

Next Chapter

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Next Chapter

by [PeaceLilies](#)

Summary

After six years of marriage, Shane and Ilya enter the next chapter of their life together... parenthood.

Notes

HOLY HECK, Y'ALL! I BASICALLY WROTE A BOOK! I'm really proud of this fic and everything that went into it. I wasn't sure if I'd ever have it in me to write this many words, but here we are!!!

Thanks so much to [Cal](#) and [Ren](#) for their encouragement, beta-ing, and editing! It means so much to me! I know that this was a huge undertaking and I am extremely grateful for the help!

I hope you all enjoy this labor of love!!! 🍷

PS: going to try and post 3 chapters every Monday!

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

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Ilya has hip surgery

May

Shane stood next to Ilya's hospital bed, holding his hand, his thumb brushing back and forth over his knuckles as Ilya was prepared for surgery. Shane's nerves were obvious and while Ilya was probably just as nervous, he was much better at hiding it.

"Okay," said one of the nurses. "We're all ready. If you guys wanna say 'see you soon', we'll get you outta here."

"Okay," Ilya replied, looking at Shane, who was looking down at him, his dark eyes big and shiny. He squeezed Ilya's hand and Ilya made a soft noise.

"Shane," he hummed, smiling, as his husband leaned down to press a trembling kiss to Ilya's mouth. "Will be fine."

"I know," Shane replied, swallowing. "I love you. I'll be here when you're all done, okay?"

Ilya smiled tenderly at him, just looking. It probably wasn't necessary, but he wanted to memorize Shane as he was; with his long hair, and his soft eyes, and beautiful freckles, and cute little nose. He loved this face, this man. He was so glad they were together, that Ilya had been able to marry the love of his life.

"I love you. I will see you soon."

Shane nodded and kissed his hand, before letting Ilya go. Ilya watched him being led out by one of the nurses, his hair tucked behind one ear, nodding along as the nurse talked to him.

The anesthesiologist came in with the surgeon, Dr. Tamara Cook, one of the best sports surgeons in the United States, and highly recommended by other hockey players Ilya knew who had had this surgery: a double hip arthroscopy and labral repair.

At the end of last season, Ilya had talked to Terry about the chronic hip pain he'd been managing over the course of the year. He'd been rehabbing, but the issue wasn't resolving itself. After some imaging, Terry had told him that he had damage to the labrum in both of his hips, which had caused damage to his hip joints. If he didn't consider getting surgery now, he would need two full hip replacements in a few years, which hadn't been appealing to Ilya. He wasn't quite ready to be done with hockey yet; plus, he wanted to still be able to be active for Shane... and their kids.

He and Shane had started the process of being approved to adopt and their dream of having kids of their own was right on the horizon. Now seemed like the best time to have surgery, before they had a little one around, and so that Ilya could play what would probably be his last season with the Centaurs, without any problems.

“How are you feeling, Ilya?” Dr. Cook asked.

She was only a few years older than Ilya, with sharp blue eyes, and a wicked sense of humor. Ilya liked her. He had been straightforward with her about his expectations for recovery and she had met him in kind, willing to compromise and work with him. He appreciated that.

“Good. Ready.”

“Good,” she replied, smiling. “We’ll have you in and out in a few hours and Shane can take you right home.”

Ilya smiled at her and she smiled back, patting his arm. “Samantha’s gonna put you under and we’ll see you before you know it.”

“Okay,” he said and took a steadying breath. In his seventeen years of playing professional hockey, Ilya had been very lucky in regards to injuries. He had never had anything too serious and besides having mostly implants as opposed to real teeth, he had never needed any kind of serious surgery. Until now. He wasn’t really surprised. He had always been harder on his body, unafraid to use it during games, and always training hard. In hockey years, at thirty-six, he was basically ancient. He wasn’t thrilled about the need for this but it would pay off in the long run.

Dr. Cook checked over the markings she’d made on his thighs, close to his hips, of where the incisions would be, and then Samantha the anesthesiologist appeared.

“Alright, honey. I’m gonna have you count down from ten for me. You ready?”

Ilya nodded and started counting down and was unconscious before he got to one.

Shane sat in the hospital waiting room, trying to distract himself. He had been listening to/reading a parenting book, as well as a few podcasts that had been recommended to him about becoming a parent, but his mind could not focus on anything he was reading or hearing.

He just kept thinking about Ilya in that hospital bed with all the wires in his arm, looking so vulnerable.

Shane had been concerned when Ilya had been talking about his hip pain last season. He’d mentioned some discomfort here and there that seemed to improve with consistent attention; it meant more time spent with the trainers, but it was manageable. Then that had stopped working and Ilya seemed to be in pain more often than not. Shane had run through all kinds

of worst case scenarios, keeping himself up at night worrying about Ilya's health and his career and what would happen if this was something *serious* .

Learning that it was just the wear and tear after years of playing hockey had been a relief but not enough to completely quell Shane's worries. Injuries were no joke and even though Ilya's hip pain wasn't life threatening, it still required surgery, and that left a lot of unknowns in terms of his career.

The surgery in and of itself was relatively non-invasive and quick. Something that was done pretty commonly among athletes and some older people who had bad hips. Shane didn't have anything to worry about, really, but he worried anyway. He wanted Ilya to have a good quality of life but surgery was a big, scary thing to talk about so casually, especially with everything else they had going on.

This past season with the Centaurs hadn't been a bad one. They had done fairly well, though they hadn't made it past the second round of playoffs, which was okay. On a personal level, there had been a few changes, positive ones for the most part, but still... terrifying.

Shane and Ilya had sat down and really talked about kids and adopting. Ilya had made it clear that he wanted to retire once they knew they'd be adopting. He wanted to be with their kid full-time. Shane hadn't realized how fiercely Ilya felt about it, not liking the idea of relying on Shane's parents or a nanny to take care of their kid when they were at practice or on the road. Shane felt guilty about that. He wanted to keep playing and he felt bad for that. He didn't want Ilya to be placed into a position of parenting alone. He wouldn't be alone all the time of course, but Shane would still spend a decent amount of time on the road and at practice.

They had talked about different approaches but Ilya had assured Shane that this was what he was choosing because it was important to him and that there was no pressure for Shane to retire, too. They'd figure out Ilya having support when Shane was gone but Ilya was sure of his decision.

He could talk to Jackie, Selena, Caitlin, or Cassie about what they had done to manage raising kids while their husbands were gone.

They had the financial means to ensure that Ilya wouldn't have to work, though he expressed wanting to do something besides parenting. He had more varied hobbies: baking, woodworking. He mused about starting a podcast and had said that he could take on some modeling gigs after having had some success with Calvin Klein (Shane still had those ads stowed away because they were some of the sexiest shots of Ilya that Shane had ever seen) and CCM had renewed his contract despite his disclosure (with conditions) that he would be retiring.

They had a tentative plan but Shane still felt anxious. He wanted Ilya to be happy and he didn't want him to be alone, and he also... didn't want him to stop playing hockey. Shane was going to miss being on the ice with him.

He felt guilty, too, that Ilya was yet again sacrificing more for Shane, for their family. Shane knew that Ilya said that it was what he wanted, that he was excited about it, that he knew how

hard it would be to give up hockey but that he was ready to be a dad. He just kept thinking about how much he had missed when Ilya was alone, in Ottawa, isolated and depressed.

Shane knew he needed to trust Ilya... and that he needed to speak up about his worries, too. If Ilya needed him, if their kid needed him, he'd quit in a second.

But one thing at a time. They had to get through this surgery and the recovery first and then they could worry about everything else. Shane wanted Ilya healthy and comfortable and that was his priority.

One step at a time.

Ilya woke up what felt like a minute later, groggy, and slightly disoriented. He made a soft noise, blinking his eyes, trying to orient himself. He was in an unfamiliar room, surrounded by beeping machines. A hospital? Had something happened? Was he in an accident? A bad check against the boards?

"Hey," said a soft, familiar voice, in English. Ilya turned his head to see a gorgeous man looking at him. He had dark eyes and dark hair and freckles along his cheeks and over the bridge of his nose. He smiled softly at Ilya and Ilya's heart went bananas in his chest. The man looked... *familiar*.

"Hi," Ilya murmured, his words sounding slurred. "You're so beautiful."

The man laughed, blushing, and whoa, he was truly *stunning*.

"Thank you," the man said, in Russian.

"You speak Russian?" Ilya exclaimed. "Amazing! Where are you from? What're you doing here?"

The man blinked at him, tilting his head to the side. "Ilya. It's me."

Ilya blinked, his brows furrowed. He was missing something, but he wasn't sure what exactly. It was like the information was just out of reach.

"I know you?"

The man nodded. "Yeah. I'm your husband."

Ilya was shocked. Utterly flabbergasted! This man... this gorgeous, stunning, beautiful man, was his *husband*?! How the fuck had he managed to pull that off?!

"No," Ilya replied in complete disbelief. "Fuck off. My husband?! Really?!"

The man laughed. "Yeah," he said, holding up his left hand, revealing a gold ring around his finger. He reached out, carefully taking Ilya's hand, and Ilya looked down, seeing a black

band around his own finger. He stared at it, lifting his hand to look at the ring, as if he had never seen one before.

He looked at the man, gaping.

“You’re really my husband? I’m married to you? For how long?”

“Six years,” the man replied.

“Six years?!” Ilya exclaimed. He leaned back against the pillow under his head, processing. He had been married to this beautiful mystery man for six years. He must have really taken a wallop to the head if he couldn’t remember this guy.

He turned his head back to his apparent husband.

“Do we have sex?”

The man burst out laughing, blushing deeply. “Oh my god!”

He had a nice laugh, melodic and happy. Ilya looked at him all dreamy. “We do, yes? Since we are married?”

“Yes,” the man replied. “We’ve been having sex together for a long time.”

Ilya beamed happily at hearing that.

The man’s expression fell after a moment as he looked at Ilya. His dark eyes were concerned, nervous, almost scared. Ilya didn’t like that look on his face. It made his heart sink and his stomach turn.

“You really don’t remember?” the man asked.

“I—” Ilya replied, reaching out to gently touch the man’s face. And then it all came flooding back to him. He was in the hospital, after double hip surgery, and Shane was waiting for him. Right. Fuck. Post surgery anesthesia was fucking *wild*.

“Shane.”

Shane looked relieved, closing his eyes, his bottom lip trembling a little.

“Oh, sweetheart,” Ilya murmured. He reached for Shane and Shane sat very gingerly on his hospital bed, leaning over to hug Ilya, and snuffle.

“I am okay,” Ilya soothed, holding Shane as best he could with wires and things still in his arm. Shane sighed and nodded, his chin hooked over Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya rubbed his back and kissed his head and Shane pulled away, kissing Ilya very gently on the mouth.

“Sorry,” he sighed, wiping his eyes. “I shouldn’t be upset. I’m not the one who just had surgery...”

Ilya shook his head, smiling softly, his heart melting. Of course Shane would have been a nervous wreck while Ilya was getting worked on, not knowing what was happening. It was a little scary, to be fair, but Ilya knew Shane had probably been spiraling.

“Is fine,” Ilya soothed. “I’m fine. And is cute that you were worried about me.”

Shane huffed a laugh, shaking his head. “I love you,” he murmured. “How are you feeling?”

“I love you, too,” Ilya replied. “Mm, fuzzy? Weird. I think is the anesthesia wearing off.”

Shane nodded, sitting back on the chair next to Ilya’s bed, holding his hand, his thumb rubbing back and forth in a soothing rhythm over Ilya’s knuckles.

“That makes sense. How’re your hips?”

Ilya considered this, checking in with his body. He felt... *okay* . Weird, which made sense. Not in pain exactly. Not yet anyway...

“Okay right now,” he replied honestly.

Shane hummed and nodded, sliding his fingers soothingly into Ilya's hair. Ilya closed his eyes, leaning into Shane's gentle touch.

Dr. Cook came back and gave Shane and Ilya the run down of the surgery and post-op care. The surgery had gone perfectly. Ilya would be sore and would need to use crutches for two weeks and two hip braces for three. He would start PT and was looking at about a six month recovery.

“Now I know you want to make the Centaurs home opener. I can’t make any promises and I strongly advise that you listen to your body and not push yourself... but if you work with your therapists and trainers and come see me when you’re supposed to... we can probably get you back on the ice before the end of October. Fair?”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. Thank you.”

“That means doing everything you’re told.”

Ilya chuckled. “Yes. I understand.”

“I’ll hold him to it,” Shane chimed in and Dr. Cook smiled at him.

“Excellent. Thank you, Shane.”

Ilya turned to Shane, narrowing his eyes at him for a moment, before smiling, and offering him a wink.

She gave Ilya and Shane information about taking care of his incision sites, informational booklets on post-op care, and the most important information that Ilya wanted to know: that he could resume sexual activity as soon as he felt ready, but that he should avoid any

positions that required excessive hip movements until a minimum of twelve weeks and up to a maximum of sixteen. Three to four months was... a long time...

That kind of sucked but he supposed he and Shane could figure out a way, though that maybe meant Shane being on top more often than not, if Shane would even let them have anal sex. He guessed he'd find out. Not today though. He was starting to feel stiff and definitely sore. The idea of having sex was actually pretty unappealing.

They showed Ilya and Shane how to use the hip braces and made sure he had crutches.

It was very slow going to get dressed but they were up and out to the car only about an hour after Ilya had woken up from surgery. He was exhausted and not in pain, but definitely uncomfortably sore. Almost achy. He wasn't loving it.

"Do you want to take anything?" Shane asked as he got into the driver's seat, adjusting the seat and mirrors to accommodate his height.

"No," Ilya replied. "But I should ice when we are home."

"Definitely."

"Home" for the time being was a spot that they had rented not far from the hospital and rehab facility. They were going to stay for about a month, until it was okay for Ilya to fly, and then they'd pick everything back up in Ottawa, with Ilya having post-op check ups scheduled that he could fly back for.

"Anya will be excited to see you," Shane said as he pulled them out of the parking lot. Ilya smiled.

"I will be glad to see her."

Shane reached out, rubbing his hand over Ilya's arm, and Ilya smiled, closing his eyes.

He dozed off in the car and Shane woke him up when they arrived at their rental. It was a slow, careful journey to the front door but Ilya managed. Shane hovered, hands out, just in case Ilya lost his balance.

They got into the house and Anya came running. Ilya couldn't bend down to pet her but Shane scooped her up and let her sniff at him and then lick at Ilya's face. They both laughed.

Shane got Ilya settled in the bedroom after helping him change into looser clothing. He was immeasurably tired, which made sense. Shane got him set up with ice and then he and Anya joined Ilya, cuddled up against his side, careful not to brush up against Ilya's hips.

Shane lay on his side, his head resting in his palm, looking down at Ilya. He ran his fingers through Ilya's hair, playing with his curls, and Ilya hummed softly, sleepily.

"Rest," Shane murmured. "I'll be here."

"Okay," Ilya replied and Shane kissed his forehead.

Ilya fell asleep in moments.

The first few days after surgery were maybe the worst. Ilya was incredibly uncomfortable. He was sore and tired and moving around was more difficult than he would have liked. He was frustrated at not having the freedom he was used to. He was also running a low grade fever which had him both hot and cold at once.

Shane hovered anxiously, fussing over him, and Ilya did his best not to snap at him.

Shane was a nervous person in general and Ilya knew that the surgery had been scary for him. Ilya was grateful to have a partner who loved him and wanted to take care of him but sometimes it felt suffocating.

Ilya felt a little better after being able to bathe but that was a whole process. He couldn't soak in a bath and he couldn't stand up in a shower, so they went the sponge bath route which Ilya absolutely hated but at least he was clean.

He mostly slept and tried to move around as much as he could, though even that was exhausting.

Things did improve as the soreness dissipated and Shane had backed off a bit when he realized that Ilya was taking his post-op care seriously and was gaining mobility.

Ilya was being very serious about his post-op care. He couldn't afford not to be. This was probably going to be his last season playing hockey anyway and he wanted it to be a good season. He and Shane had talked about it a bit as they'd made the decision to start the process for adoption. They'd talked to Farah, too, who had been nothing but supportive.

Ilya had talked with Galina about it, as well, why he was retiring first, instead of Shane. Ilya actually felt good about that decision. He loved hockey. It would be hard to let it go, but Ilya had always known that hockey wouldn't be his life forever. It didn't define him in the same ways that it did Shane.

Ilya had other interests and hobbies that he'd cultivated over the years since he'd started therapy. And he didn't want them to adopt a child and never be around to take care of them. Ilya wanted to be a present and active parent. He wanted to be the opposite of his own father. He wanted to be loving and attentive and reliable. He was excited to be a dad. He loved kids. He couldn't wait to have his own. He wanted to see Shane with them, too.

Ilya knew Shane would be so nervous at first but that he'd adjust. He thought about Shane as a parent a lot. The responsible one, of course, but sweet and kind. A good listener. An excellent cheerleader. He'd give the best hugs.

"How are you doing?" Shane asked, calling Ilya from his thoughts. Ilya shifted his head on the back of the sofa to look at his husband.

"Okay," Ilya replied. "No pain. Tired still."

Shane hummed and nodded, leaning down to kiss into Ilya's curls. Ilya smiled and closed his eyes, reaching up to brush his fingers against Shane's cheek.

"You hungry?"

"I could eat."

"Good. I'm going to make chicken parm."

Ilya chuckled. "Sounds good."

Ilya watched Shane go to the kitchen, and listened to him bustling about. He turned some music on, which surprised Ilya. Shane usually didn't listen to music. A couple songs in, he realized it was the playlist that Shane had created on Spotify of all the songs that Ilya had sent him throughout their relationship.

He had started to listen to this playlist more often after they'd moved in together, Ilya still sending him songs, and Shane adding them to the playlist. Ilya thought it was really sweet.

He sighed to himself. He was glad that he had Shane. He was grateful to Shane for taking care of him and putting up with his moodiness. It wasn't easy taking care of a partner who wasn't feeling well... physically or emotionally. Ilya knew he'd put Shane through a lot and he appreciated his steadfastness and care.

After dinner, laying in bed together, Ilya stared up at the unfamiliar ceiling, one hand resting behind his head. Shane smoothed his own hand over Ilya's chest in comforting circles and Ilya reached his free hand down to curl his fingers around Shane's.

"Hmm?" Shane murmured, turning his head up so his nose brushed Ilya's cheek.

Ilya turned his head to look at his husband, moving his hand so he could play with Shane's soft, silky hair.

"Thank you," he sighed.

"Thank you? For what?" Shane asked softly, kissing Ilya's mouth softly.

"For all of this. Taking care of me. I know I am not easy."

Shane smiled, warm and sweet. He shook his head, gently rubbing his finger between Ilya's eyes, then running his finger down Ilya's nose, and booping the tip of it.

"Love, honor, and cherish, right?" he said. "I know we didn't say 'in sickness and in health' but... I don't know... it's part of the gig. This isn't a hardship. I love you and I want to take care of you."

Ilya blinked, his eyes stinging. Shane cooed at him, gently stroking his thumb over Ilya's cheek, and kissed his mouth a few times, tender and adoring.

"I still want you to feel appreciated," Ilya finally managed. "Is not an easy thing..."

Shane just kept smiling at him, so warm and so sweet. “Well, I appreciate your appreciation.”

Ilya chuckled and Shane did, too, pressing tiny kisses to Ilya’s face. “I love you. And I got you. Okay?”

Ilya nodded. “Okay.”

Shane shifted, leaning up on an elbow to kiss Ilya properly. It was slow and tender, not escalating anything. Just... affectionate and soft. Ilya sighed into it, enjoying the familiar feeling of Shane’s soft lips against his, of the teasing brush of his tongue in Ilya’s mouth.

They made out for a little bit and then settled back together. Ilya felt sleepy and comforted. Shane’s hand was back on his chest and he closed his eyes, kissing into Shane’s hair, and breathed him in.

Ilya looked at his incisions in the bathroom mirror. He had three on each thigh, in a triangle shape. One just below his hip, and two a few inches below that, right across from one another. They were healing okay, though his skin was bruised around each incision, and that was sort of gross looking. He felt better than he had, moving easier, no longer needing the braces or crutches.

He’d been doing his exercises at home, going to physical therapy, and icing accordingly. The swelling hadn’t been as bad as he’d been expecting, and he was careful to not overexert himself. He intended to be back on the ice in October, which meant he couldn’t mess anything up.

Slow and steady. Even though he fucking hated it.

Shane was never very far away from him at any given time. He was around, just in case, but not hovering as much as he had been, which Ilya thought was better for both of them. Ilya’s mobility had much improved, so there was less of a fear around falling.

“Ilya?” Shane called from outside the bathroom door.

“Come in,” Ilya called back. Shane opened the door. He paused, his eyes sweeping over Ilya’s very naked body, which made Ilya smile. Shane’s cheeks were pink.

“Hey,” he said, a little breathless.

“Hi,” Ilya replied.

“You okay?” Shane asked, very obviously trying not to stare at Ilya’s dick.

“Yes,” Ilya replied, grinning. “Was just looking at the incisions.”

He turned to the side, his left hip facing Shane. Shane looked down at his thigh and hissed. “Oh, babe...”

Shane almost never called Ilya *baby* or *babe* ... not unless he was feeling particularly soft or in the throes of passion or if Ilya had done something so utterly romantic that caused Shane to melt into a puddle.

“Are you okay?” he asked, moving closer. He didn’t touch the bruises, but his hands hovered.

“I’m fine. They look worse than they are.”

Shane lingered, before he moved around Ilya, hugging him gingerly from behind. He pressed his cheek between Ilya’s shoulder blades and sighed. Ilya rested his hands over Shane’s, where they lay against his solar plexus.

“I love you so much,” Shane murmured.

“I love you, too,” Ilya replied. “So much, Shane.”

Shane held him for a few long moments. Ilya was sure it was hard to see the bruising, even though he was okay. Injuries of any kind were tough when it involved someone you loved. Eventually, Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya’s back and gave him a squeeze, before he stepped away.

“Maybe we can try something tonight,” he said, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s bare shoulder, looking up through his long lashes at Ilya.

“Oh yes?” Ilya replied, watching his husband. They’d given one another hand jobs and a few blow jobs, but nothing beyond that. Ilya had teased Shane about it a bit but Shane was adamant about waiting as long as possible to optimize Ilya’s healing and recovery, so anal had been off the table for the last few weeks.

If having sex is the thing that ends up setting you back and reinjuring you, I’ll be extremely upset.

If Ilya was honest, it had probably been the right call, but he still wanted to be inside Shane. Desperately.

“Mm,” Shane replied. “With conditions.”

Ilya rolled his eyes but he was smiling. “Of course.”

“I mean it.”

“I know,” Ilya replied, holding up his hands. “I will be good.” He gave Shane his most innocent face, fluttering his eyelashes at him. Shane snorted, smiling.

“Scram. I have to shower.”

“Yes, yes, fine,” Ilya replied, hobbling out of the bathroom.

He got changed and spent some time with Anya while Shane showered. He was looking forward to being back in Ottawa. He missed their house and the familiarity of it. He didn't mind the physical therapists here but he wanted to be working with the PTs back home, who knew him. Ilya was already feeling restless but he was trying to be better in reminding himself not to rush too much.

Reinjuring himself would be the last thing he needed and he really didn't want to incur Shane's wrath.

Only two more days... and then they'd be Home.

"We'll get there," he murmured to Anya in Russian, rubbing his hands against her face, smiling at her, and kissing the top of her head. He was glad they'd brought her with them. She'd been so good on the plane and it was comforting to have her little body curled next to his when he napped or when she was in his lap or on his chest.

Shane finished showering and changed, coming out of the bathroom, toweling off his hair. He wasn't wearing a shirt and Ilya let his eyes wander, appreciating the breadth of Shane's shoulders and his trim waist and perfect abs.

"Wanna go for a walk?" he asked Ilya.

"Yes," Ilya replied. "That would be nice."

They took Anya out, walking through their temporary neighborhood, holding hands, enjoying the warm, late spring evening.

"You good?" Shane asked as they went. Ilya nodded.

"Yes. Feels fine. Still a little stiff but not bad. Is easier when I am moving."

"Okay. Good. Let me know when you want to head back or if you need a break."

"I know. I will."

Shane squeezed Ilya's hand and Ilya squeezed back.

They headed back eventually and Ilya sat with Shane in the kitchen, legs stretched out, as Shane made dinner. Ilya watched him, his heart fluttering in his chest just looking at his husband. Shane had his hair tucked behind his ear on one side, his face relaxed as he read a recipe, glasses on. He was in a t-shirt and shorts, his feet bare.

He was lovely and Ilya was content just to watch him, feeling very lucky, and dreamy. Six years of wedded bliss. It had been quite a journey for them, navigating the change in their relationship, spending so much time together, where it had been the opposite for so long.

They'd found a good balance and Ilya was happy. He loved the life he and Shane had created together, that they were still creating. Building. It was an absolute dream to be married to his best friend. He was so lucky to have Shane's heart.

Shane slid the pan of chicken into the oven when he was finished preparing it and turned, hands on his hips.

“What?” he asked, smiling, catching Ilya staring.

“Nothing,” Ilya replied, smiling back, shaking his head a little. “Come here.”

Shane came, standing between Ilya’s legs. He smiled down at him and slid both hands into Ilya’s hair. Ilya closed his eyes, letting his head tip back as Shane stroked his hands through his curls, scratching lightly at his scalp.

Ilya let his lips part and he sighed. Shane chuckled, leaning down to press tiny kisses over Ilya’s forehead, his eyebrows, down his nose, over his cheeks, and the corners of his mouth. Then he gently tilted Ilya’s head forward, hands cupping his cheeks, to kiss the top of his head. Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya’s neck and Ilya leaned into him, his arms around Shane’s waist.

They stayed like that for a long time, just breathing, and holding each other. Ilya slid his hands under Shane’s t-shirt, resting his hands on his back, feeling the warm, smoothness of his skin. It was a gentle touch, comforting. Grounding.

Shane kissed the top of Ilya’s head again, rubbing his back in soothing circles.

“Let me check the chicken,” he murmured and Ilya let him go.

Dinner was a quiet affair as it had been the past few weeks, which Ilya didn’t mind. They watched TV and after cleaning up from dinner, lounged, Ilya’s legs in Shane’s lap. They took Anya out again for a shorter walk this time, and then called it a night.

They lounged in bed, talking to Shane’s parents, and Ilya texted back and forth with Troy, Cliff, and Svetlana. He hated that he was still so tired but it made sense. His body had been under a lot of stress and was healing. It was going to take time.

“Do you want to sleep?” Shane asked. “We’re gonna be busy packing up tomorrow.”

Ilya hummed and looked at Shane, smiling. “What about trying something?” he asked, reaching for him. Shane shifted closer, stroking back Ilya’s curls, and nuzzled his cheek.

“We can if you feel up for it.”

“I am always up for it,” Ilya replied, waggling his eyebrows and giving Shane his crooked smile. Shane laughed and blushed and kissed his cheek.

“Okay,” Shane replied. “But I’m on top... and we’re going slow.”

“I like slow,” Ilya murmured, turning his head so that he could kiss Shane. “You are the one who likes to go fast.”

Shane huffed but he kissed Ilya and Ilya sighed into it happily. He couldn’t turn onto his side and lay on his hip so Shane scooted closer, leaning over him so they could kiss at a better

angle. Ilya hummed into it and he felt Shane smile in response.

Ilya played with Shane's hair as they kissed, sliding the silky strands through his fingers, gently curling his fingers into them. He enjoyed Shane's sweet tenderness, the way his hands smoothed into his curls, thumbs brushing over his hairline. Shane cupped Ilya's face in his palms and Ilya nipped Shane's bottom lip, running his hands up Shane's back, pulling his t-shirt up.

Shane smiled, leaning away to pull his shirt off and toss it aside. Ilya took a moment to just look, reaching out to run his hands over Shane's chest, down his stomach. He sat up to take off his own shirt and Shane helped him carefully take off his sweatpants and underwear. He was very mindful of the incisions, smoothing his thumb just above one bruise.

Ilya watched him, relaxing into the mattress. God, Shane was gorgeous. A fucking fantasy. The perfect image of an elite athlete. Ilya loved watching the way his muscles moved under his skin, how his hair fell in his face. Shane had taken off his own clothes, his dick already hard just from their making out. He lifted his eyes, looking at Ilya through his lashes, and Ilya's heart flipped.

"You'll tell me if you're in any pain? I don't want to hurt you."

Ilya smiled softly at him. "I will. You won't. Come on..." he replied quietly, reaching for Shane, wanting to feel Shane's body pressed against his own. Shane licked his bottom lip and moved closer, kissing Ilya again. They kissed deeper this time, more needy.

Ilya ran his hands over Shane's back and waist, squeezing his perfect ass in his hands, listening to Shane sigh at every touch. Ilya reached around, teasing his fingers over Shane's dick, and Shane moaned into his mouth.

"Ilya," Shane sighed and Ilya smiled, kissing Shane's neck, running his hand up his husband's abs, to his chest, teasing a nipple with his thumb.

"Fuck," Shane breathed. "Hold on."

Ilya stopped his exploring so Shane could lean over to grab the lube from one of the nightstands.

"How do you want to do this?" Shane asked, snuggling up to Ilya again. "Sixty-nine? Or... I can open myself up and you can watch?"

Ilya grinned. "Why not both?"

Shane laughed. "Jeez... I already know I'm not gonna last long..."

"Me neither," Ilya chuckled.

Shane's expression softened and he ran his fingers gently down Ilya's neck, over his collarbones, and down his chest in an appreciative touch. Ilya's skin prickled under Shane's fingers, warmth pooling in his belly.

“The things I’ll do for you,” he sighed, dramatic and teasing.

“Yes. What a hardship,” Ilya replied flatly.

Shane laughed and leaned in to kiss him. “You ready?”

“Fuck, Hollander. Yes. Give me your dick.”

Shane laughed again, harder, and turned to straddle Ilya’s chest so his ass was up by Ilya’s face. “Hey. That’s my line.”

Ilya smirked and replied by sucking one of Shane’s perfect balls into his mouth, his husband gasping and shuddering above him.

“Fuck,” he whimpered, breathing harshly, before his lips wrapped around Ilya. It was hard to keep still, to not thrust up into Shane’s warm, wet, welcoming mouth, but Ilya would do his best to not completely fuck up this surgery.

He loved Shane blowing him. Always so eager to have Ilya’s dick in his mouth, but beyond that, he’d gotten fucking great at blow jobs. Ilya had always loved his earnestness, which had outweighed his skill in the beginning of their physical relationship, but holy fuck had Shane improved in leaps and bounds.

He moaned around Ilya which made Ilya have to pull away and bite his own bottom lip, the vibration sending pleasant tingles down his dick, through his balls, to the base of his spine. They might not even make it to fucking at this point and Ilya... kind of didn’t care. It was always so good between them, no matter what they did.

He grabbed the lube and slicked his fingers, going back to Shane’s balls, and teasing his hole with his fingers. Shane breathed out of his nose and moaned again. He pulled off of Ilya, gasping.

“Oh shit,” he panted. “I don’t know if we’re gonna make it...”

Ilya licked at the seam of Shane’s sac and laughed. “I don’t think so either.”

“Jesus,” Shane huffed. “Okay. Just...”

Ilya lazily circled his finger around Shane’s rim, looking down at Shane, his mouth hovering over Ilya’s erection, eyes closed.

“I’ll tell you when to stop,” Shane finally said and Ilya hummed.

“Bossy,” he cooed and Shane huffed. Ilya couldn’t really see him so it took him by surprise when Shane took him all the way down without warning. Ilya’s mouth fell open and an involuntary noise escaped his lips. Ilya loved when Shane blew him. He could just imagine the way his pretty pink lips looked wrapped around his cock. It was so fucking sexy.

“Shit, Hollander,” Ilya groaned. “Your fucking mouth...” Ilya gave himself a second to just enjoy Shane’s mouth on him, his eagerness, the way it felt to have him swallow around him.

“You’re so perfect,” he murmured in Russian, and then sucked on Shane’s cock, slipping a finger into him.

Ilya loved the noises Shane made around his dick as Ilya finger fucked him, teasing his prostate just a little. He loved the way Shane felt in his mouth, the way he tasted.

“Stop, fuck, stop. Oh my god,” Shane panted after pulling off of Ilya. “Shit…”

Ilya stopped, laughing. This entire situation was so amusing. He kind of loved how desperate they were for each other and the hoops Shane was willing to go through so they could have sex that wouldn’t impede Ilya or hurt him.

He turned his head kissing the inside of Shane’s thigh, nuzzling him. He loved Shane’s thighs. How strong and muscular they were, how delicate the skin was on the insides of them, soft and smooth.

“Are you going to put on a show for me?” Ilya asked, nipping at him.

“Yeah. Give me a sec.”

Ilya practically purred, kissing Shane’s thighs a few more times, before wrapping his arms around them, pulling his ass cheeks apart, and adjusting slightly to lick at Shane’s hole.

“D-don’t,” Shane stammered. “Ilya, seriously. I don’t want to come until you’re inside me.”

Well, he couldn’t really argue with that. Ilya released him.

Very carefully, Shane leaned away from Ilya, laying down on his back next to Ilya’s legs. Ilya propped himself up, adjusting the pillows behind him so he could recline and watch Shane work. Ilya loved when Shane opened himself up for him. He’d loved it the first time Shane had done it in Vegas and every time since.

Shane picked up the lube, uncapping it. His cheeks were pink, his chest rising and falling quickly, his cock hard and glistening against his stomach. He was dripping precome, which Ilya loved.

He just loved everything about Shane.

Shane didn’t waste any time, which said a lot about how much he wanted to ride Ilya’s cock. It was maybe the best compliment Ilya could ever receive. He loved that his husband still desired him like this, even after all this time, and when Ilya was all banged up from surgery, too. He didn’t necessarily feel at his sexiest at the moment.

Shane was splayed out on the mattress, two fingers pressed inside himself, two knuckles deep. He was making sweet little needy sounds, his head turned to the side where he and Ilya had locked eyes, before Shane’s had rolled closed as he’d fingered himself.

“So beautiful,” Ilya hummed. “Look at you. So desperate for it.”

Shane moaned. “You’re not, ah—!” Shane breathed. “Any better.”

Shane wasn't wrong. Ilya was watching with rapt attention. He wanted to stroke his down dick in time with Shane's fingers but tried to hold out. He wasn't very successful. Shane opened his eyes, gasping softly, watching Ilya as he stroked his cock.

"If you come," Shane panted. "I swear to God..."

Ilya bit his lip but he was smiling. He loved when Shane was all indignant and bratty. "You want it all for yourself?" Ilya asked, voice strained.

"Yeah," Shane replied, completely wanton and shameless. "Want you to come in me."

"Come on then," Ilya challenged.

Shane removed his fingers, sliding his legs under himself, and crawled up the bed toward Ilya. God, he was so fucking beautiful. Ilya loved when Shane let loose, not caring about how he was being perceived. He was sexy as fuck; lips kiss swollen, dark eyes all shiny, eyelids lowered.

He picked up the lube, pouring some into his palm, then pushed Ilya's hand off his cock, replacing it with his own. Ilya hissed as Shane slid his fist down and then up again, only once. Then, carefully, he straddled Ilya's waist, avoiding his hips as best he could.

"Don't move," Shane said, reaching behind himself to guide Ilya in. Ilya held his breath, his hands curling around Shane's hips.

"Oh my god," Shane whispered as he slid down onto Ilya's cock at the same time Ilya said, "holy fuck."

It was almost too much. Ilya bit his lip, hard, his fingers gripping Shane tight. The feeling was... exquisite. It always was with Shane but after all this time... almost a month without being inside him... it was like heaven.

He was warm and tight, welcoming Ilya in. He couldn't keep his eyes open, too overwhelmed by the sensation. He let out an embarrassingly loud moan, unable to help it. Shane leaned over him, both hands on either side of Ilya's shoulders, panting.

"Okay. Jesus," he panted. "I'm probably going to come like... immediately."

"Me, too," Ilya replied, swallowing, and opening his eyes. He looked up at Shane, his dark hair falling around his face, like a curtain, tickling Ilya's.

"Together?" Ilya asked.

"I can try," Shane huffed. "No promises."

"Is okay."

Shane smiled and kissed Ilya. He pushed himself up off of Ilya's cock, then back down. He went slow and careful and it was definitely not enough. Ilya wanted Shane to bounce on his

cock like he knew Shane wanted to. But he wouldn't. As far gone as he was, Shane wouldn't take the risk of hurting Ilya.

Shane kept moving on him, speeding up just a little, and there, right there.

“*Shane* . Yes. Like that. Don't stop.”

Shane whined and panted, keeping that pace, just enough to move them both closer to climax, a slow, steady build. Ilya's eyes wandered all over; from Shane's face, to his cock, to his chest. He slid his hands over Shane's hip to his ass, kneading the perfect muscle in his hands. Shane's dick was dripping.

“So good, Ilya. Love your dick so much.”

“You are perfect. So beautiful.”

It didn't take long for Ilya to feel his orgasm building and Shane must have been on the same page because he let his head tip back, mouth hanging open.

“Ilya,” Shane whimpered. “Fuck. Touch me. I'm going to come.”

Ilya did, wrapping his hand around Shane and stroking him twice, watching his face. Shane was beautiful, always, but there was just something so spectacular about the way sex made him. His eyes hazy, his lips parted, cheeks flushed. Absolutely stunning.

Shane came all over Ilya's stomach and chest, his ass spasming around Ilya and he tumbled over the edge after him. He pulsed inside Shane, feeling like his orgasm would never end. It hadn't been quite together but still fucking amazing.

Ilya felt a little lightheaded after, breathing hard. Shane held himself up over Ilya, his body quaking. Ilya looked up at him, leaning up to kiss him, smoothing his hands over his back. Gingerly, Shane pulled off him, and flopped to his back beside Ilya.

“Holy shit,” he managed. “Wow.”

“For improvisation,” Ilya sighed. “Was very good. But we will have to test out my hips in four months... make sure they are good...”

Shane chuckled, rolling over to kiss Ilya's shoulder and then his cheek. “If you fuck up your new hips by fucking me before you're fully healed up, I'll be very angry.”

“Yes, I know,” Ilya replied, chuckling, too. He found Shane's hand, squeezing it, and bringing it to his mouth to kiss the back of it. “I won't. Don't worry.”

Shane kissed him before he got out of bed, and went to the bathroom. He came back with a warm, damp cloth for Ilya, wiping off his chest and stomach and dick with care.

“Are you okay?” Shane asked gently, laying next to him again, one hand on Ilya's chest.

Ilya hummed, resting his hand over Shane's. “Yes. No pain. I promise.”

“Okay. Was, um, the sex... good?”

Ilya’s brows furrowed and he turned his head to look at Shane, arching a brow at him. “Is always good with you.”

Shane was blushing, looking self-conscious. “I know... it’s just... I don’t know...”

Ilya smiled small and leaned in to kiss the tip of Shane’s little nose.

“Is always good, Shane. *Always* .”

Shane snuggled closer. “Okay...”

“Besides, you are not the problem,” Ilya continued, leaning back, closing his eyes. “I am the one who had surgery. Is not very sexy. Is more... high maintenance.”

Shane chuckled. “I don’t know. I still think you’re pretty sexy. And you’re not high maintenance. You just need a little extra care, that’s all.”

Ilya made a dismissive noise.

“It’s true,” Shane hummed, kissing Ilya’s neck. “And it’s only temporary.”

“Hm.” Shane was right of course, but that didn’t mean that Ilya had to like the accommodations or extra caretaking. He preferred being independent.

“Hey,” Shane said and Ilya turned his head to look at him again. “I love you.”

Ilya smiled, his heart wobbling in his chest. “I love you, too.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Ilya announces his retirement from hockey

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

August

Shane was cuddled up in bed with Ilya, playing idly with the chain around his neck, and pressing intermittent kisses to Ilya's neck. They were both soft and sleepy after a round of athletic sex after nearly three and a half months without it.

Shane had been admittedly worried that Ilya was going to hurt himself, but he had said he felt fine. Great, in fact. Joking around about how they had to test out his new hips.

And Shane couldn't really argue. He had really missed having his husband fuck his brains out. Which Ilya had then proceeded to do. Spectacularly. They'd checked in afterward and Ilya had said he felt no different. No pain or discomfort. Maybe even better than before.

He was doing much more now than he had three months ago. Running, jumping, squatting. He was moving around like normal, without any issues. He was stretching, even doing some yoga with Shane, which had been nice. The incisions were scarred but hardly noticeable unless you knew where to look. Shane had spent some time loving over those scars, which he was pretty sure Ilya only allowed because he was humoring Shane.

Still... Shane was glad that Ilya was feeling good, though he still wanted to be cautious. Full recovery really wasn't until six to nine months post-op and this was almost half that. Shane really didn't want their sex life to be the thing that ultimately sent Ilya backward, when he had been so diligent and had been working so hard on being able to be back on the ice in October.

"Stop worrying," Ilya murmured. "I can hear you thinking..."

Shane looked up at his husband. His eyes were closed, one arm wrapped around Shane, his thumb stroking over Shane's tricep, his other arm tossed over his head.

"Sorry," Shane mumbled. "Can't help it."

"Mm," Ilya replied. He opened his eyes and turned his head so that they could look at each other.

“My hips are fine,” Ilya assured him. “I even talked to the physical therapists and Terry and Tamara about it. Everyone gave me the all-clear.”

Shane felt his face heat and he buried his head under Ilya’s armpit, hiding between Ilya’s side and the mattress. “I can’t believe you talked to them about our sex life...”

Ilya laughed. “We are married, Shane. I don’t think it is a secret that we would be having sex. And I thought you wanted me to be careful.”

Shane sighed. “I do want you to be careful...”

As embarrassing as it was to think about the people they saw almost daily during the hockey season now having confirmation that Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander were indeed boning down, Ilya was right to have asked. He was taking every precaution and being very responsible. Shane couldn’t be mad at him for that.

Ilya moved his arm from above his head, reaching out to pet Shane’s hair, and gently tug at the strands.

“Shane...”

Shane looked up at his husband and Ilya cupped his hand carefully around Shane’s cheek. He stroked his thumb over his cheekbone and Shane closed his eyes, leaning into the tender touch. He loved Ilya so much it hurt. He just wanted him to be healthy and make a full recovery. And he didn’t want him to retire.

As excited as Shane was about children, he selfishly wanted it all. He wanted to play more hockey with Ilya, until they were in their forties, *and* have kids, too. He understood why Ilya wanted to retire. It wouldn’t be fair for them to be on the road and at practices and at games so often, unable to actually raise a child themselves. But Shane wasn’t sure if he was ready to let Ilya go.

He opened his eyes and shifted up onto his knees. Ilya watched him, curious, and huffed a laugh as Shane wrapped his arms around him, holding him. Ilya hugged him back.

“I don’t want you to retire,” Shane confessed, his eyes burning.

“Oh,” Ilya said softly. “Sweetheart...”

Shane sniffled, feeling ridiculous about getting emotional like this, about something that was so reasonable and practical and made sense. Ilya squeezed him, turning his head to nuzzle into Shane’s hair.

“Is okay,” he murmured soothingly. “Is a big change... difficult.”

Shane nodded, sighing softly, letting the pillow under Ilya soak up his tears. They had had such a wonderful night. A quiet dinner outside. Shane had grilled burgers and Ilya had made a salad and they’d opened up a bottle of wine. They’d talked about how Ilya’s PT had been going and after dinner and watching part of a movie, they’d had amazing sex.

He shouldn't be feeling this emotional... but camp would be starting soon and they'd be gearing up for the upcoming season in a few weeks. The last season Ilya would be playing. He would have to tell the owners and the GM and Coach and their teammates, both current and former. He would have to say *goodbye*.

Shane knew that Ilya would grieve the end of his hockey career but Shane thought that maybe he was taking it even harder. Despite the fact that their relationship had been outed the way it had, there had been positives that had come with the experience.

They got married. They had played on the same team together. It was more than Shane would have ever expected and now it was coming to an end. And he didn't want it to.

Shane pulled away, wiping at his eyes and sniffing. Ilya pushed himself up into a sitting position and reached for Shane, wiping his thumbs over his wet cheeks. His expression was so soft and loving and Shane's lip trembled again. His heart ached.

"You're not losing me," Ilya assured him. "We're together forever, remember?" He held up his left hand, wiggling his ring finger, where the black wedding band rested comfortably, at home.

"Will be different," Ilya said, gently brushing Shane's hair behind his ear, smoothing the backs of his fingers over Shane's cheek. "But I will still be here. I will be at your home games and I will watch all of your away games and I will bring our little one with me, too, so they can watch you."

Shane smiled wetly at that. He didn't doubt that Ilya would be the loudest person cheering in the crowd and he'd already imagined hanging out by the boards, where all the families gathered with the kids during warm-ups, saying hi to their baby. He'd always imagined his parents there and Ilya on the ice with him but it wasn't unpleasant to think about Ilya with their baby in his arms while Shane came to say hi.

"I know," Shane sighed. "I'm just feeling... selfish. I want another four years of this. I want us to retire together, when the wheels fall off completely."

Ilya chuckled softly and motioned at his hips. "Unfortunately, that has sort of already happened..."

Shane laughed a little, shaking his head, and Ilya took his hands, holding them in his, his thumbs brushing soothingly over Shane's knuckles.

"My beloved," he murmured in Russian, seeking out Shane's eyes. "Sometimes change is good. I know it'll be hard, for both of us, but we're together. Always. We're a good team, you and I."

It took Shane some time to translate the words but he nodded in understanding, closing his eyes. They did make a good team. It would be a tough transition, sure, but they were in it together. They weren't doing it alone.

This was just a new chapter in their married life. Hockey would take a backseat because they'd have a baby to worry about, which was thrilling and terrifying at once, but Shane had gathered that that was a pretty universal parental experience.

And there wasn't anyone else Shane wanted to do all of this scary stuff with.

He looked at Ilya again and Ilya looked back, smiling and beautiful, and Shane loved him so completely, so thoroughly. Even with the change and transition, Ilya would still be there, by Shane's side. They would have each other, and Shane was so grateful for that.

They lay back down together, cuddled up close, Ilya's fingers toying gently with Shane's hair.

"I am excited to be a dad," Ilya murmured. "I am excited to see *you* as a dad. But also... I am excited for this season. I want to play fun hockey and have fun with you and I want to win one last Cup."

Shane nodded against Ilya's shoulder, smoothing his hand over his chest. "Me, too," Shane replied. "I want to win a Cup for you..."

In the six years they'd played on the Centaurs, they had won three cups together. Shane was pretty sure that the first one they had won with the team was his favorite of all his awards and accomplishments.

They had broken so many barriers and so many records that year. They had been tied for points, Shane with goals and Ilya with assists. The first married NHL All-Stars to win a Stanley Cup together. And the Centaurs had SWEPT the NHL Awards, too. Ilya had won the Selke!

Since then, they'd solidified their place at the top of the NHL as powerhouse centers, making the Centaurs nearly unstoppable. They had been on the covers of magazines and in interviews and another documentary that had actually shown the *real* them (or as real as one could be in a documentary).

They were the NHL's power couple.

But they would have that for one more season. Shane would win a Cup for Ilya and they would have an incredible, fun, joyful season together... and Ilya would be able to say goodbye to an outstanding hockey career he could be immensely proud of.

Shane was so proud of him and all of his accomplishments. He was so proud to play with him and be married to him. And he was proud of Ilya for going out on his own terms. Not everyone in their line of work got so lucky.

Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya's shoulder.

"I love you," he whispered.

Ilya kissed into his hair. "I love you, too."

“What do you think?” Ilya asked, standing in the middle of their bedroom in a very nice floral button down, the top button unbuttoned, slacks, and dress shoes. He’d styled his hair, his curls neat and bouncy, and Shane’s breath caught at how gorgeous he looked, like he’d walked off the cover of *GQ*.

“You look amazing,” Shane breathed, coming closer, brushing his hands over Ilya’s collar, smoothing his hands over Ilya’s chest. He rested his hands on Ilya’s pecs, feeling Ilya’s heart pounding under his hand. Shane looked up at him and Ilya offered him a small smile.

“Yes? Is okay?”

“More than okay,” Shane assured. “You look great.”

Ilya nodded, taking a deep breath, and closed his eyes. He opened them again, looking sheepishly at Shane. “I am nervous.”

“That’s okay,” Shane replied gently. “It’s okay to be nervous. This is... big.”

Ilya nodded. “Yes. Very.”

Shane smiled softly at him, wrapping Ilya up in a hug, holding him close. Ilya hugged him back. They stood like that for a long time, just breathing together, enjoying the calm before the storm. Ilya would be holding a press conference for sports media to announce his retirement.

Things felt heavy, knowing what was coming in the next hour or so. It felt a little like they were about to jump off a cliff together... but Shane supposed that was nothing new to them. That had more or less been their entire relationship. But they weren’t alone. They were together. Like always.

A week ago, when camp had started, Ilya had told everyone that he would be retiring after this season and he wouldn’t be back on the ice until the end of October. All told, everyone took it very well. They were receptive and supportive, which wasn’t surprising, though there was a bit of shock. The team loved Ilya and he was an incredible Captain. Shane had loved seeing Ilya in the Captaincy, how good he was with the team as a unit and as individuals, and he had happily settled for Alternate Captain during his tenure with the Centaurs.

Shane had cried, a lot, behind closed doors, as Ilya had told people he was retiring. It had been easier with their family and friends. Less so when it came to staff and teammates. It was like the retirement was now even more of a reality. It was *happening*. People knew and now Ilya was going to tell the whole world. After this season, he was going to be done with his professional hockey career.

They released one another and Shane reached up to gently wipe his thumbs over Ilya’s cheeks, swiping away his quiet tears.

“Ilya,” he murmured.

“I’m fine,” Ilya sighed, offering Shane a soft smile. “Just... a lot.”

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “It is.” He cupped Ilya’s cheek, standing on his toes to kiss his husband softly. “I’m here. We’re together.”

Ilya nodded, resting his forehead against Shane’s.

“I’m so proud of you,” Shane murmured, his own voice tight, vision going blurry. “You’re amazing and I’m so fucking lucky I get to do this with you, that I’ve been able to do this with you for our entire careers. All of it.”

“Shane,” Ilya huffed, laughing, though it was watery.

Shane sighed, smiling through his tears. He smoothed his hands over Ilya’s cheeks and into his curls, trying not to muss them too much. Then he ran his hands over Ilya’s sides gently, trying not to wrinkle his shirt, just wanting to comfort him. They cried together softly, reaching up to brush tears from each other’s cheeks.

Then they laughed warmly at each other, wet and sniffly.

“I love you so much, Ilya. So goddamn much.”

Ilya smiled, closing his eyes, swaying them slowly back and forth. “I love you, too, Shane. So much.”

They sighed and parted. Shane went for the tissues, bringing some to Ilya so they could blow noses and wipe eyes.

“Ugh, fuck,” Shane huffed. “This is going to suck.”

“A bit, yes,” Ilya agreed.

Shane took his hand, squeezing tight. “You’re not alone.”

Ilya smiled softly, lifting Shane’s hand to his lips, and kissing his knuckles. “I know. Thank you.”

He took a deep breath.

“Okay,” Ilya said. “Let’s go.”

Shane squeezed his hand. “Let’s go.”

They drove to the Centaurs’ practice facility and parked in their usual parking spot. Harris and Farah met them as soon as they came upstairs, ushering them to the conference room they’d reserved for them before the press conference, and taking them aside to check in with them.

“How’re you doing, guys?” Farah asked gently.

“Okay,” Ilya replied. “Ready as I am able.”

“That makes sense. It can be overwhelming,” she said.

“Do you have a prepared statement?” Harris asked, smiling softly.

“No. I am, uh, going by the seat of my pants?”

Shane smiled. “Flying by the seat of your pants.”

“That. Yes,” Ilya chuckled.

“As long as you feel good about that, I feel good about it,” Harris said and Farah nodded in agreement. She had offered to write something up but Ilya had politely declined. Harris gave them a rundown of who was here and where Ilya would be and where Shane could stand.

They asked if Shane or Ilya needed anything from them, which was so kind, and Shane appreciated how wonderful both Harris and Farah had been through this whole process. Shane was grateful that Ilya (and himself) were being treated as people, not just commodities.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Harris said to them.

Shane held Ilya’s hands, brushing his thumbs over his knuckles. God he loved him so much. He was the bravest person Shane had ever met. Ilya had his eyes closed, taking a few deep breaths.

“Okay,” he said, squeezing Shane’s hands. He opened his eyes and rested his forehead against Shane’s. They stood there, just them, quiet and steady. Together. Ilya leaned away and kissed Shane’s forehead. “I’m ready.”

“Alright. Show time,” said Harris and led them out into the conference room with Farah.

Shane gave Ilya one brief parting kiss, squeezing his hand, before he was left to stand off to the side, watching his husband take a seat, alone, at the table they had set up for him. He sat in front of what felt like the entire sports media of Canada and the United States... plus some extras from Europe.

Coach Wiebe was there, the Centaurs’ GM, and the owners, Shane’s parents, as well as some of their teammates, who had come to offer moral support to their Captain.

“He’s got this,” Coach Wiebe murmured reassuringly to Shane, squeezing his arm in support. Shane nodded and offered him a small smile, though he was squeezing his Mom’s hand so tight he was surprised she didn’t protest... but she was squeezing back just as hard.

“Hello, everyone,” Ilya said into the microphone set up for him. “Thank you for coming. I will try to be short and sweet.”

A chuckle ran through the grouping of reporters. Shane’s eyes never left Ilya. He looked so handsome and at ease, despite his earlier nerves. Shane tried to relax a little himself but he

could feel the tightness in his chest.

This was really happening.

“I have good news and then some less good news,” Ilya continued. “I will start with the good news. As everyone knows I am old now and needed to have surgery on my hips.”

More laughter.

“It looks like I am on track to return to the ice to play in late October, which is exciting. I am sad to miss the home opener but I will be there to cheer on my team. I would also like to say that Shane and I have been working through the process of adopting. It is taking time but we are excited to be new parents, hopefully sometime in the spring or summer.”

Ilya paused and the conference room was quiet save for the sound of shutter flashes from the cameras and a few murmured ‘awws’ from the gathered media. Shane blinked his eyes rapidly, trying to clear his vision. His mom clasped his hand in both of hers.

“This is now the less good news,” Ilya said and Shane could see the calming breath he took. “This will be my final season with the Ottawa Centaurs. I will retire when our season is over. As me and Shane are looking to be parents, it was important to me to prioritize my family and my physical health. This is not an easy decision for me. I love hockey and I love my team and all of the fans. I am going to miss playing and being Captain but I am also excited to be a dad and to be present and active as a parent. I wanted to retire at a time where playing was still fun, instead of being forced to because of injury.”

Ilya took a breath before he continued.

“I have been so lucky to have played almost ten seasons with the Centaurs. It means very much to me to have been accepted with open arms and to have played on the same team with my husband. I am sad to retire but also glad. So... thank you very much for many good years.”

Shane pressed his lips together and looked down at the floor, his eyes full of tears. His mom put her arm around him and he did his best to not make too much noise, covering his mouth with his hand. This felt so hard. It shouldn’t, but it did. Shane knew how uncomfortable Ilya was making long speeches in English but he had done so well and without a script or anything. Shane was so, so proud of him.

The conference room was quiet for a moment before questions started being hurled at Ilya. Harris and Farah both stepped up to calm the media and indicated that questions would be answered one at a time and for only ten minutes. Someone passed Shane a tissue and he wiped his eyes and subtly blew his nose.

Ilya answered some questions in his usual joking manner. So nonchalant and almost carefree despite the bomb he’d just dropped on the entire hockey world.

Yes, he was excited to come back to the team once he was given the all clear by the medical staff. No, nothing about potential kids yet. The adoption process was slow going and he and

Shane would have to be patient. His decision to retire now was on his terms and he was pleased with that decision. He wanted to leave hockey feeling good and playing well, rather than forcing himself to do something and no longer enjoying the sport.

Ilya thanked the media again and stood up from the table, coming down off the side. He offered Shane a smile and reached out to buff Shane's cheek in a brief touch, before hugging him and kissing his cheek. Shane hugged him back tightly, but tried not to linger. No doubt the media would be snapping pictures and he really didn't want there to be headlines about how much of a mess he was about Ilya retiring.

Ilya hugged Mom and Dad and Coach Wiebe. He was swarmed by Troy and Luca and Nick and Evan and Bood and Wyatt. Shane watched, tearful but smiling, at how much these boys loved their Captain, and Ilya deserved every bit of it.

Ilya spoke with the GM and the owners. He checked in with Farah and she assured him that she was here for whatever he needed. Shane's parents were going to meet them at their house and left the facility a few minutes before them and then finally, *finally*, Shane had Ilya all to himself.

They got into the Jeep. They sat there for a moment before Ilya put his face in his hands and burst into tears. Shane comforted him as best as he could while leaning over the center console, rubbing his back, stroking his hair, kissing his shoulder.

His heart ached.

They had spent their entire lives playing this game. Seventeen years of professional dedication to this sport that they loved, that had brought them together, and practically raised them. They had helped change the sport in so many ways, giving people representation, forcing rules and expectations to change.

Shane had never wanted to be a gay icon in hockey, but in a lot of ways, he was glad that this was how things had gone. He got to play great hockey, with his *husband*, and make lasting, impactful change at the same time. It was perhaps more subtle than most but if not for Ilya's love, Shane didn't think he would have gotten here.

They'd done so much together, achieved so much, and it was so hard to know that his partner, the person he had always stood up at the top with, was leaving the sport. Not his life, not straying from his side, but this one part of their journey that had never diverged before, was coming to an end, and it was painful.

Shane knew that they would get through it. They would be fine. More than fine. But he also knew it was important and okay for them to have space to grieve. This final season would be Ilya's swan song, and Shane had every intention of making it his best yet.

Shane gently brushed tears from Ilya's face, leaning in as close as he could to kiss his husband's face, consoling him.

"You did so good," he murmured. "I'm so proud of you. I love you so much."

Ilya let out a shuddery breath, wiping at his face with the tissue Shane had handed him. He blew his nose and leaned back in the passenger seat, eyes closed. He held his hand open on his thigh and Shane rested his in Ilya's, tangling their fingers.

"I am glad it is over," Ilya said, blinking his eyes open, and turning his head to look at Shane. His eyes were red and puffy and he looked exhausted but he was the most beautiful thing to Shane. Shane nodded and smiled, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly.

"It is. Feel better?"

"A little. I am anxious about the fans... and Harris asked me to write something for the Centaurs to publish. Can you help me?"

"Of course. Yeah. I'll be happy to help and we can talk to Farah, too."

Farah had been wonderful through this whole process and Shane knew she would be more than willing to assist them in whatever way they needed. Especially with stuff like this. Neither Ilya nor Shane were particularly articulate.

"Thank you."

"No thanks required," Shane murmured, raising Ilya's hand to his mouth, kissing the back of it. "C'mon. Let's go home."

Shane had every intention of getting them into comfy clothes, bundled up in some cozy blankets, and cuddling for the rest of the day.

Ilya Rozanov's Announcement of Retirement

I'm not sure where to even start or what to even say about the last seventeen years of my life. It feels like it was 2009 only yesterday and I was a 19 year old kid who had been skyrocketed into fame.

I was living the dream of most boys my age. I would be an NHL superstar, playing the sport I loved and had made my entire life, as a career. How lucky. How cool.

As I look back and consider my career, I feel so grateful for the coaches and trainers and teammates I had along the way. For the lessons I learned. For the way that this game and this league and all of the people involved have shaped me.

It is with a full and humble heart that I announce my retirement as a professional hockey player at the end of this season.

It's a difficult thing to write and to talk about, but I am also so lucky to have played this sport for as long as I have, to have accomplished all that I have accomplished, and to leave the ice on my own terms.

This was not a decision that I came to lightly. There were many conversations and considerations but in my heart, it was the right call for my life moving forward.

There have been so many people who have been on this journey with me, who got me to this point. Who helped train and encourage and support me, from my time in Moscow to Boston to Ottawa.

Thank you to the Boston Bears for drafting a cocky, 19 year old kid from Russia who barely spoke or understood English, who was untempered and required guidance. My time in Boston helped me become the hockey player I am today and I am forever grateful to the coaches, staff, trainers, doctors, and teammates who helped push me and make me a more well-rounded player.

Thank you to the Ottawa Centaurs for embracing me completely. My time in Ottawa has been some of the best years of hockey I have ever played. Thank you for entrusting me with the Captaincy, allowing me to lead the team to and win three Stanley Cup Championships. Thank you to all of my coaches, trainers, staff, doctors, therapists, and everyone who is part of this organization for allowing me to embrace the fun and the joy of hockey.

Thank you to the Beaumont siblings for your immense generosity and kindness and acceptance, I am forever grateful.

Over the seventeen years I have been playing in the NHL, I have had the honor and privilege of playing alongside some truly amazing hockey players, who I am so very lucky to call my friends. I cannot fully express the immense gratitude I feel for my teammates; for the friendship, the laughs, the memories, the wins, and the losses. For all of your support and acceptance of who I am as a whole person. These lifelong friendships mean more to me than can be expressed.

To the people of Ottawa. Thank you for welcoming me with open arms. It has been such a pleasure and a gift to get on the ice and play for you and to be off the ice and give back to the community that has given so much to me. Thank you for becoming my home. There will never be words enough to truly tell you all how much this city and its people have come to mean to me.

To my agents, Nikita Koslov and Farah Jalali. I would not have been able to navigate the ups and downs of a professional career in sports without your guidance, and I certainly would not have made it as far as I have without your support. Thank you for easing the way and helping me make the best possible decisions for my career and overall health.

To my mother, Irina. Where would I even be without you? Thank you from the bottom of my heart for encouraging me to pursue this sport that I love, to keep moving forward, and for loving me unconditionally. Буду вечно любить тебя.

To my in-laws, Yuna and David. Thank you so very much for your unwavering love and support. You opened your hearts and your home to me in ways I could never have imagined and I am eternally grateful to you for all you have done for me. Thank you for your trust and your guidance. Thank you for seeing me as your own and for being such wonderful, generous parents.

To my husband, Shane. What can I possibly even write? There really are no words to express the journey that you and I have been on together. You helped make me the man that I am today. I would not be here, if not for you. Thank you for pushing me, for making me a better hockey player, a better husband, a better friend. Playing with you has been the greatest delight of my life and while I will miss our time on the ice together, I will continue to treasure the life we share. Thank you for seeing me and knowing me and loving me. I would do it all again. I love you. Always.

As I consider my final season as a professional hockey player, it is with profound appreciation and happiness. I cannot wait to share this one last season with you all. To laugh and celebrate and have fun playing this game that I love so very much. I'm excited for the years to come and this next chapter in my journey.

