

swear to me that you'll show me (need you to coach me)

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by [toomuchwine \(renjuncomplex\)](#).

Summary

Ilya is a father. Shane is a youth hockey coach.

Notes

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

It wasn't supposed to be like this, Shane sometimes reminded himself. When hauling the gear to the rink, his knee aching beneath the weight. When a parent called him after a hard loss, asking if he knew what the hell he was doing. When a kid threw down his stick, spitting onto the ice. "*I fucking hate you,*" the brat would say. "*Okay,*" Shane would respond calmly. Because he knew what the kid really hated. Because he had hated it, too. "*Go do ten laps and tell me what you think about me again after.*"

If it wasn't supposed to be like this, how was it supposed to be?

Like what these kids were headed towards. The best of the best of the youth league. Collecting championships, names already coming up in conversation about what shape the pro league would take in the next decade.

Shane was supposed to be shaping the league right now. Would probably already have picked up a cup, or two. That's what they said about him, when he was the age of the boys on the ice. *A future pro, guaranteed.*

And then it was the World Junior Hockey Championships, and Shane was headed towards the goal, so close to scoring the game winning point. And then there was a body against him, a searing pain in his knee as it hit the ice. When he looked down, there was blood. And everyone was really quiet, the whole stadium. And there was an apology in everyone's eyes, and in everyone's voice as Shane repeated over and over, "*What's happening? What's happening?*"

What was happening is that he would never play hockey again. There was metal in his knee that ached before it stormed. Ached after practices. Ached all the time.

It was over.

And this began. The opportunity to assistant coach for a travel team, and then eventually head coach the team he had once played for.

He was good at this, too. He knew that. Because he knew hockey. You didn't need your body to know how to make a good hockey game.

But, God, sometimes. Sometimes it fucking sucked.

Like when the Rozanov kid showed up. Another entitled brat in a long line of brats. But this one the inheritor of a dynasty. Actually, it wasn't really the kid that was the problem. All the kids wanted was to excel in hockey, which meant they had to listen to Shane when it came down to it.

It was the dad that was the problem, really. A player Shane had encountered only once, that week when everything in his life changed. A player Shane felt often had taken the career that was supposed to be his. First in the draft. Highest scorer, season after season. Olympian and MVP and complete *asshole*.

Ilya Rozanov. He was the problem.

They were in the middle of a practice. That's how out of line it was. Shane was trying to explain a new formation to the kids, when he felt a sudden stillness fall over them, and their eyes drift past him.

"Dude, that's fucking—"

Shane turned around.

"I'm sorry, this is a closed practice," he said.

The man stepped further into the lights of the rink, his hands on the shoulders of a boy with baby cheeks and blonde curly hair. And Shane suddenly understood the energy on the rink around him. The stunned admiration.

"Oh, door is unlocked," Ilya Rovanoz said, flippant. "You should lock if practice is really closed."

Shane didn't really know what to say to that. "Um, parents have to get their kids, though."

"Okay?" Rozanov narrowed his eyes at him. "Not the point. The point is, we are here to practice."

"Well, the rink is reserved," Shane said, and went to turn away.

"With you," Rozanov added. He pushed his son forward a little.

Shane looked at the kid. He knew Rozanov had a son, born from some one night stand his first year in the league. It had been a huge scandal. Teenage dad in the NHL who was already too big of a star to shoot down. Shane had never seen the kid before, though. After awhile, his existence was forgotten, and it seemed assumed that Ilya Rozanov probably didn't spend much time being a father.

But here he was. A father. One of the worst kinds, who thought he could deliver his offspring like a gift to the world. The kid was, what, 11? He was too young for the team, the youngest was 13.

Shane looked back at the dad. "He can try out next season."

"But your season hasn't even started, no?"

"No."

"So, you can still add a player."

"No."

"No?"

Shane looked at the team of boys. “Okay, everybody, take five. And then passing drills.”

The boys skated towards the bench. Shane saw them grab for their phones, taking not-so-secret photos of the hockey pro.

Shane walked up to the side of the rink. Ilya Rozanov didn’t walk down the rest of the steps, like he was purposefully trying to stay above Shane. Great negotiation tactic. Asshole move.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, trying to be reasonable. “We’ve got a full bench. And this is a U-15 team.”

“My kid is really good.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he is.”

“Thank you, he is. Too good for U-13.”

Shane frowned. “Why do you want him to join this league anyway? Does he even live in Canada?”

“This is best league for a kid. He’s bored in America.”

“There’s great teams in America. Great U-13 teams.”

“I think you misunderstand.” And Ilya Rozanov finally walked down the stairs, leaving his kid to stand awkwardly behind him.

But Shane quickly realized this was worse. To be eye to eye with Rozanov, to face off with just some netting between them. Shane felt embarrassed as he tried to stand a little taller. It was the same as when he tried to introduce himself to a younger Ilya Rozanov, during the WJHC. The way it had immediately felt like a competition. Like Ilya Rozanov was assessing the quickest way to eat him alive. Start with the heart? The head? Take it all down at once?

Shane swayed in place a bit, tried to rebound himself.

“This is not your decision,” Ilya Rozanov said.

“Oh, what, and it’s yours?”

“No. Is Leonard’s. You know him?”

“Yes, of course I know him, asshole. You talked to Leonard?”

Ilya Rozanov smiled, smug. “Yes. He says Mischa is perfect for your team.”

Shane seethed. Fucking *Leonard*. He wondered how big the Rozanov donation had been. What sort of unspoken promise had been made. Owners thought they could do anything to their teams. Sure, throw an 11 year old in there. Let Hollander figure it out. And if he can’t, we’ll blame the team's issues on him, and fire him.

“I’ll have to talk to Leonard,” Shane said. “But fine. Mischa can shadow practice today.”

“I think you’ll find he won’t be in the shadows long,” Rozanov set back. Shane was surprised to see some pride beneath the obtuse gloating. Shane opened his mouth to respond to this somehow, *So you’ve taught him?* or something. *So they were wrong. So you were really there.*

But Rozanov was already turning around to his son. “Put your skates on.”

The kid was good. And credit to his father, he was almost the same height as the other boys. He played the same position as his dad, too, zipping past Shane’s defense to chop the puck in the back of the net.

