digging for dinosaurs

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by marquelict

Summary

Ilya Rozanov announces his retirement from the NHL on a desultory Tuesday afternoon.

Notes

Thank you to Tuna the #1 Harris Fan for BETA'ing <3

It's difficult to choose a name for Shane and Ilya's kid(s), but we at least all know they would be girl dads. I ended up choosing the name 'Emiliya' because apparently it means "rival." Also, I hope it's not too obvious that I'm not Canadian. The natural history museum featured is a mish-mash of the actual one in Ottawa and other museums in general. Enjoy!

Ilya Rozanov announces his retirement from the NHL on a desultory Tuesday afternoon.

That morning, however, he wakes cleaved in half—Shane curling away and snoring lightly on the other side of the bed—with his darling daughter, the cleaver in question, pressed against his warm skin, her drool drying on his chest. Everything seems ordinary and not at all like something is about to end.

For a few quiet moments, Ilya plays with his daughter's soft curls. Her small fingers pinch his stomach as he brushes the baby hairs away from her temple. Somedays, eyes closed and snuffling softly, she looks so much like her father: cropped black hair, little nose, endless freckles.

Ilya cannot help himself—he scoops his daughter up and pulls her onto his chest, smothering her sleepy face with little kisses like his mother used to do. She would coo, he would giggle, and then his tiny hands would reach for her face so he could return the favor.

Except, unlike baby Ilya, Emiliya prefers her beauty sleep. Pouting grumpily, she mumbles, "*Papa*," the irritated vowels stretching long

"Wakey wakey, *zvezdochka*."

Emiliya's fingers find Ilya's face and she prods at him, poking his cheeks and fussing, her voice raising imperceptibly.

The commotion rouses Shane, who shuffles around in the sheets, his tired limbs uncoordinated and grasping at whatever's closest, until he's facing Ilya and their daughter. A soft smile passes across his lips. He eases back against the pillows and observes them play-fighting without saying a word.

"Emiliya," Ilya whispers, catching her hands and stopping her from grabbing at his face, "you woke daddy with all the noise you're making."

At the mere mention of Shane, Emiliya turns her head and then, upon confirming he's awake, leaps from Ilya's chest to Shane's. Shane lets out a muffled "oomph" as his daughter lands on top of him, but he takes no time in encircling her little body with his arms.

Emiliya, who plays polite most of the time, does not admit to having a favorite. She is perhaps Shane and Ilya's biggest fan—maybe even more so than her grandmother, Yuna. (And Irina, of course, because she would have loved Shane and Emiliya as much as Ilya does.) However, Ilya sometimes teases her, voice low as they watch Shane running drills on the ice late after practice that, "Well, he's *my* favorite."

Slyly, and much to Ilya's chagrin because he was not so well-spoken at four-years-old, she replies, "I thought I was your favorite?"

And now, like always, she begins to tattle. "Daddy," Emiliya starts, her stubby fingers now poking at Shane's chin and cheeks, "Papa woke me up. He's so mean."

Shane indulges. “So mean.”

Emiliya nods tersely and then collapses on Shane’s chest, pressing her face against the crook of Shane’s neck, her nose close enough to tickle the soft skin. She’s evidently attempting to fall back asleep, but her doing so would put a dent in Ilya’s plans for today. So, he leans over, plants a simple kiss on Shane’s shoulder, and then noses at the hair on Emiliya’s head.

“But *zvezdochka*,” he says, the soft curls tickling his lips, “I am taking you to see dinosaurs today. Maybe Papa will have to go alone.”

Emiliya whips her head out from under Shane’s chin, gawking at Ilya with her eyes wide and sparkling, before turning back to glance at Shane for confirmation.

With some nudging, Ilya had persuaded Shane to let him take their family out to a natural sciences museum in downtown Ottawa. A massive brick structure with a sloping roof and tall windows that opened into a magnificent atrium. The bones, or rather bone-replicas—though Ilya would pretend they were real for Emiliya’s sake—of old dinosaurs decorated the large interior: an ancient hall of fame.

