

landslide

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by [hollanov_1410](#)

Summary

Shane and Ilya's 12-year-old son has his first panic attack before a hockey game.

Luckily for him, he has a dad who is all too familiar with them.

Notes

Hi! This is set in a universe where Shane and Ilya are retired players raising their three kids: Niko (12), Max (9), Mila (3). I wrote another fic of them as dads that focused more on Ilya and their daughter, you can read it [here](#) if you're interested. :)

Thanks for reading!

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

Mornings in the Hollander-Rozanov household were always a blur of chaos. Typically ending in, at worst, tears, and at best, with a dull headache pulsing behind Shane's eyes.

But game day mornings were another beast entirely.

It was 8:23 a.m., and by Shane's punctual standards they should have already been in the car, halfway to their oldest son, Niko's, game. That would've put them there fifteen minutes before warmups began. Enough buffer for traffic, forgotten gear, or whatever else the morning decided to throw at them.

Instead, they'd already burned through that margin inside the house, and the wiggle room was disappearing fast.

Shane closed his eyes and counted in his head.

One.

Two.

Three.

Because if he didn't, he was pretty sure he was going to chuck the pair of 8T boots he was holding straight at the wall and launch into a *this family never appreciates me* monologue that the kids would absolutely remember and probably resurface in therapy years down the line.

So instead, he exhaled slowly.

He stayed crouched in front of Mila in the entryway, who was currently draped across the bench as if she had no bones. Face mashed into the seat, her dark hair splayed out in every direction. One arm hung limply at her side, the other tucked beneath her chest. Her short little legs hung off the edge of the bench.

Short little legs that were very much barefoot, because she was currently refusing to let Shane put her wool socks and boots on. Every attempt earned him a shriek and a flailing heel, and he already had a near miss of a black eye when her foot had connected with his cheekbone.

"Mila," Shane said again, keeping his voice calm through sheer force of will. "You need your shoes. You're not going out barefoot."

"Yes I am," she retorted, her volume climbing with every word.

Shane closed his eyes again briefly. He rubbed a hand over his face and tried to remember that she was three. That this was not some sort of coordinated act of sabotage. That his toddler was not, in fact, waging a personal war against him, even though it felt like it most mornings.

"Mila," he said patiently. "Where are we going today?"

She shifted just enough to tilt her head, cheek still mashed into the bench cushion. She looked at him with one eye, eyebrows pulled tight in defiance. "Ice rink."

Shane nods, raising an eyebrow. "And are ice rinks warm? Or cold?"

She frowns. "...Cold."

"Yup. That's right. And do you like being cold?"

"Yes," she says immediately.

He just stared at her.

He swore he could see it then. The tiniest twitch at the corner of her mouth. A smug little almost-smile she was trying very hard to suppress, clearly pleased with herself for how bold the lie was.

He opened his mouth to respond just as the sound of footsteps came barreling down the hall.

"Dad! I can't find my gloves!" Niko shouted as he skidded into the entryway, already halfway out of breath.

He was half-dressed in his gear. His black hair wasn't brushed, a cowlick sticking up in the back. One shin guard was on correctly. The other was hanging off his leg at an angle that suggested he had definitely gotten distracted halfway through.

Shane paused, one hand still wrapped around Mila's wriggling calf to keep her from escaping entirely. He glanced up at Niko.

"Niko," he said evenly, in that particular tone he'd perfected over the years. The one that said *I love you, but you're killing me right now*. "I'm a little preoccupied here. Did you look in the laundry room?"

"Yes," Niko said immediately, like it was the most obvious answer in the world. He shifted his weight impatiently. "They're not there."

"Did you look in the hallway closet?" Shane asked.

"Yes."

"In your backpack?"

"Yes."

"Under your bed," Shane said, slower. "Like the last time you lost it?"

Niko hesitated. His mouth opened. Closed. "...No."

Shane pointed down the hall without looking. "Then check there."

Niko groaned but turned around, stomping back the way he'd come.

Almost on cue, Max appeared in the entryway, drawn in by the noise like a moth to a very loud flame.

