Cabane à sucre

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Cabane à sucre

by bubbleomatic

Summary

Harris organises a team field trip to a cabane à sucre — sugar shack — to gather content for the Ottawa Centaurs' social media. Ilya doesn't understand why Canadians are *so obsessed* with maple syrup, but Shane is there to make the weird cultural experience more memorable.

Notes

I was feeling nostalgic about my own childhood, going to la cabane à sucre and chowing down on taffy. Looking at it objectively, the tradition is quite bizarre and I thought it would be cute to write Ilya's first experience with it.

(I speak French, but not Russian. Apologies if there are any mistakes in Russian!)

Bonne lecture! Happy reading! *something something in Russian*

See the end of the work for more notes

It was a snowy February morning in the boonies outside of Ottawa proper. Giant leafless trees, sprinkled with fresh snow, lined the path to their destination. The uneven backwood roads jostled the passengers now and again, but no one seemed bothered by it. The whole Centaurs roster was chatty and jovial on the large team bus.

Ilya loved this team to his core. Seeing everyone so animated about a team outing on their day off made him unreasonably happy. From the management to the staff and right down to the players, everyone was so warm and friendly, to the point where it was borderline annoying sometimes.

Not to mention, this was his husband's inaugural season with the Ottawa Centaurs. Having Shane beside him on the bus, giddy and beaming like the rest of his team, felt so surreal. Like a dream he never wanted to end.

Except Ilya didn't have to worry about waking up. Shane was here. Actually, *physically* here. With him. With his team.

Life was fucking great right now.

Shane looked adorably cozy, all bundled up, donning his Centaurs toque. He was talking and laughing with Harris who sat across the aisle, and Ilya couldn't have been more pleased. Harris had an undeniable magnetism to him, being personable and welcoming with anyone he met, making fast friends easily. Ilya figured that was Harris's superpower, and he genuinely admired him for it. That, and his love of animals — particularly dogs — were huge selling points for Ilya.

And Shane was a gem of a human, the best hockey player of their generation, the hottest piece of ass he'd ever scored, *and* the absolute love of his life.

Two of his favourite people on the planet were getting along swimmingly. It made Ilya's heart soar.

"I haven't been to a cabane à sucre since I was, like, *twelve*."

Ilya perked up when he heard Shane mix in some French with his English. He had no idea what a « cabana *sookre* » was, but that throaty roll of Shane's R's was definitely intriguing…

Hot. It was really hot.

But French was a dumb language that made absolutely no sense to Ilya. (What kind of language needed math to *count*?) He could appreciate it whenever it came out of his husband's mouth, though.

Still, he needed clarification. "A what?" he piped in.

"Cabane à sucre!" Harris repeatedly happily, though the French words wobbled poorly through his English accent. He leaned into the aisle. "The sugar shack, Roz. I told you all about it, remember?"

It was true. Harris had explained this team field trip to Ilya when he pitched the idea for social media content gathering. He'd looked so proud and excited, going on about capturing "feel-good, behind-the-scenes player content that fans are gonna eat up" that Ilya might've inadvertently tuned out the finer details of that conversation. He remembered the mention of maple syrup and breakfast, which sounded like an objectively good time to Ilya.

He nodded to Harris with a smile. "Sugar shack, yes. I remember." Then he lovingly slid a hand over his husband's thigh, lightly squeezing it. "I liked the way *Shane* said it," Ilya tacked on with a knowing wink.

He chuckled when Shane rolled his eyes and quickly grabbed his hand. "*Ilya*," he scolded under his breath, blushing cutely. He kept Ilya's hand in his, lacing their gloved fingers together. "Behave."

"Mmm, no promises," Ilya replied flatly.

Shane grumbled half-heartedly. On the other side of Harris, Troy giggle-snorted *loudly*.

Harris hummed a pleasant tune measure, and leaned back in his seat. "Stop being so cute, you two," he cooed cheerfully.

"Yeah, it's kinda gross, Rozanov," Troy teased.

Ilya dismissed Troy's comment with a wave of his free hand. "Shut up and kiss your cute boyfriend, Barrett."

As the bus rounded a final curve, the sugar shack came into view. Excited chatter filled the bus. Ilya's eyes widened at the sight of the quaint wooden building, smoke curling lazily from its chimney against the backdrop of snow-covered trees.

The bus lurched to a stop into an empty gravel parking lot. Shane's hand slipped from Ilya's hold.

