sap!" Alisa said quickly

"Me too!" Misha added.

"Ugh, Mish! You always steal my thing. I am sap, like Dedushka."

Misha crossed his arms. "You have everything. I share. You need to share too. I can be sap!"

Shane shook his head, "I think, in this house, the biggest sap is your Papa."

"Hey!" Ilya protested, loud and offended, even as his grin betrayed him.

Alisa leaned forward, pleased. "Papa is sap?"

"I am not sap," Ilya said, pointing at himself as that settled it. "I am... strong."

Misha squinted at him. "Strong sap?"

Ilya opened his mouth, then closed it. Shane could see him trying to find a counterargument that wouldn't get him outsmarted by a five-year-old.

Shane slipped in, not hiding his smile. "Very strong sap."

Ilya stared at him. "You are rude."

"You married me," Shane reminded him. Ilya smiled and rolled his eyes, blowing a kiss to Shane.

Alisa clapped her hands. "So Dedushka is sap, Papa is sap, and Dada is—"

"Dada can be a sap," Shane said. "There is no limit on who can be a sap." Now, to change the subject, he wiggled the remote back at the kids. "What about the TV? Are we still watching?"

"Yes!" The kids yelled out, way too loudly for the early morning. Even Anya, who was normally unfazed, was startled by the sudden volume. She lifted her head and gave a single little bark like *excuse me, I was napping*.

Ilya winced dramatically. "Bozhe moy."

Shane laughed. “Okay, okay. Inside voices, you little gremlins. One game, then we go on the docks to swim?”

The kids screamed again, somehow even louder. “Okay!” he said, thumb hovering over the remote. “What game should we watch?”

“We want the episode where you fall in love,” Misha said.

Shane’s mind went back to the time when things turned around for them, and a few key dates popped back. He went to YouTube on their TV and looked for a Metros-Boston game in the 2017-2018 season. He found a few highlight reels from a regular-season game.

Shane put the remote down and went to prepare Ilya’s coffee and his green tea. He stepped into their kitchen, still able to see the couch and TV from their open-plan living area.

After a minute of hearing regular hockey commentary from the TV, Alisa wrinkled her nose and asked if she could swap the game. “Da! This is boring.”

Shane huffed a laugh from the kitchen. “You haven’t even watched a full minute.”

“Can I switch?” She asked, waving the remote in his direction.

Shane glanced at Ilya—who looked far too entertained by the idea of their five-year-old commandeering the television—then back at Alisa. “Okay,” Shane said. “But tell me if you need help.”

After a few seconds of comfortable silence, they started preparing food and drinks for breakfast. Even as they worked, they kept half an eye on the kids, watching them from the corners of their eyes. Ilya opened the fridge to take out the ingredients while Shane filled the kettle.

“That one,” Misha said in Russian. “Pick that one.”

“Shh. I’m reading.”

“You can’t read fast,” Misha whispered back, way too loudly.

“I can,” Alisa hissed. “I’m five.”

Shane bit the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing. Shane looked back at Ilya, who was still in the fridge, and saw his shoulders shaking with laughter. Their kids never failed to make them crack up.

Then—

Misha shrieked sharply. It was loud enough to rattle the windows.

*“Dada! Papa!”*

Shane flinched so hard his spine went rigid. It wasn't a funny sound or something that would indicate an annoyed brother. This was *distress*. He didn't even think—just dropped the teaspoon on the counter and bolted, Ilya, moving with him in the same instant. “Jesus. What happened?”

They rounded the island, and the living room opened up in front of them.

The twins were half-standing on the couch now, blankets sliding off their laps. Misha was pointing at the TV with both hands. Alisa's eyes were huge and wet, her little mouth open in a silent O.

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Cliff Marlow coming in fast.

Marlow taking Shane out.

The deafening silence of the crowd.

Ilya was skating towards him, almost dazed.