Max—*Maxim*, when he was in trouble, which wasn't exactly a rare occurrence for him—stood beside Shane, finishing off a cup of yogurt. A smear of blueberry streaked his lip. His dark blonde curls were sticking out in every direction, and he was still in his sweats.

He surveyed the scene with open curiosity, eyes flicking between Shane and the problem at hand, absorbing it all like it was live entertainment.

"She won't put them on," Max observed unnecessarily, spoon clinking against the cup.

"I'm aware," Shane muttered, tightening his grip on Mila's ankle as she tried to wriggle free again.

Max crouched down beside Mila, lowering himself to her level with exaggerated seriousness. "Mils," he says conspiratorially, glancing over his shoulder as if this was classified information. "If you don't wear your boots, your toes will freeze off."

Mila lifted her head just enough to squint at him, suspiciously. "Nuh uh."

Max nodded solemnly. "Mhmm. And then you'll have no toes, and—"

"Max," Shane warned.

"—and then you can't dance," he continued. "Or skate, or somersault."

Mila's blue eyes widened. "I dance."

"I know," Max said gravely. "But not without toes."

"Max," Shane hissed, sharper now.

"And then," Max added, because he had never in all his 9 years possessed the self-control required to stop while he was ahead, "they have to give you robot toes."

"That's *enough*," Shane barked.

But it was too late. Shane watched it happen in slow motion. Mila pushed herself upright on the bench, stared down at her feet, and wiggled her toes experimentally. One. Two. All present and accounted for. For now.

Her face crumpled.

"I don't want robot toes!" she wailed, the sound piercing and echoing off the walls.

For half a second, everything stalled.

Max froze, spoon still clutched in his hand, his dark brown eyes going wide. "I was just—I didn't mean—"

Mila's sob broke fully free, her small body folding inward as if she might collapse under the weight of the idea alone. Shane felt the last thin thread of his patience begin to snap.

"Okay," he said quickly, reaching for her. "Okay, hey—"

He scooped her up off the bench as she started to cry in earnest, her arms wrapping around his neck, face burying itself into his shoulder. The sound of it went straight through him. He felt the hot, panicked tears soaking into his hoodie. He started instinctively rocking her.

Hearing the cries, Ilya came walking in, pulling his sweatshirt over his head. He had been cleaning up after breakfast. He took in the scene in one sweep. Crying toddler clinging to Shane. Boots tipped over on the floor. Max standing beside them, frozen in place, eyes wide and wincing at the sound like he wasn't sure whether to cover his ears or apologize.

"What is happening?" Ilya asked calmly, as if this wasn't absolute mayhem.

Shane blew out a sharp breath through his nose, bouncing Mila a little too fast in his arms now. His nerves felt rubbed down to the wire.

"I'm—" he started, then stopped, words piling up faster than he could get them out. "*Everything*. Everything is happening. And we're going to be late now."

"I didn't mean it, I was just joking," Max blurted out. "I didn't think she'd—"

Mila wailed louder at the sound of his voice, burying her face deeper into Shane's shoulder. "I-I don't want robot toes!"

Shane's jaw tightened as he cupped the back of her head. He could feel himself tipping, the familiar edge of overwhelm creeping up his spine.

Ilya crossed the room without hesitation and gently peeled Mila out of Shane's arms, murmuring to her as he did. She went willingly, immediately tucking her face into Ilya's shoulder as she kept crying.

"Shh, *solnyshko*," Ilya murmured, patting her back rhythmically and kissing the side of her head. "Papa's got you. Daddy's going to go warm up the car, and we will make sure you have no robot toes."

Shane exhaled hard, the sound shaky. "I need to help Niko find his gloves," he said, words tumbling over each other now. "He's still looking for them, and Max isn't ready, and if we don't leave in—"

"Shane," Ilya cut in gently, meeting his eyes. There was a small smile there, patient and knowing. "You are having panic attack."

It wasn't a full-blown one; they both knew that. But he was unraveling around the edges, the familiar thread pulling loose. Shane huffed out a breath and pressed his palms into his eyes. "I know."

