

Learning Curve

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76211971) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76211971>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Hayden Pike/Jackie Pike , Hayden Pike & Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Hayden Pike
Characters:	Hayden Pike , Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Jackie Pike , Jade Pike , Ruby Pike , Arthur Pike , Amber Pike , Anya Ilya Rozanov's Dog
Additional Tags:	Post-Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Good Friend Hayden Pike , POV Hayden Pike , Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , hayden has a hard time tolerating ilya , but he tries for shane , Domestic , the cottage , Canon Compliant , Post-Canon , POV Outsider
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-22 Words: 7,997 Chapters: 1/1

Learning Curve

by [ofmonticello](#)

Summary

As Hayden stood up, Rozanov did too. "I will help him," he said. "You relax, enjoy not going outside in the dark."

Jackie sat back down with a smile. "Thank you, Ilya."

As Hayden and Rozanov went outside, he couldn't help himself. "What, are you afraid of the dark?"

Rozanov made a sound similar to a scoff, leading Hayden to the car. "Try harder next time, Pike." He dismissed the jab, but he didn't come up with one of his usual quick comebacks so Hayden counted it as a win for himself.

--

a year following the long game, the pike family heads to shane and ilya's cottage in ottawa to spend a week with them. hayden is forced into totally mundane situations with the man he can't stand, rozanov. during his time at the cottage, he begins to understand his best friend's husband

Notes

this is my first ever heated rivalry/game changers related fic so i am kinda nervous tbh! a week ago i thought i'd be taking a break from writing but then these hockey players consumed every moment of my thoughts so here we are.

i like to think of how hayden and ilya's relationship develops, since they're both so important to shane, so i decided to write about hayden learning to understand ilya a bit better! i hope you enjoy!

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

Sunday

To say Hayden wasn't excited would technically be incorrect. He was absolutely excited to be spending a week of his summer spending time with his favorite people on the planet: his wife, his kids, and his best friend.

The only reason he *wasn't* excited was because of his best friend's husband.

The idea of spending any more time with Ilya Rozanov than he already had to made Hayden want to claw his own face off. But here he was, turning off his car in the driveway of Shane's cottage that he now shared with the man.

"Okay!" Jackie clapped her hands together, turning around to face their children who were already beginning to unbuckle excitedly. "Before we go inside, what are we gonna remember while we're here?"

Hayden looked in the rearview mirror, watching as his daughters stopped what they were doing to look at their mother. Arthur and Amber were both asleep.

"We have to behave or we have to go home." Jade recited, a very simplified version of the speech that Jackie had given them any time the whole family went somewhere.

Hayden was aware that his kids could be a bit of a handful, which made him feel frustrated and guilty anytime he had too much time to sit with it. "What else?" He prompted.

Ruby sighed, wiping her hair out of her face as she finally got her seatbelt undone. "Say please and thank you and listen to the grown ups."

"Can we get out now?" Jade asked impatiently. While Hayden stayed put, looking at the "cottage" with probably too much dread, Jackie nodded and got out to gather Arthur.

Hayden got out after just a moment of contemplating everything, heading to grab Amber. Jade and Ruby were already running up to the front door.

"I'll grab the bags later," he said to Jackie. "I don't want to just send them in there after they've been in the car for two hours."

Jackie nodded in agreement, walking alongside Hayden to join their daughters at the front door. "Do you remember *your* rules?"

With a sigh, Hayden nodded. "I'm not a kid, Jackie." Then, sensing the look his wife was giving him, he corrected himself. "I promise I'll behave...as best as I can."

In front of them, the twins pounded their small fists on the door. It didn't take long for it to swing open, and thankfully it was Shane who had answered the door. He was immediately wrapped up by the twins, smiling brightly at them.

“Hey, guys!” He greeted, looking back up at Hayden and Jackie, stepping back with Jade and Ruby attached to his legs.

Hayden stepped in with a stupid amount of caution, like he might step on a mine or something if he put his foot in the wrong spot. Beside him, Jackie was pulling Shane into a small hug, careful not to disturb Arthur. After a similar interaction with Hayden, Shane motioned for them to follow him into the rest of the house.

Rozanov was sprawled out on the couch in the living room, standing when everyone else entered. Hayden came to a stop a bit behind his wife and Shane, battling with himself not to seem too displeased about the mere sight of Rozanov.

Rozanov, who was flashing his stupid smile at Hayden's wife. “Jackie!” He greeted, opening his arms for a hug. “Is so nice to have you here.”

“Thank you for inviting us,” Jackie said as she stood on her toes to embrace Rozanov. “Especially with the kids. You guys might be in for it.”

Rozanov waved a dismissive hand. “Your kids are awesome, is no problem.” He glanced at Hayden, his expression becoming noticeably less enthusiastic. “Pike.”

Hayden gave a small nod. “Rozanov.”

Shane frowned as he looked between them. Hayden was biting back his usual quips, since it was only the first of seven days navigating Rozanov. Not throwing an insult had him at a loss for words, though, leading to an awkward silence.

“Okay!” Rozanov said, looking at Jackie again. “I will show you the rooms.” He said, turning and leading Jackie away.

Hayden turned back to Shane, who was giving him a very familiar look. It was a mix of warning and pleading, begging his best friend to just *try*.