Shane watched Rozanov in the stands. He leaned back on the bench behind him, put his legs up on the bench in front, and spread them like he’d just made a fortuitous business deal. He caught Shane looking, and winked.

Shane wasn’t going to let him win that easy. When practice was dismissed (and parents filed in to the surprised of Ilya Rozanov, a line forming for players to get photos with him, and then Shane felt the shift in the air as the parents saw the Rozanov kid taking his skates off behind his dad, and realized their kid was no longer going to be the star on the team), Shane grabbed his phone and waited impatiently until it was clear.

Rozanov was the last to go, of course, last of his selfies taken. “I will see you tomorrow,” he called to the ice.

“Don’t you have your own practice?”

“In the off season? I am on vacation, Hollander.”

“Then go to the beach.”

Rozanov smirked. “I like Canada. And so does Mischa, yes Mischa?”

The kid looked over from where he was wandering in the stand. “Oh. Yeah.”

Shane shook his head. “Take the kid to Disney.”

“He’s been to Disney. Doesn’t like it. Too loud.”

Shane tried to imagine *Ilya Rovanoz* on *Its A Small World*. Or wearing Mickey Mouse ears.

“Okay, we will go now. Mischa!”

The kid scampered over. He had a quiet detachment that reminded Shane of himself.

“Mischa, thank Coach Hollander for letting you join his team,” Rozanov said, a gentle hand at the back of his kid’s neck.

“Thank you, Coach Hollander.”

“Well, you’re not on the team yet—“

“See you tomorrow!”

The Rozanov’s turned, and both jogged up the stairs like they were trying to get out of being accused of a crime or something.

As soon as they were out the door, Shane reached for his phone to call Leonard.

He already knew how the conversation would go. He was a nobody youth hockey coach. Rozanov was the best hockey player in the world.

Shane knew he’d be seeing more of the kid. Of both of them.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this.

Ilya knew that, but he also knew he would never replace Mischa with anything. Maybe without the kid he’d have an extra cup or two. More time for practice rather than learning how to change diapers or finding the best school district in Boston. More time for partying, for drinking and hookups, the life that led to Mischa in the first place.

Ilya never planned to be a father right on the cusp of his 20s. He wasn’t ready, that day in the hospital. He knew he wasn’t. His mind was on his own father, thousands of miles away in Russia, of the pain that he’d inflicted on Ilya through the years. How could Ilya stop himself from being the same?

But then he’d seen Mischa’s face, red and wrinkly. He was so ugly. And Ilya knew he could never be cruel to his son. Could never demand more from him than he could give. Could never ship him off on his own somewhere, or disappear from him.

Ilya had considered quitting the league right then. But he knew the league was his way to give Mischa the best life he could ever ask for.

The Christmases where the gifts covered the entire living room floor. Trips to Russia to meet Ilya’s family and go to all the places Ilya found fascinating as a kid. The first pair of skates. Teaching Mischa how to use them, but never telling him to play hockey.

It was Mischa who asked, almost as soon as he could form whole sentences. *“Play on ice with pappy?”*

So Ilya let him join a team. And then watching his son, drowning in the pads and helmet, skating across the ice with grace, scoring his first goal, Ilya got obsessed. It was how he felt about hockey when he was young. *Look at this. Look at what I can do with this. How far I could go.*

He wanted Mischa to know what it felt like to be the best. Because Ilya already knew he was. Even if he never scored another goal again, to Ilya, he was the best.

It hadn't been easy. He was supposed to raise Mischa with his mother, but she wasn't able to give up the young adulthood Ilya had. Ilya still waited for her to come back, but she'd found a life that was, hopefully, easier.

The older players on the team had wives that could watch Mischa during practices and away games. He was so grateful to them. Sometimes Svetlana was around to babysit, and sometimes the mother's mother.

Ilya had never missed his mother more, than when he needed someone to watch Mischa.

But the off season was nice. The apartment in Ontario was nice.

In the morning, they would go to the gym together. Ilya would do his weight training routine while Mischa ran on the treadmill or swam in the pool.

Then he would take Mischa to practice. Ilya would sit and watch the whole thing. Watch as the Coach, Hollander, led drills and scrimmages. There was such an organization to the practice, which was impressive considering he was wrangling 20 teenage boys.

Hollander stayed calm, Ilya noticed. When the boys broke out fighting. When they couldn't hit goals, and would bang their sticks against the ice until they splintered. When the boys would yell at their coach for changing their position.

Shane would just listen, and nod. And then ask, "Feel better now? Can we play hockey?"

Ilya felt calmed by it. He'd never considered hockey something calm. He considered it violent and passionate and *everything*, but not calm. When the boys ran their formations, they looked like they were dancing.

After, Ilya would take Mischa somewhere to eat, and they would talk about hockey. Talk about the boys on the team, the upcoming season. When the boys games started, Ilya would have to go back to Boston, for pre-season training. He planned to fly back as much as he could. He'd found a good boarding school for Mischa, and learned some of the other boys went there as well, and parents would be able to drive him from the school to practice and back.

It would be a lot of time away from each other. A lot, even for them.

"You sure you will be okay?" Ilya asked again in Russian. Mischa's Russian wasn't perfect. But Ilya made sure he knew both.

"Yes," Mischa assured. "Are *you* going to be okay?"

"Where do you learn this sass? Hollander is teaching you how to speak back to your parents?"

“I’m asking genuinely, dad,” Mischa said, tapping his fork on his plate. “What are you going to do all day?”

“Hockey.”

“And after hockey?”

“Call you.”

“You can’t call me all the time. I’ll be busy!”

“I’ll be busy! I am a famous guy! I have a lot to do!”

“Maybe you should get a girlfriend.”

Ilya scoffed. “Who said that? Does Hollander say I need a girlfriend?”

“Coach Hollander? What does he have to do with this?”

Ilya wasn’t sure. He was kind of obsessed with the coach. Obsessed with the idea that everything he said to Mischa on the ice that Ilya couldn’t quite hear must be something like, *“Is that how your dad taught you? No, that’s all wrong.”* Or *“Did you know your dad used to be a complete asshole and still is?”*

“He seems lonely,” Ilya spat back. “I just thought maybe he would be projecting.”

