

Troy and Harris Become Parents

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Troy and Harris Become Parents

by [liljenrocks](#)

Summary

Troy and Harris become parents to Ella and Ethan. When Ethan is born deaf, Troy struggles with the fear of letting his son down.

Notes

Hi everyone! Welcome to the next addition of The Centaur Family. Ethan and Ella have both made their appearances in other works in the series but before I can write anything else for them, I felt like I needed to introduce them properly.

If you've read the rest of the series, you know that Ethan is deaf. I did a lot of research for this story. But I also know there is no way I can have everything completely accurate. Please know if something isn't correct, I mean no offense.

I hope you enjoy getting to see Troy as a dad. I have to admit that Harris is my favorite character in the whole series but I couldn't write this from his POV. It had to be Troy.

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

Troy and Harris Become Parents

Troy and Harris have been married for two years when they start discussing the possibility of becoming parents.

“But how?” Troy asks Harris.

The other couples they know have gone about it in different ways. Ilya and Shane adopted their sons, Maks and Nicky. Granted they were Ilya’s nephews so their adoptions were a bit of a special case. Scott Hunter and Kip Grady used an egg donor, their sperm, and a surrogate. (They weren’t supposed to know which of them was the biological father, but one look at Benjamin and it was clear Kip Grady’s sperm won that race.) Families are made in a multitude of ways and all of those ways are beautiful. Troy and Harris just have to find the one that’s right for them.

They talk to Ilya and Shane about adoption. They ask a ton of questions. How difficult was the process? Would they do it again? And they don’t count it out. It could be a possibility.

They talk to Scott and Kip about their journey. The process is...a lot. Scott tells them they used an anonymous egg donor and then a friend of a friend served as their surrogate. It was very expensive but Troy is a professional hockey player. They spend their money wisely. The house and land are the only big purchase they made.

After weighing the options, they contact a fertility clinic in Ottawa and start the process. The clinic has donor eggs. They receive basic information about the donor. No specifics, but they know she was healthy with no known conditions. The clinic will take both Troy and Harris’s sperm and fertilize the eggs. Half with Harris and half with Troy. They’ll make the determination which embryos are the healthiest before implantation.

The process of finding a surrogate is easier than they anticipated, as well. Margot, Harris’s oldest sister, volunteers. She has two kids of her own and she says she enjoys being pregnant (so she says).

Troy and Harris realize there’s a lot that goes into the process of getting the embryos into Margot. They’re there for it all though. They buy her pizza when the injections make her hungry. They watch movies with her and feed her fancy chocolates from Montreal when the progesterone shots make her want to murder someone. And they’re with her when the doctor tells them the procedure worked and Margot is pregnant.

Troy doesn’t know much about pregnancy except what he’s learned from teammates’ wives being pregnant. He does a little reading to learn information, but, by all accounts, Margot’s pregnancy is pretty textbook. She has a little morning sickness during the first trimester but not too much. They also find out about week 10 that Margo is carrying not one but two babies.

“Both of the embryos we transferred implanted,” the doctor says. “It’s not uncommon to have twins through IVF.

Troy and Harris argue over if they should find out the gender of the babies. Troy wanted to know, Harris wanted to be surprised. But Harris also loves to plan. He relents and they find out the genders. They are ecstatic to find out that one of the babies is a girl and one is a boy.

Troy is playing in Ottawa when Margot goes into labor. She's at 38 weeks and babies look healthy to that point. They've just come off the ice after a game against Vancouver when he sees Harris running through the tunnel.

"It's time! Margot's water broke!" He tells him with more excitement than Troy thinks he's ever seen his husband have before.

Troy hustles through the post-game routine. He showers quickly, changes clothes, and meets Harris in the garage to head to the hospital. Because it isn't Margot's first birth, they know her labor could progress swiftly.

"She wants you both in the delivery room," Harris's mom says.

Troy feels awkward at first but follows Harris into the room. He keeps himself well at the head of the bed for the most part. Margot asks Troy for a game recap and he tells her about Shane's goal. He tells her about Ilya taking a nasty hit into the boards and the fisticuffs that broke out after that.

It's a little over an hour later when the doctor says, "I think we're ready to push."