“I know, I know,” Hayden said, putting up his free hand in defense. “Listen, I didn't say anything nasty to the guy. I just don't have anything else to say to him either.”

Shane crossed his arms, looking like he was trying to figure out exactly what he wanted to say. “Just please don't pick any fights. Or give in when he inevitably does.”

Hayden pressed his lips together, stopping himself from whining that it was unfair that Rozanov apparently got to pick fights. “I'll do my best.”

It didn't take long for them to head outside, the four adults sitting in very nice Adirondack chairs while the kids ran around the large lawn. Rozanov's dog was much more pleasant than he was, putting up with the antics of the children very well.

Hayden was sitting across from Shane, with Rozanov across from Jackie. Shane and Jackie were talking about something that Hayden had missed the start of, and now he was just

sitting quietly. He focused his attention in the direction of the kids playing, which was important to do anyways, instead of trying to strike up his own conversation with Rozanov.

This strategy only worked for so long.

“Hayden, what do you think?” Jackie asked him, reaching over to rest her hand on his shoulder.

Hayden turned towards her, unable to hide the fact that he hadn't been listening. “About what?”

Rozanov looked delighted at Hayden's lack of attentiveness. “Your wife was telling us about switching the school your kids go to. Very important topic, you should probably pay more attention.”

“I-” Hayden stopped himself, keeping his focus on Jackie. “Sorry, I got distracted watching the kids.”

Jackie didn't seem to care. “I was just telling Shane and Ilya about how nasty the principal is.”

Ilya.

“Oh, yeah,” Hayden nodded. “Apparently he put an eight year old in a headlock or some shit, just because he was misbehaving. Pretty fucked up to think about a school principal putting his hands on the students, so we were trying to find an alternative.”

Shane shook his head. “I don't understand why someone would work with kids if they're gonna do something like that.”

Beside him, Rozanov gave a weird, very short laugh. He didn't actually seem amused though.

Jackie pushed the conversation forward. “Do you guys have any plans for kids?” She asked. Hayden could barely imagine Rozanov as a father.

“Sort of,” Shane answered. At the same time, Rozanov said, “Yes.” Another thing they were apparently not on the same page about.

Hayden watched as Shane glanced at Rozanov, his expression much warier than his husband's. They shared a look, very similar to ones that Hayden shared with Jackie, before Rozanov explained further.

“We will have kids. Just not until we retire, and neither of us know when that is.” He then looked at Hayden with a cocky grin. “Sorry, Pike. You will keep losing.”

“Fuck off, Rozanov.” Hayden rolled his eyes, giving a frustrated huff. He had to sit there and take it while Rozanov was an ass. Bullshit!

Shane glared at Rozanov, who didn't seem affected by it at all. “Ilya would start a family right now if it was possible. It just wouldn't be right, though, if both of us are still paying.”

Rozanov nodded, looking more genuine now. “Not enough time to really be involved.”

Jackie nodded, and Hayden felt guilty again. He admired his wife's ability to care for their four children while he was constantly busy, but he also wished that he was there more. Sometimes he wondered how well his kids really knew him.

Dinner went more smoothly than Hayden had expected. Then it was dark, and the kids were in bed, and the four adults were sitting in the living room together with a TV show playing quietly as background noise.

Jackie was in one of two armchairs, Shane in the other. Hayden had sat down on the couch facing them, expecting Rozanov to be obnoxious as usual and sit with Shane somehow. Instead, he was on the opposite end of the couch, sprawled out comfortably. Hayden was not comfortable.

His relationship, or whatever, with Rozanov was better than it had been in the past. But it was still like standing on hot coals trying to like the guy, or even tolerate him. Now that he was *married* to Shane, it was somehow even more of a mindfuck.

“I’m gonna go take a quick shower,” Shane said, standing up. He gave a pointed look at Hayden and Rozanov, but didn't say anything. Hayden understood it and was sure Rozanov did too.

As Shane walked past the couch, he brushed his hand against Rozanov’s chest. It was brief, like he didn't even realize he was doing it. Hayden had to admit that it was nice to see Shane willingly show affection towards someone, someone he was *married* to, even if it was Ilya Rozanov.

“Should we grab the bags from the car now?” Jackie asked, already standing up because she was really saying *Hayden it's time to go get our bags*.

As Hayden stood up, Rozanov did too. “I will help him,” he said. “You relax, enjoy not going outside in the dark.”

Jackie sat back down with a smile. “Thank you, Ilya.”

As Hayden and Rozanov went outside, he couldn't help himself. “What, are you afraid of the dark?”

Rozanov made a sound similar to a scoff, leading Hayden to the car. “Try harder next time, Pike.” He dismissed the jab, but he didn't come up with one of his usual quick comebacks so Hayden counted it as a win for himself.

They grabbed the bags—one for Hayden, one for Jackie, one for the twins, and one for Amber and Arthur. Ilya led Hayden upstairs, where he actually hadn't been before.

“This is your room,” he said in a hushed voice, nudging the door open. “Is across from the kid's room.”

Hayden turned the light on, setting the bags he was holding on the carpeted floor. "Thanks," he mumbled.

Rozanov gave a short nod, stepping past Hayden. Then he stopped in his tracks, turning back around. "Shane is very happy that you are here," he said. "So I am happy you are here."

