Ice Baby

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Ice Baby

by verensal

Summary

Shane is the only omega on his hockey team and one of the few to play for the NHL.

He will do anything to remain at the top and protect his reputation from harmful rumors.

But when he finds out that he is pregnant, Shane’s world crumbles around him, and the only person he can trust with his secret is the alpha, who shares his heat but does not want to be his mate.

Notes

This show has consumed my life so of course I had to write an ABO about it

Chapter 1: February-March

February, 2016

It's a Saturday and Shane sleeps through his alarm clock.

He feels groggy too. He knows, that he overslept, but when he reaches out his arm to check the time on his phone, it shows only nine in the morning, which is just an hour later than he would normally wake up.

He scrolls past his mom's two texts, reminding him of their plans to meet for brunch, and then skim reads the messages from his team's group chat. Shane's thumb wavers over the screen, but he decides against going into his texts to see, if perhaps there were some messages he missed, when he put his phone in 'do not disturb' mode last night.

Yesterday, he went to bed early. He barely had any appetite, but he forced himself to finish dinner, even though the smell of chicken that he had cooked, made bile rise at the back of his throat.

Shane wanted to blame it on the stomach bug. He was doing fine in the morning, but by nighttime, his health worsened and, he was even considering cancelling the plans he had made with his mum, he knew she was going to freak out if he told her he was feeling sick. She would make him go to the hospital and get checked out and Shane, well, he did not really want her to worry over nothing.

He rolls over to his other side, hoping it will relieve the sense of nausea building slowly in his gut.

He should probably drink some water, but he does not want to get up from the comfort of his bed. He built a small nest last night, hoping the familiar scents would calm his mind, and it worked surprisingly well. Shane even snuck a couple of shirts and a sweater (which were not his) inside, and it made something warm and fuzzy spread in his stomach, when he nuzzled into the pillow surrounded by the familiar scents of bonfire and sandalwood.

Now, as he slowly moved around, his muscles felt lax and slow. He slept fine, but the moment he woke up, his body started to act out again.

Shane tries to bring himself into the kitchen to drink a glass of water, but it does not help. Instead, it somehow makes everything ten times worse.

He holds a palm to his mouth and stares at his kitchen sink.

Oh, he thinks, blankly.

Oh, fuck-

Shane bends over the kitchen counter and throws up.

It is surprisingly easy for his dinner, to rise up from his stomach, and become puke at the bottom of the kitchen sink.

*

It takes about an hour to clean his sink. After the morning incident, Shane throws up two more times, each time causing a painful tugging in his stomach and an ache in his throat. Once, down the sink again from the smell, and another down the toilet, where he hunched over the bowl, in search of some relief.

He feels both scared and incredibly exhausted.

He checks his temperature, but he does not have a fever.

Shane nearly texts his mom to tell her he is not going to make it, but by noon his nausea disappears almost entirely. He does not feel like he is going to throw up every twenty minutes, which is great, and he even manages to make himself a smoothie and some tea to calm his stomach.

Shane does not have time to think about the morning incident.

He blames it on the chicken that went bad.

(He ignores the part, where he woke up feeling nauseous for almost ten days in a row, because if he does, he might actually go insane.)

Instead, he irons his shirt and his pants, spends over thirty minutes trying to decide if he wants to wear the black jacket or the brown, and then, for almost twice as long, he tries to convince himself that wearing sneakers in snow is not a bad idea, since he is going to drive anyway (he ends up wearing snow boots last minute) and heads out of the door.

By the time Shane sits before his mother, he is feeling flustered and his knee twitches, forcing his leg to bump up and down. His hair is messy from the hat, and now, outgrown, it falls over his eyes and Shane is getting frustrated, trying to push it away from his forehead.

“Is everything alright?” Yuna asks, her eyes fixed on him over the menu. Shane hums, his attention on the buttermilk pancakes option from the ‘something sweet’ section.

He shouldn’t.