Their daughter is born first. She screams and it breaks a little part of Troy's heart. She has the prettiest, softest, downiest sandy blonde hair that's more like fuzz than actual hair. Their son is born nine minutes later. He has the same high pitched cry. The same fuzzy hair.

The nurses take them away to be weighed, measured, and cleaned before handing them back to their dads. As far as weight goes, their daughter is bigger, but their son is longer by a full inch.

They're put into chairs to sit while doing skin-to-skin as the doctors finish cleaning up Margot. Then she holds both babies and there are so many tears! Troy is so incredibly thankful for all of this. For Harris, for Margot, for the babies. It's literally the best day of his life.

Ethan Samuel and Eleanor Margot are the most perfect things Troy has ever seen in his life. They are small but not alarmingly so. They share the same shade of sandy blonde hair and the tiniest lips. Ten fingers and ten toes.

Troy and Harris are standing in the hospital room holding the twins when their pediatrician pops in. The twins are a day old at this point. They've spent most of the time with Troy and Harris, except for the moments they were receiving the battery of newborn tests.

"Why don't we have a seat for a minute?" She says.

Harris is holding Ella and Troy is holding Ethan. They sit in two recliners that occupy the room.

“I don’t want to alarm you,” the doctor says. “But we have some concerns about Ethan’s hearing.”

Troy is already alarmed the moment she says she doesn’t want to alarm them. He asks the obvious: “What do you mean?”

“We screen all babies for a multitude of different conditions. One of those is a hearing screening called Otoacoustic Emissions. We put a little earbud with a microphone and an earphone in the baby’s ear and play sounds to look for an echo response. When we performed Eleanor’s, the echo was reflected back. When we performed Ethan’s, the echo was not,” the doctor explained.

“What does that mean?” Harris asks.

“It could be nothing. Or we could be looking at significant hearing loss,” the doctor said.

“How significant?” Troy asks.

“I don’t feel comfortable speculating that yet. I’m going to refer you to a pediatric audiologist for further screening,” the doctor says.

The twins are released from the hospital the next day. Their pediatrician makes the referral for an appointment the next week.

Harris is being overly positive. Troy is used to this. He listens to Harris talk about both scenarios. He discusses what they’ll do if Ethan has hearing loss or is deaf. Troy doesn’t do much of anything except stare at his son who is so incredibly small against his large arms.

He loves this little boy so much and he wonders what it will mean if Ethan lives in a world where he won’t get to hear his fathers tell him they love him.

They hold off on any non-family visitors. But Harris is open and honest with his family about the possibility of Ethan’s deaf diagnosis. Troy isn’t sure how he expects them to react but no one seems overly concerned. Which reminds Troy that his husband’s family (his family now) have experienced open heart surgeries and maybe Ethan’s hearing is minor in comparison. For them anyway.

They settle into life as parents of twin babies who wake up every two hours. Ethan cries just like Ella does. But there’s an edge that Troy feels, an anxiousness. He tries not to spiral, tries to remind himself it really won’t do any good or change anything.

They also learn quickly that the twins don’t like to be apart from each other for long. They sleep in separate cots in Troy and Harris’s bedroom but the cots are butted up against each other. At least that way they can feel each other’s presence, even if they aren’t in the same cot. That’s why they bring Ella with them to the appointment at the audiologist.

The pediatric audiologist is a short woman who wears scrubs with characters from Bluey on them. She smiles as she moves her hand at Ethan and says, "Hello, Ethan."

Troy realizes she's using sign language. He watches as she stoops a little to release him from the baby carrier. She picks him up and cradles him in the crook of her left arm.

"I'm Dr. Sutton," she says as she signs with her right hand. "I'm the pediatric audiologist."

"Nice to meet you," Troy says. Harris shakes her hand and then leans down to scoop Ella from the carrier.

"I've had a look at Ethan's previous test. We're going to run the same test again today and do a few other things. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?" Dr. Sutton asks.

Troy feels like he has a thousand questions but he can't think about how to verbalize even one of them.

"I think we'll probably have some after the tests," Harris says, breaking the awkwardness of the situation.

The doctor takes Ethan for about an hour. They wait in a room with Ella and take turns pacing. Though Troy will admit that Harris is handling the situation much better than he is.

"I've spent my whole life living with the possibility of unexpected news," Harris tells him.

Ella is also not happy to be without her twin, even for just the little amount of time they are apart. It's like she's searching for him.