*“Hollander did not see it coming.”*

*“He's not moving.”*

Then another replay came, from a corner angle.

Another from centre ice.

*Christ.* Even Shane never seen this footage back. He didn't want to re-live it, especially from five different angles.

“Why is Dada not moving?” Misha's voice cracked.

Shane's mouth opened and closed. He forgot this footage would exist online. He forgot his kids could see him like that, laid out on the ice like something breakable.

Hockey was a violent game. Their kids grew up watching them play roughly...especially Ilya when he got a bit carried away with the possession of the puck. Or when someone on the opposing team got too aggressive with Shane. Then anything was fair game—Ilya would not hold back.

Their kids even began their training in the Little League.

But they'd never seen this. They'd never seen their Dada or Papa not get back up.

Alisa made a small, helpless noise.

Shane tried to speak again. “Okay,” he started, voice too tight. “Okay, listen—this was a long time ago. I’m fine now. I...”

The camera panned. It now showed Ilya on the ice, crowding the medical staff, jaw clenched, hands twitching like he wanted to touch Shane and couldn’t. Back then, they were still *nothing*. They were hiding their sexuality, using their rivalry to mask any feelings. They were even hiding their own feelings from each other.

Misha’s hands fisted in the blanket. His whole body was shaking. In that moment, they slid a spinal board under Shane’s body on the screen. “Dada...” he whispered.

Shane started to explain what happened. What occurred after, how he got sent to the hospital, but the doctors helped and he was strong and still played many, many games after that...but then he heard behind him... It was Ilya. Ilya, who just sucked in a breath like his lungs forgot how to work. Shane whipped his head around. Never...never he’s heard Ilya to make a sound like this....

Ilya’s face had gone pale. His eyes were wide, fixed on the screen, but not really seeing it. His chest was rising too fast, too shallow. *Oh no*.

Alisa tugged at Shane’s sleeve, voice cracking. “Dada... Pa looks weird.”

Shane reached and caught Ilya’s wrist, grounding him with touch. “Ilya, love” he said low. “Hey, hey. Look at me.”

On the screen, another angle of the impact appeared. Commentators talking over it, stating the blatant facts. *Jesus*, how many different angles did they take of this?

Shane tried looking for the remote, but it was nowhere to be found. He realised his own hands were shaking. His gaze returned to Ilya.

Ilya tried to say something, but nothing came out; his breathing was increasing. Shane could see the panic in his eyes. He knew what he tried to whisper out. *I can’t do it. I can’t—I can’t lose it in front of the kids*. Shane’s heartbeat climbed into his throat. He moved right in front of Ilya, blocking the TV with his body.

“Look at me,” Shane said, voice low and steady. “Not that. *Me*.”

Ilya’s gaze stayed glued past Shane’s shoulder, like Shane wasn’t there.

Shane cupped Ilya’s face with both hands, firm enough to ground him, gentle enough not to startle. “Ilya. Eyes. On me.”

Ilya blinked once, then his eyes finally slid down to Shane’s face, unfocused at first, then catching, as if he came into full focus. There was so much fear in them.

Shane kept his hands there. “You’re here,” he said quietly. “I am here, our babies. Anya. You’re here. I am safe. We are all safe.”

Ilya swallowed. His throat bobbed. His breath came in, thin and stuttering. “I never—” he started, but the words jammed. His nostrils flared. “I never saw it like that.”

“I know,” Shane murmured, thumb stroking the edge of Ilya’s cheekbone. “I know. Me neither. But it’s not happening now. I am here. Here, feel—” Shane took Ilya’s hand, lacing their fingers and bringing it to his beating heart. “I am never leaving you.”

Alisa slid off the couch, reaching out and pressing her small hand to Ilya’s legs. Her little face looked up, worry evident. “Pa, are you okay?” She asked in Russian.

Misha scrambled down, too. His giraffe ear was in his mouth, trying to settle his emotions. He wedged himself between Shane’s and Ilya’s legs.