Hayden stood there, unsure if there was going to be more. When Rozanov just stared back at him, apparently done there, he nodded slowly. "Yeah, uh...same."

Rozanov nodded once again, then left the room.

Monday

Hayden woke up earlier than normal, a symptom of his lasting unease. The Hayden of only a few years ago would never willingly sleep in Ilya Rozanov's house, and now the guy was sure to be a constant in his life for the rest of it. God, Hayden was a good friend.

Beside him, Jackie was still asleep. Good, she absolutely needed and deserved the rest. Hayden wasn't around enough to be lazy during his time off, it was time to be Dad Hayden instead of Hockey Hayden.

So, he stretched and rolled out of bed, throwing a shirt on to accompany the sweatpants he slept in before quietly heading across the hall to check if the kids were still sleeping.

Arthur, Amber, and Ruby were all accounted for. Jade, of course, was not.

With a sigh, Hayden closed the door and made his way downstairs, thinking of all the things Jade could be doing that would definitely not be good. As he made his way, he heard her little voice.

"Can we go swimming today?" The voice came from the kitchen, where the sound of what had to be plates clinking around could also be heard.

"Hmm," came the deeper, unmistakable voice of Ilya Rozanov. "I think it is okay with me. But we have to ask your mom and dad first."

Even though it was a completely normal and correct answer to give someone who was not his own child, Hayden was still a little surprised that Rozanov didn't automatically promise swimming.

He waited a few more seconds, letting Jade continue telling Rozanov about whatever her eight year old mind thought he should know, before entering the kitchen. Rozanov was standing with his back to Jade, cooking at the stove.

Hayden found himself unsure of what to do. He'd fully expected Shane to be the earlier riser between him and his husband, so he hadn't really prepared to be alone (plus Jade) with the guy. His time to come up with something to do quickly ran out when Jade noticed him.

"Dad, Uncle Ilya is making pancakes!" She said excitedly. Hayden was still getting used to *Uncle Ilya* too.

Rozanov, who already seemed to be dressed, turned to look at Hayden over his shoulder. "Your daughter wakes up earlier than the birds."

Hayden wasn't quite sure what to say. He really didn't want to bicker with this guy in front of his daughter, but also, what the hell else were they supposed to say?

"Yeah," he sighed. "Keeps us on our toes, that's for sure."

Rozanov made a sort of humming noise, dishing up two small pancakes and setting them in front of Jade. He looked at Hayden with a brow raised.

"I am waiting for Shane. Do you wait for Jackie?" There was a challenge laced in his words, no doubt about it. *I'm a good husband, are you?*

Hayden rolled his eyes, sitting down on the stool beside Jade in case she needed help. "Shut up, Rozanov."

Jade turned and looked at Hayden with a curiosity that only a child could possess. He knew before she even spoke that she was about to ask a difficult question.

"Why do you call Uncle Ilya that?" She asked, earning a little chuckle from Rozanov. Ilya. Whatever.

Hayden hesitated. "Well, it's—"

"Is just my last name," Rozanov explained. "Hockey players, we like to call each other by last names. Your dad calls me Rozanov, I call him Pike."

Jade's eyes lit up. "Like a nickname?"

Hayden scowled, while Rozanov kept that same stupid bemused smile. "Yes, like a nickname." Rozanov answered.

There was one thing that Hayden unfortunately could not deny. Rozanov was great with kids, especially his and Jackie's.

In the afternoon, it was time to go swimming. Hayden and Jackie got the kids in their suits and followed Shane and Rozanov down to the water, which was refreshing before even stepping foot in it. It was extremely hot, especially for Ottawa, and Hayden was just as excited to get in the water as the kids.

Jackie had made sure that everyone was wearing sunscreen, holding onto Amber in the shallower water with Arthur at her side. Hayden wasn't far, keeping an eye on Jade and Ruby in slightly deeper water.

The way he was standing, he could see Shane and Rozanov, sitting together on the dock. Rozanov was leaning back slightly, that same little smile on his lips from that morning.

Beside him, Shane had his feet in the water, facing Rozanov as he spoke. Hayden was too far to understand what he was saying.

Hayden wasn't sure why he couldn't bring himself to just...accept Rozanov. He supported Shane with all of his heart, and technically by extension, he supported Rozanov too. But it was one thing to accept a guy for liking other guys, and something completely different to accept him for being an asshole.

And God, was Rozanov an asshole.

For years, all Hayden and anyone else ever heard or said was that Ilya Rozanov wasn't much more than a cocky, arrogant asshole. There wasn't much else to it. He chirped on and off the ice, always ready to pick on literally everyone around him. And somehow, Shane of all people fell in love with him.

Hayden had secretly (okay, maybe it wasn't much of a secret) hoped that Shane would find a better man. Someone who was like him, with a kind heart and a better attitude. But then Shane married Rozanov, and Hayden had to stop hoping and start dealing with this weird reality.

There was no denying that Rozanov wasn't *all* bad. The kids loved him, Jackie loved him, and somehow, Shane *loved* him. But even now, just sitting in the sun, Rozanov managed to look smug.