“I don’t think he’s lonely.”

“No? Well, you don’t know him.”

“You don’t either! You don’t know anyone. You have no friends except Svetlana!”

“I do! You are my friend.”

“Dad!”

Ilya chuckled to himself. “You are a funny kid. But I’m not getting a girlfriend. I’m busy. And I’m too old to date. Why don’t *you* get a girlfriend?”

“I probably will,” Mischa said, assured.

“Uh, no. No, you will not date!”

“You just told me to!”

“This was not serious.”

“You’re not serious.”

“Blah blah blah.”

The first game was away, and they had to get hotels for the night.

“This is nice, right?” Ilya asked, as he threw his bag on the bed.

Mischa crossed his arms. “There’s one bed?”

“What, you’re too cool to share with your old man now?”

“The other boys are all sharing rooms,” Mischa complained. “They already think I’m a baby.”

“Well, you will share with them from now on. This is your last weekend with your dad.” Ilya drew a tear falling from his eye and pouted.

Mischa sighed. “I have to get to practice.”

“I will see you at the game. Where you will crush all of the competition because you are brilliant.”

Ilya pulled Mischa in, and kissed his head. He missed him already.

Shane was nervous. He hadn’t felt so nervous for a game since he played. He trusted his boys, off course. But having the son of the biggest star in hockey had brought attention. Too much attention for U-14. He knew the boys felt the pressure, too. National outlets were here to report on Ilya Rozanov, and his supposed prodigy of a son.

Rozanov sat with the other parents, trying to look incognito with a team baseball hat and failing miserably. The other parents spoke to him in that chummy way they always did, pointing to their son to make sure Rozanov saw and took note. Like Rozanov could draft them into the pro leagues himself.

“Hey, huddle up,” Shane called as the warm up clock whined down. The boys skated to him, forming a close knit circle. “This other team isn’t as good as you all. You’re not playing against them. You’re playing against you. Against the pressure that will make you forget what you know from practice. Against your hesitation and your impulsiveness. Follow the rhythm of the game, of the puck. Okay?” Shane clapped his hands together. “Okay, starting line up. Let’s get this face off and start strong.”

The boys took their places, on the bench and on the ice. Shane took his spot in the box.

He saw Rozanov watching from the stands. He winked at his son, starting at center.

The whistle blew. The puck dropped. Mischa swept it away, and was across the rink before anyone got a chance to blink.

Shane watched Ilya Rozanov smile wider than he'd ever thought possible. And some of his animosity towards him melted, like the glide of the blade through ice.

Shane decided the win called for a celebration.

He leaned one hand against the hotel vending machine, going over the options to give into a vice. The Oreos were calling his name. He was about to punch in the number when he heard from behind him, "This is your idea of a reward?"

Shane turned, hand to his heart. "Jesus, you scared me."

Ilya Rozanov stood in the doorway. "Why don't we go to hotel bar for a drink instead?"

Shane scuffed. "What if the kids need something?"

"What do they need? You were once them, weren't you? Even if you needed something, would you ever tell your coach?"

Shane thought of a time in a hotel with a group of boys, when they'd accidentally started a small fire with some aerosol.

Boys learned how to put out fires by themselves.

Shane looked back at his Oreos.

"One drink," Rozanov said. "And then you can go eat your cookies in your room by yourself and be sad."

"I'm not sad," Shane said.

"Good. Then drink with me."

Sitting on the barstool beside Rozanov, Shane realized he couldn't remember the last time he'd gotten drinks with anyone. Even in college, he preferred to keep to himself. He'd gone to a few parties with friends freshman year, but found he hated it. He'd rather stay home and watch hockey. He'd written on the college paper to cover the hockey team, and made some friends that way. But everyone scattered after graduation, to Toronto or New York.

Shane stayed. To coach. To be alone, with the grief of his wasted potential. He'd been there, right with Ilya Rozanov, was supposed to be a competitive first round draft.

And it hadn't gone that way.

Yet, here they were. Together again.

What did they have to talk about except hockey?

“Mischa still needs to learn to pass,” Rozanov was in the middle of saying. “He can just skate by in the first half, but by the end they learned his patterns, and stopped him easier. You need to put pressure on the wings then.”

“I was already planning on it,” Shane grumbled. His beer was already making him feel loose. He felt sort of awkward about how he was sitting on the stool, if he was supposed to look over at Rozanov or not. He kept trying to look at him while he was talking to be polite, but would have to look away as soon as Rozanov met his gaze back. It was an intense gaze, and Shane already had a hard time with eye contact.

Rozanov didn’t seem to have the same issues. He even let his knee keep falling into Shane’s. His arm would float over to Shane’s, their hair brushing. He had no regard for personal space. He just took up as much as he could. Maybe that’s what it takes to be a star.

“I think Mischa will be very good, but he has to learn when to drop back or not, too. He thinks he has to cover the whole rink.”

“I know,” Shane said. “I’ve told him to stay farther up. Look, I might not be an NHL star, but I know how to coach, okay? But you need patience. These kids can’t just change their bad habits overnight.”

“Sure,” Rozanov grumbled. “It’s just... I cannot tell these things to Mischa myself. I won’t be here, I...” Rozanov looked at Shane now, and Shane could tell he was trying to get himself to say something. “I just need to know you will look out for him.”

Shane suddenly felt the weight of it. It wasn’t about hockey. It was leaving your son in another country, all by himself. It was needing one adult that you could completely trust to have his best interests. To take care of him.

It was a lot of pressure.

“I do my best for the kids,” Shane said. “And I’ll call you if something catches my attention.”

Rozanov nodded, content. “And I will be back,” he added. “As much as I can.”

Shane cleared his throat. “You’re a good dad.”

“Oh, kills you to say.”

“No—“

“Yes, you dislike me. You want me to be a bad dad so you don’t have to like me.”

“I have no opinion on you.”

“I beat your little Canada team too many times.”

Shane rolled his eyes. He drank his beer. He swallowed, and he wondered what he had to lose. “You were rude. When we met.”

“That is why you don’t like me?”

“It didn’t give me a warm impression of you.”

“Because I was bad at English, and you lectured me about smoking?”