He has already put on a lot of weight (just a couple of pounds) over the winter break, and, he told himself he is going on a proper diet towards the end of the month, but, his cravings have been controlling his life as of late.

And he *really* wants the pancakes. They sound so good and Shane practically salivates at his mouth. He is starving, his stomach hollow after throwing up this morning, and he feels that if he doesn’t eat the pancakes now, he might actually die.

He can practically taste them on his tongue, the sweetness of the syrup and the fluffy texture. Shane is staring at the menu, when his mother’s voice brings him out of his head.

“Shane? Shane,” he looks up. She is fully glaring at him now. “Is everything alright?”

Shane wants to crumble under his chair, but instead, he clears his throat and shrugs. “Yeah. Of course. I am fine, why wouldn’t I be?”

Yuna stiffens. Her scent is muted by the blockers and the crowd around them, but Shane still notices the traces of citrus in his mother’s scent and cringes.

“You look pale,” she says, her voice low, as she leans over the table, to put a hand over his forehead. “And you smell ripe. Is it your cycle? You must be getting close, but you don’t feel hot.”

Shane’s cheeks are bright and red. He blinks at his mother, who takes away her hand only to brush Shane’s hair from his eyes. “You don’t have to tell me of course, but you really smell different, darling. It is not bad, just- strong. Is something off with your medication? You know we can always go for another check-up together.”

Shane wants the ground to open and swallow him whole.

“I am fine, Mom. Seriously. Just a little tried, but I am not,” Shane blushes furiously, and finishes in barely audible whisper, “in heat.”

Yuna’s frown does not disappear, and Shane suddenly wants to talk about anything but his body or his scent. He turns his full attention to the waitress, who arrives just in time to take their order.

His mother’s question lingers in his mind when he looks back at the menu.

“And what would you like?” the girl smiles politely at him.

Shane’s nausea comes back for the second time that day, but he does everything he can to push it away.

“I will get the salmon and poached eggs, please. With salad on the side. Thank you.”

He slaps the menu shut and tries to meet his mother’s small, but comforting smile.

*

Yuna is an alpha, so of course her senses are sharper than normal, Shane reasons on his way home. His drive home is taking ages, and the roads are slow with the traffic going into the city, but he does not mind.

It leaves him with enough time to think.

His mother has every right to be worried about him. She knows well how hard it was for him to get to the top, his second gender was always a reminder of his shortcomings.

Omega males were rare, and there were even fewer in professional sports.

But Shane never let it get to him. His achievements were his own, and he had great teammates who respected him, and parents who supported him throughout his teenage and childhood years.

He was loved. He was cared for.

Shane's grip tightens over the steering wheel. His phone is dead silent, and Shane curses under his nose for caring.

He is starving.

He ate half of the salmon, and he asked for a takeaway box, because he could not bear his mother's judging look when he saw him dragging the food all over the plate with a fork. Shane has not eaten anything since the smoothie he had in the morning but that was nearly three hours ago.

Shane had the best time with his mother, talking about the upcoming season and the goals he set, his personal ones and the ones he wished for his team to complete. His mother also asked him about Rozanov, in a very off-handed way, something, that Shane was not expecting to talk about. He and Ilya have hardly spoken since January and talking about the alpha during brunch with his mom was not Shane's ideal topic of conversation.

The last time they saw each other was still fresh in his memory. So fresh, in fact, Shane could not think about it without blushing. His body was a tight raw of nerves, and Ilya, well, he did little to calm the fire in his body.

Instead, he added to it, like gasoline, and Shane was terrified of how much he craved the feeling of being engulfed by it.

His phone rings. Shane, stuck in traffic, reaches out to check it.

'Text me when you get home xoxox'

'And let me know if you want me to book that doctor's appointment.'

'Nothing serious, just a regular check-up.'

Shane's lips tighten when he reads his mother's message.

It is nothing however, in comparison to the dread that settles in his gut when he shoots him the final:

'You do use protection when you are with someone, right?'