С любовью,

Ilya Rozanov

Chapter End Notes

Буду вечно любить тебя - Budu vечно lyubit' tebya - I will love you forever
С любовью - S lyubov'yu - With Love

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Ilya is back on the ice!

October

“How do you feel, Roz?” Coach Wiebe asked as Ilya looped back around after a shot he’d scored on Wyatt.

“Good,” Ilya replied. “No pain. My conditioning sucks but I’m not surprised.”

“You look good though. You’re moving well,” Wiebe nodded. Ilya cocked his head from side to side.

“Yes. Is fine. Scoring is good but... I want to *feel* better on the ice than I do.”

Wiebe hummed, thoughtful as he leaned on his stick, considering. “Slow and steady. Conditioning is always the last part to come back and you’ve always been pretty strong in that department. Give it some time.”

Ilya nodded. He knew, objectively, that Coach was right. His stamina had always been above average, even when he was under conditioned, but having to take things slow for so long meant he had to work his way back up. It would get there, he knew it would, but he was frustrated that it wasn’t happening faster.

He couldn’t rush it though. He wasn’t twenty-six any more. He kind of hated that.

Despite his frustration with his conditioning not being where he wanted, it did feel good to be in his skates again, back on the ice, with the team for practice, not just watching. He had gotten a standing ovation from everyone as soon as he’d stepped into the locker room and lots of hugs from his teammates. He’d missed them and he was glad to be back with them.

Ilya lingered on the ice as the team cleared off after practice, just skating around, doing crossovers, looping around the rink.

“Want some company?”

He looked up, smiling at Troy. He came to a stop.

“Sure,” Ilya chuckled. “I am just going around.”

Troy smiled back and nodded. They both started skating around the perimeter of the rink.

“It’s good to have you back, Captain,” he said, holding out his gloved fist. Ilya chuckled and fist bumped him.

“Is good to be back.”

“How are you?” Troy asked awkwardly after two loops around the rink. Ilya smiled and chuckled.

Troy had really come into his own on the team and had been named as an Alternate Captain. He had really stepped up in the last few years and Ilya was really proud of his growth as a person and a hockey player. He was lucky to call Troy a friend.

“Fine,” Ilya replied. “Frustrated with my conditioning. Excited for this season. We are doing well so far.”

“Yeah. Makes sense. We are. The team’s really vibing and clicking.”

“Yes. I feel good about this.”

“We wanna win for you, you know.”

Ilya glanced at Troy. “I know.”

It was painfully obvious that the team wanted to win the Cup for Ilya. He appreciated that more than he could ever put into words and while winning the Cup during his final season would be the best retirement gift ever, it wasn’t necessary. Ilya would always have that competitive drive, he would always want to win, so the expectation of his retirement wasn’t really a factor. His expectations and motivation for this season were just like all the others.

“I just want everyone to have fun and play good hockey,” Ilya continued. “Cup or no Cup. Just... have fun. That was what I always did and I don’t want that to change now that I’m retiring.”

“I think we can pull off both!”

Ilya laughed. “Probably. But is a lot of pressure. We have a long season. Do not spend that time thinking ‘we must win.’ By the time playoffs come around, anything could happen. It is only one game at a time. Work to win each game.”

Troy let out a breathy laugh. “That’s... very wise, Roz.”

Ilya shrugged. “I am old now. Comes with the territory. Besides, too much pressure is not good. Will mess up your game. I do not like going slow but sometimes we have to.”

Troy nodded in agreement. “That’s true.”

They looped around again in comfortable silence.

“So... any movement on the kid front?”

Ilya smiled small. “Not yet. The process is long and will take time. We are hoping by next spring or summer. So, it will be good to have a little time to prepare.”

“You seem really excited to be a parent...”

“I am! I have always wanted to be. I like kids. Will be nice to have my own and to share that with Shane.” Ilya chuckled. “Anyway. How is Harris and married life? How is Chiron?”

Ilya glanced at Troy and saw him blushing. Ilya and Shane had been at Harris and Troy’s wedding. Ilya hadn’t been able to dance as much as he would have wanted because of his recovery but it had been a very fun time.

“Harris is good. We had a great honeymoon. Super chill. Chiron’s been great. He’s getting older so he’s a little slower than he used to be but he’s healthy. Living his best dog life.” Troy chuckled.

They skated around for a little while longer, just catching up. Ilya glanced up to see Shane sitting in the stands, watching. He waved and Ilya waved back.

“We should probably get going,” he chuckled and Troy nodded.

“Sorry to keep you waiting!” Ilya called to Shane.

“You’re fine! I’ll wait for you!”

“Okay! Ten minutes!”

Shane smiled and Ilya’s heart flip flopped in his chest. He loved Shane being here, waiting for him. It still felt like such a novelty, sometimes, to have his husband with him at work, to share so much with him.

Ilya and Troy went back to the locker room, handing over their equipment, then peeling off their pads and jerseys before showering.

“See you tomorrow, Barrett,” Ilya said, fist bumping Troy as he shouldered his backpack.

“See you tomorrow, Roz.”

Shane was waiting for Ilya in the hall. He was on his phone and glanced up as Ilya came closer, bending down a bit to kiss the top of Shane’s head.

“Ready?” Shane asked.

“Yes,” Ilya replied, offering Shane his arm. Shane smiled and slid his arm through Ilya’s, leaning into him, his head on Ilya’s shoulder, as they walked toward the garage. Ilya loved these little moments. They were innocuous, nothing big or flashy, just Shane feeling comfortable. Ilya loved these tiny displays of affection, the fact that they could do them openly. It had been six years but fuck, he’d never get over it.

“Hey,” Shane murmured as they walked toward Shane’s car.

“Mm?”

“I love you.”

Ilya smiled, pressing his cheek briefly to Shane’s hair. “I love you, too.”

Shane squeezed his arm before he pulled away, pulling out his keys, and unlocking the car. They tossed their bags into the backseat and then climbed into the front and headed home.

“Relax, Hollander,” Ilya said during their second intermission. He could see the tension in Shane, feel it. It had been radiating off of him in waves. Ilya had no issue with his teammates being dialed in but the intensity Shane was playing with was concerning to Ilya.

Shane had loosened up a lot during his time with the Centaurs. His game was impeccable and he and Ilya were still the top two goal scorers on the team, always in the top five in the league. But Ilya had seen much more of Shane’s silly side with the team in recent years.

For a long time, Shane being goofy was reserved for the cottage, when he and Ilya were alone. It had always been an intimate thing that Ilya treasured, having Shane with his guard down, completely open and himself, totally at ease.

Since coming out, that part of Shane had started appearing more often in public spaces. It had made Ilya so happy to see Shane being more of his true self, particularly with their team. He laughed a lot, joked around, and didn’t take himself as seriously.

But the Shane sitting on the bench now reminded Ilya of the Shane *before* . Closed off. Remote. Shane’s eyes flicked to Ilya’s.

Troy was sitting between them, chewing on his mouth guard, and occupying himself with wiping his stick down, and ignoring Ilya and Shane.

“I’m fine,” Shane replied, somewhat tersely.

Ilya’s eyebrows raised. “You are? So if I reach up your ass I won’t find a diamond?”

Shane’s eyes narrowed at Ilya and Ilya just stared back placidly.

“I just want to win,” Shane replied.

“We are.” Ilya gestured at the scoreboard. Ottawa was up by four points to one.

“Can’t get complacent, Rozanov.”

“I am not saying we get complacent. I am saying relax. Trust your line. Not everything has to be done by you.”

Shane took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Okay,” he replied and turned away from Ilya, ending the conversation. Troy made a face.

Ilya restrained himself from rolling his eyes. They were fully into the swing of their season and things were going well. Ilya's conditioning was starting to come back. He wasn't totally happy with where he was at the moment but he was scoring at least one, sometimes two goals a game, getting plenty of assists, and he was feeling better on the ice and in control of the puck.

Ilya knew that Shane was putting pressure on himself. Whether that was to pick up Ilya's slack, which was annoying, because it wasn't necessary, or because he wanted to get them to the Cup, possibly both, Ilya wasn't sure.

He was itching for the Cup as well, but that was no different than any other season he'd played. He didn't want this one to be any different either. He wanted to find that balance of fun and competitiveness.

People were making a big enough deal of his impending retirement as it was. He wanted to surprise people. He wanted to play well and leave on a high note. He was on that trajectory, so that was a plus.

The team was on fire so far and Ilya appreciated how well they were doing as a whole. It was helpful for him, giving him the room to get back up to speed. He had had to carry the team for a long time in the beginning but the Centaurs had really found their stride, and having Shane only bolstered that.

Shane didn't heed Ilya's words of advice, however, continuing to be serious and tense the entire game. They won, giving Tampa a proper trouncing with the final score 6-2 Centaurs. Per their usual post-win ritual, Shane was third to last off the ice, pausing by Ilya to get two taps on the top of his helmet, before leaning in for a kiss. Then he was off the ice.

Ilya tapped his helmet against Wyatt's and patted his chest protector before the goalie stepped off the ice and Ilya was last, heading back into the dressing room.

The boys were buzzing from the win and it was fun to laugh and joke with them, as it always was. The team had a trapper hat that they passed around to whoever was deemed "player of the night" and any celebratory pucks or accomplishments were acknowledged and celebrated.

Ilya was one of the last guys in the shower, making sure to give time and attention to his team. Shane had already showered and was changed, waiting for Ilya in Ilya's stall, which Ilya found sweet, despite his annoyance.

He finished showering, flicking his hands at Shane to get him to move so he could get dressed. Shane did and Ilya changed back into his suit, scrunching his curls with his towel a few more times to remove any excess moisture.

"Ready?" Shane asked and Ilya nodded.

The car ride home was relatively quiet. Ilya wasn't angry, really. Just annoyed but this was also just how Shane was. He was no doubt putting pressure on himself to catapult the

Centaurs back into the running for the Cup, which Ilya knew was going to lead to Shane running himself ragged.

The last thing the team needed was a wrung out center. Even if he wasn't at his best, Shane would do fine, but Ilya wanted Shane at his best. He wanted Shane to have fun and enjoy the game and play hockey because he loved hockey, not because he felt indebted or like he had to do this thing. They always wanted to win a Cup and as lovely as it would be for Ilya to win during his final season, he wasn't going to be (too) mad if he didn't.

He would be *pissed* if Shane injured himself or got sick or was generally not fun to be around because he was tying himself into knots. That wouldn't be good for him, Ilya, or the team.

Ilya had an idea that he thought might help get his point across. It was something they'd tried before and he was pretty sure Shane would be into it. Only one way to find out though.

Ilya drove them back home, parking the car in the garage. They used the garage entrance to get into the house, greeting Anya, who was excited to see them.

"Hello, sweet girl," Ilya cooed at her. "Did you miss us?"

Shane chuckled, toeing off his shoes, hanging up his jacket, tossing his suit jacket over the back of the sofa. Ilya did the same, rolling up the sleeves of his shirt, watching as Shane went into the kitchen. He gave Anya some more attention before following after his husband.

"Hungry?" Shane asked, looking over his shoulder as he stood at the open fridge.

Ilya nodded, leaning his arms on the kitchen island, watching Shane pull out their post-game snacks from the fridge that they'd meal prepped that weekend. They ate in relative silence, standing at the island, and Ilya could see that Shane was bothered by this, fidgeting, restless, his eyes flicking back and forth between Ilya and his food.

"So," Ilya said, conversationally. "Can I go searching for that diamond?"

Shane's eyes flicked to Ilya's. "Fuck off."

"No," Ilya replied, wiping crumbs from his fingers. "We are not very far into the season and already you are so tense. This will not be helpful if it gets you injured or you bring the team vibe down."

"My wanting the team to win won't get me injured or bring the team's vibe down," Shane shot back.

Ilya arched a questioning brow at him. "No? It won't? You do not sleep well when you are tense. You put more pressure on yourself and make stupid mistakes."

Shane's eyes narrowed at Ilya. "That's not what's happening here."

"Then what is?" Ilya asked.

"I'm trying to guarantee us a chance to win the Cup! For *you!* "

Ilya sighed and closed his eyes for a moment, then looked at his husband, soft and exasperated. He didn't want to fight.

"Shane," he said gently. "You do not have to win a Cup for me. We always want to win. That is always the goal. My leaving does not change that. What I want, for this season, is to have fun with you. I want to play good hockey with my husband and enjoy this season. I believe in us and the team. We do not need anything extra. I worry that you will be so focused on only that, that any losses, or things that do not go our way, will hurt more than help. Do you understand?"

Shane swallowed as he considered Ilya's words. The fight had gone out of him, shoulders sagging. He nodded, meeting Ilya's eyes.

"Yeah... I know. I just... I know how much it would mean to get there and to win the whole thing. I want you to go out with a bang, you know?"

Ilya nodded, moving closer to his husband, wrapping his arms around him.

"Moya lyubov," Ilya sighed, tender and adoring. "I want that, too. And I know you want that for me. Thank you for that. It means a lot. But what means more is that you are happy... that I can sit on the bench and joke with you and smile and we are having a good time. That is what I care about more. Also, I think I will be able to help the team. Is not just you."

Shane blushed and nodded, smiling small. "Yeah. That's true." He sighed. "Okay. I think I get what you're saying."

"We play better hockey when we are loving the game."

Shane nodded, wrapping his arms around Ilya, and rested his head on Ilya's chest. "You're right."

"I know."

Shane chuckled.

"I want to win," Ilya murmured. "I always want to win but... I also want to enjoy myself. I am going to miss being a pro... so I want this season to be good with you and the team..."

Shane nodded against Ilya's chest, smoothing a hand over his back. "I get that..."

Ilya smiled small, kissing into Shane's hair again.

They stood like that for a while, just holding each other, and Ilya rocked them slowly back and forth. He kissed into Shane's hair again, resting his cheek on top of Shane's head. He knew that leaving hockey was going to be hard. He was going to miss playing with Shane. But he was also so grateful that they were married, that regardless of hockey, they would always have each other. Ilya wouldn't have to be without him. Even if they were apart while Shane was on the road, Ilya knew he would be coming home to him.

After a few more moments, Shane looked up at him and Ilya leaned down to kiss him. It was a slow, patient kiss; adoring and sweet and conveying all the love that Ilya held in his heart for his husband, even if he was being a pain in the ass. They eventually parted, smiling at each other, and cleaned up their snack. Then they made their way upstairs, hand in hand.

They hung up their suits and got ready for bed. Ilya came up behind Shane as he brushed his teeth, gently brushing his hair aside so he could kiss his shoulder, his neck, rubbing his nose against his skin.

“Come to me when you’re finished,” Ilya murmured into Shane’s ear, making eye contact with him in the mirror, and he smiled as Shane shivered. He gave Shane’s neck one last kiss, dragging his lips over his skin to his shoulder, and pulled away.

Ilya left the bathroom and went to their bed, stripped out of his underwear, and waited. Shane’s dental routine was pretty involved and Ilya intended to occupy himself on his phone while he waited but Shane came out of the bathroom faster than expected, which made Ilya laugh.

“So eager,” he teased and Shane scoffed, pulling off his underwear, and dropping it in the hamper.

“Shut up.” He was half-hard, which was unsurprising, and Ilya grinned at him.

Shane joined him in bed and Ilya reached for him, pulling him close. Shane sighed and pressed his body against Ilya’s, touching as much as possible. Shane leaned in for a kiss but Ilya pressed his index finger to Shane’s lips, stopping him.

Shane whined and Ilya laughed, curling his fingers against Shane’s chin, running his thumb over Shane’s lips. Shane’s eyelids were dipped low over his eyes and he kissed Ilya’s thumb. He was fully hard now, his cock pressed to Ilya’s stomach, alongside Ilya’s own.

“Sit,” he murmured to Shane and Shane made a soft noise of pleasure. He straddled Ilya’s hips and Ilya reached over to their bedside table, pulling out the lube. He poured some into his palm, slicking his fingers, reaching around to press his index finger against Shane’s rim.

“Fuck,” Shane huffed. “Is this what I think it is...?”

“What do you think it is?” Ilya murmured back, teasing his finger against Shane, taking his time to work him up a bit. He just circled his finger against the puckered skin of his rim, watching Shane’s face.

“Cockwarming,” Shane breathed, looking at Ilya, and Ilya hummed, smiling crookedly at Shane.

“Maybe... or maybe I am looking for that diamond...”

“Shut up,” Shane huffed, laughing, and then moaned as Ilya slowly slid a finger inside him. Ilya cooed at him in reply.

“No,” Ilya purred and chuckled.

Shane sighed, his head tilted back, eyes closed. Ilya watched him, enamored. He took his time in opening Shane up. He loved watching Shane like this, fully on display, seeing pleasure flit across his face as Ilya slowly penetrated him, his cock leaking just from Ilya's touch. He fucking loved how wet Shane got.

Shane rested his hands on Ilya's pecs as Ilya worked him open. Ilya added a second finger, sinking into him, carefully stretching and curling, rubbing his finger up against Shane's prostate, watching his lips part. He gasped and moaned softly at Ilya's careful ministrations and Ilya was so in love with him.

"My beloved," he murmured, in Russian and Shane opened his eyes, smiling small at him. "You are so beautiful."

Ilya did lean up then, kissing Shane softly. It was a warm, tender kiss, not escalating anything. Shane whined and Ilya smiled tenderly into it.

"Ready?" Ilya sighed and Shane nodded. Ilya removed his fingers and Shane grabbed the lube. Shane poured some into his palm, reaching behind him to stroke his fingers over Ilya's dick.

Ilya watched him, his fingers curled around Shane's hips, sparks shooting up his spine from the touch. Shane tossed the lube aside and sank back slowly on Ilya's cock, pulling a groan from him.

He settled in Ilya's lap, Ilya's cock pressed deep, and fuck if Ilya didn't love how warm and snug Shane was around him. Shane breathed, head back. He rolled his head forward after a moment and leaned down to lay against Ilya. Ilya wrapped his arms around his husband, holding him close, Shane's head tucked under his chin.

It didn't take long for Shane to completely melt against him. Boneless.

"Better?" Ilya hummed, nosing into Shane's hair, running his hand down Shane's spine, to his lower back, and then back up.

"Yes," Shane sighed. "Fuck... we should do this after every game..."

Ilya chuckled. "Sure."

Ilya kind of loved that this relaxed Shane as well as it did. Ilya should have thought about it much sooner than he had but he hadn't given cockwarming much consideration before he and Shane had lived together.

Now they had the luxury to fuck whenever they wanted so taking the time to do this, where Shane just sat with Ilya's dick inside him to chill out, felt much more manageable. They were in no rush, they had all the time in the world to have sex. There was no wasted time.

Ilya continued to smooth his hand up and down Shane's spine, pressing intermittent kisses into his hair, and enjoyed the comforting warmth and weight of Shane laying on top of him,

his smooth skin pressed against Ilya's. He thought that Shane might have even fallen asleep. His eyes were closed and his breathing was deep and even.

Ilya closed his eyes, focusing on all the places where he and Shane were touching, feeling Shane breathe against him, the two of them nearly breathing in sync. It was meditative and relaxing. Ilya could feel how all of the tension had melted out of Shane's body.

Eventually, Shane stirred, wiggling against Ilya in a suggestive kind of way. Ilya chuckled, sliding his hands down Shane's back, over his ass, reaching down to feel where Shane's ass met Ilya's cock.

Shane made a needy little noise, sitting up, his hands planted on either side of Ilya. Ilya looked at him, smiling, raising his eyebrows.

"Someone is horny," he murmured fondly.

Shane just bit his lip and started moving on Ilya's dick. It didn't seem like he had a plan, really, just sort of chasing his pleasure, which Ilya didn't mind at all. He just watched, appreciating Shane's flushed cheeks and eagerness, reaching between them to stroke Shane's cock.

"Yes, yeah, fuck yes," Shane panted.

"Come on, Hollander," Ilya encouraged. "Let me see it."

Shane moaned, slamming his ass down a few more times on Ilya's lap, and came in small, shivery spurts, body clenching around Ilya's cock. Ilya thrust up into Shane twice and came, panting.

"Fuck," he sighed, sliding his hands over Shane's thighs. "Okay?"

Shane nodded and lay on Ilya again, his face hidden in Ilya's neck.

"Yeah," he managed. "Needed that."

Ilya hummed and kissed into Shane's hair, wrapping his arms around him to hold him. "Did it help?"

"It did. Thanks."

Ilya smiled and gave Shane a tender squeeze before Shane raised his head to look at Ilya, his eyes wandering over Ilya's face. He reached a hand up, touching Ilya's cheek gently. Ilya smiled, leaning into the touch and Shane kissed him sweetly.

"I'm sorry... for before."

Ilya shook his head. "Is fine. You are just being you."

Shane smiled a little and Ilya kissed him again.

Shane got up, and Ilya watched him. He went to the bathroom, and came back with face cloths. He cleaned Ilya up, tossing the cloth into their hamper, and came back to bed, laying on his side next to Ilya. Ilya turned to face Shane, head nestled against his pillow.

Shane's eyes tracked Ilya's face, his expression soft, before his eyes trailed down. He reached out, tracing a finger gently over the scars on Ilya's thigh. Ilya watched him. The scars were small, barely noticeable, but of course Shane would know where they were.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Fine," Ilya replied. "Good. Much better than before."

Shane nodded. "I'm glad you're pain free."

Ilya smiled. "Me, too."

Ilya leaned in, nuzzling his face against Shane's. "I love you."

Shane smiled, wrapping an arm around Ilya, and kissed him. "I love you, too."

Shane settled down, rolling over so that Ilya could spoon against his back. Shane tangled their fingers, squeezing.

"Thank you... for today..."

"Mm?"

"I think I needed to hear you tell me to relax," Shane elaborated. "I know I get caught up in my own head and... I want to have fun this season, too."

Ilya smiled, his heart warmed by Shane's words. He kissed the back of his head and shoulder. "I will tell you whenever you need it."

Shane chuckled. "Yeah. I know."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Ilya gets a hat trick

“Come on, boys!” Shane called from the bench, watching his teammates as they raced down the ice, his eyes tracking their movements. He watched Bood check one of the defenseman into the boards, fighting over the puck, Bood managing to get it away. It was scooped up by Luca, who passed to Ilya, avoiding a poke check.

Ilya took the puck and broke away, the fans in the stands, and the entire bench, were on their feet as Ilya raced down the ice. Shane was holding his breath, watching his husband fly past. He’d been working so hard on his conditioning and Shane was filled with excited anticipation at watching him book it down the ice, showing off the speed he was known for. Ilya took the shot, and scored.

The arena erupted. Ilya had his hands up, motioning at the crowd to give him the well-deserved praise. He collided with his linemates, tapping their helmets as they hugged him. He came by the bench, running his glove along the entire line and Shane was beaming brightly.

“Hatty watch!” yelled Nick Chouinard.

Ilya had already scored once this game, off an assist from Shane during the power play, and Shane didn’t doubt that he would get that hat trick. He was looking *really* good this game. He’d been doing well during most of his games but this was maybe the first one since his surgery that he seemed to be back at one hundred percent.

Ilya was on a serious point streak, scoring goals, racking up assists. Shane could tell that Ilya was really feeling himself on the ice again and he was kind of loving that Ilya was back into being his cocky self. He’d been a bit more reserved as he’d been coming back, so it felt good to really see him back in true Ilya Rozanov form.

There had been plenty of commentary in sports media of people waiting for Ilya to heat up, wondering about his recovery after surgery, concerns that he would have a bad season, and wouldn’t that be a terrible way to leave the sport.

It had pissed Shane off and he knew that it at least annoyed Ilya. Ilya had been doing well. It certainly wasn’t what he was capable of but given that he had come off of double hip surgery, he was punching well above his weight. They both did their best to ignore the media as much as possible but they weren’t always successful. Shane knew that Ilya intended to prove everyone wrong. He already was.

Ilya was getting that hat trick tonight.

And sure, enough, early in the third, he scored.

Shane laughed as Ilya held up both hands, skating down the boards, as if to say, *‘what? You think I wasn’t going to?’*

He was engulfed by his linemates and hats were tossed onto the ice. After their goal song, *Can’t Take My Eyes Off Of You* started playing while the hats were cleaned up off the ice. Shane was smiling hugely, swaying back and forth on the bench along to the music besides his teammates as Ilya came skating toward them.

Shane met Ilya’s eyes and started singing along with everyone in the arena. Ilya was laughing as he came to a stop in front of Shane at the bench as he belted out (terribly) the rest of the chorus of the song, grinning widely.

“You know this song?!” Ilya giggled.

“Of course I do!” Shane replied, smiling and laughing. He’d listened to it several times from various playlists that played in the locker room and had heard it enough times to be able to sing at least the chorus.

Ilya came back to the bench, the rest of the team congratulating him, and he sat next to Shane, who knocked their helmets together.

“That was so sexy,” he said and Ilya smiled his crooked smile at Shane, winking at him, making heat pool in Shane’s stomach.

“I know,” he hummed and Shane laughed, his cheeks pink, but he didn’t even care. Ilya had been right. He loved when they were together like this. Laughing and flirting and having a good time. Maybe even being kind of silly.

The game was better when they were enjoying it. The intensity and dedication they had with hockey would never change but losing sight of just loving the game and enjoying playing together wouldn’t really serve them.

Shane wanted to ride this high all the way to the playoffs. To the fucking Cup. He wanted to watch his husband look so confident and competent on the ice, enjoying himself, being in his element.

Shane just stared at Ilya’s face in profile, the masculine lines of his face, how perfect he looked in his bucket. He turned his head, smiling at Shane, his eyes crinkling. Shane’s heart flipped. He loved this man so much it was overwhelming.

The game ended and the Centaurs swarmed the ice, celebrating their victory. They shook hands with the Washington team and then waited to give Wyatt some love before heading off the ice.

“Nice job, Hazy,” Shane said, tapping his helmet against Wyatt’s, and patting his shoulder.

“Good playin’, Hollander,” Wyatt replied before Shane skated back toward the bench.

Ilya was waiting there, always the last one off the ice. Shane smiled at him, his heart squeezing in his chest with pride.

“Good game, Captain,” he said to Ilya as Ilya tapped his helmet.

“It was,” Ilya replied. “Good job, Hollander.”

Shane practically beamed, turning his face up. “You, too.”

Ilya smiled back and covered the distance between them, kissing Shane quickly on the mouth. The arena cheered around them. Shane was off the ice and headed down the tunnel after that, giddy as he always was after a game win. He loved the fact that he and Ilya got to kiss, out in the open, on ice. He loved that they had their own little celebratory post-game ritual.

He was going to miss it, when Ilya retired, but he was going to focus on their win tonight and how well Ilya had played and he was going to make sure that Ilya was all loved up tonight. He deserved it. He’d played incredibly.

And that *fucking hatty* .

Shane was half-hard, which was sort of embarrassing, but he was too happy about the win and Ilya’s performance to really care. The dressing room was electric, music blasting. Everyone cheered when Hazy and Ilya came into the room. Ilya gave several theatrical bows and waved and everyone laughed. He made his way to his stall and sat, pulling off his helmet, smiling, and laughing. God, he was so fucking hot when he was all sweaty and beaming and having a good time.

Shane couldn’t pay attention to anything else in the room, all of his focus was on Ilya. He felt a little dreamy if he was honest. Playing on the same team as Ilya had sort of reconfigured how they saw one another on the ice... and it had reshaped their relationship, too, in a way, mostly for good.

The only experiences they’d really had playing together were at the All-Star games, which weren’t a good barometer for actually playing with someone. He and Ilya had always had great chemistry on the ice and the Centaurs’ power play success was a testament to that.

But playing together had made Shane really appreciate Ilya’s skill up close and personal. He saw the respect Ilya had in the locker room, with their team. Ilya’s approach was just as Shane expected him to be as a parent. Fair but firm. A soft touch when required, offering a listening ear or a shoulder to lean on, but always pushing his teammates to be at their best. He didn’t take anyone’s shit but he also wasn’t afraid to have fun.

Seeing him in his element every day had only made Shane love and appreciate Ilya more.

“Gentlemen! Excellent game!” Coach Wiebe said. “I’ve been really impressed by our playing so far. You guys are going out there, hanging on to pucks, being assertive on the ice, making

good plays. Let's keep things moving. And I wanna make sure we honor our Captain and his hat trick tonight."

Everyone clapped and whooped as Coach handed Ilya his three pucks, all wrapped in tape, indicating what pucks they were. Ilya took them, thanking Wiebe, and hugged him. He posed for a few pictures for Hannah, the social media manager.

"Alright, boys! Great game tonight!" Troy Barrett said, everyone quieting, turning their attention to Troy. He was sitting in his stall, holding the trapper hat. "Gonna pass this off to our Captain, for making a great comeback."

Everyone clapped and Shane smiled as Ilya and Troy clasped hands and hugged. Ilya took the hat and put it on, which made everyone chuckle.

"Nice job, everyone. Great game. We fought hard for this. Let's keep this momentum going for the next one. Get some rest tonight, we'll come back better tomorrow."

The room clapped and Shane whistled. Things settled down a bit, though the media came in to talk to them. Ilya was the most popular, of course, everyone wanting to ask about how he was feeling, and about the hat trick.

Shane spoke to them as well, having scored one of the five points that night, with Luca Haas having gotten the other. He talked about how well he thought the team was doing overall, that Ilya was finding his stride and feeling good, and how proud he was of Ilya's recovery and his performance on the ice.

Shane slipped away to shower, passing Ilya on the way out when he'd finished. He changed back into his suit and sat in Ilya's stall, as was tradition, and waited for his husband to finish showering.

"Why are you always in my spot?" Ilya asked, the smile in his voice belying any annoyance. Shane grinned at him.

"To annoy you."

"Mm, I can tell."

Shane didn't move, making Ilya reach over him to grab his clothes. He laughed, pressing a few brief, sneaky kisses to Ilya's chest as he leaned over Shane.

Ilya gave Shane a look, one eyebrow quirked up in question, his lips twitching up into a small smile, and Shane just shrugged, though his cheeks were pink. They usually weren't physical with each other in the locker room, keeping things pretty professional, but they were the only two left at this point and Shane couldn't help it. Not when Ilya was so close and right there in front of his face, impossible to resist.

Ilya finished dressing, making sure he had his pucks, and they left the locker room together, arm in arm.

They were kissing before they'd even gotten through the door of the house. They stumbled inside, Ilya kicking the door closed while Shane started pulling his coat off his shoulders, dropping it to the floor, and backing Ilya up against the wall.

"Shane," Ilya laughed.

"Fuck I want you," Shane replied. "You played so good tonight and that fucking sexy-ass hat trick."

Ilya laughed, sounding carefree and delighted, running his hands into Shane's hair, kissing him back just as fervently. Anya was snuffling around their clothing and barking at them.

Ilya turned his head to look at her and Shane kissed his neck, Ilya's hands squeezing his ass.

"Hello, sweet girl," Ilya cooed at her. "I'm sorry. Papa and Dad are a little busy..."

Shane made a noise of agreement as he went back to attacking Ilya's mouth. Ilya didn't object and Anya seemed to get the message.

"Maybe I will have to keep getting hat tricks, if they make you so hot for me," Ilya teased and Shane huffed at him, already having gotten off Ilya's suit jacket, and was currently working on his shirt buttons.

"I'm always hot for you," Shane replied and Ilya kissed him again, smiling into it.

This wasn't unusual for them. They were always a bit more heated and frantic after games, especially if one of them played well, it tended to be even more intense if they both played well, and a win was involved. There had been numerous nights of not making it to their bedroom, having sex on the sofa or against a wall or on the kitchen counters instead.

God, it had been a bit of everything tonight. Ilya being back up to snuff, his hat trick, he and Shane killing it on the power play. It made Shane horny as hell to have such incredible chemistry with Ilya on the ice, just as much as off it.

Why did it have to take so fucking long to get naked?

"Let me," Ilya laughed as Shane made a vain attempt to rip the shirt off of Ilya. He was very close to whining but Ilya hauled him close, hands under Shane's ass, and Shane wrapped around him. Ilya hoisted him up, carrying him to the stairs.

Shane felt a pang of anxiety whenever Ilya did this. It had been worse when Ilya complained of hip pain but Shane still felt it, even after Ilya's surgery.

"Are you okay?" Shane murmured, cupping his cheek.

"Fine," Ilya replied, smiling. "My hips are good."

Ilya carried him upstairs, stopping on the landing to press Shane against the wall and kiss him. They made it up to their bedroom and Shane tugged Ilya's shirt off completely, tossing it to the floor.

He got to his knees, unbuckling Ilya's belt, and undoing his fly. Ilya's hands slid into his hair and Shane looked up at him as he tugged Ilya's pants down. His husband didn't look away, just watching Shane with dark, smoldering hazel eyes, his curls falling rakishly in his face. Ilya stepped out of his pants and kicked them away before Shane leaned forward, mouthing and nuzzling greedily at Ilya's mostly hard cock through the cotton of his briefs.

He sighed, reaching up to tug Ilya's briefs down, letting him step out of them before he started worshipping Ilya's cock with soft kisses and little kitten licks. Shane made a soft sound of pleasure as he sucked gently under the head of Ilya's cock, making him hum.

Shane continued his gentle teasing before sliding his lips down, taking Ilya deep. He closed his eyes, just enjoying this. Ilya in his mouth, his hands in Shane's hair.

"Love your mouth," Ilya murmured. "So good, Shane."

Shane made a dreamy noise in reply, loving the praise. Ilya let Shane suck him for a bit before tugging at his hair, not roughly, just enough to get Shane's attention.

Shane pulled off of him and looked up, sitting back on his heels.

"Come here," Ilya rumbled and Shane did, getting to his feet. Ilya was watching him, his expression intent and intense. Shane swallowed. Ilya lifted a hand, very gently brushing Shane's hair back behind his ear, thumb stroking over his cheek.

"Take your clothes off," Ilya told him, not quite ordering, but Shane got the hint. Shane would be good for him, because Ilya deserved that, especially after tonight.

"Get on the bed."

Shane took off the rest of his clothes, crawling into bed and laying on his back, watching as Ilya took off his socks. Shane licked his lips, watching Ilya stalk toward him. For someone who was such a dog person, Ilya reminded Shane of a large cat. He always moved with such purposeful grace, which amazed Shane even more considering how big Ilya was. Broad shouldered and long legged. He was six foot three of pure muscle and just that fact alone was enough to make Shane swoon. It never ceased to make Shane feel vulnerable but he loved that. Ilya's size only made him more attractive.

Ilya joined him, pressing Shane back onto the mattress, laying his body out on top of him, every inch touching. Shane sighed, wrapping his arms around Ilya, tangling his fingers into his curls, running his hands up and down Ilya's back, squeezing his ass.

They made out for a while, rutting against each other until Shane pushed at Ilya's chest, rolling him onto his back, and straddled him. He looked down at his husband, his curls wild and fanned out under his head, his lips red and kiss swollen, his eyes dark and shimmering with lust and delight.

"Do you want to fuck me?" Shane asked him, dragging their lips together.

"Yes," Ilya replied.

Shane smiled and kissed Ilya's mouth, then lifted his face to kiss over his forehead. Shane could admit that he tended to be impatient with sex. He liked it hard, fast, and intense. Ilya was more flexible, though ultimately he enjoyed dragging things out because it forced Shane to be good. He knew that that did it for Shane. But Ilya could handle going slow.

Shane could be slow and attentive for Ilya. He wanted to be. He wanted to show him how much Shane appreciated him, how happy he was about his triumphant return to hockey, and to worship him a little. Ilya was always telling Shane how much he appreciated his body, it was only fair that Shane returned the compliments.

Shane kissed down between Ilya's eyes, over his eyebrows, his eyelids, his cheeks. He cupped Ilya's face in one hand, kissed the corner of his mouth, and murmured, "beautiful," in Russian, before he continued to kiss down Ilya's neck, to his collarbone.

Ilya's long index finger slid against Shane's cheek, curling under his chin, tilting his head up, and Shane looked at him through his lashes.

"What is your plan, Hollander?" Ilya asked.

Shane smiled, ducking his head again as Ilya brushed his hair behind his ear. "Patience, Rozanov. You'll see."

Shane felt Ilya's rumbling laughter as he kissed over his sternum and across one pec.

"I suppose I will trust you," Ilya replied and made a very soft sound of pleasure as Shane tugged and licked at his right nipple.

"It'll be good. Promise," Shane hummed. "You'll get to fuck me, don't worry."

"Oh good," Ilya chuckled, teasing.

As much as Shane loved Ilya's body, his primary focus was for Ilya to feel loved and appreciated. Shane loved him so much; for his steadfastness and his softness and his enormous, golden heart. He loved that underneath Ilya's chirpy, dickish, sometimes intimidating facade, he was really a giant marshmallow.

Shane loved that he was privy to that information, that he got to see these parts of Ilya, to know him on such a deep level. He loved being trusted when he knew how hard it could be for Ilya to trust.

Shane turned his attention back to loving on his husband. He loved Ilya's chest; how broad he was and muscular. He loved the fine dusting of dark hair that covered his pecs and the catch of it against his skin.

Shane pressed a kiss over the snarling bear tattoo over Ilya's heart and Ilya chuckled, then hissed as Shane trapped his nipple between his teeth and tugged. Shane ran his tongue over it, soothing, and wanting to work Ilya up a bit. His nipples were a particular erogenous zone that Shane loved exploiting.

Ilya had talked about getting one or both pierced and Shane kind of loved the idea.

Shane bit his pec gently, then kissed over it, taking his time to tease Ilya's already stiff nipples, until Ilya was panting. He worked his way down Ilya's chest, to his abs, his obliques, taking his time to kiss over the firm muscle. Ilya's long fingers threaded into Shane's hair, holding carefully, just wanting to touch.

Shane paused over Ilya's ribs, pressing a few kisses over the tattoo that resided there. It was a series of very elegant roman numerals, which were the four dates for each of Ilya's Stanley Cup wins. Shane's was a mirror image, with two extra dates.

Ilya had convinced him to get it last year, even though they hadn't won the Cup. It had been a nice reminder though, of how far they had come in their careers, and what they got to share together. It was Shane's first and only tattoo and he was more than okay with just this one, another memory for him and Ilya to share.

He hoped to add at least two more dates before he retired.

"You're beautiful," Shane said, looking up at Ilya, who was reclining luxuriously against their pillows, his free arm settled behind his head, accentuating his muscular bicep. He was watching Shane, looking perfectly sexy.

He smiled, warm and flirty, his fingers curving around Shane's face, thumb brushing his cheek.

Shane turned his head, kissing Ilya's palm, before he continued his journey, following the trail of hair from Ilya's perfect bellybutton to the base of his dick. He left Ilya's dick alone for the time being, kissing down his groin, to the inside of his thighs. Shane got to Ilya's knee, then sat up, leaning over to press a kiss over one of the scars on the outside of Ilya's thigh.

Ilya huffed and Shane looked up at him, running his hands over Ilya's quads.

"Who are you and what have you done with my husband?" Ilya asked. He was being playful and Shane made a face.

"I don't know what you mean..."

"You're going so slow, Hollander..."

Shane tapped a finger against his lips. "I seem to recall a certain Russian telling me that sometimes faster isn't better..."

"You know other Russians?" Ilya asked, incredulous.

Shane sputtered and laughed and Ilya did, too. He loved this. It warmed him to his core to be able to laugh with his husband like this, joking around, especially when they were being intimate. It was stupid but he liked this. Being silly together.

"No! You, you idiot!"

Ilya cackled, knowing damn well what Shane meant, and Shane smacked the back of his hand playfully against Ilya's quad. "You're such an ass," Shane chuckled, leaning down to

kiss one of Ilya's hips.

"But you love me," Ilya hummed.

Shane smiled, warm and tender. "Yeah," he sighed, "I do."

He pressed a kiss to Ilya's other hip, then settled between his legs, teasing his tongue over the head of Ilya's cock, brushing the tip over his slit, before sucking him into his mouth. Ilya let out a shaky sigh and Shane closed his eyes, taking his time.

He loved the way Ilya felt in his mouth; warm and silky, the weight of him familiar. He loved being able to do this, making Ilya feel good. He took Ilya all the way down, swallowing around him. Ilya swore and Shane opened his eyes, lifting them, watching the way Ilya's face looked in pleasure. His dark eyes on Shane, plush lips parted. Shane closed his eyes again and took Ilya deeper.

"So sweet for me," Ilya murmured in Russian. "So perfect."

Shane hummed around him and Ilya groaned. He loved when Ilya spoke in Russian and he loved his fucking accent when he spoke in English. It wasn't the first time that Shane thought about recording Ilya talking, simply because he loved the sound of his voice, especially when he was praising Shane. But he could consider that another time. Instead, Shane reached down to tease Ilya's balls a bit, rolling them in his hand, stroking his finger along the seam of his sac.

"Fuck," Ilya breathed.

Shane pulled off Ilya, brushing the tip of his finger over his perineum, resting his cheek against Ilya's thigh.

"How do you want me?" he asked, blinking slowly up at his husband.

Ilya blinked back.

"Up here," he replied. "I want to look at you."

Shane kissed the inside of Ilya's thigh and then sucked on the head of his cock for a moment, making Ilya sigh out a moan, before crawling his way back up Ilya's body, and straddling him. Ilya already had the lube and Shane cupped his face, kissing him, as Ilya's slick finger rubbed against his hole.

Ilya went slow, too, taking his time in opening Shane up. Not that it took much time but Ilya was being indulgent, careful, his eyes never leaving Shane's face. It was so easy for Ilya to make Shane feel so adored. Sometimes just the way he looked at Shane was enough to undo him completely.

"You are being so good for me," Ilya murmured, reaching up with his free hand to touch Shane's cheek with gentle fingers, brushing the backs of them over Shane's cheekbone.

Shane closed his eyes and leaned into the touch, smiling small, his cheeks warming. He didn't urge Ilya on, letting him take his time, continuing his slow penetration with his fingers, even though the last of Shane's patience was starting to burn up.

Ilya's fingers rubbed up against his prostate intermittently, sending waves of pleasure through him, though not enough for Shane to come. Just enough to work him up. He let his head fall back, lips parting, moaning softly, both hands planted on Ilya's chest, fingers digging into the muscle.

"So close, sweetheart," Ilya practically purred. "You can do it."

Shane bit back a whine, teeth sinking into his bottom lip. He could do this for Ilya. He hadn't even touched his own dick, which was a challenge in and of itself. But he did love a challenge.

"I'm so proud of you," Shane murmured. "You played so well and you looked so good out there tonight."

"Yes," Ilya replied, fingers gently twisting and curling and stretching apart. "Was fun. Felt good, too."

Shane smiled back. "Good."

"Ready?" Ilya finally asked, and Shane tilted his head forward to look at his husband.

"Yeah," he sighed, opening his eyes. "Been ready."

Ilya smiled at him, withdrawing his fingers. "Come on then."

Shane shifted his weight back, sitting down on Ilya's slick cock. They both made the same sound as Shane sat down fully, Ilya pressed into him, filling him up. He loved this feeling so much and he loved what it did for Ilya, too.

Ilya sat up, which surprised Shane, but he wasn't mad about it. He rested his hands on Ilya's shoulders for leverage and Ilya wrapped his arms around him, keeping him close. They kissed, slow and thorough, and Shane lifted himself up and slid back down on Ilya's cock.

Ilya sighed, kissing the underside of Shane's chin, his neck, the hollow of his throat, the tops of his pecs.

"You're so gorgeous," Ilya murmured in Russian.

Shane smiled, huffing out a laugh as he found a steady rhythm. "So are you," Shane replied, also in Russian. "Stunning." He tilted his head down for more kisses and Ilya obliged, smiling into them. His hands slid over Shane's ribs and waist, curving around his ass, squeezing.

It didn't take long for the last of Shane's control to dissipate. He rode the hell out of Ilya's cock, bouncing in his lap, letting himself be loud. He moaned and panted and whined.

“So good, Ilya. Holy fucking shit. Love the way you fill me up.”

“Fuck, Hollander,” Ilya grunted. “Go for it.”

Shane gasped, smiling, and looked down at Ilya. “Want you to come in me.”

“Whatever you want, moy vozlyublenniy.”

Shane whimpered. “Touch me.”

Ilya wrapped his hand around Shane, stroking him.

“Fuck. Yes, Ilya. Shit. I’m so fucking close.” Shane knew that Ilya couldn’t be far behind. “I’m right there.”

“Don’t stop,” Ilya panted and Shane definitely wasn’t going to stop. He was right at the edge, chasing.

“Shit. Fuck. Oh yes. Yes,” Shane gasped, coming messily all over Ilya’s hand and their stomachs.

“*Shane*,” Ilya moaned breathlessly as he stilled and pulsed inside Shane. They were looking at each other, chests heaving, sweaty, and blissful. Shane loved the way Ilya looked when he came, the way he said Shane’s name, and he loved this too, the world dialed down to just *them*.

He dropped his forehead against his husband’s, wrapping an arm around Ilya’s shoulders, his other hand fisting into Ilya’s hair. He let his eyes close and he hummed as Ilya wrapped his arms around him tight, brushing their noses together.

“Do you want to shower?” Ilya asked, his hand running up and down Shane’s back in soothing strokes. Shane had shifted his head to Ilya’s shoulder and Ilya had his cheek pressed to the side of Shane’s head. He felt so loose and happy and sleepy... but he wouldn’t mind a brief rinse.

“Mm... maybe a quick rinse...”

Ilya huffed a laugh. “Okay.”

Shane sighed wistfully as he pulled off of Ilya and rolled, inelegantly, out of bed, which had Ilya chuckling. He, on the other hand, was absurdly graceful, taking Shane’s hand and kissing his knuckles.

“So charming,” Shane murmured.

“Yes,” Ilya replied. “I am. Thank you.”

Shane chuckled, letting Ilya lead him to the bathroom. He turned on the water in their shower, letting it warm, and turned to Shane, pulling him into his arms. Shane went easily,

sliding his hands up Ilya's back, pressing as close as possible to him. Shane rested his cheek on Ilya's shoulder, nosing his neck a little, Ilya's cheek resting on his head.

Shane slid his hand to Ilya's chest, fiddling with his crucifix, then smoothed his fingers over his skin, staring into nothing, just enjoying the reassurance of being in Ilya's arms. They stepped into the shower together when the water was sufficiently warm, mostly just rinsing off, though they folded back together, standing under the spray, Ilya gently rocking them back and forth.

Shane was happy and at ease. It always felt so good to be close to Ilya like this, just enjoying the comfort of being close, and knowing that he was loved.

They got out before they got all prune. Ilya changed into pajamas and went downstairs to take Anya out before bed, leaving Shane to clean up the mess they'd left in their entryway.

Shane chuckled as he hung up their coats, folding their suit jackets over his arm, and grabbing their dress shoes, taking everything back upstairs. He hung up their jackets, put their shoes away, and pulled Ilya's pucks out of his pockets.

He looked at them, his heart feeling so full.

#81 Rozanov 1 WS v OC 10/20/27 Hat Trick

#81 Rozanov 2 WS v OC 10/20/27 Hat Trick

#81 Rozanov 3 WS v OC 10/20/27 Hat Trick

Shane heard Ilya and Anya come back inside. He listened to Ilya talking animatedly to Anya, who barked a few times, and Shane set Ilya's pucks on their dresser. He ran his finger over one of the pucks. They'd have to get them made up all nice and added to their trophy case.

Ilya and Anya came upstairs and Shane greeted them both, kissing Ilya warmly.

"Mm," Ilya hummed. "I was only gone for ten minutes..."

Shane just shrugged.

They brushed their teeth and then went back to bed, gravitating back together again under the comforter. Ilya rested his head on his pillow, his eyes half-lidded, a small smile on his face as Shane stroked his hand through his curls, twisting a few around his fingers, then releasing them.

"You're my best friend," Shane whispered in the quiet space between them. "I'm so proud of you."

Ilya's eyes slid closed and he smiled a bit wider. "You're my best friend also," Ilya replied. "I'm proud of you, too."

Shane sighed, knowing that Ilya meant it. He kissed the tip of his nose.

“Ilya...”

“Mm?”

He opened his eyes, looking sleepy and soft, and Shane’s heart wobbled helplessly in his chest. He rested his hand on Ilya’s cheek, stroking his thumb over his stubble, and smiled as Ilya struggled to keep his eyes open.

“You’re everything to me,” Shane murmured. “I’m so grateful for you.”

“Shane...” Ilya sighed.

“Shh,” Shane replied, smiling. “You’re a wonderful husband and an amazing teammate and I’m so fucking lucky that I get to be married to you and spend the rest of my life with you.”

Ilya made a disgruntled noise, his cheeks going pink, and he turned his face to hide it in his pillow. Shane smiled wider and laughed, nuzzling his face against Ilya’s as best as he could.

“You’re truly incredible,” Shane continued. “And I adore you.”

Ilya peeked out from where he was hiding.

“Gross,” he replied but he was smiling.

Shane chuckled and kissed him and Ilya turned, wrapping his arms around Shane to kiss him properly.

“I don’t tell you enough,” Shane sighed as they lay together, all tangled up, and sleepy. He had his hand in Ilya’s hair, foreheads pressed together.

“I don’t mind hearing it...”

Shane smiled, kissing between Ilya’s brows. He adored this man more than words could ever express and he would make sure that Ilya never forgot that.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Ilya spends time with the rookies

November

Ilya had been very aware that the rookies this season were... *into him* .

Tanner Dillon, Miles Boyle, Trace Young, and Kevin LaPointe had either been traded or retired, so the Centaurs had brought on a bunch of fresh faces this season, which had allowed players like Luca Haas and Troy Barrett to take on more senior roles on the team.

The rookies had all been called up from the Belleville Centaurs, the Ottawa Centaurs minor league affiliate and were a group of four early twenty-somethings who had been absolutely starstruck by both Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander.

It had been kind of cute, seeing their slack jaws as Shane had run literal circles around them over the summer, with Ilya playfully chirping from the sidelines, and being nice to them. He'd bring coffee and remember random things about them that would have them all flustered.

Ilya had never been called 'sir' so many times in his life and he thought it was fucking hilarious.

As they'd all gotten more comfortable, and upon Ilya's return to the team, he became a more active participant in training and drills. Ilya always liked teaching. He enjoyed coaching at his and Shane's camps and he liked being able to take the rookies under his wing and show them the ropes.

He had had some good mentors help him navigate his way when he had first started in Boston and he felt like this was his way of paying it forward.

At the moment, it was just him, Luca, Dykstra, and the rookies in the training room. Ilya was finishing up his dumbbell work before he stretched, and did some PT protocol with Sophia, one of the physical therapists on staff.

He was very aware of four pairs of eyes on him. He was tempted to turn his head, smile, and wink, which would probably confuse all four boys and send them into a tizzy. It was really very funny and, if he was honest, a nice ego stroke. But mostly he just hoped that they were actually listening to what he was saying and didn't do anything stupid when they were at practice or during games.

Ilya set down his dumbbells, picking up his towel to wipe sweat from his face, and turned around to see Brayden Mitchells, one hand and one knee braced on a bench, attempting to do what looked like dumbbell rows.

Ilya crossed his arms over his chest. “Mitchy,” he called. “What are you doing?”

Mitchy looked up at him with wide blue eyes. The other rookies gathered around him followed, their eyes all on Ilya. Haasy and D were both watching, smiling from their bikes behind the rookies. Ilya managed to keep a straight face.

“Uh...” was Mitchy’s very eloquent response.

“Dumbbell rows,” Aster Sanderson answered for him.

Ilya nodded, pressing his lips together. He unfolded his arms and approached the rookies, their eyes following him as if they were unsure if he would bite them or burn them if they got too close.

“Stand up,” Ilya said. Mitchy stood up. Ilya held out his hand for his dumbbell. Mitchy handed it to him.

“This is how you do a dumbbell row properly,” he told them. “No knees on the bench. Feet shoulder distance apart. Soft knees. Hinge forward. Flat back. Head is neutral. Everything square. One hand on the bench. The other hand with the dumbbell. Lead with your elbow, squeeze your back. If you are rotating, the weight is too heavy.”

Ilya demonstrated a few rows, then rested the dumbbell on the weight bench.

Luca and Evan clapped from the bikes and Ilya laughed, flipping them off.

“Thanks for that, Roz,” said Charlie Hanford, probably the bravest of the rookies, and the oldest, at twenty-three.

“No problem,” Ilya replied, offering the boys a warm smile. “I have been doing this a long time and is important to have good form. Avoiding injuries in the weight room is just as important as avoiding them on the ice.”

The boys all nodded in unison and Ilya didn’t miss that Mikhail Dmitriev’s eyes had drifted to his chest.

“If you have any other questions, Mac is the best trainer here and can help. Just ask.”

“Yes, sir,” the boys all said simultaneously which made Ilya chuckle.

“Ilya,” he replied. “Or Roz. Don’t call me sir. I’m not *that* old.”

They all stuttered apologies and Ilya laughed and waved them off, telling them to have a good workout. He grabbed up his towel and water bottle, making his way to the exit. Luca and Evan were finished and they all left the weight room together.

“Oh my god,” Dykstra laughed once they were in the hallway. “It’s like the Ilya Rozanov fan club!”

Ilya just chuckled, rolling his eyes, and shaking his head.

“It’s kind of cute,” Luca chimed.

“You were not so different once,” Ilya told him.

Luca smiled and nodded. “Yes. But then I got to know you.”

Ilya rested a hand on his heart, looking wounded.

Luca put an arm around Ilya’s shoulder. “It’s better now. We’re friends!”

Ilya’s heart clenched a little and he put an arm around Luca in return. “That’s true. Is much better.”

Luca had come so far over the time that he and Ilya had been working together. He had really come into his own and was a true contender on the team, putting up big, impressive numbers. Ilya felt good about leaving the team in Luca’s hands. Ilya knew that when he retired, Luca was going to truly shine.

Luca and Evan dropped Ilya off in one of the other training rooms where Sophia was waiting for him.

“Hey, Roz.”

“Hi,” Ilya chuckled. “What torture do you have for me today?”

“It’s not torture,” Sophia laughed.

Ilya was with Sophia for maybe fifteen minutes, stretching and rolling out, before Shane found them.

“Oh, there you are,” his familiar voice said from the doorway and Ilya felt himself go warm with pleasure. “Hi, Soph.”

“Hi, Shane.”

Ilya looked up and smiled at his husband.

“Hi.”

“Mind if you join you?” Shane asked.

“I don’t,” Sophia replied.

Ilya sighed dramatically. “I suppose, if you want to watch me suffer.”

Shane laughed and shook his head. “You’re fine.”

“That’s what I said,” Sophia added.

“Eugh,” Ilya huffed.

Sophia put him through his paces with PT exercises for his hips while Shane stretched and did some yoga.

Ilya was pretty stoic through the exercises, grunting or sighing here or there, but his mind was absolutely whirring. Sophia was not gentle and she pushed him to the limits of his flexibility.

Sometimes he was afraid that something was going to snap and he’d be completely fucked, but she’d never done him wrong yet and he always felt better afterward.

“How’re you feeling?” she asked as Ilya finished up his last exercise.

“Good,” Ilya replied. “No pain or discomfort, besides the exercises. Feeling normal. I feel good.”

“That’s what I like to hear,” she replied, smiling, and patted Ilya’s arm. “You’re all set, Roz.”

“Thanks, Sophia.”

“My pleasure.”

Ilya turned to Shane who was sitting with his legs crossed like a pretzel. He smiled at Ilya and Ilya smiled back.

“Ready spaghetti?” he asked as Shane stood up. Shane looked at Ilya and started laughing.

“Where did you hear that?”

“What? *Ready spaghetti*? Is cute! D was saying it to Susie! I like it!”

Shane was smiling widely, laughing, his eyes, nose, and freckles all crinkled. This was Ilya’s favorite Shane expression, when he was happy and warm and amused, his face all scrunched. Ilya’s heart flip flopped in his chest.

“You’re actually really adorable, you know that?” Shane said, taking Ilya’s hand.

“No,” Ilya replied, turning his head away from Shane. “You do not tell me I am adorable.”

Shane leaned into him. “Well, you are,” he cooed. Ilya huffed a laugh, turning his head to press a kiss into Shane’s sweaty hair.

“If you say so. I think you are more cute.”

“As if,” Shane chuckled, his cheeks pink.

They headed toward the dressing room to shower and change and head back home for the day. It was cold in Ottawa and they were bundled up against it, heading to the Mercedes.

“Evan was saying that you’ve beguiled the rookies,” Shane said.

Ilya furrowed his brows. Sometimes Shane used words that Ilya could not for the life of him figure out how to translate because he had never heard or read it before. It happened less frequently, but sometimes it caught him off guard.

“He said I did what?”

“Beguiled, like, enchanted or bewitched, the rookies.”

Ilya considered this and chuckled. “Well, maybe that is a little true. But not on purpose.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing,” Ilya laughed, unlocking the car. “I just exist. Is because I am hot.”

Shane rolled his eyes. They got into the car and Shane shivered in the passenger seat.

“Jeez, it’s cold.”

Ilya started the car and turned up the heat.

“I was in the weight room with Haasy, D, and the rookies. Mitchells was trying to do bent over dumbbell rows but wrong, so I showed him and the other three how to do them properly. I think they cannot decide if they want to be me or be fucked by me...”

Ilya was never wrong about these things. It was easy for him to tell when someone liked him or when they liked other people and those three guys definitely had a *vibe* that he was picking up on.

“Ilya! Oh my god!”

“What?! I did nothing! I am only nice to them! Try and help them out sometimes because they are young... and maybe a little stupid.”

Shane laughed, shaking his head. “God. Is there no one who *doesn’t* have a crush on you?”

Ilya grinned. “I have a lot of sex appeal.”

“That’s for sure,” Shane grumbled, which made Ilya laugh.

“Is nothing. They are just young and do not know that I am very lame and boring.”

“You’re not lame or boring.”

“No? You do not think so? I think your boring rubbed off on me, after all these years.”

“Shut up,” Shane said, lightly punching Ilya’s arm. Ilya just laughed more. He liked going back and forth about silly things like this with Shane.

“I think you’re pretty cool,” Shane said as Ilya drove them toward him. “And interesting... and the opposite of boring, really.”

Ilya quirked a brow and glanced at his husband. He didn’t say anything. Intrigued. He smiled a little.

“You do things so... effortlessly. Competently. You’re confident and you don’t let things get under your skin. You know how good you are at hockey and sex. You’re charming and personable. You have fun no matter what the setting is and people gravitate to you... even though you’re a dick.”

Ilya chuckled.

“I feel selfish sometimes... that I get to have you all to myself...”

Ilya softened, glancing at Shane again. He was looking out the passenger side window but Ilya knew that he was blushing.

“What? You want to share? Are you thinking about a threesome?”

“No. Shut up.”

Ilya smirked. They lapsed into a brief silence before Shane said, “I’m jealous, too, sometimes. I wish I could be more at ease...”

Ilya reached out, resting his hand on Shane’s thigh, right above his knee, and squeezed.

“I like you just the way you are,” he said sincerely. “Even if you are usually an uptight wet blanket...”

Shane scoffed. Ilya squeezed his thigh again, then patted it, and put his hand back on the steering wheel.

“You are better. Not as nervous, I think. You have more fun since we came out. And the team respects you and your skills. I like seeing you smile more and laugh on the ice and at home, too. You are like how you were at the cottage, over the summers, before. A little silly, more yourself. Is nice to see that. For other people to see it.”

“Ilya...”

Ilya felt his own cheeks reddening uncomfortably and he shrugged. He couldn’t help it though. He would normally tease Shane but... it felt a little like the truth was needed.

Ilya pulled into the driveway, parking the car in the garage. Shane turned in his seat and Ilya turned to face him. He reached out, cupping one gloved hand over Ilya’s cheek.

“Thank you for being mine,” Shane murmured, his thumb brushing over Ilya’s cheekbone.

Ilya smiled at him. “I am very proud to be yours.”

Shane blushed and smiled and his dark eyes sparkled in the way that suggested tears. Ilya leaned over the console, pressing a warm, soft kiss to Shane's mouth.

"Let's go inside," he hummed. "Is fucking freezing."

Shane laughed. "Okay."

"Show me again," Luca said.

Ilya grabbed another puck with his stick, he went slow, skating from center ice toward the empty net. As he approached the net, he switched to his backhand, then faked a shot, then went for a forehand wrist shot high into the corner of the net.

Luca was watching him intently. They had been practicing Ilya's signature move, 'The Rozanov', for a few weeks now. There were plenty of people who had attempted the move over the years and Shane was the only other person, besides Ilya, who had managed to pull it off successfully.

So Ilya was trying to teach Luca.

During a night out at Monks, where Ilya had gotten a little tipsy, he'd told Luca that Luca should seriously consider switching to center from right wing. Wiebe had toyed around with the idea of moving Luca to center before Ilya had talked about retiring, but now the possibility seemed to be headed into the direction of 'probably likely.'

With Ilya retiring, most of the responsibility of carrying the 1C position would be on Shane. Aster had a pretty good shot at being a star center but he was young and still coming into his own in the league. They would need someone reliable, besides Shane, because Shane wouldn't be able to keep playing forever, much as maybe he would like to.

Ilya and Shane had been an unstoppable force for the Centaurs. They had the highest rate of power play success in the league since they'd started playing together and continually ranked in the top ten scorers. Ilya's spot opening up meant that someone would have to step up and he thought that Luca would be the best choice.

He was twenty-seven, in the prime of his career. He'd been playing right wing incredibly well and had played a few games earlier in the season as a center while Ilya had been out, recovering from his surgery. He had taken to the position better than anyone had probably anticipated, though ultimately Ilya wasn't surprised.

Luca was adaptable and smart. Shane had worked with him a bit during the summer and into the early fall, giving him pointers, and he had even commented on how quickly Luca had absorbed the information and adjusted.

"Do you want to try?" Ilya asked, coming to a stop in front of Luca.

Luca was processing. He nodded after a moment, skating past Ilya, and grabbed a puck.

Ilya watched him as he skated toward the net. He went slowly, getting a feel for things. Ilya watched him as he moved through each part of the shot slowly, before shooting the puck. He just missed the net, but it wasn't a bad attempt.

"Again," Ilya said. "Trust your aim."

They were on the ice for an extra hour, working on the move. Luca was close. He'd picked it up faster than Ilya had expected, probably faster than Shane had learned it, though Shane had taught himself, wanting to "surprise" Ilya.

"You will get it," Ilya assured Luca as they made their way off the ice. "You are close."

"I have to practice," Luca replied. "But... feels good."

Ilya smiled. "Good."

He had liked becoming friends with Luca over the time they'd been on the team together. Luca had alternated with Troy between Ilya and Shane's lines in recent years, which had been fun. The configurations had good chemistry and Ilya liked having a strategy for the different teams they played, making sure they played to everyone's strengths.

He was sure there would always be a bit of a mentor-mentee vibe between himself and Luca, but Luca had become so much more comfortable in his own skin and in the locker room. He took more risks and was being more assertive and Ilya was immeasurably proud of him. He had really come into his own and Ilya loved seeing how popular he was amongst the fans.