Exhibits with fossilized memorabilia, plaques with images and names of all the greats, icons that lived on even after millions of years. Emiliya loved to practice reading out the dinosaur names to him and Shane. *Triceratops*, *Stegosaurus*, *Velociraptor*, *Pterodactyl*.

Ilya had never imagined he would have to learn how to pronounce dinosaur names in English, but he didn’t mind that it meant learning alongside his angel of a daughter.

“No, no,” Emiliya says empathetically, pawing at her father’s chest. “Daddy, he can’t do that. He won’t really go without me.” She looks at Ilya imploringly, and Ilya, always beholden to her pleading, gathers her up in his arms.

“But don’t you want to go back to sleep?” he asks.

Although Emiliya shakes her head in disagreement, she flops down on Ilya once more, her eyes slipping shut. She does this every morning without fail and thus, Ilya and Shane are starting to perfect their wakeup methods.

“You’re not helping your case, Emi,” Shane tells her softly. His voice is always gentle in the mornings: light as the air slipping in through the cracked window and warm as the sun rays passing over the bed. It’s almost like a lullaby, but it tends to have the opposite effect with their daughter.

She moans, the sound muffled against Ilya’s chest, but turns her head to peer at Shane. “Can I wear my princess dress today?”

“‘May I wear my princess dress today, please?’” Shane corrects.

Emiliya sighs, sticking out her lip, and then repeats after Shane with minimal enthusiasm. If dinosaurs were not involved, she might even turn to Ilya for help against her evil grammar-correcting father, but today she acquiesces. She even allows Ilya to carry her from his and

Shane's bedroom to her own as she tends to migrate from her bed to their bed nearly every night.

The closeness she currently craves from her fathers will not last forever. Ilya and Shane cling to it—even if it means they're not having sex as often as they would like.

"Of course you may, my little Emilochka," Ilya says as he swings his legs off the bed, hauling her with him. She giggles as she goes, waving her tiny hand at Shane still tucked in bed. When Ilya sets her down, she races from their bedroom in search of her dress yelling, "Anya! Where are you?" in a loud, happy voice.

Almost as soon as Emiliya is out of sight, Ilya slides back onto the bed and crawls towards Shane. He has known, for years and years, since the moment Shane introduced himself to Ilya in Regina eons ago, that there is only one thing he hungers for. One thing he covets above all.

"*Sweetheart*," he murmurs in Russian, his hands finding Shane and grasping him with immense delight, "you are still coming with us, I hope?" Ilya will persuade Shane with many kisses if he tries saying otherwise. It is the easiest trick in the book—and has worked many, *many* times.

"I would not miss it for anything."

"Mmm. Because you are old like dinosaurs. Is like visiting family."

Shane lightly smacks Ilya's bicep. "We're the same age, asshole."

"Eh…" Ilya tilts his head, pretending to think deeply, and then says, "You are older." But before Shane can sneak in a retort, Ilya is kissing him, pawing at Shane's bare chest with blunt nails, and desperately trying to swallow Shane whole.

Shane bucks up against Ilya, and he's almost just as desperately trying to burrow into Ilya's skin. His hands gravitate to Ilya's sides—his "love handles," as Ilya happily refers to now since he learned the phrase years ago—and then Ilya's back and his perfect ass. Shane, who is just as greedy when it comes to getting his fill from his husband, squeezes.

Ilya moans into Shane's mouth before pulling away, his lips wet and eyes hazy with lust. This is so difficult, Ilya thinks, but if he continues licking into Shane's mouth they won't be heading to their intended destination anytime soon.

"Ilya…" Shane breathes out, chasing the sensation of Ilya's lips on his before slowly realizing Ilya *isn't* going to continue kissing him.

"We have to get ready," Ilya says. "Emi and the dinosaurs are waiting for us."

Groaning, Shane throws an arm over his eyes. Enamoured and hungry at the sight of Shane's muscular bicep on full display, Ilya nips at the tanned skin and then burrows his nose in Shane's pit, nuzzling at the fine hairs. Shane lets him, momentarily, and then—very rudely, Ilya might add—shoves Ilya off him.