Shane tilted his beer glass, watching the liquid tilt to one side. He was surprised Rozanov remember. How many people introduced themselves to him like that over the last decade? Hundreds? *Thousands*? Why remember some rookie that didn’t even make it out of the youth league you met once a decade ago? But that was Shane’s issue, wasn’t it? The real reason he’d held a grudge against Rozanov for the same amount of time. “I guess maybe I was unfair. Or jealous.”

“Or jealous,” Rozanov repeated, as if he agreed.

Shane looked up at him. “What, is your English still bad? You have to repeat what I say?”

“No, my English is perfect.” Rozanov’s eyes narrowed. As if he was assessing Shane. This made Shane look away again. “I just mean, I understand why you are jealous.”

“Was jealous.”

“No, I said it correctly. You are still jealous, I see.”

Shane shook his head. “I like coaching.”

“It’s not the same as being famous.”

“I didn’t want to be famous. I wanted to be good.”

“I wanted to be rich.”

This made Shane smile.

“You will be a better influence for my son. He’s like you.”

Shane pulled his arm back some from Rozanov’s. “How so?”

Rozanov shrugged. “Just feeling.”

“A feeling? Or how we feel?”

“God, Hollander, you do make me feel bad at English again.” Rozanov drained the rest of his beer. He looked at Shane. “Should I get another?”

Shane scoffed. “Aren’t you on parent duty, technically?”

“It’s two beers. And he’ll probably stay in other boys’ room. Up all night.”

“Better not, they’re still practicing tomorrow.”

Rozanov grabbed his shoulder. “You’re so hard on them!”

“This was an easy opponent. Next week—”

“Is harder, I know.” Rozanov pouted. “I will miss it.”

“We’ll send you videos of all the goals Mischa scores.”

Rozanov grinned. “I’ll drink to that.”

In the elevator, Ilya tested it. “I think Mischa will be asleep. I feel bad waking him.”

Shane smiled next to him. “I thought he’d be up all night?”

“No. He’s good kid. Has bed time.”

Shane looked at his watch, and sighed. “It’s past my bedtime.”

“No fun. I was going to say we should have our own sleepover. Remember the good old days.”

Shane seemed to do a double take, as if he was trying to figure out Ilya’s intentions.

My intentions are I want to see the inside of your hotel room. I bet you keep it so clean, don’t you? I want to be in your clean room.

“Your son would think you were missing,” Shane joked.

“Ah,” Ilya sighed. “You are probably right.”

The elevator dinged. They were on Ilya’s floor. “Another time then.” The elevator opened. Ilya stepped out. As the doors closed, he winked to emphasize his point. He just saw Hollander’s face grow confused to the point of frustration when the doors closed.

Ilya did not think it was so confusing or complicated, really, what he wanted. Maybe only because he was his son’s coach, a little bit closer than he would typically reach for. But he wanted to reach. And that was simple to understand, he thought.

In the room, Mischa was sleeping. He was snoring, which he never did, and Ilya sensed he was not the only one drinking tonight. That concerned Ilya. Almost 13 was young, too young to be exposed to too much. Ilya knew that from experience.

He hadn’t considered that when pulling Mischa up to a team at his level. They were still above his social level.

Ilya would have to mention it to Shane.

The feeling hit him as he got into bed. Tomorrow, Ilya would drive him home. The next day, to school. He would drop Mischa off there, and then leave for training. Their time of getting

to pretend to be a normal father and son would be over. And then the adult Mischa would spend the most time with would be his coach.

Ilya was glad he had picked a good one.

how did Mischa play?

still tried to play full ice. got better after half when I reminded him.

he scored goals?

2

my boy 😊🇷🇺

yes you should be proud

and the other boys are being nice?

I think because he's younger they feel protective of him

he is like angel mischa 😇👦

um sure

and you?

what am I an angel?

yes but not what I ask

???

you felt happy about your coaching for game?

Shane stared at the text. No one ever asked him about how he felt he coached. Only told him everything he did wrong. Or the boys did wrong. No one ever cared how he felt he'd done actually talking to the team.

It took him a long time to respond. He hoped Rozanov wasn't watching the bubbles appear and disappear over and over.

I could have been better. the defense kept getting confused on who they should stay with. it gave up 2 goals. I need to show them in practice how to talk on the ice.

that is really hard to learn...

hm I never considered how hard it is to coach that. I do not envy of you.

how do you do it?

communicate on ice? it's like knowing. knowing where you are supposed to be but also knowing where to look for where you are needed. does this make sense?

of course

how was it for you?

when I played? mmm it was more mechanical than you describe. I had all of our formations memorized and I could picture myself within them on the ice. but always looking. always listening.

yes listening is important. made me a good father I think.

yeah your kid doesn't say much

he will open up one day and then be mini me

I don't think that's possible

he is pain in butt sometimes. told me to get girlfriend.

Shane laughed to himself. The book he'd been reading in bed before Rozanov texted slid off his chest, closing and losing his page.

He swallowed, and he realized his mouth was really dry. He felt sort of awkward talking about this personal stuff with Rozanov. They weren't friends. But they'd also had drinks together, which may have made them friends. And there was the comment about the sleepover, but Shane probably misunderstood, and it was all friendly. So maybe they were friends, and this is what guy friends talked about. Women.

oh haha

you must have girlfriend, right Hollander?

Shane looked around his empty apartment.

no?

but you are such a catch!

Not really

oh, I would think hockey moms always on top of you

they're all married

yes Shane haha

Shane shook his head.

I shouldn't talk about that

oh so they do flirt with you

Shane typed **no only you** but quickly deleted it. This wasn't flirting. Rozanov was a pro hockey player. This wasn't flirting.

I can't blame them

Oh.

okay I am off to find girlfriend in boston

Shane paled. Huh?

no wish of good luck?

good luck

thank you, coach

Texting Shane was fun. Mostly because Shane knew so much about hockey. Knew more than anyone. Knew more than Ilya's own coach. Always had insights to the game Ilya hadn't even considered. Gave Ilya pointers that even a decade in had him improving.

why do you only coach little boys? you should be here coaching me

I basically just started

and look at your team! they will see soon, and you will be pulled away. so sad, I want you to coach Mischa forever

maybe we'll go pro together

Mischa was doing well. It worked out perfectly that Ilya had an off week the same weekend as Mischa's first tournament.