Shane looks at the traffic.

He then checks how far it would take to drive home. In a span of two minutes, he decides to reroute and instead drive to the closest supermarket.

He gives all of his mum's messages a 'thumbs up' and to the last one he sends an overly enthusiastic 'yes!!!'.

*

For a Saturday afternoon, the grocery store is surprisingly empty.

Shane really does not need to be here. He orders most of his groceries through the app, but this is strangely comforting. He wanders through the aisles, without much goal in mind, but he does have a cart with him if he decides to pick something on a whim.

Which he does.

Shane gets a jar of pickles, and cheese slices. He throws in sourdough, and pickled tomatoes. He gets three flavours of ice cream and a pack of ketchup crisps. He got chocolate cake (a *whole* cake) and whipped cream, just in case.

He blacks out at the cashier counter. He packs everything and carries the bags to his car without an ounce of shame.

He tries not to think of what he had just done. He felt like a teen with his parents' credit card, buying a bunch of junk food. But Shane is satisfied, and he is particularly excited about the cake.

He forgot, when the last time he had some chocolate cake was. Was it someone's birthday? Was he seven?

The drive back goes a lot smoother than before. He gets home when it starts to get dark outside, and he brings the food to his apartment, humming a little under his nose.

Shane is tired, but he is content when he unloads the groceries. He wants to shower, the foreign scents clinging to his skin, in a way he finds unpleasant.

He changes into sweatpants and a sweatshirt that is too large for him, but it smells of Rozanov which is nice.

They do stuff like that. Exchanging clothes for their hats and ruts, to bring into the privacy of their apartments. They started doing it not long ago, perhaps last year, and Shane is still getting used to the fact that he can simply pick up Rozanov's shirt or sweater in his wardrobe and bring it to his nest.

It is comforting, in a way. It is also terrifying how much Shane missed his scent.

They saw each other last month, and yet Shane does not think, that it was enough.

Rozanov's sweatshirt smells of home. Shane finds so much comfort in the alpha's scent, of warmth and something woody, that his body automatically relaxes, and his mind stops racing at an ungodly speed.

He can actually focus on dinner, the ground beef bowl with sweet potatoes this time, instead of worrying about why the foods he used to eat since he was a kid are now making him nauseous. Shane eats the food while catching up with the latest sports news. There is not much to watch off-season but the Australian Open, and Shane is grateful for the distraction.

When he goes to bed he is almost at peace. There is no gassy feeling in his stomach, or tugging at his muscles. Shane reads a couple of pages of his book and throws in a couple of Rozanov's shirts into his nest.

Even when he heads to sleep, he is still wearing the sweatshirt, thinking that if he were to take it off, the fragile peace he built with his body would break.

*

March, 2016

"Omega bitch."

A whistle from the referee. A red card for language.

The beta skates away with a snarl, and Shane is sweating buckets under his uniform.

Soar loser, Shane thinks, when he glances at the score. He is leading, five goals to one, and he is smiling despite the exhausting tugging at his muscles.

This goal felt especially sweet.

The team was riling Shane up since the start of the game. If they wanted a fight, Shane was not going to refuse. He felt good, he was in good shape for today's match and Shane was proud of that.

The past month his health has been on a rollercoaster. His pheromones and his scent were too strong even for his regular blockers, and even things like working out and running started to tire him out way quicker than before. He treasured the days when his body was normal like everything was fine.

It made little moments like this goal feel especially precious.

Shane hides his smile around his mouthguard and skates towards Hayden, who is watching him intently across the rink.

"You okay?"

The alpha nudges Shane playfully, but he can't hide the worry in his voice. Shane feels goosebumps rise on his skin, both from the touch, and from Hayden's display of protectiveness which fuels the warmth, swelling in his chest.

"Yeah! I am fine," Shane puffs his chest.

Omega bitch, the voice in his head nudges. He had been called worse.