He was an All-Star and a fan favorite. He was putting up impressive numbers and was getting quite a bit of ice time, which he completely deserved. He had more than earned being named Alternate Captain and Ilya was sure that, regardless of if he stayed in Ottawa or went somewhere else, that he'd be the Captain of whatever team he was on.

Ilya was excited to see Luca take on this challenge and he had no doubt that he would succeed. He would have an incredible career and Ilya was glad to be a small part of it. As sweet as Luca was, Ilya was sure it wasn't easy being in his and Shane's shadows. They loomed large in Ottawa and the league. Neither of them were anything but team players but there was so much lore and hype around them.

Ilya thought he and Shane did a good job of minimizing their reputations with the team. They were just here to help the team win. But he was sure that Luca would really show his true colors once he was out of their shadows and Ilya hoped that his retirement would give Luca that opportunity.

They went to the locker room, showering, and changing, and then headed out to grab lunch, as had become their tradition. There was a cute little cafe not far from the practice rink they had been frequenting for the last four or five years after practice.

Ilya liked having these moments. Spending time with his friends and teammates, away from Shane. It wasn't that he didn't want Shane around or to be with him but they spent almost all of their time together and having space from one another was important.

They'd learned that lesson the hard way and had adjusted accordingly. Going from having barely any time together to spending all of their time together had been a larger adjustment than they'd both anticipated in the beginning.

So they'd incorporated time alone into their schedule. Shane had time to himself at home, with Anya, while Ilya went out for lunch, and they would catch up later once Ilya got home.

He texted Shane, letting him know that he and Luca were grabbing food, and then pocketed his phone. The cafe was a small, ten table establishment, with lots of tile and wood. The owners and staff knew them, which was nice, and put in their orders before either of them could place them.

Ilya always got a cappuccino and their 'classic turkey' sandwich on a bagel. Luca got a regular black coffee and a breakfast sandwich with sausage.

They sat at their usual table close to the register and Ilya chuckled at the one couple at the table diagonal from them who were openly gawking. He was pretty sure that they were tourists.

"So," Ilya said, leaning back in his seat, one arm draped across the back of it, legs crossed. He sipped his cappuccino. "Are you seeing anyone?"

He smiled over the rim of his cup as Luca blushed and fidgeted in his seat. So yes, Luca *was* seeing someone.

Ilya placed his cup neatly back onto the saucer. "Who are they?"

"Um... no one you know..."

Ilya laughed softly. "Yes. I know. But tell me about them! Have you been seeing them long? Where did you meet? What are they like?"

Luca fidgeted again and took a sip of coffee. "His name is Henry. We met at an art workshop a few months ago. He's an art student and works for the National Gallery."

Ilya nodded, impressed. "How long is a few months?"

"Three."

"Three months, Haas?! And you have not told us?!" Ilya leaned back dramatically in his seat, a hand on his chest as if he'd been mortally wounded.

Luca shrugged helplessly. "I wanted to be sure it was serious..."

"Is it?"

"I think so."

Ilya smiled. "Do you have a picture of this Henry?"

Luca's entire face went red and Ilya couldn't help but laugh. Definitely pictures that were only meant for Luca's eyes, surely. He sighed, taking his phone out of his pocket, and looked through it before he showed Ilya a picture.

It looked like it was maybe from Henry's social media, like a profile picture, showing a man with dark hair, green eyes, and a wide smile with a dimple in one cheek. Cute.

"He is cute," Ilya said, nodding in approval. "You like him?"

"Yes. A lot. He is funny and kind and a wonderful artist. We get along very well. He has never played hockey but he likes it and he skates."

Ilya smiled. "Is he Canadian?"

"Yes! From Toronto."

"Canadian boys are hard to resist."

Luca blushed some more and laughed, nodding a little, before sipping his coffee. Ilya chuckled.

Their sandwiches arrived and they talked a little more about Henry and whether or not Luca was going to talk to the team about him or bring him to family skate. Luca said he wanted to but would talk with Henry first.

"It's a lot... to all of a sudden be scrutinized. Maybe not as much as in other sports but..."

Ilya nodded. "Is harder for queer players. Our relationships are looked at more closely."

"Yes. Exactly. I can only imagine what it's like for you and Shane. Or even Scott Hunter and his husband, before Scott retired."

"Was hard, in different ways. The scrutiny is not so bad, now that it has been so long. But, people will have much to say when I am retired, I'm sure." Ilya scoffed a little. There had already been media going around about him being a 'househusband' once he retired.

First, Ilya didn't think there was really anything wrong with that, as long as all parties involved were in agreement. And second, no one knew fuck all about what he would be doing when he retired; hopefully helping to raise a kid and his myriad of other hobbies and interests. Even if all he did was sit on his ass and do nothing while Shane brought in all their income, it was no one's business but their own.

"Are you... looking forward to retirement?" Luca asked cautiously.

Ilya smiled. "Yes and no. Will be hard to say goodbye to my professional career, to you and the team, the coaches and staff, the fans. I know I'll see you all still but will be different. Change is hard. And I know I will grieve. But, I am also excited. Shane and I want to be parents and I'm ready for that. Things will be different, but just as good."

Luca smiled back at Ilya. “Yes, that’s true. You will be missed, you know.” He looked down at his sandwich. “I will miss you.”

“Aww,” Ilya replied, though it was meant genuinely. “I will miss you, too.”

“We will still be friends, yes?”

“Of course!” Ilya exclaimed. Luca looked up at him, his eyes surprisingly shiny. Ilya reached out to pat his forearm comfortingly. “You will have to meet my kid. And I will be at family skates and home games. I’ll be watching all the away games. Maybe I will start my own podcast and you will have to be a guest. And you know that the cottage is always open to you. You are welcome any time.”

Luca offered a watery smile and sniffed. Ilya’s heart clenched.

“C’mon, Haas. You cannot really think we would not still be friends. You will see me all the time! Will probably get annoying. I will show you every baby picture and you will hate it.”

Luca scoffed. “No, I won’t.”

Ilya made a face that said ‘I wouldn’t be so sure about that.’

“No one knows how unbearable I will be as a parent. Probably over the top.”

Luca laughed and smiled, which made Ilya feel better. “Maybe. I can see you doing that.” He sighed, shaking his head a little. “It’s just weird, you know.”

“It is,” Ilya agreed. “But will be okay. I’m not done yet.”

Luca nodded and smiled. “You’re right.”

“I always am,” Ilya winked.

They finished their sandwiches and settled their bill, before heading back to the garage, and their respective cars. Ilya hugged Luca and smiled when Luca hugged him back.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Haasy.”

“See you tomorrow, Roz.”

When Ilya got home, he was greeted by Anya.

She came running to the door, wiggling, her tongue lolling out the side of her mouth, smiling her puppy dog smile at him. She wasn’t as quick as she used to be and she had more gray in her muzzle, but she was still the sweetest dog.

He toed off his shoes and hung up his coat, giving her pets and kisses.

“Where is Dad?” he asked her.

The house was quiet, which could mean that Shane was napping, or doing some yoga. Usually he was bustling about in the kitchen or on the sofa watching TV.

“Shane?” he called, not getting any response.

Ilya walked through the living room and then into the kitchen, where he found his husband. He was sitting at the kitchen table, headphones in, reading, a mug of steaming tea next to him. He hadn’t even noticed Ilya.

He had his hair tucked behind one ear, his cheek resting on his hand. He looked so beautiful, just sitting there, lost in his own world. Ilya watched the sweep of his lashes as he blinked. Too bad Ilya was going to ruin the moment.

He smirked, moving closer to the table, and drummed on it with his fingers. He laughed as Shane jumped.

“Jesus Christ,” he hissed, pulling out one earbud.

Ilya grinned.

“I’m glad you think it’s funny that you gave me a heart attack,” Shane grumbled.

“You are fine,” Ilya replied. “And you should be paying more attention.”

Shane rolled his eyes and Ilya snickered. He moved around the table, placing one hand on the table, the other on the back of Shane’s chair, leaning in to kiss the top of his husband’s head.

“How was lunch?” Shane asked.

“Good,” Ilya replied. “Luca seems sad that I am retiring. He is afraid we will not be friends.”

Shane looked up at Ilya, turning in his chair so Ilya could stand between his legs.

“Aww, Haas,” Shane replied, arms around Ilya’s waist, his head resting against Ilya’s stomach. “I don’t think he has anything to worry about.”

“No,” Ilya replied, smoothing his hands down Shane’s back. “But is a big change. I understand.”

“Of course.”

“I told him he can come to the cottage any time.”

Shane chuckled. “Sure.”

Ilya leaned down and kissed the top of Shane’s head.

“What are you reading?”

Shane sighed. “Another parenting book.”

Ilya laughed into Shane's hair and Shane whined, slumping against him.

"Shut up. Don't laugh at me about this."

"I am not laughing at you," Ilya chuckled, wrapping his arms around his husband. "Is cute."

"Hmpf."

Ilya smiled, pressing more kisses into Shane's hair, nuzzling him, his heart glowing. Shane was so nervous about parenting and wanting to be a good parent. It wasn't surprising he was reading all these parenting books and listening to podcasts and driving their friends crazy with questions about being a parent. It was so *Shane*.

Ilya didn't doubt that Shane would be a good dad. He would be patient and kind and sweet. But he loved how Shane worried. Because it showed how much he cared. If there was anything that was worth caring about, it was definitely about wanting to be the best parent you could be.

"Will not be perfect. No one is perfect... but you will be a great dad," Ilya murmured, leaning away so they could look at one another. Ilya had said it before and he would keep saying it. They would be good parents. They'd be in it together and it would be peaceful.

Shane rested his chin on Ilya's chest and blinked big, shiny eyes at him.

"I can't wait to be a parent with you."

Ilya smiled, stroking his hands through Shane's glossy hair, and kissed his forehead.

"Me, too."

Shane got up from his seat so they could kiss and hug properly, Ilya gently rocking them back and forth as they held each other.

He rested his chin on top of Shane's head as Shane placed his head against Ilya's clavicle. He closed his eyes, appreciating the familiar warmth and firmness of Shane in his arms, the two of them just breathing together.

"Can I tell you something?" he asked softly.

"Of course," Shane replied, just as quietly.

"I want our kids to be Hollanders. We don't have to combine our last names or whatever... I just don't want my father in any part of my life now..."

Shane leaned away quickly, looking at Ilya, brows furrowed. His scrunched confusion face. Ilya smiled, maybe a tiny bit watery, and carefully smoothed his thumb over that furrow.

"Ilya..."

Ilya sighed. There was so much he could say but he wasn't sure if he knew all of the words in English. He chewed on his bottom lip before he spoke, in Russian, staring out their kitchen window at the Ottawa River.

"It means so much to me to be a part of your family. To have parents who love me, and a kind, loving husband, and a life that's all my own. It felt like love died when my mother did. I never thought I would have that again, that anyone would ever love me or want me." Ilya swallowed past the lump in his throat. "But you did. You do."

He looked down at Shane, who was already crying silent tears. Ilya cooed at him softly, reaching up to smooth his thumb over the wet tracks on Shane's cheeks.

"They'll be *our* kids. It'll be *our* family. I don't want my father's name to touch that."

"Okay," Shane replied, in Russian, nodding in understanding. "I love you so much, Ilya. Thank you for loving me back."

Shane reached up to brush at the tears on Ilya's own cheeks and gently pulled him down for a salty, shaky kiss.

"You're easy to love," Ilya murmured against Shane's mouth and Shane huffed, rubbing his nose against Ilya's. He sighed, taking out his other earbud. He put it away and then took Ilya's hands.

"You really want that?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes. I do."

Shane nodded, rubbing his thumbs over Ilya's knuckles, looking up into his face. "I want them to be connected to you, too. To Russian culture. I know it's hard with your family but I still want them to know you and those important parts of you and who you are."

Ilya smiled, resting his forehead against Shane's. "I will teach them."

"Yes," Shane replied. "Absolutely."

Ilya closed his eyes for a moment, appreciating Shane and all he had given him.

"C'mon," Shane murmured. "I want to cuddle you..."

Ilya chuckled and went easily, because that sounded like an amazing idea.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Some friends throw Ilya a surprise retirement party and Shane and Ilya make a bet.

December

Shane was going to make them late.

Ilya didn't usually care that much about being on time to things. He liked arriving fashionably late but they were going to be beyond that at this point and he didn't really like the idea of arriving when such an intimate party was in full swing.

"Hollander," Ilya growled through the bathroom door of their hotel room. "Did you fucking fall in? What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm coming!" was Shane's annoyed response.

Ilya rolled his eyes and paced the hotel room. They were in New York, having played the Admirals earlier that day. They'd be flying home tomorrow and had made plans to catch up with the queer New York hockey player contingent at The Kingfisher.

Scott had retired last year and Eric was well and fully into life post-hockey. Troy and Harris were going to be joining them, along with Kip and Kyle. They had agreed to meet up at six-thirty and it was nearly seven.

"Okay," Shane said, coming out of the bathroom. His cheeks were pink and he looked nervous, which made Ilya suspicious. He looked at Ilya.

"Ready?"

"Yes," Ilya replied slowly.

They slipped into their jackets and made their way downstairs where a cab waited. They sat in silence next to one another in the car and Ilya had an uncomfortable feeling in his stomach.

Shane rarely hid anything from Ilya. He was also bad at hiding things and he was a terrible liar. For a horrifying second Ilya thought that maybe Shane was hiding the fact that he was cheating on Ilya, which Ilya dismissed immediately. Shane would never do that, Ilya was sure of it, but now he felt even more sour.

"What is going on?" he finally asked.

Shane was texting. “What do you mean?”

“Why the fuck were you taking forever? Who are you texting?”

“I wasn’t taking forever,” Shane replied. “And no one. Rose.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes at Shane, starting to get frustrated. He didn’t like whatever game Shane was playing. One, because it was out of character for his husband and two, because it hurt... Shane didn’t usually keep things from him... and Ilya didn’t like being shut out.

“Come on,” Shane said. “We’re here.”

Ilya didn’t want to go inside. He didn’t want to see their friends while he was feeling hurt and frustrated with Shane, confused as to what was actually going on.

But he got out of the car, shoving his hands in his coat pockets, and followed Shane into the bar.

“SURPRISE!”

Ilya blinked, taken aback by having a room full of men screaming at him, laughing.

“What is this...?” he said, looking around at the gathered group of people. Scott and Kip, Eric and Kyle, Troy and Harris, and Luca.

Everyone was smiling widely and there was a sign on the wall that said “Happy Retirement!” with a bunch of balloons.

Ilya turned his gaze to Shane, who was smiling, looking at him apologetically. Ilya didn’t get the chance to say anything before Scott came forward to hug him.

“Welcome to the club, Rozanov!” he said, laughing.

Ilya slowly returned Scott’s hug, patting his back, feeling like he’d just gone through some emotional whiplash.

“Hey! It is only December! I still have at least five months left!”

He doled out hugs and handshakes, thanking everyone as they congratulated him, joking around about his age and gearing up to retire. Kyle brought him a glass of vodka (“the good shit, I promise”) with ice.

Ilya needed a moment to get his bearings. He had not expected this, at all, and he wasn’t surprised at getting chirped like this given the circumstances but he had not at all been prepared. He was able to roll with the punches usually but he was feeling caught off guard. He had never gotten surprised like this.

“Sorry,” Shane said, having sidled up to him at the bar. He had a beer bottle in his hand and was looking sort of embarrassed.

“Is this why you were taking so long?”

“I was stalling,” Shane explained. “Troy, Harris, and Luca got stuck in traffic so they needed me to delay us a bit. I was texting Scott. He and Eric organized this.”

Ilya looked at Shane, feeling relieved, and sort of guilty.

“I’m sorry for getting frustrated.”

Shane shook his head. “It’s okay. I thought it would be a fun idea, I just wasn’t sure how to go about it. I didn’t mean to make you feel weird.”

Ilya smiled and leaned in, kissing Shane’s forehead. “Is fine. Thank you.”

Shane smiled up at him, blushing, and nudged him a little with his elbow. “Go on. Go mingle. It’s your party.”

Ilya chuckled and reached for Shane’s hand. “Come with me.”

Shane took his hand and Ilya tugged him along with him to join the little group.

Apparently Eric and Scott had been planning the party since Ilya had told them he would be retiring. They couldn’t resist busting Ilya’s balls about retirement and him joining the ranks of “retirees.”

In truth, Ilya knew that he was going to be in good company.

“So,” he said, sipping his vodka and looking at Scott. “How *is* retirement?”

“Great, actually,” Scott replied. “It was hard at first, the first few months after the summer, knowing that I wasn’t going to be going back. But it’s also been nice to be busy with the Hockey Alliance and keeping up with that. I get to do some activism and support other hockey players around all the leagues. The best of both worlds.”

Back when Ilya and Shane had been outed, Scott had told them about the group he had wanted to start in support of all hockey players and speaking up about misogyny, homophobia, toxic masculinity, and other issues that were rampant in the NHL, and hockey in general.

They had done some great work so far and it was nice to hear that Scott was focusing on running the organization, supporting players from all over the hockey world, and keeping that connection to the sport.

“I am sure Kip is happy, too.”

Scott pawed at the back of his neck, his cheeks flushing. “I mean, it seems so. It was hard on him, me being on the road and stuff so often. Not to mention everything else that comes with hockey. It’s nice that we can focus on us now, doing what we want to be doing.”

Ilya smiled and nodded in agreement.

“What’re your plans, Ilya?” Eric asked. “I know you mentioned kids on the horizon.”

Ilya nodded, looking down into his glass. “Yes. We hope. We don’t get much say about that process but we know what we will do whenever it happens. I’m excited to be a dad.”

And he was excited. If a bit nervous. It was going to be one heck of an adventure and probably enough to keep his mind off of no longer playing pro hockey. Much like Scott, he would have things that would keep him tied to the sport in some ways. The Irina Foundation, being part of the Hockey Alliance, his contract with CCM, and Shane, of course.

He had other interests, too. Plenty of things to keep him busy besides parenting.

“You guys got names picked out?” asked Scott.

Ilya chuckled and shook his head. “No. Not really. I think we are waiting. It is possible we may adopt older children, maybe three to five years old? So, we do not want to change their names.”

“Seems reasonable,” replied Eric.

“I think so. We are looking forward to it. Whatever happens, it will be an adventure.”

“Well, we’re all really excited for you. And Shane. You should feel so accomplished. You’ve had an amazing career.”

Ilya chuckled and smiled. “Is not over yet. But thank you for that and for all of this. It means a lot to me. I appreciate us being friends, Hunter. You, too, Bennett.”

“You’re not so bad, Rozanov,” Eric chuckled.

“An acquired taste, for sure. But no, not bad at all,” Scott agreed.

Ilya laughed and they all clinked their glasses together. Ilya sipped from his, his eyes glancing over to Shane, who was talking to Kip, Kyle, Troy, and Harris. He was laughing, looking beautiful and comfortable. He was dressed casually, in a pair of jeans and a sweater. Ilya’s heart fluttered like it did every time he looked at Shane. He wanted to wrap his arms around him and rest his chin on top of his head, zone out from the conversation and just enjoy touching him, and being close.

Shane took a pull from his beer bottle, eyes shifting to meet Ilya’s. He smiled at him and winked and Ilya grinned back. Shane must have read his mind because he excused himself from the conversation and came over to join Ilya, Eric, and Scott.

“Hey, guys,” he said, putting an arm around Ilya. Ilya reciprocated, draping his arm over Shane’s broad shoulders. “How’s it going?”

The four of them chatted before the rest of the group joined. It was nice, catching up with everyone, laughing, just enjoying a nice night with their peers, not having to hide. It had been six years and it still felt like a novelty.

Ilya turned his head to press several kisses into Shane's hair, nuzzling him, and Shane squeezed him, chuckling.

"Wanna play pool?" Shane asked.

"You are feeling like losing tonight, Hollander?" Ilya replied, the two of them moving toward the pool tables, away from their friends, arms still around one another.

Shane snorted, turning his head to look at Ilya, and rolled his eyes. "I think you have that backwards."

"Is that a challenge?"

Shane's dark eyes flashed with a competitive glint and a familiar heat that Ilya knew so well. Ilya grinned sharply.

"You're on, Rozanov."

"What are the stakes?" Ilya asked lowly.

Shane's eyes smoldered, his cheeks pinked, and he bit his bottom lip. Ilya kept grinning. He knew Shane was getting hard in his jeans. God, he loved playing like this.

"Loser has to give the winner a rim job," Shane replied, rather boldly, which probably meant that Shane was in the mood for that, giving or receiving. Heat pooled in Ilya's belly. He loved when Shane was like this, when he said what he wanted, when he was being brave.

Ilya was almost tempted to let him win simply because he wanted to reward Shane for being so straightforward, but Shane liked the challenge, and he would be pissed at Ilya if Ilya lost on purpose.

This was going to be fun.

Ilya lowered his eyelids and tilted his head. "Okay. We are agreed."

Shane smiled at Ilya and pressed a brief kiss to his mouth before he let Ilya go, wandering over to grab a pool cue.

Ilya lost at pool. He wasn't really mad about it because as soon as they'd gotten into their cab to go back to the hotel at the end of the night, he and Shane were making out. Ilya had absolutely no idea what had gotten into Shane.

But he was *loving it*.

They'd never made out in the back of a cab before. It was pretty gauche and maybe not the best look, but Ilya didn't care. He'd made out with and gotten off dozens of women in the back of cabs. It was just one of the many things that he and Shane had never been able to do out of fear of discovery and now they finally could. Ilya had to admit it was kind of hot.

Shane paid for the cab and Ilya chuckled at noticing him tip the driver fifty percent, before they were both out of the car and making their way back into the hotel.

They managed to resist making out in the elevator but Ilya was kissing Shane's neck as soon as they were at the door to their hotel room. Shane got the door open and they tumbled inside.

Ilya had already shucked his coat and tossed it to the floor, pulling Shane's off of him, and pressed him against the wall. He curled his fingers around Shane's face, his thumb pressed against his jaw.

"So," he purred. "You won."

He turned Shane's head gently, leaning down to drag his lips over Shane's neck, to nip at the delicate skin, not quite marking him. "Do you want your reward?"

"Yes," Shane breathed and moaned as Ilya's free hand slid down to cup and massage him through his jeans. Shane was like fucking granite, which made Ilya smile, and fill with delight. He loved how eager Shane always was.

"I earned it."

Ilya chuckled lowly, a rumble that vibrated through him and Shane.

"You could have just asked me to eat you out," Ilya murmured, biting Shane's earlobe, making him shiver and gasp. "But you just wanted to play a game, didn't you?"

Ilya leaned away so he and Shane could look at each other.

"It's sexier," Shane replied. "Beating you, being rewarded for winning."

Ilya smiled at Shane, lifting his face, brushing their lips in an almost kiss. "So competitive, moy lyubimyy. And *kinky*."

Shane didn't reply. He only huffed, his hands at Ilya's jeans, undoing his belt.

"So impatient," Ilya chided, though he was fond.

"I want you."

"I know, sweetheart. You have me. I promise you will get what you won."

Ilya kissed Shane properly, tangling their fingers and holding Shane's hands above his head. He whined, pressing his body against Ilya's, rippling against him. Ilya slid his thigh between Shane's legs, rubbing up against him, and Shane rutted back.

Ilya nipped at his bottom lip, pulling away from their kiss. He shifted their hands down to their sides, fingers still tangled, walking backward toward the bed in their room, then released Shane's hands.

Shane's lips were kiss swollen and red, his dark eyes full of wanting. Ilya smiled at him, cupping his face, kissing him again, chuckling as Shane's hands fisted into the front of his turtleneck. He made needy noises into the kiss and Ilya just hummed in response.

They parted again and Ilya curled his fingers under the hem of Shane's sweater. He tugged it off of him, pressing a kiss to his bare shoulder.

"Shoes," he chuckled, both he and Shane sliding out of them, and kicking them aside, before Ilya started working on Shane's jeans.

He went slow, unbuckling his belt, undoing his button, unzipping his fly. He pushed the jeans down, dragging his fingers teasingly over Shane's erection through the cotton of his briefs, making Shane whimper, then tugged his underwear down, too.

Shane kicked out of both jeans and briefs, then took off his socks. He stood naked in front of Ilya and Ilya wouldn't have minded just looking at him. Shane was so beautiful, with his long, glossy hair, and his broad shoulders, and plush pecs, and perfect abs. Ilya loved his muscular legs and arms, and his smooth, flawless skin.

He curled his thumb and index fingers around Shane's chin, kissing him very softly and gently, preventing Shane from rushing the kiss, before he slid to his knees, sliding his hands up Shane's sides, over his hips in a worshipful touch. He pressed tender kisses to Shane's stomach, sighing as Shane's fingers slid into his hair.

"Ilya," Shane murmured, tugging at Ilya's curls. Ilya smiled, nuzzling against the firm ridges of muscle under his lips, before teasing his tongue over the head of Shane's cock. He licked the precome from his slit and sucked teasingly just under the head, making Shane pant, before he took him into his mouth. Shane moaned, fingers tightening in Ilya's hair.

Ilya indulged in a few more moments of sucking before he let Shane go and stood up.

"On the bed," he instructed. "Get comfortable."

Shane did as he was told and Ilya stripped off his shirt, jeans, underwear, and socks. He'd let Shane tell him where he wanted to go tonight. It was possible Shane just wanted to come from Ilya's tongue alone or he might want Ilya to fuck him or finger him. Maybe all of the above.

Whatever Shane desired, he would get. Though Ilya wouldn't be above teasing him a bit. He loved when Shane was slutty and bratty, and he would still tease the fuck out of his husband about it.

Shane had placed himself in the center of the bed, on his side, watching Ilya, his head pillowed on his bicep. God he looked irresistible. Like an offering. Ilya's for the taking. As much as this was Shane's reward, it was Ilya's, too.

Ilya stalked toward the bed and climbed onto it. Shane rolled to his back and Ilya loomed over him. He dragged the tip of his index finger over Shane's lips and chin, down his neck, his chest, following his sternum to his solar plexus.

Ilya spread out his hand, resting his palm against Shane's skin, his fingers almost long enough to span the entirety of Shane's chest. Shane shivered. Ilya leaned in close, their lips almost touching.

"Turn over."

"Fuck," Shane breathed.

He rolled over, chest on the mattress, ass in the air. Ilya smiled at Shane's obedience. His eagerness. And he loved the way he looked like this, needy and horny, body shamelessly on display. Ilya kissed his shoulder and moved behind Shane. He leaned over him, resting nearly all his weight against Shane's back, his hips pressed up against him.

He was tempted to tease his dick along Shane's ass but decided against it. He pressed small, tender kisses to Shane's shoulders instead, carefully brushing his hair to the side to get at all of his skin. Shane shivered and made a soft, plaintive noise, and Ilya nuzzled the back of his head.

Ilya kissed the little grouping of freckles at the back of Shane's neck that he loved. He kissed over the breadth of his shoulders, and then down his spine, kissing over each vertebrae with soft adoration. He took his time, slow and gentle, stroking his hands down Shane's back in the wake of his lips.

Shane sighed, pushing back against Ilya just a little. Ilya smiled, leaving a trail of kisses across Shane's lower back, from hip to hip, before moving to his right ass cheek. Shane had such a perfect ass and Ilya honestly loved rimming him for the singular fact that he got to just hold it in his hands the whole time.

It was a simple thing but he couldn't help liking what he liked. Shane's ass was definitely the second most perfect hockey ass in the entire NHL (behind Ilya's). Ilya would put actual money on that. It deserved love and attention.

"Any day now," Shane huffed, annoyed. Ilya chuckled, and sunk his teeth into the firm flesh of Shane's ass cheek in response, making Shane yelp.

"Brat," Ilya murmured, licking over the bite to soothe it, and then kissed it. He loved leaving marks on Shane, dragging things out, and torturing him a little.

"Fucker," Shane breathed. Ilya cooed at him and kissed the bite once more, before pulling Shane's cheeks apart. He leaned in, starting light and soft, the way he knew Shane liked, fluttering his tongue against the puckered skin of his entrance.

Shane sighed, sinking deeper into the mattress, and Ilya listened to the noises he made as he worked his tongue over him. He loved when Shane could let go like this, at ease, not overthinking things.

Ilya loved that Shane had bet this on a game of pool.

“Is this what you wanted?” Ilya asked when he pulled away, stroking his thumbs over Shane’s skin.

“Yes,” Shane breathed. “Fuck yes. You’re so fucking good with your tongue.”

Ilya smiled, pleased as he always was when Shane appreciated his skills. He licked at him with the flat of his tongue, long, firmer strokes, and then smaller kitten licks. Ilya alternated between them, keeping his mouth busy, spreading Shane’s cheeks apart to get deeper, while Shane gasped and sighed and moaned.

Eventually, Ilya poked his tongue into Shane, enjoying the immediate response.

“Oh fuck. Ilya. Holy shit.”

Ilya chuckled and fucked Shane with his tongue, listening to Shane swear and moan and press his ass back against Ilya’s face. He loved how Shane opened for him and how reactive he was under all of Ilya’s touches. *This* turned him on. Knowing that his husband was enjoying himself, that he felt good, that Ilya was able to do this for him.

“I like watching your ass when you play pool,” Ilya mused, pausing to knead Shane’s ass with his hands.

“Of course you, ah, do,” Shane replied.

Ilya chuckled. “It’s a nice ass. Perfect.”

He licked at Shane again, pressing his tongue back into him. Shane moaned.

“Jesus...”

Ilya chuckled.

“Do you want to come like this?”

Shane was breathing hard and took a few moments to respond.

“No,” he managed, sounding breathless. “Want you in me.”

“Okay,” Ilya hummed in reply, kissing Shane’s lower back, before slipping out of bed to grab the lube from his suitcase. He came back, dropping the bottle within reach, and curved his hands over Shane’s hips. He rubbed soothing circles in his lower back and watched Shane relax.

“Good?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah,” Shane replied.

Ilya kissed the middle of his back, then went back to work. He slicked his fingers, teasing the tip of his middle finger against Shane for a moment, before pushing inside. He loved doing this, watching Shane’s body as Ilya worked him open.

Shane was so stunning; the strong muscles in his back and arms and legs bunching and flexing as Ilya's fingers sank into him, curling and twisting and stretching. Ilya stroked over Shane's prostate, fingers in as far as he could get them, watching the way Shane rocked back into him.

Ilya loved the noises Shane was making, panting with pleasure. Ilya wanted to be inside him. He wanted to push into him and pull those noises past those pretty pink lips. He wanted to hear Shane beg for more, to watch the way his hands fisted in the bedsheets, his mouth slack, eyes dark.

"Enough," Shane said. "I'm ready."

Ilya didn't need to be told twice. Shane rolled onto his back and Ilya shifted one of Shane's legs over his shoulders as he slid into him in one thrust. They both groaned in relief and Ilya paused, enjoying how warm and tight and perfect Shane felt around him.

"So good, baby," Shane breathed, arching. "So fucking good."

Ilya started a firm, steady rhythm, watching the way Shane slid against the mattress, his hands balled in the sheets. He turned his head, kissing Shane's knee, pressing his face to his leg.

"You're so good for me, my love," Ilya said in Russian. "Gorgeous. Fuck, you feel incredible."

Shane whined softly and closed his eyes.

"I love when you fuck me," Shane replied, in Russian, and Ilya nipped his skin, sighing, and closed his eyes. He loved when Shane spoke Russian. It completely melted Ilya's insides, hearing Shane's voice speaking Ilya's mother tongue.

Ilya reached for Shane's other leg, his hands curled around Shane's thighs, bending him in half. He fucked him harder, deeper. Their room was filled with the sound of flesh smacking against flesh, Shane's moans, and Ilya's grunts.

"Fuck, Ilya. So good. Holy shit. I love you. Love you inside me. Love when you fill me up," Shane panted. "Don't stop."

Ilya sped up, completely losing any rhythm, and Shane's hand was around his own cock, stroking.

"Oh god. I'm gonna—," Shane whimpered before he came spectacularly all over himself and that was enough to send Ilya over the edge. He moaned, long and low as he came inside Shane, pleasuring rolling over him in intense waves.

Shane reached for him, pulling him close, and Ilya did his best to not completely collapse on top of him.

"You're fine," Shane chuckled. "C'mere."

Ilya huffed, smiling, and shifted Shane's legs carefully from his shoulders. He settled his weight on top of his husband and Shane stroked his hair and shoulders, kissing into his curls.

"Shower and bed," Shane sighed and Ilya nodded, kissing Shane's neck, feeling pleasantly spent and happy.

"Thank you," he murmured. "For tonight. The surprise. Was fun. Good."

Shane hummed, nuzzling into Ilya's hair tenderly.

"Of course. You deserve it. I know it was sort of a joke but... Scott seemed to really want to celebrate you... and you deserve that. To be celebrated. I want everyone to see and recognize how amazing you are."

Ilya moved his head so he and Shane could look at each other. Shane cupped Ilya's cheek, looking at him with soft adoration that made Ilya's eyes prickle.

"I'm so proud of you. You deserve the world, Ilya. I want that for you."

Ilya smiled. "I have it already."

Shane's brows furrowed in scrunched confusion. Ilya chuckled. "You."

It seemed to take Shane a moment to recognize what Ilya was saying. His cheeks went pink and he bit his lip, his dark eyes going glassy. "You can't just— how can you just say things like that?"

Ilya smiled. "I mean it. Is the truth."

"I know," Shane replied, pulling Ilya close, kissing all over his face, his breath puffing over Ilya's skin. He closed his eyes, smiling into it. "Sometimes I can't believe you're real."

"What? Why?"

Shane looked at him, gently carding Ilya's curls behind his ears. He was smiling, awed, and shaking his head a little. "You're so sweet and wonderful to me. The things you say, the things you do. I can't believe that you just... exist... and that I get to have you..."

Ilya smiled, his heart squeezing at Shane's words, and the soft expression on his face.

"I love you so much, Shane."

"I love you, too. So much, Ilya."

Ilya got his arms under his husband and held him close and tight. He felt so lucky. To have such a loving husband and wonderful friends. He was lucky he got to keep this, even if he was saying goodbye to his career.

Retirement might not be so terrible after all.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya have a little Christmas get together... and Ilya gets into a fight...

Two weeks before Christmas

Shane leaned against the doorframe between the living room and dining room, watching the myriad of people gathered throughout the living room, standing or sitting in groups, talking and laughing.

The fireplace was on, though they probably didn't need it, given all the bodies warming the space.

Shane crossed one foot over the other and sipped from his wine glass, content to people watch as teammates and their partners mingled about. Over their years on the Centaurs, he and Ilya had hosted many a team gathering, so this was nothing novel.

Shane wouldn't consider himself much of a host. He preferred small, intimate gatherings with four to six people, while Ilya enjoyed the larger get-togethers, the whole house feeling full to the brim.

Shane had always known that Ilya was more extroverted than he was but seeing it up close was an entirely different experience. It was one of Shane's favorite indulgences, if he was honest, just watching his husband in his element. Ilya would flit from group to group, talking with anyone and everyone, smiling and laughing.

Shane watched him now, easy to spot as he was one of the tallest people in the room. His usual chaotic curls had been tamed with product and nearly an hour with a hairdryer, the curls tight and shiny, falling handsomely around his face. He wore a wine colored sweater and dark jeans, looking like he should be on the cover of a magazine.

He was laughing at something that Harris said, smiling wide and bright. He was the most beautiful and interesting thing in this entire room and Shane would be happy to just watch Ilya socialize for the entirety of their party.

Shane loved how easily he talked to everyone, how he moved effortlessly around the room, making sure that no one felt left out or unattended. And he looked so fucking good while he did it. It was a fucking huge turn on for Shane. He *loved* a competent man and Ilya was all that... and more.

He chuckled to himself, sipping his wine, and smiled as he saw Anya squeeze out of the crowd and make her way toward him. She was a bit of a social butterfly herself, but she

always sought either Shane or Ilya out for reassurance or if she needed a break. It could get overwhelming to be so small and be surrounded by large, loud hockey players.

“Hi, sweet girl,” Shane cooed, crouching down, stroking his hand over Anya’s head, down her back. “You good?”

Shane took some time with Anya, giving her some belly rubs. “We should probably get back to the party, huh?”

Anya gave Shane a look that suggested that *Shane* needed to return to the party and she was going to her doggy bed. Shane laughed and kissed the top of her head, before wading into the crowd.

Ilya was sitting down with Bood, Cassie, Wyatt, Lisa, Dykstra, and Caitlin, chatting about holiday plans and Christmas gifts for those who had kids. Shane moved closer, smiling softly, and rested a hand on Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya looked up at him and grinned.

His expression was warm and pleased, happy to see Shane, though his voice was teasing when he said, “so, you’ve decided to join the party.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Shane replied, smiling, coming around the chair Ilya was sitting in to park himself in Ilya’s lap. Ilya’s arm came around him immediately and Shane rested his arm over Ilya’s shoulders.

He settled in, enjoying the comfort of having Ilya so close, and knowing that Ilya liked this, too. He was such a tactile person and he always appreciated when Shane was openly affectionate with him. He’d gotten more comfortable with that over the years, no longer feeling the knee-jerk reaction to pull back or keep distance between them.

He allowed himself to ease into the group, laughing along, and listening, basking in Ilya’s glow. Shane liked the way he shined in these kinds of gatherings, drawing everyone to him like moths to a flame.

Shane smiled softly whenever Ilya propped his chin on his shoulder, or occasionally bumped his nose or brushed his lips against Shane’s cheek or shoulder. He loved these soft, tiny gestures and the coziness of this moment, just he and Ilya being affectionate, hanging out with their friends.

It had been nice, being able to host their own parties, with people coming to them. It helped that there was no more hiding. They could just be themselves, as a couple, and the relief had made the experience so much more enjoyable.

He smiled at something Ilya said and gently smoothed some of his curls behind his ear, pressing a small kiss to his temple, right near the streak of silver there. Ilya had started sporting more silver in his stubble and that one streak in his curls around the time he’d turned thirty-three. Shane loved it, the color rather stark in Ilya’s golden-brown hair, and Shane thought it made him look distinguished.

“Hey guys,” said Harris. “We’re gonna get going.”

Shane smiled up at Harris and Troy and stood up from Ilya's lap as gracefully as he was able, Ilya following behind.

"Already?" Ilya replied, teasing.

"Yeah," Harris sighed, looking bummed. "We gotta get back to Chiron."

"Thank you guys so much for coming," Shane said, hugging them both.

"Thanks for having us," Troy replied. "This was really nice."

"Have a very merry Christmas," Ilya chimed in. "Be safe getting home."

"Oh, wait!" Shane said, hurrying to the kitchen. He grabbed one of several paper boxes he'd ordered to send people home with leftovers, packing the box full of Ilya's homemade cookies. Ilya had gone a little overboard, pulling an all-nighter to bake them.

"Here," he said, coming back to hand the box to Troy.

"Thanks," Troy chuckled.

"Of course. Thank you both for coming. Really. We were so happy to have you."

They walked Troy and Harris to the door, making sure that they had their coats and shoes.

It was a slow trickle after that, their guests slowly leaving, needing to relieve babysitters and keep to workout routines. Shane brought out the boxes so people could take cookies with them. Eventually the house was empty and it was just the two of them. Shane was exhausted.

"Did you have fun?" he asked Ilya, wrapping his arms around his husband from behind, his cheek pressed to Ilya's back.

"Yes," Ilya replied, his hand resting on top of Shane's. "Did you?"

"I did," Shane sighed. "But I'm so tired."

Ilya chuckled. "Go to bed, then. I will finish up down here."

Shane hummed, pressing a kiss between Ilya's shoulder blades, and let him go. "Not a chance."

They cleaned up downstairs, packing away leftovers, tossing empty bottles of wine and beer. Ilya slid into his winter gear to take Anya out and Shane washed his hands in the kitchen, watching his husband and dog outside. It had started to snow.

Shane smiled, his heart full. He felt so lucky. Even with all of the ups and downs and worries over the years, he and Ilya had built such an amazing life together. He loved what they had and, despite his nerves, he was looking forward to adding a baby to the mix.

They'd been able to enjoy married life and they were both ready for a kid. But Shane still had a lot of feelings about Ilya retiring before him. It made sense and Shane knew why he wanted to do it... but Shane had always hoped they would retire together. He supposed one couldn't predict injuries or other life circumstances. He respected Ilya's desire to retire at the end of this season, wanting to be a stay at home parent, but there was a part of him that felt guilty, too. Yet another sacrifice Ilya was making for Shane and their relationship, though Shane knew that Ilya wouldn't say that that was how he felt, that he probably didn't see it that way at all.

He dried his hands and sighed. There was no use worrying about anything like that right now. They had a lot of season left to play and he would enjoy that time. Not to mention the holidays. Christmas was a relatively relaxing time for them and Ilya did always enjoy spending time with Shane's parents and getting gifts. And tonight had been lovely, as it always was.

Ilya came back inside with Anya and Shane watched them together. Ilya was so gentle with her, taking off her booties, making sure she got pets. They came into the kitchen so Ilya could feed her and Shane reached out to tug at the sleeve of Ilya's sweater.

"Mm?"

He turned, looking at Shane, head tilted in that way he did when he was curious about what was going on, or considering something. His cheeks and the tip of his nose were red from the cold and he looked so stupidly handsome it physically hurt.

"You're cute, you know that?" Shane replied.

Ilya smiled, soft and sweet. He stepped closer, tangling his cold fingers with Shane's, and brought Shane's hand up to his mouth, kissing the back of it.

"Maybe," he chuckled.

Shane smiled and squeezed Ilya's hand, his heart feeling too full in his chest. He let Ilya go, watching him feed Anya, waiting for him so they could go upstairs together.

"You did not need to wait for me," Ilya murmured, putting an arm around Shane, kissing his temple. Shane leaned into him, greedy for Ilya's comfort.

"Come on. Bed."

They turned off all the lights, making sure the doors were locked, and Ilya whistled for Anya. They all went upstairs together after Ilya turned off the fireplace. Shane scooped Anya up, cradling her, and kissed her gently.

She was an old lady now and while she could still get up the stairs, it was slow going, and maybe he just wanted to spoil her a little in her twilight years. Ilya chuckled. He loved how much Shane loved Anya.

They got upstairs and Shane lay Anya down in her luxurious dog bed, making sure she was all tucked in, before getting ready for bed.

Ilya was pulling off his sweater, running his hand absently through his curls. Shane just stared. It didn't matter how long they had been together or how long they would be together, he would always be completely mesmerized by Ilya Rozanov... especially when he was taking off his clothes.

"What?" Ilya asked, glancing at Shane as he wiggled out of his jeans. He was looking at Shane as if he knew exactly what Shane was thinking. Shane rolled his head back, looking up at the ceiling, and sighed dramatically.

"Why do you have to be so fucking gorgeous?"

Ilya laughed and Shane watched the way his abdominal muscles flexed. He moved across their bedroom floor in nothing but his briefs and stood in front of Shane, nearly touching. He was smiling.

"I have the same question for you."

Shane made a dismissive noise but Ilya shook his head, curls bouncing. "Tonight was nice. I like having our friends all here, together, and I like watching you," Ilya said.

Shane laughed and blushed, gliding his hands up Ilya's bare chest, enjoying the warmth and firmness of him, the catch of his chest hair under Shane's palms. Ilya wrapped strong arms around Shane and bent his head to meet Shane in a kiss.

"I like watching you, too," Shane murmured when they broke the kiss. "It's my favorite thing." Ilya smiled and hummed, nipping Shane's bottom lip, and reached his hands down to squeeze Shane's ass.

Shane laughed and ran his hands through Ilya's hair, the curls thick and soft under his fingers.

"Come to bed," Shane sighed, brushing his lips over Ilya's.

"Take off your clothes first," Ilya hummed in reply.

Shane leaned away to do just that.

"I'm going to get into a fight," Ilya said casually to Shane on the bench. It was their last game before the Christmas break and they were up against the rough and tumble team from New Jersey.

Shane turned to look at his husband incredulously.

"No you're not."

“Yes,” Ilya replied calmly. He pointed his glove at one of the Jersey wingers. Sergei Dobrov, number twelve. He had been drafted the same year as Luca, known for his scrappy style of play and fighting.

“He has been picking on the rookies,” Ilya continued. “Being a bully.”

Ilya was right, of course. Shane had noticed that, too, the larger player making a point to target the younger, smaller players, and it was pretty frustrating that the refs weren’t calling him out on it. Shane knew that Ilya wanted to take matters into his own hands. Ilya usually let his teammates fight their own battles and rarely got involved unless someone was being placed in a bad position or retaliation made sense. He protected his team when they needed protecting. The rookies were definitely being fucked with and Shane knew that Ilya wasn’t having it any more. Shane didn’t agree exactly, he avoided fights unless absolutely necessary, but this would certainly get the point across.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” Shane told him as Ilya stood up to get onto the ice for his shift.

“Of course not!” Ilya replied with a flash of his bright smile before he skated away. Shane smiled, too, shaking his head.

It took almost no time at all for the gloves to be dropped. Back in the early days of their NHL careers, Ilya had gotten into more fights. It happened less often now but when it did, any Ottawa fan away or the entire arena at home, went bonkers about it.

Shane had to admit, Ilya was fun to watch in a fight.

Shane watched his husband tussle with Dobrov, losing his helmet, before taking Dobrov down in a move that was straight out of fucking Wrestlemania. Ilya got his arm around Dobrov’s neck and used Dobrov’s body weight against him, slamming him down onto the ice, and landing on top of him. Dobrov was a big guy... but Ilya was bigger.

“Ooo!” said the entire Ottawa bench, wincing, as Dobrov went down hard on his back, probably getting the wind knocked out of him, and the crowd erupted.

Ilya said something to Dobrov before he released him, skating away with a linesman to the penalty box. He made eye contact with Shane and shrugged. Shane shook his head, laughing to himself. Watching Ilya fight was sexier than it had any right to be. Dobrov joined Ilya in the sin-bin and Shane watched them talking animatedly in Russian.

“What’re they saying?” Charlie Hanford asked, sidling up to Shane on the bench.

Shane couldn’t really hear over the crowd and it was hard to read Ilya’s lips, since he was speaking so fast.

“I’m not sure,” Shane replied. “Ilya’s probably telling him to lay off you guys.”

“I owe him a beer,” Chuck said. “He’s always looking out for us.”

Shane chuckled. “That’s why he’s the Captain.”

Ottawa won 3-2 and Shane joined the line to thank Wyatt, then looped back around to go to Ilya, who was waiting on the ice, tapping helmets, and patting backs as each of his teammates passed.

“Good game, Captain,” Shane said. “Nice fight.”

Ilya smiled warmly at him, eyes crinkled. “Glad you enjoyed it. Nice goals.”

Shane laughed and Ilya tapped his helmet, before meeting Shane halfway for a brief kiss. Shane left the ice, Wyatt and Ilya right behind him.

They went to Monks afterward and Shane watched Ilya with the rookies. Mikhail Dmitriev was tall, slightly shorter than Ilya, but the others were all around Shane’s height, and Ilya towered over them. It was kind of funny. The rookies reminded Shane of ducklings sometimes, following Ilya around, gravitating toward him. He had that kind of energy.

Troy joined Shane at the table Shane had commandeered and they split a pitcher of beer. They talked about their respective holidays and when to schedule a playdate for Anya and Chiron. Shane liked Troy. Ilya teased him about it, since Shane had been, in the beginning, a tad jealous of Troy being close to Ilya, and playing on the same team as him.

It seemed silly now, but it had been hard back then, when they had been hiding. Ilya had been right, too. Shane and Troy had a lot in common that went beyond their shared physical attributes and being gay. They had similar mindsets when it came to hockey and playing the game and they liked a lot of the same stuff, both being Canadian boys born and raised into hockey.

It was nice, having a gay friend.

Shane chuckled and sipped his beer, noticing Ilya making his way over to their table.

“Lost your entourage, I see,” he said, setting his beer bottle on the table.

Ilya rolled his eyes. “What? You are jealous?”

Shane chuckled. “Not even a little.”

Troy snorted. “They kind of are like your little fan club, Roz.”

Ilya sighed. “Yes. I know.” He shook his head and laughed softly. “They are very young.”

Shane patted Ilya’s back consolingly but in truth, he kind of liked that the rookies had taken such a shine to Ilya. The rookies got on well with pretty much everyone in the dressing room and Shane appreciated their energy and exuberance. He liked helping them and interacting with them but Ilya had a way with them that no one else really did.

He’d sort of always been that way, Shane had noticed. Kind and patient, giving the starstruck kids attention because he liked their reactions. But he genuinely cared for them and wanted them to succeed. Ilya had never had a Russian teammate before, either, so Shane knew that he had a soft spot for Dima.

Shane changed the topic, updating Ilya about his and Troy's plans for Anya and Chiron, which Ilya was enthusiastic about. They chatted for a while longer and then moved toward the pool tables. Shane decided to watch instead of play, enjoying the way the guys chirped each other, plus he was able to fully enjoy the way Ilya's ass and thighs looked in his jeans as he bent over the pool table. It wasn't a new sight for Shane but it was one that he was always able to appreciate.

Ilya was fucking good at pool, too.

"Do I get a reward if I win?" Ilya teased softly as he waited for his turn.

"Maybe," Shane replied, looking at Ilya through his lashes.

"Only maybe?" Ilya replied. "I guess I have to be very impressive."

Shane just smiled back, chuckling.

"Roz! Stop flirting with your husband! It's your turn!" called Bood.

Ilya chuckled and Shane shook his head, watching him as he walked away, appreciating his swagger, the broadness of his shoulders, and his slim waist. Regardless of how well Ilya did playing pool, they were definitely fucking tonight. Maybe Shane would even be extra good for him, reward him for sticking up for the rookies.

They waited outside at the end of the night for a cab, huddled together in the cold. It was snowing and Ilya had snow in his hair and stuck to his lashes. He looked so handsome and perfect and Shane was so helplessly in love with him and couldn't wait to get him home and naked.

Ilya looked at Shane and smiled and Shane kissed him because he couldn't help himself, cupping Ilya's cheeks in his gloved hands. They both laughed when they pulled apart and Shane ducked his head while Ilya pressed tiny kisses to his forehead. Shane rested his fingers against Ilya's cheeks, giggling softly.

Their cab arrived and they snuggled close in the back seat. They didn't really talk, instead opting to enjoy the quiet.

Ilya paid for their cab and they walked through the gate, up to the driveway, to their front door. Shane wrapped his arms around Ilya from behind, rubbing his face against his coat, between his shoulder blades. Ilya laughed, opening the door.

They got inside, hanging up their jackets, taking off their shoes. Anya came to inspect them and they crouched down to give her pets and kisses. When Ilya stood back up, Shane fisted his hands in his sweater and backed him up against the wall.

"Oh," Ilya breathed, his hazel eyes glinting, joyful and heated. "Hello."

"Hi," Shane replied.

He slid his hands appreciatively down the soft material of Ilya's black sweater, feeling the firmness of muscle underneath, before sliding his hands around Ilya's waist, and into the back pockets of his jeans.

Shane leaned up on his toes and Ilya smirked, meeting him in a kiss. It was a hungry kiss, but slow. Shane dragged it out a bit before pulling back, rubbing his nose against Ilya's.

"Been wanting to do that since the bar," he sighed. "Back you up against the pool table, kiss you." Shane squeezed Ilya's ass. "Touch you."

Ilya licked his lips, eyebrows raising, his expression one of interest.

"Oh yes?"

"Mm."

"And now?" he asked, his own hands shoved into the back pockets of Shane's jeans. "Do I get a reward?"

Shane chuckled. "Is there anything you want?" he asked, pulling one hand out of Ilya's pocket to walk his fingers up Ilya's chest.

Ilya bit back a laugh. "What is this move? Are we in like, a sexy movie from the sixties?"

"Stop it," Shane huffed. "I'm trying to be sexy."

"You were doing fine before the finger thing. That was weird."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Ilya."

"What? Is true."

"Oh my god." Shane made to pull away but Ilya used his hands in Shane's pockets to keep him where he was. Shane huffed. Annoyed.

"Stop being a dick."

"Okay," Ilya replied, conceding, lowering his head to kiss Shane's neck. Shane sighed, closing his eyes, tilting his head to the side to give Ilya more access, his hands sliding under his husband's sweater to get at warm skin.

Ilya kissed his jaw, under his ear, and nipped his earlobe, making Shane sigh. He turned his head, Ilya's hazel eyes were dark and full of heat. They kissed harder this time. Shane wrapped an arm around Ilya's shoulders, cupping his cheek in one hand, Ilya's arms going around him tight.

Shane hopped into his arms and Ilya moved them into the living room, to the stairs, climbing them. Shane hummed happily and went back to kissing his husband, releasing his legs from around his waist when they got to their bedroom so he could be placed on his feet.

“So,” Ilya hummed, brushing his tongue over Shane’s lips. Shane’s lips parted and he opened his eyes, looking up at Ilya. “Do I still get a reward?”

Shane swallowed and licked his bottom lip. “What do you want?”

Ilya tilted his head in that sexy way he did, his eyelids lowered over his eyes, lashes fluttering slightly as he considered Shane, as if sizing him up, or trying to decide where to bite first. His eyes met Shane’s again, smoldering.

“I want your mouth on my cock,” he purred. “And I want you to open yourself up for me while you blow me and then I will fuck you.”

“Oh,” Shane replied, heat flooding through him and going straight to his dick at those words. “Fuck.”

Ilya smiled that sexy crooked smile that had been making Shane fucking crazy for years and the combination of that smile and Ilya’s closeness and his words were almost too much.

“Do you want that, my beloved?” Ilya asked in Russian, his nose brushing Shane’s.

“Yes,” Shane replied, also in Russian, his mouth dry. “I want that.”

Ilya brushed his lips against Shane’s in a tender kiss. “Take off your clothes.”

Shane loved when Ilya talked in Russian pretty much always, but he loved it especially when they were having sex. The fluidity of the words and the way Ilya spoke them made Shane fizz all over.

He stepped back, pulling his shirt off and dropping it to the floor. Ilya was leaning back against their dresser, watching Shane, arms crossed, long legs stretched out, one ankle crossed over the other, casual as could be. Shane looked back at him. If Ilya wanted to watch, then Shane could give him a bit of a show.

Shane undid the buckle of his pants, slow and deliberate, pulling the belt free. He undid the button of his fly, the zipper, and then slowly shimmied the tailored pants off over his hips and ass and thighs. He dropped them to the floor, standing in front of Ilya in nothing but his briefs.

Ilya’s head was cocked to the side, his eyes trained on Shane, never wavering. He held out a hand to him as if to say ‘proceed.’ Shane slid his thumbs into his briefs and pulled them off, his cock already hard and eager and wet.

Ilya smiled at him knowingly. Very nonchalantly, almost absently, he opened the top drawer of their dresser, and pulled out a bottle of lube.

“Come here,” he said, still in Russian, his tone gentle.

Shane came. He looked up into Ilya’s face, wanting to strip him and press himself against his husband, wanton and slutty. But Ilya had plans so Shane would be good. Ilya reached up a

hand to brush Shane's hair behind his ear, smoothing a careful thumb over his cheek, along his freckles. Shane let his eyes flutter closed at the tender touch.

"So beautiful," Ilya murmured, gently nudging a crooked finger under Shane's chin, lifting his head so they could kiss. Shane sighed into it, sliding his hands under Ilya's shirt to touch his skin, running his fingers over Ilya's firm stomach, to his chest.

Ilya huffed a laugh, nipping Shane's bottom lip.

"On your knees," he said. Shane went to his knees as gracefully as possible. He looked up at Ilya, waiting, his heart hammering, his whole body primed. Ilya looked down at him, handing him the lube, which Shane took, then slid his hand into Shane's hair.

Ilya's expression was soft but his eyes smoldered with desire. "So good for me, Shane."

Shane appreciated that Ilya was keeping the Russian simple so he could keep up. His conversational Russian had improved in leaps and bounds over the years and he liked when he and Ilya spoke in Russian together. One, because it was easier for Ilya to express himself, two, because Shane liked being proficient, and three, it was sexy.

Ilya ran his thumb over Shane's slightly parted lips and Shane pressed a kiss to the digit, darting his tongue out to lick it. Ilya smiled, lips quirked up in the corner, and he pressed his thumb into Shane's mouth. Shane closed his eyes, breathing harshly out of his nose as he sucked on Ilya's finger.

It wasn't even close to what he wanted but Ilya seemed to want to drag things out, so Shane would do his best to keep up, as much as he wanted to rush through, and have Ilya fuck him. Ilya didn't tease Shane for long, pulling his thumb gently from Shane's mouth.

Shane opened his eyes, glancing up at Ilya, who nodded at him, and Shane leaned forward, nuzzling his face against the bulge in Ilya's jeans. He reached up with shaky fingers, undoing Ilya's fly, tugging down his jeans and briefs just enough to get to his cock.

Ilya hissed softly and Shane leaned in, wrapping his lips around the head of Ilya's dick, moaning around him in relief. He closed his eyes, loving the taste and feel of Ilya in his mouth. Ilya's hand returned to Shane's head, fingers pushing through the strands, resting at the back of Shane's head.

Shane sucked him blissfully for a few long minutes, enjoying the soft sweet nothings Ilya murmured to him in his native language. Shane pulled off of him to grab the lube, slicking his fingers. He'd done this a few times before but it wasn't something Ilya asked of him often. Shane liked it, the combination of opening himself up for Ilya while worshipping his cock was a heady combination.

Shane carefully worked a finger into himself as he took Ilya back into his mouth.

"Such a pretty mouth," Ilya murmured. "So sweet. Perfect."

Shane hummed around Ilya, hot and horny. He loved doing this. He loved making Ilya feel good, doing the extra work so Ilya could just slide into him later. He bobbed his head along Ilya's cock in time with the slide of his finger inside himself. He worked in a second, moaning around Ilya, which in turn made Ilya sigh.

He raised his eyes to look at his husband, who was looking down at him, curls framing his face, his lips parted, eyes dark, expression intense. Shane whimpered and Ilya cooed softly at him, stroking his hair.

"You're doing so well, my love," he soothed. "Keep going."

Shane did, working his fingers in and out of himself, nudging up against his prostate just a little, eyes rolling closed, making helpless sounds. He worked a third finger in, two knuckles deep. He could probably come like this. He loved having Ilya's cock in his mouth and while he would have preferred a dick in his ass, the fingers weren't nothing. He should have grabbed one of the toys they had, with a suction cup at the bottom. But it was too late for that now. This was enough, but that wasn't what he or Ilya wanted.

So Shane worked himself up a little more before finally pulling back, removing his fingers, catching his breath. Ilya chuckled.

"Were you getting close?"

"Yeah," Shane breathed. "Too close."

"You want me to fuck you?"

"Yes."

Ilya hummed and stroked his hand through Shane's hair again. "On the bed."

Shane stood, a little unsteady on his feet, and went to the bed. He crawled into it, laying on his back, watching Ilya strip off the rest of his clothes. Shane bit his lip, one arm above his head, his other hand tracing patterns on his own skin. He was tempted to touch his cock, but he didn't want to come until Ilya was inside him.

Naked and looking impossibly hot, dick hard, Ilya sauntered over to the bed, lube in hand. He tugged Shane to the edge so he could stand and Shane squirmed.

"You're so eager for it," Ilya purred, still speaking in Russian, bending forward to suck on the head of Shane's cock, which made Shane cry out and arch against the mattress.

"Ilya, fuck," Shane panted. "Want you to fuck me."

"I will," Ilya replied once he'd let Shane slip from his mouth. He slicked himself up and pressed into Shane with the ease and confidence of many years of experience. Shane's eyes rolled back, hands curling into their comforter.

Ilya lifted his legs, curling Shane forward as far as he could go, driving into him hard, just the way Shane liked, adjusting his hips to get at just the right spot.

“Yes. Holy fuck. Just like that. Don’t stop. Oh my god.”

Shane was beyond embarrassment. He was blissed out, the feeling of Ilya’s cock filling him, wringing pleasure from him, was so fucking good. Shane babbled nonsense, saying Ilya’s name, begging for more, telling Ilya to make him come.

And Ilya praised him, his mouth pressed to Shane’s ankle, jackhammering into him, chasing his own pleasure.

Shane came hard, mouth wide open, his hands gripping Ilya’s biceps so hard he might leave marks. He felt like he was in outer space, euphoric, aftershocks pulsing through him as Ilya thrust into him a few more times and came, looking impossibly beautiful and perfect as he did.

Shane smiled dreamily up at him, cupping Ilya’s face, brushing his curls with gentle fingers. He sighed, feeling incredible. Ilya smiled back at him, kissing at his fingers. Ilya gently brushed back Shane’s hair and Shane wrapped his arms around his husband to hold him.

“Okay? Good?”

“More than,” Shane replied. “That was fucking hot.”

Ilya laughed. “Yes.” He kissed Shane’s neck and shoulder, nuzzling him, before he carefully lowered Shane’s legs, and slipped out of him.

They opted for a shower, just rinsing off together, kissing, and holding each other, before getting ready for bed. They snuggled up together, cozy and warm and safe.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

It's Christmas time! And the Centaurs have a rough start in the New Year

Christmas

Ilya was sitting on the floor, looking over the puzzle that covered the entire surface of the coffee table. Dad sat on the sofa across from Ilya, also looking at the puzzle. They each had pieces of the puzzle in their hands, trying to see where the pieces would fit.

Shane laughed softly as his mom bumped her hip playfully against his and put her arms around him.

“Oh, they’re really concentrating,” she murmured.

“They really are,” Shane replied, chuckling, his heart glowing. He loved seeing Ilya and his dad like this. They were always talking and hanging out, doing puzzles together on Christmas. Shane had always loved hearing that Ilya spent time with his parents when Shane was in Montreal and he was relieved to know that Ilya would have his in-laws so close once they had a kid.

The idea of Ilya being alone with a baby made Shane sad and more guilty... to the point of him considering his own retirement. Shane had talked to Mom about it and she had reassured him that she and Dad would stay with Ilya and help out as long as he needed. She’d also encouraged Shane to talk about his concerns, which Shane said he would. And he *would*. Eventually.

But things were fine and he didn’t need to bring up anything that wasn’t worth worrying about right now.

“How’s he been feeling?” Mom asked.

“Good,” Shane replied. “No issues at all. Basically good as new. He’s been keeping up with PT and he’s been doing more yoga with me. No pain or anything.”

“That’s good.”

“Yeah,” Shane replied, watching Ilya and Dad strategize. “I’m glad he’s pain free. That was the biggest thing.”

“Definitely,” Mom agreed.

Shane smiled, hugging his mom. He loved Christmas, if only because he could be all cozy with the three people he loved most in the world.

“You want anything to drink?” he asked her.

“If you’re making tea, I’ll have some.”

“Okay.”