The tournament was a big deal. Brought a lot of eyes. Could determine which kids got asked to play in the WJHC.

Ilya knew as soon as he got to Canada, as soon as he got to Mischa, that he wanted it. He watched his son's knee bounce as they drove to the hockey arena for the first game.

"Mischa, you have to play like it's any other game," Ilya advised.

"I know, that's what Coach Shane said."

"Did he? Smart guy. So he is a good coach? You like him?"

Mischa nodded. "Yeah, he's good."

"Just good? So could be better?"

"I don't know, he seems good to me," Mischa whined, irritated by his dad's poking. "The parents will sometimes yell at him, like when he doesn't give their kid enough playing time or if we lose. But he never lets parents yell at their own kids. And he fights the officials for us." Mischa shrugged. "So, I think he's good?"

"He fights officials? I would like to see."

And Ilya did, second game of the day.

"Come on, there's no way!" Shane shouted, hands moving wildly, as Mischa headed to the penalty box for sticking. "That was hip height!"

The official blew his whistle as a warning, getting the players to focus again.

Ilya leaned forward. The game was tied 2-2 in the last period.

"Okay, focus!" Shane called to the players. "And keep your sticks down!" Ilya was pretty sure he just added this to antagonize the officials.

Even with his son in the penalty box, Ilya couldn't help smiling. Hollander was good. He wasn't just an effective coach, he was a fun coach to watch. Because he cared. He gave his all to the game.

"Cheat up, Dylan!" Shane coached, clearly reminding him of something they'd already practiced. Which impressed Ilya. How many youth coaches were teaching penalty formations? Maybe all of them, but Ilya was still impressed, how the whole team didn't miss a beat. It's like they put more pressure on the other team, and were suddenly a stone wall impossible to pass.

Everyone jumped out of their seats as the boys still scored a player down, pulling ahead.

Mischa got put back on the ice. It was clear he felt he had to make up for his time out. He skated to the opponent's goal, putting another one on the board, to give them a comfortable lead to the end.

Ilya rose to go to his son. But then he saw Mischa skate to the edge of the ice, to Shane. He saw Shane put an arm around him, proud and comfortable. He saw his son look up to this man that wasn't him.

This man who had never not been there when he was supposed to be. Had never failed him. Had taught him what he needed to be the best player he could be.

Something twisted inside Ilya.

“Hollander!”

Shane turned from where he was standing in the hall of the hotel. He found himself smiling without making himself smile as Ilya walked to him. But then he saw the crease in his brow, the flush on his skin.

“You have to run your mouth like that?” Rozanov spat at him.

Shane blinked. It’s how he was used to being confronted after these games. But not usually after a pretty impressive win. Not by Ilya Rozanov.

“Um. When?”

“About the sticking!” Rozanov ranted. “Now officials entire tournament will be watching Mischa to make mistake. Because you can’t just let it go.”

“It was a bad call,” Shane said calmly. What was happening? Rozanov who spent half of his professional career arguing with officials on perfectly straightforward calls was upset with Shane for doing the same? “And they won’t hold it against him. And he won’t make the same mistake again.”

“Well, you should have coached him not to, instead of fighting with an old man for no reason!”

Shane shook his head. “I’m sorry, did I miss something? I thought we were...”

Rozanov raised an eyebrow. “You thought we were, what? Friends? Do you know how much I pay you?”

Shane crossed his arms. “You don’t pay me anything. You pay for your son to play on my team.”

“Mm, not your team. Leonard’s team.”

“What is this actually about?” Shane tried to reason. “You don’t think I’m giving Mischa enough attention? Not enough praise? He’s doing great, Rozanov.”

“But I’m not there!” Rozanov’s voice broke. He put his hands to his hips, and turned away.

Shane wasn’t sure what to do. How to comfort Rozanov. He cleared his throat. “You’re here now.”

It hung in the air between them. Rozanov was still turned away, collecting himself.

And then he turned to Shane, and Shane felt Rozanov’s hands on his neck, and for a moment he thought he was going to be strangled, but then they traveled up into his hair, and Rozanov was pulling him in, kissing him.

Shane felt his heart skip a beat. For a moment, his hands were just down at his side, but then he found Rozanov's shirt, gripping him closer. His mouth was soft, which felt wrong to Shane. His tongue was so sharp when speaking. But now it was all melting into him.

Shane suddenly heard the ding of the elevator, and he shoved Rozanov back off of him. He turned back to see some stranger enter the hall. They turned the other way, down the hall. And then they were alone again, but it wasn't private.

"We can't," Shane said.

"Not here," Rozanov agreed. He grabbed Shane by the arm, and pulled him towards a door. Got out a key, and opened it. Pulled Shane inside, and closed the door behind them, and they were alone. And Rozanov turned to kiss him again.

Shane put up his arms to stop him, and it felt like stopping an impossible force. "Wait, wait. What about—"

"What about what?" Rozanov raised his eyebrows. He was so unbelievably sexy, and infuriating.

"*Everything*," Shane said, or whined. He hated how his voice sounded. "Who you are, Rozanov, if people found out—"

Rozanov groaned. "No one will find out. Who I am is someone that gets what and who I want. Do you want this, too?"

Shane didn't know how to answer except by doing what he wanted to do. Which was to fall to his knees. And unbuckle Rozanov's pants. And take him in his mouth.

Rozanov's hands were in his hair immediately, and he sighed out deeply. "That's right. I knew you wanted it."

"Shut up," Shane mumbled before swallowing Rozanov down again. He was big. Shane spit in his palm to help, his tongue on the tip as he brought his hand to touch him.

"Oh, fuck, Hollander. Need to lay down if you do that."

Shane released Rozanov. He stepped back towards the bed, and Shane crawled on all fours after him.

"Mmm," Rozanov hummed, as he sat on the edge of the bed. Shane immediately reached for his pants, already around his thighs, and pulled them all the way off. "I knew you were a good coach, but who coached you?"

Shane slapped Rozanov's thigh. "I didn't have to be coached."

"You are natural?"

Shane blushed. "I went to college. Just let me do this, please."

“You ask so nicely.” Rozanov spread his legs, and gestured for Shane to continue.