“He is a dickhead. Just ignore him. One of the other guys will take care of him, if he keeps bugging you,” Hayden reassures him, even if Shame does not really say that he isn’t too bothered by the insults.

Shane is about to skate away, when Hayden asks him quietly, or as quiet as he can manage through the cheers of the crowd and the loudspeaker announcement ringing through the stadium, “Are you sure you are alright? You smell like- like you are close to your, you know, cycle.”

Shane stares at him, wide-eyed. “I am fine! Really.”

Hayden skates away, his arms raised. “I know, man. Just wanted to make sure you were alright. We need you healthy, Shane. Can’t have any accidents happen.”

Shane knows that the alpha means well, and yet, he can’t help but dwell on the words even after the match. His teammate was not the first person to comment on Shane’s smell despite his not being able to scent anything.

His mother was first. And then there was Hayden.

Shane wins the game, but he can’t bring himself to celebrate. He stays with the team to prep for their next match, but when he gets home the only thing he wants is to shower and collapse into bed.

‘Saw your game last night. Having fun with the Oilers’ left wing?’

Shane reads the text when he walks through his front door. He scoffs to himself. Leave it to Rozanov to text him at the worst possible time, and all because he saw the little fight he had with the opposition.

Shane contemplates whether he should reply now, or after his shower.

He takes off his jacket and sweater, then removes his pants and his socks. He stands naked, wearing only his underwear in the middle of the room, when he texts Rozanov back.

‘Why? Feeling left out?’

He smiles to himself. It is stupid of him, he knows, but he kind of likes the little sparks of jealousy in Ilya’s texts.

He pushes down the feeling that wants Rozanov to be with him here and now. Perhaps they could shower together, their bodies pressed against each other, and Shane could suck on Ilya’s dick and maybe allow him to knot in his mouth. If they had enough time, they could cuddle after, and Ilya could scent him, so that Shane would stop feeling so hot and bothered underneath his skin all the damn time.

Before Shane’s thoughts become a nuisance, his phone rings.

‘No.’

Ilya double texts before Shane's smirk disappears from his face.

'Are you home now?'

Shane huffs, typing: 'Yes.'

He bites his bottom lip. He feels sudden wetness gathering between his thighs. 'Why?'

Shane is about to take off his underwear. Rozanov keeps typing and then deleting the message. It is so unlike him to hesitate, before asking Shane to do something for him.

'Send me a picture.'

Shane nearly chuckles in disbelief. He does not know what it is, the height of the victory or the excitement of finally talking to the alpha after almost a month-long silence, but, he decides to snap a picture in the mirror.

Nothing crazy, just his torso, and the swell of his breasts with the slight roundness of his stomach from all the junk he has been eating lately. His briefs feel tight around his thighs, and you can see the way they bite into his tanned skin in the mirror. Shane sends it fast, before he changes his mind.

He does not even study his face, for it is half covered with the phone, but if you look closely you can see his disheveled hair and the side of his freckled cheek.

'So sexy.'

'Want to suck on those tits when I see you again.'

Shane flushes when he reads the text. His fingers hover over the keyboard, deciding if he sounds too desperate to ask the alpha to spend the time with him in two weeks when they come to Montreal.

'I might let you.'

'If you ask nicely.'

Shane does not have to wait long for a reply.

'We both know you will end up beginning for it by the end of the night, baby.'

*

Next day

Shane arrives for his appointment nearly forty minutes early.

It is nothing, he keeps saying to himself, just a regular check-up.

To ease his mind off things, and to figure out what is wrong with his pheromones.

He booked it last night, because he was feeling riled up from the brief conversation with Rozanov, and because Hayden's words never truly left his mind. If he and Ilya were truly to see each other soon, Shane would rather just figure out what is wrong with him before so that there would be no awkwardness between them.

He had his family doctor on the call and they said Shane could come anytime between ten and twelve in the afternoon so now here he was, at nine-twenty, squirming in his car seat.

It is not that he is .. sick.

It is more likely that his symptoms are .. inconsistent.