“I don’t think that counts as ‘getting ready,’” Shane says.

Ilya responds by sticking his tongue out.

The natural sciences museum, a pale edifice with a large glass and stone facade, stands imposing amid the clump of shops and apartment buildings clogging downtown Ottawa. It houses an assortment of exhibits and dioramas focused on Canada’s wildlife, particularly the flora and fauna found in Ontario and near the Great Lakes, artifacts and imagery of early expeditions into the vast white expanse of the country, beautiful rocks and other gems that twinkled enough to catch Emiliya’s eye from time to time, and, of course, the most important of all: dinosaur bones.

Emiliya darts ahead of Ilya and Shane as the Hollander-Rozanov family makes their way to the entrance. The sun crests high overhead—the sky cloudless and the blue canopy stretching endless.

Shane, who remains quite nervous when it comes to public outings, has dared to hook his pinky around Ilya’s own. Although the whole world now knows about them, and despite the overwhelming urge Ilya has to constantly curl around Shane and claim him, they rarely indulge in public displays of affection. Every moment with Shane is precious to Ilya regardless.

“Papa, Daddy,” Emiliya cries out from up ahead. “You walk so slow!”

She runs back to them, her princess dress swishing with every motion, and reaches out to take their hands. Ilya and Shane let her drag them to the double doors with almost no complaint.

“Maybe you are just very fast,” Ilya says.

Shane butts in. “Faster than *you*, perhaps.”

Pretending to be affronted, Ilya pauses, stopping both Shane and Emiliya in their tracks, and says, “That simply cannot be true. We will have to race each other. Is no other way to find out.”

“Papa!” Emiliya squeals with delight, clapping her hands together and glancing between her fathers with an uncontrolled eagerness. She has undoubtedly inherited a streak of competitiveness from both of them.

“To the doors?” Ilya asks, looking between his daughter and Shane. The two nod in agreement. “Okay. Three.”

The Hollander-Rozanov family line up for a race: two seasoned hockey players, fit and incredibly indulging, one of which will be announcing the end of an almost twenty year career, and a feisty four-year-old who makes them both feel young, alive, and eager for another baby.

“Two.”

Ilya looks over at Shane, who’s looking down at Emiliya with such gentle fondness. Who could ever have imagined?

“One.”

Emiliya bounces on the balls of her feet, impatient as ever.

“Go.”

This “race” is perhaps the most leisurely Ilya has ever run. Just slow enough so that Emiliya makes it to the doors first, but fast enough that he beats Shane. Shane smiles so wide at Ilya, however, that Ilya almost grabs his face to kiss him silly.

He doesn’t. But he wants to.

“Seems like there’s a clear winner,” Shane says, and crouches down to high five his daughter. But instead of high-fiving him back, Emiliya smacks a wet kiss against Shane’s palm and then sticks out her tongue.

Shane shakes his head. “Your Papa is a very bad influence on you.”

“The best influence, actually,” Ilya corrects. “Now, *zvezdochka*, let’s go see your dinosaurs.”

Ilya stands bereft in front of a towering skeletal replica of a Styracosaurus. The plaques plastered on the wall are numerous: it’s from the Cretaceous period—a whopping 75 million years ago—and was found somewhere in Alberta. It’s adorned with sharpened spikes that jut out from its large neck fill, and there’s one boney horn stabbing upward above its snout. An ancient, colorful-looking rhinoceros. A remnant of so fucking long ago that Ilya struggles to even conceptualize an image of earth where these creatures once roamed.

He’s waiting on a text from Harris. Keeps checking his phone periodically even though he’s flipped the ringer on and is listening carefully for a high-pitched trill.

One month ago, in early August when the wind in Ottawa first started picking up again, Ilya sat down with the Ottawa Centaurs’ GM, the coaching staff, and his husband Shane to discuss Ilya’s plan to retire at the end of the season. Shane had sat beside him, his shoe pressed against Ilya’s beneath the long desk, to keep Ilya’s heart steady.