"I will handle our little terrors. You need 30 seconds," Ilya continued calmly, bouncing Mila as she hiccuped into the crook of his neck and stretched out the neckline of his shirt. "To breathe."

"I don't have 30—"

But Ilya was already handing Shane the car keys from his pocket, then grabbing Mila's boots after with his free hand, not taking no for an answer. He brushed a quick kiss to Shane's lips, lingering just long enough to steady him, before heading down the hall.

"Max," Ilya called out over his shoulder. "You have three minutes. Shoes on. Or we leave without you."

Shane let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. Then opened the door and headed for the car.

At the rink, Shane was in the stands, bouncing Mila on his knee and Max sitting beside him.

Mila's mittened hands wrapped around the drawstring of his hoodie, tugging and twisting at it absently. She always had liked doing that. Ever since she developed the fine motor skills to grasp. She leaned back against his chest, warm and solid, boots knocking lightly against his shin every time she shifted.

It wasn't even two minutes before Max looked up at Shane and asked, "Can we practice my slapshots today?"

Of course as soon as they were at his brother's game, his brain had already fast-forwarded to his own. Shane smiled down at him. "If you can get through the whole game without causing trouble," he said mildly, "then sure."

Max acknowledged that by not acknowledging it at all. He leaned forward instead, elbows on his knees, eyes tracking the warmups.

Mila craned her neck past the glass. Her gaze skipped right over the kids warming up and landed instead on the Zamboni parked behind the boards. "Boni," she said reverently.

Shane smiled into her hair, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. "Yes," he murmured. "Zamboni's resting up for its big performance later."

Down by the boards, Ilya was with the team and the other coaches, running the kids through their warmups with the same easy enthusiasm he always brought to it. Ilya volunteered as an assistant coach for both of the boys' teams, a role he adored and slipped into almost without trying.

Shane and Ilya talked through the logistics of having kids early on, including how they wanted that transition to look. After they had a baby, Shane would train and gradually work his way back to playing, and Ilya would officially retire. Ilya loved hockey, but it had always felt like more of an escape for him. But now he had the love of his life. He was *married* to Shane, and they were going to have a family together. So transitioning from focusing his energy from hockey and into being the stay-at-home parent felt more like a realignment than a sacrifice. So when Shane was pregnant with Niko, Ilya stayed on for one more season with the Centaurs, skating his final game just before Niko was born.

Shane officially retired when Max was five, transitioning into a skill development coach role with the Centaurs—a position he's held ever since, save for the stretch of paternity leave when Mila was born. It kept him tethered to the game without the travel or the constant wear on his body, and was a lot more flexible. That was also Max's first year playing in a division, on a real team. With two boys in school, both on teams, and Shane no longer traveling the way he used to, Ilya found himself drifting naturally into the role of assistant coach at their practices and games. He could still be the one home for drop-offs and sick days, still home most of the week. But now he also got to watch his kids, along with plenty of others, find their own love for the game.

Shane was watching as they did the warmup drills. At first, everything looked normal enough. Niko skated hard laps, took a few shots on net, and passed cleanly to his teammates.

Watching his kids skate had always been a kind of language Shane understood without thinking about it.

He could tell when Niko was tired by the way his shoulders rounded forward on the bench, when he was pissed off by the harsher snap of his passes during warmup, when he was feeling cocky by the extra little burst of speed he threw in for no reason at all. Shane watched hockey the way some people watched faces. He read every shift in posture. Every hesitation.

So when Niko's rhythm went wrong, Shane felt it in his own body before his brain could fully name it.

His strides were shorter than they normally were. Choppier. Almost as if he was fighting his own body for balance.

He slowed, circling wide, one hand coming off his stick for a second as he bent forward slightly, hand braced on his knees. He stayed there a beat too long. He snapped up when the whistle blew again, lining up with his team to listen for the next instruction, but Shane noticed when he rubbed at the side of his helmet, then at his chest.

During the next drill, when the puck was passed for him, he hadn't even come close to retrieving it. Shane was almost sure he wasn't even looking at it, though it was hard to see his expression from this far and with his helmet cage obscuring his face.