Ilya’s breath hitched, seeing how scared their kids were—Shane still lay out on the ice on their 80-inch TV.

“*Alexa*, turn the TV off.” Said Shane. In an instant, the TV screen went black.

The sudden silence was deafening. Shane leaned his forehead against Ilya’s, wrapping his arms around Alisa and Misha, to bring them all close together. They felt their little arms wrap around their legs with more strength. “Breathe with me,” he whispered. “In. Slow.” Shane inhaled deliberately.

Ilya tried to follow. The breath came ragged, like it hurt. The kids followed suit, synchronising their breaths. “Good,” Shane said softly. “Again.”

This time, Ilya’s inhale was longer. Still shaky, but better.

They stood in that embrace for a long minute. Shane could not believe how strong their kids were, staying with them in that moment. Normally, they were always on the move. He felt so much love in that moment for his entire family.

After a while, Alisa whispered in Russian, “We don’t watch that one.”

“*Da*. Not this one,” Shane promised back in Ilya’s mother language, keeping his voice calm even as his heart kept hammering.

Ilya’s eyes were wet. He dragged in another breath and then lifted his hand to Shane’s wrist—touching him back, proving he was present. He used his other hand to wipe his tears. “I’m sorry.”

Shane shook his head. “Don’t. No apologies. Not for this. We are here for you.”

Alisa leaned in, pressing her rabbit into Ilya’s side like an offering. “Here. Bunny helps me when I am sad.”

Ilya let out a sound that might have been a laugh if it hadn’t broken halfway. He took the rabbit gently and held it to his chest.

"Okay," Shane said softly, kissing Ilya's temple once. "Let's watch something else. Something safe."

Misha sniffed. "Hockey is scary."

Shane's heart broke a little at that. They didn't want them to see this side of the sport. While it was a reality for all contact sports, it was also the game that was important in their lives. It was no longer the primary aspect of Shane's life. *Hell, it probably didn't make the top 5*, but it was something that will always stay with them.

"Sometimes," Shane admitted. He wanted to be honest. Then he knelt down and kissed Misha's forehead, lingering for an extra beat. He pulled him into a hug that was tight enough to mean something. "But we're safe," Shane murmured into his hair. "We're all safe. That was a long time ago, and I'm right here."

Misha nodded against Shane's chest, still sniffing.

Ilya knelt down too, one arm still wrapped around the rabbit, the other around the three of them, pulling them in close like he needed the contact as much as they did.

"Spasibo," he rasped in Russian, voice rough—*thank you*. He pressed his forehead briefly to Shane's shoulder before kissing the top of Alisa's head and squeezing Misha a little tighter, as if he could pour the gratitude straight into their skin.

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After Shane settled Ilya and the kids in front of an old Russian cartoon they found on YouTube. It was cute, silly and *light*. Ilya had his hands full, as both kids climbed over him. It looked like he needed the constant physical touch to bring him down.

Shane finished preparing their breakfast.

After they cleared breakfast, Shane excused himself to the laundry. Taking kids' pyjamas off, which they managed to cover with strawberry jam.

They were now sitting at the dinner table, with Ilya colouring in. It felt like the storm of the morning finally settled around it. But Shane still felt the uneasiness around them.

When he entered their laundry room, he shut the door behind him and leaned back against it, exhaling through his nose. His hands were steady. His mind was not.

He quickly pulled out his phone.

*Mum.*

He didn't hesitate long enough to talk himself out of it.

**Shane:** Would you be free to take the kids for the night?

The reply came almost instantly.

**Mum:** Of course. Is everything ok?

Shane stared at the words. He hated how perceptive she was, how easily she could read him.

**Shane:** Yes. Will tell you later.

Three dots appeared. Disappeared. Appeared again.

**Mum:** Ok. Love you Shane. Send my love to Ilya. We will be there for 2 pm.

Shane closed his eyes for a second.