Ilya tried not to let his disappointment show, but his shoulders slumped before he could stop it. He knew Shane was still…adjusting to public displays of affection. Yes, they were both out. And yes, they were *married*. But the journey here had been quite clumsy and jarring. The way things ended so poorly for Shane in Montreal, the team to whom he'd given his everything, had undeniably left him battered and scarred emotionally. Feeling comfortable in being outwardly lovey-dovey in front of his new teammates was going to take time. Ilya understood that.

But it didn't make it any easier for him.

Progress, Ilya reminded himself. The fact that Shane had initiated holding his hand at all earlier was a testament to that.

Harris's voice brought Ilya back to the present.

"Alright, gang!" Harris called out, standing up at the front of the bus. "Remember, we're here to have fun, but I need to get some wholesome team field trip content." He waved his phone

in his hand. “Please make my job easy for me today, okay?”

Ilya stood from his seat and turned to address the seats lined with his teammates. “Yes, smile big whenever Harris is in your face.” Then he hooked his fingers into either side of his mouth and pulled it wide, showing off all his teeth in an exaggerated grin.

The players rumbled with a chorus of laughter. (Most importantly, Ilya clocked his husband’s warm chuckle through it all.)

From the back in between cupped hands, Wyatt shouted, “Don’t do that, we’ll *lose* followers!” and the group erupted into even louder roars of laughter.

“No sugar shack for you, Wyatt,” Ilya countered quickly. “You stay on the bus. Everyone else, let’s go.”

Ilya hung back and let his teammates off the bus before him, including Shane. When Wyatt came down the aisle, he swiftly stepped in front of him with a shit-eating grin. He cleared his throat dramatically, and said, “Captain first.”

Wyatt sputtered out a laugh and patted Ilya on the shoulder. “Of course, where are my manners,” he deadpanned playfully.

The team spilled out of the bus in a flurry, buzzing like kids on a school field trip. Heavy hockey-player footfalls crunched into the fresh snow in front of Ilya, diligently following an enthusiastic Harris. An older gentleman with a weathered face and a thick salt-and-pepper beard emerged from the cabin, sporting a wool-lined plaid flannel jacket and well-worn boots. He greeted Harris with a face-splitting smile and a booming voice, then turned to address the rest of the group.

The bearded man bellowed a greeting in French to start. « Bienvenue à la cabane à sucre, Centaurs! »

Ilya was able to piece that together easily on his own.

Thankfully, the man continued in English. “My name is Émile, and I will be showing you around today,” he said with a thick Quebecor accent. With a clap of his hands and a crinkly smile, he started to walk towards a tree a few feet away. “Allons-y, come this way! We start our tour over here.”

Émile led the group to a towering maple tree, its bare branches stretching towards the pale winter sky. He patted the trunk affectionately, and returned his attention to the players.

His exuberant gestures accompanied his even more lively explanation of…*something*. Definitely about the tree, Ilya guessed, but that was as much as he could garner on his own.

Ilya found himself creasing his brow, struggling to decipher the rapid-fire French words that wedged themselves into Émile’s heavily-accented English sentences. He could sympathise, though. Just like he was more comfortable speaking Russian, his mother tongue, Émile likely felt the same when speaking in French.

But Ilya didn't know a lick of French, so his sympathy was waning.

He felt a gentle nudge of an elbow against his side. Shane sidled up to him quietly. "You look confused," he remarked in a whisper.

Ilya glanced at his husband, then back at Émile. He leaned to the side, brushing their shoulders. He whispered back, "Yes, his accent… Is hard to follow." The irony of that statement wasn't lost on him. "I am only understanding half of it, maybe less."

Shane chuckled softly, his breath a white puff in the winter air. "I can catch you up."

As Émile continued his animated demonstration, Shane chimed in here and there whenever Ilya scrunched up his face. Ilya watched what Émile was doing in front of him, but he wasn't really registering any of it. He was far more captivated by the gentle cadence of Shane's voice in his ear. It was kind of intimate, he realised. He could hear the fondness with which Shane spoke each word, making sure Ilya could follow along with the rest of the group, and it warmed him from the inside out.

"Oh look, watch," Shane murmured, his hand resting on Ilya's bicep. Ilya instinctively leaned into the touch.

Émile tapped a thin metal rod into the small hole that was already drilled into the tree trunk. Almost immediately, a clear liquid began to drip slowly into the bucket that hung right below it.