When the doctor finally comes back in, she deposits Ethan gently into Troy's waiting arms. She tells them to sit.

"Ethan has what we would characterize as profound hearing loss in both ears," Dr. Sutton looks down at Ethan.

"Would hearing aids help?" Troy asks. It's something he read about one night while he was scrolling on his phone.

Dr. Sutton shakes her head. "Hearing aids amplify sound for those that can hear some sounds. From the test we've conducted, Ethan cannot hear any sounds." Troy and Harris exchange a look. "We will test again in two months but I want to be honest with you. There will most likely be no change."

Troy is confused. "But why would this happen?" he asks.

"Genetics," the doctor answers.

"But neither of us is deaf. And, as far as we know, the egg donor wasn't either," Harris says.

“That doesn’t mean you don’t carry a recessive gene.” Troy and Harris exchange a look. “90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents.” “What will life look like for him?” Troy asks.

“It will look like it does for any child. Just because Ethan is deaf doesn’t mean he is anything less than perfect,” Dr. Sutton explains. “He may have to do some things a little differently but he will live an amazing life.”

Troy appreciates that she doesn’t seem to have any sign of judgement in her eyes and he realizes that this is something he should have known. How could he not? This sweet little blue eyed boy in his arms was perfect. Ethan kicked his feet and looked up at him with bright eyes.

“What can we do to make sure we are the parents he deserves?” He hears Harris ask.

“You should both start taking sign language classes. I would recommend starting to sign as soon as you can,” she says. “The sooner you can start signing to him, the sooner he will learn.”

Ilya and Shane are the first team members to visit them at home. They’ve brought their boys with them and they both sit stoically on the sofa with Ilya as he holds Ella.

Shane is on his feet holding Ethan and swaying back and forth. “They’re beautiful,” Shane says.

He and Harris are standing off to the side, watching their close friends with their children.

“What do you think, Maks and Nicky?” Harris asks.

“They are so tiny,” Nicky says and puts his fingers up to measure just a small inch.

Maks gets up and walks to stand next to Shane. He tugs on his shirt so that Shane stoops down and Maks smiles at Ethan. “We can be friends, Ethan, even if I’m older,” Maks says.

A lump forms in Troy’s throat. He knows his son can’t hear Maks saying it but he hopes it’s true nonetheless. Maks Hollander-Rozanov would be a great friend to have. Troy recognizes something in Maks that lets him know that he understands tough situations more than a lot of people.

Harris stoops down then to be on level with Maks and Shane. Troy watches him swallow hard. Harris runs the back of his hand along Ethan’s cheek and the baby stirs. “Maks,” Harris says. “Ethan can’t hear you. He’s deaf.”

Troy sees Maks thinking. “That’s okay. We’ll learn how to talk to each other.”

(Maks learns the basics but, as they get older, he and Ethan mainly learn to communicate through writing or texting. Maks’s wife, Charlie, and Ethan become fast friends and Ethan becomes an integral part of their family.)

Troy and Harris enroll in virtual sign language classes. Troy's travel schedule makes it difficult for him to consistently attend classes in person. Most of the lessons are on off night or in the morning over Zoom.

"Come with us! Get dinner, get drinks," Ilya says. He's taking the team out in Philly before their game tomorrow afternoon.

"Can't," Troy says. "I have a thing."

Ilya looks at him, unimpressed. "What 'thing'?" He makes the air quotes over "thing" like he's sure Troy made it up.

Troy sighs. "I have an online sign language class. Harris and I are trying to learn and since we travel so much during the season, I do it on the iPad."

Ilya looks at him and narrows his eyes a little, like he's thinking. "Okay, you want us to bring you food back?" He asks. Troy is curious how his attitude changed so quickly. "Is how Shane learned Russian too. He would do lessons online. Is important to be able to communicate with the people you love."

"And you, of course, being the person he loved?" Troy chuckles.

"Da, always me," Ilya smiles then and he knows he's being mushy. "We'll bring you food. Have good lesson, yeah?"

"Yeah, thanks," Troy says.

He shuts the door and kicks up the iPad to start the Zoom. Harris is already there and seeing him in the weird Brady Brunch frame makes his heart ache a little.

"I love you," Harris signs.