Missing a pass wasn't unusual. But this felt different. Niko wasn't scrambling to recover it like he usually was, with his usual focused energy. His reactions were delayed, everything was just a beat too late. Like he was moving underwater.

Shane's eyes flicked instinctively toward the boards.

Ilya had gone still. Not fully—he was still talking to the kids beside him, still gesturing with his hands—but his attention was narrowed now, tracking Niko in the same way Shane was. Shane could see it in the set of his jaw, the way his eyes didn't leave their son.

Then Niko reached for his helmet. Not casually. Not to adjust. Not the usual absent-minded scratch at the side of his head through the cage.

He clawed at it.

His fingers fumbled under the chinstrap, jerky and frantic. Like he couldn't remember how the clasp worked. Even from the stands, Shane could see the tremor in his grip, the way his chest was heaving.

Niko skated away from the drill—just abandoned it mid-play—and nearly tripped over his own feet skating to the boards. His breath coming in sharp, uneven pulls. His helmet was half-unclipped now, hanging crooked and nearly covering one of his eyes. His gloved fingers were still fumbling uselessly at the strap, trying to take it off but being very unsuccessful.

He collided clumsily with the open gate instead of stepping through it. Ilya was immediately there to meet him. Ilya knew exactly what this was. He'd seen that same wild-eyed, overwhelmed look too many times before, mirrored on Shane's face.

"Papa, I'm—can't breathe," he managed to choke out, breath hitching badly.

"Hey, hey, hey," Ilya said, keeping his voice low as his hands closed around Niko's arms. "I've got you. I've got you, Nikolai." He guided him off the ice, practically holding him upright, as Niko's legs seemed to be made of lead. Like they might give out completely at any second. "Let's sit down, yes? Right over here."

Niko didn't really respond to that. He latched his hands onto the front of Ilya's jacket with surprising strength, fingers digging in as Ilya steered him toward the bench. He let himself be moved and held up, like he didn't trust his legs to keep doing their job.

Shane was already halfway out of his seat before his brain fully caught up. He lifted Mila off his knee and plopped her onto the seat beside Max. "Max," he said quickly. "Watch your sister for a second, okay? I'll be right back."

Max's brows pinched together immediately. "Is Niko okay?"

"Yes," Shane said, nodding, even as his chest tightened. "Yeah, honey. He just needs a little break. It's okay."

Max hesitated for half a second, clearly still a little worried, then nodded. He opened his arms out toward Mila, who happily climbed into his lap. Shane dropped a quick kiss onto both their heads before turning away.

He jogged over to where Ilya had taken Niko, to a bench set farther back from the ice. The head coach was there too, murmuring quietly, while one of the other volunteer dads took over

on the ice, herding the kids back into position and resetting the drill like nothing had happened. Business as usual.

Shane was grateful for that. The last thing Niko needed was a spotlight.

Ilya looked up as Shane approached, his expression soft and steady. He didn't say anything. He just shifted, giving Shane space, handing him the moment without ceremony. He knew having both of them hovering would make things worse. And if Niko was anything like Shane—which he definitely was—then what he needed right now was one solid presence to lock onto, not two.

Shane dropped into a crouch in front of Niko, his knees hitting the rubber mat. "Hey," he said, keeping his voice calm and low. "Hey, Niko. Look at me, honey."

Niko's eyes were squeezed shut, his jaw clenched so tight Shane could see the muscle jumping in his cheek. His chest was rising and falling too fast.

"You're going to be okay, buddy," he says. He reached for his helmet, thumbs brushing briefly against Niko's temples before lifting it away, tossing it on the floor. Niko's thick hair was damp, plastered to his forehead, cheeks flushed hot against the cold air.

Niko shakes his head, his eyes darting from the floor, to the ice, but never to Shane's eyes. "I feel—" his breath hitched. "Something's not right, Dad, I can't breathe—"

Shane leans in closer, cupping his sweaty, flushed cheeks and bringing his face until their noses were practically touching. It forced Niko's gaze to meet Shane's at last.