Shane took him in his mouth again, spit running across his cheek.

Rozanov’s hand went to the back of Shane’s neck, and he pushed his hips forward slightly, fucking isn’t the back of his throat. “This okay?”

Shane nodded. It was more than okay. “I think you tell people what to do all day,” Rozanov observed. “And now you want to be told what to do, yes?”

Shane felt that his eyelashes were wet.

“So get naked.”

Shane looked up.

“Yes, off me, and clothes off.”

Shane ran his tongue down Rozanov as he backed off. He saw Rozanov twitch like he had a shiver.

Shane stood. “Just, like, all off?”

“All off.”

Shane awkwardly fumbled with his jean zipper. He got them off. And then his shirt. He folded both, and set them on a chair by the bed.

“And underwear,” Rozanov said.

Shane ran his thumbs into his waistband. He tried to do it more sexy, pulling them off slowly, to reveal himself hard.

“Very good, Coach Hollander,” Rozanov commended.

“Gross,” Shane voiced.

Rozanov smirked. “You like it.”

“Just call me Shane, please.”

“Shane,” Rozanov repeated. “Shane, you’ll call me—“

“Don’t even joke about that,” Shane interrupted. “I know what you’re thinking, and that’s gross.”

“I was going to say Ilya, pervert.”

“Oh.”

“Get on the bed. You are so ridiculous, it makes me want to fuck you so bad.”

Shane was on top of him in a moment, kissing him again. Ilya's hands went to his waist. "Why do you stay in such good shape?"

"For this," Shane whispered.

"Oh, whatever."

Ilya's hand squeezed at his bottom, his fingers brushing towards his ass. Shane moaned.

"I haven't even touched you yet."

Shane reached for Ilya's shirt, and pulled it off.

"You want me to touch you?" Ilya asked, as Shane kissed his chest.

"Please."

"You like spit so much, huh?"

"Please."

"Then spit." Ilya held out his hand.

Shane whimpered. He shook his head. "Want yours."

Ilya smiled. "Please?"

"Please."

Ilya spit into his own hand. Dragged his fingers into his own mouth, drooling onto them.

When he touched Shane it was like that first feeling of stepping onto the ice before a game. It was an excitement, an anticipation Shane hadn't felt in so long. It was like feeling grounded and yet totally weightless. Like you could disappear. Like you could be nowhere else.

"Thank you," Shane whispered. He went back to kissing Ilya's chest. He licked over Ilya's nipples. He was sure he felt goosebumps on Ilya's side.

"Oh, God, Ilya," Shane moaned. "I want to cum already."

"I want you to cum."

Shane shook his head. "No, I want... together. I want you to fuck me first." Shane looked up at Ilya.

"Lay down."

Shane listened.

Ilya stood, and went to his backpack. "You've done this before, yes?"

Shane coughed. “Yeah.”

Ilya frowned as he came back with a condom and lube. “So sad. When I met you as a teenager I’m sure you hadn’t, right? I could have been your first.”

A lot would be different if Shane hadn’t been injured, he knew. “I would’ve never done that,” Shane said. “I’d be way too nervous with so many eyes on me.”

“Mmm, no. I would have made it only my eyes on you.”

Shane’s breathing was shallow. “You think so?”

Ilya looked at him. “I know so. I knew you wanted me that time we met. I knew you wanted me when I showed up at your practice. You can’t help it.”

“You’re so full of yourself.”

“Ah, no, you’ll be full of me.” Ilya clicked his tongue. “Turn over.”

Shane did as he was told. He felt Ilya’s mouth graze his back, kissing his shoulder blades. And then he felt Ilya’s fingers inside of him. He looked back, and Ilya met his mouth with a kiss.

“Feels good,” Shane assured him.

“You do.”

Ilya curled his fingers into him, and Shane’s toes curled in response. “Fuck. Fuck me.”

Ilya held out a hand. “Spit.”

Shane did his best. Ilya touched himself with Shane’s spit, which made Shane squirm. “Ready now?”

Shane nodded.

Ilya’s fingers moved out of him, but were quickly replaced. Shane was worried about how loudly he moaned, but he couldn’t stop himself. Ilya was inside of him. He moved slowly in, and then out.

“Your hand,” Ilya said.

Shane held it out. Ilya spit into it. “Touch yourself.”

Shane did. It wasn’t long before he felt like he was going to cum. “Ilya, Ilya. I’m going to—“

“Can I go faster?”

Shane nodded.

Ilya fucked into him. It felt like how he played. Aggressive but smooth. Physical but grand. With everything. Giving everything.

Shane pushed himself up onto his knees. Ilya grabbed his hips. “You’re so good, Shane.”

“Ah. Can I—?”

“Mhm.”

Shane saw white. Felt warm all over. Came into his hand. Felt himself tighten around Ilya, and knew that was all it took for Ilya to finish too as he moaned Shane’s name.

They caught their breaths for a moment.

Shane looked down. “Fuck, I got some on your sheets. Sorry.”

“What? Whatever, who cares?”

“It’s gross. Do you have tissues?”

“Wait.”

When Ilya came back, he wiped Shane’s hand with a towel, and then the bed. “You hang out with teenage boys all day, but a little bit of cum is too gross?”

“Oh, fuck, shit.” Shane realized what they’d done. “Is Mischa sleeping in here tonight?”

Ilya’s eyebrows raised. “No, I pay for him to have his own room. Are you crazy?”

“Sorry, duh. Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. No, Mischa will not bother—“

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

“Shit!” Shane whispered.

“Go in the bathroom!” Ilya told him, as he stood to get his clothes on.

Shane grabbed his clothes, and disappeared into the washroom. He got his clothes on, feeling warm and ashamed as he listened to Mischa tell his dad goodnight through the door.

Shane looked at himself in the mirror. What the fuck was he thinking? That he was 20 years old again and could hook up with whoever he wanted without consequences? Shane sat on the toilet, hung his head between his legs.

He heard the bathroom door open. “Coast clear.”

Shane looked up to see Ilya. He looked completely normal, like he did before they did anything. Like there was no evidence on him. Shane couldn’t say the same for himself.

“Want to shower?” Ilya asked, motioning.

Shane shook his head. “I need to go.” He stood.