Some days he feels completely normal, his appetite is good and he sleeps better than ever, while on other days he wakes up to nausea and aches in his chest. It happened two days ago, when Shane realized with mortification that his chest was leaking in his sleep. He must have slept through it but when he woke up, there were tiny damp spots on his pajama shirt, and when Shane inspected it closely, he was hit by the subtle scent of milk.

So yeah Shane is a little .. freaked out.

He does not want his odd behavior to stop him from seeing Rozanov soon. The last time they met it was bad enough, and Shane does not want to feel the embarrassment of submitting to his instincts again.

That seems to be an issue with his omega and Ilya.

Somehow, Shane finds them extremely compatible. He submits to him easily and bares his neck without worrying that Ilya would lose his shit and bite him on the gland.

No, they are not that close.

It is simply very good sex, with both of them getting something out of it.

For Ilya, it is releasing pent-up tension and letting Shane handle his intense ruts.

For Shane, it is finally letting go during heats and having a familiar scent to carry into his nest.

It works both ways. Plenty of alpha and omegas sleep together without mating. Or so Shane hopes.

He gets out of the car when the clock shows nine fifty and heads to the doctor's office. It is a private clinic and Shane is not surprised to see that he is the only person inside. He pays his doctor enough for confidentiality and privacy.

This was the one thing his mother insisted on when Shane joined Montreal and got drafted for the League, that he must, at all times, have a check-up with a doctor. Being an omega in a predominantly alpha-filled sport was already bad enough and Shane was at consistent risk of being threatened by an alpha despite the officially issued suppressants and scent patches they all had to wear when inside the rink.

But his mother said it was important for his health, because his well-being must always be his number one priority. When he presented Yuna made him take about five different sex ED classes, one of which was especially focused on heat sex.

Shane's knee twitches as he waits for the doctor in the waiting room.

Perhaps four years ago, he should have listened closely when the omega teacher warned him about the dangers of knotting during your heat.

"Mr. Hollander?" the nurse calls out his name.

Shane raises his head, suddenly very, very nervous.

"Dr. Richards will see you now."

*

"Alright, Mr. Hollander, you can get dressed now, please."

Shane pulls up his underwear and his pants. He sits on a low examination table, the doctor's glasses perched up on his nose and he scribbles something in his pad. Shane's heartbeat is so rapid that he can feel it in his eardrums. The doctor inquired about the symptoms and did a scan of his stomach.

Shane moves to the doctor's desk when he asks him to join him at the table.

"Now, Mr. Hollander, I want to first say and reassure you that you are perfectly healthy and there is nothing to worry about in terms of your hormonal levels. I might need to see the result of the blood test, but judging from the other scans I don't believe there would be any deviations from the normal."

Shane swallows hard. He nods, unsure of what to make of the doctor's monotone voice.

"Now if you don't mind I want to ask you a couple of questions," the doctor opened his notepad again. "When was the last time you experienced your mating cycle?"

Shane drops his gaze on the neat stacks of papers before him. "Uhm, two months ago I believe. Start of January."

"And would you say that you have spent it with your partner?"

"I- well, I don't have a mate, but yes, I did have someone helping me during that time. He is an alpha."

"And are you currently on any sort of birth control, Mr. Hollander?"

Shane's stomach drops. "No, but he always- we always use protection."

"It is fair to say that during heat cycles using contraception can still lead to the risk of accidental pregnancy," the doctor notes, and his voice softens. "Mr. Hollander, your sickness

is not unusual for a male omega entering his third month of pregnancy."

Shane blinks. The words slowly settle in his head, while he stares wide-eyed at the man before him.

No.

"No," Shane whispers. "I am-I am not- I can't be pregnant."

"It is early to tell, but I can see the outlines of the fetus on the scans," doctor pulls out the result of the MRI to show Shane with calm and somewhat comforting tone, "now, I want you to know that on the third month it is too early to tell the gender but there little uncertainty that you are indeed pregnant. I believe congratulations are in order."