"Yes, you can," Shane said gently but firmly. "You're breathing right now. I can see it. Your chest is moving. You're doing it."

His pupils were blown wide, huge dark circles swallowing the blue. His eyes were brimming with unshed tears. He shook his head violently, his gloved fingers moving from his helmet to the neckline of his jersey, grasping it tightly. "Something's not right, Dad—"

"I know it feels that way, honey," Shane said, voice steady even as his heart ached. "But this is going to end. You're not in danger, I promise. Okay? Your body's just confused."

Niko made a broken, shaky sound. His eyes tried tracking back to the ice, but Shane tightened his hold on his cheeks and adjusted his face so it stayed locked on Shane's eyes.

"Stay with me," he murmured.

Niko's hands were trembling. Shane helped him take off his gloves. Without thinking, Shane stepped closer, using his body to block Niko from the ice, the stands, the lights, the dizzying movement. All 200-something pounds of him, shoulders wide and solid. Creating a small, contained space where nothing else could get in.

Shane had never spent much time thinking about his body, beyond the simple fact that Ilya worshipped it. He worshipped everything about Shane. The same went for his appearance,

even back when he'd been dubbed *Hottest Man in the NHL* in 2016. Those things had always felt peripheral. Flattering, but ultimately unimportant.

Parenthood changed that. One of the things Shane appreciated now was what his body could do for his kids. The fact that he was big enough, solid enough, to step in front of the world and make it smaller. That he could be something steady and block out the noise and the lights. In moments like this, it made him feel useful in the deepest way, like he could physically hold them safe.

Shane heard the whistle again. Warmups resume. Kids shifting. The world continued while Niko's body did something else entirely.

He was sure Ilya had probably stepped aside from helping with warmups and gone to check on Max and Mila. He was probably taking them to the little concession stand near the entrance, buying them a treat before they had time to ask too many questions about what was really going on with Niko.

Shane's thumbs ran over Niko's cheekbones, the ones that were just now starting to edge out over the last of his baby fat, and over the freckles dotting his cheeks. Shane both loved and resented how grown-up he was starting to look these days, now that he was 12. How his limbs were too long. How his voice dipped lower sometimes. How he was becoming a teenager right in front of Shane's eyes with no regard for Shane's emotional stability.

But at this moment, Niko looked like his baby again.

"The—the game," Niko tries to look back at the rink, but Shane's hand tightens around his hold on his face and he makes him keep looking at him.

"Just focus on me, okay?" he murmured. He took one of his trembling hands and placed it at the center of his own chest. "Follow."

Shane inhaled slowly.

Niko's inhale caught halfway, turning into a gasp. His shoulders hitched. His eyes flew wide again, panic spiking.

"That's okay," Shane said immediately. "That's okay. You did it. You took a breath. Now again. Slow."

He inhaled again.

Niko tried to follow, but broke off. He was rubbing at his chest again. "Dad—," he chokes out. "I'm—I need—hospital. I can't breathe. I—"

"Hey, hey," Shane said calmly, already moving. "I know it feels that way. But you're not in danger. We're going to get you more comfortable, okay?"

He reached for the hem of Niko's black jersey and lifted it up and over his head. The fabric dragged for a second, snagging on his helmet hair. Niko was breathing unevenly the whole time, holding onto Shane's wrist as he threw the jersey on the bench beside them.

The shoulder pads came next. Shane undid the straps quickly but methodically, fingers practiced, movements unhurried. He eased them off piece by piece, careful not to jostle him, setting them aside on the bench. He was in just his black compression shirt now. Niko sagged forward immediately once the weight was gone, shoulders shaking, breath still uneven but just a fraction less trapped.

He placed Niko's hand back against his own chest again, steady and solid beneath his palm. The other is still cupping his rosy cheek. "Feel that? Breathe with me."

"In for four," he added, exaggerating the breath as he drew it in, shoulders lifting.

Niko followed. It was shallow, but there.

"Good," Shane said immediately. "Now out for four."

He exhaled slowly, audibly, counting it out under his breath. Shane kept his eyes locked on Niko's the whole time, exaggerating each movement so there was nothing else to track.