Troy signs it back and mouths, "I love you."

Then the instructor is on the screen. They run through a few basic signs. She's testing them to make sure they are keeping up with their end of the bargain. Harris is really good at it and Troy is a little jealous he's not better than he is.

The lesson lasts about 90-minutes, three times a week. It's March. The twins are nearing six months and he and Harris have been working very hard to learn as much as they can, and, on the advice of their pediatrician and the audiologist, they sign with Ethan and Ella as much as possible.

Troy is staring at a picture of the twins that Harris just sent him when there's a knock at the door.

He's surprised to find Ilya and Shane at the door with bags full of food.

“We brought dinner,” Ilya says. He lifts the bags up for dramatic effect.

“Did you not eat?” Troy asks.

“We thought we would have dinner with you and you could tell us about the kids,” Shane says.

“We have new pictures of our princess too,” Ilya says. He pulls out his phone and shows it to Troy.

“She’s so adorable,” Troy laughs at the picture of the little baby dressed in an outfit covered with matryoshka dolls.

Troy feels bad for not having asked about Natalia earlier. She must be four months old and was adopted not long after the twins were born. It’s nice to think the twins will grow up with a Hollanov kiddo.

It’s funny to him too how much of a girl dad Ilya is. He loves his sons but who would have thought he would be such a softie for a baby girl?

“Come. Eat, I’m starving,” Ilya says as Shane pulls the food from the bags and sets it out on the table in the hotel room. It’s not a fancy dinner. Better burgers than fast food. But it’s nice to be here with them. Nice that they thought of him.

“My husband is very smart. Not as smart as me, of course,” Ilya says.

“Of course,” Troy shakes his head.

“Tell him your idea, Shane,” Ilya nudges at Shane.

“It’s silly,” Shane says. “But maybe you could practice sign language when you talk to us. Like to the team.”

“What do you mean?” Troy asks.

“Just, like when we’re having conversations, you should sign as you talk. We won’t know if you’re doing it correctly but it lets you practice.” Shane looks at Ilya.

“Is why he had a group of Russian babushkas in Montreal,” Ilya grins.

“There’s this Russian bakery in Montreal that I would go to,”

Shane elaborates. “I would just buy stuff so I could practice saying the names. And there was this group of elderly Russian ladies that hung out there.”

“Babushkas,” Ilya clarifies.

“I literally talked to them three times!” Shane says and Ilya raises his eyebrows like he doesn’t believe him.

“They had big crush on Shane Hollander,” Ilya says and Troy wonders if he doesn’t hear a little jealousy in his voice.

“Oh my god, Ilya! I’m gay! Grandma’s are not my type,” Shane says. “And I was literally learning Russian to talk to you.”

Troy is wondering which alternate universe he’s ended up in, listening to his captain and his husband argue about Russian grandmothers.

“The point is, they let me practice,” Shane says. “We will also let you practice.”

“And maybe we learn some along the way, da?” Ilya asks, popping a French fry into his mouth. “Would be good. Then we teach Maks, Nicky, and Nat too.”

“Okay, I’ll try,” Troy says.

But Troy and Harris both start doing it. When they have conversations with others. When they talk to Troy’s teammates. And Ilya and Shane also try to learn a few basics too.

Troy likes to think he and Harris have a solid foundation in their marriage. It’s part of why they waited two years before starting a family. Things were good, why change them?

But there’s one day, when Troy feels like the world is out to get him, that he snaps. He breaks a blade during the game. No big deal, happens. He literally just has to skate over for the equipment manager to put a new one on. But for some reason, it feels like a big deal that day.

A reporter asks a question about queer hockey players. It’s not offensive, it’s actually just a question for clarification. Troy can’t even remember what it was about later. He’s just tired of being made to answer those kinds of questions. But it always comes back to him being one of the first openly queer players in the MLH.

It doesn’t get better when another reporter asks about his “deaf kid.” Troy knows he wouldn’t have to answer the question if Harris were here but he’s not. He’s home tonight with the twins. Troy wants to yell at the reporter to have a little couth. Ilya does it for him instead.

His car battery is dead after the game. Is it an inconvenience? Yes. Is it the end of the world? No. He calls Harris and Harris comes to the arena to get him.