Shane's ears are ringing. He does not know if he is breathing but he ends up listening to the doctor for an hour before he leaves the room on shaky legs.

He can't be pregnant.

What will his mother say?

And his teammates?

And Ilya, *fuck*, what will Rozanov say?

Shane is trembling when he gets into the car. He sits in dead silence for fifteen minutes, before, he decides, that he needs a confirmation, another source to prove that the doctor is right.

Of course, he has no reason to lie, and Shane saw the scans, but he needed a prof, a solid prof that there is indeed something growing inside his stomach.

He pulls up to the nearest drug store and puts on a cap to hide his face. The store is almost empty when he buys four pregnancy tests and scans them through the self-checkout. They are all from different brands too and Shane hopes one of them will actually comfort him by saying it is a mistake.

But when Shane gets home and waits for the result, all four of them have two sticks displayed in bright red.

*

Next week

Ilya lands in Montreal during a snowstorm, only to find out that his match is postponed to tomorrow evening.

He is bored in the city, which is dead under the layers of snow and he is fiddling with his phone because stupid Shane Hollander does not reply to his texts.

He is more than a little bit pissed off.

He wants to pretend that the radio silence isn't pissing him off but he can't.

Ilya thought they were fine. Hollander replied to his texts and even sent a picture of himself to Ilya the last time they spoke, which was already an improvement since the omega rarely puts himself in front of the camera.

Ilya hoped things wouldn't get awkward after Hollander's heat and they didn't.

Shane's heats were always a little rough but Ilya prided himself on taking good care of him even if that shit didn't matter because they were not anything.

But Shane always got a little knotdrunk and dumb, forgetting to drink water or eat and over the years Ilya had built a good routine at looking after him and making sure Hollander was plenty satisfied with his knot.

So yeah, alone in his hotel room, Ilya is more than a little pissed off, and he had every right to be.

He texted Hollander twice since he landed, and each message has not even been marked 'read.'

He opens his screen and stares blankly at the texts he sent Hollander.

'See you tonight.'

'?'

'I know you are wet just from thinking about my dick, baby'

Okay, perhaps the last one was a bit of an overkill, but Ilya was horny. Nobody managed to fill his craving like the pretty omega did.

Shane's scent drove him crazy, the mix of jasmine and black cherries, and there was something addictive in its sweet taste, that lay thick on Ilya's tongue.

He was addicted to it. He was buzzing with excitement on the plane, so imagine his disappointment when, there was no reply even when he got to his hotel room after the airport.

The text he sent was in the morning.

Ilya grits his teeth, thinking if he is desperate enough to text the omega again.

Fuck it.

He is.

'Hey omega.'

‘Did you get swallowed by the snow or something?’

‘Or do you have better plans than getting fucked by me tonight?’

The last thought .. stings. Ilya is not possessive by nature, but the idea that Hollander could be out there, letting another alpha scent his gorgeous, long neck and bite at the soft skin of his chest does make something ugly curl in Ilya’s stomach.

Even when he met his for the first time, Ilya hated that every alpha in the league was eye fucking the omega.

Shane was not the first to enter hockey as an omega, but he might definitely be the youngest.

He presented early, Ilya remembers. When he met him, he knew Shane was an omega but it did not make him think less of the boy.

Quite the opposite.

He was fascinated from the moment their eyes locked on the rink.

Ilya hates to admit it, but he misses him.

He toys with the crazy thought of just turning up to Shane Hollander’s apartment but he knew that would be crazy since Shane does not even live in the building where they keep fucking.

Ilya looks at the call button. He could do that. He could call Hollander and see what he has to say about ignoring Ilya’s texts.

Before Ilya decides to do something stupid, his phone rings.

He picks it up in excitement, only to throw and puff angrily at the screen.

‘Talk to me after the match tomorrow. 10 pm. Don’t be late.’