Shane squeezed Ilya's arm excitedly. "See, that's how they extract the…" He paused. "Tree… juice…? No, wait—"

Ilya snorted a little too loudly, drawing a few curious glances from their teammates. "Tree juice?" he repeated, suppressing a laugh. "*Tree juice*, Hollander?"

« Ça y est! » Émile's voice cut through for a moment. "This is how we get the sap to make syrup."

"*Sap!* I meant sap," Shane huffed, sporting his signature angry kitten face. Ilya clutched his sides as he shook, trying to prevent a giggle fit, and Shane lightly smacked him on the arm. "Don't *laugh*. I forgot the word for, like, half a second."

Ilya finally managed to blow out a steadying breath. "You are bad at translating," he grinned.

Another arm smack. "Shut up, I speak *three* languages!"

"Two and a half. Your Russian is only okay. Wolf bird does not count."

"Well. Your translator is leaving."

"Noooo," Ilya mock whined, tugging Shane back by his coat sleeve. "Mr. Two-and-a-Half-Languages, please stay. You are so useful and pretty!"

As they bantered in the background, Ilya noticed Harris circling the group, phone in hand, snapping photos and recording video. The social media manager caught Ilya's eye and gave him a thumbs up.

"Be good, Hollander," Ilya smirked as he waved in Harris's direction. "You are on camera."

Shane let out a huff, and forced a small smile. "*You* be good."

"I am always good."

Before Shane could chirp back, Émile's jovial voice interrupted them. "And now, mes chers amis, it's time for a treat!"

The sugar shack owner picked up a much larger metal bucket of what appeared to be thick, amber liquid. He trotted it towards rows of waist-high icy snow banks, and the team followed curiously. Émile lifted the bucket, and poured neat strips of syrup onto the snow.

Ilya stared blankly, utterly confused.

"What is happening? Are we going to eat snow, like pancakes?" he whispered to Shane.

Shane snorted. "Just—*pay attention*."

Ilya crossed his arms over his chest, unconvinced. Émile handed a handful of popsicle sticks to the player nearest him, who passed them down to the group. Then he rolled the syrup around a stick, collecting a thick, golden maple goo.

« Et voilà, d'la tire! Essayez en. » Émile declared like everyone understood what he was doing. "Come, everyone! Please try some taffy."

Some of the players' faces lit up in childlike recognition, Shane included, as they hurriedly made their own weird sticky popsicle treats. Others looked as confused as Ilya felt, but followed suit nonetheless.

Ilya glanced at his popsicle stick, then at the quickly-disappearing rows of maple goo. He poked at it hesitantly.

Weird.

Ilya had learned many strange things about Canada since he moved here. People apologised for bumping into inanimate objects, hockey was its own religion with intensely passionate devotees, milk was sold in plastic bags for some ungodly reason, and now *this*.

Maple tree juice on snow.

Who invented this? Were Canadians so starved for entertainment in the dead of winter that they had to pour hot maple syrup onto snow *for fun*?

"You gonna try some, Rozanov?"

Ilya turned to see that Shane had been replaced by Troy, who was licking his own maple-glob-on-a-stick. Shane had drifted a few feet away, treat in hand, and was chatting with Bood and Wyatt.

Ilya gave the syrup snow an incredulous look. “Why do you Canadians do this,” he said bluntly to Troy.

Troy made a noise that was muffled by sticky syrup. “Don’t look at me. I didn’t have this growing up in Vancouver. I’m new to this, too,” he confessed with a shrug. He licked his taffy again. “Tasty, though.”

“Troy!” Harris’s voice rang out from across the snow-covered yard. “Stop being such a taffy hog. Bring me some!”

Troy smiled shyly, his usual stoic expression melting away. “Duty calls,” he said, turning back to the cooling syrup. He rolled up a new stick of goop, added more to his, and practically skipped over to Harris.

Ilya watched as Troy handed a stick of maple gunk to Harris, who took it quickly and happily. They were giggling, sharing licks of their taffy with one another like dumb, lovestruck teenagers.

It was disgustingly adorable.

Ilya realised he was just standing there and staring into the distance, bare popsicle stick in hand, when a familiar presence warmed his right side.

“You haven’t tried it yet?” Shane asked, an amused lilt to his voice.

Ilya shrugged, feigning nonchalance. “I was waiting for my translator to come back.”

