

shared language

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by [dowhile](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander's fluent in hockey.

When his five-year-old daughter begins falling in love with figure skating, he has to learn whether that fluency will be enough.

Notes

using naming conventions from the books just btw

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

Shane knew Mari was a goner when she stared, wide-eyed with wonder at the junior Olympics skating team that had taken to the ice.

He remembered the first time he'd stared in that same way: the 1998 Winter Olympics on the living room TV. He'd been seven then. His family had always been a hockey family: taking him to Voyageurs games, sporting jerseys, playing any game that was on in the background. He shamefully admitted that he didn't really "get" it until the Olympics, when Canada was making their way to the top, only to lose the Bronze medal match to Finland. It was a devastating upset and the Hollander family would take weeks to stop grumbling about it.

Even with Canada's loss, his parents had proceeded to watch the Gold medal match—Russia versus the Czech Republic. He'd never seen them so quiet during a game. He didn't pretend to know how it all worked back then, what strategies each team was employing, names of all of the roles and how to identify them. All he felt was the excitement, the adrenaline, the hush over the room that told him this was the best hockey that hockey could be. Red jerseys vs white zooming around the rink. Incredible puck control.

Suddenly he had wanted to feel what it was like out there on the ice, scoring the goal that led his team to victory. The rest was history.

When Shane grabbed her hand to take her back to the car, she was still mesmerized, staring back at them. Long clean lines and lithe motions. They danced on the ice. Shane knew how badly she wanted to be them.

—

"I think we're going to have a figure skater on our hands," said Shane, opening the fridge.

At the table, the two-year-old Lena was being fed Cheerios between Ilya shoveling handfuls into his own mouth. Anya sat alert, tail wagging, waiting for snacks to come flying down from on high.

"What, you are switching careers?" said Ilya, dumping a hefty mound of cereal on Lena's tray at her protestations.

"Can you give her a banana or something?" said Shane, ignoring the quip. He was about to grab one from the counter when Ilya replied, "I already did. She is empty pit. She does not stop eating. I think she is half-banana already."

Ilya swallowed his dry cereal (Shane shivered at the thought), and returned to the original conversation. "She is being propagandized at the rink, yes?"

"That, and God knows what the Pikes have been showing her."

Since the Pike children had entered their teenage years, they'd been the Hollander-Rozanov family's number one babysitters. And number one bad influencers.

“I was thinking we get her some figure skates,” said Shane, leaning back on the kitchen counter and watching Lena vacuum up her breakfast. “Sign her up for some lessons.”

Ilya stole a final Cheerio from Lena’s tray and gave her a wink. She didn’t seem all that impressed.

“Yes, good idea,” he said. “It would be a shame if the only thing our family was any good at was hockey. We should...ah...”

“Diversify?”

Ilya snapped his fingers and grinned. “Yes. Exactly.”

—

Shane was batting off attempts for a second round.

“Fuck you, I’m trying to find something online,” said Shane, laughing, attempting to remove himself of the Ilya that was trying to wrap himself around him.

“Exactly, Hollander,” said Ilya playfully. “That is exactly what I am trying to do. Fuck you.”

“I’m a busy man, Rozanov,” said Shane. “I’ve got two kids.”

Ilya smiled as he attempted to pull the phone out of Shane’s hands. “That is funny, so do I. See? Match made in heaven.”

Shane let Ilya leave gentle kisses up his arms and down his chest.

“I was thinking—” began Shane.

“*Oh*, he was thinking.”

Shane rolled his eyes and set his phone down on the nightstand.

“I was *wondering* when you fell in love with hockey,” restated Shane, taking his glasses off and setting them neatly beside his phone.

Ilya stopped his kisses to look at Shane directly, Ilya’s eyes searching his. Despite the sex, despite their nakedness, they suddenly felt overexposed.

Ilya flopped back over to his side of the bed.

“We are getting sentimental in our old age, aren’t we,” he said, staring at the ceiling.

“Shut up. Forgive me for asking my husband a question,” said Shane.

Ilya turned to his side, propping himself up on one elbow.

“Russians. They are born with a hockey stick in their hands,” said Ilya, matter-of-factly.

“I think yours ended up your ass.”

“Those are fighting words, Hollander,” said Ilya with a grin.

“Can you answer the question?”

Ilya leaned back into his pillow with a groan. “So you are interviewer now. Please, ask me how I am going to win next game.”

Shane just stared at him, that love struck, stupid stare he did that lowered all of Ilya’s defenses.

“Fine. You will not like the answer.”

“Of course I will.”

“It was when I realized I was so much better than everyone else.”

Shane laughed. He believed it.

“And how old were you?” asked Shane. There were still stars in his eyes.

“Mmm,” Ilya said, considering. “Maybe eight. It was unofficial game. I was on my brother’s team. Everyone was older than me. And I realized that I knew exactly where the puck should go and how to get it there when nobody else did.”

“And you felt powerful,” said Shane, knowing that same feeling. It was that feeling that kept him going. He might be ignorant about most things, but he’d always be fluent in hockey.

“So I scored my first official-unofficial hat trick and the other boys were so angry. Seeing red,” he said, scrunching his face in anger, waving a hand over his face.

Shane imagined the mighty triumphant yell of young Ilya.

“They thought it was beginner’s luck, so they didn’t beat my ass for real,” he said, a bit too non-chalantly for Shane’s taste. “I begged my mother to let me play on official team.”

His smile faltered then, a momentary flash of grief he’d learn to hide quite well.