But then, as Hayden watched, Shane said something that made Rozanov actually laugh. Not his mocking chuckle, but a real, uncontrolled laugh. He said something back, earning himself a small shove from Shane, who just looked so...pleased to have made Rozanov laugh. In response to the playful shove, Rozanov hauled himself into the water, reaching up and pulling a fighting Shane in with him.

There really wasn't much to it. It was something that Hayden had absolutely done to Jackie before, and would do now if given the opportunity. But it somehow felt bigger, seeing that behavior from Shane and Rozanov. It somehow felt more intimate, like Hayden was intruding by witnessing it.

So he tore his gaze away, even though the interaction was nothing more than a pure display of affection.

Tuesday

Hayden noticed at some point throughout the day that Rozanov was absolutely nowhere to be seen. He probably should have realized sooner, when his peace had gone undisturbed through the entire morning.

But he didn't realize until he and Shane were with Jade and Ruby in the indoor synthetic hockey rink. Hayden had been very entertained when Shane had first shown it to him, because of course Shane Hollander brought work with him to his summer home.

Shane was watching as Ruby and Jade raced one another, his arms crossed comfortably over his chest. When Ruby won, Jade began making up reasons for her loss, which made Shane chuckle.

“Wow, she sounds like Ilya.” He said, nothing but fondness in his voice.

Hayden frowned at the thought of his daughter growing up to be anything like Rozanov, then turned to look at Shane. “Wait, where is Rozanov? He hasn't given me shit once today.”

“Oh, he's with my parents.” Shane said, like it was the most normal thing in the world for Rozanov to just be with his parents. Hayden didn't have a *bad* relationship with his in-laws, but he wasn't sure that he'd just go hang out with them.

“Doing what?” He found himself asking, not even trying to mask his disbelief.

Shane shrugged. “Uh, I don't know. He goes over there a lot, they do random stuff. Maybe my mom is teaching him a new recipe or something.”

Hayden felt his brows furrow together. “He just...hangs out with your parents? Without you there?”

This made Shane smile. “Yeah, he's really close with them. He's been going there since he came to Ottawa. I think he's probably their favorite.”

Hayden was having a really hard time making sense of this. Shane and Rozanov had been enemies to the world for so long, and there was no way that David and Yuna didn't hate Rozanov the way everyone else in Shane's life did. Yet they just took him in with open arms and what, loved him?

“How did they react?” He asked. “When they found out about you guys.”

“Oh,” Shane shrugged again. “They were surprised. I hadn't told them I was gay yet, and my dad kinda just happened upon us. Here. Um..kissing.” He bristled slightly, somehow uncomfortable mentioning the act of kissing the man he was married to. “We went and told them about us, and they were accepting pretty much immediately.”

Hayden tried to picture what that conversation might've been like. “Weren't they a little...I don't know, unhappy that of all people, it was Rozanov?”

Shane seemed to consider this. “I think at first maybe they weren't all that thrilled, especially because of Ilya's, um, reputation. But then he told them—” he smiled fondly, but didn't seem entirely sure about what he was sharing. “He told them he's only ever loved one person. That kind of won them over immediately.”

Wow. Hayden knew that Rozanov supposedly loved Shane, but he didn't ever see him act that kind of way. In fact, he normally behaved pretty much the same as he did on the ice, but with an added affection to his teasing of Shane.

Hayden remembered when he'd found out. Well, he actually figured it out, which he was kind of proud of himself for. Shane had told him that Rozanov had given up playing for Boston to

go to *Ottawa*, and that he loved him. Hayden had decided then that he needed to actually meet Rozanov, but that had gone very poorly.

“I’m glad you have a good support system,” he said, a bit softer than he'd just been speaking. “It's awesome that your parents are there for you like that.”

Shane nudged his shoulder. “You're part of that system too, Hayd. You've been there for us since you found out.”

Us. Hayden supposed it was true, in a way. He may not like Rozanov much, but he sure as hell hated the way some people spoke about him and Shane both. And maybe, just maybe, Hayden was learning that Rozanov wasn't *entirely* the enemy.

That night, Hayden found himself in a bit of a dilemma. It was late, but he really needed to shower, and he had no idea where the towels were. He'd already showered the day before, but Shane had supplied him with a towel then.

Hayden considered his options. He'd already looked in the guest bathroom, but there weren't any full sized bath towels, just little hand towels. He briefly considered just using one of them and hoping it dried him off well enough, but that sounded miserable and also kind of weird for some reason.

Then he considered trying to find the towel he'd used before, but quickly discovered that someone (probably Shane, the clean freak) had already taken it away.

There was no way Hayden wasn't going to shower. He seriously needed one, if he was being completely honest. So, he'd have to just man up and ask for a damn towel. First, he texted Shane. It wasn't surprising that he didn't get a response. Everyone was already in bed, and Shane barely used his phone during the day, let alone at night.

So Hayden had no choice but to (very bravely) tip-toe his way down the hall to the bedroom that Shane shared with Rozanov. He stopped, feeling like a little kid, trying to listen to make sure he wouldn't accidentally interrupt anything.

He stood there for a moment, leaning just a bit towards the door to listen. It was silent. Clearly, and maybe thankfully, nothing was going on. After taking a deep breath, Hayden stood up straight and knocked on the door.