Shane chuckled, light and buoyant, and *god*, Ilya would *never* tire of that love song. The apples of his cheeks were pleasantly pink from the chill, his constellation of freckles more prominent when he wrinkled his nose in laughter. From under his toque, a few rebellious strands of jet-black hair caressed his features, whispering over his soft lips.

Shane was so effortlessly *stunning*, in every which way. Ilya was so smitten.

Without a word, Shane plucked the popsicle stick from Ilya’s fingers. He carefully rolled the stick over the cooled syrup, twirling up the amber liquid into a perfect spiral, and held out the confection to Ilya.

“Here. Try it.”

Ilya eyed the goop stick suspiciously, then took it from Shane’s hand. He gave it an exaggerated sniff, eliciting a snort and an eye-roll from his husband. Then he stuck out his tongue, and tentatively licked the tip of the taffy. His eyebrows shot up in surprise. He paused, considering. He licked it again, more enthusiastically this time. The candy was unexpectedly soft and pliable, its maple flavour bold and complex on his tongue.

“So? What’s the verdict?” Shane asked, his smile impossibly fond.

A slow, crooked grin pulled at the corners of Ilya’s mouth. “Is not terrible,” he admitted simply. He gave the maple taffy another lick, and nodded. “Still weird, but sweet. Good.”

Shane huffed a short laugh. “You’re so hard to impress.”

“Maybe you feed it to me next time,” Ilya purred surreptitiously. He parted his lips, and suggestively slid the taffy from the cave of his mouth to the tip of his tongue.

Shane shoved Ilya off-balance momentarily, squeaking out an embarrassed “ohmyfucking*god*” and blushing profusely.

A shameless laugh erupted from Ilya as he regained his footing. If there was one thing he loved more than Shane, it was riling Shane up for no good reason other than for his own amusement.

The teasing slowly subsided between the two, dissolving into quiet little nibbles and licks of their maple treats. Ilya’s gaze wandered over to where Troy and Harris were huddled together. Harris held his phone out at arm’s length from on high, angling it down to capture their faces as they posed with their taffy. Troy draped an arm over Harris’s shoulders, and leaned into frame. Their love was so casual, so obnoxious, so carefree, and gross, and…

God help him, Ilya wanted that so fucking *badly*. He craved it — that easy, open display of affection. To flaunt, to brag, to throw a big-ass parade about how stupidly proud and lucky he was to be married to Shane Hollander. To love and to *be loved* by Shane Hollander.

And while this was *nothing* compared to the physical ache he felt when they were actively concealing their relationship from the world, Ilya longed for a *bit* more leniency.

The ache was dull and more manageable now — Ilya could tuck it away if need be — but it was still *there.*

“What’s up?” Shane’s voice yanked Ilya from his self-made whirlpool of anxieties.

Damnit. How long had Ilya been quiet? He shook his head, not chancing a glance towards his husband. He occupied himself by chewing his maple taffy. “Is nothing. Enjoying the moment.”

Ilya knew Shane wasn’t going to buy that *at all*. They were way too attuned to each other at this point to get away with such blatant white lies.

He heard Shane shift awkwardly beside him for a moment. Then, to Ilya’s surprise, he pulled his phone out from his coat pocket. “Wanna take some pictures?”

Ilya stopped mid-chew to look at his husband. “Really? You want to?”

“Yeah.” Shane nodded, his expression soft and loving. “I do.”

Ilya's heart happily somersaulted in his chest. He *beamed*, his earlier concerns evaporating into thin air.

"C'mere, let's out-gross those two." Shane invited Ilya into his space with an open arm.

Ilya didn't need to be told twice. He eagerly leaned in, pressing his stubbled cheek flush against Shane's and wrapping an arm around his shoulder.

Shane held his phone up at the ready, shifting it around to get the right angle. "Silly face first?"

Ilya nodded, his grin threatening to split his face in two. "Yes, silly face!"

Shane stuck out his tongue to the side, and crossed his eyes. Ilya mirrored his expression, adding in impromptu bunny ears behind Shane's toque just in time before the shutter noise.

"Now with weird Canadian maple thing," Ilya said excitedly, holding up his half-eaten taffy in frame. Shane laughed, bringing his taffy up in a pretend toast, like they were about to clink champagne flutes.

Shane's eyes sparkled on his phone's screen. "Okay, one more?" he suggested, his voice tender.

"Yes, okay," Ilya agreed, turning back to face the camera.

He expected another goofy pose or maybe just a casual smile. Instead, a whispered "I love you" fanned over his skin before Shane's lips gently pressed the words into his cheek.