Ilya put a hand to his chest. “Wait, there’s no reason.”

“This is a bad idea.”

“Me being a single dad doesn’t mean I don’t get to sleep with men,” Ilya said, stern. He crossed his arms.

Shane scoffed. “It’s not because you’re a dad. It’s because you’re *his* dad. It’s unprofessional of me.”

“If I was a woman, wouldn’t it be different? Isn’t this how adults meet each other?”

“You’re not a normal adult!”

Ilya’s brow furrowed. “I’m not? I’m not allowed to have secrets like everyone? My sex life —”

“I don’t know if I can just keep this in my sex life!” Shane burst apart. “I mean, I feel like it might turn into more than that. For me.” Shane felt so embarrassed he wanted to just disappear right there. What a huge presumption from some texts and one hookup. “So, I just think we should end things while we’re ahead.”

Shane went for the door again. Ilya grabbed his wrist. “Hollander, wait—”

“I’ll see you at the game tomorrow,” Shane cut off. And he fled for the door.

It was an awful game. One of those games that makes you just want to close your eyes. Mischa did his best, but the defense was made up of huge boys impossible to pass. They slammed into Mischa and the other players, sending them sprawling.

Shane spent the whole game yelling at the officials that someone was going to get hurt. But it was all above board.

Ilya felt awful for him, for Mischa, for the whole team. It was this reminder that they weren’t undefeatable. They were suddenly just kids on ice.

“You did your best,” Ilya told Mischa after the game.

“I sucked,” Mischa whined.

“It’s good to lose, makes you tough.” Ilya made eye contact with Shane across the center. Shane quickly looked away.

Ilya felt a little bit awful. He'd never had someone ignore him like this, turn him down like this. He knew Shane's reasons, knew Shane's perfectionism, what he demanded of himself.

Ilya had not told him last night that he felt the same way. That he could not just keep Shane in his sex life.

It had felt different. When he was with Shane. It felt like something that didn't take any practice. There was no way to lose. It was the first thing that felt easy after so many years of things being hard. Hockey and parenting and, yes, being on his own.

Talking with Shane, kissing Shane, making love with Shane was like coming up for air. How could Ilya ever tell him this? What would make him understand?

"Dad," Mischa said, getting his attention. "I said, as a cheer up, would it be alright to invite some teammates to Boston, when I come see you play next weekend?"

Ilya looked back to Shane. "Yes, invite the whole team. But won't you need a chaperone to travel?"

Shane could not believe he was actually having a sleepover at Ilya Rozanov's house.

He of course thought the field trip was a good idea. The boys needed something to bring their energy back up after the hard loss at the tournament. Maybe Shane needed it, too.

Ilya had paid for their flights. Had gotten them the best tickets in the arena. Had played such a flashy, perfect game for them to learn from.

And now, he was setting up his living room for 20 teenagers to sleep in. He pushed the couches aside and brought out blankets and pillows and sleeping bags. Shane helped him, of course.

The boys were in the kitchen shouting over five large pizzas.

"Thank you again, for this," Shane found himself saying.

"Do not say thank you again. It's so boring."

Shane laughed. "Okay. I can sleep on the couch."

"I have a guest bedroom for you."

"Oh, thank you."

Ilya fake yawned.

From the guest bedroom, Shane could hear the boys pretending to sleep. A crescendo of laughter would float through the door, followed by shushing. Shane was glad they could be just kids.

His phone buzzed.

come see my balcony. through my bedroom.

Shane frowned. **I'm trying to sleep.**

okay I will enjoy my view all by myself

Shane got out of bed. He opened the door as quietly as he could. He tiptoed through the hall, to the master bedroom. He felt, too, like he was just a kid.

When he entered the bedroom, he could see Ilya out there on his balcony, the city lights silhouetting him. Like a shadow.

Shane went to the door, and out onto the balcony. There was a chill in the air. Shane should have pulled on a sweater or something. But he couldn't turn back now.

Ilya was sitting in the cold, smoking. He overlooked the lights of Boston. It had to be the best view of the city anyone owned.

"I didn't know you still smoke," Shane said as he took a seat beside Ilya.

Ilya inhaled. "I don't, I am a father. Just this once because so many boys is so stressful. I don't know how you do it."

Shane shrugged. "They mostly take care of themselves."

"I wouldn't trust them with the life of a goldfish."

"Well, goldfish die quite easily. Kids are resilient."

Ilya smiled. He looked over at Shane, and put his cigarette out on the pavement beside him. "Did you think anymore about us?" Ilya asked plainly.

Shane leaned back in his chair. "What is there to think about?" In all honesty, Shane had thought a lot. He had tried to think of any scenario where it would be possible for them to be together in a real way. Most of the time he didn't get further than *Ilya doesn't want that*, but sometimes he got into these delusional lines of thought. But all of them ended badly.

"Did you mean what you said?" Ilya said.

Shane wanted a cigarette now, if only for something to do with his hands. "That was completely embarrassing. Can we drop it?"

"No."

“Please?”

“I feel the same.”

Shane perked up. It felt like an electric shock. “What?”

“You seem like more than sex. I like you.”

Shane shook his head. “Are you sure?”

“I haven’t gotten very much... fun? In life,” Ilya said, looking at Shane instead of the view. “You make me feel young again. Like things are not so stressful. Like I still have time, but I need to use it how I want.”

“Same.”

“‘Same’,” Ilya repeated, shoulders falling. “Who’s English is bad now?”

“No, I mean,” Shane tried to save it. “I feel like I want to have time. Because of you.” Shane folded his arms. “But it doesn’t matter. Nothing can happen.”

“Why? I come to Canada all the time for my son. And the only people’s opinions I care about are yours and his.”

“What about Leonard?”

Ilya rolled his eyes. “You won’t even teach youth much longer. You will get an offer for college, or pro.”

Shane had never given it much thought, how far he could take coaching. It wasn’t like playing in that way. “I think I’d want to stay a youth coach. I like the kids.”

“They like you.”

“Although, I kind of wish they weren’t here right now.”

Ilya groaned. “I know, dumb on my part. I should have gotten them hotel.”

“How do you do it?” Shane asked. “Have a kid around all the time?”