It took just a moment before the door opened. As much as he'd been hoping that Shane would be the one on the other side, he wasn't surprised to see Rozanov. The universe seemed to hate him.

“Sorry,” Hayden said quickly. Rozanov was looking down at him a bit sleepily, which for some reason felt surprising. He was shirtless, displaying that ridiculous bear tattoo with the loon on his shoulder, with tight shorts on.

Behind Rozanov, Hayden could see into the room. It was a bit dramatic, with huge windows that looked out at the lake. Shane was asleep, laying sprawled out on his stomach, the covers only going up to his hips. The dog was at the foot of the bed, and the space that Rozanov had been in was evident. The lamp on what must've been his bedside table was the only light on.

"I'm sorry," Hayden repeated. "Um, I just need a towel, and I didn't want to rummage through your things."

Rozanov blinked, then nodded, and brushed past Hayden. Wordlessly, he led him to a door. "This is um," he waved his hands in front of him. "Towels, sheets. Closet for that stuff."

"Linen closet." Hayden supplied.

Rozanov nodded, tapping the door. "Linen closet. You can help yourself. Sorry there is none in your bathroom."

"Thanks," Hayden mumbled, watching as Rozanov went back to bed.

It was such a painfully average interaction that Hayden felt weird about it. Rozanov seemed like a much more normal person than Hayden, or anyone, knew.

Wednesday

Hayden once again found himself on the couch sitting beside Rozanov. There was a movie playing on the television for the sake of keeping the kids occupied, because none of the four adults in the room had the energy to keep too close of an eye on them.

Despite it very clearly being a kids movie, Hayden had still ended up getting sucked in a few times. Ruby was tucked into his side, Jade on the floor for some reason. Amber looked like she was on the verge of sleep in Jackie's lap, and Arthur...

Arthur was with his favorite uncle. Which, of course, was fucking Rozanov.

Rozanov was also paying attention to the movie on screen, much to Hayden's amusement. Arthur was looking relaxed in his lap, his back against Rozanov's chest as he gently pushed a Hot Wheels car along the Russian's arm.

Hayden was honestly just glad to see his son enjoying the company of someone else. Arthur was such a quiet kid, and oftentimes separated himself from everyone else during family gatherings, even at just six years old.

It was unclear what about Rozanov had earned him Arthur's unwavering trust, but Hayden was forced to appreciate whatever it was. He just sat there, staring absentmindedly at his son, his little body rising and falling just slightly with Rozanov's breathing.

The spell was broken when Rozanov laughed. Briefly, Hayden assumed that he was the cause for the laughter yet again, but when he looked up at Rozanov's face he saw that the man's focus had never left the TV. Rozanov was literally just laughing at something in a movie for children. Of course.

But when Rozanov laughed, Arthur looked back at him, and then turned back to the TV and laughed as well. And something about that just made Hayden feel like he might explode, cry, or both.

Hayden took a deep breath, desperately needing to say something so that he'd stop appreciating Ilya fucking Rozanov. "Shane, how come you never had us up here before?"

Shane turned and looked at him, giving a little shrug. "Having guests wasn't really my intention, at first. I wanted a quiet place, just for me. Ilya's the first person I brought here."

As Hayden prepared to comment on that, Rozanov gave a little scoff. "Not true. First guests were people for boring TV show."

Yup, there he was. That was the Ilya Rozanov that Hayden knew and tolerated.

Shane rolled his eyes, grinning widely at the same time. He did that combo a lot when interacting with Rozanov. "Yeah, yeah, the boring show that *you* tuned in to watch."

Rozanov smiled. It was different from the usual, lopsided cocky smile that Hayden had seen so many times on the ice. It was just...fond.

"Da. Like I said, I needed help sleeping."

The gleam in Shane's eyes only brightened. "You were keeping tabs on me and you know it."

The smile on Rozanov's lips didn't change, but he looked down, almost *sheepishly*. "Whatever you have to tell yourself, Hollander." He said affectionately.

Hayden was having a very hard time understanding life during this trip. Thankfully, Jackie spoke up, distracting his mind from whatever changes it was trying to make in the Ilya Rozanov file.

"I forget if you've already told me this," she started. "Did either of you guys change your names?"

Shane shook his head. "No, we both kept ours. It just felt right, if that makes sense."

Jackie nodded. "I would have kept my name, but it was just so boring. At least you don't hear of a million people with the name Pike."

Rozanov, of course, made an amused sound. He didn't say anything, though. Hayden had noticed that he tended not to make any jabs at Jackie's expense. Just another reason (of the few) to *tolerate* Ilya Rozanov.

Thursday

Hayden woke up to his four year old daughter poking his face. It was extremely early, and Hayden absolutely did not want to get out of bed. But Amber was relentless.

"What's the matter?" He asked through half open eyes.

Amber frowned back at him. "I'm thirsty."

Hayden sighed and grabbed his phone to check the time. It was only 6:47. He yawned, turning his phone back off and sitting up.

"Okay, let's go get you a drink." As he got out of bed, Amber reached her arms up as a request to be carried. Hayden felt like he didn't get enough opportunities for moments like this, so he'd be picking Amber up for forever, if she'd ask.