Ethan and Ella are just over a year old and both are having nuclear meltdowns in the backseat of Harris’s pick up truck. It’s loud wailing like he’s not heard before. Ella is easy to pacify, he gives her a stuffed octopus she loves and a literal pacifier while Harris turns the radio to a lullaby she loves. But Ethan is not calming down. He’s screaming, he’s sobbing to the point that Troy makes Harris pull over on the rural road because he’s sure the little boy is going to vomit with how worked up he is.

Troy gets Ethan out of his seat and presses him to chest while he cries. Troy rocks him back and forth. “Come on, buddy. Just relax. Just relax. Do you want me to sing? Hmmm?”

And then Harris says, “Troy, he won’t calm like Ella does.”

And Troy loses it. He takes everything he’s felt for so long out on the one person he knows will love him no matter what.

“I know my son is deaf! I know he can’t hear me!” Troy yells. “And I just want to know when I get to stop being the fucking poster child for everything and get a fucking break!”

And Troy is crying too now. And Harris does what Harris does best: he loves him. He pulls him into his arms and holds both Ethan and Troy.

“I’m sorry,” Troy sobs.

Miraculously, Ethan starts to quiet.

“It’s a lot,” Harris says. “I know it is.”

“First it was Dallas Kent and being the only person who believed he was capable of everything he did. Then it was being one of only four or five gay hockey players. And now it’s being the parent of a deaf child and I love Ethan and I wouldn’t trade him for anything. It’s just so…”

“Hard,” Harris finishes for him.

“What if I’m not the dad he needs me to be? What if I can’t soothe him when he cries? What if I can’t learn sign language? What if I become what my dad is, an asshole with kids who grow up to resent me?” Troy feels like he’s vomiting every single thought he’s had over the last twelve months. He doesn’t mean for it to come out.

Harris is still hugging him. “That’s a lot to hold in, pal.”

“God, I’m sorry,” Troy mumbles.

“Troy,” Harris says. “Don’t apologize. We are a team, you and me. We do this together. I know it feels like everything is shit sometimes. I know it may feel like you’ve been dealt a lot. But we will always have each other. The fact that you worry about the things you worry about means that you love our son. There will be times when we will fail but, I know you, Troy Barrett-Drover. You are a good father because when we fail, you won’t give up.”

Harris pulls back a little and Troy looks down into Ethan’s eyes as they blink tears away. Then Ethan puts his hand on Troy’s cheek and smiles.

“You said he couldn’t hear you but you know when he’s close to your chest like that, he can feel your chest vibrate. I’ve figured out that that’s comforting to him. So you can sing to him. He can’t hear the words but he can feel the love in them,” Harris says.

Harris is right because he usually is.

“I just don’t want to fail him,” Troy says. “I want him to have every opportunity and do whatever he wants and I don’t want to be the reason he misses out on anything.”

Harris leans forward to kiss him then. “You are an amazing father, Troy, and he is a lucky little boy to have someone who loves him so much.”

It’s during warmups at an afternoon game that Troy sees the sign. It says, “Go, Troy!” But the letters are written in hands forming the letters in sign language. There’s a little girl holding the sign and jumping up and down.

Troy motions for her to come closer to the boards and tosses a puck over the glass to her.

The girl catches it and shows it to the man standing next to her before she turns to him and signs, “Thank you.”

When he gets back to the locker room before the game, he texts Harris, who’s at the game that night, and asks if he can find them.

Sure, Harris texts.

Will you see if they can stick around after the game until I can come out? I’d like to meet them, Troy texts back.

You got it! 🙌 Harris texts.

Troy texts a quick “🙌*too*” before they head out of the locker room.

When the game ends, Troy checks his messages to see that Harris found the girl and her father and would bring them down when he was ready to meet them.

“Hi,” Troy signs to the little girl. “I’m still learning sign language so I might not be able to do much,” he tells the man who he assumes is the girl’s dad. Harris is standing to the side watching. Troy knows he’s probably itching to take photos of the exchange.

“That’s okay. Do what you can,” the dad says. “We can interpret the rest for you.”

“I’m Troy. What’s your name?” He stumbles through the signs.

“Cora,” she signs back. She signs more but Troy doesn’t catch all of it. He looks to her Dad.

“You’re my favorite player,” the dad says, interpreting for his daughter. Cora signs something and Troy realizes just how bad he is at sign language. “How do you know how to sign?”