They did it again.

And again.

The shaking didn't stop right away, but the static was turning down a notch.

Shane didn't say much after that. He just stayed close, murmuring now and then that Niko was doing a good job, over and over.

Niko eventually swallowed hard, blinking rapidly as he tried to tell whether his breathing had actually evened out or if he was just imagining it. When he spoke, his voice was raw.

"Everyone saw me freak out."

Shane's chest tightened.

"Niko," he said firmly, without raising his voice. "Listen to me. You didn't freak out. Your body got overwhelmed. Those are not the same thing"

Niko shook his head, frustrated. "I freaked out over nothing," he said, words still wobbling. "Literally *nothing* was happening."

Shane bit the inside of his cheek. He had always been worried that if their kids played hockey, they would feel all this pressure. Like they had to be the best, and they had to tough it out. They were the kids of hockey royalty, whether Shane liked the phrase or not. And no matter how carefully he and Ilya tried to soften it, to make their home a place where the game didn't *completely* dominate the air, that kind of legacy seeped in anyway. From other parents, other kids, long-time fans. From the way people watched a little too closely.

So the conversation started early. Not once, but over and over, quietly reinforced. With the boys first, and later they would with Mila, once she actually understood what a team was and why people were more interested in scoring than the Zamboni intermissions.

Shane still remembered the first time he said it out loud to Niko.

He was five years old. Too small for his gear, helmet tipping forward every time he moved. Shane knelt in front of him on the bench, fingers working through the familiar ritual of tying skates, pulling laces snug but not too tight. The rink smelled like rubber and something faintly sweet from the concession stand, just like it always did. Niko's feet swung as Shane worked, barely containing energy buzzing through him.

"You excited, bud?" Shane had asked, glancing up at him.

Niko had nodded hard, flashing his big smile, displaying the gap where his front tooth used to be was on full display. He had lost his first baby tooth that week and had been proudly showing it off to anyone who would look.

Shane smiled. "Hockey's just a game, okay? It should be fun. And if it ever stops being fun, you tell me and Papa. Deal?"

Niko looked at him with those sharp blue eyes—Ilya's eyes, right down to the little flecks of gold that caught the rink lights—and nodded like Shane had just stated an obvious fact. Like the sky being blue.

"Okay, Daddy."

Minutes later, he had trotted off toward the ice, helmet bobbing, already halfway gone.

Shane rested his hands on Niko's shoulders and gave them a little squeeze. "Panic attacks have a mind of their own, Niko," he said. "I've had a lot of them. I know. This didn't happen because you freaked out over nothing."

Niko's jaw worked as he swallowed. He stared down at the rubber mat beneath their skates.

"How were you feeling about this game?"

Niko looked back at him. "Like I always do."

Shane nodded slowly, turning that over. "Okay. Were you feeling anxious about anything?"

"No," he said, a little sharply. "I mean—yeah, we were almost late. But that happens, like, every game day. Everything was fine." His voice pitched upward, frustration creeping in. "It was just supposed to be a normal game, and then my body just—" He gestured vaguely at his chest. "Decides to give me a *heart attack* or something."

Shane's head was also spiraling, now that the adrenaline was wearing off. The realization that he had just watched his son have his first panic attack. And right behind it came the questions he didn't want: had there been signs he'd missed? Was hockey already weighing on him more than it should? Had he given him this? The panic, the fear of failure, the way pressure lodged itself in the body?

Niko had always been a little on edge. Nothing dramatic. Shane wasn't even sure how much of it was real and how much was just him overanalyzing, seeing patterns where there weren't

any because he was so goddamn terrified of missing something important. The stomachaches on school mornings that vanished by lunchtime. The way Niko would cry hard after a bad grade when he was younger, even when Shane and Ilya reassured him endlessly it didn't matter.

And maybe all those things that Ilya and Shane had chalked up to him being a good older brother weren't just that. Double-checking Max's helmet strap before practice, tugging it tighter even when it was already secure. How attentive he was with Mila, calling for Shane or Ilya the second her bandaid got wet, hovering over her when she tripped in the backyard even when she popped right back up like nothing had happened.