Quietly, he carried her down the stairs and into the kitchen, setting her on one of the stools at the kitchen island. Shane had said that he'd gone grocery shopping to make sure they were fully stocked on what the Pike kids would eat and drink, so Hayden poured Amber a small cup of milk.

Then, sleepily, he sat down on the stool beside her and stared off into space.

A few minutes later, Amber was gone, just her cup left in her place. Hayden sighed when he saw that she'd, of course, barely drank any of the milk. Whatever, he'd expected that.

As he got up to rinse out the cup, he noticed a tall figure coming towards the kitchen. The sun was coming up, but it was still a bit dark inside the house. This didn't stop Hayden from recognizing that it was Rozanov.

Apparently, Rozanov hadn't noticed Hayden though, because he nearly jumped out of his skin when he finally saw him. After what was sure to be a Russian expletive, Rozanov stared at Hayden with wide eyes and a hand on his chest.

"Jesus, Pike, you fucking scared me. Why are you lurking in the dark?"

Hayden couldn't help but laugh. He'd never seen the Russian scared, let alone been the one to cause it. "Didn't know you were so jumpy, Rozanov. *Are* you afraid of the dark?"

Rozanov stared at him, having calmed down just about immediately. "Is too early for this." He set his phone down on the kitchen island and turned on the light, much to Hayden's dismay.

Hayden continued with what he was doing, rinsing out Amber's cup and watching Rozanov move. He quickly realized that he was getting ingredients out for what had to be a smoothie.

"Didn't know you were a health nut too." Hayden commented, sitting back down. "Shane got his claws into you, huh?" He immediately regretted his choice of words.

Rozanov shook his head. "Is for Shane. His food is gross and boring." He said, continuing without looking back at Hayden, who thought that he'd escaped without a dirty joke. He was wrong.

"You do not want to know about Shane's claws." Rozanov had turned and winked then.

Hayden grumbled, deciding he needed coffee if he was going to spend the early morning hours dealing with this shit. He got up and turned on the coffee maker, opening the cupboard

and pulling out a mug.

Rozanov made a noise of disapproval. “Do not use that cup. Is Shane's.”

“But he's not having coffee if you're making him a smoothie,” Hayden said. “I don't think he'll mind.”

“Yes, he will.” Rozanov said, sounding as sure of himself as always.

Hayden didn't care much about the cup. Really, he just needed to argue with Rozanov while he had the opportunity and Shane and Jackie couldn't yell at him for it. “It's just a mug, Rozanov. I don't think my best friend is going to get mad at me for using it.”

Rozanov frowned. “Okay, well I *know* that my husband would not get mad, but he would not be happy either.”

“Shane has literally never once said I couldn't use something of his. I don't think he'd tell me I can't borrow a mug.”

“Yes, because Shane is too polite to tell someone he does not want them to use his mug. I am not too polite, I am an asshole.” Rozanov reached over and plucked the mug right out of Hayden's hand. “Please do not use it.”

Hayden couldn't argue with that. Shane *is* polite, and Rozanov is absolutely an asshole. He grabbed a different mug, earning a nod of approval from Rozanov that he didn't need, and made himself some damn coffee.

“Didn't realize you were much of an early bird,” Hayden commented.

Rozanov put the smoothie in the fridge, turning back to Hayden and grabbing his phone. “I am not. I am...” he hesitated, before seeming to come up with a reason for his early start. “I have meeting.”

Hayden watched as Rozanov grabbed a sticky note from what looked like a ridiculously organized “junk” drawer. He wrote something on it that Hayden couldn't read, given that it was in Russian, and left it on the counter presumably for Shane to find. Then he grabbed his car keys and left.

Where could Rozanov be going for a meeting that early?

This is precisely what Hayden asks Shane when he wakes up. They were sitting together outside, Jackie taking the kids to look for flowers or something that the twins had requested doing.

“So, I ran into Rozanov on his way out this morning.” He said, doing his best to sound casual. “He said he had to go to a meeting? He was kinda weird about it.”

Shane's face twisted up slightly, like it did when he was trying to come up with an easy lie. Hayden remembered seeing it when he “was meeting his friend Lily.”

Then his face changed, something close to a realization in his eyes. “Oh, he probably forgot the word ‘appointment.’ He had one this morning.”

Hayden took a deep breath, looking out towards the lake. “Right...” he let Shane hear the lack of certainty in his voice. “He’s lived in English speaking countries for over ten years and doesn't remember the word *appointment*? As a professional athlete?”

Shane sighed and turned to look at Hayden. “It was early. He probably stayed up too late because he always does, and then he was tired and had a hard time remembering English. Sometimes it’s a difficult language, you know.”

“I’m just saying, he was weird about it.” Hayden put his hands up in mock surrender.

“He wouldn’t...do anything, Hayd,” Shane's tone was firm, but still as gentle as always. “It's Ilya.”

To Hayden, that felt like an *exactly!* moment. But for some reason, Shane had it in his head that Ilya was just perfect, or something really close to it.

But Shane also didn't seem concerned. Hayden shrugged. “Whatever you say, man.”

Shane huffed, then turned his body to almost face Hayden all the way. “In what way did he seem ‘weird?’ Was it just because you guys aren't friends or something else?”

Okay, so maybe Shane *was* concerned.