Ilya exhaled. “It was hard, when he was a baby. And I was so young. All I want is to party and hookup. But I have to be here for him. He goes everywhere with me. Even if we are apart, I am responsible for him. Have a time I have to pick him up from babysitter. It was so hard, so much harder than hockey or... when when my father died, and things fell apart with my family in Russia. It is the hardest thing, to be a dad. But also the easiest, like there is no other choice. You just have to take care of him. And now... he is away at school. And I feel so alone in this house. It is so empty, and so quiet. And I could do anything. Have anyone over, go anywhere. But all I want is to watch a hockey game with him in the living room. Sorry, talked so long.”

“Don’t be sorry.” Shane loved listening to Ilya. “I’m sorry about your dad, about Russia.”

Ilya shrugged. “Feels like a long time ago now.”

“I think you’re an amazing dad.”

Ilya looked at him. “I think you will be an amazing dad one day, too.”

—

Ilya was up out of his seat immediately. “Yes! That’s my son!”

He watched as the team piled on Mischa. Mischa’s stick was raised triumphantly in the air.

There were still 2 seconds on the clock, and the officials were trying to regain control to play it out to zero. It didn’t matter. They had won. The puck was dropped, the whistle blew, and that was it.

The bench emptied as the team came on the ice to celebrate.

Ilya could hardly look away from Mischa, but he did for a moment, to see Shane, still completely composed, go to the opposing team’s coach and shake his hand. Great manors. Everything about him, a great coach.

He had made it worth it, and Ilya knew he would. When he was researching what team to put Mischa on, he’d heard of Shane Hollander. And remembered him, his sportsmanship from when he was a player, his ability. He heard as a coach that Shane was sensible and gentle in his demand for better, everything Ilya worried he lacked as a player, as a father, as a man.

So it had been worth it, the commuting to another country, the private school, even trusting being away from his son.

Shane had made Mischa a better player, and more importantly, a better kid. He’d understood Mischa, been patient with him. Had not just seen him as a pro’s son that could get away with anything. Shane had been fair every step of the way. All the way to the Championship game, which they’d just won by 1 point, scored in the final moments of the game by Mischa Rozanov.

And Ilya knew he couldn’t protect Mischa. From the eyes that were about to be upon him. From the pressure he’d be under.

But he knew Mischa would have a coach that would keep him humble, keep him focused, and keep him dedicated to this sport that had given Ilya everything, as complicated as everything was.

Ilya walked towards the ice. He saw Shane turn, finding him. Shane smiled and pointed at Mischa. *Look at him, he did it!*

“Thank you,” Ilya mouthed.

Shane just smiled, and shrugged. Later, he would tell Ilya thank you. For bringing him a kid that reminded him why coaching was so special. Why it was exactly what he was supposed to be doing.

But even right then, even before hearing from Shane about what they should do, Ilya was so sure what he wanted.

“Can I ask you something?” Ilya asked Mischa in the car. He was driving him back to school, after the excitement of the weekend. He would be a little celebrity at school now. There had been news stories about his goal on national sports outlets.

Mischa turned to him. “Yeah, what?”

“Well, maybe I need to explain something else first. Sorry, this is very awkward.”

“It’s fine.”

Ilya cleared his throat. “Okay. You told me to get a girlfriend, you remember?”

“No.”

“Great, well you did. And I actually met someone.”

“Really? In Boston?”

Ilya clicked his tongue. “Not exactly. Here actually.”

“What? How? When?”

“Um. Through your team.”

“One of the moms?”

This was worse than Ilya expected. “No. It’s... a man.”

Ilya looked sideways to see Mischa's reaction. Mischa looked ahead. “Oh. Okay. Sorry for assuming.”

“What? That’s it?”

Mischa tilted his head. “Yeah? I don’t care.”

Ilya exhaled. “Okay. First hurtle done. Honestly, that was the easy part. I have to tell you who it is now.”

“Is it Coach Shane?”

Ilya nearly crashed the car. “What? How’d you know?”

“I know you’re friends,” Mischa said matter-of-fact. “I don’t know anyone else you know. So it just makes sense.”

Ilya knew he should feel slightly insulted, but he only felt relieved. “You’re okay with that?”

“Yeah, he’s cool.”

“You don’t think it’s weird?”

“Why would it be weird? As long as you’re not embarrassing, like talking about me and telling him how to coach me or something.”

“No, we never talk about you. So boring.”

Mischa rolled his eyes. “Okay. Then it’s fine. I’m happy for you, dad.”

Ilya expected it to be much harder. But he shouldn’t have doubted Mischa. “You’re the best kid, you know that?”

“I’m the only kid you have, how do you know I’m the best?”

“You are. Now tell me I’m the best dad.”

“Maybe Coach Shane will be my favorite dad, though.”

“Woah, woah, woah, slow down there.”

Mischa giggled. He was still so young. So talented, so smart, but still just Ilya’s baby. “Kidding. You’ll always be my favorite, pappy.”

Ilya reached over, rubbing the top of his head, his mop of blonde curls falling into his eyes.

Sometimes when Ilya looked at Mischa, he saw a younger version of himself. This must be how he looked, when he lost his mom. But Mischa had a light that Ilya lost at a much younger age. It was a light Ilya wouldn’t let go out again. He would protect it for his son. And for himself.

Ilya turned up the song playing on the radio. He drove them, sometimes talking, but mostly in silence. As they got closer to the school, Ilya slowed down. He wanted as much time with Mischa as he could. He didn’t want to have to say goodbye.

But they would. And they would spend a few weeks apart. But it would be okay. Shane had promised to keep doing some one on one lessons for Mischa even though the season was over. So Ilya would hear all about Mischa from him.

He thought of the two of them, playing hockey together. Finally, Ilya had someone he could trust completely, someone he didn’t feel guilty for passing his son over to. It felt like a partner in this, a real partner.

“You’re growing up,” Ilya said, to Mischa, but maybe mostly to himself. “I have to learn how to say goodbye, even when it’s hard.”

Mischa looked over, understanding why Ilya had to say it. “I’m all good here,” Mischa assured him. “You don’t have to worry.”

“I will always worry,” Ilya countered. “But I know, you’re in good hands.”

End Notes

thanks for reading. shaking off the fanfic writer dust for hollanov.

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