Ilya came back over, with a cold water bottle, breaking Shane from his thoughts. He ran his hand through Niko's sweaty hair and bent down in front of him, beside Shane. "How are we feeling, *malysh*?" he asks as he hands Niko the water.

Niko took a sip of the water, glancing back at the ice. He shrugged. "Better."

Shane exchanged a look with Ilya. Better was something. Ilya put a hand on Shane's back, his palm running up and down his spine. Shane let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding.

"You did the right thing, Niko," Ilya said. "Coming off the ice and getting help. That was very brave, *malysh*. I know that was scary."

Niko gave a short nod, eyes fixed on the bottle, his brows drawn together so tightly it carved a line between them. He looked so intense sometimes. Shane always thought he looked so much like Ilya in that way. Now he worried Niko was wearing it like a mask.

After a few more moments, Niko tightened his grip on the bottle. "Can I go play now?" The game had definitely started by now.

Ilya snorted softly, tipping his chin up and giving it a brief, affectionate wiggle. "Your body just fought imaginary bear," he said. "And all you think about is scoring goals?"

Niko groaned a bit and jerked away. "I don't want to miss it."

"Finish this first," Shane said, tapping the water bottle. "Then we'll see."

A few more minutes passed, but Niko was able to finish the water. Shane felt the questions stack up in his throat. He wanted to ask again if Niko was okay. Wanted to suggest sitting out the rest of the game, just to give his body more time. Panic had a way of leaving things dysregulated longer than it looked, and Shane knew that too well.

Because what if it happened again out there. Niko going back too soon and his body decided it wasn't ready, and then the fear latched on—that expectation that it could happen anytime. Or every time.

Shane swallowed it all back and nods. "Okay. You really want to go play?"

"Yes," Niko said immediately. His voice did seem steadier now.

Shane held his gaze for a beat longer, searching. Then he reached out and helped him with his shoulder pads, steadying the straps while Niko shrugged into them. He watched his hands closely as Niko pulled his jersey on.

Ilya rested a hand briefly at the back of Niko's neck. "If you need a break again," he said quietly. "If anything feels off, you come find me again, yes? Just like before."

"I know," Niko said.

Ilya squeezed once, then stood. "Okay. One goal maximum. Your nervous system has already met its quota. "

As Ilya straightened, his gaze flicked to Shane. He leaned in and pressed a brief, grounding kiss to Shane's mouth. Then he turned back to Niko, resting a hand at his back as he guided him toward the ice.

Shane was back in the seats with Mila and Max, who were still finishing the hot chocolates Ilya had bought them earlier. He was holding Mila on his lap again as she leaned heavily against him.

She twisted in his arms and put her hot chocolate up to his lips. And even though Shane's stomach was still in knots and he had absolutely no appetite for something with 24 grams of sugar, Shane took an exaggerated sip, widening his eyes like it was the best thing he'd ever tasted, just to watch her dissolve into giggles.

The sound pulled Max's attention back to them. Shane wiped a smear of whipped cream from the corner of Max's mouth. Max immediately squirmed, batting his hand away with an indignant *Dad*, but there was no real heat behind it. Shane smiled faintly and let his hand fall.

Down on the ice, Niko sat out the remainder of the first period. Helmet on, stick resting between his knees, listening. When the second period rolled around, Shane spotted Ilya crouched beside him, close enough that their shoulders nearly touched. Ilya said something Shane couldn't hear, slow and deliberate. Niko nodded once. Then twice. Ilya reached up and tugged Niko's helmet gently toward him, pressing a kiss to the side of it before letting go.

A moment later, their son hopped over the boards and pushed off onto the ice.

Shane's mind was still racing. The what-ifs stacked up faster than he could knock them down.

So he closed his eyes and counted in his head.

One.

Two.

Three.

End Notes

someone get shane a ginger ale ASAP

thanks for reading!!

i'm planning on making more slice-of-life moments focused on them as parents, they'll be under [Our House](#) xx :)

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