2 pm. They had the morning and lunch together. It was a good time. It would give them time to soak up the time with the kids, but still give Shane enough one-on-one time with Ilya, he knew he desperately needed.

Shane looked at the message from his mum again. *Christ*. As she knew they needed this morning, but she had already decided on the schedule. Like she was already planning the drive, packing snacks, making it simple so Shane didn't have to ask twice.

**Shane:** Thank you.

He sent it before he could overthink it, before guilt could creep in and tell him he was failing at being a parent. He didn't want to have to get rid of the kids for the night. But seeing Ilya like that...it triggered something deep within him. He didn't think they ever properly closed off that wound. It was just mere months before Ilya first came to the cottage. Before their first '*I-love-yous*'

Shane stood there in the laundry room, the hum of the house faint through the door—the clink of a cup, the soft chatter of the kids, the low murmur of Ilya's voice in Russian as he asked Alisa if she wanted more fruit.

Shane pressed his knuckles to his lips, trying desperately to forget Ilya's panicked look...the helplessness underneath it. It felt like a horror of almost losing something you hadn't even been allowed to have ot name.

If this were to happen now—if either of them had been knocked out on ice like that—now they had everything to lose.

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They had an amazing afternoon. They took their kayaks out, making sure they covered the kids in sunscreen and fitted them with life jackets.

Alisa went into Ilya's kayak, taking the front and pretended to be a Captain. Misha, who was always a bit quieter, sat down with Shane and grabbed his little oar to help paddle, tongue poking out of the corner of his mouth in concentration.

They spent hours just a few meters away from the dock, chasing each other, playing pirates, cops and robbers and even shark-cops and shark-robbers.

After, when the kids bussed themselves outside playing soccer, Shane approached Ilya, wrapping his arm around his husband.

He kissed one of his favourite moles, right at the top of Ilya's shoulder. "My parents are going to take the kids for the night." Shane took a deep breath, preparing himself for confusion, rejection of his idea, and for Ilya to say he was fine and they didn't need to make a big deal out of it. He braced for the automatic deflection, the joke, the I'm okay, don't worry.

Instead, Ilya brushed his hand over Shane's arm, "Ok."

Then he leaned into Shane's side, eyes closed, as if admitting *yes, I need this*.

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They stayed close together all afternoon. After the kids got picked up by Yuna and David, the cottage felt really quiet. It was unusual for them to have this kind of peace, but they needed it.

They moved through their living areas like magnets...always touching somewhere. Currently, they were sitting at opposite ends of the couch, toes pressed together. Ilya was on his phone, watching the Grand Prix highlights, and Shane was reading a new spicy romance novel recommended by Rose.

They had a quick dinner, then enjoyed a glass of red on the docks, watching the sunset. Neither of them said much. They didn't need to. Around 8 pm, they silently made their way to their bedroom to prepare for the night.

Shane took his time showering. He used his favourite body wash, inhaling the calming lavender. He took a stock-take of his body. He felt relaxed. Despite the rough morning, they had an amazing day together, and he felt physically calm. However, there was a pulse, a thrumming under his skin that would not go away. He knew what he needed—*who* he needed.

When he returned to the bedroom, a towel wrapped around his midsection, he saw Ilya on the edge of their bed, elbows on his knees, staring at nothing. Shane wondered if he was still seeing that game, the way Shane's body folded wrong on the ice. Still feeling his own lungs collapse.

"Hey," Shane said softly, coming right in front of his husband, slotting in between his knees.

Ilya's head snapped up; he must not have heard him come in. His eyes were a bit wild. "Hey."

He sank to his knees between Ilya's legs, hands settling on Ilya's thighs. "Talk to me."

Ilya's jaw worked. "I'm fine."

"You don't have to be fine." Shane's thumbs traced circles on the worn fabric of Ilya's sweatpants.

"Shane. I lost it in front of the kids." He said, voice breaking. Shane could see tears on top of his lashes.