“Dad. Ilya. You want anything to drink?” Shane called into the living room.

Both of them perked up, looking at Shane.

“Yes!” Ilya replied. “And a snack.”

He stood up as Dad asked for a coke. Shane and Ilya went to the kitchen, Ilya rummaging through the desserts that had been packed up. Shane chuckled and kissed his shoulder as he passed him to pull mugs from the cabinet.

“Do you need help?” Ilya asked.

“Nah. I’m good,” Shane replied.

Ilya hummed, wrapping his arms around Shane from behind. Then slowly, after Shane had turned on the burner under the kettle, tugged Shane backward.

“Hey,” he laughed. “What’re you doing?”

Ilya had brought Shane back so they stood in the doorway between one of the halls that led to the bathroom from the kitchen. Ilya pointed upward. Shane followed his finger and laughed as he saw the fake mistletoe that Shane’s parents had hung there.

He looked at his husband, who was grinning at him, and Shane grinned back.

“So sappy,” Shane teased.

“Only for you,” Ilya replied and Shane smiled all goofy back at him, giggling. Ilya smiled and bent his head forward. Shane stood on his toes to cover the distance, kissing Ilya. It wasn’t a sexy kiss, but it was warm and affectionate, Shane’s hand fisted in Ilya’s sweater, and Ilya’s hands cupping Shane’s face.

They parted and chuckled and Ilya kissed the tip of Shane’s nose, and then rubbed their noses together.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Ilya stroked his thumbs over Shane’s cheeks, just looking at him for a moment, his expression soft and adoring and Shane’s heart wobbled in his chest. God, he got to have this

man *forever*. Incredible. Ilya let him go and they moved apart slowly, smiling and chuckling at each other.

Ilya made a small plate of cookies to share with Dad and grabbed two cokes, while Shane made tea for himself and Mom.

Shane brought the mugs into the living room. Mom was sitting next to Dad, watching him and Ilya work on the puzzle. He handed Mom her mug and curled up in an armchair. Christmas music played softly in the background and it was snowing outside. Everything felt quiet and relaxed and Shane thought about how, a year from now, they'd probably have a kid.

He didn't know what to really make of that. It was exciting and also terrifying. Would Christmas be more chaotic? Or still pretty chill? He imagined his parents would be thrilled to have a grandchild to pamper and spoil and Shane was sure that he and Ilya wouldn't have to worry about the kid at all because his parents would be all over them.

That was... kind of nice to think about. His parents being excited and how Christmas might feel a bit extra festive and exciting because it would be all brand new for their kid. And for them, in a sense.

Shane imagined Ilya on Christmas Day, in his pajamas, curls a mess, up early because their kid was up, being all excited while they opened presents, or more likely helping them open presents. Ilya laughing and smiling and being so attentive. He really was going to be a great parent.

Shane sipped his tea, hiding his smile, feeling almost giddy.

Ilya and Dad finished the puzzle and Shane and Ilya started getting ready to go home. They'd already opened gifts and they needed to get back to the dog. Shane and Dad went out to wipe off the car and after a few more goodbye hugs and kisses, they were back on the road.

Shane reached for Ilya's hand and Ilya hummed, holding it, their hands resting on his thigh.

"I was thinking about next Christmas," Shane said softly into the quiet comfort of the car.

"Next Christmas?" Ilya chuckled. "Why?"

"Because we'll probably have a kid by then..."

Ilya shifted slightly in his seat, looking at Shane, and Shane glanced at him, his cheeks heating.

"Yes. Probably," Ilya replied softly.

"I'm excited for that..."

"Me, too."

Ilya squeezed Shane's hand and kissed the back of it, his lips lingering against Shane's skin.

“I can’t wait to see you as a dad,” Shane continued, unable to help himself, the words spilling out. “I’m probably going to die of cuteness overload.”

Ilya laughed, sounding fond. “I cannot wait either. You will be a good dad. I love watching you with kids.”

It wasn’t the first time that Ilya had said that but Shane felt himself glow inside, warmed by the fact that his husband was just as excited to see him as a dad as Shane was to see Ilya as one.

Shane parked the Jeep in the garage and they headed back inside, hanging up coats, leaving shoes at the door, and giving Anya some attention. They went upstairs together, holding hands, and Shane basked in the wonder of living the life he’d never even dreamed he could have, with the man he loved.

January

Ilya was last off the ice, behind Wyatt, following after his dejected looking teammates. They’d had a bit of an up and down start after the Christmas break with a few injuries and new players being called up to fill in the gaps.

In theory, this should have been an easy win. Brooklyn was not doing well this season, comparatively, but the Centaurs couldn’t seem to keep it together tonight.

“Fuck!” Ilya heard Shane yell into the empty hall and what sounded like a stick snapping. It wasn’t usual for Shane to get so emotional after a loss. He tended to withdraw and shut down, not lash out.

Ilya saw him towards the end of the hall, still in his skates, pacing. His stick had been broken and his helmet was discarded with the broken pieces.

“Hollander,” he called.

“What?” Shane snapped back, turning his head sharply to look at Ilya.

“Go cool off,” he replied, still in ‘Captain Mode.’ Shane wasn’t the only one upset at the loss and Ilya had to support the entire bench, not just one individual person.

Shane didn’t reply and Ilya turned into the locker room. He made eye contact with Wiebe and nodded his head, before sitting in his stall, pulling off his jersey, and running a hand through his sweat damp hair.

Wiebe talked to them a bit about the loss and Ilya did the same, trying to pep the guys up a bit. New adjustments after the break were tough and they just needed to get their feet back under them. Then, the media came in. Ilya wasn’t in the mood to talk to them but he offered what he could.

They had had a few unexpected changes in the line up, which meant having to call audibles, and relearn line dynamic and chemistry. It was a difficult adjustment at times, especially when you were in a good groove, and they just hadn't been in top form tonight.

After speaking with the media, he stripped off the rest of his equipment, texted Yuna and David that he and Shane might be late, since his in-laws had come to the game, like they always did. That task done, he finished with the rest of his clothing. The locker room was pretty down, understandably so, no music played, and there was little chatter in the showers.

Ilya took his time, coming back out to the locker room to change back into his suit. Still no sign of Shane. He got dressed, leaving his phone and bag in his stall, and went to find his husband.

Ilya took his time, peeking into rooms, wandering. He found Shane in the small workout room in the arena that they used for warming up. He'd dumped most of his gear and was riding a stationary bike, hard.

Ilya walked into the room and Shane looked up. He was sweating, hair sticking to his face, cheeks pink from exertion. Shane slowed his pace and Ilya stood in front of the bike, just looking at his husband.

"What?" Shane asked, blunt, but not as angry as he had been before.

"You're going to hurt yourself."

"I'm fine."

Ilya rested his hand over his husband's on one of the handlebars and looked Shane dead in the eye. Shane stopped pedaling. Ilya's eyes tracked his face and it was obvious to see the distress under the frustration.

Shane had wanted to win.

But not just win, because Shane Hollander was a competitive little shit on any given day. Shane wanted to win *for Ilya*. Because it was his last season and anything less than an NHL award sweep and the Stanley Cup was unacceptable.

Which was sweet and romantic as hell... but also not healthy.

They weren't in their twenties any more and Shane couldn't afford to overwork himself, not when they had consecutive games to consider, and at least another year or two (or more) of playing for Shane.

Ilya squeezed Shane's hand and he watched Shane's face crumble. Shane got off the bike and Ilya opened his arms, bundling him close as he cried frustrated tears into Ilya's shoulder. He rested his cheek on top of Shane's sweaty head and squeezed him. Sweat had never bothered him and the suit and shirt could be dry cleaned.

"I'm so frustrated," Shane managed, pulling away to wipe his eyes. "That was supposed to be an easy fucking win..."

“Sweetheart...”

Shane sighed, resting his forehead against Ilya’s chest and Ilya kissed his scalp.

“We will not win them all. It isn’t possible.”

“I know... I just... I want to win for *you* . I want this to be an incredible season for you. I want...” Shane’s voice was tight and he took a shuddery breath, cutting himself off.

Ilya smiled, his heart so full. He loved this ridiculous, overly ambitious, sweet man so much.

“I know. But is okay. I don’t need perfect. I want to win, too. Always. But I want to have fun and enjoy playing hockey. Remember? We are together, win or lose. Playing with you is my favorite thing.”

Shane sighed, wrapping his arms around Ilya. They held each other for a while, Ilya gently rocking them back and forth.

“It’s my favorite thing, too...”

They looked at each other and Ilya kissed the tip of Shane’s adorable little nose. “Is not all about hockey, either. We get to have the rest of our lives together. Things don’t stop when I retire.”

Shane smiled and laughed all watery and Ilya kissed between his eyebrows.

“Yeah. That’s true,” Shane sighed. “We’re lucky.”

“Very.”

They hugged, Shane’s face tucked against Ilya’s neck, standing there for a few more moments. Ilya knew that Shane was taking this hard. That every loss and every mistake felt more because of Ilya leaving and it ground against Shane’s perfectionist tendencies. He wanted to reassure Shane that he didn’t need to put that pressure on himself, which was a bit of an uphill battle, since Shane always wanted to be perfect and good.

But he was to Ilya. Always.

“Come on,” Ilya murmured, kissing Shane’s hair once more. “We are the last one’s here and I am sure they will need to close up soon and your parents are waiting.”

“Yeah,” Shane sniffled. “Let’s go. I can shower when I get home.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yeah,” Shane replied as they headed into the hall.

“You already ruined my suit,” Ilya huffed. “And you will stink up the car, too.”

Shane shoved Ilya and Ilya chuckled.

“Dick. Fine. I’ll shower.”

“Get your ass moving then,” Ilya replied and smacked Shane on the butt.

He waited in the locker room while Shane took the fastest shower of his life and then dried off and changed. Yuna and David were waiting for them by security and the two of them smothered Shane, and then Ilya, in hugs.

“You’ll get back on track,” Yuna assured them. “You’re doing well. It’ll be okay.”

Ilya watched Yuna mother Shane, smiling softly at the similarities between mother and son. Ilya was very grateful for his in-laws and their continued support, through everything.

“How are you holding up, Captain?” David asked.

Ilya offered his father-in-law a smile. “Fine. Better than Shane. Was a tough loss but we will be okay. I am not worried.” Ilya huffed a fond laugh. “Your son is very hard on himself.”

David made a noise of agreement. “Don’t we know it.” David looked at Ilya conspiratorially. “He gets that from his mother.”

Ilya chuckled softly. He loved this family so much and he was so grateful to be a part of it.

They parted ways with Yuna and David at the car and Ilya climbed into the driver’s seat, turning up the heat. They drove home in relative quiet. Ilya parked the car, waiting by the door as Shane came around the car.

“You didn’t have to wait for me,” he said and Ilya just smiled, resting his hand on Shane’s lower back as they stepped into the house.

Ilya watched Shane slide off his shoes and hang up his coat, before he sat on the floor with Anya, giving her pets, and letting her lick his face. She crawled into Shane’s lap and Shane hugged her.

Ilya smiled, placing his suit jacket over the back of the sofa, and moved closer to Shane. Shane leaned into his leg and Ilya reached down, gently stroking his fingers through Shane’s still damp hair.

“Anya cuddles are the best,” he murmured and Shane nodded, snuggling Anya a little tighter. “Do you want anything?”

“No,” Shane replied. “I’m fine.”

“Okay,” Ilya hummed and moved away, going into the kitchen for a snack and water. He pulled two bottles out of the fridge and set them on the counter, then grabbed the large tub of Greek yogurt, and some fruit.

He closed the fridge and pulled out two bowls from the cabinet, as well as the granola that Shane liked, from the pantry. Anya came trotting into the kitchen as Ilya was scooping yogurt into the bowls.

“What’re you making?” Shane asked, having followed after Anya.

“Yogurt with fruit and granola,” he replied.

“Two?”

“One is for you.”

“Oh.”

Ilya smiled, splitting the fruit between the bowls, and then topping it with granola.

“I forgot the honey,” Ilya murmured.

“I got it,” Shane replied, going to the pantry and coming back with the organic honey they stocked up on from Beth who had a farm not far from their cottage. Shane set it on the counter, wrapping his arms around Ilya from behind and kissed his shoulder.

“Do you want?” Ilya asked.

“Just a little.”

Ilya drizzled a little honey on Shane’s and a little more than that on his own. He patted the top of Shane’s hand where it rested on his chest and Shane pulled away to grab two spoons.

They both leaned against the counter and ate their yogurt. Ilya could tell Shane was replaying the whole game in his head, going over any mistakes he had made, opportunities he might have missed.

“Stop,” Ilya said, poking at his husband’s ankle with his foot.

Shane raised his eyes sheepishly at Ilya, blushing, knowing he’d been caught and called out. Ilya took another spoonful of yogurt. He stuck the spoon in his mouth, turning it so he could drag his tongue along the bowl, getting all the yogurt, granola, fruit, and honey. He dragged the spoon out of his mouth, knowing that Shane was watching.

Ilya popped the spoon out of his mouth and hummed. Shane was staring at his mouth, lips parted. He shook his head after a moment.

“Stop making eating yogurt sexy,” Shane grumbled and Ilya laughed.

They finished their snack and Shane took the bowls and spoons to clean them while Ilya took Anya out. He always made sure to give her nice walks before practice or games and they had a dog walker who came and took care of her, too.

“You are such a good girl,” Ilya cooed at her, scooping her into his arms, peppering her little face with kisses, and brought her inside.

It looked like Shane had already gone upstairs, so Ilya sent Anya up, then turned off all the lights and made sure the doors were locked. He went upstairs when he was done, finding

Shane already in bed, and Anya in her own.

Ilya smiled at Shane softly, coming around to his side of the bed. He was all snuggled up under their comforter, looking cozy and sweet. He sat on Shane's side, running his fingers through his hair.

"Come cuddle me?" he asked.

"Sure," Ilya hummed, leaning in to press a few kisses to Shane's temple. Shane sighed, closing his eyes, and Ilya smoothed his palm over his hair a few times, before he got up, and got ready for bed.

He hung up his suit, placing it aside to be dry cleaned, along with his shirt, and dumped his dirty socks in their hamper. He brushed his teeth and washed his face, then joined Shane in bed, pulling him close.

Shane rolled over so his face was pressed into Ilya's chest, tossed an arm over his waist, and whined. Ilya chuckled.

"What?" he asked, rubbing his face into Shane's hair.

"I feel so stupid," Shane replied, voice muffled from where it was shoved between Ilya's pecs.

"You are just passionate," Ilya replied, resting his chin on top of Shane's head, and twirling some of his hair around his finger absently. "Nothing wrong with that."

"It was just immature. I shouldn't have overreacted."

"Mm."

Shane sighed. "I can do better..."

"You can," Ilya replied. "But we are not perfect. It happens."

Shane lifted his head to look at Ilya and Ilya looked back.

"You really don't care that much about winning?"

"I would not say that," Ilya chuckled.

Shane smiled. "I guess that's fair." He closed his eyes for a moment. "You want to have fun."

"Yes."

"It's hard to not take things so seriously. It's hard to not push that..."

"I know," Ilya assured. Shane opened his eyes, looking at Ilya, his brows furrowed. "I do not want you to stop being you. I just want you to believe that we can do this. The team. You and me. The world is not on your shoulders, Hollander."

Shane nodded in understanding, looking away for a moment. He looked back up at Ilya, cupping his cheek in his palm.

“I love you,” he said softly, earnestly. “You have done so much for me, for our relationship. You’re already doing so much for our future family. I know you’ve told me that you’re retiring because you want to and you’re ready... but I need you to know how much I’m going to miss you on the ice. And how much I love you for already being the best dad in the world to our kids.”

Shane’s thumb ran over Ilya’s cheekbone and his eyes were all shiny with tears, his bottom lip trembling.

“Shane...”

Shane swallowed. “You are an incredible person, Ilya. You have the biggest heart. You love so deeply and so completely. I want you to know how grateful I am for that and that I’m here for you. Always.”

“Jeez... so emotional,” Ilya teased and Shane smacked him in the chest. He wasn’t wearing his metal wedding ring, having switched it out for a silicone one during the season, but it still hurt.

“Ow!”

“Stop being a dick... I’m trying to be serious here.”

Ilya nodded, his face soft, but serious. “I know, sweetheart.” And Ilya did know.

They had done so much work together, as a couple, and Ilya didn’t doubt how much Shane cared and appreciated him. He had known that Shane might feel anxious about Ilya’s impending retirement, reminding him of the year they had been outed, and how hard things had been.

“I am not hiding anything. I’m ready and we will do this together and I know who I can rely on. Will be fine. And we have time. I know you worry so much because you care but is okay. Let it go. We have to just... let it happen.”

Ilya reached up to brush tears from Shane’s cheek and kissed over his eyelids, and the tip of his nose.

“Easier said than done,” Shane murmured.

“Yes,” Ilya replied. “We are not alone. Is easier together.”

“Yeah. It is,” Shane conceded.

“You’re not losing me,” Ilya murmured, watching the way Shane’s expression eased. Ilya knew that was Shane’s biggest fear. It always had been. That they’d break up or something would happen to Ilya and Shane would lose him somehow. He could see how Ilya leaving

hockey would feel that way to Shane. Things would just be different but he would still be here, in Shane's life. Still his husband.

Shane nodded and nestled himself close against Ilya. Ilya held him close and tight.

"We are good," Ilya assured.

"I know," Shane breathed.

Ilya rolled onto his back, pulling Shane with him. Shane chuckled, half on top of Ilya. He rested his arms on Ilya's chest, his chin on his wrists.

"What would you name our kids?" Ilya asked.

This was a conversation they had visited often over the years. It had started out sort of as a joke, with Ilya saying they should name their son Roger Crowell, after the homophobic dickbag Commissioner of the NHL.

Things had turned more serious the deeper they got into actually adopting.

"Mmm," Shane hummed, closing his eyes. "I like Leonora, as a name. Katrina, too. Ethan. James."

Ilya chuckled. "No Russian names?"

Shane opened his eyes. "Do you want Russian names?"

Ilya shook his head. "Is not required."

"If we have a daughter," Shane said, lowering his eyes, and drawing nonsensical patterns against Ilya's chest with his index finger. "Maybe we can name her Irina? Or... as a middle name?"

Ilya's heart skipped a beat, his eyes stinging a little. "Okay..."

Shane's eyes lifted to look at Ilya again, searching his face. "Do you not like that?"

"No," Ilya replied quickly. "I do. Is just... a lot."

Ilya had talked a lot about grief in therapy. It was a lifelong process, something he would be managing for the rest of his life. Sometimes it would be more manageable and other times it would feel fresh and raw. Every life stage he entered where parents would be present, he felt the acute sting of his grief, missing his mother, wishing she were here to be with him.

He grieved her not being able to see his success in the NHL or meet Shane or see them get married. He mourned that she would never meet her grandchildren and that he would never be able to ask for her support or her advice on parenting. He loved how much Shane wanted to honor her memory and make her as much a part of their life together as possible. It meant so much to Ilya but it was hard, too. Reminding him of what he had lost and things he would never get to have because his mother was gone.

“I’m sorry,” Shane said, smoothing his thumb under Ilya’s eye.

“Is okay,” Ilya replied. “Thank you. Is very sweet. I like it, maybe as a middle name.”

Shane smiled and leaned in, kissing Ilya gently.

“They’re going to be your kids, too. I want them to have that connection to you...”

Ilya smiled. “I will help raise them. That is enough.”

Shane nuzzled his nose against Ilya’s cheek and kissed him there. Ilya squeezed his husband close, their cheeks pressed together.

“I can’t wait to be a parent with you,” Shane whispered.

Ilya closed his eyes and smiled. “Me, too.”

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya are at Ilya's last All-Star Game

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

February

Shane leaned against the bar, waiting for his beer. It was All-Star weekend and the ballroom they were using for the welcome party was jam-packed with players from all over the NHL. Shane turned his head at the sound of Ilya's laugh, spotting his husband almost right away.

Ilya was standing with a few other veteran All-Stars, looking absolutely stunning in a wine colored button down, dark slacks, and expensive looking loafers. He had a cocktail in his hand, a martini maybe, his free hand resting in the pocket of his slacks.

Shane hadn't been able to keep his eyes off of Ilya, which was unsurprising. Shane was so proud of him. Ilya had been named Captain of their team, which Shane had seen coming from a mile away. Ilya had tried to downplay it, saying it was only because he was retiring, but Shane was having none of it.

He felt a lot like the meme of that one actor on the red carpet, holding out his hands, gesturing toward his wife, as she was photographed. Shane wanted to tell everyone who would listen how amazing his husband was, even though everyone already knew.

"You must be feeling real proud."

Shane turned his eyes toward the man standing next to him and smiled.

"Hey, Cliff. I am," Shane chuckled. "You must be, too."

Cliff Marlow was one of Ilya's closest friends. Shane had learned a lot about him over the years, how close he and Ilya had been in Boston. They had reconnected after Ilya and Shane had been outed and Ilya had gone on a few trips with him and some of his former teammates to Cape Cod. Shane had met Cliff on a more formal level when he'd come and visited them at the cottage over the summer a few years back.

It had been sort of embarrassing to learn that Cliff had realized that Shane had been in the hotel room with Ilya during the All-Star weekend before they were outed. Cliff had been really chill and accepting of Ilya and Shane's relationship, and had expressed the importance of his friendship with Ilya.

Shane knew how much it had meant to Ilya to have Cliff be supportive. Shane knew that Ilya would say he didn't care what anyone said about his relationship with Shane, friend or not, but Shane knew that Ilya would have been quietly devastated about losing Cliff's friendship.

Shane considered Cliff a friend now, too.

"I am," Cliff replied. "It's pretty cool to be able to call Roz a friend. A good friend. He's a fuckin' legend."

Shane smiled and turned when his beer was brought over and he thanked the bartender, sliding a tip into the glass on the bar she was using as a tip jar.

"What're you drinking?" Cliff asked.

"Just the pilsner," Shane replied, taking a sip.

"I'll have the same," Cliff said to the bartender.

He turned back to Shane, smiling, and glanced over in Ilya's direction.

"Feels weird knowing he's retiring," he said.

"Yeah. Tell me about it."

"Feels just like yesterday he was welcoming me to the team... and chirping me up and down the ice."

Shane chuckled and Cliff shook his head, though he was very fond about it. "Man, those were the days. Roz ever tell you about that time we went out clubbing in Boston and ended up at a house party in Southie and had to walk back because there were no cabs or trains?"

Shane laughed. "Is this the one when St. Simon lost his shoe?"

"Nope, different time."

Shane shook his head. "Oh my god. No. He didn't tell me."

"Buddy," Cliff said. "Do I have a story for *you*."

Shane stood with Cliff for almost ten minutes, being regaled with this colorful story of Ilya's time in Boston, one of many. They couldn't have been more than twenty-one or twenty-two, Shane wasn't even sure if Cliff had been of legal drinking age at the time.

Shane liked hearing these stories about Ilya. His experience was so different from Shane's own. While it was obvious that Ilya had been the responsible one in the group of young Boston players (he'd been an Alternate Captain for some of his tenure there, before becoming Captain), he had still done so many things that Shane couldn't have imagined doing.

But that was just who Ilya was. And he had always gotten Shane to step outside of his comfort zone. There were so many things that Shane had done because of Ilya's

encouragement and support... and being challenged by him. If there was one thing Ilya was very good at, it was using Shane's competitive nature against him, though usually for their mutual benefit.

Ilya's cologne reached Shane first. The familiar sweet, musky, woodsy smell made Shane's stomach drop pleasantly at knowing that Ilya was so close. "What is going on over here?" he asked, his arm wrapping around Shane's shoulder, and he pressed a kiss to Shane's cheek.

Shane smiled and looked up at Ilya, wrapping an arm around his waist.

"Cliff was just telling me about your adventures in Boston."

"Oh?" Ilya asked, one brow arching in question. He looked at Cliff. "Which story is this?"

"The Southie house party."

Ilya nodded and hummed sagely. "Ah, yes. I remember that night. Kind of."

The three of them stood around and chatted for a bit before Ilya and Shane were pulled away to do some social media content. Afterward, they drifted from group to group, holding hands, or keeping their arms wrapped around one another. There wasn't one person who hadn't come up to shake Ilya's hand and thank him.

Shane liked being witness to that, to seeing Ilya get the appreciation (and admiration) that he deserved. Vets that they'd known for years and rookies alike all came by to say hi. Some of the younger guys even asked for autographs.

Shane was more than happy to blend into the background, going mostly unnoticed, happy to see Ilya get the attention.

They were going to have an interesting weekend ahead of them. They were doing the breakaway competition together. Their gimmick was to use canes instead of hockey sticks.

"Because we are so old," Ilya had chuckled. "That is so dumb."

It *was* dumb but surely it would be hilarious for everyone else.

Shane never really understood these things, but if the fans liked it, he supposed he didn't need to.

At the end of the night, he and Ilya rode the elevator upstairs, arms around each other.

"Tired?" Shane asked as they walked down the hall, hand in hand.

"Exhausted," Ilya replied, he let go of Shane's hand to massage his cheeks with his fingers. "My face hurts from smiling so much."

Shane chuckled. "I bet."

Shane opened the door to their room and they stepped inside, toeing off their shoes, leaving them by the door. Shane watched Ilya walk into the room with the usual little swagger in his step. He picked up a water bottle and opened it, standing at the window, looking out at the Florida night.

Shane didn't allow himself to think about this being the last All-Star game they would share together. Instead, he focused on how nice it was to be here together, to just enjoy the silliness of the weekend, and the nice little vacation they'd get afterwards, just the two of them. Alone.

He came up behind his husband, wrapping his arms around him, one hand sliding underneath Ilya's shirt, since he'd left it mostly unbuttoned, resting over his heart. Ilya rested his hand on top of Shane's, looking over his shoulder.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Ilya turned in Shane's arms, wrapping his own around him, looking at him warmly.

"Do you remember our first All-Star Game?" Ilya asked.

"Mm, I do. I beat you at the shot accuracy contest."

Ilya hummed, resting his forehead against Shane's. "Yes. You did."

"You were in hotel room twelve twenty-one."

Ilya grinned, laughing. "You remember my room number?"

"Of course," Shane sighed, smiling at Ilya, feeling himself blush, though he wasn't embarrassed. "It was a very memorable weekend."

Ilya's hotel room number that weekend was an impossible thing to separate from the memory of that time as a whole. The excitement of the competition during his rookie season, the sexual tension between himself and Ilya, their relationship combative and explosive and sexy. Shane had been so needy and desperate for Ilya, scared of his own feelings, but unable to resist the magnetic pull between them. He thought about those two kids a lot, looking back now, with seventeen years of distance. Those boys had no idea what the hell they were in for.

Ilya was smiling as he closed his eyes. "I wanted to fuck you. I asked for your phone number."

Shane huffed. "You asked for my phone. And gave me your number. *Lily*."

Ilya laughed again and god, Shane loved that laugh. Deep and rich. It was a joyful sound, uninhibited, and it was one of Shane's favorite sounds in the entire world.

"*Jane*," he replied, opening his eyes, all crinkled from smiling.

Shane laughed too, reaching up to brush loving fingers over the silver streak of curls right at Ilya's temple, and smoothed his thumb gently over the deepened lines at the corner of his eye. He cupped Ilya's cheek and held him there, sweet and tender.

How lucky he was to grow older with this man. To have shared so many firsts with him, to still have so many firsts ahead of them that they got to experience together. Shane leaned up on his toes and kissed Ilya. He wrapped his arms around Ilya's neck and Ilya pulled him close.

They broke apart when lips became sore and oxygen was necessary again. They chuckled at each other and Ilya brushed his lips over Shane's forehead.

"Do you remember what we did that night?" he murmured.

"Mm. I do," Shane sighed, lifting his eyes to look at Ilya. "Do you want me to blow you? Then roll around in bed for a bit, making out, before you blow me, proposition me, then we jerk each other off in the shower?"

Ilya's head fell back as he laughed and Shane snickered, resting his forehead against Ilya's collarbones.

"I must admit," Shane sighed. "It was stupidly sexy... even if it was also infuriating."

"My M.O.," Ilya chuckled, stroking his fingers through Shane's hair at the back of his head.

Shane made a noise of agreement, pressing a kiss to the hollow of Ilya's throat, loving the way his cologne smelled on his skin, with his own smell underneath.

"I wouldn't mind blowing you," Shane hummed. "But I definitely want you to fuck me."

Ilya looked at him, wearing his sexy, crooked smile, hazel eyes full of heat and promise.

"I can make that happen."

Shane and Ilya stood at the entrance to the rink, surrounded on both sides by fans in the stands, and the camera crew. They were dressed in all their equipment, no helmets, waiting to be called onto the ice.

"Ready for this?" Ilya murmured and Shane smiled up at him.

"Yeah, old man. Are you?"

"Who are you calling old? You are, like, much older than me."

Shane laughed and shook his head. He was only thirty-six days older than Ilya. They were called out onto the ice and skated out to much fanfare, making their way to center ice, coming to a stop by the MC for the day.

Ilya was asked about how he felt with this being his last All-Star game and Ilya gave his usual, casual response. He was just happy to be here and to enjoy himself. Shane watched, full of fondness.

He was asked a similar question and responded in kind. He was happy they were here, having fun, and how lucky they were to have been All-Star players for their entire careers.

The goalie they were up against was announced and their sticks were traded for canes. Shane couldn't help but laugh at the ridiculousness of it all.

They passed the puck back and forth as they made their way from center ice, chirping each other. It was surprisingly hard to do this without the right equipment but they managed and Ilya "scored", hands raised as he skated by the boards to cheers and applause, then wrapped his arms around Shane. Shane held him and kissed his cheek.

The judges gave them all tens.

The rest of the competition was fun to watch, as always, and the rest of the day was relaxed. They went out to dinner with Cliff, J.J., and a few other friends of theirs from around the league.

After that, they went for a quiet moonlit walk on the beach.

They carried their shoes and held hands, walking along the damp sand, the surf lapping at their ankles.

"I wanted to walk with you on the beach," Ilya murmured. "Back in, what, twenty seventeen?"

Shane hummed, leaning into Ilya, resting his head on his shoulder for a moment as they walked. "Yeah," he sighed. "I think that would have been nice... but I don't know if we were ready for that."

Ilya chuckled. "No. Definitely not." He was silent for a moment and then said, "I was so in love with you... even then..."

Shane smiled, his heart full to bursting. He squeezed Ilya's hand and nuzzled his face against his arm.

"I was, too," Shane replied. "But I think I love you even more now..."

"Aww, sweet," Ilya cooed, pressing a kiss into Shane's hair. "Me, too."

This wasn't the first moonlit stroll on a beach that they had taken and it certainly wouldn't be their last but Shane couldn't help that things felt a bit full-circle at the moment. All the things his younger self had never allowed himself to want, he now had.

"Hey."

"Mm?"

“I love you,” Shane said, pressing a kiss to the outside of Ilya’s upper arm, over his loon tattoo. “And I’m proud of you.”

“I know,” Ilya replied, a smile in his voice. “Thank you.”

The rest of the weekend passed quickly. They lounged by the pool and Shane watched Ilya with the kids, some of whom they had known since they were babies. It made Shane’s heart flutter, filling him with anticipatory excitement about their own impending parenthood.

The All-Star game itself was fun and low-key, both of them enjoying their time on the ice together, playing on the same line. Shane had moved to right wing this time around, letting Ilya play center.

At the end of the weekend, they said their farewells, and picked up their rental car to head to Key West for the rest of the break before they’d return to Ottawa.

Shane had been looking forward to this part of their trip. He wanted to be somewhere warm and tropical and he wanted Ilya all to himself. He knew that the All-Star game would leave them both feeling drained and Shane was sure that Ilya would have bigger feelings about it... having to start saying goodbye to different parts of his pro career.

They’d rented an adorable little bungalow, newly renovated, with its own private beach. It was a small house, one bedroom, a bathroom, a small living room, a galley kitchen. There was a small back deck, and then the beach right there.

They unpacked the car, leaving their bags in the bedroom, and unloaded the groceries in the kitchen. Ilya was quiet, a little withdrawn, and Shane rested a hand on his back as he folded up one of their reusable grocery bags. He looked at Shane curiously.

“Do you want to be alone?” Shane asked gently.

Ilya blinked at him for a moment and then nodded, a few curls falling into his face. Shane smiled and tucked them behind Ilya’s ear, smoothing a thumb over his cheekbone.

“I can handle things. Go.”

Ilya offered Shane a little smile and a kiss, slipping his phone into his pocket and leaving the bungalow. Shane watched him through the sliding glass door that led to the deck, as Ilya walked down toward the water.

Shane was sure Ilya was feeling a lot of things right now and he hoped he’d be able to take care of Ilya for the rest of the time they had on their break. Whatever Ilya needed.

Shane finished unpacking their groceries, packing away their grocery bags, and then unpacked their suitcases. He hung up their suits, started a wash, and then put the rest of their clean clothes into the drawers in the bedroom. He placed toiletries in the bathroom and left the lube and a small vial of fancy oil he’d bought on the bedside table.

Task complete, he put on a podcast, and started making dinner. By the time Shane was done, Ilya was back, sitting out on the sand, legs curled up to his chest. Shane washed his hands

and dried them off, then went outside.

It was a beautiful day, though still February, so the sun would be setting soon. He paused on the deck, just watching Ilya. The breeze made his curls dance, his linen shirt tugged this way and that.

Shane walked across the warm sand, the breeze ruffling his own hair and shirt.

“Hey,” he called gently. Ilya turned. His eyes looked a little red but he smiled and Shane rested a hand on top of his windswept curls as he leaned his head against Shane’s thigh.

“Good walk?” he asked.

“Was okay,” Ilya replied.

“Are you hungry?”

“Always.”

Shane chuckled, scratching his fingers against Ilya’s scalp. “C’mon. I made tuna melts.”

Ilya looked up at him, one eye closed against the sun, and smiled, before he got to his feet. Shane held out his hand and Ilya took it and they went back to the house.

Their evening was spent in easy, companionable quiet. There was a small fire pit out on the deck that they played around with and sat out there together, Shane in Ilya’s lap, talking about everything and nothing.

“Is just... weird,” Ilya sighed. “We will be back but is hard to think about only watching.”

“Yeah,” Shane replied, twisting some of Ilya’s curls around his fingers. “It is weird. I feel like... I don’t know... we won’t know until we’re there.”

“Yes. Exactly. Feels... surreal? Is that the right word?”

“Yeah. It is surreal.”

Ilya sighed again and Shane kissed the side of his head. “You don’t have to rush anything. If you feel sad, that’s okay, or if you feel normal, that’s okay, too.”

“You’re right,” Ilya said. “I am a little sad but mostly I won’t know until later.”

“There’s no right or wrong way. I’m here for you, no matter what.”

“I know.”

Shane turned his head and Ilya tilted his up for a kiss. Shane obliged, kissing Ilya’s top lip, then his bottom lip, then both at once. They cuddled together, watching the fire, before heading inside as the wind and chill started getting the better of them.

Shane doused the fire, following into the house after Ilya, closing up the doors, drawing the curtains. The bungalow was cozy and comfortable and Shane shooed Ilya into the bedroom, making his husband chuckle.

Shane found Ilya lounging in the hammock that was off to the side of the deck. He was wearing a wide brimmed hat that looked so good with his curls, a pair of sunglasses, no shirt, and swim trunks. He had one hand resting behind his head, the other laying across his chest. His curls had lightened to a coppery-gold and his skin was beautifully sun-kissed. He looked so perfect and summery and relaxed and Shane felt a little bad that his first instinct was to interrupt Ilya's quiet moment by crawling on top of him.

He approached the hammock and Ilya turned his head, holding out his hand.

"Come to join me?" he asked.

"If I can fit," Shane chuckled.

"You can fit," Ilya chuckled.

Shane had opted for a silly Hawaiian shirt he'd left unbuttoned, his own swim trunks, and a backwards snapback. Not nearly as fashionable as Ilya. Shane wasn't as big of a fan of hammocks as Ilya was. He always felt so awkward getting in and out of them, which never ceased to entertain Ilya.

Ilya chuckled, pulling Shane against him, and Shane slung a leg over his hips, his hand sliding over Ilya's chest, curving around his ribs.

"What is this hat?" Ilya murmured, sounding fond.

"They gave it to us at the All-Star game."

"Did they?"

"Yeah."

Ilya shrugged. "You look like a frat boy."

Shane laughed.

"Thank you?"

Ilya made a face but he started to smile. "Is not really a compliment."

"Hey! That's so mean!"

"Is not mean! What even is this outfit?"

Shane turned his head and nipped at Ilya's shoulder. "Whatever happened to me being able to make a paper bag look good?"

"I was wrong."

"Ilya!"

His husband started laughing and Shane pouted, even as Ilya held him, pressing kisses to his face, his arms sliding around Shane to hold him. But Shane couldn't be upset. He knew the outfit wasn't great and he didn't care because it was just the two of them.

"You look cute," Ilya conceded and Shane rolled his eyes, though he smiled.

They were mostly staying off their phones, posting a few things here or there on social media, but not indicating where they were. Shane liked the privacy and the quiet.

They settled down together in the hammock and napped in the shade, then went for a swim, then came back for lunch.

They cleaned up after lunch together and went on a nice walk along the beach. They'd gotten a workout in that morning, but it was nice to be leisurely and take their time, enjoying the sun and surf.

Ilya seemed in good spirits overall. He was chatty, smiling and laughing, and Shane wanted to pamper him. They got back from their walk and prepped dinner, then sat on the deck, watching the sun set, finishing the bottle of wine they'd opened yesterday.

They washed and dried the dishes after dinner and showered off sand and sunscreen, before retreating to the bedroom.

"You are sure you do not want to have sex on the beach?" Ilya teased as Shane crawled into bed, laying out next to Ilya.

"Absolutely not," Shane replied. "I don't want sand everywhere."

Ilya laughed, his head resting on his palm, propped up on his elbow, looking at Shane.

"Haven't you ever tried it?"

"No. And I don't want to."

"But it's romantic! And sexy!"

"I don't want fucking sand up my ass, Ilya."

Ilya laughed, tossed back on the bed, and Shane couldn't help his own smile, or chuckle, just watching his husband. Ilya just looked so gorgeous, happy and handsome, his muscles flexing as he laughed, filling Shane with delight. He loved when Ilya was so joyful.

"I have another idea," Shane offered.

Ilya rolled back over and raised a questioning brow at him, still smiling. Shane let his eyes wander, from Ilya's chaotic bronze curls, down his handsome, grinning face, to his broad, muscular chest, over his obliques, and stomach, to one strong muscular glute and hamstring.

"What idea?"

"A massage."

Ilya's other eyebrow joined the first. "Oh yes?"

"Mmhmm. I want to pamper you."

This wasn't the first time they'd done this. Ilya was very into massages, as a general concept. Sports massages weren't super comfortable but they were helpful, and Ilya was a fan of ones for relaxation, too. Shane wasn't really all that into having people touch him that weren't people he knew unless absolutely necessary, but Ilya was an incredibly tactile person. If Shane had to name his number one love language, it was physical touch (his own was words of affirmation).

The last time Shane had given Ilya a massage it had gone over pretty well and so Shane didn't think Ilya would turn him down. He also just wanted Ilya to feel a bit more loved on after the All-Star weekend.

"You do?" Ilya asked, curling his arm underneath his head, looking at Shane, fluttering his lashes at him a little. Shane smiled.

"Yeah," he replied. "I don't have to if you don't want me to."

"I didn't say that."

Shane chuckled, reaching out to gently drag the tip of his finger from between Ilya's brows, down his nose, gently booping the tip.

"Is that okay?"

"Yes. Of course," Ilya replied, nodding, smiling back at Shane. "I like being pampered."

Shane laughed and playfully rolled his eyes. "I know."

Ilya rolled onto his back and stretched out, which Shane was sure was just for him to shamelessly put himself on display. It worked. Shane leaned in, pressing a kiss over Ilya's bear tattoo, then his cheek, before rolling over and grabbing the oil he'd bought. He dangled the bottle in front of Ilya's face and Ilya reached up to take and examine it.

"Fancy," he said, popping the cap and sniffing at it. "Smells good."

"It's supposed to be sex safe, too," Shane replied.

"Impressive."

Shane chuckled. He bent his head, pressing a few slow, delicate kisses to Ilya's long neck, and bit his earlobe gently. Ilya hummed.

"How do you want me?" Ilya asked.

Shane sat up, gesturing at Ilya to get off the bed. He grabbed an extra sheet and tossed it over their comforter, making Ilya laugh, before he got back into bed, and grabbed his pillow, resting it on his lap. "Come here."

Ilya climbed back into bed and moved to lay his head down on the pillow in Shane's lap. Shane scooped his hands under Ilya's head, gently moving his curls out of the way, then looked down at his husband.

"Comfortable?"

Ilya looked back, nodding. Shane smiled at him, and Ilya smiled back.

"Tell me if you don't like something," he murmured, gently brushing his hands over Ilya's hair, watching as Ilya's eyes fluttered closed.

"Okay."

Shane started at the crown of Ilya's head. He massaged his fingertips against Ilya's scalp, smoothing his thumbs over his hairline in soothing circles. Ilya's lips parted slightly, his face smoothing out.

Shane liked doing this. He liked touching Ilya like this, watching the way any tension he held melted away under Shane's hands. It gave him the time to just look at Ilya, too, to revel in how handsome he was, the fact of which Shane would never tire of. And there was the added bonus of turning his husband on.

He moved his hands under Ilya's neck, mindful of his chain, using the pads of his fingers to massage along the base of Ilya's skull, down the back of his neck, to the top of his spine.

"Okay?" Shane asked softly.

"Yes," Ilya murmured back. "You are good at this."

Shane smiled. He knew he was. He'd done a ton of research about sensual massage, wanting to know all the different ways he could use touch in his intimacy with Ilya. Ilya was always affirming him, praising him, expressing his love and appreciation, which always made Shane feel good and he wanted to be sure that Ilya felt the same. Hugs and kisses just because, a foot rub, or playing with his curls, something like this, and then just sex in general, of course.

He'd worked hard to be good at this and there was a lot of pay off. Ilya got all relaxed and felt all loved up and Shane felt accomplished. He could feel the way Ilya melted into the mattress as Shane moved down to his shoulders, carefully working out the few knots he felt there.

Ilya tended to hold tension in his shoulders and arms.

Very carefully, Shane shimmied out from under Ilya, the two of them laughing softly as Shane settled next to Ilya. Ilya opened one eye, looking at Shane, and Shane kissed his cheek.

“Sorry,” he murmured.

“Is fine,” Ilya smiled.

Shane picked up the oil this time, pouring a generous amount in his palm, and rubbed his hands together to warm it. He straddled Ilya’s waist, running his slick hands over Ilya’s right arm, pressing his thumbs into Ilya’s shoulder, then running firm hands down his bicep, to his elbow, and back up.

Shane liked feeling the muscle under his palms, appreciating Ilya’s size, and how fit he was. He moved onto Ilya’s forearms, following the prominent veins, moving to Ilya’s hands. Ilya had nice hands. Large, strong palms, and long, surprisingly elegant fingers. Shane threaded his fingers through Ilya’s, rotating his wrist in one direction, then the other, then rubbed his thumbs over his palm several times. Finished, he pressed a kiss to Ilya’s palm, and then lay his hand back down at his side.

Shane repeated the action on Ilya’s other arm and hand, kissing Ilya’s palm, and then over his wedding band, before he moved on to massaging his thumbs over the tops of Ilya’s pecs. He bent forward, dropping a kiss to Ilya’s sternum, teasing his thumbs over Ilya’s nipples. Ilya made a soft noise of pleasure and Shane hummed, lingering, because he knew that Ilya liked it. Then he kissed Ilya’s solar plexus, before moving to his husband’s legs.

“Want these off?” Shane asked, teasing his finger under the hem of Ilya’s briefs.

His eyes were open, half-lidded, looking at ease. He wasn’t fully hard but Shane could tell it probably wouldn’t take much more to get him there.

“Sure,” he replied and Shane slid his fingers into the waistband, tugging the briefs off and down Ilya’s long, long legs. He picked up the oil again and took a moment to appreciate how fucking gorgeous his husband was.

Shane wanted to take a million pictures. In the beginning, he’d been pretty paranoid and hadn’t saved many of the sexy pics Ilya had sent him, but after their wedding, he’d stopped caring as much. He’s started saving dick pics and nudes that Ilya sent him and he wasn’t above taking pictures of Ilya in bed.

But he wouldn’t back it up to his Cloud and instead stored everything on an encrypted, two-step authentication application with government level security, that he had done extensive research about.

Ilya just looked so perfect. Adonic. It was so unfair. They’d been living together for more than six years and Shane still... *STILL* got hard when Ilya just *thought* something sexy in Shane’s direction.

“What?” Ilya asked. His eyes were closed but he knew Shane’s eyes were on him. Shane felt his cheeks heat.

“You’re unfairly hot,” he replied.

“Really?” Ilya replied, as if he didn’t know that he was. He stretched his arms above his head because he knew exactly what he looked like when he did. Shane’s heart fluttered, heat pooling in his belly, and his cock gave a hopeful twitch.

“You’re supposed to be relaxing,” Shane huffed. “Tease.”

“I am,” Ilya replied, smiling. “I am *so* relaxed.”

Shane rolled his eyes and shook his head, before he went to work on Ilya’s quads, which were basically just pure muscle. He chuckled softly to himself, smoothing firm circles with his thumb above Ilya’s knee.

“I should have just brought the Theragun for your thighs,” Shane murmured and Ilya laughed, flexing his quad, which made Shane laugh.

“You’re doing great,” he hummed, sounding genuine. He was smiling, and Shane chuckled, dropping a few kisses to Ilya’s hip, moving to the outside to kiss over his scars, before moving back to the crease of his groin, and the top of his quad.

“How’re you feeling?” Shane asked.

“Nice,” Ilya replied, peeking his eyes open to look at Shane, his expression soft and appreciative. “Very relaxed.”

“Good.”

By the time Shane was done with Ilya’s other quad, Ilya was hard, his dick laying against his stomach, the head poking out of the foreskin. Unable to help himself, Shane kissed it, darting his tongue out for a little taste, making Ilya hiss. Shane pulled away, licking his lips, his own dick hard in his briefs.

He paused to admire his work so far, appreciating the way Ilya looked, his golden skin glistening with oil. He ran his hands down Ilya’s shins, then massaged the tops of his feet, though he didn’t linger, as Ilya could only tolerate having his feet touched for so long.

“Roll over,” Shane said and Ilya did, looking way too sexy and elegant as he did so, laying down on his stomach. Shane started at Ilya’s upper body first. He kissed the back of his head as he straddled his waist, massaging over Ilya’s shoulders, his shoulder blades, down his spine.

The room was quiet, comfortably so. Just the soft sounds of breathing and hands sliding over skin.

“Oof,” Shane said under his breath, feeling a knot in Ilya’s back under his fingers. Ilya grunted.

“Sorry,” Shane said. “Want me to keep going?”

“You can go for it,” Ilya replied. “Is fine.”

Shane worked his hands over the knot as carefully as possible until it released and he felt Ilya sag under him.

“Better?” he soothed, leaning down to press a kiss over the spot.

“Yes,” Ilya groaned, relieved. Shane smiled, brushing his lips over Ilya’s skin tenderly, and kept going.

He smoothed his hands over Ilya’s back, working into the muscle, all the way down his spine getting in a few good cracks even that had them both laughing, and Ilya sighing in relief. Shane got to Ilya’s lower back, pressing a kiss to his back dimples, massaging his fingers into the top of his glutes.

Shane kissed his left ass cheek and then bit it playfully, sliding his tongue over the bite, then kissing it, before he worked on Ilya’s hamstrings, his calves, his ankles. He finished with the bottom of Ilya’s feet.

Ilya looked like a boneless puddle on the mattress and Shane kneaded his ass a little, kissing along his waist. With an oil slick finger, Shane slid a tentative finger between Ilya’s ass cheeks, stroking the tip over Ilya’s hole.

Ilya turned his head and sighed, opening one eye to look at Shane.

“Keep going.”

“Roll over,” Shane murmured and Ilya did.

Shane settled between his legs, wanting to blow him and finger him at the same time. He wanted Ilya’s cock in his mouth, his taste on his tongue, while he finger fucked him. And Shane loved when Ilya was like this, loose and relaxed, his legs were spread wide, his arms above his head, his lips slightly parted.

Shane went slow. He circled his finger carefully against Ilya’s hole, rubbing against the puckered skin in soothing strokes. He slid his finger up, along his perineum, then cupped Ilya’s balls in his palm, squeezing slightly, tugging them, rolling them in his palm.

Ilya swore in Russian, his breathing speeding up. Shane smiled to himself, taking his time, rotating between Ilya’s balls, his perineum, and his hole. When he had Ilya sufficiently panting, he bent over to worship his cock.

Ilya was usually pretty talkative during sex. He liked dirty talk and murmuring praise to Shane but apparently he was *no thoughts, head empty*, because the only noises he was making were soft whines and pants and moans.

Shane kitten licked and kissed Ilya’s dick, sucking under the head, eyes lifted to watch the way Ilya arched up, one hand sliding into Shane’s hair. Shane slid his lips down over Ilya’s

shaft, taking him all the way down, and slid a slick finger into him at the same time. It was easy to do, with Ilya open and loose for him.

Ilya made a punched out noise and Shane stilled for a moment, before he bobbed his head and worked his finger in and out of his husband carefully. Ilya was babbling in Russian, definitely too far gone for English, which Shane loved. He knew he was doing something right when Ilya was speaking in only garbled Russian during sex.

He pulled off Ilya slowly so he could focus on adding a little more oil. He pressed a kiss to the inside of Ilya's thigh, feeling him quiver. Shane stroked his finger against Ilya's prostate.

"Holy shit," Ilya rasped out and Shane smiled, pleased. He loved doing this for Ilya, loved what he could reduce him to, loved making him feel amazing. He kept up a slow rhythm, finger fucking Ilya, rubbing intermittently against his prostate, and put his mouth back on his husband's cock.

Shane knew that Ilya wasn't going to last long at all.

"Fuck," Ilya breathed. "*Shane.*"

Shane hummed around him, listening to Ilya moan and gasp, his fingers tightening in Shane's hair.

"I'm going to come," Ilya warned, in Russian, a moment before he clenched hard around Shane's finger and came in his mouth. Shane moaned softly, swallowing around Ilya. He pulled off of him carefully and slid out his finger, sitting back on his heels. He admired his work, swiping a thumb over his mouth.

Ilya was sprawled out on the mattress, looking perfectly, beautifully debauched. His curls were wild under his head, bright against the dark pillowcase, legs open, one arm stretched up, hand pressed to the headboard. Shane pressed little kisses to his hip, along his abs, up to his chest, waiting for him to come back down, watching him open his eyes.

"Holy fuck, Hollander."

Shane chuckled, stroking his thumb over Ilya's pec.

"Good?"

"Fucking great," Ilya replied, running his hands over his face and into his hair. He looked at Shane, grinning his lopsided, sexy smile. He looked so relaxed and handsome, Shane wanted to rub himself all over him.

"Come here. I'm going to blow you."

Shane laughed softly, straddling Ilya's chest, resting his hands on the headboard, Ilya's lips wrapping around his dick. It didn't take much. Ilya squeezed his ass in his hands, using his considerable skill, and Shane was right at the edge faster than he'd anticipated.

"Ilya. Shit. I'm close."

Ilya hummed in reply and that was enough for Shane. He let his head fall back, moaning long and loud as he came down Ilya's throat. Ilya released him and Shane slid off of him, flopped on his back. He rolled to his side, tossing an arm and a leg over Ilya, and met him in a sleepy, messy kiss.

"Love you."

Ilya smiled. "I love you, too."

Shane ran his hand into Ilya's hair and Ilya kissed him, slow and gentle. They parted and smiled at each other. Shane brushed their noses together and kissed Ilya again, simply because he could.

"I'm so proud of you," he murmured, his thumb brushing back and forth over Ilya's scruffy cheek. "Of who you are and everything you've accomplished. I'm so proud to be your husband."

Ilya closed his eyes and Shane gently swept his thumb underneath one, just looking at him. He thought about falling in love with Ilya Rozanov at seventeen, at nineteen, at twenty-five, thirty, right now, at this very moment.

Shane had been falling in love over and over again and he would keep falling for the rest of his life. He felt so lucky and so privileged to be with Ilya. To get to love and be loved by him.

Mine. All mine.

Ilya opened his eyes and smiled at Shane, sweet and shy.

"Thank you," he murmured back.

They snuggled together, close and tight, and fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Ilya's cologne is Le Labo's Tonka 25

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane are in the Stanley Cup finals

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

April

“I know that you don’t normally like to talk about the playoffs or the Cup finals,” Galina said gently as Ilya sat across from her in her office.

He smiled at her, chuckling softly.

“But I feel like we need to talk about this one.”

Ilya nodded in agreement, looking down at the familiar carpeting, and the coffee stain in the right corner that his eye always drifted to when he was in his therapist’s office.

“Yeah,” he replied. “We should.”

Galina was quiet, letting Ilya gather his thoughts. He wasn’t sure where to start exactly. He was full of so many warring feelings, and he wasn’t entirely sure how to articulate them. He closed his eyes and took a few breaths.

One at a time.

“We’re playing really well,” Ilya said, opening his eyes, and looking at Galina. “I know this thing is going to go to game seven and anything could happen. Vegas is a great team. We have some stiff competition. But... we’re playing well.”

Galina nodded, a small smile on her face. She knew that Ilya didn’t like talking too much about the playoff games. It was a bit of hockey superstition and for his own general mindset. Things could change at the drop of a hat. He didn’t want to be too cocky... or too hopeful.

“It’s like any other time we’ve been in the finals. Head down. One game at a time. It’s a marathon, not a sprint. It’s taxing, mentally, emotionally, and physically. So... we just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other.”

“That’s true,” she agreed.

“I’m taking care of myself. Shane makes sure I do. Lots of stretching and rest. Not overexerting myself.

“Good.”

Ilya nodded, rubbing his thumb over the knuckle of his index finger, taking a breath.

“I’ve been trying not to think about it too much, to be honest. About... this being my last series. I know that I should, maybe, but, I know that if I let myself go there, that’ll be it.”

Galina uncrossed and then recrossed her legs, hands folded on top of her notebook. She waited for Ilya to continue.

“Whether we win or lose won’t matter about how much I’m going to grieve leaving hockey,” Ilya confessed. “It’s going to hit me like a ton of bricks, I know it. Shane and I talked about it, before playoffs, like, we made a whole plan. Because, even if we win, I’m going to fall apart.”

He found himself surprisingly calm as he spoke the words, his eyes dry. “It’s so weird to think about it this way, but it makes sense in my head. Hockey has been there for me. So I know, when it’s over, it’ll be like when my mom died, sort of. Hockey helped me cope and I won’t have it any more and I think those feelings are all tied up in it. I’m retiring on my terms, which is good. I’m leaving on a fucking high note, but the loss is still going to be... enormous.”

Ilya looked at Galina, who looked back. Her face was soft and full of understanding. His eyes stung then and he swallowed, taking a breath.

“Being ready for and excited about this next chapter in my life doesn’t mean I’m not going to miss everything that hockey was to me, what it gave me,” he said, voice going wobbly.

“Of course not,” Galina replied. “Hockey has been a fixture in your life for thirty years. It’s been one of your main sources of coping, your source of income, how you met your husband, your friends. It’s been, more or less, your entire life. Letting it go is a huge loss. When we talk about grief, we talk about how the grief is proportional to how deeply we cared for and loved that thing that we lost, even if it wasn’t always good to us. If it held meaning, then the grief is deeply felt. You love hockey quite a bit and so your grief will match the size of that meaning.”

Ilya nodded, wiping at his damp eyes, lacing his fingers together. “Yeah. Exactly. I know I’ll still be around it and I can still skate and everything. It’s just going to be a huge adjustment. And so is being a parent. Which, to be honest, I hope kind of distracts me.”

Galina chuckled. “It very well might. But grief is a tricky thing, as you well know.”

Ilya sighed. “It is. I’ve thought so much more about my mom, knowing that I’m going to be a parent. Not being able to ask her for advice, knowing that she’ll never meet Shane, or our kids. It sucks.”

“It does.”

Ilya closed his eyes, smiling ruefully. “Will there be anything in my life that I can have that won’t be touched by grief?” Ilya knew the answer, but he needed to say the question out loud anyway.

“Yes and no,” Galina replied. “It’s only one part of a complex experience. It’ll always be there but everything else grows around it.”

Ilya opened his eyes and smiled small. “That’s true.”

That had already happened, in a way. Since allowing himself to really process and grieve, that loss had felt more manageable. Still a part of his everyday life, but the rest of his life had begun to fill in the empty spaces. Hobbies and friends and Shane. Ilya missed his mother every day but he had a good life and he believed that she knew all about it.

“Anyway. That’s kind of where I’m at. I’m just trying to ride this one out for as long as I can. I’m having fun with my team, with Shane. He’s been really awesome. He’s always been super supportive but, I don’t know, we’re on the same page. It feels good.”

“That’s good to hear. I’m glad.”

Ilya spent the rest of his session talking about what he and Shane had planned out for when Ilya’s grief eventually got the best of him. It wasn’t helpful to pretend he wouldn’t be devastated by leaving hockey but he was hopeful that his and Shane’s planning would help and he had a lot of supportive people ready to rally around him.

Hockey wasn’t gone from his life completely. He’d be a hockey spouse, involved in charity work, getting to cheer and chirp Shane from the stands. He’d get to participate in alumni games and they still had their camps. He was a part of the Hockey Alliance, the group that Scott Hunter had started in order to combat toxic hockey culture. He was still a CCM brand ambassador, too, which was pretty cool.

And, hopefully, they’d have a baby to take care of, because Ilya really was truly excited about being a parent, and it felt like the wait was taking forever.

After therapy, Ilya got home, greeted by an excited Anya.

“Hello, sweet girl,” he said, rubbing her cheeks in his hands, giving her pets and kisses. Shane wasn’t anywhere to be seen but Ilya eventually found him hanging out on their back deck. He was leaning against the railing, watching the sunset. He was wearing a pair of basketball shorts and one of Ilya’s tank tops, the skin of his shoulder exposed, revealing perfect, freckled skin. His feet were bare.

Ilya watched him for a few moments from his vantage point in the doorway, before Anya squeezed out onto the deck, and trotted toward Shane. Shane turned and smiled, bending down to lift Anya into his arms, cradling her. Ilya smiled, joining them.

He wrapped his arms around Shane from behind, pressing their cheeks together, his beard rubbing up against Shane's own patchy facial hair.

"Quit it," he grumbled but Ilya knew he didn't mean it.

Anya smiled her puppy dog smile up at both of them, her tongue lolling out of her mouth.

"Such a spoiled little girl," Ilya cooed at her and Shane laughed.

"She's the most spoiled," he hummed and pulled her close to kiss the top of her head.

They stood like that for a while, Ilya swaying Shane and Anya back and forth, his chin resting on top of Shane's head.

"How was therapy?" Shane asked softly.

"Good," Ilya replied. "We talked about the Cup finals, a little. About grief."

Shane hummed softly as he listened. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay," Ilya replied. "Will be hard, when it is over. But I am okay now."

Shane shifted his head and Ilya moved his own. They looked at each other, Shane's dark, earnest eyes searched Ilya's face. Ilya smiled softly at him and kissed the tip of his adorable nose.

"I am okay," he whispered.

Shane nodded and Ilya kissed him softly, then let him go. Shane put Anya down and wrapped his arms around Ilya, holding him. Ilya knew that Shane worried. He cared so much and Ilya appreciated that. But he was okay. And he would be okay, even if he wasn't for a little bit. He was allowed to have big feelings about this and it would happen when it happened.

For now, they would just focus on winning hockey games.

The rest would come.

Game seven of the Stanley Cup finals was played at home.

Ilya was glad to be in Ottawa for what would ostensibly be his last professional hockey game. He liked having the home team advantage. He liked that he would be ending where he felt like it had kind of all started.

Not his career necessarily... but the first building blocks of the life he had wanted to build with Shane.

On the ice for warmups, taking in the three Stanley Cup banners that already hung from the rafters, the excited murmurings of the fans already in the stands, Ilya felt so lucky. He was

tired, it had been a grueling series against Vegas, and he wasn't surprised by that, but he fucking loved these games. He loved the high stakes, the competitiveness.

It made him feel alive.

"Feeling good?" Shane asked, bumping up against him, and skating around him. He came to a stop in front of Ilya and Ilya just smiled at him.

He was wearing his helmet, his hair poking out from underneath it, his cheeks already flushed.

"Yes," Ilya replied. "You?"

"Yeah," Shane replied, smiling. "We got this."

Back in the locker room after, Wiebe gave them a rousing speech, and Rose Landry, accompanied by Svetlana Vetrova, read the line up.

Shane and Ilya had gotten tickets for Shane's parents, Rose, and Svetlana, but Ilya hadn't known that Rose was going to read the line up. It had been a nice little surprise.

When the game started, Ilya felt at peace. He was still dialed in and he wanted to win but he was open to the ebb and flow of the game and would adjust accordingly. He was going to leave it all out on the ice at the end and that was something he knew he could be proud of.

He opened the scoring early, which felt good, and gave the team a boost. But the game was an expected back and forth. The boys were on point though. Ilya was so happy with their performance, hanging on to pucks, being aggressive and assertive on the ice, even the rookies.

Vegas wasn't going to make it easy for them.

The score lingered at 2-2, one goal by Ilya, one by Shane, with assists from Troy and Luca. Ilya was suspecting they'd head into overtime. He wanted to avoid double overtime if they could but that would be a toss up and he didn't want to think that far ahead.

In the middle of the third, the Centaurs were on the power play. Vegas had scored earlier in the period and no one was going to let them keep the lead. Ilya felt a rush of adrenaline as Shane joined him on the ice. He loved being on the power play with Shane. They were just so good. Playing with him was intuitive and Ilya knew that Vegas knew that they were in trouble.

"Ready?" Ilya asked Shane.

Shane grinned. "Let's get 'em."

Whenever Ilya skated with Shane, it was almost like they were the only two on the ice. They read each other so well, knew each other's strengths, and played to them. Shane passed to Ilya, who deked around a defenseman, and scored.

He skated around the back of the goal, arms raised, before Shane slammed into him, knocking him into the boards. Ilya laughed, wrapping his arms around his husband, before their linemates joined them.

“Nice shot!”

“Nice assist!”

“Good job, boys!”

“Let’s wrap this up,” Ilya said. “I have a retirement party to get to.”

Luca scored the game winning goal in overtime, his linemates swarming him, knocking him to the ice, as everyone from the bench spilled out to join them.

Ilya found Luca and hugged him tight.

“Fuck yes, Haas! Fuck yes!”