“My son, Ethan,” Troy swallows and signs.

“Is he deaf?” Cora signs.

“Yes,” Troy signs back.

Cora smiles and looks at him with bright eyes. She signs excitedly and her dad interprets, “There are not many hockey players who know about being deaf. Your son is one of us and

you are too!”

Troy doesn’t know why but he can’t push down the lump in his throat anymore and he lets out a little bit of a wet sob. He’s physically wiping away tears. He’s been so worried about what being deaf will mean for Ethan that he hasn’t thought about the amazing community that exists that their entire family gets to be a part of.

“There’s a group here in Ottawa for deaf and hard of hearing children. There are kids of all ages in it. We get together every other week so the kids can be around other kids who sign,” the dad says as he signs. “It also gives us parents a chance to be around other parents who understand the complexities of raising a deaf child.”

“It’s fun!” Cora signs. “I get to play with other kids that sign. None of the kids at my school know sign language.”

“I can give you the information if you want. No pressure,” the dad says while signing. “How old is your son?”

Troy clears his throat. “He’s thirteen months old. My husband and I are both learning how to sign but he’s definitely better at it than I am.”

Harris joins them then. “I’m the husband, Harris,” he says as he signs.

The dad laughs. He says and signs, “I’m Jasper, by the way. It’s nice to meet you both.”

Troy shakes his hand. “Ethan has a twin, Ella, she’s hearing. Would it be okay for her to come too?”

Jasper nods. “Of course. Cora’s older brother and younger sister are hearing, as well. We try to include the whole family as much as possible. And it would be good for your daughter to be around others that are signing.”

Jasper gives Troy the name of the group, and as they check the social media pages that night, he and Harris decide to give it a try.

Getting to the park with two toddlers is an adventure in itself. The twins are surprisingly calm and collected. It’s he and Harris that seem to be stressed.

“Do we take food?” Harris asks.

Troy shrugs. “I have no idea!”

“Is it weird if we dress the twins in Centaurs gear?” Harris asks.

“Again, no idea,” Troy doesn’t mean to sound so exasperated but he might also be slightly nervous about meeting new people or about introducing the twins to new people. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to be snippy.”

Harris stops what he's doing and comes around to where Troy is standing in their bathroom. He puts his arms around Troy and Troy instantly feels himself sigh out a breath.

"We have amazing kids," Harris says. "And this is just a great opportunity for Ethan and Ella and us to meet people who know more about things we need to learn about." Troy nods into him.

They don't dress the kids in Centaurs gear. They do bring an apple crumble that Harris had in the fridge.

Harris also explains to the twins where they're going and what they're going to do. He's good at that, making sure they're aware of what's happening. He signs to both of them and Troy has noticed that while Ella can say words like Dada and Pup, both Ethan and Ella move their hands like they're signing.

The group is larger than Troy was anticipating and there are children of all different ages. Some are even younger than the twins and it makes Troy a little sad they didn't know about this group before.

Troy is carrying Ethan and Harris is carrying Ella, as well as his apple crumble. Ethan is looking around like he does, taking every sight in. Ella is making noises and pointing.

When he catches sight of them, Jasper walks towards them. "Hey guys, I'm glad you made it," he signs as he talks.

"Thanks for inviting us," Troy says.

"We brought apple crumble," Harris says.

"That's perfect!" Jasper takes it from him. "Come meet some of the other families."

Troy and Harris follow behind Jasper to a pavilion where maybe a dozen other adults are standing around talking and signing. Jasper puts the apple crumble on the table and then introduces them.

"Everyone, meet Troy and Harris Barrett-Drover," Jasper says as he signs. "Remind me of your kiddos' names?"

"This is Ethan," Troy says.

"And this is Ella," Harris says and signs.

I should have signed, Troy thinks to himself.

"They are adorable!" One of the women says and signs. "How old are they?"

"Almost fourteen months," Harris answers. Troy watches him flawlessly sign.

One of the other women wraps her arm around the first woman's waist. "We're Jo and Darcy," she says and signs. She points to a boy and girl running around. "Those are our kids,

Flora and Justin.”

The other parents take turns introducing themselves as well. They meet Jasper’s wife, Livy. They also have a teenage son that introduces himself as Shane.