Hayden really didn't have much to go on other than Rozanov's weird hesitation and his general distaste for the guy. “Um...I don't know, he had a hard time telling me where he was going. I promise I asked in a completely normal way. Then he said it was a meeting and left.”

“Oh,” Shane relaxed a little. “But nothing seemed wrong? Like, he was normal Ilya?”

Hayden scoffed. “Yeah, I guess. Still an asshole, if that's what you mean.”

As if on cue, the door to the porch opened and Rozanov's obnoxious voice said, “Who is asshole?”

“Speak of the devil,” Hayden said, turning to look at Rozanov. He did look tired, and his eyes looked a little red.

But Rozanov flashed his signature cocky smile at Hayden. “Even when I am gone, you cannot stop thinking about me. Sorry Pike, I am taken.”

Hayden glowered. “Fuck off, Rozanov. I was just telling Shane about your meeting this morning.” He watched Rozanov's face, hoping for a reaction before he added, “I was just getting to the part where you're afraid of the dark.”

Rozanov stared back at Hayden, then looked down at Shane as he moved to stand slightly behind his chair. "You are best friends with such a simple man. He has been telling me I'm afraid of the dark for three days."

"Leave him be," Shane said, barely sounding reprimanding at all. He reached up and held onto Rozanov's hand. "How was your...meeting?"

Good. Shane was testing him too.

Rozanov shrugged. "Was good." He glanced up, and Hayden swore he sent him some kind of warning glare. He let go of Shane's hand, giving his chest of all things a little squeeze. "I am going on run with Anya. I will tell you about meeting later."

Shane nodded and leaned his head back to look up at his husband. Rozanov leaned down, giving Shane a surprisingly brief kiss. "Ya tebya lyublyu."

Hayden had come to understand that one a long time ago. When Shane repeated the phrase, Ilya smiled softly and let him go, disappearing back into the house.

"Hayden," Shane was looking at him with a very pointed expression. "I promise you, everything is fine."

"Okay," Hayden nodded. "Just...I just need to know that I'm always behind you, okay? In any situation."

Shane gently bit his lip. "I know."

Friday

In the afternoon, most of them went swimming again. Hayden was sitting on the dock with Shane and Rozanov, watching Jade and Ruby treading water. Jackie had decided that she didn't feel like swimming and instead was napping with Arthur and Amber inside.

Hayden wished she was out there with him. He really hated feeling like a third wheel, and it was simply impossible not to when around Shane and Rozanov.

"Uncle Ilya!" Ruby called out. "Come play mermaids with us!"

Hayden turned to look at Rozanov, who had Shane's head in his lap. "What color mermaid do I get to be?" He called back.

Ruby turned to look at her sister, deliberating. "Well, I'm pink and Jade's purple...maybe you can be blue?"

"Hmm," Rozanov tapped his chin as he pretended to deeply consider the offer. "Okay, I guess so. Shane, get up, I have important business."

Shane laughed softly, sitting up and shielding himself from the splash that resulted from Rozanov jumping into the water.

Hayden scooted slightly closer to his friend. "I really never expected him to be so good with kids. All of mine really love him."

"Yeah," Shane was watching Rozanov with all the fondness in the world. "He's so excited to be a dad. It means a lot to him, I think."

They watched as Ilya splashed around with the girls, going right along with their make believe. Then, because of course she did, Ruby asked a prying question.

"Why do you wear that necklace so much?" She pointed to Rozanov's chest, where the crucifix attached to a golden chain rested against his wet skin.

Shane sat upright, suddenly on high alert. Hayden figured that must mean it wasn't something Ruby should ask about, because of course it wasn't. "Ruby, leave him alone." He said.

Rozanov glanced over. "Is okay," he said, somehow sounding small despite his big voice. "It was my mother's." He told Ruby.

Jade, of course, got involved too. "Did she give it to you?"

Rozanov had a way about him, in this moment, that Hayden had never seen from the man in all the years he'd known him. The Russian cleared his throat as he nodded. "She did."

"Is she nice?"

Hayden wanted to jump in the water and swim to the bottom of the lake. Why, of all things, did his daughters have to ask Rozanov about his dead mom?

But Rozanov smiled. "She was the best." He answered, holding onto the chain.

Neither Ruby or Jade seemed to catch onto the past tense, which was probably a good thing. Hayden knew that Rozanov's mother had taken her own life, but his knowledge on the situation didn't really go beyond that. It seemed to be a closely guarded subject, and Hayden could imagine why.

Later on, when the kids grew too tired to keep swimming and they all went up to sit around a bonfire together, Hayden made sure to find an opportunity to apologize to Rozanov.

"Hey man, I'm sorry about the girls. I should have...I don't know, somehow found a way to make them not bring that up."

Rozanov looked at Hayden with a small smile. "Is okay. Sometimes I want to talk about her. There isn't anyone better to ask than Jade and Ruby."

Hayden felt a wave of relief wash over him. "Thank you," he found himself saying. "For being so good with the kids. All of them, I mean. Even Arthur just adores you, and that's really important to me and Jackie."

There was a short moment where Rozanov seemed to consider what he should say next. Then he said, "You are a good dad, Hayden. Your kids are lucky to have you."

“Oh,” Hayden was more taken aback than he'd been maybe his entire life. “Thanks. That... really means a lot, actually.”