Luca was laughing, though it sounded wet and sniffly. They pulled apart, Luca’s face all red, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Aww,” was all Ilya said, ruffling Luca’s sweaty hair. “C’mon. Is good.”

“I’m just happy,” Luca sniffed. “That I could win for you.”

Ilya smiled wide, his own eyes starting to burn, and he pulled Luca close.

“I’m so proud of you.”

Luca sniffled. Ilya looked over Luca’s shoulder at Shane, who was watching them, his face soft and fond, while he stood with his parents, Rose, and Svetlana.

Luca’s parents, having flown in from Switzerland, had made their way to the ice, and Ilya let Luca go so he could hug them. They both shook Ilya’s hand, thanking him for taking care of their son as his Captain, and wished him good luck in his retirement. Ilya thanked them and found his way to his own family.

He was engulfed in a group hug.

“We are so proud of you,” Yuna said. “Both of you.”

They were eventually called away to actually get the Cup, which was handed to Ilya first. He lifted it over his head, smiling widely as his teammates and coaches and loved ones cheered and hollered around him.

He brought the Cup over to Shane, who reached out, resting his hands on the Cup along with Ilya. They looked at each other, understanding and acknowledgement passing between them. An end and a beginning.

Shane smiled wide, his face all crinkled in the way that Ilya loved so much. Eyes, nose, freckles.

He wanted to remember this moment forever. Winning his last Stanley Cup and sharing it with the man he loved. He smiled back and leaned in, kissing Shane, to more applause and whistling.

It was celebratory chaos after that. The Cup was passed around, more pictures were taken. Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, his cheek resting against the side of his head, at center ice. They just stood there together, Ilya's eyes closed, arms wrapped around each other tight.

"I love you so much," Shane whispered.

"I love you, too," Ilya whispered back. "So much."

In the dressing room, music pounded, beer and champagne were brought out. Ilya drank the gross champagne beer concoction from the Cup and was hosed down with more champagne.

"Someone find me a clean razor!" Shane yelled into the crowd, making everyone laugh.

They did manage to all shower and change, before the party was moved to Monks, in true Centaur fashion, the local bar packed to the absolute gills.

There was more champagne and food, too, thank god, because Ilya was fucking starving. He was handed a full bottle of champagne and took that and his plate of food to a table, where he was joined by Shane, Troy, Harris, Luca, and Bood.

For a Stanley Cup winning night, things were pretty tame. By the time Ilya and Shane got home, they were both a little tipsy, but not super worse for wear, which was good, because Ilya was very keen on fucking his husband.

Fuck. He couldn't believe he was married to a six time Stanley Cup champ. He'd really nailed it with Shane. His husband was so impressive.

"Are we gonna have sex in front of the Stanley Cup? Again?" Shane asked, smiling wickedly, sliding his hands up Ilya's shirt, dragging the material up to his armpits, backing Ilya up against the wall in their entryway.

"Yes. Obviously," Ilya laughed in reply. "And you love an audience."

"Shut up," Shane huffed at him but he didn't sound serious. He kissed Ilya, hard and hungry and impatient. Ilya kissed him back, running his hands into Shane's hair, holding him in place. He loved that winning made Shane so horny. Doubly so since it was the Cup.

Ilya wanted to devour him, ravage him completely. He flipped their positions, Shane pressed against the wall, Ilya's thigh wedged up against Shane's erection, making Shane whimper.

"What do you want?" Shane murmured against Ilya's mouth, pressing up against him.

Ilya nudged at Shane's chin with his nose, getting Shane to tilt his head so Ilya could kiss his neck, sucking a mark into his skin, sneaking his hands into the back pockets of Shane's jeans, squeezing his perfect ass.

"I want to devour you," Ilya purred. "Ravage you, for hours. I want to fuck a six time Stanley Cup champion."

He punctuated this by nipping Shane's earlobe.

"Oh fuck," Shane whimpered, rubbing himself up against Ilya's thigh.

"Do you want that, too?"

"Yes," Shane nodded. "Fuck yes."

"Then get upstairs," Ilya growled. Shane obeyed, pulling away from Ilya and headed toward the stairs, taking them two at a time, pulling off his shirt as he went. Ilya chuckled, sliding his own shirt off, and picking up the Stanley Cup from where they'd left it next to the front door.

He brought the trophy upstairs, into their bedroom, where Shane was already laid out on the bed. He was naked and gorgeous and as much as Ilya wanted to go to him, he took his time. He set the Cup on the dresser and admired his work.

He turned around, finding Shane sprawled out on their bed, both arms above his head, legs spread. He was all flushed and gorgeous, his dick hard and leaking against his stomach. The low light of the bedside lamp cast shadows on every dip of muscle, making him look otherworldly. Ilya stood at the foot of their bed, dropping his shirt to the floor.

"You gonna strip for me?" Shane asked, his voice husky, face smiling.

Ilya just smiled back at him, running his hands down his own chest to his fly, thrusting his crotch, which made Shane snort. Ilya chuckled and undid the button on his fly, then the zipper, wiggling out of his jeans and briefs, kicking them to the side.

Shane was watching him and Ilya pushed his hands into his hair and tilted his head back dramatically, moaning. Shane cracked up.

"Oh my god. Come here."

Ilya went, laying himself over Shane, wanting to feel every warm, firm inch of him, smiling into their fervent kisses. Shane's hands wandered all over his back, down to his ass, squeezing, and then up into his hair, bunching Ilya's curls between his fingers.

Ilya nipped at Shane's bottom lip, kissing down to his throat, leaving several marks on his neck, before kissing down between his plush pecs.

"My husband," he murmured. "Six time Stanley Cup champion, Shane Hollander."

He looked up at Shane, thumbs brushing over his nipples in slow, teasing circles. Shane whimpered, biting his bottom lip.

“You were spectacular today.” Ilya continued his trail of kisses and praise. “You are always spectacular. But I loved seeing you play. So fierce. So beautiful.”

Ilya pressed soft kisses to Shane’s stomach, one of Shane’s hands sliding into his hair.

“Ilya,” Shane breathed.

Ilya nipped at Shane’s hip, kissing a slow path down his groin, ignoring his cock, for now, kissing the insides of Shane’s thighs, knowing how much Shane loved the way his beard felt on his skin.

“All I could think about was how lucky I am,” Ilya sighed, brushing his lips over the delicate skin of Shane’s inner thigh. “You are so impressive. And you’re mine.”

Ilya lifted his eyes to look at Shane again, his face pink, his eyes huge and shiny.

“Yours,” he breathed. “All yours.”

Ilya hummed, low and deep, leaving a mark on the inside of his thigh, moving to give the other side some attention, before sucking one of his balls into his mouth, making Shane gasp. Ilya meant every word. He was *so* lucky. Shane was an incredibly accomplished hockey player, probably the best hockey player of their generation. He was also one of the kindest, most caring, sweetest people on the planet, and Ilya got to be with him and love him for the rest of their lives.

Of all of Ilya’s own many accomplishments, marrying Shane was by far his best, and his favorite.

He took his time, sucking Shane’s balls, then the head of his dripping cock, rubbing his finger along his perineum until Shane was a quivering, panting mess. Ilya grabbed the lube Shane had had the forethought to leave out and had Shane roll over.

Ilya chuckled as Shane practically shoved his ass in his face. He kissed his left ass cheek, then bit it, making Shane gasp, then moan. Ilya licked the bite and then kissed it. He leaned over Shane, pressing his weight against him, kissing the back of his head, over his broad shoulders, down his spine, over his lower back.

Ilya murmured tender, sweet praise into Shane’s skin. Telling him how perfect he was, how lovely, how good he was being for Ilya, how much Ilya loved, and appreciated him.

Shane reached a hand back and Ilya tangled their fingers, squeezing.

“Hey,” Shane said and Ilya looked up at him. “You’re hot.”

Ilya huffed a fond laugh and smiled, releasing his hand so he could pull Shane’s cheeks apart and rim him.

He took his time, going slow, focusing on the way Shane loosened up and opened for him, the way he whined and panted. Ilya slid his tongue into Shane, humming as Shane swore and moaned and asked for more.

Ilya could give him more. He picked up the lube, slicking his thumbs, sliding one into Shane, giving him a moment to adjust, then added the other.

“Holy shit,” Shane breathed, hands fisted in the comforter. “Fuck.”

Ilya gave him a moment, before adding his tongue, his thumb teasing Shane’s prostate. He didn’t drag it out like he had everything else, just giving Shane a taste, before he pulled away, watching Shane’s back rise and fall with each breath.

Ilya leaned back over Shane, threading their fingers together, sliding his dick between Shane’s ass cheeks.

“Are you—ah—gonna fuck me?” Shane huffed.

“Of course,” Ilya replied, biting Shane’s ear.

He pulled away and moved to sit next to Shane. Shane raised his head and sat back on his heels, climbing into Ilya’s lap. He grabbed the lube, pouring some into his palm, and then reaching back to stroke Ilya’s cock, slicking it, making him grunt.

“Wanna hold me?” Shane asked.

“Da. Yes,” Ilya replied before he bit his lip as Shane sank down onto him. Shane’s eyes slid closed, his head tilted back. He sighed, biting his bottom lip, before he straightened, looking at Ilya.

He smiled, sweet and tender, and Ilya’s heart tumbled in his chest. Shane cupped his cheeks, his eyes wandering all over Ilya’s face, before he kissed him. Ilya curved a hand around the back of Shane’s neck, his other hand pressed just under Shane’s shoulder blade.

They parted and Shane slid up and then back down on Ilya’s cock. Ilya swore quietly and Shane grinned.

“I’m so fucking proud of you,” Shane said, finding a steady rhythm. “I fucking loved watching you today. The way you were skating. How in charge you were on the ice. Of the team. So goddamn sexy.”

Ilya felt his lips curve up in a small, surprised smile, his hold tightening around Shane.

“Couldn’t wait to get home. Wanted you all to myself. Wanted you inside me.”

Ilya let out a helpless sound. “I’m there. Is it good?”

Shane’s head tilted back, eyes closed, his pace speeding up. “So fucking good. I love it. I love you.”

Shane trapped Ilya’s hips between his thighs, bouncing on Ilya’s cock, moaning and gasping. Ilya watched, enraptured as he always was when Shane was like this, when he let himself go, losing himself to the pleasure of the moment.

Ilya wasn't going to last long and he could tell Shane wasn't either.

"Fuck. Shit. Ilya. God. I'm gonna come."

"Come on, sweetheart."

Shane let out a long, loud moan as he came, spurting ribbon after ribbon of come between them, spasming around Ilya, forcing him over the edge.

"Jesus," Shane breathed, leaning over Ilya. Ilya hummed, wrapping his arms around his husband and holding him, pressing a kiss to the hollow of his throat and down his sternum.

They lingered like that, holding each other, before Shane slid off of Ilya, and dragged him to the bathroom for a quick shower. As much as Ilya would have liked to make love to Shane for hours, they were both struggling to stand up... maybe they could try out some marathon sex after the parade.

They crawled back into bed together, exhausted, and happy.

"We won the Cup," Shane sighed, sleepy and warm and happy.

"We did," Ilya replied.

Shane gently petted Ilya's cheek, rubbing his fingers into his playoff beard. "I'm glad we won for you."

Ilya closed his eyes and hummed, his heart full of gratitude. It meant so much to him, truly, to have won this final Cup, with this team. He loved everyone hugging him and congratulating him and saying 'this was for you, Roz.' It was for all of them, really, but the sentiment meant more to him than he could ever express.

Shane rubbed his nose back and forth against Ilya's. "I'm so proud of you. And I know it's going to be a tough adjustment... but I'm here for you."

Ilya blinked his eyes open slowly, looking at Shane, his heart clenching. Shane's face was soft, his fingers stroking over Ilya's hair, brushing his damp curls behind his ear, the tip of his index finger smoothing over his hairline, alone the one prominent streak of gray hair he had at his temple.

"I can't wait for this next chapter. To be a parent with you. To support you in your new endeavors. I'm so glad I get to do life with you, Ilya. You make me excited about what's to come."

Ilya smiled, closing his eyes again, soaking all of that in. He knew Shane loved him but it felt nice to hear it, to feel it. He was glad that he got to do life with Shane, too. They had so many good things to look forward to.

Shane rested his palm on Ilya's cheek and Ilya opened his eyes.

"Ya gorzhus' tem, chto ty moya vtoraya polovinka," Shane murmured.

“Shane,” was all that Ilya could say, overwhelmed by the words, his vision blurring. Shane smiled and kissed him, brushing a thumb under Ilya’s eye.

“Shh,” Shane hummed. “I love you.”

Ilya huffed a wet laugh, sniffing. “I love you, too.”

Chapter End Notes

Ya gorzhus' tem, chto ty moya vtoraya polovinka - I am proud that you are my soul mate/other half

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Summer has arrived and Ilya's retirement is official

June

The start to their summer was idyllic.

They were very busy in the beginning, with all of the Cup celebrations. Then there was Shane's birthday, then Ilya's birthday. Their (seventh!) wedding anniversary was right around the corner, and their hockey camps were coming up, so there was a lot going on.

The plan was to head to the cottage at the end of July to spend the rest of their vacation together, in peaceful quiet, preparing their nursery.

They had been working intermittently on the one at the Ottawa house and had managed to get that all set up in early June and the intention was to work on the one at the cottage. They had to paint the walls, put furniture together, and organize everything just to their liking.

It had been a bit emotional for them both, in a good way, to have everything set up at the Ottawa house. The fact that they were going to be parents (hopefully soon!) felt much more real than it ever had before.

They'd had intermittent check-ins with the adoption agency they were working with and continued to try and be patient and enjoy the downtime and quiet while they still had it.

Being at the cottage always settled something deep within Shane and he was looking forward to being back, to release any remaining tension from the season, and to feel more centered. He wanted to be in top form, too, because he knew that Ilya would need him to be.

Shane had been keeping an eye on him, trying to be aware of what was going on with his husband.

Ilya had improved in leaps and bounds when it came to talking about how he felt and what he needed but he wasn't perfect and there were occasionally things that Shane didn't know about, though he could tell Ilya had something weighing on him, until he finally managed to pry it out of Ilya.

He worked hard to be mindful and notice things but Ilya seemed... *fine*. *More* than fine.

He'd gotten a bit misty eyed about the nursery, but to be fair, Shane had, too. Shane would sometimes find Ilya lingering in their joint trophy room but he seemed more wistful than

depressed.

Ilya was still his laughing, smiling self, hazel eyes twinkling with joyful delight. Sometimes, Shane caught himself feeling anxious, wondering when the other shoe was going to drop. But they knew to expect the grief to be sudden, that it could feel unexpected.

It was tricky with this, too, when they were coming off a huge celebration, where things didn't necessarily feel like a complete ending. Shane knew that Ilya had talked to Eric and Scott about their own retirement experiences, and he'd talked to Galina about it, too, so it wasn't like they were going in blind.

Things would be okay, even if they were difficult.

"I need to get my things," Ilya said to Shane, his face tucked against Shane's neck from behind as Shane made them coffee.

"Mm? What things? From where?" Shane asked, chuckling as Ilya snuck a hand up Shane's shirt, resting it on Shane's belly, stroking his skin. They'd had sex already, before they'd come downstairs, but Shane wouldn't put it past them both to go again on the kitchen counter.

Ilya pressed a kiss to his neck, then his shoulder, making Shane hum pleasantly, a tingle of warmth sliding down his spine.

"From the locker room," Ilya replied. "My skates and gear and things."

"Oh! Yeah. Okay. We can do that today, if you want."

"Probably should," Ilya replied.

"No problem," Shane murmured, resting his hand on top of Ilya's, comforting.

He poured them coffee when it was finished, handing Ilya his mug, and getting a gentle kiss in thanks. He smiled, watching Ilya add milk and sugar to his coffee, and pull various breakfast food items from the fridge.

Shane set his coffee down at the kitchen island, scooping Anya into his arms, and sat down with her, both of them watching Ilya as he made breakfast. Shane loved these routines. He loved that Ilya loved making them breakfast and Shane loved watching him, moving so fluidly, familiarly, *competently*, around the kitchen.

Ilya could crack eggs with just one hand, which Shane found absurdly sexy for no reason at all. They chatted as Ilya worked, glancing over his shoulder to smile or wink at Shane and even after all these years together, it still sent Shane a flutter.

They ate breakfast together at the kitchen table. Anya hung out by their feet, waiting for someone to drop something. Ilya gave her a few blueberries, but he made her work for them. She had to sit and give him her paw. It was very cute to watch.

Shane loved his little family so much. He loved watching Ilya being soft and sweet and silly. He loved the way he let his guard down, smiling and laughing so freely. Shane wanted to protect him from any hurt but he knew it was coming. They would just have to weather the storm together.

They cleaned up after breakfast and got ready for their excursion to the arena. It felt a little weird to be doing this without more ceremony but Shane supposed that this was the most mundane piece of Ilya's retirement.

Ilya had been truly celebrated over this past season and Shane couldn't have been more proud. They had a whole retirement ceremony for him. They'd won the Cup, they'd swept the NHL awards. Ilya's final season as a pro had been pretty stellar. He'd ended his career on top.

Ilya was waiting for Shane by the front door, petting Anya, as Shane came through the living room.

"Ready to go?" he asked and Ilya kissed the top of the dog's head.

"Yes," he replied, offering Shane a smile. Shane smiled back and kissed him gently on the mouth before they headed to the garage. It was summer and usually Ilya was riding around in his Porsche or on his Ducati (even though Shane still hated the motorcycle), but they were taking the Mercedes because Ilya would have all of his gear and they needed the trunk space.

Ilya had apparently called ahead and was told that they would be good to go and that he could take all the time he needed.

"They said I could go on the ice," Ilya said as they drove and Shane rested a hand on his leg.

"Want me to come?"

"Yes."

Shane squeezed gently. "Okay."

They made it to the arena and Ilya parked the Mercedes in what was his usual spot. They got out of the car and Ilya paused, looking as if he was steeling himself. Shane's stomach was a bit knotted but he took a deep breath. They were okay. Shane offered Ilya his hand and an encouraging smile. Ilya took it.

They walked in together and Shane took a step back, letting Ilya do whatever he needed and wanted to do. He talked to security, to staff, all who knew him well. He thanked them for everything and how great it had been to be a part of the Centaurs.

Shane watched Ilya drag his fingers absently along the walls, pausing in almost every room, taking it all in. It hit Shane, too, how much of an influence Ilya had on this team. He had really brought them together and made the team his own. He had helped instill confidence in them and had helped get them to four Stanley Cups.

Shane watched his husband walk ahead of him and tried to memorize Ilya in this place. Immortalized. He'd be in the hall of fame one day and his number would hang here proudly. Shane was going to miss seeing that jersey. He would miss seeing Ilya on the ice, miss having him next to him, in the locker room.

Ilya turned, looking over his shoulder, and he stopped walking, waiting for Shane. Shane smiled and caught up, wrapping his arms around Ilya's, and leaning into him.

"You okay?" he asked, looking up at him.

"Yes," Ilya replied. "Is... weird."

"Yeah. It is. It's going to be hard thinking of this place without you. You're a fixture here."

Ilya smiled sadly and nodded. "Yes. Will be strange not being here..."

Shane nodded in understanding and smoothed his hand down Ilya's back soothingly. They went to the dressing room to find that both their stalls had been set up, all their equipment out, as if they had a game.

"Oh... this is so nice..." Shane said, touched that the staff had put in the effort to put all of their gear out like this. He stood with Ilya in front of his stall, where his jersey, skates, and pads rested.

They were quiet for a long time, just looking, and Shane turned his head up to look at Ilya. His face was sad, unsurprising, and Shane watched him reach out, fingers fiddling with the sleeve of his jersey.

Shane rubbed his hand over Ilya's back, resting his temple on his shoulder.

"Do you still want to skate?" Ilya asked softly.

"I'm down if you're down," Shane replied.

"I would like to."

"Then let's do it."

Shane sat across from Ilya in his stall. He loved sitting across from Ilya, being able to watch him, see him in his element. They took off their shoes and replaced them with their skates and headed out to the rink together.

The lights were on but the place was mostly empty.

Cameron, the rink director, was there and he gave them the go ahead to skate.

Shane let Ilya step out onto the ice first and paused just to watch him go. Ilya was always so graceful and elegant, but never more so than when he was on the ice. He moved so fluidly and easily and Shane wondered if maybe he would have been a figure skater in another life, though he was a bit too rough and tumble for figure skating.

Ilya did a few figure eights, skating on his edges, before sweeping back, and coming to a stop by Shane. He held out his hand.

“Join me?”

Shane smiled and took his hand.

They skated around the perimeter of the ice, holding hands.

Shane didn't ask how Ilya was doing. He was just with him and whatever Ilya needed, Shane would give, even if all that was was a comforting presence.

Eventually Ilya guided them to center ice. Shane looked at him and smiled as his husband turned to him, wrapping his arms around his waist. He curled his hands around Ilya's biceps, squeezing appreciatively.

Ilya smiled back and then looked up at the Stanley Cup banners hanging in the rafters, all of them theirs. *Ilya's*.

Shane looked, too.

Ilya took a deep breath and let it out slowly, before looking back at Shane. Their eyes met.

“I'm so thankful for this organization,” Ilya said, in Russian. “For giving us so much. For giving *me* so much. I'm going to miss being here, I'm going to miss playing hockey with you.”

“I'm grateful, too,” Shane murmured, also in Russian. “I'm going to miss you so much on the ice, in the locker room.”

Ilya nodded. “Me, too.” He kissed Shane's nose and forehead, and Shane closed his eyes, soaking up this moment.

“Only good things ahead,” Ilya said and Shane smiled.

“Only good things.”

He opened his eyes and reached up to touch Ilya's cheeks. He smoothed his thumbs over Ilya's scruff, looking at his handsome face; the streak of gray waves that fell over his forehead, the beautiful hazel eyes framed by long lashes, the slightly crooked nose, the sharp cheekbones, the cleft chin, the lazy stubble, and the plush, perfect lips pulled up in a soft smile.

“I adore you.”

Ilya smiled a little wider, turning his head to kiss Shane's palm.

Shane pulled him in for a kiss, letting it linger. Shane wanted Ilya to know how proud he was of him, how much he loved him. This next part was going to be hard but he wasn't alone. They pulled apart, foreheads rested together. Shane ran his hands up and down Ilya's arms.

“You ready?”

“Yes. As I will ever be.”

Shane squeezed his arms and then took his hand and they skated off the ice together. Ilya lingered, just standing there and Shane let him, quiet, observant. Then he finally stepped off the ice.

Shane helped Ilya pack up his things. It was a slow process, dragging out the moment. When everything was packed, Ilya looked at what used to be his stall, and carefully removed the plastic placard that had his name and number on it.

Ilya Rozanov #81 Captain

Ilya held it in both hands, staring at it, and it took Shane a moment to realize that he was crying. He was so quiet, the tears just coming, sliding down his cheeks, landing on the placard. Shane moved closer, one hand on Ilya’s arm, the other wrapped around him, his head on his shoulder.

“Baby...”

Ilya let out a quiet sob and Shane turned him to face him, pulling his husband into his arms. His own eyes prickled with tears. This was saying goodbye. For real. Shane rested his hand on the back of Ilya’s head, stroking his hair, and just held him.

Eventually, Ilya lifted his head, sniffing, wiping at his face, and Shane reached for him, smoothing his hands over his shoulders, before he fished the tissues he’d remembered to pack out of his pocket.

Ilya took one and blew his nose, wiping at his eyes, and Shane ran a hand over his back in soothing circles.

“Okay,” Ilya sighed. “Let’s go home.”

“There’s no rush,” Shane assured.

Shane let Ilya take his time, keeping to the shadows, letting Ilya do whatever it was he needed to do; shaking hands and thanking everyone he saw, lingering in the halls.

Finally, they left the arena. Shane took Ilya’s hand, kissing the back of it as they headed to the Mercedes.

Ilya hadn’t slept. He had been up most of the night, processing the reality of his retirement from hockey. He was done. Officially. It left him feeling weirdly hollow inside and anxious. It wasn’t like his life would be empty. He had hobbies, friends. They’d hopefully adopt soon.

But now he was facing this gaping hole in his life and he was feeling so much that he almost felt nothing at all. He didn’t want to wake Shane, who was sleeping soundly, his arms

wrapped around Ilya.

Ilya tried to draw some comfort from his husband's presence. It did feel good to know that Shane was in his corner. That Shane loved him even though he was going to be a mess, trying to sort out his life without the one thing he had had, no matter what.

He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths, reminding himself that it was okay to be sad and overwhelmed and to remember how much more he had now than when he was twelve. He had family and friends who loved him and would rally around him. He had hobbies and interests outside of hockey.

And he wasn't losing hockey for good.

He managed to get some sleep before he got up with the sun. It was weird to be up before Shane but he was just vibrating on the inside, unable to settle. He slid out from under Shane's arms, looking at his sleeping love, so peaceful and sweet. Shane's hair was fanned out behind him on the pillow, his dark lashes laying against his freckled cheeks, pink lips slightly parted. Ilya smiled, his heart fluttering in his chest, and he leaned in to press small, tender kisses to Shane's shoulder before he slipped out of bed and into some workout clothes.

"Come on, Anya," Ilya murmured to the dog, who had woken up when he had gotten up. They went downstairs together, where Ilya grabbed a water bottle and Anya a toy, before they went to the basement. Ilya did some stretching and Anya lay down in the bed they kept down there for her, by the dumbbells.

The anxious, uncomfortable feeling from the day before still rested on Ilya's chest, though moving his body helped dissipate some of the discomfort. He took his time, moving through each stretch, holding positions, before he went to one of the stationary bikes they had. He wasn't listening to any music, just pedaling, allowing himself to be in his body, and out of his mind. He rode at a hard pace, taking off his sweat damp t-shirt, feeling the way his quads burned. He biked for about forty minutes before he slowed to a cool down pace, his legs screaming, and he was breathing heavily.

"Hey," came Shane's voice from the doorway. He had walked into the gym, hands behind his back, walking over to Ilya. His hair was pulled back, still a bit messy, and he was wearing shorts and a t-shirt, his feet bare.

"Hi," Ilya replied, looking up at him, smiling a little, because he couldn't help but feel a tiny bit lighter whenever Shane was nearby.

"You been down here long?"

Ilya shrugged. "An hour maybe?"

Shane smiled a little and nodded. "You sleep okay?"

"Not really."

"I'm sorry."

Ilya stopped pedaling, running his hand through his sweaty curls. He shrugged a little and Shane frowned, looking unhappy to hear this.

“Why don’t you shower and I’ll make breakfast?”

“You are not going to workout?” Ilya asked, curious. Usually Shane would work out first thing in the morning, before breakfast.

“I can later,” Shane replied, offering Ilya a small smile. “I have more important stuff to do.”

Ilya blinked, surprised to hear this. It wasn’t that Shane wasn’t giving with his time or effort, but it just felt nice to be blatantly told that he was important. It was reassuring. He nodded and smiled small.

“Yes. Okay.”

Ilya dismounted and grabbed up his shirt, kissing Shane, and laughing at his protests that Ilya was all sweaty.

“You love when I’m gross,” Ilya replied, chuckling, and Shane shook his head, and laughed, his cheeks pink because he knew that Ilya was right. They went upstairs together, Anya following, and Shane went to the kitchen to start coffee and breakfast while Ilya went upstairs to shower.

He didn’t rush, standing under the warm spray, sitting with his thoughts. He was still sort of anxious and a bit sad, and that was okay. He imagined that this would linger for a bit while he found his footing in his new, post-hockey life.

He didn’t have to have all the answers now and it was fine to just sit with how he felt and honor how much he would miss the sport that had raised him.

Ilya washed and rinsed. He dried off, towel drying his hair by scrunching his curls in a towel carefully, and changed into the comfiest set of clothes he had. An old band t-shirt he’d had for years and a pair of gray joggers. He went downstairs, finding Shane and Anya in the kitchen.

Anya came to him and he crouched down to pet her, before he went to Shane, who was finishing plating food. He came around to Shane’s side of the kitchen island and wrapped his arms around him, tucking his face into Shane’s neck, breathing him in. This was his favorite thing to do, holding Shane and enjoying the way he smelled, especially in the mornings.

Shane hummed and kissed into his curls, smiling softly, which made Ilya’s insides turn to jelly.

“Hungry?” Shane asked.

“I could eat.” Ilya replied.

They ate breakfast and drank coffee out on the deck and sat out there for a little while longer in the warm light. Ilya leaned back in his seat a little, face turned up into the sun, eyes closed.

The warmth felt good on his face and he knew that he was already tanning from the time they'd spent outside.

He liked to sunbathe naked at the cottage, which he knew that Shane loved, too. It had been hilarious at how anxious Shane had been about it at first, afraid someone would somehow happen upon Ilya, which was ridiculous because the cottage was on an enormous piece of property and was private. But now, Ilya knew that Shane was entertained by Ilya not having tan lines... and he totally just liked seeing so much naked man on display for his eyes only.

Sometimes Shane even joined him, which Ilya quite liked. Shane looked good without tan lines, too. And he got more freckles on his shoulders and across his upper back. Ilya thoroughly enjoyed kissing all over them.

"What do you think about heading to the cottage after the camps? We can do some stuff for our anniversary there?"

Ilya opened his eyes and looked at Shane.

"Okay. That sounds nice."

"Is there anything you want to do for our anniversary?"

Ilya shook his head. "I don't know. A nice dinner? Somewhere fancy?"

Shane smiled and chuckled. "Sure. You got a place in mind?"

"I can ask Bood. Or Harris. Do some research," Ilya replied.

He was excited to celebrate seven years of wedded bliss with Shane. Whatever they decided to do, whether that was a fancy dinner or ordering take out, he knew they'd have a good time. It just felt nice to be together. He'd be sure to figure out something nice for Shane... and buy him some flowers... that would be a useful thing to focus on and keep busy about.

They went back inside to clean up. Ilya wasn't more than an arm's length away from Shane, touching him intermittently as they moved around each other in the kitchen. Ilya was always very tactile but even more so when he was feeling down.

He just wanted the reassurance of having Shane close. The grounding nature of his touch. And he appreciated that Shane didn't question it. He just smiled at Ilya and touched him back. Shane closed the dishwasher and started it, before taking Ilya's hand, and bringing him to the sofa. Ilya watched as Shane lay down and then he pulled Ilya down on top of him, making Ilya rest his head on his chest, Shane's legs on either side of Ilya's ribs.

"Sleep if you want," Shane murmured, carefully fiddling with Ilya's soft, air dried curls. "Or just rest. I'm here. Not going anywhere."

Ilya sighed, closing his eyes at the familiar, tender touch of Shane's hand in his hair. He turned his head to press a kiss to Shane's sternum, then rested his head back on Shane's chest, listening to his heart beat. After a little while of Shane stroking his hair and rubbing his back, Ilya relaxed and dozed off.

He didn't sleep for too long, maybe an hour. He snuggled some more with Shane when he woke up, because he wanted to. They kissed, soft and slow, before Shane got ready for a workout and Ilya took Anya for a walk.

It was good to just walk with her, taking their time. Anya was getting older and while she was still a happy, healthy dog, she wasn't as spry as she used to be. Ilya let her sniff as much as she wanted, going slow.

He got a little teary thinking about losing her, too, but they probably had a few more years with her at least.

Ilya got back to the house and Shane was in the living room, reading on the sofa. He looked up, smiling at them, his smile fading as he looked at Ilya's face.

"Oh, babe," he hummed. "Come here."

Ilya went to him, sitting down on the sofa, and wrapped his arms around Shane. He let himself be held, his chin hooked over Shane's shoulder. He sniffed and Shane petted his hair.

"What's up?" Shane asked gently.

"I was thinking about Anya dying," Ilya replied, his voice hitching a little, his eyes blurry.

"Ilya," Shane soothed. "She's okay."

"I know," Ilya sighed. "I couldn't help it. I don't have hockey any more and it just made me think of what else I'll lose..."

Shane hummed softly, smoothing his hand up and down Ilya's back.

"I get that," Shane murmured. "It's hard to not think about all the sad things when you're already sad..."

"Yes," Ilya huffed. "Exactly."

He closed his eyes and tucked his face against Shane's neck, allowing himself to just be upset, and to trust that Shane would hold that space for him.

"I worry about what you will think of me," Ilya continued when he found his voice.

"What do you mean?" Shane asked, his voice soft, confused.

"I've only ever been a hockey player. I know that I am more than just that but... in our relationship, that is what I have been. It's strange to not be that, any more, and I worry who I will be to you..."

Ilya had been rolling those thoughts over in his mind a lot over the last year. He had been thinking so much about what it would mean to him to be without hockey, who he would be without it.

Who was Ilya Rozanov without hockey?

He hadn't come up with a good answer. He knew that he didn't have to know right now, that it would be a process of rediscovery, but he worried that Shane wouldn't like this "new" version of Ilya. That Ilya without hockey wasn't someone that Shane could love...

"Ilya..." Shane murmured, tender and warm. They leaned away, looking at each other. "I'm not going to think anything different. You're still *you*."

Ilya searched Shane's face, finding only love and surety. Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya's cheek and nuzzled him. "You're my husband. My best friend. You're going to be the father of my children. Retiring from hockey doesn't change any of the important things about you or our relationship."

Ilya felt that right in his heart and his vision went blurry with more tears. He knew, logically, that Shane was right. It was much harder to know it emotionally, but it felt good, reassuring, to hear that, to know that that was what Shane thought.

"What if I can't figure it out...?" Ilya asked, small and scared.

"You will," Shane assured. "And I'll help. We're in this together. I love you and I can't wait to see and know and love all these new parts of you."

And Ilya knew that Shane meant that with his whole heart. Shane cooed softly at him, pulling him close, holding him tight.

"We're on this journey together. It'll all be okay. And it's alright if this is hard right now. It's all so new and fresh. Just one day at a time."

Ilya huffed a wet laugh, squeezing Shane. "You're right."

"I know."

They both chuckled softly and Shane buried his face in Ilya's curls, humming. They held each other for a long while. Anya wiggling herself between them, making them both laugh. They parted and Shane gently wiped tears from Ilya's face. Ilya took Shane's hands, kissing them warmly.

"Thank you."

"Of course. Always. Is there anything you need right now?"

"Just this," Ilya replied honestly. "Maybe a blowjob later."

Shane smiled, cheeks pink as he laughed. "Well, I might be able to manage that," he murmured against Ilya's lips.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya celebrate their anniversary

July

Ilya felt like he was riding a rollercoaster of emotions. Some days were good, where he would wake up and feel serene and relaxed and okay with this new chapter of his life, and some days he woke up and he felt so sad and miserable he didn't want to get out of bed, and some days started out fine and ended in tears, and some days started bad and ended fine.

It was a lot and he was exhausted.

Shane was taking it all like a champ, present and sweet and comforting in all the ways that Ilya needed him to be. He couldn't fix anything and he wasn't trying to and Ilya was so grateful for that. He appreciated Shane's patience and love, because he knew this was hard for him, too.

It did help that he had fallen down a rabbit hole around traditional wedding gifts for anniversaries. He hadn't even known that that was a thing because it wasn't in Russia and it seemed like just an excuse to spend money but Ilya liked buying Shane presents, usually of the sex toy variety, but he was open to mixing things up.

He wanted to get some nice things for Shane for their anniversary and he'd needed ideas because Shane was notoriously difficult to buy for. It was a helpful distraction, too.

Ilya liked the symbolism behind the "traditional" anniversary gifts, and learning about the gems and flowers often associated with each year. For a seventh anniversary, the gifts were copper and wool, stationery or desk organizational items, freesia (a kind of flower, apparently?), and onyx. The colors were yellow or off-white, which Ilya wasn't crazy about but he could make it work probably.

Ilya found a local florist that did a large bouquet of just freesia and was able to get them in multiple colors, mostly yellow, white, and purple. He bought Shane a pair of wool socks, for the winter, because his feet were always cold (even though he liked walking around with bare feet), a set of nice, simple off-white stationery with his initials monogrammed at the top, and a pair of gorgeous onyx and sterling silver cufflinks.

Ilya flirted with the idea of getting Shane another sex toy but decided against it. They already had a pretty decent collection and there would be more birthdays and holidays he still needed gifts for.

He felt good about the gifts. He'd had to rush order the cufflinks because they were custom made but it would be worth it.

Shane had almost caught him a few times, narrowing his eyes at Ilya as he hid his phone screen, or closed out of tabs before Shane could see.

"Are you watching porn?" Shane had asked.

"Maybe," had been Ilya's reply, with a cheeky little grin, which had made Shane all huffy. It was kind of cute and a good way to throw his husband off his scent. Ilya wanted the gifts to be a surprise.

And Shane was being sneaky, too. He wasn't very good at hiding it. So Ilya knew that he had gotten Ilya something as well. He was curious and kind of excited to find out what. Ilya loved presents. He liked being surprised and knowing that Shane had been thinking of him and just the general enjoyment of opening something up to see what was inside. A little childish perhaps but still something he found fun.

He still loved all of the gifts that Shane had given him over the years. The Foosball table was still a favorite of his, though they had started to opt more for experiential gifts rather than physical ones because they didn't necessarily need more stuff.

They'd taken a trip to the Maldives when Ilya had turned thirty-five and that had been incredible.

Having Shane's gifts all done made Ilya feel better, accomplished, and he made a dinner reservation at an upscale restaurant in Ottawa with a coursed menu and wine pairings. It was an intimate setting, about ten tables, bar seating, and two dinner services on weekends only. Everything was locally sourced, sustainable, and seasonal. He was excited to see how things went and it helped having something exciting to look forward to.

Ilya woke up to a soft, snuggly Shane. He'd pressed himself against Ilya, dropping kisses over Ilya's collarbones, the hollow of his throat, his neck, and the tip of his chin. Ilya wrapped an arm around him, chuckling fondly, before rolling on top of him, laying out so he could feel every inch of Shane under him.

Shane laughed. "Happy anniversary," he hummed, nuzzling against Ilya's cheek.

"Happy anniversary," Ilya replied, kissing Shane's neck.

They stayed like that for a long time, Ilya's head tucked under Shane's chin, resting against his chest, his thumb stroking back and forth over Shane's ribs. Shane played with his hair, pressing intermittent kisses to the top of his head. Ilya listened to the sound of Shane's heart, familiar and comforting, the way his chest expanded under Ilya's hand as he breathed.

Ilya shifted himself up and off of Shane, pressing a kiss to his shoulder, before sliding out of bed.

“What’re you doing?” Shane asked.

“Brushing my teeth so I can kiss you.”

Shane laughed, following after.

“I cannot believe,” Ilya bemoaned as he brushed his teeth. “That we are still doing this.” He spit toothpaste into the sink. “After *how many years* we have been together?”

“Shut up,” Shane replied, mouth all foamy. “Morning breath is gross.”

Ilya looked incredulously at his husband. “You say this but you kiss me after I suck your dick or rim you.”

“That’s different,” Shane huffed, also spitting into the sink.

Ilya rolled his entire head. “It is not.” But he laughed anyway because despite Shane’s weird idiosyncrasies, Ilya still loved him with his whole heart.

Teeth brushed, Ilya turned to Shane, pressing kisses to his shoulder, crowding up against him. Shane sighed and turned to him, wrapping his arms around Ilya’s neck. They kissed, deep and hungry, and Shane hopped into Ilya’s arms.

Ilya carried him back to bed and lay Shane out on it, pressing soft, worshipful kisses to his mouth, down his neck. He worked his way to Shane’s ribs, pausing at the tattoo there, brushing his lips on the newest date, before continuing his journey. He kissed down Shane’s abs, over his pelvis and hips, to his inner thighs. He loved worshiping Shane’s body, giving him all the attention he deserved.

He kissed up the length of Shane’s erection, kissing the tip, licking precome from his slit, making Shane gasp and shudder, his hand tangling in Ilya’s hair. Ilya smiled, dipping his head to tease Shane’s balls.

“Jesus, Ilya,” Shane breathed and shivered. “So fucking good.”

Ilya found the lube that Shane slid down the bed to him, popping the cap, slicking his fingers, opening Shane up as he kissed and licked and sucked Shane’s balls and cock. Ilya would never get tired of this.

In truth, he thought he would have. Not in a resentful, unhappy kind of way, but just in the way that sometimes happened in a long term relationship. Things would be familiar and comfortable and enjoyable but maybe not as mind-bendingly hot as they once were.

Some things had shifted from thrilling into comforting but mostly, their sex life was pretty fucking awesome.

Ilya still loved the way Shane opened so beautifully for him, the way he gave himself so easily to Ilya, trusting him, welcoming him inside. Ilya loved how eager Shane still was, how willing he was to please, to be obedient. Ilya still loved how he begged.

They were just so fucking good together. Even after all this time.

Shane moaned and sighed and panted as Ilya's fingers curled and stretched and twisted inside him, Ilya watching his husband sink deeper into the sensations. He looked so stunning, so beautiful and perfect, his cheeks flushed, eyes closed, lips kiss-swollen and parted.

"Ilya," Shane gasped. "I'm ready. Come on."

Ilya pressed a kiss to Shane's hip and removed his fingers, reaching for the lube, getting himself ready. Shane was biting his bottom lip, looking eager, slutty.

"You want it?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah. Fuck yes. Give it to me."

Ilya pushed into Shane in one long, steady slide, and it was fucking perfect. Shane's body was so warm and tight, clutching around Ilya like he belonged there. Shane groaned in relief, spreading his legs, pulling his knees closer to his body.

Ilya slid his hands around Shane's thighs, pushing them back, working himself deeper. As deep as possible. Ilya loved how flexible Shane was. Thank god for yoga.

"Okay?" Ilya asked, checking in.

Shane's eyes opened. "Incredible." He smiled sweetly and Ilya's heart melted in his chest.

He settled into a hard, steady rhythm, murmuring praise and sweet nothings to Shane, about how perfect and beautiful he was, about how much Ilya loved and adored him.

"Love you, too. Love you so much. So fucking good, baby. Want you to come in me," Shane panted in reply.

As if Ilya could deny him anything.

He sped up his thrusts, leaning over Shane, bending him in half, watching Shane's face lost in pleasure, listening to his whines and pants and moans. Their headboard smacked rhythmically against the wall.

Shane was stroking his cock and Ilya knew he was close.

"Oh my god. Shit. Don't stop. Gonna come. Oh—*fuck*."

Ilya loved watching this moment. He loved the way Shane's brows furrowed, his mouth slack, eyes glazed. He loved when he kept his eyes on Ilya's as he came, how his brows relaxed, his face morphing in ecstasy, spasming around Ilya, hand and stomach covered in ribbons of his come.

"Fuck, Shane," Ilya grunted, chasing his own pleasure. "I'm going to come."

Shane squeezed Ilya's triceps and Ilya came, hard, emptying himself into Shane, pleasure rippling through him.

He leaned over his husband, trying to catch his breath and Shane cupped his face, tugging him down to kiss him. Ilya sighed into it and Shane scrunched his hand in his hair. Ilya smiled and Shane chuckled softly.

Ilya leaned down to kiss his cheek, his neck, his shoulder.

They stayed like that for as long as they could before Ilya's softened dick slipped out of Shane and he got up to get something to clean Shane off with. He was finishing his task, pressing a kiss to Shane's lips, when the doorbell rang.

They both looked up. Anya started barking. Ilya watched Shane grab his phone and check the cameras.

"A delivery?"

He looked at Ilya, who was smiling impishly at him. Shane narrowed his eyes at him, smiling, though suspicious.

"What did you get me?" he asked.

"You will have to see."

Shane slid out from under Ilya and changed. Anya went with him downstairs and Ilya took his time, smiling to himself.

He came downstairs to find Shane closing the front door, balancing a large bouquet of freesia in the crook of his arm.

"Need help?" Ilya asked, smiling.

"I got it," Shane chuckled, holding the vase in both hands, and dipping his nose into the flowers, smelling them. "These smell amazing."

"Do you like them?"

"Yeah," Shane replied, looking over the flowers at Ilya, his cheeks pink, face partially hidden by the flowers. He looked so beautiful and sweet and adorably shy. Ilya wanted to bite his pink ears and take him back upstairs to ravage him some more. "I'm guessing these are from you?"

"Yes," Ilya hummed, beaming.

"You didn't have to get me stuff," Shane huffed, moving closer so he could kiss Ilya in thanks.

"Why not?" Ilya murmured, resting a hand on Shane's hip, lips brushing as they talked. "Is our anniversary."

Shane shook his head, which brushed their noses together. “I don’t need things. I just like being with you.”

Ilya smiled, his heart feeling too big for his chest. He pushed his hand under Shane’s shirt, stroking his thumb over Shane’s hip. “I like being with you, too... but I also like buying you gifts. There is more than just the flowers.”

“Ilya,” Shane whined, resting his head on Ilya’s shoulder for a moment, before he pulled away, taking the bouquet into the kitchen. Ilya followed after, laughing softly.

“What kind of flowers are these?”

“Freesia,” Ilya replied.

Shane’s brows furrowed a bit. He leaned his hands on their kitchen island, the flowers set in front of him.

“Why freesia?”

Ilya chuckled and told Shane about the rabbit hole he had fallen down about anniversary gifts and the specific kinds of things you got for each anniversary. He explained that freesia were the flower for the seventh year of marriage.

“How much more did you get me?” Shane asked, smiling fondly.

“Only three more things.”

Shane sighed. “Three?”

“They are small!”

Shane shook his head. “Well, I got you some stuff, too.”

“Did you?” Ilya asked, leaning on the island, too, across from Shane. He put his face in his hands. “Is a surprise?”

“Yes,” Shane chuckled. “But I guess we can exchange gifts whenever.”

“Coffee and breakfast and then gifts,” Ilya suggested.

“Deal,” Shane replied.

Ilya beamed happily.

After coffee and breakfast they settled in the living room after retrieving their respective gifts, laughing at each other for hiding them in places they thought the other would never look. Shane had put his in one of the guest room closets and Ilya had hidden his in a shoebox in the back of their closet.

“Here,” Shane said, handing Ilya his gifts; a long box wrapped in shiny red wrapping paper and a card taped on top.

Ilya took them, smiling gleefully. He loved getting gifts and he was so curious about what Shane had gotten him.

Ilya opened the card that was attached first, looking at Shane, waggling his eyebrows. Shane shook his head, but he was blushing.

“I couldn’t decide on which one you’d like, so, I just went with the whole package,” Shane said, sounding nervous. Ilya pulled out the card and opened it. There was a gift certificate of some kind folded in the card and he moved it aside to read what Shane had written.

Ilya

Happy Anniversary! I can’t believe we’ve been married for seven years already! Here’s to many, many more. I love you.

Shane

Ilya smiled warmly at the simple inscription. Neither he, nor Shane, were very articulate, but he appreciated the sentiment all the same.

“I love you, too,” he said, looking up at his husband, before he looked back at the card and the gift certificate. He unfolded it, eyebrows raising.

“Oh! I like this place!”

“I know,” Shane replied. “That’s why I got it. It’s, like, their whole spa package.”

“This is very nice. I am going to be so pampered,” Ilya chuckled, honestly so warmed by the gift. Ilya enjoyed the occasional spa experience. Sitting in a sauna, getting a facial, a manicure and pedicure, a massage. Shane knew him so well. The certificate was for all of the things that he liked.

“Just for me? You are not coming with me?” Ilya asked, folding the certificate back up and sliding it into the envelope.

“Not this time,” Shane replied. “It’s just for you.”

Ilya chuckled. “Thank you.”

“There’s one more thing,” Shane noted, smiling shyly.

Ilya placed the card down and tore open the wrapping paper on the box, tossing it aside. He opened the box and unfolded the tissue paper curiously. Nestled in the box was a plush white robe. He ran his hand over the soft, luxurious material, and started laughing.

“Is this from the hotel we went to in Switzerland?”

Shane was laughing, too. “Yeah! You said you liked it so I ordered one for you!”

Ilya chuckled, smiling brightly, and pulled the robe from the box. He and Shane had gone to Switzerland over the summer a few years ago and had stayed at a gorgeous hotel in the Alps. They had had the most incredible robes in their hotel room and Ilya had been obsessed with his, wearing it whenever they were in their room instead of clothes.

He couldn’t believe Shane remembered and had bought it for him.

“This was very nice, moy lyubimyy,” Ilya hummed, leaning in to kiss Shane warmly. “Thank you.”

“I’m glad you like them.”

“I love them. Will wear this all the time around the house. No clothes.”

Shane’s cheeks pinked and his eyes were heated. “I wouldn’t mind that.”

Ilya hummed. “No. You would not.”

They kissed a few more times, smiling into each kiss, before pulling away.

“Your turn,” Ilya cooed.

Shane smiled and looked down at his gifts. He opened the stationery first.

“This is really nice,” Shane said, examining the paper. It was simple, an off-white with Shane’s initials at the top in gold.

He set the stationery aside and opened the socks, laughing. “These are comfy,” he said. “For my feet when I get cold?”

“Yes,” Ilya chuckled.

Shane shook his head. “So, are stationery and socks part of the traditional gift giving or...?”

“Wool is the, uh, material, the traditional one, and the modern one is anything for, like, a desk. Stationery, organizational things,” Ilya explained. Shane nodded, intrigued, and then opened the last gift, the cufflinks. Ilya was most interested in seeing Shane’s reaction to this.

Shane set aside the wrapping paper and opened up the tiny box. Ilya watched his face, seeing Shane’s eyes go wide, lips parting in surprise.

“Oh, Ilya,” he murmured. “These are beautiful.”

Shane held the box carefully in one hand and gingerly pulled one of the cufflinks out of the box. Ilya smiled warmly, watching Shane examine the link.

“Is this onyx?”

Ilya nodded.

“These are lovely. Thank you.”

“I’m glad you like them.”

“I do. Was onyx the gemstone, then?”

Ilya nodded. “Yes.”

Shane looked up at him, smiling softly, and moved closer to pull Ilya to him, kissing him.

“Thank you for all of this.”

“Of course.”

They kissed some more and then parted to clean up the wrapping paper. They had dinner reservations in the evening and the rest of the day all to themselves.

After their camps had wrapped up, Ilya and Shane went to the cottage. They sort of hit the ground running, and focused on setting up the nursery. They had already painted but mostly they were putting the remaining furniture together.

They’d had the agency they were working with come to both houses and see that they had ample space and everything that a child could reasonably need or want. It had been such a strange process, having to more or less advertise and market themselves as good potential parents.

It wasn’t anything they weren’t used to but Shane had still been so anxious about it. He wanted to come across as a likable person, someone who could be a good parent. It felt like so long ago since they’d gone through the whole process of approval and still nothing.

Shane had started worrying. Maybe they actually weren’t good fits. Maybe the agency had found a reason to exclude them. Because they were too high profile, because they were both men.

Shane hadn’t wanted to bother Ilya with his concerns, especially because he was processing his life post-hockey, but Ilya could read him like a book, and he knew something was up.

“Is okay. Taking care of you helps me, too,” Ilya murmured, his arms around Shane as they stood out on the back deck as the sun set over the lake. He was gently rocking them back and forth and Shane closed his eyes, squeezing him.

“Tell me one thing.”

Shane sighed.

“I’m afraid it’ll never happen. I’m afraid that they just... didn’t like us and we’re never going to be parents.”

“Shane...”

“I’m afraid that they judged us and think we won’t be *good* parents.”

He sniffed, surprised at how emotional he was getting about all of this. He had hoped that something would have happened by now. He didn’t want to head into the hockey season leaving Ilya alone with a baby. He wouldn’t be completely alone but Shane wanted to be involved. He wanted them to do this together and he was worried they wouldn’t be able to.

“What would they have to not include us? Gay couples adopt all of the time. This agency has worked with primarily gay couples. Is why we picked them. And we are perfect candidates. We are young and excited and we can give any kid whatever they might need. Especially love.”

Shane sighed, nodding his head a little. “That’s true.”

“It takes time. I know is hard to be patient. I am also anxious, a little. Is hard to wait. But will be fine. Will happen when it happens.”

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “You’re right.”

Ilya kissed into Shane’s hair and rested his cheek on top of his head. It was reassuring and grounding and Shane squeezed Ilya tighter.

“You care so much, my love,” Ilya murmured in Russian. “That will make you a good parent.”

Shane took those words and balled them up, tucking them close to his heart, where he kept all of the sweet, tender things that Ilya said to Shane that made him feel so good and so loved. Reassuring and bolstering him.

“Thanks.”

“We are in this together. You and me.”

“We’re a good team.”

“The best.”

Ilya was right, of course. Everything would be okay. They were in good hands and whenever it happened, was when it happened. They were ready.

Shane felt a little better after that conversation with Ilya. He had multiple contingency plans anyway, in case they ended up adopting during the season. There were plenty of people who were ready to support both of them, but especially Ilya, if Shane wasn’t able to be as available as he would have liked.

They would be good parents. They had tons of people to vouch for them and kids that they had helped raise. Shane had to trust in the process. Things would happen when they happened, just as Ilya had said.

They’d be ready.

But when Ilya got a call from a Russian number a few days later, it wasn't anything that either of them had been expecting or anticipating.

They'd just come back from a walk with Anya, sweaty and satisfied and laughing. It had been a completely lovely morning. They'd slept in a bit, had slow, sleepy sex, then got up to make coffee and breakfast and take Anya on an epic walk.

They would need to shower and then make lunch and they had the whole day to do whatever they wanted. Ilya was working on a table he'd agreed to make for Evan Dykstra.

Ilya's phone had started ringing on the counter while they stood in the kitchen and he'd glanced at the number, doing a double take, his face going very serious.

"What?" Shane asked but Ilya shook his head, picked up his phone, and answered it.

"Hello?" he said, in Russian.

Shane watched after him as Ilya walked out of the kitchen. Shane could hear him talking but it was in very quick Russian and he was too far away for Shane to make out what he was saying. He looked at Anya, who looked back at him, just as confused and concerned as Shane.

Ilya didn't have any contacts in Russia that Shane was aware of, besides his brother, who he was estranged from. Shane's only thought that might make sense was that Andrei was calling to reconcile but even that seemed sort of weird.

Shane's stomach fluttered unpleasantly with anxiety. He crouched down to pet Anya, her face all wet from drinking out of her water bowl.

"I'm just as confused as you, buddy," he said to her.

When Ilya didn't return to the kitchen, Shane went looking for him. He found Ilya standing in the sun room, staring out the window. His phone was held clenched in his hand and he was so still it was almost scary.

"Ilya?" Shane asked tentatively. Ilya didn't respond. Shane touched his shoulder with careful fingers and he felt his husband twitch under his touch.

"What's going on?"

Ilya turned to Shane. His face was ashen and Shane reached up to gently touch his cheek, full of concern and worry.

"What happened?"

Ilya blinked a few times, as if coming back to himself.

"Andrei's dead."

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Ilya and Shane try to figure out how to rescue Ilya's niece

“Andrei’s dead,” Ilya heard himself say, not quite registering what was going on. It felt like a bomb had gone off. He felt numb.

Ilya had anticipated that losing hockey was going to be the biggest hurdle he’d have to overcome but now it seemed that he had even larger concerns than he had first thought. How the fuck was he actually supposed to make sense of all of this?

Andrei was dead.

And he’d left behind a daughter.

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice cut through Ilya’s racing thoughts and he looked at his husband. Shane’s hand was pressed to his cheek, warm and firm, grounding. Ilya breathed, looking into Shane’s dark, concerned eyes.

“Hey,” Shane murmured. “Come here.”

Ilya went, letting Shane wrap his arms around him, and pet his hair. He closed his eyes, wrapping his arms around Shane and holding him tight, tucking his face against his shoulder, letting Shane’s presence ground him.

“What happened?” Shane asked softly after a few minutes of them just holding one another.

It took him a few moments to formulate the words, to figure out how to even say them in English.

“I don’t know all the details,” he said slowly. “My, ah, former sister-in-law called me. She said that she and Andrei divorced and she was tired of cleaning up his messes. She said that there was a baby, my niece, from a woman Andrei was having an affair with. Tatiana does not want her. She said it was, um, I don’t know the word, she was being nice by calling me, and telling me. The mother gave the baby up, so, if I don’t claim her, she will be sent to an orphanage...”

“Oh shit,” Shane replied, pulling back to look at Ilya.

Ilya looked into Shane’s face. His heart felt heavy and anxiety sat uncomfortably in his stomach. He wanted to buy a plane ticket to Russia, tonight, and go. He wanted to find his niece and save her. Russian orphanages weren’t exactly the pinnacle of good childcare and he

wasn't sure if he could live with himself knowing that he had been told about her and he'd done nothing.

But this was a lot all at once and it wasn't just his decision. It was Shane's, too.

"Shane," he said.

Shane blinked at him, his face set in determination.

"We'll get her," he said firmly, nodding. "We'll figure it out and we'll get her and bring her here."

Ilya blinked. He had never been more in love with Shane than at that very moment. Shane had just looked at him and known and they were on the same page and Ilya was so grateful for him he could cry.

He pulled Shane close, hugging him tightly.

"Thank you," he breathed and Shane squeezed him back, kissing into his hair.

"Of course," he murmured. "We should probably make some phone calls."

They sat down in the living room after a few minutes of just... processing. They called the adoption agency they were working with and explained the situation. The case manager on the phone was lovely, taking in all the information, and informed them that she would talk to their international team, and call back with courses of action that could be taken.

They waited to call Shane's parents, wanting to talk with the agency and find out what the legal process was to go about figuring this out. Ilya would have been on a plane by now, probably breaking several international laws in the process by smuggling a baby back to Canada.

They had to do this the right way.

Ilya paced the living room. Anya barked occasionally at him, anxious to see him anxious. Shane tried to get him to sit down but Ilya couldn't. He had too much nervous energy and not enough of an outlet for it.

He wasn't usually like this, acting like a caged animal, but it was hard not to be fidgety. This was a serious situation with a ticking clock.

Shane's phone started ringing on the coffee table and he answered immediately.

"Hi Shane, Hi Ilya," said the case manager's voice on the other end. "So, we have some information for you both and we can take you through everything and tell you our thoughts and what might be the best way to go about this from a legal standpoint."

"Got it," Shane said, looking up at Ilya, who had come to sit on the floor by the coffee table, across from Shane who was sitting on the sofa. "What do you have for us?"

“So, really the best way to go about doing this, especially with a child so young, is to adopt her in Russia. Ilya, because you’re her next of kin, you have priority, and because she’s so young, they’ll probably want to place her with you as soon as possible. We can’t say for sure how long it would take for things to be processed there but, once she’s in Canada, and because you’re both Canadian citizens, over eighteen, and are using us, that process would be fairly simple. That’s really the best option. The second option is sponsorship. This is a bit tricky because the child would have to have a representative in Russia and because she’s a newborn, we’d have to hire someone over there to act on her behalf, and that would usually be the guardian or next of kin. Since that’s not the case, then it would be a lawyer of some kind. It’s possible but leaves more questions about where she would stay and with whom and the like. And that’s just about it, besides hoping she lands at an orphanage that does international adoptions and we somehow find her.”

“No,” Ilya said, just as Shane said, “absolutely not.”

The case manager chuckled on the other end of the line.

“Yeah, I figured you wouldn’t like that one. If you need more time to kind of think things over and process, please feel free. This is a huge decision and obviously something the two of you weren’t anticipating.”

Ilya was looking at Shane and Shane looked right back. They probably should talk about it but both of them knew which option Ilya was angling for and there was going to be very little that Shane could do to change his mind.

“No, we’re um, we’re pretty sure we’re going with option number one.”

“Oh. Okay. Perfect!”

They talked a little longer about what would be needed after the process was handled in Russia and after ending the call, Ilya immediately went upstairs. All of his important documents were back in Ottawa so they were most definitely going to have to leave so he could get everything he needed.

“Ilya,” Shane said, having followed him up the stairs, standing at their bedroom door as Ilya pulled out a bag to start packing.

“Ilya,” Shane said again, touching his arm. Ilya looked at Shane. A wave of frustration rolled through him at being interrupted but Shane’s expression was soft, his eyes concerned.

“Baby, this is *a lot* . Can you pump the brakes a little? I know that you’re scared for her and I know you want to get her and make sure she’s safe but you can’t just go rushing in blind. I don’t want you to run out the door and realize you forgot something important.”

Shane was looking at him beseechingly and any of the fight Ilya had in him melted away. Shane was right, of course. He was being impulsive because he was concerned and scared but he would make things worse if he just barreled through without going in prepared.

He took a deep breath and turned toward Shane. “You’re right.”

Shane offered a small smile and rested his forehead on Ilya's shoulder, wrapping his arms around him.

"I'm overwhelmed," Shane murmured. "And scared. I don't know how any of this works. I want to make sure that you're gonna be okay and the baby will be okay and that you come back safely."

Ilya rested his chin on top of Shane's head, holding him. "Me, too. All of that."

"Can we sit down and make a plan?"

Ilya smiled and closed his eyes, dipping his head to kiss the top of Shane's. "Yes. Okay."

They went back downstairs and laid out a plan, Googling information about the adoption process in Russia, what Ilya would need, how things would look. Ilya would probably need a Russian lawyer, a place to stay, things for the baby. They made multiple lists. Ilya went through his contacts and wrote down people he might be able to call and ask for help.

Svetlana was at the top of the list. She still had family in Russia, her parents went back every summer. There were a few contacts he had from his father, people in the Ministry he might be able to call upon for help. He had no idea what use it would be, but he could try. His ex sister-in-law, Tatiana, too, even if her help was begrudged.

To add insult to injury, he wasn't the most popular person in Russia. After he and Shane had been outed, he'd steered clear of Russian media after having seen a few terrible articles written about him. It had been six years, so while he didn't think he'd be arrested on sight, there was an added level of risk, and Shane couldn't come with him.

It was evening by the time they had finished planning and neither of them had eaten much all day. Ilya was shaky and exhausted and Shane wasn't fairing much better.

They ended up ordering takeout. Ilya would have to make a bunch of phone calls tomorrow and then he'd hopefully be on a plane to Russia the day after. Everything felt like it was happening so fast and it felt dire.

Anything could happen. And Ilya had so many questions that he wasn't sure he'd ever get the answers to.

Shane was doing his best to be supportive and comforting and Ilya really did appreciate it. It helped to have someone with a cool head, and Ilya knew that Shane was managing his own anxiety.

He tried to take a few breaths and recenter, snuggling up to Shane on the sofa while they ate dumplings. Shane sighed, relaxing a bit.

"I'm sorry," Ilya murmured, feeling that he owed that to Shane for his stress and inability to be still.

"It's okay," Shane replied. "Nothing to be sorry for. This is all new for us. And fucking terrifying. I don't like being so responsible for another life."

Ilya chuckled. "Welcome to parenthood."

"Shit," Shane murmured. "Hayden was right..."

Ilya turned his head to kiss into Shane's hair, smiling. "Hayden was right about what?"