"And that is fine," Shane said gently. He was usually not great with words, but when he was sure of something, like he was of this...words could not come fast enough. "You are the strongest person I know—the strongest person they know. Not because you can keep it together. But because you are here for us."

"They were scared," Ilya whispered. "I scared them."

"They are not scared of you. They were concerned for you. That's different." He leaned his forehead against Ilya's. "They saw their Dada have big feelings and still stay and be ok. Still choose us. That's not something to hide. That's something they will learn from. From you. Their Dada."

Shane felt Ilya's lips find his collarbone, the same bone he fractured in that game.

Shane shifted, rising just enough to bring their mouths level. His hands slid from Ilya's face to his shoulders, thumbs tracing the hard curve of muscle beneath the shirt. "But right now, it's just us."

Ilya's eyes fluttered shut. "Shane—"

"I'm going to kiss you now, and then I'm going to remind how much I love you. How I'm yours, and you are mine."

Ilya made a strangled, choked sound, barely keeping his tears from falling freely down his cheeks. Shane kissed each of the eyelids, feeling the salt under his lips. He kissed his way down, past Ilya's stubble, and when their lips finally met, Shane felt Ilya's lips part. But there was hesitation in his touch.

Shane didn't push, he just stayed breathing him in, letting the kiss deepen at the pace Ilya's needed.

When Ilya's hand finally came up to rest against Shane's jaw, Shane's heart cracked open. He turned his head just enough to press a kiss to Ilya's palm, then his wrist, feeling the hammer of Ilya's pulse beneath his lips. "Ya zdes'," Shane whispered against his skin. *I'm here.*

Ilya's breath caught, a sound too close to a sob. "*Vy zdes'*" You are here.

He stood, drawing Ilya up with him. His fingers found the hem of Ilya's shirt, lifting it slowly, exposing the stretch of his stomach, the sharp cut of his hips. He took the fabric off, letting it fall next to them on the bed. Shane dropped to his knees again, this time pressing his mouth to Ilya's abdomen, kissing each freckle, each sharp line of his body.

"You're shaking," Ilya said, his voice raw.

"So are you." Shane's hands slid down to the waistband of Ilya's sweatpants, anchoring his hands in the elastic "Let me make it stop."

He pressed his face into the hollow of Ilya's hip, breathing in the scent of him. It was so familiar to him by now that he loved the predictability of the feeling. At the beginning of their relationship, when it was all taboo and dangerous, this smell reminded him of danger and thrill—of doing something out of character. He was rebelling against everything he knew.

Now...now it was his *home*.

Shane's mouth found the sharp line of the bone and began to suck a mark. Ilya's fingers threaded into Shane's hair. He didn't guide him anywhere; he just held him. It felt as if Ilya was making sure Shane was a solid base under his fingertips.

"Shane," Ilya whispered. It sounded like a confession. "Mne bylo tak strashno." *I was so afraid.*

Shane's throat tightened. "I know." He spoke against Ilya's skin, not letting his lips leave. Then he lifted his head, meeting Ilya's gaze. "I know."

He stood up, tracing a finger down his collarbone. There was a faint scar there, from the surgery he had after the game, but it was really hard to see, especially in the soft glow of their bedside lamp.

Shane took Ilya's hand and put it on his abs, taking the hand to trace upwards towards his tits. He knew it was Ilya's guilty pleasure. Underneath, his heart was beating with a steady rhythm. "Feel that? I'm here. This is real."

Ilya's palm was hot against his skin, his fingers trembling. "You're not supposed to be the one comforting me. You were the one injured."

"I am your husband," Shane said, stepping closer between Ilya's legs. He cradled his head to his own chest. "That's exactly what I'm supposed to do." Shane kissed the top of Ilya's head, enjoying how the soft curls tickled his nose.