Shane took Ilya’s hand in his. “Well, I’m glad she let you. I’m glad she got to see you.”

Ilya sighed deeply but smiled all the same.

“I remember when we bought Mari her first stick. I was so excited to see *her* excitement. My mother did the same for me,” he said. Shane watched his face turn momentarily far-away, smiling at the memory.

Suddenly, it clicked for Shane why Ilya had been adamant about picking Mari’s first stick, down to the wrapping paper and bow.

Shane swallowed hard, his heart wobbling. These glimpses into Ilya's past were so treasured and so rare. He didn't mind that Ilya kept them for himself sometimes.

They sat in a pleasant silence together. Shane imagined to himself what Ilya was replaying in his head: the small Russian kid he used to be, crooked smile and all, and his mother who would be his biggest cheerleader.

It was moments like these where Shane was most acutely aware of the loss of the woman he had never known. How she'd have fit in so well with the Hollanders, how much she would've gushed over her son, how much she would have loved the two little girls Shane and Ilya called their own.

"And you?" asked Ilya, breaking Shane out of his mind.

"And me what?"

"When did you fall in love with hockey?"

"1998," Shane said, knowing Ilya would pick up his meaning immediately.

"Those fucking Czechs and their fucking gold medal. I cannot believe you would bring up such a painful Olympics for a Russian."

"A Russian? What about me? Canada got shut out from a medal entirely!"

"Yes, well, Canadians are losers."

—

Shane and Ilya had taken Jackie and Hayden out to dinner at some fancy new Italian place that had popped up in downtown Ottawa.

The Pikes were now half of the way to being empty nesters, with Jade and Ruby home from university for the summer. Amber and Arthur were still in high school. In fact, it was the Pike children who'd been tasked to take care of Ilya and Shane's own children for the night. All four had agreed immediately.

"Were you ever surprised that only Amber stuck with hockey?" asked Shane over a gorgeous plate of pasta. The place felt too fancy for all of them, but still, the food was delicious.

Jackie shook her head. "Not really," she said, setting down her wine glass. "I think when daddy is known for hockey, you want to distance yourself from it."

"Well," said Hayden. "We taught them how to skate, obviously. But Ruby always preferred soccer. Arthur just wanted to be like Ruby, always. Jade didn't care much either way, but joined Ruby just to join Ruby. I always told them I didn't care what they did, they just needed to get some exercise. Amber ended up being the only one I could convince, it seems."

"I'm just glad they only picked two sports," said Jackie. "Ferrying them around to soccer games alone was so crazy."

“You were soccer mom and hockey wife,” said Ilya. “Superwoman.”

“Right? Thank you!” said Jackie with a laugh. She gave Hayden a look that said, “Why don’t we invite this guy around more often?”

“Mari seems like she wants to figure skate,” said Shane, almost bashfully, refolding his napkin in his lap. He hadn’t quite figured out how to approach the situation.

“Let her!” encouraged Jackie.

Shane smiled down at his plate of food. “Of course—”

“He is worried he will not know how to talk about sports if she does not play hockey,” Ilya translated. Shane glanced over at Ilya. He sometimes felt that overwhelming feeling that Ilya honest-to-god read his mind.

“Well,” said Shane. “I want her to be happy. She likes hockey too, so I don’t want to pull her away from that—”

And then Hayden presented a solution so simple that Shane felt like a moron for not thinking of it.

“Let her do both,” said Hayden. “She’s what, five? No big deal. She’s not going pro for either sport at five.”

“She’ll go pro for both at sixteen,” said Ilya. Shane shot him a look.

“Joke!” Ilya said. “It was joke.” Only when Ilya’s mouth was full of penne did Shane proceed to ask his next question.

“And you didn’t feel like you couldn’t show up for them?” Shane asked. “Soccer’s so... different.”

“You learn it the same way you learn anything,” said Hayden. “Watching, listening, reading.”

Shane reminded himself he could skate, so there’d always be that similarity. At least figure skating was on turf he was familiar with. But what he couldn’t do was a triple axel or really name any other move. He began folding his napkin again in his lap.

“Listen to Hayden. Somehow he has good kids,” Ilya said with a wink, raising his wine glass in a toast.

—

Shane had taken Mari to get her skates fitted before, but this time felt different.

What he had imagined to be a monumental moment had really turned out to be the routine try-on followed by Shane handing his credit card over. No rushing musical score, no try-on montage. Just the mundanity of life.

She still went to hockey practice. She still celebrated when she got the puck past the goalie. And yeah, she still got upset when her team lost.

He hadn't always been there to take her to games or practice. Nor had Ilya. Though veteran players themselves, not all skating practice could be skipped. Friends and family had always picked up the slack.

It was important that Shane was here today, however. Just one of them could miss practice without Coach being upset. He reached down to tie her white leather figure skates that had come undone and watched her face beam.

He pulled off her coat and set it on the bench, watching, arms crossed, as she waved back at him and took to the ice with gusto.

He was in the midst of some new revelations as she skated into center circle with the rest of her class. If anything, she seemed happier to have more time on the ice. Maybe this was the evidence he needed that she didn't want to quit altogether.

But he quickly realized as he watched her warmup that he wasn't so scared of that possibility. Shane was beginning to see now that even if she hated it, if she'd dropped her hockey gear in the garbage one day and never looked back, that he'd adapt. He'd meet her where she was.

There were languages to speak other than hockey.

End Notes

went back in time on this one a bit, and reordered the series. thanks for reading!

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