"That parenting is the most stressful thing that you can ever do and that I'm going to be a mess. We literally don't even have a baby yet and I'm freaking out."

Ilya laughed, unable to help it, because Hayden had been *right*.

"Oh my god, shut up," Shane whined, pushing at Ilya, who flopped over, trying to catch his breath.

"It is so stressful," Ilya agreed as he calmed down, placing down his chopsticks, and scrubbing his hands over his face and into his hair. "I don't think this is normal though. Not normal levels of stress."

"No," Shane agreed. "Not at all. This is like... something out of a soap opera."

"Yes."

Shane sighed, turning to look at Ilya, leaving his chopsticks in the takeout container in his hand. He used his free hand to rub Ilya's leg comfortingly.

"I'm sorry, Ilya. This has been a fucking terrible day for you."

Ilya nodded, staring up at their living room ceiling. He didn't really even know what to feel. His brother was gone. He had a niece to save. International laws to go up against.

"I only want to do the right thing," he said, looking at Shane. Shane reached for his hand and took it, squeezing.

"You are," he replied, reassuring, and Ilya's tension eased a fraction.

"I hope so."

They finished eating and cleaned up, taking Anya out once more before they settled in for the night. They would have a lot to work on in the coming days.

The next day they headed back to Ottawa so Ilya could gather all of the proper documents he needed and pack. He called everyone in his contacts who had known his father. Some of them had retired, some of them didn't even want to speak to him, but there were a few people he talked to who very much remembered him, some friendly, some not.

Ilya hadn't wanted to talk to any of these people. He felt so scummy sitting on the phone with them and either listening to them go off about what a terrible person he was for leaving

Russia and marrying a man or having to hear them praise his father, and his brother, for being “good” men.

Eventually, Ilya was put in touch with someone who had known Ilya’s father and brother, and remembered his mother. Her name was Natasha. Ilya had never met her but she sounded like an older woman on the phone. She knew him, at least from his hockey career, and remembered him as a little boy.

She offered her help. She was sympathetic and kind and her willingness to do this for him was enough to make Ilya tear up. It was the first genuinely helpful person he’d talked to in several hours. The first sign of hope he had.

She could expedite the adoption process but it would cost about fifty thousand Canadian dollars. It felt like a steal. They figured out a plan and Ilya gave a rough timeline of when he would be in Russia, took down Natasha’s number and address at the Ministry, and that was that.

He spent maybe twenty minutes crying afterward, exhausted, and scared and a little relieved, only to be full of worry that this stranger was just going to take his money and leave him high and dry. He just didn’t know what other options they had available.

He called Tatiana to tell her about his intention to come to Russia and help as best he could. She was a little softer on the phone this time around and told him she would do what she could to help as well and that she had the keys to Ilya’s former condo.

He booked his plane ticket, one-way, since he wasn’t sure how long it would take to get things sorted, then found Shane, and promptly collapsed into his arms. Ilya felt guilty for needing so much from Shane, leaning on him like this, but Shane reminded him that he wanted Ilya to lean on him, to trust that he’d be there to support Ilya, and that he was never a burden.

“What’s the plan?” Shane asked softly, twisting Ilya’s curls around his fingers, and gently releasing them. Ilya sighed against Shane’s neck. The flight from Ottawa to Moscow was going to be brutal. Thirty-nine hours of travel, plus the time difference. Ilya wasn’t looking forward to it.

He told Shane he’d leave tomorrow, Wednesday, and arrive Friday morning. He had a lay-over in London for twelve hours, which was kind of bullshit, but he guessed it would be useful to get some rest that wasn’t on a plane. The flight from London to Moscow was about four hours.

“I have to pack,” Ilya sighed. “Bring a suit...”

“I’ll help,” Shane assured.

They went upstairs together and Shane helped Ilya pack his suitcase, making sure he had enough clothes.

“There is a washer-dryer at the condo, so,” Ilya said, laying one of his suits on the bed, before sliding it into a garment bag. “I shouldn’t need more than two weeks of clothes, I think.”

He sighed. “I hope Andrei didn’t wreck the place...”

Ilya still wasn’t sure how to even feel about the fact that his brother was dead. It still felt... unreal. He didn’t know if Tatiana would want to talk about it. He didn’t know if he’d also be responsible for the funeral.

Who did Andrei even have, in the end.

“Hey...” Shane murmured, resting a hand on Ilya’s back.

“I’m sorry,” Ilya sighed, shaking his head a little, dropping his hands, holding a half-heartedly folded t-shirt.

“Don’t be sorry. You haven’t done anything wrong.”

Shane’s hand smoothed over Ilya’s back in comforting circles and he moved closer, pressing a tender kiss to his shoulder.

“This is so much to happen in the last, like, twenty-four hours. You’re okay.”

Ilya nodded. “I know...”

They finished packing and Shane pulled Ilya into bed, the two of them curled up around each other. Ilya just wanted Shane close. He didn’t know how long they would be apart and the idea of it was just as distressing as walking back onto Russian soil, facing the tattered remains of his family.

“You’re the strongest person I know,” Shane murmured, his fingers stroking gently over Ilya’s face.

Ilya didn’t feel particularly strong but he appreciated Shane saying so. And he appreciated Shane being here, supporting him.

“Thank you, moy lyubimyy.”

“Call me every day. Text me. I don’t want you to feel all alone over there. I’m sorry I can’t be there in person.”

“I will. I know. Is not your fault...”

They tried to settle down to sleep but neither of them slept very restfully.

Ilya rolled over and found Shane awake, it was early in the morning, and Shane looked so soft and a bit sad, which Ilya couldn’t have.

“Sweetheart,” he murmured, in Russian, kissing Shane gently, not even caring that he hadn’t brushed his teeth. He slid his hand into Shane’s hair and Shane sighed, kissing him back

without complaint.

“My beloved,” Ilya hummed between kisses, rolling Shane onto his back. Shane wrapped his arms and legs around him, pulling him close. They kissed for a long time and had slow, gentle sex, trying to drag things out, wanting to be as close as possible for as long as possible.

They showered together and then Ilya got changed, bringing his bag and suit downstairs, leaving it by the door. He had coffee and breakfast with Shane and cuddled Anya for a bit before they loaded the car and they made their way to the airport.

Their tangled fingers rested on Ilya’s thigh as Shane drove them, Anya in the backseat.

“I think Anya will like having a sibling,” Ilya mused as he looked out the window.

Shane chuckled, squeezing his hand. “I think so, too. She’s so good and she loves everyone. She’ll be the best big sister.”

Ilya smiled and hummed in agreement.

They lapsed into silence again, comfortable, but heavy. Ilya knew Shane would come with him, if he was able, but they couldn’t take that risk, as their marriage wasn’t legal overseas. Ilya already felt he was placing himself in a precarious position by going back but he didn’t see another palatable option.

“Thank you,” Ilya said into the quiet. “For doing all of this.”

“You don’t have to thank me. We were going to do it anyway, one way or another. We weren’t expecting this but... I want her safe and sound with us just like you do.”

Ilya’s heart felt too big for his chest, Shane’s words reassuring and sweet. Shane wanted this, too. He knew that he did but hearing it now relieved some of the tension in Ilya’s shoulders. He kissed the back of Shane’s hand, lingering, his lips pressed to the familiar skin.

They made it to the airport and Shane turned to Ilya, reaching for him.

“I don’t tell you enough how grateful I am to you, for all you’ve done for me, for us. All that you continue to do. I love you so much, Ilya. There will never be enough words to tell you how much.” Shane’s voice was wobbly and soft and Ilya held him, burying his face in his neck, breathing him in.

He knew what Shane was saying and why he was saying it and he loved him for that. Ilya didn’t doubt Shane’s love or gratitude, but it felt good to hear, to have it reaffirmed, before he went off to do maybe one of the scariest things he’d ever done in his life.

“I love you so much, moya lyubov.”

He didn’t want to let Shane go... but he had a baby to rescue.

“I’ll be back before you know it. With a present.”

Shane smiled, wiping at his eyes, and Ilya kissed his wet, freckled cheek, and his adorable little nose, and his soft, pink mouth.

“Be safe.” Shane sighed, sniffing, his hands gently petting Ilya’s curls, running over his cheeks.

“I will.”

Ilya said goodbye to Anya, grabbed his suitcase, and suit, and was off into the airport.

The hours of travel seemed to just go by in a blur. Ilya was nervous about returning to Russia. He hadn’t stepped foot in his home country since his father’s funeral and so much had changed since then.

He had no idea what he was walking into and he didn’t know what to expect.

Maybe he’d get arrested in customs. That would be fun. He could probably pay his way out of whatever he needed to, though he wasn’t really looking forward to that. He probably didn’t need to worry about it really... and yet...

He talked to Shane a little, which helped. Shane had called his parents, updating them about what was going on. Ilya wouldn’t be surprised if they stayed with Shane for a bit, since he knew Shane would be stressed being in the house alone with just the dog.

Ilya suggested talking to the Pikes and Rose and maybe even J.J. Ilya had talked to Svetlana already and had texted a little with Troy and Bood. Everyone had been incredibly supportive and had asked how they could help, if at all, which had gone a long way in alleviating some of Ilya’s anxiety and he hoped might help Shane’s.

He did manage to sleep in London and was on the flight to Moscow without any problems. No one seemed to recognize him, which was good. The plus-side of being in places where hockey wasn’t as popular was being able to remain anonymous.

Ilya had always been very good at faking it till he made it. He could appear confident and like he didn’t have a care in the world, even if his insides were tying themselves into knots. He landed at Sheremetyevo, the entire experience feeling weirdly familiar. He’d done this hundreds of times before his father had died and even after all these years, it was still like muscle memory.

Ilya gathered his bags and waited in line at customs. He was sweating as he approached the counter to show his passport.

“A one way ticket,” the officer stated, looking at Ilya critically.

“I’m home for a funeral. My brother.”

The officer nodded, raising his eyebrows. He looked at Ilya for a long moment and Ilya was sure he recognized him. He stamped Ilya’s passport and handed it back to him.

“My condolences, *Mr. Rozanov* .”

Ilya bowed his head slightly in acknowledgment, took his passport back, and moved on through.

By the time Ilya got outside, he let out a long sigh of relief. Well, he was here, and he hadn't been arrested. So, he might be okay. For now at least. Things were only just beginning.

He texted Shane that he had arrived safe and sound and would be heading over to his old condo. He didn't expect Shane to answer, as Ilya was now eight hours ahead. He'd still be sleeping (he hoped). He texted Tatiana that he was catching a cab. She texted him back as he climbed into the cab, stating that she was already at the condo and would let him up.

It was surreal being back in Moscow. It felt wholly the same but completely different. There was a strange comfort to it. Hearing people speaking in his native tongue, reading billboards and traffic signs and businesses, and not having to worry about translating.

Ilya hadn't really felt homesick for Russia. Shane had become home to him and he was more comfortable and at ease with him than anywhere else he had ever been, but he felt an unexpected pang of nostalgia and grief.

He had been born and raised here and a part of him would always belong here, would always love Russia, in the same way he did his father. Russia would never be home to him and would never love him the way he wanted, but he still felt a childish hope that it could be different, one day.

He closed his eyes.

The cab dropped him off at the building that housed his old condo. He had texted Tatiana and waited outside for her, his suit slung over one arm, his hand curled around the handle of his suitcase.

The front door of the building opened and Tatiana stepped outside. Ilya had only met her a handful of times. He had been at his brother's wedding and had known her before she and Andrei had been engaged. She was tall, with brown hair and light brown eyes, and high cheekbones. A former model who worked in international real estate as Ilya recalled.

She was Andrei's *type*.

“Hello, Ilya,” he said.

“Hello, Tatiana.”

She smiled wanly at him, bussing his cheeks, and gestured toward the building. He followed after her.

They made small talk in the elevator, though things were stiff and awkward. It was strange being here with her, being in this building that had been so familiar to him once, over the summers he had spent here what felt like a lifetime ago. It was surreal, like he'd stepped back in time.

“I left some things for you, from when my son was young. A diaper bag, bassinet, carrier, some bottles. There’s diapers, formula, pacifiers.”

“You didn’t have to do that,” Ilya replied as Tatiana opened the door to the condo.

Tatiana shrugged and looked at Ilya. “Your brother was a bastard but it’s not the baby’s fault.”

Ilya offered her a small smile and nodded. They stepped into the condo. It was in better shape than Ilya had expected. Plain and sterile like it always had been. It had never been or felt like home to him, so there were no mementos, or personal items, no art on the walls.

Tatiana had left most of the items in the living room, the bassinet was in the guest room, along with some baby toys, clothes, diapers. Bottles and formula were in the kitchen.

Ilya paused for a moment, looking around, before looking back at his ex sister-in-law.

“We should probably talk about how we’re proceeding with Andrei...”

“Of course.”

They sat and Ilya got most of the story.

Tatiana had been aware of Andrei having affairs. He wasn’t very secretive about it and she admitted being frustrated with Ilya when he’d given Andrei the condo. She and Andrei had a son together, born after Ilya had left Russia for good. He hadn’t even known that Tatiana was pregnant, but that was unsurprising. Andrei wouldn’t have told him that and they had stopped talking soon after their father’s death.

She had tried to figure out what to do, squirreling money away, trying to manage having a baby, and a philandering husband. Things got a little better after Sasha was born and then started up again around the time Sasha was three.

She knew that Andrei was seeing one woman in particular. It was an affair, for sure, not a random one night stand, or paid sex. Andrei was also working on a large case that Tatiana didn’t know much about, only that it was dangerous. She eventually confronted Andrei about the affair and finding out that his mistress was pregnant, and more or less demanded a divorce. He gave her a bit of a run around, saying he would change, then threatening her, before finally acquiescing. The divorce was finalized only a few months ago, right before the baby was born.

She told Ilya that Andrei had died in a car accident but she suspected foul play. The Ministry hadn’t agreed to release the body yet so there wasn’t much to be done. The mother of the child had abandoned the baby and so here Ilya was because Tatiana hadn’t known who else to contact.

“I had to at least try. I appreciate that you answered.”

“I appreciate that you called. Do you need anything? Money or...?”

Tatiana shook her head. “No. Andrei didn’t leave anything to the other woman. Whatever he has is mine and Sasha’s. He has some debts but those are being handled.”

“You’re sure?” Ilya asked, skeptical.

Tatiana smiled and nodded. “You’re already in this deep enough. I don’t think there is much more you can do. If you want to see your brother’s body, it’s at the morgue. The baby has been at this hospital since she was born. She’s about a month old, I believe.”

She handed Ilya a business card with the hospital’s information on it.

“They know the situation.” Tatiana stood. “I trust you can take care of yourself?” she asked.

“Mostly,” Ilya replied, chuckling softly. “Thank you again, for doing all of this.”

Tatiana nodded. “It’s the least I could do. Take care, Ilya. I’m sorry for all of this. I understand why you left. And... I wish you and your husband well.”

Ilya blinked, surprised. He hadn’t thought that Tatiana would have looked into him at all... but he supposed it wasn’t difficult to find information about him, given who he was. He smiled at her.

“Thank you. I wish the same for you and my nephew.”

Tatiana smiled small and nodded.

Ilya walked her to the door and they said their goodbyes. He closed the door behind her, turning to press his back against it. He thunked his head against the wood and closed his eyes.

And now he had work to do.

Ilya had never been to a maternity ward before and he had no idea what to expect. He’d hired an attorney, recommended by Svetlana’s mother, who met him at the hospital. Ilya checked in at the main desk and had been guided upstairs to an office to meet with the director of the hospital. It seemed that the situation had been explained to them and they would be involved in releasing the child to Ilya’s care while he sorted out all of the paperwork for adoption as her next of kin.

They were in the office for two long, grueling hours, going over all of the proper paperwork, getting clarification, mostly around whether or not the baby’s mother could claim her, but apparently she had signed over her rights, effectively making the child a ward of the state, which was overridden by Ilya claiming her as kin.

It was a lot, to say the least.

Ilya signed and got copies of all the documentation required in regards to custody, as well as the baby’s birth certificate, and medical records.

The name on the birth certificate had been left blank, the only information was the last name, *Rozanova*. It seemed so bleak and careless, to not even have bothered to name her. Ilya knew that she'd get a new birth certificate in Canada... that he and Shane got to name her... but it still saddened him.

Paperwork in hand, Ilya was led to the maternity ward by a kindly nurse. He walked down a hall lined with doors and at the end, there was a glass window looking into a nursery, with small beds set up for newborns.

The room was empty, except for one small bed, with a single swaddled baby. She was wearing a pink hat, and was wrapped in a pink blanket.

"This is her," the nurse said and Ilya stared through the glass at the tiny little human all wrapped up, fast asleep. She looked perfect. Her tiny little face serene as she slept.

When Ilya had met Shane for the first time, in Saskatchewan, it had been love at first sight. Ilya's head hadn't known it at the time but his heart had. It had taken a long time to fully realize that it was love but he'd gotten there.

The moment he set eyes on that sleeping baby, it was love at first sight, and he knew it instantly.

"Can I...?" he asked the nurse, looking away to glance at her, before looking back at the baby.

"Of course! Here, this way."

He was led to a small room with chairs and a bed and told to sit and wait. So he did. His palms were sweating and he wiped them on his jeans, nervous and excited all at once. The nurse returned, wheeling the small bed into the room.

"It's almost feeding time, so you can feed her if you like, give her some skin-to-skin contact. We do what we can but it's harder when there aren't any parents."

Ilya just blinked at the nurse and nodded his head. She reached into the bed and carefully lifted the baby, who made a soft noise.

"Oh, hush now. You're alright. Look who's here to see you."

She placed the baby in Ilya's waiting arms. She was so small, fitting in his hands so perfectly as he cradled her.

"Hi," he said softly. The baby wiggled a little, whimpering, and Ilya hushed her very gently, holding her close. "I'm your Papa. It's so nice to finally meet you."

He just looked at her and her tiny pink face, the way she wiggled, her little face scrunching up. She fussed and Ilya brought her closer to his face, nuzzling the tip of his nose gently against her nose, humming softly. She smelled like new baby.

"You're okay," he soothed. "I got you."

The nurse had gone and came back with a bottle, the baby fussing in earnest.

“I know, I know,” he chuckled. “You must be hungry.”

He fed her, then followed instructions as the nurse directed him on how to unswaddle her. He took off his shirt and held her carefully against him, using the blanket to keep her back warm.

She was tiny and pink and warm and soft, with a head of golden-brown colored hair much like his own. She cooed, snuggling against him, and Ilya’s heart melted. He was so in awe of her and he knew that he would do absolutely anything for her.

“You’re so good with her,” the nurse noted.

Ilya smiled, kissing into her hair, stroking his thumb very carefully over the back of her head. “Thank you.”

Ilya finally left the hospital after a crash course in baby care, with the baby in her carrier, and all of her paperwork. They went back to the condo and Ilya called Shane.

“Oh my god,” Shane said, appearing on Ilya’s phone screen. He was wearing his glasses and looked exhausted. It was morning in Ottawa and he was sitting in their living room. “Is everything okay? Are you okay? How’s the baby?”

Ilya smiled, just looking at his frantic husband on the screen. He was missing Shane so much, wishing he was here with him, instead of being over four thousand miles away.

“Everything is okay,” Ilya replied. “I’m fine. And so is the baby. Do you want to see her? She is sleeping.”

Shane looked relieved and nodded excitedly, his dark eyes wide behind his glasses. Ilya smiled widely and turned the screen toward the baby, still in her carrier.

“Oh my god,” Shane said and Ilya knew he had his hands over his mouth. “Oh, Ilya. She’s perfect. Oh god, I love her so much. I love you so much.”

“She is perfect, yes. I love her, too. I love you.”

“I can’t wait for you to come home. I just want to hold both of you. I can’t believe you’re so far away.”

“I know, moy vozlyublenniy,” Ilya replied gently. “Soon.”

Ilya turned the screen so he and Shane could look at each other and Shane was wiping his eyes.

“Shane...”

“I just want to have you both in my arms,” he sniffled.

“I cannot wait. Won’t be much longer... I hope.”

“I hope so, too.”

Ilya smiled at his husband, warm and fond and full of so much love he thought he might explode.

“We need to name her,” he said.

Shane had settled his glasses back on his face and nodded. “She wasn’t given a name?”

Ilya shook his head. Shane frowned.

“I was thinking... Leonora Irina. Is good, yes?” Ilya offered softly.

Shane smiled brightly, his face all crinkled up, his eyes shiny. “I love it.”

“And she will be Hollander, too. Like we talked about.”

“Yeah,” Shane breathed, his voice tight. “Okay.”

“Sweetheart,” Ilya cooed.

“I’m allowed to be emotional,” Shane replied, his fingers pressed to his eyes, his glasses wedged up.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed, his own eyes a bit misty. “You are.”

Ilya watched Shane on the phone, wanting to be curled up with him, with Leonora, all of them together and safe.

“Soon,” Ilya repeated.

Shane dried his eyes with a tissue and nodded. “Yeah. Soon. I can’t wait to meet her.”

Ilya couldn’t sleep. Mostly it was anxiety. He’d never had to worry about taking care of a baby before and though he was resting when the baby rested, he wasn’t really able to sleep, worrying about what she might need.

He looked at the sleeping infant next to him, her tiny limbs all akimbo, her little chest rising and falling as she breathed. The more he looked at her, the more he saw himself and Andrei in her. He had no idea what her mother looked like.

She was so tiny and vulnerable and he wanted to do whatever he could to keep her safe. The next biggest hurdle was adoption paperwork... and then hopefully getting out of Russia without any hiccups.

He sighed, leaning his head on his bicep.

He couldn't believe that Andrei had had a kid. *Two* kids.

He couldn't believe Andrei was dead.

Ilya took a few breaths. He felt... weird. This all felt so unreal. He wasn't sure if that was due to his lack of sleep or how he coped with stress or what. He wished Shane was here... he wished he was home.

"It's just you and me now," Ilya murmured to the sleeping baby. "I'll take good care of you."

Ilya tried to go back to sleep but wasn't very successful. He was thinking of Andrei, of his father, of his mother. Everyone was gone. He cried a little... sad that his family hadn't been better. That he and Andrei had never been able to be close. That his mother had suffered. That she wasn't here to help him.

He missed her. He felt like he needed her now more than ever. How was he supposed to be a parent without her? Unable to go to her for advice or to watch her with her grandchildren or just have her reassurance that he wasn't fucking this all up.

Ilya rolled onto his side, wiping his eyes, sniffing, and watched the tiny baby asleep. He got up, washed his face, and came back to look at Leo.

"She looks just like you," Ilya whispered in Russian. "I hope you can watch over her... and me... this is going to be a long journey..."

Leonora slept for a little while longer before she woke up, all fussy. Ilya fed her, then walked around the condo with her on his shoulder, gently rocking from foot to foot, humming to her. Ilya hadn't known her long but he was under the impression that she had had to clamor a lot for her needs to be met.

Lots of loud crying and fussing. He hoped that, with some consistency, she would calm a little, knowing that her needs would be met. He cuddled with her often. Plenty of skin-to-skin contact and a little time on her belly.

He knew he wouldn't be able to do this on his own for long but he was hopeful that he wouldn't be away from Shane for much longer. He smiled, pressing a kiss to Leonora's head, thinking about how Shane would be.

Nervous and excited. Questioning whether or not he was doing something right but his face all set and determined. Ilya already knew that he would be perfect. Sweet and soft and gentle. Ilya couldn't wait for that.

He told Leonora all about the family waiting for her back in Canada. Her Daddy, her two grandparents, her doggy sister, all of the aunts and uncles who couldn't wait to meet her. She would have everything she could ever want or need... Ilya would make sure of that.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Ilya brings Leonora home

Chapter Notes

I just got very impatient so here is a midweek extra chapter! ENJOY! 🤔

Shane ended the call with Ilya and flopped back onto their bed, his hands pressed to his face. He was relieved, mostly, having been carrying so much anxiety and stress since Ilya had left Ottawa. He was glad to see that Ilya and the baby were okay, everyone in one piece. His heart finally felt at least a little more at ease.

He'd been worrying himself sick, his mind falling down rabbit holes of worst case scenarios. Ilya getting arrested, something happening to the baby, the person helping them stealing their money, Ilya being stranded.

Even with all of his husband's consistent updates, Shane couldn't help but be afraid. They were in uncharted territory and Shane hated that Ilya was alone, that Shane couldn't be there to support him, or help him through.

Shane pulled his hands from his face, pulling his glasses off his head, and placing them to the side. He sighed, thinking about seeing Ilya's tired but handsome face, and looking at their sleeping baby.

His heart clenched, his whole body warm just thinking about that adorable little face. He couldn't wait to have his husband and his daughter in his arms. He wanted to kiss their faces and cuddle them close and make sure that they were safe and sound and taken care of. He wanted to protect them and keep them close.

Hopefully they would be coming home soon and Shane would get a few blissful weeks of them all to himself before the next hockey season started. He closed his eyes, imagining that. He and Ilya and Leonora and Anya, going on nice walks and snuggling on the sofa, their house being filled with sweet baby giggles, and a pleasant kind of chaos.

Shane wanted to see Ilya with Leonora in his arms, being tender and sweet with her in the way Ilya always was with babies, but it would be *more*, because she was *theirs*.

For the first time in what felt like weeks, Shane was excited. Hopeful. It was going to be quite the adventure, but he was ready for it. He couldn't wait. He smiled, opening his eyes, and grabbed his phone. He texted Ilya.

Shane: I love you and I miss you and I can't wait for you both to come home. Please send me all of the pictures of Leonora...

Ilya texted back almost right away. It was a picture of the baby, still sleeping, but in a bassinet this time. Shane stared at the picture and the baby's sweet sleeping face. She was wearing a onesie, no hat. She had a head full of golden-brown hair and Shane felt his eyes tear up again.

He was going to see Ilya in her, he knew it. The same color hair, maybe it would even be curly like Ilya's. Maybe she would have hazel eyes. She was biologically his niece after all and genes were fucking wild.

Shane: She looks like you a little

Ilya: A little

Shane: I love her

Ilya: ❤️

Shane: I'm sending this pic to my parents

Ilya: are they with you?

Shane: No. They're coming tomorrow

Ilya: good. You should not be alone

Ilya: I love and miss you, too

Shane sighed a little. Ilya was right. Shane never did very well alone when he was feeling this anxious but Ilya shouldn't be alone either. Shane was determined to make sure that Ilya was taken care of when he got back.

He sent the baby's picture to his parents.

Shane: Leonora Irina Hollander ❤️

Mom called him almost immediately and he sat up, answering the FaceTime request with a big smile.

"Shane!" Mom exclaimed and Shane could see his Dad in the background trying to get in the frame of the FaceTime. "That is the cutest baby I've ever seen!"

"So cute!" Dad called from behind Mom.

Shane laughed. He loved his parents. He was so grateful for them and their support and love and excitement. They had been so great through this whole process, making themselves available, and being so thrilled to be grandparents, which hadn't surprised Shane at all.

"She is," Shane chuckled.

"Leonora... I love that name," Mom cooed, resting a hand over her heart, her own eyes as misty as his.

"It's a good name!" Dad added.

Shane smiled widely, his eyes stinging with happy tears.

"Yeah. We really like it and we wanted to give her Ilya's mother's name as a middle name since the kids are going to have my last name."

"That's such a beautiful tribute," Mom replied, wiping her eyes.

"Yeah. It was important to me to have that, especially because Ilya didn't want to use his last name."

God, just thinking about that. They'd already talked about how Ilya wanted their kids to be Hollanders but it felt like such a huge thing. So much love and trust to want that. And Shane still wanted their kids to feel that connection to Russian culture, at least, if not Ilya's family. He wanted their kids to speak Russian. Everything that they had talked about was going to become a reality... it was fucking crazy to think about.

Shane talked with his parents for a while, giving them updates, and promising to forward whatever pictures Ilya sent him of the baby.

"How's he doing?" Mom asked. "I don't want to inundate him with texts. I know it's a lot right now."

"He's okay, I think. He seemed tired, understandably so. I think he'd probably appreciate a text from you guys."

"Maybe I'll send something quick and small..." Mom pondered. "You still want us to come to you tomorrow?"

"Yeah, please. That would be great."

"Great! We can go shopping and get anything else you guys might need! Your father and I want to get her some gifts, too, from her grandparents."

Shane smiled, warmed all the way to his toes. "Sure. Okay."

They finalized plans for tomorrow and Shane ended the call. He wanted to send the picture of Leonora to everyone but there was another part of him that was nervous about that. He wanted her and Ilya to come home first.

He wanted to just be with them and take care of them and settle in as a family before he started posting things and telling people stuff. He was still scared that something could go wrong and he didn't want to jinx it.

He stared at the picture, smiling, and then texted Ilya again.

Shane: Pics of you? 🙄

Shane waited almost six minutes before he got another picture.

Ilya was laying in bed in his condo. He was shirtless and Leonora was resting on his chest so they were skin-to-skin. She had a little pink blanket settled over her, her tiny baby face turned away from the camera. Ilya's hand rested underneath her to support her, her little body fitting in the palm of his hand, and he was smiling his crooked smile and winking.

Shane clapped a hand over his chest. His heart had absolutely melted into a puddle, all of his insides had turned to goo. He had no idea how on earth Ilya could look so gorgeous and so soft and sweet at the same time. And with their freaking baby. Who looked so *tiny* against him. Shane was going to die. He immediately saved the photo to his phone and made it his home screen wallpaper.

He texted back immediately but it was a bunch of gibberish and then heart emojis.

He wished he could teleport to Moscow or have them just teleport here. He didn't want to have to wait, he wanted his little family home with him *now*.

August

Ilya was in Russia for almost a month. Shane's anxiety steadily increased the more time passed. The process for adopting Leonora was taking longer than anticipated, even with the extra help from the contact Ilya had connected with within the Ministry.

It wasn't helping that Shane could tell how stressed and exhausted Ilya was. Leonora was a newborn who didn't have any kind of sleep schedule and he was worrying about her and making sure that all of her papers were in order and that they could get her a visa or a passport or something, and then he had to bring her back to Canada, which was a whole other thing in and of itself.

Shane was just about ready to go to Russia himself (which was a bad idea), when Ilya called, saying that all of the proper paperwork had come through and he was going to get the soonest available flight home.

Shane had cried about it. He was just relieved they were coming home and it wasn't going to take months and months for things to be sorted out.

They were so fucking lucky.

It was a rough few days waiting for Ilya and the baby to come home. Anticipatory anxiety and lack of sleep and some excitement, too. His parents were fondly exasperated with him but they weren't giving him that much of a hard time.

This was a big change and it had been so stressful to get here. Shane knew that he would be a mess once they actually had Leonora with them but he just wanted them home. He wanted his husband and his baby with him so he could dote on them both, especially after all this stress.

He wanted Leonora to have a soft place to land, for her to feel loved and safe. He could only imagine what all of this must be doing to her poor little nervous system. Shane had read a lot about trauma and babies and how stress affected them and their development. He was worried about her ability to bond with them, if things would be harder because of everything she'd experienced.

"Everything's gonna be fine, kiddo," Dad said, calling Shane from his thoughts. Shane smiled at his dad wryly and nodded.

"I know," he murmured.

"Just one thing at a time, eh? There's no guidebook on how to do this thing. But we're here to help and you and Ilya will be in it together. You've got all your friends. You're in good shape."

Shane nodded, looking down at his coffee.

"I just don't want to mess it up, you know?"

"Of course," Dad replied. "No parent does. But you'll make mistakes and you won't be perfect, but you learn from it. Being a parent is messy and chaotic and stressful... but you care so much, Shane. And that's the biggest thing. Giving a shit."

Shane looked up at his dad again and smiled, chuckling. His dad wasn't much of a swearer and he was a man of few words. He was more of an "actions speak louder than words" guy but Shane appreciated him saying all of this.

"I do. I love both of them so much."

Dad smiled back at him and nodded. "That's going to take you a long way. It's not everything, but it's a lot."

"Thanks, Dad."

"Anytime."

Coffee and breakfast finished, they all got ready to head to the airport. Shane was shaking, a mix of excited nerves, so Dad drove. Shane couldn't keep his leg still, bouncing it anxiously, tracking Ilya's flight on his phone.

They'd landed and they had to get through baggage claim, then customs, and then out of the airport. Ilya texted Shane that they were in line at customs and Shane texted back about a million crossed fingers emojis.

Ilya was radio silent for the next thirty minutes. Shane was doing his best to not catastrophize. Customs always kind of took a long time and Ilya had extra things to worry about.

"Oh! I see them!" Mom said. Shane looked up and out the window. They'd been waiting in the pick up line, at the curb, not wanting to wait inside the airport, since it would probably cause a scene. Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov spotted at the airport with a mystery baby. Yeah, that was a whole thing he didn't want to have to deal with.

Shane saw Ilya, towering over most people as he walked through the doors from the terminal, and he was out of the car as quickly as possible.

Ilya looked so exhausted. His curls were more chaotic than usual and he had dark bags under his eyes. His hands were full with a suitcase and a baby carrier and all Shane wanted to do was hug him.

"Hi," Ilya said, smiling tiredly.

"Hi," Shane replied, wetly, resting his hands on Ilya's arms, leaning in to kiss him. Ilya kissed him back, brief and soft. They looked at each other, relief and affection palpable between them, in just that single look.

"I brought you a present," Ilya said, holding up the carrier, and the sleeping baby in it. Shane's heart was so full and he laughed, covering his mouth as he looked at the perfect sleeping baby in her little summer outfit.

"Here," he finally managed, taking the carrier. "I got her."

Ilya said hi to Mom and Dad, who took his bags, everyone pausing to ogle over the baby, before Mom hustled everyone back to the car, saying they'd have plenty of time to coo over her once they were back at the house.

Ilya and Shane sat in the backseat, the baby between them. Shane reached out, touching Ilya's cheek, stroking his thumb over his cheekbone tenderly.

"I'm so glad you're home," he murmured, in Russian.

Ilya smiled and nodded, leaning into Shane's touch. "Me, too. I'm very tired."

"I can tell. We'll get home and get you settled in and you can sleep. We've got help."

Ilya closed his eyes and sighed and Shane could see the stress start to ease out of him. He watched his husband for a few moments, before looking down at the perfect baby in the carrier, sound asleep.

He reached out a finger, gently brushing it over her soft cheek, completely melting just from looking at her. Shane thought he knew what love felt like but this felt like so much more. He would do absolutely anything for Leonora.

They got back home and Shane reached out to gently smooth a hand through Ilya's curls, stroking his finger down between Ilya's brows. Ilya hummed and opened his eyes.

"We're home," Shane murmured and Ilya smiled, nodding, stretching out.

Mom and Dad shooed Ilya and Shane into the house with the baby.

"We'll get the bags and everything. You go inside," Mom insisted.

Ilya carried the baby into the house where Anya went bananas, barking and whining, her tail wagging. It had been a long time since she'd been apart from Ilya for this long.

"Yes, my sweet girl! I know! I'm sorry I was gone so long," Ilya cooed at her. "But we brought home your new sister."

Anya was definitely interested in what was in the carrier, hopping up onto her back legs, her front paws on Ilya's thigh, trying to get closer.

"Come here, Anya," Shane said, scooping Anya up, as Ilya set the carrier down on one of their armchairs. He unbuckled the baby from the carrier and carefully lifted her out of it, cradling her in his arms. He sat down on the floor and looked at Shane.

"Is okay," he said. Shane gave him an uncertain look but let Anya go. She came over to Ilya and sniffed at Leonora. She was soft and gentle, one paw resting on Ilya's knee, the other tucked up against her side. Shane moved closer, joining them on the floor.

"Good girl, Anya," Ilya murmured. "This is Leonora. Your sister."

Anya licked at Leonora and the baby wiggled and made soft little noises, making Ilya chuckle. It was a sweet, soft moment.

"It's okay," Ilya soothed, in Russian. "You're home now. Do you want to meet your Daddy?"

Ilya's eyes lifted to meet Shane's and Shane bit his lip. He held out his arms and Ilya moved closer, settling Leonora into them. Shane cradled her close, smiling. The baby's eyes were open and she looked up at him. She moved a little, stretching out, and yawning, making Shane's heart wobble.

"Hi, baby," he murmured. "I'm your Dad. We've been waiting for you. We're so happy you're here."

Leonora made a soft cooing noise, reaching up her little hand, and Shane kissed her tiny fist gently. He pulled her closer to his face, nuzzling against her, his heart so full, eyes stinging.

"Hi. Hello. I love you so much. Welcome home."

Ilya had moved closer, wrapping an arm around Shane, his chin on Shane's shoulder. He reached his free hand up, wrapping careful fingers over Leonora's foot, rubbing his thumb over her tiny little sole.

"She's so perfect," Shane murmured, turning his head as Ilya rested his forehead against Shane's temple.

"She is," Ilya replied, kissing Shane's cheek.

"You have to tell me everything," Shane murmured, turning to kiss Ilya warmly. "But I want you to sleep."

"Yes," Ilya replied. "Me, too. I want to shower and then sleep."

"Do you want to now? I think me and my parents can handle the baby for a bit..."

Ilya chuckled. "Yes. Okay." He rested his forehead on Shane's shoulder. "Wouldn't mind showering with you."

Shane chuckled, too, kissing into Ilya's hair. "Mm. We might need to rethink our sex schedule..."

"Ah," Ilya sighed. "We are truly parents now."

Shane smiled, feeling so much better now that Ilya and Leonora were here, relieved that everything was fine and normal. They were still *them* ... just with a baby.

"I love you," Shane sighed. "Go shower."

"I love you, too," Ilya replied and they kissed again. The baby started fussing and they both looked down at her.

"Diaper or hunger or a secret third thing?" Shane asked, his heart rate spiking as Leonora wiggled unhappily in his arms.

"Maybe all three," Ilya replied, taking the baby.

Shane had no idea how Ilya had managed to do this, on his own, for a *month*. He changed the baby's diaper, which settled her a bit, but it was also possible she was hungry.

"I got her, Ilya," Shane assured, taking the baby back. "Go."

Ilya nodded, smiling softly at Shane, kissing him, and then the baby, before he went upstairs to shower.

Shane let his parents fawn over Leonora, warmed to see them so excited and happy about the baby. They made her a bottle, which she seemed very comfortable with, and Shane settled on the sofa. Leonora seemed to eat well and he watched her, feeling so soft and in love.

Ilya had updated Shane about as much as he could when they'd talked on the phone. Things on Leonora's birth certificate, her preferences, different noises she made and what they meant as far as he could discern. Shane knew that he was just going to have to learn these things for himself and that was okay. He was up for the challenge.

"We're gonna get to know each other really well," Shane murmured to Leonora. "I'll take good care of you. I promise."

When Leonora had finished her bottle, Shane walked around the living room, baby propped on his towel-covered shoulder, rubbing and patting her back gently. He talked to her softly about her new house and what you could see out the windows and how happy he was that she was here.

"Did Ilya go to sleep?" Mom asked, concerned.

"He was going to shower and then sleep, I think," Shane replied, turning to his mom, gently swaying back and forth on his feet. "I was gonna go up in a bit and see if maybe he wanted to nap with the baby."

Leonora turned her head on his shoulder and made a soft noise that made Shane smile. She was so cute and small. He didn't want to put her down.

Shane kissed into her hair, nuzzling her, keeping her close. He could hear Ilya moving around upstairs and then he was coming down, his curls damp, wearing a pair of shorts, and a tank top.

"Go sleep," Shane said.

"But you are here," he replied. "And Leo."

Shane felt himself blush and smile, shaking his head. "You're calling her *Leo* already?"

Ilya smiled and Shane rolled his eyes, smiling fondly. Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, *Leo* caught between them. He pressed his forehead to Shane's, nuzzling their noses, then kissed the top of Leo's head.

For a long moment, it was just the three of them together. Shane's entire world was right here and there was no place else he wanted to be. Then Ilya kissed Shane again and pulled away and Shane remembered that his parents were here, too.

Ilya went to get something to drink and Mom asked what everyone wanted for lunch.

The baby was put down to sleep. Shane had obsessively checked the baby monitors, making sure they worked after they'd bought them, so he felt good about them. The monitors had cameras so they could watch Leo as she slept.

They all sat in the kitchen to eat and Shane could tell that Ilya was fading. His parents moved into the living room while Ilya helped Shane pack away leftovers. Shane wrapped his arm around his husband, leaning into him, glad to feel him close again, to smell him. He smoothed his hand over Ilya's chest, nuzzling his neck a little.

“You need to sleep,” Shane hummed.

“Yes,” Ilya replied. “But your parents are here.”

“They won’t care,” Shane chuckled.

Ilya sighed and nodded, giving in. He went upstairs and Shane followed. He’d set the bassinet up not far from their bed, since he’d read that Leo should sleep with them until she was about a year old. Ilya got into bed and Shane sat on the edge, running his hand through Ilya’s curls, pressing tender kisses to his husband’s face.

“I missed you,” he sighed, nuzzling his face against Ilya’s.

“I missed you, too,” Ilya replied softly.

Shane wrapped an arm around Ilya, rubbing his back soothingly. They enjoyed a quiet moment together, before the baby started crying. They laughed and Shane pulled Ilya a little closer, held him a little tighter.

“We better get used to this, huh?” Shane murmured.

“Yes,” Ilya chuckled.

“I got her.”

“Bring her to me,” Ilya replied.

Shane nodded and went to the bassinet, picking Leo up, holding her against his shoulder.

“Shh, you’re okay,” he cooed to her. Ilya held his hands out and Shane handed Leo to him. Ilya took her, laying down with the baby on his chest.

She calmed almost instantly.

Shane smiled. “You did this with her a lot?”

Ilya hummed, his eyes sliding closed.

“Mm, when she needed. She gets lonely, I think. She did not get a lot of attention in the hospital.”

Shane lay down next to Ilya, resting his hand carefully over Ilya’s on Leo’s back. “I can only imagine...”

Ilya hummed. Shane smiled, kissing his shoulder.

“Sleep. I got you.”

Ilya fell asleep almost right away, his breathing deep and even. Leo looked so tiny laying on Ilya’s chest, his big hands keeping her close and secure. She was sleeping, too, and Shane

wondered at the love she didn't get after her birth, how hard it must have been for her, coming into the world, and not being cared for and loved in the way she would have needed.

It would be different now. She was home, with two parents who loved her so much already. Shane wanted to be sure that Leo never doubted how loved and wanted she was and he knew that Ilya wanted the same for her.

He stayed for a long while with them before finally going back downstairs to his parents. He felt bad leaving them to their own devices but they were understanding and chill about the whole thing.

"We're happy to help however we can," Mom said, hugging Shane. "But you three need to bond as a family, too. Take all the time you need."

Ilya slept for almost twelve hours. He woke up alone, to the sound of soft voices. He had never been more relieved to hear English in his entire life. He sighed, feeling better having actually slept. He hadn't even woken up to the baby crying.

He stretched out, giving himself a few more minutes to wake up, before he got out of bed, and made himself somewhat presentable for his in-laws. He was grateful for David and Yuna staying with them. Trying to care for a baby alone was something he hadn't really been prepared for. He'd done alright, he thought, but he didn't want to repeat the experience if he could help it.

It was stressful, wanting to be sure that she was taken care of and feeling like he couldn't be everywhere he needed to be. Ilya would happily take all the help he could get. And it was good for Shane, too, who was already anxious about being a new parent.

He came downstairs, finding everyone in the living room. Yuna had Leo in her arms, talking to her softly while she fed her.

"Hi," Shane said, his voice soft and affectionate. "How're you feeling?"

Ilya took the hand that Shane had reached out for him, smiling, and squeezing Shane's fingers gently.

"Better," he replied. "Thank you for letting me sleep."

"Of course," Shane hummed. "You needed it."

"There's coffee and breakfast in the kitchen," David said. "If you're hungry."

"Thank you," Ilya replied, smiling at his father-in-law. Shane kissed his hand and then let him go and Ilya went to the kitchen.

Ilya got himself some coffee and made himself a breakfast sandwich of eggs and sausage on a croissant. He joined the Hollanders in the living room and sat with Shane on the sofa, smiling as Shane snuggled up to him.

“She is a very good baby,” Yuna noted, Leonora propped up on her shoulder.

“How was she while I was sleeping?” Ilya chuckled.

“Good,” Shane replied. “She was up a bunch to eat but was surprisingly easy to put back down to sleep. We cuddled a lot. It was nice.”

Ilya smiled, his heart full. “Good.”

Shane and Ilya let the grandparents have their time with the baby. Yuna had the baby in her lap, she and David were talking to her in soft, sweet voices.

“You boys get ready for your day,” Yuna said, looking up. “Do what you have to do. We got her.”

Ilya and Shane exchanged a glance and a smile. They’d both eaten and had coffee but they both needed showers. David had walked Anya, which was good, and very helpful.

“You’re sure?” Shane asked.

“Of course,” David replied. “That’s why we’re here!”

“Thanks, guys.”

They both got up from the sofa and Ilya went to drop his mug and plate in the sink. Shane had gone upstairs and Ilya followed. The shower was running, the bathroom door partially open. Ilya peeked inside, finding Shane, naked, his back to Ilya.

Ilya pushed the bathroom door open and Shane looked over his shoulder. He smiled, surprisingly flirty, and put a finger to his lips.

“We have to be quick and quiet,” he said and Ilya grinned, pleasantly surprised.

“That will be a challenge for you,” Ilya purred, pressing his whole body against Shane from behind. “Except maybe the quick part.” He kissed Shane’s bare shoulder, running his hands over Shane’s chest, down his firm stomach.

“Fuck you,” Shane laughed breathily. “Good thing I love a challenge.” He turned his head, seeking out Ilya’s mouth. Ilya kissed him, grinding his dick against Shane’s ass, and Shane made a needy noise into Ilya’s mouth. Ilya wrapped his hand around his husband’s erection, stroking.

Shane moaned softly, his arm shooting out, his palm pressed to the shower door, and Ilya pressed him against it, biting Shane’s ear, dragging his lips over his neck.

“Could fuck you like this,” he hummed. Shane whimpered, pressing back against Ilya.

“No,” he managed. “In the shower. There’s lube in there.”

Ilya laughed, kissing the back of Shane’s neck, and leaned off of him. “Okay.”

Ilya pulled off his clothes, dropping them to the bathroom floor, and followed Shane into the shower. They wrapped around each other, making out under the rainfall spray, Ilya sliding his thigh between Shane's legs, rubbing up against him, Shane's hands digging into Ilya's shoulders.

"C'mon," Shane breathed, turning around so his back was facing Ilya. He planted his hands against the wall, ass lifted. "Hurry up."

"So bossy," Ilya quipped, grabbing the lube. He palmed Shane's ass cheek appreciatively, before slicking his fingers, and sliding his middle finger against the puckered skin of Shane's rim.

He would have liked to do more, to take his time, to worship Shane, especially after their time apart, but he didn't want to take complete advantage of his in-laws. And it was enough that Shane was allowing this. He normally didn't like having sex if his parents were staying with them.

Ilya leaned over Shane, pressing kisses over his back, working his finger in and out, adding another.

"Too much?" Ilya asked. He knew he was moving fast and he didn't want to hurt Shane.

"No," Shane breathed. "You're good. Keep going."

Ilya wasn't as thorough as he was normally, but fuck, it had been a little over a month since he'd last fucked Shane, and their sex life was about to get real funky real quick with a baby in the mix. They'd have to take it where they could get it.

He rubbed against Shane's prostate, making Shane whine and pant, pressing back against Ilya's fingers.

"So eager for me," Ilya growled.

"Yes. Fuck. It's been more than *a month*. C'mon. I'm ready."

Ilya didn't need to be told twice. He withdrew his fingers, slicking himself up, before pressing into Shane. He went slowly, carefully, until he was pressed fully inside.

"Ah—fuck," Shane groaned.

"This what you wanted, sweetheart?" Ilya cooed, curling his hands around Shane's hips, delighting in the warm clutch of Shane's body.

"Yes. Fuck yes. Come on. Fuck me."

Ilya didn't need to be told twice. He pounded into Shane, adjusting his angle to hit just the right spot as he found a brutal pace. Shane gasped and moaned, surprisingly quiet, as Ilya's hips slapped against his ass.

He had to bite his own lip to stay quiet, loving the way Shane felt as he fucked into him.

“So fucking perfect, Shane,” Ilya grunted. “So good for me.”

“Oh god. Ilya,” Shane whined. He reached down, jerking himself off, letting out a soft, plaintive sound as he came in shivery spurts. Ilya felt the way Shane spasmed around him, which only spurred him on. He was close. Only a few more thrusts before he emptied himself into his husband, pleasure washing over him in long waves.

Ilya rested his forehead against Shane’s back, both of them catching their breaths. Ilya smoothed his hands over his husband’s sides soothingly.

“Okay?”

“Yeah,” Shane hummed.

Ilya pulled out of him and Shane stood, taking a moment to stretch, which made Ilya chuckle, before he turned around, wrapping his arms around Ilya. He held Shane close, brushing his hand over his wet hair, and kissed him tenderly.

Shane leaned into him, kissing him back. It was a sweet, tender kiss, affectionate and reassuring, and they hugged tightly when they parted.

“I love you so much,” Shane murmured against Ilya’s shoulder. “Thank you for bringing our baby home...”

Ilya tucked his face against Shane’s neck. “I love you, too. So much.” He pressed a kiss to Shane’s wet skin. “I’m glad she is safe now.”

Shane rubbed his hand over Ilya’s back, squeezing him. “Me, too.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya fall in love with their baby

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

September

Shane was so in love.

He rocked back and forth on his feet gently, smiling down at the infant in his arms who seemed very content to have a bottle in her mouth. Her eyes were open, her little hands flexing against the bottle.

Shane smiled at her tenderly, speaking to her in murmured, affectionate French. He told her how much he loved her and how good of an eater she was and that they were going to go on a nice walk later.

It was the last few days of summer and Shane was trying to soak up as much of it as he could. He was lucky to have had a month with Leo but he was sad to be going back to hockey so soon, which was weird. A month didn't seem like nearly enough time.

It had been him and Ilya and the baby for the majority of the time. Shane's parents had been helping out and they'd had a lot to do; filing adoption paperwork, taking Leo to the pediatrician, and learning all about her.

It had been stressful, mostly because it was a lot of checkered sleep, making sure that Leo was getting everything that she needed, and the fact that she had been struggling with colic. Ilya was pretty sure it was because of her abandonment and Shane was in agreement. It was hard, seeing her so upset, and not being sure how to console her.

They'd found a few things, like skin-to-skin contact, and a different kind of formula for sensitive stomachs that seemed to help but from all their reading and what the pediatrician said, it would just have to run its course.

But they were managing. They made a good team and it really helped to have Shane's parents help them out, especially with things around the house, like laundry and dishes. And there were plenty of things they were learning about Leo, too.

She was a chatterbox, loving to make noises, and grab onto things. She would smile at Ilya and Shane, though her favorite place to be was in Ilya's arms. She liked a pink stuffed

elephant that Grandma and Grandpa had gotten her and fisting her little hand in Shane's hair.

He'd already decided he would probably cut it because Leo liked to pull. He just had to figure out how to break the news to Ilya.

But he had been enjoying having Ilya and Leo to himself. They'd told friends and said they were just settling in, nesting, for the three of them to get comfortable with each other, but that they were excited for everyone to meet Leonora.

They had made one post, a picture of their hands cupped around Leonora's feet, in black and white, that they'd posted on their respective social media. It had gotten tons of likes and reposts, but Shane hadn't been paying much attention to that.

He was just content to be with his husband and baby.

They'd been waiting so long for this and even if things hadn't gone to plan (like, at all), they'd gotten here. They were finally parents! And that was really exciting.

Shane thought he was settling in pretty well. He was still occasionally anxious, wanting to be sure that he was doing all of the things he was supposed to be doing, though Ilya did a good job of reminding him to slow down.

So he just reminded himself to enjoy this moment.

"All done?" he asked the baby, chuckling softly, putting down the bottle, and settling Leo on his shoulder. He rubbed and patted her back soothingly. It would be nap time and he and Ilya would probably try and get some shut eye, too.

Shane leaned his cheek gently against Leo's head, turning in a little circle as he rocked her gently, pausing at seeing Ilya in the doorway. He was leaning against the door jamb, one leg crossed over the other, arms crossed over his chest.

He was smiling, his expression fond, and Shane's heart fluttered in his chest, his cheeks turning pink.

"How long have you been there?" he asked.

"A little while," Ilya replied, chuckling. Shane rolled his eyes, though he was smiling, too. It was kind of sweet that he liked watching Shane with the baby... Shane liked watching Ilya with her, too. She was so little and he was so big and the dichotomy made Shane all squirmy (in a good way), his insides melting at the sight.

Ilya pushed off the door and stepped into their room, coming up to wrap his arms around Shane, their baby between them.

"Nap time?" he asked, kissing Shane's forehead, then ducked his head to kiss the top of the baby's.

"Yeah. For all of us, I think."

“Good. I am so tired.”

Shane laughed softly and Ilya did, too. “Me, too.”

They put the baby down in her bassinet and both climbed into bed, Anya curled up by their feet. Ilya tossed an arm around Shane and snuggled against him. Shane drifted to sleep easily, waking up about two hours later to Leo crying.

“My turn,” Ilya murmured from behind Shane, kissing the back of his head.

“Bring her here,” Shane murmured back, yawning.

Ilya hummed in reply and Shane watched him walk around their bed, leaning over the bassinet to pick Leo up, cooing at her. She looked so, so small in his hands, and Shane’s heart fluttered. He watched Ilya bow his head, lifting the baby close to his face so he could nuzzle and kiss her, his curls covering his face like a curtain.

Ilya spoke to Leo in tender Russian, resting her against him, his hand at the back of her head, rocking on his feet, giving her tiny, sweet kisses. He was so sweet with her and seeing them together filled Shane with so much love and happiness he felt like he could rocket into space.

He got up to get Leo a bottle, coming back upstairs to find his baby and husband in bed.

Shane handed the bottle to Ilya and joined them, cuddling up against Ilya’s side. He rubbed his thumb and index finger over Leo’s tiny foot, eyes lifting to Ilya’s face. He’d tucked his curls behind one ear as he looked down at their baby, his face soft and adoring, all of his concentration on her.

Ilya was exactly as Shane had expected and anticipated him to be as a father. He was so attentive and sweet and playful. Shane loved listening to Ilya and Leo laughing together. Her laughs and giggles were just the sweetest things and Shane felt a little swoony every time he heard them.

Anya came wandering over, resting her head on Shane’s thigh, and sighing heavily. Shane chuckled, petting her soft ears and head, all warm and fuzzy at having his tiny family close like this. He pressed a kiss to Ilya’s shoulder and Ilya turned his head to kiss Shane back.

He passed the empty bottle to him and Shane put it on the bedside table, watching Ilya pace around the room with Leo on his shoulder, talking to her in Russian again. Shane felt a little dreamy, watching his perfect husband and their perfect baby.

Ilya really was such a natural with her and Shane could watch them together all day, and not get bored.

“What do you think?” Ilya asked. “Should we go out?”

Shane nodded. “Yeah. I think that’d be good.”

They all got up and dressed, Leo in a little baby sun hat and onesie. They had a special kind of sunscreen and made sure to give her a light layer on her little legs and little arms, but she’d

be in a covered stroller, safe from the sun's rays.

It was nice getting outside. They took Anya, too, walking the sidewalks around their neighborhood. Their neighbors had been so kind, congratulating them, even bringing over food, asking how they could help if at all.

"Are you still awake?" Shane asked, leaning over the handle, smiling at Leo. She smiled back and Shane felt like he'd just won a gold medal.

"Look at that smile! Are you a smiley girl? Yes! So smiley!"

Ilya laughed fondly next to him, knowing how accomplished Shane felt whenever Leo smiled or laughed at him.

They stopped by one of the parks nearby, sitting in the shade. Leo did eventually fall asleep and it was just nice to enjoy the warm weather in comfortable silence. They headed back home and let Leo sleep. Ilya scooped her out of the stroller, taking her inside, and Shane watched after them.

They made lunch and fed the baby when she woke up, spending some time playing, before another nap.

They were in bed, curled up together when Shane broached the subject of friends visiting.

"Why not?" Ilya murmured, laying mostly on top of Shane, nuzzling his face under Shane's chin. Shane chuckled, squeezing Ilya close. "She is old enough now, yes?"

"Yeah," Shane replied. "I know the Pikes and J.J. wanted to meet her, all the guys."

Ilya hummed. "Svetlana, too... and Rose."

Shane nodded, burying his face in Ilya's curls, kissing into them warmly. "Maybe we can start planning when people come by? I know it'll be more travel for Svetlana and Rose but... everyone else isn't too far."

"Yes. Okay," Ilya replied, kissing Shane's neck.

"We should probably rotate when we have people coming... I don't want her to be overwhelmed... or get sick."

"Shane," Ilya sighed, nipping Shane's neck.

Shane smiled. "You're tired."

"Yes. You are not?"

Shane laughed. "I'm exhausted."

"Sleep, moy lyubovnik."

“Okay,” Shane chuckled again.

He leaned over, turning off the light.

“Will be fine, Shane,” Ilya said for the twentieth time, sounding increasingly exasperated (but fond). “Hayden has like, a million kids, he is an expert.”

“I know! I’m not worried about that,” Shane huffed, not even bothering to comment on Hayden having “a million” kids. “I’m worried about how Leo will be.”

“She will be fine,” Ilya assured, tugging at Shane’s shirt sleeve to pull him close, wrapping his arms around him. “If she cries, she cries. Is okay. Not the end of the world.”

Shane sagged against Ilya. “I know you’re right... I just want her to be comfortable.”

“I know,” Ilya hummed. “She will be. We won’t leave her.”

Shane closed his eyes and wrapped his arms around Ilya. “We won’t.”

The Pikes and J.J. were coming over today to meet Leo for the first time and Shane had been all in his head about it.

They’d managed to get a workout in that morning, which had helped Shane’s nerves. Ilya had set up a pack n play in their gym so they could keep an eye on Leo and it had actually worked out well.

They had settled into a good routine and he hoped they could keep it going, even when the hockey season started. Adjustments would be required but would probably be manageable. He was dreading sleep training when they had to deal with that. He had a hard enough time with Leo being fussy...

But one thing at a time.

He was looking forward to having his friends meet Leo. He knew Ilya was excited about it, too. They’d been so involved in their friends’ kids’ lives that they were looking forward to having their friends involved in Leo’s.

They’d gotten so much support already from people they knew from the Foundation and around the League and it felt really nice to have so many people reach out and offer assistance in whatever way they could.

The Centaurs had even made a post about it, which had been surprisingly sweet, and the owners had sent along a care package of all kinds of baby supplies and toys, and a little Centaurs sweater and hat. Shane was so appreciative of how warm everyone had been so far, though Ilya hadn’t seemed at all surprised.

“We should get ready,” Ilya murmured to Shane, kissing his cheek.

Shane smiled. "Okay."

Everyone came by around lunch time. Shane wasn't sure exactly what he'd been expecting, but it hadn't been getting all emotional as he watched his two best friends holding his baby.

Hayden was such a natural with kids, which made sense, since he had four of his own. He held Leo in the crook of his arm, cooing over her, making funny faces, laughing with her as she laughed.

Leo was absolutely minuscule in J.J.'s arms but he was so gentle and sweet with her, speaking to her in tender French. It filled Shane's heart to see his closest friends with Leo and he appreciated Ilya for being so patient as Shane got all in his feelings about it.

But Shane's favorite part was still just seeing Leo in Ilya's arms, how comfortable he was with her, having casual conversation with Jackie with a baby against his shoulder. He was so perfect... and god, sexy.

They hadn't had sex in quite a while, both of them too tired and stressed, but Shane was sure they could figure something out... eventually.

It was nice to be with their friends though, to have everyone love their baby as much as they did.

And Leo was so good! She had fussed when she was hungry and needed a diaper change but was mostly pretty chill, comfortable with being held by others... maybe even soaking up all the attention. And that had been a relief.

They had decided to introduce her slowly to their friend group. Hayden, Jackie, the kids, and J.J. had been the tester group. Svetlana and Rose were flying in from Boston and LA respectively to meet Leo and would be staying with them for a few days but seeing how Leo was now, Shane was feeling far less anxious.

His main concern was Svetlana and Rose being woken up by Leo crying. He'd warned them that Leo wasn't sleeping through the night yet but neither of them seemed to mind.

It was sort of nice having extra hands over the few days that Svetlana and Rose were visiting. The two of them fawned over Leo, telling her how she could come to them for whatever she needed when she was older.

They'd brought her all kinds of gifts, too. Which was sweet and unnecessary.

Shane felt so grateful for their found family. All their friends who were going to be aunts and uncles to Leo and help raise her.

They'd gotten so lucky.

The week before training camp started up was the hardest. Shane didn't want to leave Ilya or Leo and he could see the toll that not returning to hockey was taking on Ilya. He was distracted by the baby, sure, but he was otherwise more withdrawn.

They were doing their best to make time for each other, too. Their needs didn't just stop because they had a baby, they just needed to find a balance.

With Leo put down for sleep, Shane tugged Ilya into bed with him, holding him. He wasn't going to push, but he did want Ilya to know that Shane was here for him. He stroked his fingers gently through Ilya's curls, kissing into them, warm and tender.

Ilya's thumb rubbed back and forth against Shane's side, just under his armpit, his head pillowed on Shane's chest. It was quiet in their room, comfortable, the silence disrupted by a long sigh from Ilya.

Shane kissed him again.

"I miss my mother," Ilya murmured into their quiet bedroom, in Russian. Shane didn't say anything. He just held Ilya a little tighter, listening.

"I thought, maybe, I would be more upset about not going back to hockey, and I am sad about that, but, I am more upset about her not being here. I wish she could be with me and it really fucking sucks that I can't call her and just... ask for her advice or buy her a plane ticket so she could stay with us..."

Ilya sniffled and swallowed, bringing up a hand to wipe at his face. Shane smoothed his hand up and down his back gently.

"I hate that she's gone... that she's missed so much..."

"Baby..." Shane murmured, also in Russian, and squeezed Ilya, kissing into his hair. Ilya let out a shaky breath and Shane just held him close. He couldn't even imagine what Ilya was feeling. The idea of Shane being without his own mother felt unfathomable... the hurt and grief that Ilya was experiencing was something he'd never understand... but he didn't want Ilya to feel alone.

Shane felt his own eyes sting, feeling his husband cry against him. It had been such an emotional whirlwind for both of them but Shane knew that Ilya was getting the brunt of it. Shane felt so guilty... wishing he could take away Ilya's pain and stress. He had lost so much... sacrificed so much. He deserved so much better... though Shane knew that Ilya wanted a family with Shane, that what they had together was *good*.

Shane just held Ilya close, pressing tender kisses into his hair, running his hand up and down his back until he'd seemed to run out of tears. Shane gently hushed his apologies, running his hand very carefully into Ilya's curls. He had nothing to apologize for.