There were hundreds of mornings when he cursed the curls for waking him up way before his alarm, or when he found the curls in the bathroom sink, or when they clogged the shower. Now, however, he could not imagine ever leaving this embrace.

Ilya's arms wrapped around his midsection, and they held each other. After a while, Ilya started to talk. "What if one of us gets hurt in next season? What if kids see us like that in real time? What if it's worse? If we don't wake up? If—"

"Shhh—" Shane breathed, tightening his hold. "Hey. Come back to me. None of that is happening right now." He tipped Ilya's chin up gently. "Right now we are here. We're safe. The kids are safe. And whatever comes, we face it together. Not alone. Never alone."

"It's *possible*, Shane," Ilya said, desperately trying to convey his fear.

"I know. I know. It's possible. *Yes*, but it's not probable. And it's not happening right now."

Ilya held his gaze for a while. Shane hoped he could convey as much strength and reassurance as possible. Yes, he couldn't predict the future. He could not guarantee that they would never get hurt. But they were not reckless rookies anymore. They were seasoned players who took calculated risks. They knew the game, and the danger that came with it. They also knew what was at stake...their family.

After a while, Ilya nodded...his shoulders sagged. Shane knew that it was not in any shape or form a solved issue. That this was a deeper scar that ran under all the playfulness and bravado Ilya showed.

There was no way that he could solve all of this now. While he felt helpless in his inability to help. He could control his actions and ensure that tonight his husband wasn't alone, that he knew he was cherished and loved.

Shane shifted again, straddling Ilya's hips. The motion made Ilya's breath catch, his hands sliding to Shane's thighs, gripping tight. Shane leaned forward, caging Ilya in with his arms, bringing their faces close.

"Right now," Shane whispered, his voice low and deep. "You are in our bed. I am on top of you. Our kids are asleep with my parents, safe. We are all safe, healthy and strong." Shane kissed him again. He felt Ilya's arms on his waist. He loved how his big hands could almost engulf his chest. "Please, let me show you tonight how real all of this is. How much I love you."

Ilya nodded, wordlessly, before their lips met in a kiss.

Shane began a slow roll of his hips. The rhythm was slow and sensual. They were still swimming in big emotions. They didn't need anything more than this. They just needed to feel each other close.

The press of their bodies together was insistent...each roll of Shane's body dragging a shudder from Ilya's chest. Ilya's hands moved to Shane's ass, gripping hard, guiding the rhythm.

"Shane," Ilya breathed into his mouth. "I—"

Shane cut him off with a kiss, swallowing the words. He didn't need them. He could feel everything in the way Ilya's thighs trembled, in the broken gasps he could not hold back.

The pace stayed unhurried. Shane rolled his hips like waves, each crest drawing them tighter, each trough a moment to breathe, to taste, to feel Ilya's heartbeat hammer against his own chest. He could feel his orgasm building—not a frantic rush, but a deep, slow coil winding tighter with each drag of skin on skin.

Ilya's fingers dug into Shane's back, pulling him closer, harder. It was sudden. "Blyad—gonna—"

Shane's brain short-circuited. He was so lost in the motion, in letting Ilya take and feel, he didn't realise how close his husband got. Shane looked down, seeing how his towel fell off,

leaving him naked. Ilya's own hardness slipped out of the confines of his pants.

Shane moaned wantonly. "Do it," He pleaded. It was desperate and needy. He didn't care how pathetic he sounded. All he needed in that second was to feel his husband fall apart underneath him.

Ilya's back arched, his orgasm pulsing hot between them. The first stripe came across his stomach. The sight and noise Ilya let out sent Shane over. He ground down once, twice, and then he was coming too, spilling hot between them, his hips stuttering against Ilya's as pleasure rolled through him. He collapsed forward, panting against Ilya's shoulder.

They lay there, sticky and shuddering, the room filled with the sound of their breathing. Shane pressed his face into Ilya's neck, feeling the pulse hammer there, feeling Ilya's hands slide up to cradle the back of his head.