“After Shane Hollander,” the teenager says. “It’s so cool you’re here,” Shane’s voice is excited and he signs a little wildly. But what Troy notices is that Ethan is watching him intently and he reaches for Shane. And Shane takes him. “Hey, Ethan.”

“Troy might be a little jealous you’re named after Hollander,” Harris jokes.

“I was born in Montreal so I was a Metros fan until Shane Hollander moved to Ottawa. Then I was a Centaurs fan. Sadly we did not have another son to name Troy,” Livy says with a grin.

“We have Cora, who you met the other day, and our youngest daughter, Hazel,” Jasper explains, pointing to the girls swinging on a swing set.

Troy is watching as Shane talks to Ethan and signs. Ethan starts moving his hands back at the teenager. Obviously he’s not saying any words but Troy sees him.

“He’s babbling,” Darcy says as she signs and nods to Ethan. “He’s moving his hands. He’s not signing anything yet but he knows that’s how to communicate. That’s a good sign.”

The adults invite Troy and Harris to sit. Ethan seems content with Shane (which is going to get confusing when they see Shane Hollander-Rozanov again). Ella has found a playmate in another toddler about her age named Calliope.

“I’m so glad Troy asked me to find you guys at the game,” Harris says. His eyes are on Ella as she plays with the other little girl. Troy notices that Callie, as they call her, has hearing aids but she also “babbles” like Ethan and Ella. “Can I ask how this group started?”

“One of the biggest challenges a deaf child can experience is feeling isolated or alone,” Jasper says as he signs. “We wanted to make sure our kids have a community within each other so we started this group about 8 years ago, Cora was a baby. We all shared a common audiologist and kind of connected that way.”

“I think we all had so many questions but we didn’t know how to ask them or who to ask them too. So it’s not just the kids who benefit from this group. It’s us as parents too,” Darcy says.

“There’ve been some kids that have grown up and parents that don’t really need us anymore but we keep meeting and keep passing on the roles to others,” Jasper adds.

Troy is listening and he’s watching the way Ethan is sitting on the blanket now with Ella and Callie. Teenage Shane has been recruited by Cora to push her on the swings.

“Do you have any questions you want to ask us?” Livy asks.

Troy can’t help that he blurts out, “How did you get so good at signing?”

“Oh, sweetie,” Darcy laughs. “We’ve had a long time to learn. And I don’t know about the rest of you, but I was terrible for a long time. We adopted Flora when she was six months old and got a crash course in sign language. Like being a parent, it just takes time and you won’t ever know everything.”

“It’s just important that you try,” Livy adds.

And that’s the lesson in all of it. It’s the same thing that Harris has said to him. His worries, his concerns, he just has to try.

The support of the group helps Harris and Troy know better how to advocate for Ethan and his needs. When he’s enrolled in school, they know to ask for an education assistant to sign for him.

The group also connects him with a therapist for deaf and hard of hearing children. Ethan can often get upset when Harris and Troy can’t understand what it is he wants or needs. The therapist helps him learn to stay calm.

Ethan learns to sign quickly and there’s a point where he’s teaching them signs. He interacts with the kids in the group but he also learns how to better communicate with other children who don’t sign.

They are also beyond shocked when they find out that five-year old Natalia Hollander-Rozanov is taking sign language classes. They are visiting the Hollander-Rozanov house when Harris notices what appears to be a sight word sign language worksheet.

“Is Nat’s,” Ilya tells them.

“Nat’s?” Troy asks.

“She is taking lessons,” Ilya says, almost like he’s telling them it’s sunny outside or they’re having roast beef for dinner.

“Your daughter, Natalia?” Harris asks for clarification.

Troy looks then to the living area where the kids are. Natalia is sitting in front of Ethan and Ella is next to her. She’s showing her signs and Natalia is attempting to duplicate them.

“She does not like hockey, to play anyway. She is better at watching. We asked her if she wanted to do something else instead and she said she wanted to learn to talk to Ethan,” Shane explains. He’s also watching the scene in front of them. “She takes lessons two days a week.”

“She said he is special to her,” Ilya adds. “I should be concerned but I’m not. Yet.”

Natalia takes lessons for a few years before Ethan and Ella become the only teachers she needs. The twins, Nat, and Diana Hayes form their own little community and they spend

hours together. Sometimes playing, sometimes dancing to no music, and sometimes just sitting together.