"You've been through so much, Ilya," Shane murmured. "I'm sorry things have been so heavy for you. But you have nothing to be sorry for."

Ilya raised his head, resting his chin on Shane's chest, and Shane gently wiped his damp cheeks, cooing at him softly, cupping his hand gently around Ilya's cheek.

"Thank you," Ilya murmured.

“No thanks required. I’m here for whatever you need.”

Ilya sighed softly and closed his eyes and Shane gently carded his fingers through Ilya’s hair some more before Ilya got up and went to wash his face and blow his nose. He came back and Shane opened his arms for him.

“C’mon,” he murmured. “Nap time...”

They cuddled up together and slept until Leo woke up. Ilya seemed a bit better after the nap and Shane watched him with the baby, the way he smiled so softly at her, talking to her in Russian, and cuddling her close.

He’d wanted this for so long and finally having it felt so surreal. It didn’t seem fair to not have more time... so Shane cuddled up with both of them, just wanting to have them in his arms.

Ilya leaned back against him and smiled. Shane kissed into his soft curls and smoothed his thumb over Leo’s tiny head.

“I don’t want to go to camps,” Shane murmured.

“But you love them,” Ilya murmured back.

“Yeah, well, I love you guys more.”

Ilya huffed a soft laugh, turning his head to press a kiss to Shane’s neck. “We will be here.”

“I know... I just don’t want to leave you...”

“I know.”

Shane held his husband and baby a little tighter.

“Promise you’ll have help? My parents would love it... and I’m sure any of the other WAGs will be down to help...”

Ilya barked a laugh, which made Leo make an unhappy, surprised noise.

“Sorry, moya zvezdochka,” he murmured, soothing her, before he leaned slightly away to look at Shane. “I am a WAG now?”

Shane blinked back at him. “Um, I guess technically?”

Ilya chuckled softly and rolled his eyes, but he settled back against Shane. “Is hard to not worry, I know, but I will ask for help. Your mother already threatened me.”

Shane smiled. “She did?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds like Mom.”

“I also got a few messages from Lisa, Caitlin, Selena, and Cassie that if we need anything, to just tell them.”

“That was nice.”

“Mmm. I am in the WAG group chat now.”

Shane laughed softly, burying his face in Ilya’s shoulder.

“We need a better, uh, what is word? A word that stands for something?”

“An acronym.”

“Okay. Yes, that.” Ilya paused. “Maybe I will get a jersey that says *Daddy* on the back with your number and wear it at games...”

Shane sat up straight. “You better not!” he hissed.

Ilya looked at Shane out of the corner of his eye, grinning mischievously.

“Why not? I am a househusband now. A sugar baby,” he teased.

Shane’s face was beet red. “No. Absolutely not.”

Ilya snickered. He just loved making Shane uncomfortable. Shane pouted.

“Please don’t,” he finally said. “I feel bad enough as it is...”

Ilya shifted so that he was sitting up and turned carefully, looking at Shane, a sleeping Leo cradled in his arms.

“Why?” he asked, eyebrows pinched.

“Because of everything you’ve been through. Everything you’ve done. Ilya... you’ve given up so much for us. You’ve lost so much. How the fuck am I supposed to go and just play hockey and feel all casual about it? I’m not an idiot. I know what the wives of hockey players go through and experience and it won’t be any different for you. It’s going to be so hard... and I feel selfish...”

“Shane...”

Shane pinched the bridge of his nose, eyes stinging with frustrated tears. Ilya reached out one hand, placing it on Shane’s thigh, rubbing his thumb soothingly over the fabric of his sweatpants.

“I am choosing this,” Ilya said. “I want to do this. I want things to be better for my kids than it was for me. Will be hard, yes, but I know this. And I know that you see that.”

Shane swallowed and looked at Ilya, nodding. Ilya smiled softly back at him.

“Will be okay. I know you will help when you are able and I know that you love and appreciate me.”

“So much,” Shane interjected, wanting Ilya to know how much Shane meant it. That he loved and appreciated Ilya more than words could ever express.

Ilya smiled wider and chuckled. “I know, sweetheart. Try not to worry too much. And trust me. I will tell you if something is wrong and I will ask for help.”

Once upon a time Shane would have had a hard time believing that but Ilya had worked so hard to get to a place of being able to talk about what was going on in his head and when he needed extra support. It wouldn’t be easy but he would do it and Shane did trust him.

“Okay.”

Shane wrapped his arms around his little family, wanting them close.

“You’re an amazing parent,” Shane murmured to Ilya. “I love watching you with her.”

Ilya hummed. “I love her,” he replied softly. “And I love being a dad.”

Shane smiled, kissing Ilya’s cheek, and the back of Leo’s tiny head. “So do I.”

Shane was having a hard time dialing in at camps. He wasn’t surprised by this, he’d expected it, but it only made his stress worse.

He hated not being in top form but everyone seemed to be taking it in stride. Coach had sidled up to him, leaning casually against the boards.

“Things going okay with the baby?” he asked.

Shane liked Coach Wiebe. He was the most chill coach that Shane had ever worked with. Down to Earth, smart, witty, and empathetic, he really cared about his players, and that had meant a lot to Shane.

“Yeah,” Shane replied. “It’s an adjustment. I’m just having a hard time knowing that Ilya is alone.”

Wiebe nodded in understanding, his face sympathetic. “That’s understandable. I remember when my oldest was born. I almost didn’t make it home to be there, we were on a road trip. It was hard only getting a few days with her and my wife before I had to get back on the road. It’s never easy leaving the person you love all alone with an infant, wanting to be there, but not being able to. Frankly, it sucks.”

Shane sighed heavily and nodded. “Is it weird to want some kind of paternity leave?”

Wiebe laughed. “Man, not at all. I think most of us feel that way. It’s not easy, having to spend so much time apart, but it does get easier as you figure out what works and what

doesn't. And we got your back. Whatever you and Ilya need, we're happy to help however we can."

Shane smiled appreciatively at Wiebe. "Thanks, Coach."

"Anytime, Hollander. Now let's get back out there. I still need you to skate circles around the rookies."

Shane was exhausted by the time he got home but he was eager to see Ilya and Leo. Anya greeted him at the door and Ilya walked into the entryway from the kitchen.

"Hi," he said, smiling at Shane. "How was camp?"

Shane dropped his bag in the entryway and went to Ilya, holding him. Ilya hummed, holding him back.

"I missed you," Shane sighed.

Ilya chuckled, kissing the side of Shane's head. "I missed you, too."

They stood in the entryway, just hugging each other close, before Shane pulled away to kiss Ilya, brushing his fingers over his cheeks warmly.

"Camp was okay. I was distracted but... I'll figure it out. How are you? How was Leo?"

Ilya was looking at Shane knowingly. "Fine. Leo was good. She is sleeping now. I made dinner."

Shane sighed, kissing Ilya's cheek, lingering. "Thank you..."

As they sat down for dinner, Shane felt... hopeful.

They could do this. They were doing it. It wouldn't be easy but he'd found that most things worth doing weren't the easiest. They were going to make things work and he didn't doubt how rewarding the experience would be, in the end.

Chapter End Notes

moya zvezdochka - my little star

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Shane's hockey season starts

October

Shane's season was off to a good start. Ilya was proud of him and how well he was doing, considering all of the big changes that had been made in their life in such a short amount of time.

It was hard being without him during the day for practice but they had figured out a good routine as they got through camps and into the pre-season. Luca was playing center and doing incredibly well. Ilya was proud of him, too.

It was weird not being there with them but he and Leo had made a few excursions out to the practice facility and she got to meet all of the guys. She handled it like a champ, only getting a little weepy but brightening up as she was held and cuddled.

Ilya loved watching her recognize Shane, the way she would reach for him, or brighten up when he came to nuzzle or kiss her. It made Ilya's heart lurch every time. So sweet and soft.

They'd had the longest sexual drought of their relationship since bringing Leo home, which neither were surprised by or angry about. They had been tired and stressed and transitioning into being parents hadn't been easy. They'd figured some things out though, taking advantage of nap time on weekends or getting frisky in the shower together or on the sofa or in their trophy room.

It reminded Ilya a little of their life before, when they'd had to make good use of only an hour or two together, and having sex in places that weren't their bedroom. It felt good to have worked out a lot of the kinks, finding their way into this new chapter of their life together.

It wasn't easy, of course. They were short with one another sometimes due to exhaustion and frustration if Leo was really struggling. Her colic had improved though and she was sleeping longer hours.

Ilya knew Shane was dreading sleep training but Ilya thought it would be okay. Leo had settled in pretty well and they were all adjusting okay, even with the hockey season starting. The worst had been Leo getting her vaccines, her poor little immune system working over time. There would be good and bad days and Ilya was just doing his best to ride the waves.

He was getting better at not panicking every time Leo cried. He could read her moods better, knowing the noises she made, and what they meant. She was much more expressive now,

laughing and smiling, making noises that imitated words, and moving around a lot more.

She could lift her head on her own and would roll over onto her back from her belly. She loved playing with toys and reaching and grabbing things. Shane's hair had become a favorite and he had talked about cutting it. Ilya wished he wouldn't but he understood. He'd had to rescue his husband from Leo's clutches more than once and she had a *very* strong grip.

Leo had favorite things, too. A pink stuffed elephant from her grandparents, a cozy blanket that Ilya and Shane had gotten, her little bouncy seat, bath time, and raspberries blown on her belly.

She was a cuddler, which Ilya loved. That was maybe his favorite thing, getting to cuddle with her while she was all sleepy and drowsy, before putting her down for a nap. He'd fallen asleep himself with Leo on his chest and Shane must have had about a thousand pictures of that on his phone... apparently it was his favorite thing, too.

Ilya loved tickling her and making her laugh. He had noticed her cheeks dimpling and he wondered if those would stay or if it was just because she had adorably round cheeks, which he loved to playfully bite.

Leo really was the sweetest baby. As she got older, Ilya started seeing more of his mother in her. The golden-brown hair that was most certainly going to be curly, the same eye shape, maybe even the same color, but she was still too young to tell just yet.

It was so weird. Andrei had looked so much like their father, it surprised Ilya to see more of their mother in Leo, but genes were strange. He had no idea what Leo's biological mother looked like, so he could only assume that features that didn't match his own were from her.

Every day was a new adventure and he was learning so much about himself and Leo and how to take good care of her.

It helped to have Yuna and David and all of the Centaurs ladies in his corner. He'd talked more to Jackie than he ever had in the years that he had known her. He hadn't even realized how anxious he could be about small things. Any weird noise that Leo made or thing that she did that was new had him freaking out a little.

Lisa was probably the most helpful. As a pediatrician, she had assured Ilya that most of the stuff that would happen was fine and normal and it was usually pretty obvious when something wasn't right. And Leo's pediatrician wasn't worried about her at all. So Ilya tried to take that to heart.

They had filed all the paperwork they needed to make Leonora a Canadian citizen and have both Ilya and Shane named as her parents. It was all thrilling and scary but apparently their paperwork looked good, so now they just had to wait.

All things considered though... everything was good.

Ilya wanted to bring Leo to some of Shane's home games. He'd gotten her a tiny jersey with Shane's number that said 'Daddy' across the back and some pink headphones for babies to

protect her little ears.

He knew Shane would like that, coming over to the boards to say hi to Leo. It was just one of those things that Ilya knew Shane had wanted to experience. Ilya was happy to give that to him. He wanted to experience it, too, to see how happy and delighted Shane would look.

Shane got home from practice and Ilya and Leo greeted him at the door. Shane melted as Leo reached for him and he held her close, kissing and nuzzling her face. Ilya's heart turned into goo watching them together.

"Bonjour mon petit," he cooed. "Were you good for Papa?"

Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, ducking his head so that he could rest his cheek against Shane's, and smiled as Shane rubbed their cheeks together.

"She is always good for me," Ilya replied warmly, making a face at Leo, laughing as she laughed. "Yes, you were such a good girl for me today! Do you want to tell Daddy what we did?"

"Bababa," Leo replied, clapping her hands.

"Oh really?" Shane laughed. "Wow! That's amazing!"

Leo giggled and pressed her little hands to Shane's mouth and Shane smiled, pressing kisses to her palms.

"Mon étoile," Shane hummed. Ilya had heard him say that before but he had not even one inkling of what it meant.

"What is that?" he asked, turning his face to press his nose to Shane's cheek.

"Hm? Oh. My star."

Ilya smiled. He called Leo the same, in Russian, and had told Shane what the translation was when he asked.

"Are you copying me?" he teased, kissing Shane's cheekbone.

"Only because it suits her," Shane replied, chuckling. "Or mon chou."

Ilya hummed. "Which is...?"

"My cabbage."

Ilya laughed.

"It can also be a kind of puff pastry... but it's sort of like a version of 'my darling' but I like it for Leo because she's so round. I can't get enough of these chunky, dimpled cheeks," Shane explained, leaning in and using his lips to "bite" Leo's cheeks, making her giggle, and hide her face in Shane's shoulder.

“Are you a little cabbage?” Ilya asked her, reaching up a finger to tickle her. “Are you our little cabbage?”

Leo shrieked with laughter, making both of her parents laugh along. Ilya loved this. He loved being silly and sweet with his family. He loved listening to Leo laugh and seeing Shane smile so brightly.

This was what he had always wanted. A house full of love and laughter. Even if he had never been able to put a name to it, he knew what the feeling was. And this was it. It was everything. The man he loved and this little miracle baby who had come into their lives at the perfect time.

“Are you hungry?” Ilya asked Shane, kissing the sliver of exposed skin where Shane’s neck met his shoulder.

“Yeah,” Shane replied.

“Good. I made food.”

Shane sighed. “You’re the best.”

He turned his head and they looked at each other, kissing softly.

“Are you ready for your adventure?” Ilya asked Leo in Russian as he laid her out on his and Shane’s bed, dressing her.

He always spoke to her in Russian when they were alone. It felt important to him to do so and it was the language she responded to best, given that it was what she had heard for the majority of her life. But he and Shane spoke to her in English, too, and Shane occasionally used French.

Leo smiled and wiggled and Ilya chuckled, very carefully sliding her little arm into a tiny little sweater.

“Yes, Papa! I am so excited! We’re going to see Daddy and watch him play hockey! It’s going to be so much fun!”

He finished dressing her with her little Centaurs’ jersey and a tiny pink beanie to keep her little head warm.

“You’re so cute,” Ilya cooed, holding her tiny hands in his, and leaned in to rub his nose against hers. “I’m going to take a picture of you. So many pictures!”

He took several pictures of a smiling, dimpled Leo, his heart so full he felt like it could burst, then he sent the best one to Shane, Yuna, and David. He didn’t bother looking at the replies yet, pulling Leo into his arms, kissing her cheek, and cuddling her, laughing as she laughed, talking to her as they went downstairs.

Ilya checked and then double checked to make sure he had everything he needed, including Leo's headphones, extra diapers, and formula, her blanket, and various other sundry baby items he might need at the drop of a hat.

He was wearing his own Hollander jersey, deciding to cut Shane some slack and not get a 'Daddy' one of his own. He made sure to eat something, made sure Anya was taken care of, and then started getting ready to leave for the arena.

"Okay, little girl," he said, putting her into her carrier. "Let's go."

Leo did great in cars, which was good. She usually fell asleep but she was awake when Ilya came to get her before they went into the arena.

He was surprised at all the attention they received from staff when they got inside. People asking how things were going and how he was doing and how excited they were for him and Shane and how adorable Leo was.

He was spotted by some of the partners and their children after heading down the hall that would lead outside to the ice.

"Ilya!" Cassie called, waving him over. Milo and his sister, Nicki, were standing next to her.

"Oh my god, look at this little peanut," she cooed at Leo. "Hi sweetheart. Aren't you just the cutest thing!"

Leo said hi to the Boodram siblings, getting fist bumps from them both, before they were joined by the other spouses and their kids.

They had their own room to drop off bags and carriers and things, before filing out to the boards. It was a little disconcerting to be here without actually getting on the ice, but Leo was a welcome distraction. Ilya gently slid on her headphones, then lifted her from her carrier, holding her close. He kissed her cheek and held her against his chest.

"Ready? Let's go. We're going to see Dad!"

The arena was just starting to fill up with fans and the team was on the ice for warm ups. Some of the guys gathered around to greet their partners and kids and Ilya spotted Shane immediately.

He looked like he was looking for Ilya and Leo, which was very sweet, and Ilya came around the boards, close to where Shane was lingering on the ice. Shane spotted them and came over, smiling, his face all crinkled in the adorable way that Ilya loved so much.

"Hi!" he called.

Ilya laughed, turning Leo in his arms so that she could face the boards.

"Hi, baby! Hi, Leonora!"

“Look,” Ilya said, glancing between his daughter and husband. He reached out and tapped his fingers against the glass. “Is Daddy.”

She didn’t react in the way she normally did when she saw Shane, and Ilya wondered if it was because Shane was wearing his helmet. Shane looked concerned and Ilya chuckled.

“She doesn’t know you with your helmet,” Ilya said and Shane laughed, relieved. He took it off and Leo smiled and clapped her hands.

“Aw,” Ilya cooed. “See? Is Daddy.”

She reached out to touch the glass and Shane bent forward to be at face level with her in Ilya’s arms. He waved at her and made funny faces and got a few more giggles and smiles.

“I love you,” Shane said to the baby, lifting his eyes to look at Ilya. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Ilya replied, smiling. “Good luck! Say, ‘good luck, Daddy!’.” Ilya lifted Leo’s hand and waved it at Shane.

He laughed. “Thank you, mes étoiles!”

Shane blew them both kisses and waved, before he skated away, putting his helmet back on. Ilya watched after him, wishing he could be on the ice with him. Leo pushed herself back against his chest and he adjusted her, bringing her close to his face, kissing her warmly on her perfect round cheeks.

“C’mon,” he hummed to her. “Let’s see Daddy win at hockey, yeah?”

The matinée games were nice because they weren’t late. Leo fell asleep not even halfway through the first period and Ilya was able to watch Shane in action from the private box meant for spouses and their families.

But Leo was the belle of the ball. She was the youngest out of all the kids and certainly the tiniest. Everyone was interested in meeting her and hearing all about her. She was passed around early in the second period and fed by three different people, then was finally given back to Ilya.

“You went on such an adventure, huh?” he asked her, kissing her tiny little face, and held her close. “I missed you.”

“Are you guys going to have her learn Russian?” Lisa asked, sitting next to Ilya. Ilya looked up at her and smiled.

“Yes,” he replied. “Is important to both of us that she know it. We talk to her in English, too. And sometimes French, with Shane.”

Lisa smiled. “She’s going to be a little smarty pants.”

“I hope so,” Ilya replied, looking at Leo, who was watching Lisa with interest. “I hope she is smarter than me.”

Lisa looked at him, smiling fondly. “She’s going to be just fine. You’re great with her.”

Ilya bowed his head, feeling his cheeks go warm, and he smiled. “I like being a dad.”

“I can tell.”

The words moved Ilya and he glanced away. “Thank you.”

God, was he going to get all emotional at his husband’s fucking hockey game? Maybe...

Ilya had never seen his own father enjoying parenthood. He always seemed to see it as just another chore, chastising and criticizing, when he wasn’t using Ilya for his talent or fame or money.

Ilya never wanted Leo to experience that. He only ever wanted her to feel loved and cherished and taken care of. And he hoped that other people saw how much he loved being a parent.

Lisa hummed softly beside him and gently tickled the bottom of Leo’s foot, making her giggle and squirm. Ilya laughed.

“Aren’t you so popular today, hmm? You’re gonna sleep so well tonight.”

Cassie came over to talk to him, letting him know that he was more than welcome to join her carpool if he ever wanted to come to a game with the baby and drink. The family room at the arena was incredibly well-stocked with food and a full bar, a play area for kids, and day care staff on hand.

Ilya wasn’t quite ready for that, especially with Leo being so young, but maybe when she was a little older, he wouldn’t mind letting her run around with the other kids, supervised by a trained professional, while he had a few cocktails, and watched Shane play hockey.

During the second intermission, Ilya checked his phone. He saw the texts from Yuna and David getting all excited about how sweet Leo looked and a series of texts from Shane that were just crying and heart emojis. Ilya opened up his social media, gently rocking Leo’s carrier back and forth.

He laughed at seeing the Centaurs’ official IG page having made a video post of Shane with Ilya and Leo. They captioned the video *Baby Hollanov* 🥰 and had tagged Shane and Ilya.

It had been reposted by SportsCenter and bardown and various other hockey socials. It was a cute little video Ilya had to admit, all three of them smiling and laughing. He reposted it, adding his own heart eyes emojis.

Ilya took a picture of Leo sleeping and sent it to Yuna, David, and Shane. Then watched the rest of the game. It was nice to mingle with the other partners and catch up with everyone about their summers and how everyone was doing.

There was a lot he was learning about being a hockey spouse rather than a player. It was overwhelming at times but he felt like he was in good hands with the more seasoned

spouses.

The Centaurs won and Shane had played exceptionally well, as always, which was even more impressive knowing that he was *exhausted*. Ilya was going to have to figure out how to reward him later...

He filed out with the rest of the spouses and kids and they headed downstairs to wait for their husbands.

Leo had fallen asleep in her carrier, completely passed out, and Ilya smiled at her sleeping face. He looked up, keeping an eye out for Shane, and spotted him. He was dressed in his suit, his hair damp, and he was smiling wide.

"Hi," Shane greeted, standing on his tiptoes to kiss Ilya. It was a warm, lingering kiss that made warmth pool in Ilya's belly. He smiled against Shane's mouth and hummed as they parted.

"Hi," Ilya replied. Shane smiled back at him, leaning down to look at the baby, sound asleep.

"Aww, she's all tuckered out."

"She had a very busy day."

"I bet."

Shane rested a hand on Ilya's back as they made their way out of the arena, saying brief hellos and goodbyes, more than a few parents needing to take home their cranky kids. Shane dropped Leo and Ilya off at the Mercedes and would meet them at home, as he'd driven to the arena in the Jeep.

Ilya beat Shane home by a minute, which he teased Shane about, simply for the sake of teasing him. They both put the baby down, gave Anya some love, and Shane changed before they went to the kitchen where they made dinner together.

"You played so well tonight," Ilya hummed, arms wrapped around Shane from behind, his face tucked against Shane's neck as dinner baked in the oven.

"Thanks," Shane sighed, resting his hands on Ilya's forearms. "I'm glad you and Leo were there."

"Mm, me, too. Was nice. She was very popular."

Shane chuckled. "I bet. Was she good for you?"

"She was perfect."

"Good," Shane hummed, kissing into Ilya's curls.

"I have been thinking about your reward," Ilya murmured, kissing Shane's neck. Shane shivered.

“My reward?”

“Yes. For winning and playing so well,” Ilya continued, breathing against Shane’s ear, nipping his earlobe.

Shane sighed. “Yeah?”

“Mm,” Ilya cooed. “Yes. Maybe standing against a wall. In the shower or our bedroom, somewhere you will have to be very quiet.”

“Oh,” Shane shuddered. “Fuck.”

As if on cue, Leo started whining. Ilya laughed and gave Shane one more kiss.

“For later,” he promised.

Later arrived.

The baby and the dog were taken care of. Dinner cleaned up and leftovers packed away. Ilya had scooped Shane up and placed him on the counter, standing between his legs, his hands finding their way under Shane’s shirt.

Shane draped his arms around Ilya’s shoulders, his legs hooking around Ilya’s thighs, and Ilya smiled, nudging his nose against Shane’s. Shane hummed softly, smiling back, and they met in a kiss.

It hadn’t been that long since they had had sex, only about a week, but this was the first time in a while they could indulge in something a little slower, more luxurious, since Leo was sleeping longer through the night.

“I missed you,” Shane sighed as Ilya kissed his neck and Shane’s hands tugged up Ilya’s shirt.

“I missed you, too,” Ilya hummed, pulling away to let Shane tug his shirt off. He chuckled as Shane’s hands ran over his chest, squeezing his pecs. He had to bite back a laugh as Shane pressed his face into Ilya’s chest.

Shane lifted his head, smiling and snickering, and Ilya shook his head, kissing his husband again.

“Come here,” he cooed and Shane tugged off his own shirt, dropping it with Ilya’s on the floor, before wrapping around Ilya, and letting him lift him from the counter. They kissed all the way to the living room and Ilya paused them by the sofa.

“Where do you want me to fuck you?” Ilya whispered.

He watched Shane consider the question. Ilya knew that Shane felt weird about the idea of having sex in the same room as their baby but Ilya didn’t think it was that big of a deal. She

would have no idea what was going on, and, if Shane was quiet, she wouldn't even wake up.

"Here," Shane finally answered. "On the sofa."

Ilya grinned. "Okay."

Ilya set Shane down on his feet carefully and they wrapped around one another again, kissing, touching.

"Are you going to be quiet?" Ilya hummed, his hand cupped around Shane's jaw, thumb sliding over Shane's pink, kiss-swollen lips.

"Yes," Shane nodded, dark eyes glazed, his warm breath puffing against the skin of Ilya's finger.

"Good boy," Ilya purred in Russian, sighing as Shane sucked his thumb into his mouth, closing his eyes, and making a soft, plaintive noise around the digit.

Ilya watched him, enraptured, before he pulled his finger from Shane's mouth. Shane's eyes fluttered open and he watched as Ilya slid his own finger into his own mouth.

"Fuck," Shane breathed and Ilya grinned.

They kissed some more, eager and hungry. Shane pushed Ilya down onto the sofa, taking off his pants and underwear, kicking them aside. Ilya did the same, opening his arms for Shane. He came and they kissed for a heated moment before Shane trailed kisses down Ilya's neck and torso until he was on his knees between Ilya's legs.

He rested his hands on Ilya's thighs, gently sucking on the underside of his cock, making Ilya hiss, and sink deeper back against the sofa cushion. He slid his hand into Shane's hair, enjoying the show of Shane sucking his cock.

Shane's cheeks were flushed, his eyelids lowered over his eyes as he worshiped Ilya's dick. He made very soft, needy noises, kitten licking Ilya's cock, kissing it. He raised his eyes as he wrapped his perfect lips around Ilya and slid down his shaft. Ilya bit back a groan, fingers tightening in Shane's hair. It was only fair that he be quiet, too, but holy fuck, it was going to be hard to do when his husband looked like a fucking fantasy, sucking Ilya's cock like he couldn't imagine doing anything else.

"So fucking sweet for me, Shane," Ilya murmured, trailing his hand from Shane's hair, to brush his fingers over Shane's cheek. "Your mouth..."

Shane hummed and Ilya tossed his head back against the sofa cushion, panting. This was going to be torture but damn it was too good. Shane felt so incredible around him but he didn't linger. He pulled off of Ilya and gave his cock a parting kiss before he went to the mantle to retrieve their lube.

Ilya watched him, just admiring, and appreciating Shane's naked, muscular back, and his perfect pert ass. Shane came back with the lube and Ilya patted his thighs in invitation. Shane smiled, climbing into his lap, handing him the lube.

He wrapped his arms around Ilya and they kissed as Ilya dragged his hands down Shane's chest, pinching and tugging a nipple in his fingers, making Shane whine.

"Shh," Ilya hummed and Shane bit his lip, eyes shuttered. Ilya smiled, slicking his fingers, and teasing one over Shane's rim. Shane took a breath and let it out slowly and Ilya pressed a finger into him.

Shane panted but stayed quiet, back to biting his lip as Ilya worked him open. Ilya dragged it out, curling and stretching and pressing his fingers in deep. He teased Shane's prostate, Shane's hands gripping into the couch cushion behind Ilya, his mouth finding Ilya's so Ilya would swallow his noises.

It was effective and Ilya was proud of him but they weren't done yet.

"Ilya," Shane whimpered softly and Ilya withdrew his fingers. Shane's cock was leaking all over Ilya's stomach and he knew Shane was ready.

"Turn around," he instructed, slicking his own cock.

"How do you want me?" Shane asked, back to Ilya.

"Sit on me," Ilya said, chuckling softly. "And lean back against me."

Ilya loved Shane's obedience, licking his top lip as he watched Shane adjust. He got up, turned, and sat on Ilya's cock. The view of his dick disappearing into Shane was fucking hot as hell. Ilya had to bite down on a knuckle to stay quiet and he had no idea how Shane managed to whimper only once, quietly. He took a moment to adjust, before he leaned back against Ilya, legs spread over Ilya's thighs.

"Oh fuck," he breathed, his face next to Ilya's on the couch cushion.

"Good?" Ilya replied.

"This angle..." Shane replied.

"Mm."

Ilya slid a hand under Shane, fingers curled around where Shane's ass met his thigh. He pushed up into Shane, feet planted on the floor, and Shane gasped.

"So loud, Hollander," Ilya hummed, tweaking one of Shane's nipples with his free hand, making him whimper. Shane went back to biting his lip, his cheeks flushed.

Ilya thrust up into his husband in a slow rhythm at first, testing things out. Shane reached an arm up, his hand resting in Ilya's hair, doing his best to be quiet, and mostly succeeding.

"God, Ilya... feels fucking good."

Ilya smiled, kissing Shane messily, fucking him with slow, deliberate thrusts. Shane seemed to ease into things, making soft noises of pleasure against Ilya's mouth. Ilya let this play out

for a bit, enjoying the way it felt to feel all of Shane, to be inside him.

He wished he had a mirror, wanting to see Shane's face, to see the way he looked, impaled on Ilya's cock. He told Shane this, murmuring in his ear about how perfect he was sure that Shane looked, how sexy, making him whimper.

Ilya ran the fingers of one hand over Shane's raised arm, the other stroked over his chest, petting, ignoring his cock, which was leaking like a fountain. Shane bit his lip as Ilya used both hands to tease his nipples and pushed up into him deeper, harder, faster.

"Shit," Shane hissed and Ilya grinned.

"You're doing so well," he praised and Shane whimpered softly, turning his head to the side, and Ilya kissed his neck, fucking up into his husband's tight heat, waiting for him to break.

"Oh fuck, oh god," Shane breathed, his mouth slack, though he was trying not to get too loud. Ilya took pity and pressed his hand over Shane's mouth, just going for it.

Shane didn't get much louder but he was whining and panting into Ilya's palm, reaching down to stroke his cock, his other hand pressed to Ilya's, over his mouth.

"Yes, Shane," Ilya sighed, turning Shane's head toward him, removing their hands so they could kiss messily.

Shane came, hard, moaning into Ilya's mouth as he shook and shivered and spasmed, pulling Ilya's own orgasm from him, his whole body pulsing with pleasure.

"Fuck," Shane managed hoarsely, his whole weight relaxed and leaned against Ilya's chest. Ilya made a satisfied noise and wrapped both his arms around his husband, holding him close.

"That was more difficult than I thought," Shane sighed. "Staying quiet..."

"Mm," Ilya replied, kissing his cheek and jaw. "But you did so well."

Shane huffed a laugh. "Thanks." He turned his head and kissed Ilya, slow and sweet. "That was great."

"You liked it?"

Shane nodded and smiled, looking relaxed and sleepy. "A lot."

Ilya smiled and chuckled fondly, kissing the tip of his husband's adorable nose.

"Good."

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Shane goes on a road trip

November

Ilya was pouting.

It wasn't something that he normally did and Shane was kind of entertained by it. It was... *cute*, though Shane thought his husband was being a bit ridiculous.

"You do not love me," Ilya said plaintively, though his actions said otherwise. He folded a shirt for Shane and placed it neatly into his suitcase.

"That's not true," Shane replied. "I love you very much."

"But you cut your hair," Ilya whined. "And are leaving me..."

Shane rolled his eyes to the ceiling, laughing softly. "I cut my hair because our baby likes to pull it and it hurts and I'm only leaving for six days. I'll be back before you know it."

Ilya continued to pout and help Shane pack his suitcase and Shane shook his head. He knew that Ilya was just teasing him but Shane did feel guilty about his impending road trip. It would be the longest he'd be away from his family since Leo had been with them and he was nervous about leaving Ilya alone with her.

He knew Ilya was more than capable of taking care of her but he worried about Ilya's stress levels and exhaustion and his needs not getting met. He worried about Leo forgetting him and being afraid or unsure of him if he was gone for so long.

His worry must have shown on his face because Ilya said, "Shane."

Shane looked up. Ilya was sitting on his legs on their bed, Shane's suitcase open in front of him. He had his hair pulled back in a messy little ponytail with wavy tendrils falling handsomely in his face. He was wearing a t-shirt and joggers, looking comfortable and beautiful and Shane's heart flip flopped helplessly in his chest.

"Come here," Ilya chuckled fondly and Shane put down the pair of briefs in his hands, getting into bed with his husband.

Ilya pulled him close and they both flopped over onto the pillows together, laughing softly. Ilya carded his fingers gently through Shane's short hair. It felt weird to have it short again

but Ilya playing with it still felt just as good as it always did.

“You are worrying,” Ilya murmured against Shane’s forehead.

Shane closed his eyes and sighed, pressing his palm against Ilya’s back. “Yeah.”

“About what?” Ilya asked.

Shane sighed, hooking his chin over Ilya’s shoulder, and opened his eyes, looking at the bassinet next to their bed where Leo was sleeping soundly.

“I’m worried about leaving you and Leo. I want to be here to support you and help take care of her. I’m afraid she won’t remember me while I’m gone and that you’re going to be stressed and exhausted. I feel guilty leaving.”

“Shane,” Ilya murmured, exasperated but fond.

“I can’t help it,” Shane replied, his eyes stinging. “It’s hard. I don’t want to be away from either of you.”

Ilya turned his head to kiss the side of Shane’s, smoothing his hand up and down his back tenderly.

“I know,” Ilya hummed gently. “It is hard, being apart. And all of the new things. We are still learning.”

They had had Leo for three months now and Shane thought that they had done a good job of adjusting to taking care of an infant. They had found a good routine with Shane’s schedule and Ilya was a bit more flexible as he was still fleshing things out on his end.

It was weird adding things into the mix like longer road trips and Ilya’s potential modeling gigs but life didn’t just stop because you had a baby, so he supposed they would just have to keep adapting.

Shane felt a little foolish, like he should be able to roll with the punches better than he was. Their life was going to be a lot less predictable now and things were going to be hard and scary and imperfect... and he needed to be okay with that.

But Ilya wasn’t judging him. Maybe teasing a bit but he was there when Shane needed him to be. They were in this together and they would tackle whatever changes came their way as a team. Shane knew he could rely on that, on the trust they had built.

Shane closed his eyes and squeezed his husband closer. “Yeah.”

“Will be fine. Your parents are coming to help. I have things to do for me. We set up all the cameras so you can see her while you are gone... and me, too, I guess.”

Shane chuckled, tucking his face against Ilya’s neck. “Of course I want to see you both. I love watching you with her.”

Ilya hummed. "I know. I will send you pictures and videos. And we will have time together when you are home. You have a few days off after, yes?"

"Yeah," Shane replied. "Like, two full days."

"Perfect."

Shane sighed, pressing a kiss to Ilya's warm skin, then leaned away so they could look at one another. Ilya looked so cozy and sweet and Shane was going to miss him so much while he was gone. Even having lived together for six years, being away from Ilya for so long was still difficult. Better than it had been in the past, but still hard.

He reached up, cupping his hand around Ilya's cheek, and watched Ilya close his eyes, turning his head into Shane's palm, nuzzling against him.

"Thank you."

Ilya smiled at him. "Is no problem."

Shane chuckled, leaning in to kiss Ilya, enjoying the familiar soft, plushness of his lips, the scratch of his stubble against his skin, the warm, familiar drag of his tongue in Shane's mouth.

They kissed for a bit, just because. They'd be almost a week without this and it felt nice to be indulgent. Shane loved having Ilya's long fingers in his hair, his big hands sliding up under his sweatshirt to touch skin, caressing and soothing him. They parted after a few long, enjoyable minutes, Shane rubbing their noses together, before they got back to packing.

The next morning, Shane woke up to Ilya cooing softly to Leo. He rolled over and watched his husband lifting Leo out of her bassinet.

"Did you sleep well last night?" he asked her, kissing her cheek, and cuddling her close. She cooed back at him, making soft little baby noises. Ilya smiled at Shane, seeing him awake, and brought the baby into bed so they could all snuggle up together.

"Mm, I bet she did," Shane murmured. "She only woke us up once."

"And she is not very fussy," Ilya noted, watching Leo kick her legs, her little hand wrapped around his finger. "Are you hungry, my little dumpling?"

As if on cue, Leo started to fuss and cry, making her parents chuckle.

"Oh, yes. I'm so hungry," Shane cooed.

Ilya smiled and picked her up. "Come on, little one. Breakfast."

Shane watched Ilya prop Leo on his shoulder, rubbing her back, and make his way out of their room to head downstairs. Shane followed shortly after with Anya on his heels. He let her out into the backyard and then back in when she was done. Ilya was feeding Leo in the kitchen, cradling her in one arm, talking to her softly.

Shane started coffee and wrapped his arms around Ilya from behind, reaching up to gently stroke his thumb over Leo's soft hair. She had a lot of it, the same golden-brown color and texture as Ilya's, and Shane was obsessed.

The coffee machine beeped and Shane kissed Ilya's shoulder and the top of Leo's tiny head before he went to pull out mugs and pour coffee.

They traded places, Shane taking the baby so Ilya could make breakfast. Shane had her propped on his shoulder, rubbing her back, slowly pacing around their kitchen. He loved the sweet little noises Leo made, her soft coos and baby babble.

He talked to her, laughing softly as she sat up in his arms, looking around.

"Is that Papa?" Shane murmured, nuzzling her cheek, her eyes trained on Ilya. Ilya looked at her and waved.

"Hi! I see you! Yes! Hello!"

It was the perfect morning. They had breakfast and drank coffee and had some play and cuddle time with Leo before Shane had to start getting ready to leave. He didn't want to go and the heaviness of it settled in his stomach uncomfortably.

"You'll call and text? And send me pictures?" Shane asked as he kissed Ilya at the door.

"Yes, Shane," Ilya chuckled, exasperated. "And you can watch Leo sleep from the video feed."

They had several baby monitors set up that they could watch from their phones and Shane had every intention of checking it whenever he could.

"I know," he sighed. "Okay."

He gave his husband one more kiss before Ilya handed Leo to him so he could hug and kiss and nuzzle her goodbye.

"I love you so much," he murmured to her. "I'm going to miss you so much while I'm gone but I'll be back soon."

He closed his eyes and tried to memorize the feeling of her tiny little body in his arms. Her sweet smell and tiny noises. He opened his eyes and looked at her adorable little face and laughed, smiling wide, as she pressed her little hands to his mouth. He kissed her palms and watched her smile and giggle and held her closer. He handed Leo back to Ilya reluctantly and with a few last parting kisses, he was on his way out the door.

"Good luck! I'll be watching!" Ilya called.

Shane smiled. He was going to have to play really well this trip.

Ilya: Go out! Is fine! You are the Captain!

Shane chewed on his bottom lip, staring at his texts. Right above the text from Ilya was a picture of Leo with Mom after a bath, both his daughter and his mom looked so cute together, with Leo smiling, wrapped up in a yellow baby towel.

He had been invited out to dinner with some of the guys but he'd been noncommittal, wanting to spend his evening in, checking the baby monitor feed, and talking with Ilya. He'd texted his husband about it, feeling guilty, but Ilya's response, of course, was to encourage Shane to have fun.

Ilya: I will probably still be awake

Shane sighed and texted back.

Shane: I'm not going to stay out long. I miss you 😞

Ilya: I know. Do not worry. Have a good time ❤️

Shane: I love you...

Ilya: I love you, too, and so does Leonora, and your parents

Shane huffed a laugh and sent Ilya a million heart emojis, then went to the team's group chat to text the guys that he would be joining them for dinner, then set his phone down so he could get ready.

Ilya was, of course, right. Shane was having a nice time at dinner, just hanging with the guys, catching up.

They asked Shane about what things were like as a new parent and how he and Ilya were holding up. Shane was honest but he tried not to talk too much about it. He knew some people would get all swept up in parenthood and only talking about their kids or their stress and Shane didn't want to be annoying or ruin the conversation.

Mostly, he sat and listened, laughing when jokes were made, and adding in his two cents when applicable.

"So," Troy said next to him. "How's it *really* going?"

Shane looked at Troy. "What do you mean?" he asked, sipping his beer.

"Like, parenthood and shit."

Shane blinked. "Fine," he replied. "Good. Great."

Troy smiled at Shane quizzically. "You know you're allowed to talk about it right?"

Shane smiled and looked at his beer. "Yeah. No. I know. I just don't want to be *that* guy, you know?"

Troy chuckled. "I think you're worrying too much about that..."

Shane sighed. "Probably."

Troy smiled. "Well, if it helps, I'd like to see some pics of baby Leo."

Shane smiled shyly at Troy. "Are you sure?"

Troy laughed. "Yeah, Hollander! Fuck! Let me see!"

Shane laughed and pulled out his phone. He unlocked it and went to the album he had of all the pictures of Leo he had. He set his phone on the table, leaning over it with Troy, showing him the pictures.

"She's really cute," Troy said.

"She is," Shane replied. "She's smiling and laughing a lot. She has her favorite things like her pink elephant and cuddling with Ilya and this cool baby gym thing we got her with little toys that hang down that she can play with."

It felt nice... talking about his family. He wasn't bragging, exactly, but just feeling excited about sharing how adorable his baby and husband were and how much he loved them and how much he loved being a parent.

"I miss them."

"That would track."

Shane smiled, putting his phone away. "Thanks, Troy."

"Anytime, man."

"How are things with you and Harris?"

Shane and Troy talked for a while before the bill was settled and everyone made their way back to the hotel. It was well before curfew and Shane felt good. It was nice to feel closer to Troy, as a fellow queer friend, and to the team as a whole.

He missed Ilya and Leo but it had been a good idea for him to go out.

He got back to his hotel room and got ready for bed, brushing his teeth, washing his face, putting on pajamas. He settled into the massive king sized bed and opened up the baby monitor app.

He opened up the feed in his and Ilya's room and his heart melted at what he saw on the screen. Ilya's back was to the camera and he was swaying back and forth on his feet, probably humming to Leo, because that was what he did when he put her down to sleep. The camera feeds didn't have sound, only video, so Shane was making some educated guesses. Leo looked so cozy, cradled in Ilya's arms.

Shane watched Ilya press little kisses to her head before carefully placing her into the bassinet, leaning over it, rubbing her belly gently, and talking to her. Something along the lines of "sleep well" and "Papa and Daddy love you so much", all in Russian, before he pulled away, and moved out of view.

A few moments later, Ilya called Shane, and Shane answered, sniffing.

"What's wrong?" Ilya asked, chuckling softly.

"I saw you on the baby monitor with Leo, putting her to bed, it was so cute."

Ilya laughed fondly. "Glad you liked it."

"You're so good with her..."

"I love her."

"I know," Shane sighed. "It makes me so happy."

"Good."

Shane squirmed against the mattress, too full of love and sappiness to be still. "Can I video call you?"

"Of course."

Shane switched to video call and Ilya answered. His curls were tucked behind his ears and he looked sleepy and gorgeous on Shane's screen, reclining on their sofa.

"Anya wants to say hello," Ilya chuckled, turning the camera so Shane could see Anya with her head resting on Ilya's stomach.

"Aww, hi sweet girl," Shane cooed.

Anya moved her head to face the camera and just looked at Shane, making him and Ilya laugh. Shane watched Ilya's hand come into view, petting Anya, before the camera turned back to show his face.

"Good game today," Ilya hummed. "You guys look good out there."

Shane smiled and blushed a little. "Thanks. Yeah. We're really clicking and it feels good. Luca has been doing fantastic at center. I'm impressed."

"Mm. He looked confident. I'm glad."

"You taught him really well."

Ilya smiled, his expression soft. "I hope so."

They talked a bit about the game and how Shane's traveling was, then about how Ilya and Leo were doing, and when Shane's parents were arriving. Shane didn't keep Ilya long. They

got off together and Shane sent Ilya straight to bed.

He needed to sleep, too, but he did feel lighter, knowing that everything was okay. Ilya would be getting support from Shane's parents, Leo was fine, he and Ilya were good. Everything was okay. The road trip would go by fast and Shane would be back with his family before he knew it.

The second to last night of their road trip, Shane had been inundated with some of the cutest photos and videos he had ever seen in his life.

Pictures of a sleeping Leo on a sleeping Ilya's chest, Leo laying on the floor, laughing, playing with her feet, Anya laying on Leo's blanket with her. There was one picture that his mom had taken that Shane had immediately made his phone's wallpaper; Ilya, leaning over Leo, both of them in profile, laughing, Leo's tiny hands curled around Ilya's thumbs, his big hands wrapped around hers. Shane had spent almost ten minutes vacillating between just staring at that picture and holding his phone to his chest, whining into his empty hotel room.

He wondered how Ilya would feel about getting professional photos done of the four of them. He had been all about it when Shane had wanted to get some done after they'd gotten married. They hadn't taken engagement photos and they hadn't had a professional photographer at their wedding. Shane hadn't wanted the pictures for social media. They were just for himself and Ilya. They'd posted only one on socials and kept the rest for themselves. He wanted the family pictures to be the same.

Shane texted Ilya about it.

Shane: Can we get family photos taken? 🙄

Ilya didn't respond right away, which didn't surprise Shane. He was taking care of their baby and entertaining Shane's parents and probably trying to have some time just for himself if he could get it.

He had a game to get ready for though and these pictures were going to get him through.

Ilya texted back right before Shane got off the bus at the arena. He smiled.

Ilya: Of course! Will be very cute 😊

Shane felt great the entire game. It had been weird without Ilya but Shane was slowly adjusting. He missed having Ilya on the ice with him, hearing his laughter fill the locker room, or being on the receiving end of his chirping.

The adjustment had been challenging at first but the team was managing, filling in the gaps that Ilya had left behind. Hockey would never be the same, if Shane was truthful. There was an emptiness to it now, a not-quite-satisfying feeling, without Ilya being on the ice or the bench or in the locker room with him.

Shane had never really considered retirement so consistently before but he supposed it made sense. For their entire hockey careers they had pushed one another. It was always them, together at the top. Ilya had always challenged Shane in the way that he loved, even when they'd played together.

And that was the part Shane missed the most. The way that Ilya spurred him on, making him play harder, smarter, better. Things wouldn't be the same, now that Ilya was retired.

But the team played well and Shane was happy with his own performance and he was looking forward to having some time talking to his husband, catching up about their days, and then they'd be together the day after tomorrow.

Shane went through his usual nightly routine and got comfy in bed, checking the baby monitor feeds. It was a little later than usual so it looked like Leo was already in bed, sound asleep. There was another active feed, which was weird, and Shane clicked on it.

It looked like one of the monitors had been set up on their mantle, the couch in view. Shane could see some shadows and then Ilya appeared in the frame. Shane couldn't hear anything but he could see Ilya clearly, dressed in a pair of joggers and a sweatshirt.

He flopped onto the couch, laying on his side, one arm curled under his head, his other arm raised up over his head, exposing the skin of his hip. He was on his phone, looking casual and relaxed and Shane watched, unable to look away. He wanted to be there... snuggled up with Ilya on the sofa, chatting a little, or maybe just being warm and cozy and quiet.

Shane pouted, missing his husband... and wondered if Ilya knew that the monitor was on?

Shane opened up their text chat and texted him.

Shane: hey... you know the monitor in the living room is on, right?

Shane hoped that Ilya didn't fall asleep on the couch, he'd be complaining of a crick in his neck. Shane was about to close out of the feed, expecting a text back, when he saw Ilya set his phone down, and roll to his back. He pulled what looked like lube out of his joggers pocket, and then he started... touching himself. He slid a hand up his chest, rucking up his sweatshirt.

Shane froze.

He had seen Ilya touch himself many times over the years on the screen of his phone (and in person) but never without Ilya knowing that he was being watched. Shane was filled with a mix of desire and anxiety. Should he close out of the app? Ilya was his husband but it was strange seeing him if he didn't know that Shane was watching...

But Shane also wasn't sure if he could look away.

Ilya was biting his bottom lip, his eyes closed. Shane couldn't hear him, there was no sound, but he knew he was probably breathing hard, making soft breathy sounds as he ran his hands over his torso, teasing his nipples.

Ilya lifted his hips, both thumbs hooked into the waistband of his joggers. He tugged them down and then kicked them off, his sweatshirt hiked up under his chin, leaving him mostly naked. His perfect dick lay against his stomach, the head poking out of the foreskin.

Shane's mouth was dry and his own dick was like granite, heat flooding his entire body, eyes fixed on the screen. He bit his lip, watching Ilya drizzle lube into his palm, before he wrapped his hand around himself, his thumb sliding over the head of his cock a few times.

He went slowly, taking his time, looking like he was enjoying the casual touch, the familiarity of it. Shane wanted to dive through the screen, replacing Ilya's hand with his mouth.

Ilya reached down, cupping his balls in his palm, rolling and tugging them.

"Shit," Shane murmured into his room, his whole body flushed with warmth. Ilya was such a vision. Shane loved watching him, no matter what he was doing, but fuck, he was so ridiculously hot when he was naked and getting himself off.

Shane's eyes wandered shamelessly over his husband's body. From his splayed curls to his broad shoulders and chest, his firm torso, his thick cock, his enormous, muscular thighs. He watched Ilya's hand drift to his cock once more, stroking lazily.

He watched Ilya stretch his legs wider, saw him take his sweatshirt between his teeth, to quiet his noises. Shane could imagine them, his sighs of pleasure, his panting. Shane loved how fucking big Ilya was. He loved the way his hand moved so surely over his dick, the way his pecs twitched, how his muscular forearms looked as he worked himself.

Shane completely caved as he watched Ilya lean his head back, his eyes closed, his hand speeding up. Shane slid his hand into his own pants, pushing them down just enough to get to his cock, stroking himself as he watched Ilya.

He could tell Ilya was going to come, his body going taut, muscles standing out in stark relief.

"Fuck, Ilya," Shane whimpered, speeding up in time with Ilya's own stroking, and watched as Ilya's body stilled as he came spectacularly all over himself, come spilling all over his belly. His orgasm looked like it lasted forever and Shane came a moment later, moaning breathlessly.

He was breathing hard, watching Ilya's chest rising and falling rapidly as he caught his own breath. He stretched out a little, releasing his sweatshirt from between his teeth, looking relaxed, and sated. Shane just watched Ilya laying there, feeling like he'd just watched a porno.

Ilya's breathing had slowed, and then Shane watched him open his eyes. Ilya pulled a cloth out of his sweatshirt pocket and cleaned himself up. Finished with his task, he reached for his pants, and pulled them back on.

He sauntered over to the monitor on the mantle, looking right at the camera. He smiled his crooked, sexy smile, and Shane's mouth dropped open as Ilya waved, and blew Shane a kiss, before cutting the camera's feed.

The fucker knew.

He *knew*!

He'd done that on *purpose*!

A second later, Shane's phone began to ring in his hand. Ilya's laughing face (a candid picture Shane had taken on their honeymoon) popped up on his screen. Shane swiped to answer the call.

"You asshole!" Shane hissed and Ilya laughed. "You knew! What the fuck, Rozanov?!"

Ilya was still laughing, sounding like he was trying to smother it.

"You are so easy, Hollander," he snickered.

"What the actual fuck? You asshole!"

"What? You did not think it was sexy?" Ilya asked, his voice full of teasing.

Shane rolled his eyes to the ceiling. "Of course it was fucking sexy."

"So? Why are you upset?"

"Do you know when I check the baby monitors? You planned that all out?"

"Of course I do and of course I did. Thought it would be fun."

Shane sighed, shaking his head, his heart wobbling in his chest, because honestly, it was actually really sweet that Ilya was paying that much attention and that he'd gone out of his way to do something like that. To show that he still wanted Shane. That he loved him. That they could still have a hot sex life even with a baby.

"It was fun," Shane replied sincerely. "And... hot. Very hot. But I'm still pissed at you!"

Ilya just chuckled and Shane knew he was smiling.

"Can I see you?"

"Of course."

Ilya switched the call to video.

"Hi," Shane sighed.

"Hi," Ilya chuckled.

“I’m a mess over here. Just so you know.”

Ilya purred. “Good. That is what I like to hear.”

“You’re a menace.”

“Ah, but you love me.”

Shane melted, smiling warmly at his husband, overwhelmed by how much he really did loved and appreciated this man. They just looked at each other, sappy as shit, before Shane closed his eyes and laughed. “Wanna come with me while I clean up?”

“Sure,” Ilya chuckled.

Shane brought Ilya into the bathroom with him and they chatted about Ilya’s day and Leo and getting family pictures taken and Shane’s game.

“I really missed you on the ice today,” Shane confessed as he got back into bed. He rested his phone on his pillow so it was like he and Ilya were in bed together, face to face.

“Oh yes?” Ilya asked gently. He was in bed now, too, all cuddled up under the blankets, talking softly so as not to wake Leo.

“Mm. It was your kind of game today. Intense. Fun. I kept thinking about you and how much you would have liked it.”

Ilya smiled, closing his eyes. “It looked fun.”

“It was. But not as fun when you were with me.”

Ilya’s eyes opened, his expression very soft. “Shane...”

“I’ve been thinking more about my own retirement,” Shane murmured honestly. “Hockey feels so much more... hollow... without you. I don’t know if I can do more than another season or two... if this is how it’s going to be.”

“You do not need to decide now, moya lyubov,” Ilya replied softly.

“I know. I’m not. I’m just saying...”

Ilya nodded in understanding.

“You should sleep.”

“So should you.”

“I can’t wait to see you.”

“Soon.”

“I can’t believe you did that... with the monitor...”

Ilya smiled crookedly at him, looking rakish and sexy and flirtatious. "I like surprising you."

Shane blushed, hiding his face in his pillow. Ilya laughed.

They stayed on the call a little longer, mostly just looking at each other, before finally saying goodnight and goodbye. Shane plugged in his phone and hunkered down to sleep, excited to see his husband and baby soon.

Ilya and Leo were waiting for Shane when he came home. He dumped his bags and jacket on the floor, and engulfed his two favorite people in the world in his arms.

"I missed you both so much," he murmured, pressing kisses to the top of Leo's head and Ilya's cheek.

"We missed you, too," Ilya chuckled, handing the baby to Shane. She looked at him with her big eyes and smiled and he smiled back, nuzzling their faces close, kissing her adorable little cheeks. He'd missed her so much; being able to hold her and snuggle her and kiss her.

With Leo nestled against him, Shane turned to Ilya, smiling at him warmly, his heart feeling too big for his chest. Ilya wrapped his arms around Shane, their baby between them, and Shane completely melted, looking up at his husband all dreamy.

Ilya looked just as dreamy back and leaned in to kiss Shane; sweet, and warm, and loving, making Shane's toes curl.

He needed to shower but he just wanted to snuggle up with his husband and daughter and dog and sleep. Ilya seemed to read his mind, pressing kisses to his forehead, and smiling.

"Shower. We'll be here when you're done."

"Okay," Shane chuckled. He gave Leo back to Ilya, hung up his coat, took off his shoes, and brought his bag upstairs.

After his shower, Shane found Ilya, Leo, and Anya in bed, all of them waiting for him. Leo was on her back, laughing as Ilya tickled her, making funny noises and faces. He leaned in, rubbing his face against her little belly, making her squeal in delight, and Ilya's happy, unguarded laughter filled the room. It was the cutest thing and Shane just stood there, watching, completely spellbound.

He joined him after a few moments, giving Anya some pets, and kissing Leo's little fist and nibbling at her round cheeks. Ilya smiled at him, reaching over to gently brush his fingers over Shane's bangs and then his cheek and Shane leaned into his touch, blushing a little.

The whole room was so full of love and softness it was almost cloying but Shane didn't care. He loved this. He loved his little family and he loved how he felt being with them. Shane hadn't been sure it was possible to be this happy, to have a life that was beginning to be fully realized.

He rested his head on his arm, watching Leo and Ilya together, Anya curled up comfortably by their feet. He couldn't believe that this was all real. That he got to have this. The man of his dreams. The most perfect baby. The best dog.

He quieted the bit of anxiety within himself that told him to question this, to fear when the other shoe would drop. Shane knew things wouldn't be easy. They hadn't started that way and they'd managed just fine. He believed in his marriage and their support system. They could weather any storm.

He was allowed to have this happiness and enjoy it.

They put Leo down to nap together and then Shane wrapped Ilya up in his arms, holding him.

"Thank you."

Ilya hummed, kissing where Shane's neck met his shoulder.

"Of course."

Shane closed his eyes.

There wasn't anywhere else he wanted to be.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Christmas time again!

December

“So, this is how you use the monitor,” Shane said, showing his parents how to use the baby monitor. Ilya stood in their entryway, pulling their coats out of the closet, smiling to himself.

“Shane,” Yuna said, sounding exasperated. “We got it. We know how to work the monitors. You showed us how they work the first time we came over.”

“Oh, right.”

“Go and have fun. We’ve got it.”

Ilya turned, his and Shane’s coats draped over his arm, watching his husband hug his parents, thanking them for coming over to watch their baby. Shane turned to him, looking sheepish, and Ilya smiled fondly at him, handing him his coat. They were going on a date. One of three they’ve had since bringing Leo home.

“Thanks,” Shane murmured, taking the coat, and sliding into it.

“We should not be out too late,” Ilya said to Yuna and David, hugging them as well. “Thank you for watching Leo.”

“Of course,” David replied. “We’re happy to help. You boys have a good time.”

Ilya slid into his own coat and he and Shane headed out into the snow and the car they’d called that was waiting for them at the curb in front of their house.

Ilya leaned back in the seat of the car, closing his eyes, and sighing. For the next few hours, it was just him and Shane. It would probably take a little coaxing but he was sure that he could get Shane to be in the moment and enjoy himself, at least a tiny bit.

To start, Ilya reached across the seat to take Shane’s hand, tangling their fingers, and he smiled as Shane squeezed his hand.

They were going to a comfortable bistro for dinner. It wasn’t anything super fancy but not extra casual; a nice, middle of the road spot that they liked, and where they could get a private table and enjoy their night.

Ilya let Shane head in first, resting a hand at the small of his back as they walked through the door and up to the hostess stand. They were seated and given menus. They got through ordering drinks and negotiating appetizers before Shane was on his phone.

Ilya gave him a few moments before he cleared his throat and put down his menu. Shane looked up, cheeks pink, and put his phone face down on the table.

“Sorry.”

Ilya shook his head a little. “Is fine.”

Shane reached across the table for Ilya’s hand and Ilya placed his in Shane’s, his husband rubbing his thumb back and forth over Ilya’s knuckles.

“You have my full attention.”

Ilya huffed a laugh. “I want you to *relax*. ” He squeezed Shane’s fingers gently and Shane smiled small, nodding.

“I know. I know she’ll be okay.”

“She will,” Ilya assured. “This is not the first time we have left her with other people. And was fine those times. Will be okay this time, too.”

Shane squeezed Ilya’s hand back and then let go, taking his phone, and placing it in his coat pocket. “If there’s any issues, my parents will call.”

Ilya nodded. “Yes.” He softened. “You are a good dad, Shane.”

He smiled gratefully at Ilya, blushing deeply, squirming a little in his seat, which made Ilya chuckle. “Thank you.” Ilya watched him take a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Okay. Yeah. We’re good.”

Before Leo had even come into the picture, Shane had gone all in when it came to learning about parenting. Podcasts, books, YouTube videos, talking to all of the parents they knew. Ilya had learned, by proxy, that taking care of a kid was a unique experience for each family and each child.

The basics were important but ultimately, you just had to be in it and figure it out. Ilya knew how to keep a kid alive and he was very certain that he would love and cherish them.

It was hard to not be nervous, at times. Babies were hardy in a lot of ways but also fragile and taking care of Leo on his own had been very stressful. But he loved her and would do anything for her and that had guided him.

Shane, perfectionist that he was, had gone a little overboard.

Ilya was proud of him though. He’d recalibrated a bit; he did less, paying more attention to what Leo was trying to communicate, rather than attempting to anticipate her needs, and

learning what she preferred, going at her pace. He still stressed, hence checking his phone, but that was just typical Shane behavior.

He had come a long way and Ilya was so in love. He adored seeing Shane and Leo together, how sweet and gentle and adoring Shane was with her. He was exactly as Ilya imagined he'd be, just as enamored with her as Ilya was.

The server brought the bottle of wine they'd ordered, which Shane tried, and said he liked, though the joke between them was that they didn't know anything about wine, only that some tasted better than others. They put in their food orders and thanked their server, before Shane looked at Ilya.

"What?" Ilya asked, lips curving up in the corner.

"I love and appreciate you," Shane said. "That's all."

Ilya chuckled. "I know." He picked up his wine glass. "Za lyubov."

Shane smiled, lifting his own glass. "To love."

"So," Ilya hummed, settling back in his seat, legs crossed, wine glass in hand. "Tell me the gossip. What is happening?"

Shane laughed and shook his head, rolling his eyes, before he started dishing about the latest drama in the league. Ilya missed this. He missed knowing the goings on of different players and teams and what was new in people's lives, especially with their guys.

Shane updated Ilya about how Luca was holding up, and how the younger players were doing. They discussed Christmas party invitations, which then turned into negotiations about their own Christmas celebrations.

They usually spent time with Shane's parents at their place but now that they had a baby, they were considering hosting Christmas, which meant decorating, which was not something that they had really done previously. Even when they'd hosted parties, they'd done the bare minimum with a tree and stockings and that was about it.

Ilya had no idea how crazy Shane would want to get, so he tried to gauge things as they talked. He was okay with a tree and some general decorations inside, like tinsel and holly and a stocking for Leo and such, but he wasn't sure how willing he was to crawl out of windows or onto a ladder to string lights on the outside of their very large, very tall house.

They seemed to come to a general agreement that decorating inside and having a wreath on the front door was reasonable. Shane had a lot of opinions about if they should get a fake versus another real tree which Ilya did not care about at all. If Shane wanted to keep getting real trees then that was fine.

They split their apps and shared some of their entrées with one another, laughing and teasing each other. Ilya tapped his foot against Shane's and smiled when Shane trapped Ilya's foot between his.

They finished the bottle of wine and declined dessert, before settling the check.

“Ready?” Ilya asked and Shane nodded, sliding his arm through Ilya’s.

“Let’s stop somewhere before we go home,” Shane said as they walked out of the restaurant. Ilya’s brows furrowed.

“Like where?”

“The donut shop down the street. I know you like them and we can get some hot chocolate...”

“I thought you didn’t want dessert,” Ilya chuckled.

“I could eat a donut,” Shane replied. “And maybe I want a little extra time with you.” He snuggled up closer against Ilya, looking up at him with his pink cheeks and a sweet, shy smile.

Ilya grinned. “Okay.”

They walked to the local donut shop, an independently owned place that they liked stopping into occasionally, wanting to support local businesses. Ilya got a jelly donut (classic) while Shane settled for a vanilla glazed (also classic) and they each got a hot chocolate. Shane tacked on some donut holes for his parents and they walked around a little, eating their donuts, and drinking their hot chocolate in the snow.