The two of them were quiet for a while. Rozanov seemed perfectly content with sitting in silence, even with someone he wasn't close with at all. Hayden had to admit that that took some kind of skill.

But then, Hayden felt Rozanov's eyes on him. “Shane told me you thought it was weird, about my meeting.” He said, completely calmly. No part of his voice sounded angry at all, in fact.

Hayden pressed his lips together. “I wasn't trying to stir trouble or anything,” he explained. “I just wanted to...I don't know. It was like a precaution, you know?”

Rozanov nodded slowly. “Good. You are a good friend to Shane, that's important.” He was still completely calm, apparently unbothered by Hayden's concerns. “Shane knows where I was. It was only an appointment.”

“Got it,” Hayden replied, waiting for Rozanov to tell him to stay out of his business or something. But that never came.

Thankfully, Shane came and sat down on the other side of Rozanov. Immediately, he was tucked snugly into the larger man's side. “Are you guys finally playing nice?” He asked, his voice filled with doubt.

“Yes,” Rozanov answered, leaning his head against Shane's. “I was telling Pike how bad he is at hockey, and he was finally starting to come to terms with it.”

Hayden sighed, shaking his head at the familiar insult. Part of him wanted to tell him to fuck off, but another, growing part of him was starting to understand where those quips came from. Rozanov had just sliced the awkwardness hanging in the air right in two.

Saturday

The week that the Pikes spent at the Hollander-Rozanov cottage was not what Hayden had been anticipating during the drive over from Montreal. Aside from the usual, mostly innocent quips, he and Rozanov had tolerated one another just fine. Shane must've threatened him or something, because he was surprisingly polite the entire trip.

And now that it was their last full day there, Hayden finally had some real alone time with his friend. Rozanov and Jackie took the kids to go get ice cream, meaning there wasn't a single person to keep an eye on or someone that might walk in mid conversation. It was just Hayden and his best friend.

The two of them were playing video games, because no one was there to tell them to go outside instead, making simple conversation. Easy conversation, really, because that's how it always was with Shane and Hayden. With best friends.

And, of course, the conversation was about hockey.

“No, that's literally never gonna happen. Buffalo is never crawling their way out of whatever hole they fell in.” Shane chuckled, shaking his head.

“Never say never,” Hayden reasoned. “Ottawa was right there with them, and then you guys sent a ladder down, or whatever.”

Shane shook his head. “That's different. Ilya and I are the best players in the league. And we're never going to fucking Buffalo.”

“Okay, but when you guys are done, there'll be *new* best players in the league. And they'll maybe go to Buffalo.”

“No one in their right mind would willingly go to Buffalo if they're the best player in the NHL.” Shane stated, clearly amused by Hayden's outlandish suggestion.

But Hayden knew he'd say that. “No one in their right mind would willingly go to *Ottawa*. But you guys both did.”

Shane finally understood. “Well that's different. Ilya and I did it for each other, not the team.”

“I still can't believe Rozanov just...up and went to Ottawa for you. Like, I don't think I could ever do that.”

There was a wistful way about the look on Shane's face, and Hayden worried briefly that he shouldn't have mentioned it. But then Shane spoke.

“I think a lot of people don't understand Ilya.” He said slowly. “I know he's...he can be hard to get along with. Believe me, I know that probably better than anyone. But at the same time, he's the best person I've ever known. You know?”

Hayden didn't know. Well, maybe he was finally starting to see what Shane was talking about. “I guess it's just hard, if you're an outsider. I can't lie, I often wonder how you and Rozanov even figured it out. That you...I don't know, wanted each other? Loved each other? Like, why *Rozanov*?”

Shane was quiet for a moment. Hayden kind of expected him to say something like, *why Jackie?* and he wouldn't be able to argue with that very much. Other than the fact that he and Jackie weren't arch rivals for a decade.

“I don't know,” Shane finally answered, which kind of surprised Hayden. “We just...understand each other, in a different way. We always have.”

Hayden made a face, trying to lighten the mood again before it got too sappy. “Ew, I don't want to hear about that.”

Shane smacked his arm. “Not like that! Well, yeah, like that, but that's not what I meant. The first time I met Ilya he was...kind of an asshole. And he was every other time, too. But he also saw something in me that I wasn't ready to see myself, and he was the only person I could show it to.”

“There was a long time where we weren't even friends. But still, he was the only person that I didn't hide from. At least, in *that* way. And at some point I had the horrible realization that he was all I wanted, and I couldn't have him. And that was the worst feeling in the world. So, I invited him here. And he came, and he told me he loves me, and we found a way to make it work.”

Hayden and Shane talked a lot, all the time. But it was rare that Shane ever opened up about Rozanov like this, and Hayden could understand why. No one saw Rozanov the way that Shane did.

“I’m glad you have him.” Hayden said honestly. “And I’m glad that I have to deal with him being an asshole to me, because he's great with my kids and my wife loves him as much as she loves you. And I’m sorry that I didn't really say that sooner.”

Shane smiled at Hayden, his dark eyes somehow brightening. “Thanks, Hayd.”

End Notes

thanks for reading! if you feel so inclined, let me know what you think! maybe i will keep writing these guys...we'll see lol

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!