Ethan is 8 when the school calls them into the office. Troy is at practice and he sees Harris on the edge of the practice rink. Harris looks like he just ran there from his office.

“Ethan’s been in a fight,” Harris tells him as he struggles to catch his breath.

“What?” Troy is surprised. Ethan is usually the most docile of the two twins. He’s learned how to keep his calm over the years. “What happened?”

“I’m not sure. The principal wants to see us,” Harris tells him.

Troy runs through a million scenarios in his head. Ethan has done so well regulating his emotions and learning to communicate his needs over the last few years. Therapy has been a big help with that, as well as supportive teachers and friends who are willing to learn what works best for Ethan. So why his usually reserved son would get in a fight is beyond anything he can comprehend.

What Troy doesn’t expect to see when they walk into the school is Ilya and Shane Hollander-Rozanov sitting outside the office, their daughter Natalia between them, wiping tears from her eyes.

“Hey,” Troy says to Shane and Ilya. Shane’s hair is peppered with grey and Ilya’s eyes have the slightest of wrinkles at the corners. Their families are close, constantly together. And while Ilya and Shane are retired from the team, they are still constantly working. They are still active in the Centaurs. But really it’s the Oracles and the Irina Foundation that keep them occupied. In addition to their three kids.

Ethan is sitting across from the Hollander-Rozanov family with Ella by his side. Troy stoops down in front of him. “You okay, buddy?” He signs.

“Stupid Jack,” Ethan signs back to him.

Natalia and Ethan’s teacher and Ethan’s educational assistant come out of the office first.

“What’s going on?” Troy asks as he stands from his crouch.

“There’s been an incident,” Mr. Jameson, Ethan’s teacher, says. “The principal would like to talk to all of you and the children in her office.”

The principal is a middle-aged lady who brings Ethan and Natalia in with their parents. She also has Ethan’s education assistant stay so she can sign for Ethan. The principal asks what happened. It seems rhetorical to Troy. Like she might already know but needs to hear it from the kids.

“It’s my fault,” Natalia says quietly. “Jack Martin called me a name and...I told Ella what he said. And Ella told Ethan.”

“What name did he call you, Natalia?” Shane asks.

“I don’t want to say it,” she’s chewing on her bottom lip like Ilya sometimes does when he’s nervous.

“You won’t get in trouble, kotenok,” Ilya says.

“He called me a bitch,” Nat says.

Troy can practically feel the anger rolling off of not just Ilya but Shane too. Shane Hollander is legendary for his cool but no one messes with the Hollander-Rozanov children.

“Where is this Jack?” Ilya asks through his teeth.

“Ilya, you’re not fighting an 8-year old,” Harris says.

“No, I will fight his parents,” Ilya says.

The principal sighs. “I don’t think that will be necessary, Mr. Hollander-Rozanov.”

To Troy’s surprise, the principal leans forward and signs to Ethan. “Ethan, when something like that happens, you have to tell an adult. You can’t just punch people because they say mean things.” She looks up. “Right, gentlemen?”

She’s talking to all of them. A group of professional hockey players, one of them legendary for good punches. Troy can literally feel Ilya roll his eyes.

“Right,” Ilya eventually says.

“I will take care of Jack but no more punching,” the principal signs to Ethan. “You are a good friend though to want to protect Natalia.” She looks at Troy and Harris then. “I’m going to have him meet with the school counselor but I have a feeling this won’t happen again.”

“It won’t,” Ethan signs. “I’m sorry.”

“You will need to tell Jack you’re sorry too,” the principal signs. “And Jack will need to tell Natalia he’s sorry, as well.”

The principal dismisses the children for the day, telling them all to go home, and she’ll see them bright and early in the morning.

“I’ll write Jack an apology note,” Ethan signs.

As they walk out of the office, into the hallway, Natalia hugs Ethan tight and he hugs her back just as fiercely. When they pull apart, Natalia puts her hands on Ethan’s cheeks to make sure he’s looking at her.

Then she says and signs, “I love you.”

Troy watches as Ethan doesn’t even hesitate to sign back, “I love you too.”

Troy and Harris should have known then that their lives would be irrevocably intertwined with Ilya and Shane.

End Notes

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