He wanted, above all, more time with his baby daughter before she started growing up too fast—the way all children tended to do at her age. Already Ilya reminisces about how small Emiliya was in his arms right after her birth, when he held her tiny body against his bare chest, and wishes so badly he could return to that moment. To the realization that he was finally entering fatherhood.

Ilya gazes at the replica bones. The Styracosaurus, the one this model was based off of, must have had children. One of the plaques referenced adulthood, referenced the dinosaur's size in relation to the carnivores that may have hunted it.

Ilya runs a finger across the golden chain hooked around his neck.

Is there nothing on this earth with impenetrable skin? Death comes inevitably—the dinosaurs are proof of that. His mother and father, too. But are Ilya's bones, broken and mended again and again after so many years on the ice, capable of lingering on this earth for millions of years? Are Shane's?

Memories of them *must* linger, he decides. They *have to*.

Something wraps around his leg. Emiliya has ambled over to him from where she was once standing with Shane as they peered at other replicated skeletons.

She ushers him to another area of the exhibit. A little educational play area for children tucked in the corner behind some plexiglass panels and minimally populated at this time of day. There rests a long bench, low to the ground, wrapped around a rectangular basin filled with small rubber granules. It's a dinosaur dig pit.

Mock plastic bones are stuck to the bottom of the basin and, in a plastic tub next to the pit, some brushes await tiny hands to play mini-archaeologist.

"Grab two of those brushes for us, Emilochka," Ilya says and nudges Emiliya in the direction of the tub.

She fishes out two brushes with bright handles and thin bristles, handing one off to Ilya and keeping the other to herself. Kneeling down on the bench, she begins to sweep away some of the granules with a heavy hand. Ilya mimics her motions.

Propped against the entryway, Shane watches them. He's always watching them. Memorizing them.

Yuna always tells him, "Take a picture. It'll last longer," which causes Ilya to burst out laughing. He's started using the phrase with Shane, too. He says it now, in fact, just to watch a reddish blush pass over Shane's face and darken his freckles.

Ilya returns to his archaeological project with Emiliya, who has since cast her brush aside. Her chubby fingers curve beneath the pale little granules as she scoops them up and lets them fall between her fingers.

"I'm not sure that's the proper method archeologists use when digging for bones, Emi," Shane says.

Emi grabs another handful of the granules. "Lame."

"And boring," Ilya adds, setting aside his brush as well. He, too, begins to paw at the granules, his large hands covering more distance and gathering more little rubber bits in his palms. They spill out between his fingers and rain down over the plastic bones.

It’s a miracle Ilya can hear Shane when he murmurs, “Yeah, super boring.” And he’s smiling. Shane smiles so much now. Much more than before.

Ilya’s phone dings, then, and he can feel, almost like a stabbing, the small device vibrating in his pocket.

“*Zvezdochka*,” Ilya says gently, catching Emiliya’s attention. “Papa has to step away for a moment. Daddy will keep playing with you.”

Emiliya pushes out her bottom lip in disappointment, but says, “Okay.”

As Ilya passes Shane, their hands brushing momentarily, he hears his husband telling their daughter, “Oh, I am not touching that, sweetie. And we are definitely *all* washing our hands before we leave.”

Ilya glances down at his phone at last. A message from Harris flickers across the screen:

It’s done! The team post has gone live on social media. See you at the office next week, and bring Anya this time! ❤️🌈🤰🐶

A heavy sigh ripples through Ilya and, for a brief second, he feels weightless. A body suspended. And then he glances at the two figures huddled in front of the dig pit and—

Yes, Ilya Rozanov loves hockey. So, so much. The sport rescued him. It gave him Shane. But there will always be one thing he loves more than hockey and it’s right there in front of him. Two beautiful souls. Maybe another, if Ilya gets lucky.

He goes on Instagram to like and repost the newest Ottawa Centaurs video and then he turns off his phone.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!