He heard the click of the camera, and Ilya had no idea what kind of face he just made. It was probably a mix of surprise and giddiness. He blinked, a little stunned.

Shane had just kissed him. In front of his team. In front of *everyone*.

Sure, it was just a peck on the cheek, but for Shane, it might as well have been a frenzied exchange with tongue in the middle of a crowded dance floor at a gay club.

They would work up to that. Eventually.

"I'm sorry," Shane said quietly, dropping his arms to his sides.

Ilya gave him a quizzical look. "Why sorry?"

"For being weird today," Shane added, his voice still small. He idly squished some snow under his boot. "I'm just—I'm not quite *there* yet, y'know?"

And Ilya did know. "We go at your pace," he reassured easily, tucking a silky black lock of hair behind Shane's ear. "Is okay."

"I'll be better for you. Promise."

Ilya shook his head, and hooked his index finger with Shane's. "You are perfect already."

Shane's face flushed a beautiful shade of red. His smile was sweet, private.

Just for Ilya.

He decided then that it was okay to keep *some* parts of Shane for himself.

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Their sugar shack visit ended with a hearty lumberjack breakfast — an absurdly large meal of pancakes, bacon, sausages, fried eggs, potato wedges, and beans, all swimming in a pool of maple syrup. Some even substituted the sugar in their coffee with *more maple syrup*.

Ilya indulged wholeheartedly, shovelling the sweet and savoury food into his mouth by the forkful. He hammed it up for the camera, much to Harris's delight, deliberately letting some syrup dribble out of the corner of his mouth.

He ate his fill, and *then* some. And then a bit more. Plus some extra maple taffy as breakfast desert, because why the hell not.

Ilya was *so full*.

The bus ride back into the city was unsurprisingly quiet. Everyone else had chowed down *almost* as much as he had. Most of his teammates were dozing off, jackets draped across their laps, legs lazily stretched out into the aisle.

Shane's head rested on Ilya's shoulder as they watched the world go by through sleepy eyes.

"Today was fun," Shane mumbled.

Ilya sighed contentedly. "Mmm, yes. *Very* weird, but fun."

Shane hummed. "You know…" He shifted slightly, tilting his head up to meet Ilya's gaze. "I always liked going to the sugar shack as a kid. I'm glad I got to share that with you today."

His deep brown eyes were so soft, relaxed at the edges, as he looked at Ilya through a curtain of dark lashes. His freckles perfectly contoured his dreamy daze, and Ilya fought like hell not to kiss every single one right then and there.

"I am grateful too," Ilya said simply, placing a chaste kiss to the top of Shane's head. No elaborate declaration needed. Just pure, uncomplicated love.

As the last few snowy maple trees slid out of view, Ilya was reminded of something. Something funny that Shane was definitely *not* going to be happy about. He tried to keep it to himself, but his body shook with very poorly repressed laughter.

Shane sat back up into his seat, and Ilya could *feel* his confused stare. When Ilya turned, Shane narrowed his eyes at him playfully. "What?"

Ilya grinned at him, crooked and mischievous. “In Russian, we say ‘sok’ for ‘sap’.”

Shane’s face scrunched up, processing, his head tilted. Then, the expected grimace.

“...Did you just say ‘juice’?”

Ilya snorted. “Yes.”

“As in *‘tree juice’*?”

“Yes.”

“Fuck. *You*.” Shane shoved Ilya’s shoulder. “Are you serious?”

“Yes, of course! I am good translator!”

Shane’s response was immediate and dry and *in Russian*: « Ya tebya nenavizhu. »

Ilya burst out into laughter now, completely unbothered. “That is not nice, Hollander!” he protested, holding a hand over his chest like he’d been stabbed through the heart. “You do not hate me.”

Shane grumbled under his breath, but his lips curved up into the reluctant smile that Ilya knew all too well.

Ilya pulled reluctant Shane into a forced side hug. “Shh, is okay, don’t worry,” he soothed, teasing. “I married you for your looks, not your brain.”

“You’re such an asshole,” Shane chuckled, nuzzling back in.

Ilya squeezed him, kissing his temple. « Ya tozhe tebya lyublyu. »

I love you too.

End Notes

Hope your teeth are rotten from the fluff uwu

Shoutout to tristezaeternal and her magnificent brain for inspiring the little sok/juice bit at the end. Love ya, pal!

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