Back at home, they walked up their walkway hand in hand, and Shane paused them on the stoop before Ilya could unlock the door.

“I love you,” he said. “Thank you for tonight.”

Ilya smiled at him and leaned in for a kiss. “I love you, too. Was fun. We should do this again sometime.”

Shane laughed. “Yeah. I’d like that.”

Ilya was mostly awake. He was dozing, listening to the distant sound of birds and the occasional car; Anya’s soft snuffling and Shane rolling over next to him.

“Ilya,” Shane whispered, one of his warm hands gliding over Ilya’s chest. “Are you awake?”

“Mm?” Ilya replied, opening one eye to look at his husband. Shane was sitting up on his elbows, his face very close to Ilya’s.

“Do you know what time it is?”

Ilya closed his eye, confused. “No,” he murmured back, turning onto his side, and stretching out.

“It’s almost nine o’clock.”

Ilya opened his eyes, brows furrowed. “That’s late for you.”

Shane was grinning at him. “I don’t care. Leo slept through the night.”

Ilya blinked at Shane for a second before he realized that Shane was right. They hadn’t woken up at all last night.

“Holy shit,” he replied.

“I know!” Shane was grinning and Ilya laughed.

“Wow.” He sat up a little, peeking at the bassinet. He could hear Leo wiggling around and making soft baby noises but she wasn’t crying or anything. She was just awake. Ilya looked at Shane and Shane looked back. He grinned and kissed Ilya.

Shane rolled Ilya onto his back and kept kissing him, finally pulling apart, and leaving Ilya a little breathless. He grinned, watching Shane as he slid out of bed, and went to the bassinet. He reached inside, smiling warmly.

“Hi, sweet pea! Good morning! Did you sleep through the whole night? Good job,” Shane cooed at Leo, pressing kisses to her cheek, and cuddled her close. He brought her to bed and Ilya made a happy sound, wanting his husband and baby close.

“Good morning, Papa!” Shane said in Russian and laughed as Leo reached for Ilya. He held his arms out for her, taking her gingerly, and hugging her against him, kissing her cheek.

“Hello, little star,” he hummed, chuckling as Leo wiggled in his arms. He lay her down between him and Shane, the two of them on their sides, watching her as she wiggled and rolled over and giggled whenever they tickled or kissed her.

“I feel so well rested,” Shane chuckled, Leo’s hand wrapped around his finger.

“Me, too,” Ilya replied. “I forgot what that was like.”

Shane nodded in agreement, leaning down to kiss Leo’s little hand.

“Are you hungry?” Shane murmured to the baby. “I know I am.”

They spent a little more time just snuggled in bed together before Ilya took Leo to change her, kissing her little belly and little face and listening to her squeal with delight. Back in her onesie, they all went downstairs for breakfast.

Shane was in charge of feeding Leo, so Ilya made coffee and breakfast for them, making sure that Anya was taken out and fed. Leo was eating solids now and Ilya always got a kick out of the baby foods she was trying.

“Let’s see. Today we have... peaches! Yum!” Shane exclaimed.

Ilya smiled, loving Shane's enthusiasm as he spoke to Leo, making everything interesting and exciting. Ilya set mugs on the counter and gave Anya some attention, stroking her ears, and giving her some belly rubs, before going back to the kitchen, watching Shane feeding Leo.

There was a lot of laughing and giggling from Shane and Leo, which made Ilya laugh. He poured coffee and left a mug within Shane's reach. He gently smoothed his hand over Shane's short hair and kissed his neck. One positive about the short hair was easier access to his husband's neck, and the freckles there, which Ilya did appreciate. He nuzzled Shane, before pulling away to make eggs and toast.

After breakfast, they got ready to go out for a walk in the snow.

Shane had bundled Leo up in all her baby winter gear. She was wearing a hat that had round bear ears on it and it made her look impossibly adorable.

"Okay," Shane hummed. "Here we go."

He had Leo in a wrap against his chest and Ilya chuckled as he watched Shane zip up his jacket, leaving only Leo's head poking out.

"Don't move," Ilya said. "Where is my phone?"

Shane laughed. "In your pocket?"

Ilya took off his gloves and reached into his pocket, finding his phone. He unlocked it and opened his camera app, taking a picture of his impossibly cute husband and baby, looking all cuddly and snug together in Shane's jacket.

Ilya took several photos; one of Shane smiling wide at him, his face adorably crinkled, another with Shane's head ducked as he cooed at Leo and she looked up at him, and one more of Shane pressing a kiss to Leo's head.

"Good?" Shane chuckled and Ilya nodded, sliding his phone back into his pocket, and putting his gloves back on.

"Yes," he sighed. "You are both so cute."

Shane blushed and Ilya kissed his cheek and then Leo's, wrapping his arms around his little family. Shane hummed, leaning into him. They stayed like that for a bit and finally left the house, letting Anya lead the way, dressed in her bright jacket and booties.

It was snowing pretty steadily and Shane walked a bit ahead of Ilya and Anya as Anya stopped to sniff around. Shane laughed as Leo kicked her legs, his hands resting on her back, head down to look at their baby.

"What is that? What is that stuff? Is that snow? It's so cold!" Shane chuckled, rubbing his cute little nose against Leo's cute little nose.

Ilya's heart was so full. He had absolutely everything he could have ever wanted. A wonderful husband, an adorable baby, a happy, fulfilling life. It wasn't perfect but Ilya had

never wanted perfect. He just wanted a life full of love and he'd gotten it tenfold. It was almost too much. Overwhelming. He hadn't known it was possible to be this happy.

"Come on, Anya," he said gently and stepped closer to Shane. He wrapped his arms around him and Leo, just holding them in the cold. Shane hummed, resting his head on Ilya's shoulder, Leo caught between them, making curious noises.

"I love you both so much," Ilya murmured.

"We love you, too, Ilya," Shane murmured back. "So much."

They walked around the block and then went back inside, changing out of their winter clothes, and hung out in the living room, playing with the baby, before she napped, and they had some time to themselves.

The house was pretty much ready for Christmas. They had new stockings hung above the fireplace, a moderately sized real tree, some holly and tinsel hung on the fireplace and wrapped around the stair banister. Ilya thought it was all tasteful without being too much and Shane seemed happy.

They were able to get a workout in and took an indulgent shower together, made lunch, and then wrapped some gifts, before Leo woke up. Ilya fed her and let her bounce around in his lap a little. She was a pretty active baby, almost always moving around, able to sit up, and roll over, and constantly reaching for things.

Shane took her into the living room to play while Ilya cleaned up lunch. Leo was starting to put weight on her legs, with support, and was very wiggly and squirmy on her belly. She'd probably start crawling soon. There were so many things to start looking out for. Crawling, teething, attempting to speak.

It was a lot to keep track of but they were just taking it one day at a time and trying to enjoy every moment of it.

"Oh!"

Ilya turned toward the living room, rinsing his hands, and grabbed a dishtowel.

"Excuse me, ma'am. Where are you going?" Shane laughed.

"What?" Ilya asked, coming around the couch to find Leo *crawling* away from Shane. "Holy shit."

"Ilya!" Shane laughed, smiling wide, looking up at Ilya and then back at the baby.

"What? She cannot understand yet!"

"But she's learning!"

"Shane! This is more important!" Ilya gestured at their *crawling* baby.

“This is early,” Shane noted. “She’s only six months... most babies don’t start crawling until seven, sometimes up to a year.”

“She is a *genius*. ”

Shane laughed and scooped Leo into his arms. “Where do you think you’re going, huh? Where were you going?” He kissed her cheeks and chuckled as she fussed a little, apparently unhappy to have had Daddy stop her exploration.

Shane placed her back down and she crawled toward Ilya, smacking her little hands against his feet, and then sitting back on her butt. She looked up at Ilya and Ilya looked down at her.

“What are you doing down there? Are you exploring?”

She clapped her hands and laughed and Ilya smiled, lifting her up, and blowing a raspberry on her belly, making her shriek in delight.

“You are so smart,” he cooed, hugging her close, before placing her back down. “Go to Daddy.”

“C’mere, Leo.”

Leo crawled to Shane, right into his lap, and he beamed. “That’s my girl!”

They spent as much time as Leo could tolerate on the floor, watching her crawling around, before she started getting tired. She took her second nap of the day, giving her parents time to get all excited about her crawling, before she woke up two hours later.

They had dinner and then some cuddle time, with Shane reading Leo a story, before she was put to bed.

“Our kid really is a genius,” Shane murmured as he and Ilya cuddled on the couch, only semi-watching a movie.

Ilya laughed. “Yes. She is.”

Christmas Eve

“Hi,” Shane sighed as Ilya wrapped his arms around him from behind, kissing the hinge of his jaw, and behind his ear.

“Hi,” Ilya hummed and Shane giggled softly, leaning into Ilya, his wet hands still hanging over the sink.

“How’s it going?” Shane asked, going back to washing the nice china plates they’d been using for dinner.

“Good,” Ilya replied. “Your parents are showing Leo the tree and she is playing with all of her new toys.”

Shane chuckled. “She made out like a bandit.”

Ilya nodded and chuckled, resting his chin on Shane’s shoulder, just holding him. “So spoiled. Is this what Christmas was like for you?”

Shane huffed. “I don’t know. I was a baby.”

“I think that is a yes.”

“I was an only child! And so is Leo... right now.”

Ilya laughed, tucking his face against Shane’s neck. He loved when Shane got all huffy. It was cute... and a little sexy.

“Come join us when you’re done?” Ilya murmured, nuzzling behind Shane’s ear, nipping the delicate flesh. Shane shivered in his arms.

“Of course.”

Ilya gave Shane’s neck one last kiss, sliding his hands along Shane’s belly, over the soft cashmere sweater he wore, before he went back to the living room where his in-laws and baby were.

David had Leo in his arms, a soft smile on his face as he watched her, her eyes dipping closed.

“Someone’s sleepy,” Yuna cooed, running gentle fingers over Leo’s chubby little arm.

“It has been a lot for her today,” Ilya said, smiling as he watched Leo’s grandparents completely melt over her. “Her first Christmas.”

“So much excitement,” David agreed.

“You guys wanna put her to bed?” Shane asked as he came back into the living room, smoothing his hand across Ilya’s shoulders as he stood next to the sofa where Ilya was sitting.

“We’d love that,” Yuna said, looking up and smiling warmly.

Ilya and Shane watched Yuna and David take Leo up to bed. Shane looked down at Ilya as Ilya wrapped an arm around his waist.

“They are very cute with her,” Ilya noted, chuckling fondly.

“Yeah,” Shane replied, smiling. “They’re excited to be grandparents. It’s nice.”

“It is.”

Shane gently plucked at Ilya's curls, smoothing them back, smiling at Ilya, looking like he just couldn't help himself. Ilya smiled back, helpless and adoring.

It had been a fun day, watching Leo with her grandparents and ripping through wrapping paper and getting so many toys and new clothes. They'd taken so many pictures and it had been a lot of fun.

Ilya was tired but glad. He could only imagine what future Christmases would be like as Leo got older... and maybe if they added another kid to the mix. More chaos, more excitement, more laughter. He wasn't upset about the idea at all.

He loved it actually.

He pressed a kiss just above Shane's hip before he leaned away and grabbed two cookies from the coffee table. He offered one to Shane and Shane took it, which made Ilya smile.

"Scoot," Shane said and Ilya moved over so Shane could sit next to him on the sofa and leaned into him, eating his cookie. David and Yuna came back downstairs and joined them.

"What a little angel," Yuna sighed as Shane turned on the baby monitor.

"She is perfect," Ilya agreed and Shane smiled.

They sat around, just hanging out with Shane's parents for a bit longer. Ilya and David had worked on a puzzle earlier, passing the baby around, and laughing as they tried to keep her from grabbing the pieces and putting them in her mouth.

Eventually they said their good nights and it was just Ilya and Shane, cleaning up. Ilya put on some soft music from a Christmas playlist that Wyatt had recommended, and swept Shane up in a little impromptu dance around their kitchen. Shane laughed and blushed, his face scrunching up as he smiled, happy.

Ilya pressed his face against Shane's cheek, unable to look at that adorable, crinkled happy face any more, too overwhelmed with love and happiness and contentment that he felt like he might explode.

"I honestly never expected you to be so romantic," Shane murmured, turning to rest his head on Ilya's shoulder as they slowly turned in a circle. "But I love it."

Ilya chuckled warmly. "Only for you."

They finished dancing and looked at each other. Shane's expression was soft and sweet. He reached up, gently brushing his index finger over Ilya's curls, tucking them behind his ear, before he smoothed his thumb over Ilya's cheek.

"I'm so happy," Shane said softly, as if it was a confession. "I love that this is our life. I love that we get to have everything we wanted." His eyes were a little misty and Ilya huffed a soft laugh, pulling Shane close and kissing his forehead.

Shane whined and wrapped his arms around Ilya, squeezing. “I dreamed about this. I know it’s so stupid but I did. I thought about it all the time. Being parents and hosting Christmas and... all of it.”

“I know,” Ilya replied, because he did, he had dreamed about it, too.

Shane lifted his head and Ilya gingerly swiped his thumb over Shane’s freckled cheeks, wiping away tears. Then he kissed his husband, slow and thorough and gentle. Ilya remembered Shane saying that it felt like he was looking into their future when they’d been hanging out with the Pike kids almost eight years ago.

The two of them with kids of their own, married, being together.

They’d gotten there, perhaps not in the best, most conventional way, but still. Ilya loved the life they’d built. He loved Shane and he loved Leo and he felt like the luckiest guy on earth.

“Come to bed,” Ilya sighed against Shane’s mouth and Shane hummed, opening his eyes.

“Yeah.”

Christmas morning was snowy and quiet.

Ilya smiled down at a wiggly Leo, picking her up, and taking her to bed with him so he and Shane could snuggle with her. It was his favorite morning routine, everyone warm and cozy together.

They stayed in bed for a long time, just being together, enjoying the morning, taking their time. The snow made everything more peaceful, muted, and the lack of pressure to get up and start the day was nice.

Leo was changed and they all went downstairs for breakfast and playtime and finished cleaning up from the night before.

Shane and Ilya exchanged Christmas gifts, which were mostly silly and for fun. Ilya had gotten Shane a book of “Sex Coupons” that had Shane laughing and blushing but which Ilya thought would be helpful for incorporating more regular sex back into their routine, something just for them.

Shane had gotten Ilya a bunch of specialty Russian snacks, which was incredibly thoughtful and heartwarming. Ilya had expressed missing certain Russian foods and snacks from his childhood years ago and they would make Russian delicacies together from time to time, but it meant a lot that Shane had ordered more.

There were video calls and phone calls and texts from friends and lots and lots and lots of cooing over Leo. Ilya had put a bow from one of the gifts on her head and it was the cutest thing in the entire world.

Ilya would never have expected Christmas to be something he would enjoy so much, but he did. He was so appreciative of Shane including him in his traditions and for them to share that with Leo, and create some of their own along the way.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Ilya surprises Shane for Valentine's Day

February

Shane looked at his phone absently as he toweled off his hair and frowned. No texts from Ilya. It was Valentine's Day and Shane was on a road trip. He felt bad being away and not being able to celebrate with Ilya, especially since they'd had the last six years to spend the day together.

Shane supposed that Ilya could be busy with Leo, which was fair, but he was usually pretty good about keeping Shane apprised of things; sending him updates and pictures and running commentary about Shane's game. Shane had sent him a bouquet of flowers and some very nice specialty chocolates, and the Centaurs had won their game, but there wasn't a text acknowledging either thing.

He tried not to be too upset about Ilya's weird radio silence, chalking it up to being busy with the baby and managing their household without Shane there to help... but it was hard to not feel sort of miffed about it.

Shane finished getting dressed and was one of the last ones out of the locker room, making sure everyone was accounted for and had all of their stuff, thanking the staff, before he was on the bus.

A bunch of the guys were going out but Shane was staying in. He wanted to at least call Ilya and check in, see how he and Leo were doing, and then maybe try to fit in some video sex before they both had to sleep.

If Ilya even wanted that.

Shane sighed, sinking further down in his seat, staring out the window. Maybe Ilya didn't want to talk to him. Maybe he was upset that Shane was gone so often and he was withdrawing and resentful. Maybe he was disillusioned with their life together now that they had Leo and he was all by himself. Maybe he was seeing that things weren't all they were cracked up to be and he wanted to leave Shane.

Shane closed his eyes, taking several deep breaths to calm his racing thoughts. Of course Ilya didn't think any of that. He wasn't mad. And Shane knew, for a fact, that Ilya loved him and Leo and their life together. He had said so many times and he made it abundantly clear, often.

Shane was much more confident that Ilya would have said something about how he was feeling if it was important for Shane to know... especially if he was having a hard time.

Things were good and Shane had no evidence to suggest otherwise.

They'd talked yesterday and everything had been fine. Ilya had been all smiles; flirty and funny like he always was. And Leo had seemed in good spirits, her sweet, giggly self.

It was probably nothing. Just Ilya having to get things done. They would talk tonight and it would be fine.

"Hey, Shane."

Shane opened his eyes and looked up at Harris. He was traveling with them tonight to help with some of the media the team was doing for the documentary ESPN was filming about the Centaurs and their season.

"Hey," he replied. "What's up?"

"I just wanted to let you know that there's a package or something for you at the front desk. At the hotel."

Shane's brows furrowed. "Really?"

Harris nodded. "Yeah. The staff gave me a heads up so I wanted to be sure I passed along the message."

"Oh. Okay. Yeah, thanks."

Harris smiled. "No problem."

Harris went to sit back down next to Troy and Shane went back to looking out the window, smiling a little. Maybe Ilya had sent him something after all. He felt better, relieved.

God... he hoped it wasn't a sex toy though... that would be so embarrassing.

The team arrived back at the hotel, unloading from the bus. Some of the guys waited outside, calling cars to go out, while other guys trickled back into the hotel. Shane reminded the players going out that they had a noon flight and a game tomorrow, so to party accordingly.

Captain duties taken care of, Shane made his way inside to the front desk.

"Um, excuse me?"

The manager behind the desk looked up from her computer and smiled at him.

"Hi there. How can I help you?"

"Uh, I was told that there was a package here for me? For Shane Hollander?"

The woman made a thoughtful face before she ducked under her desk.

“Oh, yes! Mr. Hollander. Here, this is for you.”

She held out a plain white envelope. Shane took it, confused. Well, this definitely wasn't a package exactly.

“Thanks”

“Is there anything else I can assist you with?”

“No, I think that's all. Thank you.”

Shane turned and moved away from the desk, toward some of the ottomans set up in the waiting area. His name was written across the envelope in an unfamiliar hand and he turned it over, pulling a slip of paper out of the envelope.

At the bar was all the paper said. Shane's brows furrowed. What the fuck was at the bar? Had Ilya bought him like... champagne or something? A fancy bottle of wine? But wouldn't that have just been delivered to his room?

More confused than ever, Shane took out his phone, and texted his husband.

Shane: what the heck did you send me?

He pocketed his phone and made his way to the bar.

The bar was mostly empty. A few people were still sitting at some of the tables and there were two people at one end of the bar and a lone figure sitting right in the middle. Shane stopped in his tracks. His heart started pounding in his chest and his stomach dropped as if he'd just jumped off a cliff.

He knew that golden-brown head of curls and the breadth of those shoulders anywhere; dressed in a burgundy shirt and dark slacks. Ilya turned his head slightly and Shane looked at that familiar profile, all of Ilya's sharp, masculine edges.

He was so handsome, just sitting there, looking confident and sexy. He must have spent time on his hair because his curls looked perfect and shiny. Fuck. Shane couldn't believe that he was married to this man. He'd hit the fucking jackpot.

Shane's feet started moving before he could even think. He went up to the bar and rested his hand on his husband's back, feeling the warm firmness of him through the fabric of his shirt. Ilya turned, smiling brightly at him, and then Shane was kissing him.

Ilya was *here*.

He'd flown all the way from Ottawa to be here. On Valentine's Day.

“Whoa,” Ilya said when they finally parted. “Nice to see you, too, Hollander.”

“You asshole,” Shane huffed, wrapping his arms around Ilya, having to stand on his toes because fuck his husband was tall, and sitting in a high chair at the bar. “I thought you were

ignoring me...”

“Ignoring you?” Ilya replied, hugging Shane back. “Never.”

They looked at each other and Shane cupped Ilya’s cheek in his palm. He didn’t care that they were in a bar and that people knew who they were. His world was dialed down to the man in front of him.

“I’m so happy you’re here.”

Ilya smiled back at him, soft and adoring. “Surprise.”

Shane kissed him again and Ilya laughed into it.

“Are you done with your drink? Do you need to close out?”

Ilya’s smile went crooked and sexy and Shane was so turned on he could have combusted.

“Why?” Ilya asked seductively. “Were you expecting something?”

Shane bit back a whine. “Ilya...”

“Sit with me,” Ilya hummed. “Have a drink... then we’ll go upstairs to bed...”

Shane didn’t want to sit at the bar and have a drink. He wanted to take Ilya upstairs to his hotel room (he was rooming alone) or Ilya’s hotel room (if he even had one) and then have his husband fuck him into the wee morning hours.

But instead, he sat at the bar next to Ilya, and looked at the menu when Ilya passed it to him. Maybe he could get a shot and just down it? Shane took a breath and relaxed. No. He’d have a drink and sit with his husband and be good and patient and be rewarded for it later. Ilya rested a hand on Shane’s thigh, leaning his elbow on the bar, his head resting on his fist, watching Shane.

Shane glanced at him.

“What’re you drinking?”

“A martini,” Ilya replied.

Shane ordered a glass of Merlot and a separate glass of water and turned to face his husband.

“Where’s the baby?” Shane asked.

“Home alone,” Ilya replied casually. “She is, what, seven months now? Totally old enough to take care of herself.”

“Ilya!” Shane hissed. “That’s not funny.”

Ilya laughed. “She’s with your parents. Don’t worry.”

Shane huffed, shaking his head. “How long have you been planning this?”

“Since I knew you would be on the road.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes,” Ilya replied, chuckling. “You are surprised?”

Shane thanked the bartender when she placed the wine and water glasses in front of him. He rested his fingers over the coaster under his wine glass.

“Yes and no,” Shane replied, looking at Ilya. “This is very you but I also wasn’t expecting it...”

Ilya nudged him gently with his shoulder, reaching a hand out to hook his pinky with Shane’s. Shane blushed.

“I love you,” he murmured.

Shane smiled. “I love you, too.”

They sat at the bar and had their drinks and talked. It was romantic and normal, the two of them, just like any couple on Valentine’s Day, though Shane loved the promise of pleasure that was simmering under the surface. He loved the way they exchanged little touches, meeting each other’s eyes meaningfully.

They finished their drinks and Ilya closed out, paying for them both. They left the bar hand in hand and Shane curled his arms around one of Ilya’s, leaning his head on his shoulder as they waited for the elevator.

“Twenty two oh one,” Ilya murmured into Shane’s hair, pressing a kiss to his head. Shane smiled and chuckled.

“You got your own room?”

“Just in case.”

They stepped into the elevator, the doors closing behind them. Shane backed Ilya up into the corner of the elevator and kissed him, fisting his hand into Ilya’s shirt, the material slick under his palms.

Ilya’s strong arms wrapped around him and he kissed Shane back, fervent and hungry. God, they hadn’t had sex in weeks. It was a little like before, when they would be separated for long periods of time, playing on different teams.

Only this felt worse in some ways because they lived together now.

There had just been so much going on with Leo and Shane being on the road and it felt nice to have this, just the two of them. The baby was in good hands and Shane would get to see her in three days. He missed her like crazy. But this was nice. He’d missed this, too.

The elevator arrived at their floor and they pulled apart, stepping out onto the carpeting. Ilya took Shane's hand and led him down the hall. Ilya stopped them at the door to his room, keying it open, and held out a hand for Shane.

"After you," Ilya hummed.

"Thank you," Shane chuckled.

The door closed behind them and they were wrapped up in one another again. Hands slid greedily into hair and down chests, untucking shirts, working on buttons, trying not to break their kiss.

Ilya pressed Shane up against a wall, having divested Shane of his suit jacket and tie, kissing Shane's neck as he unbuttoned his shirt. Heat pooled in Shane's belly as Ilya sucked lightly where his neck met his shoulder.

"I missed you," Shane sighed and Ilya lifted his head.

"I missed you, too," Ilya replied, kissing Shane again.

They managed to get shirts off, shoes kicked aside, and Ilya lifted Shane up, hands under his ass, Shane's legs and arms wrapped around him as Ilya walked them to the king sized bed. They flopped onto the mattress, laughing, moving themselves into the middle of it. Shane cupped Ilya's face, kissing him, before Ilya pulled away, trailing kisses down Shane's neck and torso.

Shane sighed dreamily, very gently petting Ilya's curls, running his hands over his shoulders as he was kissed adoringly, Ilya's hair and stubble tickling his skin, making him shiver. Ilya sat back on his legs and Shane let his arms fall to his sides, outstretched.

With nimble fingers Ilya slowly unbuckled Shane's belt, his eyes smoldering, his lips quirked up in a small smile.

"You did so well tonight," Ilya purred. "The game winning goal..."

Ilya undid the button on Shane's pants, then gently unzipped his fly. He looked so fucking sexy, his plush lips red and kiss swollen, his hair mussed and falling rakishly in his face.

"You were so patient, sitting with me at the bar..."

Shane bit his lip, swallowing. "Do I get a reward?"

"Of course," Ilya replied, his fingers sliding into Shane's pants and briefs, tugging them down, and then off. Ilya even peeled off his socks, tossing everything to the floor.

Shane couldn't deny how hot it was to have Ilya still wearing his pants when Shane was completely naked. It was more vulnerable like this but he knew he could trust Ilya to take care of him, never taking more than he knew Shane could give.

“What do you want?” Ilya asked, running his hands down and then up Shane’s thighs, curving his hands over Shane’s hips, but doing nothing else.

Shane knew his face and ears were red, his mind whirring. It would never really be easy for him to say what he wanted but he had gotten a little better at it, with practice. And in truth, he was so fucking horny, he didn’t really have many fucks to give.

“I want your mouth on me,” Shane managed. “And then I want you to fuck me until I come. I want you to come in me.”

Ilya’s eyebrows lifted toward his hairline, his expression showing that he was impressed, before it morphed into something seductive. “I think I can make that happen…”

Ilya settled comfortably between Shane’s legs, sliding one over his shoulder, kissing the inside of his thigh, up to his groin, before he sucked one of Shane’s balls into his mouth.

“Oh fuck,” Shane gasped, hands fisting into the sheets. Ilya was so fucking good at this. He knew exactly what Shane liked and how he liked it. He rolled the delicate orb gently in his mouth, releasing it carefully, before running his tongue over the seam of Shane’s sac, fingers teasing along Shane’s perineum.

“Shit. Ilya. Oh my god. So good.”

It really wasn’t going to take much to get Shane to the edge. He was leaking all over his stomach, his dick hard as granite, his whole body flooded with heat and pleasurable sensation.

Ilya knew exactly what he was doing and it was so goddamn incredible. Even after all these years, Shane still felt a little like he was just trying to keep up.

Ilya lifted his eyes to meet Shane’s gaze, maintaining eye contact as he licked Shane from base to tip with the entire surface of his tongue. Shane had no idea how Ilya managed to make that action look so sexy but it fried Shane’s brain.

Ilya winked, fucking *winked*, as he sucked the head of Shane’s cock into his mouth, teasing his slit with his tongue. He released him, sucking gently under the head for a bit, before kissing and kitten licking at him. Shane made soft, needy sounds at all the attention, unable to look away.

Ilya closed his eyes and hummed, taking Shane down all the way and Shane was going to die.

“Holy fuck,” Shane groaned.

Ilya swallowed around him, his throat flexing around the head of Shane’s cock. Shane involuntarily rolled his hips into the wet heat of Ilya’s mouth, eyes rolling closed. Ilya’s strong hands curled around his hips, holding him as he sucked Shane for a few blissful moments before pulling off of him.

“How do you want it?” Ilya asked, standing up at the end of the bed, hastily taking off his pants and briefs. Shane stared, dazed, at Ilya’s hard cock, and the entirety of him. His broad shoulders and chest dusted in dark chest hair, the ever present crucifix that hung around his neck, his muscular torso, and impressive thighs. No one had the right to look so fucking stunning.

“Like this,” Shane panted. “Wanna see you. Touch you.”

Ilya smiled, pulling a packet of lube from his pocket before he dropped his pants back to the floor. He crawled into bed with Shane, sliding their bodies together. Shane wrapped around him, pressing against Ilya, seeking friction.

Ilya kissed him, deep and thorough, before pulling away to open the lube.

“I have been thinking about this,” Ilya said, rubbing a slick finger against Shane’s rim.

“Getting you alone, listening to you. I love when you are loud, begging for it, asking me for more.”

Shane whimpered, biting his bottom lip as Ilya slid a finger into him, working it in and out, careful and easy.

“Want you,” Shane murmured. “Want your dick.”

“You will have it,” Ilya cooed, sinking another finger into Shane, curling and twisting, carefully stretching Shane apart, stroking over his prostate.

Shane closed his eyes, riding the sensations, feeling himself open for Ilya. It was easy to do, when Ilya knew just how to touch him. It took little time for Shane to be loose. He was already happy, warmed by Ilya having surprised him, and just being here.

Shane knew Ilya was probably just as eager to fuck Shane as Shane was to be fucked but he was enjoying Ilya’s tender attention. He knew Ilya liked to watch him while he fingered him open, seeing the way Shane’s body stretched out and relaxed in pleasure.

“I’m ready,” Shane murmured, opening his eyes to look at his husband. Ilya smiled, soft and tender, and withdrew his fingers.

“Condom?” Ilya asked, because he always asked, even though Shane couldn’t remember the last time they had used them. He still wasn’t a fan of mess but he could shower after and that was fine.

“No,” Shane replied. “Come here.”

Ilya slicked himself and leaned over Shane, kissing him in the adoring way he had that turned Shane into a quivering, needy mess. He entered Shane slowly, both of them making relieved noises. Shane loved this, the way Ilya filled him, leaving no empty spaces.

He wrapped his legs around Ilya’s back and Ilya huffed a soft laugh, smiling. He moved slowly at first, deliberately. Shane wrapped his arms around his husband’s neck, eyes tracking Ilya’s face. He always looked so awed, as if this was a gift Shane was giving him.

Shane tightened his hold. "I love you so much," Shane sighed. "Keep going."

Ilya sped up and Shane moaned, his mouth slack. He tried to keep his eyes open, watching Ilya's face as he fucked Shane harder, the sound of flesh slapping against flesh, their panting and whining and moaning filling the room.

"Fuck, Ilya. So fucking good. Love the way you fuck me. So perfect. Don't stop."

Shane let himself be loud. Asking for more, asking for it harder, spurring Ilya on.

"Yes, Shane. Let me hear you. Beautiful."

Pleasure washed over him in waves, building up, bubbling under the surface.

"Stroke yourself. Let me see you."

Shane wrapped a hand around his dick and watched Ilya's head fall back, snapping his hips, thrusting harder, faster. They were so good together, they always had been. And they got to have this forever.

Shane whined and panted, watching as Ilya dipped his head forward, his forehead pressed to Shane's, noses brushing, breaths puffing against each other's faces. Ilya opened his eyes, soft and vulnerable and sweet. He kissed Shane messily.

"My love," Ilya panted against Shane's mouth. "Come for me."

Shane gasped and shuddered at the words, coming hard all over his hand and chest, his orgasm rolling over him in hard, intense waves. He heard Ilya swear and still above him, pulsing inside him.

Ilya leaned over Shane on his forearms, his face tucked against Shane's neck, both of them trying to catch their breaths. Ilya nuzzled against Shane's sweaty skin and Shane closed his eyes, sliding his hand up and down Ilya's spine.

They kissed a little, slow and tender, before finally parting. They took a quick shower together and crawled into bed. Ilya lay next to Shane, stretched out long, arms above his head as they talked quietly.

Shane pressed a kiss to the curve of Ilya's bicep and reached out a hand to brush his thumb over the cleft in Ilya's chin. Ilya smiled at him, huffing a laugh.

"Thank you," Shane sighed. "For tonight."

Ilya winked at him. "My pleasure."

Shane smiled. "Did you get my gifts?"

"Yuna texted me. They arrived."

"You left before they got there?"

“Yes,” Ilya chuckled.

Shane snuggled up against him and Ilya wrapped his arms around him, kissing the top of Shane’s head. Shane smoothed his hand over Ilya’s chest, his chest hair catching against his palm pleasantly.

“I know this has been hard... I appreciate and love you very much.”

Ilya rubbed his hand back and forth over Shane’s arm. “Is hard but not bad,” Ilya murmured, reassuring. He lifted his hand, tucking a finger under Shane’s chin and lifting his head so they could look at one another.

“I love you and I appreciate you, too. But everything is okay. We are okay. Leo is okay.”

Shane smiled and nodded, closing his eyes and sighing softly as Ilya pressed delicate, sweet kisses to his face. When he was done, Shane opened his eyes, and Ilya brushed away the single tear that escaped.

“You’re the best thing that ever happened to me,” Shane murmured. “I want you to know that.”

Ilya blinked and licked his lips. He smiled small, hazel eyes going glassy.

“You are the best thing that ever happened to me,” Ilya replied. “You brought love back into my life. And good things. Was not easy but I would do it all again for you.”

Shane sniffed and hugged Ilya close, peppering kisses all over his face, smoothing his thumb over his cheek, before pressing their foreheads together.

“Me, too,” Shane replied, rubbing their noses. “If it meant being here with you, getting to love you for the rest of my life? Yeah, I would. But we’re here *now* and I get to love you for the rest of our lives.”

Ilya smiled. “Yes.”

“I love you,” Shane said, in French. “I adore you. I cherish you.”

Ilya chuckled, his cheeks pink. “I love you, too.”

Shane woke up the next morning in his husband’s arms. He snuggled down against the mattress and against Ilya who was curled around him, protective. Shane smiled, enjoying the comfort of Ilya’s presence, before his alarm went off.

Ilya jerked awake and Shane smoothed a hand over his arm comfortingly, before he slid out of bed to fish his phone out of his jacket pocket, and turn off his alarm.

Ilya was sitting up on his elbow, one eye open, curls all a mess. He looked adorable and sleepy.

“Do you have to leave?” he asked, his voice all frayed and throaty. He was still half asleep.

“Soon,” Shane replied, climbing back into bed. He got Ilya to settle back down, and cuddled up against him, tangling their legs.

“Don’t leave without saying goodbye,” Ilya murmured.

“Never.”

Shane’s alarm went off about a half hour later and he did need to go this time. He kissed Ilya and snuggled him, before he got out of bed to shower quickly, and get dressed. Ilya was sitting up in bed, watching him, still all sleep mussed and gorgeous.

“When do you fly back?” Shane asked.

“Late afternoon,” Ilya replied. “I am getting room service breakfast.”

Shane laughed. “Good. You should. I’m sorry I can’t enjoy it with you.”

Ilya sighed dramatically. “I will survive.”

Shane smiled, leaning in to kiss Ilya. “I believe in you.”

“Mm,” Ilya hummed, fixing Shane’s tie, and then the collar of his shirt. “There. Respectable Captain.”

Shane chuckled. “Thank you again for coming. Text me when you get home?”

“Of course,” Ilya sighed, stretching. Shane took a moment to take in all the naked man on display in front of him, the sheets only just barely covering his hips.

They kissed a few more times and Shane double checked he hadn’t forgotten anything.

“Good luck on the rest of the road trip. I will be watching,” Ilya said.

“Thanks. I will. I’ll see you in a few days.”

They kissed again, parting reluctantly.

Shane headed to his floor and the room he hadn’t slept in, changing quickly for the plane, and making sure to grab all of his bags, and get downstairs to the team.

Harris and Troy saluted him with their to-go coffee cups and Shane laughed, waving at them. He supposed he needed to thank Harris for helping Ilya with all of this.

Shane took out his phone, biting his lip at the photo waiting for him on it from Ilya. A selfie of him, very naked, in the hotel bed, drinking coffee out of a dainty china mug.

Shane: I fucking love you. Can’t wait to get home ❤️

Ilya: I love you, too. Soon ❤️

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Stanley Cup finals are here yet again

May

Ilya was pretty sure that Leo was the most well-traveled baby in the world. In the first year of her life, she had traveled from Russia to Canada, from Ottawa to Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, New York, Tampa, Los Angeles, and Boston.

Currently she was sitting in the stands with Ilya and her grandparents, surrounded by other family members of the Ottawa Centaurs, in Seattle, for game seven of the Stanley Cup Finals.

Ilya had never been so nervous for a final in his entire life.

He had watched Shane play in the finals before, on TV, before they were married. He had always wanted Shane to play well and would get a little stressed watching, but mostly it had been fine. If anything, his jealousy over not playing in the finals had been more difficult.

Even when they played together, Ilya had lived for the competitiveness, for the rush of being able to play with Shane and knowing that they were almost unstoppable together.

Now, sitting in the stands, Ilya could hardly sit still or relax. He wanted to be out on the ice with everyone and sitting and watching was more challenging than he would have expected.

The Centaurs had fought hard to get to the finals and it had been a back and forth with Seattle for the past six games. They were playing well and Shane always shined the brightest, dazzling Ilya any time he was on the ice.

They were starting the third period and Ilya's heart was in his throat. Yuna wasn't fairing any better and David seemed to be the only one who was relatively calm. Leo, with her headphones on, seemed blissfully unaware of what was going on.

Ilya held her in his arms, standing, gently rocking back and forth on his feet, watching the game with intense focus.

The weeks leading up to the playoffs had been... weird.

Ilya had tried to give Shane as much space as he could because he knew that Shane was in the zone, and to his credit, Shane did make an effort to be present with Ilya and Leo. There was

tension though, a nervous-excited energy that pervaded the house, and Leo wasn't managing it well.

Ilya couldn't blame her.

She came down with an ear infection, her first illness, which had sent Shane into a bit of an anxiety spiral. He was already pulled taut and Leo getting sick was the straw that broke the camel's back.

It couldn't have been worse timing, but they couldn't control illnesses or anything like that. Ilya had tried to take on the lion's share of responsibilities, which had just made things worse. Shane was worrying about everything.

Leo, the playoffs, Ilya taking on more responsibility.

He wasn't sleeping, he was scattered, and irritable.

They'd had to sit down and have a very long, difficult conversation about finding balance and relying on one another. Ilya had to admit that his first instinct was to do more in order to alleviate some of Shane's anxiety, when sharing the load was a better approach.

Shane did eventually calm down and they found a good rhythm. They'd never had to deal with a sick baby before and Ilya supposed that the rough timing meant that subsequent illnesses would feel like a piece of cake.

It had been very stressful but they'd managed to figure things out and Leo was just fine. The team had rallied around Shane and Ilya had gotten a lot of support from the WAGs and Yuna and David.

"Ilya," Yuna said. "I can take her. It'll give me something to do with my hands."

Ilya laughed and handed Leo off to her grandmother before he turned back to the game. This was fucking torture. The teams were neck and neck and Ilya's stomach was twisted in uncomfortable knots.

The score currently sat at 1-1 and Ilya hated how much time the Centaurs were spending in their own zone. Way too close for comfort. He had a running commentary to himself in Russian. They needed to get the puck to the other end of the ice, what were they doing?

Shane seemed just as frustrated from what Ilya could tell and when Shane was on the ice, Ilya could see him dial in. Shane was a smart player. He could be aggressive when he needed to be and this was when his fierce competitiveness really showed.

He was merciless. Checking Seattle players, stealing pucks, pushing the team back into Seattle's O-zone and keeping them there. Troy shot the puck and it was deflected but Shane got it on the rebound and slapped it into the back of the net.

The Centaurs' contingent roared.

2-1.

But there was still plenty of time for Seattle to come back.

Leo was handed back to Ilya, tucking herself against him. She was tired, he could tell, and he held her close, nuzzling her little head, and pressing kisses into her hair.

“I know this is a lot,” he said to her. “You’re being such a good girl.”

The clock was running down.

Ilya was flanked on either side by Yuna and David, their eyes on the ice as time ran down, the Centaurs managing to keep Seattle at bay. The Ottawa Centaurs were going to be the defending champions.

Shane had won his seventh Stanley Cup.

The arena exploded. Ottawa fans hooting and hollering and cheering so loudly for their team. Even with her headphones on, the noise was startling, and Leo burst into tears.

“Oh, little star,” Ilya chuckled softly, holding Leo close and tight, resting his hand on the back of her head. “It’s okay.”

“Aww, it’s okay, honey,” David soothed.

“Poor thing. It’s so loud in here,” Yuna said.

Ilya managed to calm Leo down and they started moving toward the rink, waiting until they could get on the ice.

The Centaurs were named the Stanley Cup champions. Awards were given out. Handshakes were had. The Cup was passed around. Ilya watched Shane kiss and hoist the Cup, looking flushed and perfect, before he handed it off to Bood.

Shane found his family in the crowd, waving to them, and he looked tearful, though he was smiling.

Eventually, families were let on the ice, and Shane made a beeline for them. Ilya stepped gingerly onto the ice, more careful than he might normally be, since he had a baby in his arms.

Shane looked so fucking good in his uniform and cap. He was definitely crying and Ilya’s eyes stung, as he wrapped his free arm around his husband, who was nearly as tall as him now, in his skates.

“Congratulations,” Ilya hummed. “I am so proud of you.”

“Thank you. I love you so much. I couldn’t have done any of this without you,” Shane replied, his voice tight. “This is just as much for you as it is for me.”

They looked at each other, smiling, and tearful. Shane cupped Ilya’s face in his palm, dark eyes scanning his face, a few tears escaping down his cheeks. Ilya tiskd softly and Shane

laughed wetly before he leaned in for a kiss.

“I love you,” Ilya sighed and Shane smiled brightly. Ilya handed Leo to Shane, who cooed at her, kissing her, and Ilya wiped his eyes, sniffing. He watched Shane hold their baby close, rubbing his nose against hers, kissing her warmly.

“Hi, baby,” Shane hummed. “I missed you.”

Yuna and David hugged their son, looking so proud and happy, and Ilya’s heart felt too big for his chest, watching his husband, daughter, and in-laws all together in a huddle.

“Get in here, you!” Yuna laughed and Ilya obliged, joining the group hug.

So many pictures were taken and Shane was pulled away to be interviewed, though he didn’t go very far. Several teammates came up to say hi to Ilya and he congratulated them, shaking hands and doling out hugs.

Someone brought the Cup back over and Shane put Leo in it.

“Baby in the Cup! Baby in the Cup!” some of the Centaurs around them chanted, everyone laughing as pictures were taken of Ilya, Shane, and Leo with the Cup.

“We’ll take Leonora,” Yuna said as things started to wind down on the ice and the guys started heading back into the locker room. “She’s exhausted, I’m sure. You guys go out and celebrate!”

“Are you sure?” Ilya and Shane asked, almost simultaneously.

Yuna smiled at both of them and nodded, touching their cheeks.

“Have fun. Besides, you know how much your dad and I love spoiling her.”

Shane laughed. “Yeah. I know.”

Ilya and Shane cuddled and kissed Leo before handing her off to her grandparents, hugging them goodbye, too, and Shane took Ilya’s hand so they could head back to the locker room together.

When they got there, they were greeted by a cacophony of sound. Everything was excited chaos and Ilya felt the buzz of it through his whole body. Someone was blasting ‘We Are the Champions’, with guys singing along. Someone had opened a bottle of champagne, spraying everyone with it. People were yelling and laughing and crying, hugging their partners and sleepy kids.

Ilya laughed as Shane drank a gross mix of beer and champagne out of the Cup, making a face afterward, and laughing.

He grinned at Ilya, looking as bright and beautiful as a diamond. He wrapped himself around Ilya and Ilya held him. He turned the cap Shane was wearing backwards, smiling at him, and

leaned down to kiss him. They made out a bit with the team and their friends cheering around them.

Ilya couldn't believe how lucky he was. His husband was so impressive and *all his*.

When they parted, Ilya pulled a clean razor out of his pocket.

Shane laughed and took it. "You're the best," he cooed, kissing his husband, and darted away to go shave his patchy play off beard.

"Roz!"

Ilya looked up and laughed as Brayden Mitchells, Aster Sanderson, Charlie Hanford, and Mikhail Dmitriev came up to him. They weren't rookies any more and it was nice seeing them looking more confident and sure of themselves.

He talked with them for a bit, Luca, Troy, Harris, Wyatt, and Lisa coming to join them. It was nice catching up with everyone, seeing them happy and excited, and he appreciated how pleased they seemed to be at seeing him.

It felt nice to be included... to know that he had made a lasting impression. Even if he wasn't playing any more... he was still a part of the team, in a way.

Shane found his way back to Ilya's side, his face perfectly shaved and smooth. He kissed Ilya's cheek and pressed up against him, joining the conversation.

Eventually, the group made their way back to the hotel, crowding the hotel bar, buying bottles of champagne. Ilya found an empty table and laughed as Shane joined him with a bottle of champagne and two champagne flutes.

Shane sat in Ilya's lap and Ilya hummed, wrapping his arms around his husband, pressing kisses to his shoulder as Shane poured them champagne.

"Dima!" Shane called to Dmitriev. The Russian defenseman turned around and noticed Shane, who was holding up the bottle of champagne.

"Take this," Shane said to him, in Russian. Dima grinned and took the champagne, saluting Shane and Ilya.

Shane turned back to Ilya, arms around his shoulders.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Shane smiled, face all crinkled; eyes, nose, freckles, and Ilya's heart flipped. Shane cupped his cheek in one hand and kissed him. It was a deep, filthy kiss, which surprised Ilya, and also turned him on like nothing else. He loved when Shane wasn't worried about where they were or who was looking at them, where he just kissed or touched Ilya and didn't care.

Ilya curved his hand around Shane's thigh, squeezing, his other arm tight around Shane's torso, kissing him back with fervor.

They parted and Ilya felt a little winded. He felt himself blush. Fuck. That was new.

Shane was smiling, his cheeks pink, but he turned casually to pick up a champagne flute and take a sip.

"Wow," Ilya hummed. "Seven time Stanley Cup Champion Shane Hollander is *different*."

"Shut up."

Ilya laughed and picked up his own champagne flute, taking a sip from the glass, before nuzzling against his husband's neck.

"You looked so good out there," Ilya said against Shane's skin, loud enough for Shane to hear over the sound of the celebrating team. "Confident and determined. Was very sexy."

He pressed a kiss to the tendon in Shane's neck and nipped his earlobe. Shane squirmed in his lap and Ilya moved his hand higher, nearly brushing Shane's dick.

"Fuck, Ilya."

Ilya grinned and Shane kissed him again. God, Ilya really loved that winning made Shane so horny. Things were gonna get freaky tonight, he just knew it.

But until then, he didn't rush anything. They sat and drank their champagne and talked to some of the other guys and their partners if they came by to say hello.

Shane and Ilya were on the same page though, exchanging glances and smiling at each other and shamelessly flirting. Ilya didn't want to stop kissing Shane. He was so painfully in love with him and ridiculously impressed.

Shane never ceased to amaze him. Everything about him. His heart and grit and passion. Ilya loved seeing how many people came up to him to thank him for his leadership and for helping guide the team to another Cup. He loved the respect he received, how well-deserved it was, and how humble Shane was about it when he didn't have to be because he was *the best fucking hockey player*.

Ilya was the luckiest goddamn asshole on the planet.

Shane finished his champagne and turned to Ilya.

"Let's go," he said, surprisingly tender, and Ilya nodded, downing the rest of the champagne in his glass in one go.

"Okay."

They left the bar, saying their goodbyes to the team on the way out, laughing as people wolf-whistled at them. Shane blushed deeply and Ilya just waved because he knew that everyone

knew what he and Shane were about to get up to in Shane's hotel room.

"Oh my god," Shane laughed, resting his forehead on Ilya's sternum as they took the elevator. "You're such a ham."

Ilya chuckled, his face buried in Shane's hair, holding his husband close. Shane sighed, cheek to Ilya's chest, his arms wrapping around Ilya, too. They stayed like that the whole elevator ride, Ilya's heart overflowing. He loved this man so much.

They arrived on Shane's floor and he took Ilya's hand. They walked together, stopping at the right door, and Shane keyed them in. They turned to each other, smiling, and Shane cupped Ilya's face in his hands, bringing him down for a kiss. It was soft at first, quickly turning heated.

They kissed urgently and Ilya pressed Shane against the wall, Shane's hands sliding up under Ilya's jersey, dragging his palms over Ilya's chest greedily. Ilya hummed, sliding his thigh between Shane's legs, pressing up against him.

Shane's arms wrapped around Ilya's neck, his leg over Ilya's hip, pulling him close. They touched and rubbed against each other, getting hard, though it really didn't take much, they were both eager for it.

They broke their kiss so Ilya could shrug off the Hollander jersey he'd been wearing and then helped Shane unbutton his shirt, sliding it off his shoulders. Pants and underwear were next, both of them laughing as they kicked off shoes, and tugged off socks.

Ilya pressed Shane back against the wall, hoisting him up against it. Shane's legs and arms went around him automatically, his head pressed back against the wall.

"Fuck," he huffed.

"Could fuck you like this," Ilya murmured, nipping at Shane's jaw.

Shane panted softly. "No," he replied. "In bed... I want you to fuck me... but I want to look at you. Touch you. Kiss you."

Ilya hummed, capturing Shane's mouth, sucking on his bottom lip, nipping it. He pulled away from the wall and carried Shane to the bed, laying him down on it gently. Shane scooted further onto the bed and Ilya crawled after him.

He loomed over his husband and Shane reached for him. Ilya kissed him, deep and hungry, laughing as Shane pushed him onto his back. Shane straddled him and sat up, running his hands over Ilya's chest, splaying his fingers out on his pecs, just looking down at him.

Ilya rested a hand over one of Shane's and smiled at him.

"What?"

Shane shook his head. "You're beautiful."

Ilya hummed, closing his eyes, preening a bit. "Tell me."

"Everything about you," Shane murmured, leaning over Ilya, his warm breath puffing against Ilya's face.

"I love your curls," Shane sighed, pressing kisses into Ilya's hair. "The way they look and the texture. I love your eyes, how sometimes they look gold, and the way they crinkle up when you smile."

Shane kissed between Ilya's brows, over his closed eyelids. "I love your nose." He pressed a kiss to the tip of Ilya's nose and Ilya snorted.

"I love your mouth." Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya's top lip, then his bottom lip, then both of his lips together, dipping his tongue briefly into Ilya's mouth, before pulling away.

Ilya opened his eyes, watching his husband, his heart wobbling in his chest. "I love how broad you are. How big." Shane's hands squeezed Ilya's pecs and Ilya chuckled.

"I love how sweet you are with me. I love how soft you are with our baby. I love how generous you are. I love *you*, Ilya. So much."

Ilya sat up, wrapping his arms around Shane, holding him, his cheek pressed to Shane's collarbone. Shane had his arms around Ilya's neck, cheek resting on his hair.

"Couldn't help it," Shane whispered. "I started and just... couldn't stop."

They looked at each other and Shane gently pushed Ilya's hair back with careful fingers, stroking his cheeks. "Fuck you're handsome."

Ilya laughed helplessly. "You're gorgeous," he told Shane, in Russian. Shane smiled and blushed, kissing between Ilya's brows once more.

"I'm not done with you," he grumbled and Ilya grinned, letting Shane push him back down.

Ilya splayed out, putting himself on display for Shane. Shane bit his lip and slid off of Ilya, sitting on his legs, his knee pressed to Ilya's thigh.

"I want to watch you," Shane said softly. "As my reward. Touch yourself."

Ilya chuckled, debating whether or not to tease Shane, but he decided against it. Shane was being sweet and he'd won the fucking Stanley Cup, so Ilya figured he could cut him a tiny bit of slack. But only a tiny bit.

"Winning the Cup was not enough of a reward?" he asked, arching a brow at Shane. Shane laughed.

"Shut up."

Ilya sighed, closing his eyes for a moment. "I suppose I can do it."

Shane leaned in and nipped at his shoulder. Ilya turned his head and met Shane's eyes, running his hands over his own chest, watching the way Shane's eyes tracked them, entranced. Ilya loved the way Shane looked when he was turned on, completely locked in. It was a nice ego stroke. He liked that he still captured Shane's attention like this.

He wrapped a hand around his cock, stroking lazily, with no real rhythm, taking his time. Shane just watched him and Ilya smiled lazily at him as Shane's tongue darted out to lick his bottom lip. He seemed to be trying to take all of Ilya in at once. Ilya hummed and Shane's eyes went to his face.

"Fuck, Ilya," Shane breathed.

Ilya smiled and chuckled again, closing his eyes and sighing as Shane's hand rested on his thigh, touching him lightly. It felt nice, the inside of his thigh was sensitive, and Shane's thumb stroked in slow circles there.

Shane leaned in and kissed Ilya's hip, making him twitch, the touch unexpected but not unpleasant. Ilya opened his eyes and Shane looked at him, checking in. Ilya nodded and Shane smiled, trailing tender kisses along Ilya's obliques.

Shane worked his way up Ilya's body, catching one of Ilya's nipples in his teeth, making Ilya hiss. He licked it soothingly, sucking it into his mouth, and Ilya moaned, jerking himself a little faster.

His husband looked at him, eyes glazed with lust, before he leaned in and kissed Ilya, pressing against him, his erection pressed to Ilya's hip. They kissed messily for a bit before Shane pulled away, moving himself between Ilya's legs.

"Stop," he said and Ilya bit his own lip, stopping his hand. Shane brushed Ilya's hand aside impatiently and Ilya's laugh turned into a groan as Shane replaced Ilya's hand with his mouth. Ilya's eyes rolled closed as Shane took him all the way down, swallowing around him.

"Hollander," Ilya breathed, one hand sliding into Shane's hair. "That fucking mouth."

Shane moaned around Ilya, the vibration traveling down Ilya's dick, to his balls, the base of his spine. He didn't know if he'd make it to fucking Shane if Shane didn't stop. But he seemed to know what Ilya was thinking because he pulled off of him.

"Lube."

"Where?" Ilya asked.

"Bedside table."

Ilya turned but Shane was already reaching for it, handing the bottle to Ilya.

"How do you want it?" Ilya asked but Shane was already next to him, chest pressed to the mattress, ass in the air. Ilya smiled and laughed. He leaned in, kissing Shane deeply, before pulling away and moving behind him.

“This fucking ass,” Ilya growled, squeezing Shane’s ass in his hands. “Mine.”

“Yours,” Shane breathed. “All yours. Every part of me.”

Ilya leaned in, sinking his teeth into Shane’s right ass cheek because he couldn’t think of a better response to that statement. Shane yelped, and then moaned. Ilya licked the bite, kissing it gently, before he pulled Shane’s cheeks apart, and ran his tongue over his rim.

He fluttered his tongue in the way that Shane loved, smiling to himself as Shane melted into the mattress, pressing his ass back against Ilya’s face.

“Oh god,” Shane breathed. “So fucking good, Ilya. Love your tongue. Been thinking about this since the locker room.”

Ilya hummed in reply, enjoying the way Shane started to loosen and open for him. He pushed his tongue into him, loving the way Shane moaned and panted, his hands curling into the sheets.

Ilya pulled away, grabbing the lube, slicking his fingers.

“My husband,” Ilya cooed, carefully sliding a finger into Shane. “Seven time Stanley Cup champion, Shane Hollander.”

They both laughed and Ilya kissed Shane's left ass cheek before stroking his finger over Shane’s prostate, watching the way Shane shuddered, and whined.

“Jesus...”

“I am so proud of you,” Ilya continued as he finger fucked Shane, opening him up, fingers curling and stretching and stroking. “So beautiful on the ice. So accomplished.”

“Ilya,” Shane breathed, turning his head to look at Ilya out of the corner of his eye.

Ilya hummed, kissing along Shane’s lower back, working his husband open.

“I am the luckiest man on Earth. Being married to you. Getting to fuck you. Spending the rest of my life with you.”

He meant every word. Down to his core.

Shane whimpered and Ilya took pity, removing his fingers. He grabbed the lube again, slicking his cock.

“Yes. Fuck yes. Come on,” Shane panted. Ilya slid into Shane, overcome, as he always was, by the way Shane felt around him. It awed him every time, truthfully. He was always amazed how Shane welcomed him inside, like he belonged there.

Because he did.

Ilya wrapped his hands around Shane's hips, fucking him hard and fast, hauling Shane back against him. Shane's hands were fisted in the sheets, his head back, body arched.

"Yes, Ilya. Fuck. More. Harder. Give it to me. Love your cock. Love you in me."

Ilya was more than happy to oblige, jackhammering into Shane hard and fast, making Shane whine.

He watched Shane reach a hand underneath himself. Ilya paused long enough to haul Shane up against him, Shane's back to Ilya's chest.

"Oh shit," Shane gasped, his free hand wrapping around Ilya so he didn't fall forward, though Ilya held him, one hand pressed to Shane's chest as Ilya thrust into him, Shane stroking his cock.

"Fuck, Ilya, fuck. I'm gonna come. I'm gonna— shit, *oh* —"

Shane's mouth fell open, his head resting on Ilya's shoulder as he came, hard, spasming around Ilya. Ilya pressed his mouth to Shane's cheek, panting as he chased his own pleasure, before his own orgasm surged up, and he emptied himself into Shane.

They were suspended like that for a moment, both breathing hard, before Ilya sat back on his heels, taking Shane with him. Shane was completely lax and Ilya buried his face in Shane's shoulder, closing his eyes.

"God that was good," Shane breathed and Ilya smiled, kissing his shoulder.

"Yes. Very."

Ilya released Shane and Shane rolled onto his back, stretching out on the mattress. Ilya smiled at him, stroking his hands over Shane's thighs. He dropped a kiss just above his knee, before he got out of bed and went to the bathroom.

He came back with a few cloths to use to clean Shane up, wiping off his hand, his belly, and took his time swiping gently against Shane's slightly swollen entrance. Shane closed his eyes, smiling softly, flushed and relaxed and happy.

"Feels nice," he sighed and Ilya hummed. He tossed the cloths aside and snuggled up next to his husband, pulling him close. Shane rested his head on Ilya's chest, smoothing a hand over his pecs.

Shane yawned and Ilya kissed his forehead.

"I'm wiped," Shane murmured. "But I love you... thank you for everything..."

Ilya hummed, squeezing Shane close. "I love you, too. I would do anything for you..."

"I know... but you need to know how much I appreciate it."

Ilya smiled. "I know."

Shane lifted his head and Ilya looked at him. They kissed, soft and sweet, before Shane settled his head back down, sighing, his whole body relaxing.

He was asleep in almost no time at all and Ilya listened to his deep, calm breathing, his heart full.

June

In the middle of June, they celebrated Leonora's first birthday and Ilya's thirty-seventh, in Ottawa.

Ilya had put Leo in a dress patterned with strawberries and a red bow in her copper colored hair. He and Shane had baked her a cake and Shane had brought it outside with a single candle in the middle while all their friends and family sang happy birthday.

She was absolutely spoiled the entire day and it was *great*.

Rose had been carrying her around and she'd been holding up her index finger, telling everyone that she was a year old.

They'd gone to the cottage a few days after, just the three of them and Anya, to enjoy the quiet before their camps started up. They sat on the dock on the lake, Shane leaning against Ilya's chest, Leo in his arms.

Leo was babbling away and Ilya smiled, watching her as Shane hummed and nodded along, talking back.

"You have so much to say," Ilya chuckled, smoothing his thumb over her arm.

"She's had a busy day, Papa. Traveling in the car and playing in the water and walking around the backyard."

"That is true."

Leo pushed herself up against Shane, her little arms wrapping around his neck. Shane sighed, hugging her, and Ilya pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

He leaned his head against Shane's and looked out at the sun setting over the lake. The realization dawned on him, not for the first time, but still taking him by surprise, that he had everything he could have ever wanted.

A family. A home. A place that he belonged. People who he loved and who loved him right back. It was a good life. Perfect in all its imperfections.

"Hey," Shane said.

Ilya turned his head to look at him. Shane smiled and Ilya grinned back at him. They didn't even need to say anything. Ilya just squeezed his family tight.

Yeah. There was really nothing better than this.

Chapter 21: Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya talk

August

Shane fiddled with Ilya's crucifix, rolling the familiar pendant in his fingers, listening to Ilya's heart beating. He set the pendant carefully in the center of his husband's chest, smoothing his fingers over it, before he propped his chin on Ilya's pec.

Ilya opened one eye, peeking at him, and smiled.

"What do you think about another baby?" Shane asked quietly.

Ilya opened his other eye, turning his head on his pillow to look at Shane, giving him his full attention.

"What do you mean? Like, soon?"

Shane shrugged. "Not super soon. Maybe in the next two years or so?"

Ilya considered this for a moment, then smiled a little. "Yes, okay. Would be nice to have more than one, like we talked about."

Shane smiled back, nodding in agreement. "Yeah. I'd like that, too. And... I think I'd want to retire. I want to be home with you and the kids. I could like... get a coaching certification or something... maybe. I don't know. But... I do know that I want to be with you all."

Ilya's expression was soft, his eyes tracking Shane's face.

"You want that?" he asked softly.

Shane nodded. "I do."

"But you could still play for another few years..."

"I know," Shane replied. "But... you're more important to me. Leo's more important to me. It was hard with just one kid, I can't imagine how it would be with two, and... I feel like I missed out on things. Not a lot but, I don't know, it just feels important."

Ilya nodded, gently brushing his thumb back and forth over Shane's cheekbone. "Okay. If you are sure. I will support you."

Shane smiled, his cheeks heating. He knew that Ilya would but it felt good having that reaffirmed in words. He leaned up, kissing his husband gently.

“Thank you.”

Ilya smiled. “This is easy,” he replied, holding Shane close. “Is fine.”

Shane snuggled against him.

“I think you’re a really incredible dad,” Shane murmured into the quiet. “It kind of makes me want to have a million kids.”

Ilya laughed. “Two is enough, I think.”

Shane chuckled. “Yeah. No. It definitely is.”

Ilya turned his face into Shane’s hair, still laughing, before he sighed. “I’m glad you think I am a good dad. I wanted to be better than my father...”

Shane nodded, rubbing his hand soothingly over Ilya’s chest. “You’re wonderful, Ilya. Our kids are so lucky to have you. To know that they’re loved and safe. You make me feel that way and I don’t doubt that our kids will feel that way, too.”

Ilya was quiet for a long moment.

“I hope so.”

“I know so.”

He huffed, pressing a kiss to the top of Shane’s head.

“Thank you, sweetheart.”

Shane pressed a kiss to Ilya’s bear tattoo and smiled. “Anytime.”

FIN

End Notes

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