"Still here," Ilya whispered, voice wrecked. "We're still here."

Shane nodded, but couldn't speak yet. He rolled to the side, pulling Ilya with him.

Ilya's head was tucked under his chin, their legs were tangled, hearts still racing but slowing now. Calming each other.

Outside, the wind rustled through the trees, loons wailed, and the lake calmed it all. Inside, however, the world narrowed to this: Ilya's weight against him, the sweat cooling on their skin, the raw, quiet certainty that they will always have each other.

"Ya lyublyu tebya," Shane whispered, gently.

"Ya tozhe tebya lyublyu"

*I love you too.*

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## **Ilya**

The next morning, Ilya woke up in quiet waves. His body was still and calm. Yet, his mind felt as if he had been hit by a ton of bricks. It felt like the biggest hangover. *Emotional hungover.*

Then he noticed the weight beneath his cheek, the familiar rise and fall under his ear. *Shane.*

He breathed in, slow and careful, the scent of Shane's skin and clean sheets settling somewhere deep in his chest. His husband's heartbeat was steady. Ilya allowed himself to take it all in.

After a few minutes, he felt Shane move underneath him. Instead of good mornings, he said the first thing that popped into his mind. "It's quiet,"

Shane huffed a soft laugh above him, chest shaking under Ilya's ear. "Not for long," he said, and Ilya could hear the smile in it. "We'd better get dressed and fix up the room. My parents are coming for breakfast with the kids."

The knot in Ilya's chest loosened, at the mention of their kids. He nodded against Shane's chest, eyes closing briefly again. "Ok," he whispered.

He didn't say thank you out loud to his husband. But it was there. There was a mountain of gratitude for the way he helped him in the moment yesterday, for the day with the kids after, for the space to fall apart in the evening, and for this morning.

Also for knowing that he needed Misha and Alisa to be there—to re-fill in their house with footsteps and laughter—to re-fill it with small voices calling them *Dada, Papa* again.

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It took about fifteen minutes after they finished straightening the bedroom before they heard a car on the gravel outside.

Ilya went to greet them, one hand wrapped around Anya's collar. As soon as the car stopped, he let go, and she bounded forward, tail wagging...she missed her siblings. She didn't jump—his puppy was better trained than that—but she did wiggle like every bone in her body.

He crossed the front path to the car and leaned in to unbuckle Misha's seatbelt. David was already helping Alisa out of the other side.

"Papa, Papa!" Misha burst out in one breath, pressing a quick kiss to Ilya's cheek the second he was free.

"Papa!" Alisa chimed in, dark curls escaping everywhere. "Babushka and Dedushka showed us more cartoons yesterday. We watched *Inside Out*. It's this movie about a girl named Riley! And...and...and she's a hockey player like us. And she has these emotions!"

"And Dedushka cried when Bing Bong died," Misha added, proudly.

"Bing Bong." Alisa corrected, not too kindly.

"That's what I said!"

"You didn't, you said..."

Ilya smiled and ruffled her hair before more bickering could continue. He picked up both of the twins, setting them one on each hip, giving them each a kiss for good measure. "Of course Dedushka cried. Only heart made of rock does not cry at Bing Bong."

The kids gasped.

"You've seen it?"

"You know *Inside Out*?"

Ilya smiled. "Of course. It's a very good movie. Let's go inside and show Dada. He was boring growing up, so he never watched it."

At the same time Shane appeared in doorway. His hair was a little sleep-rumpled, eyes soft when they landed on Ilya balancing the twins, holding them both up with ease.

Their gazes caught, and it felt like a quiet, private check-in. Ilya felt it like a hand on his spine.

He walked towards the house, giggling kids hanging on his arm, the dog weaving circles around his legs, his husband waiting for him with open arms. This was exactly how he wanted to spend his morning—loud, warm, and full of life.

## End Notes

Thank you for reading, if you made your way till the end ♥♥



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