Attached below is the address. But instead of the usual place, it is different, and it takes Ilya exactly twenty seconds to realize that Shane wants to see him at his home.

*

Boston plays well, but clearly, not well enough.

Shane does a superb job of avoiding Ilya the whole match like the plague. He does not look at him when they shake hands, nor does he pay Ilya any attention when they are on the ice. I

Ilya is irritated by the sudden cold shoulder, but, he keeps telling himself that he will see Shane at his home, his apartment, soon enough so he can let go of the pretty annoyance.

Shane’s only way to cast Ilya a bit of his attention was closer to the end of the match.

Shane played well, better than Ilya for certain, with two goals to his one being the living proof, but, Ilya isn’t overly fixated on it.

Instead, he catches the whiff of Shane's scent when he skates past him, and it's so sudden and bizarre he almost trips over.

"Are you not on blockers?" Ilya nudges him with his shoulder, when Hollander gets ready to join his team for the final celebrations. Even behind the helmet, Hollander's eyes are cool and dark, but there is a fresh flush on his cheekbones.

Shane's scent is stronger now that they are close. It is not overwhelming, but it is there, a distinct sign of omega that makes Ilya's mouth water.

"I will see you later," Shane says instead, and moves past, too fast for Ilya to do anything to catch him.

He is lost, that is for certain. He had never scented Hollander inside the ring before. Ilya tries to do some calculations to see if that is perhaps his heat, but that can't be right, the last one they spent together, and Hollander's cycle are every .. two months?

Does that mean he is close now? It is March, so that is probably why his scent is so strong.

Ilya's chest swells at the thought of taking Shane inside his nest.

They spent Hollander's last heat, here, in Montreal, but it was not in his apartment. Perhaps Hollander is finally realizing how much better it would be for him to experience the cycle in the comfort of his room.

Ilya takes a long shower after the match, but he gets dressed fast, and he does not want to think of how desperate he is, when he types Shane's address into the navigator.

One whiff of Hollander's scent, and here is Ilya bending over backwards for him, trying to make way through Montreal's traffic just to see the glimpse of those pretty eyes and flushed face. Shane always looked gorgeous, but the closer he was to his heat, the more irresistible he became in Ilya's eyes.

The building was not far from downtown, and Ilya texted a quick 'downstairs', thinking if Shane would come and meet him outside, instead he received the floor number and a rapid, and very desperate, 'hurry.'

Ilya's heart is beating stupidly fast when he gets into the elevator. This is not the first time, Shane shared the heat with him, and it certainly won't be the last (Ilya's hopes), but, the thought of being in the one place Shane never allowed him to see makes something jump in Ilya's stomach, both terrifying and exciting.

He decides to knock, and once he does, he waits.

Now, Hollander is not the one for lingering, and, yet, he leaves Ilya for over two long minutes, as he stands outside the door, with his hands tucked inside the pockets of his leather jacket.

The hallways are empty, thank fuck, and it does look like Shane's little apartment is the only one that takes up space on the whole floor.

Ilya wonders if his place is just as fancy as that other place he owns in the city. Two floors, Ilya imagines, with a private gym and a view of the city. The bed is nice, and soft, with many pillows bunched on top of each other and two blankets to form a nice nest.

Does Shane throw Ilya's clothes in the middle, to join together with the rest of the scents? To make his bed smell like the alpha even when Ilya is far away? He should not be thinking about it because if he does, he might stink up the whole floor with his scent.

The door opens wide with a bang and Ilya does not even have to knock twice.

"Come in."

He moves slowly and nearly flinches when the door shuts behind him with a loud 'click.'

Hollander looks well .. normal. He is not flushed from the heat, nor does he smell like overly ripe fruit which is what his scent turns to, when his cycle is close. Even his hair is brushed nearly, and his sweater and pants are both ironed, without even a wrinkle on them.

He does not look like an omega close to his heat.

Ilya raises his brows. "Hi?"

"Take off your shoes. I will show you to the living room," Hollander looks constipated, but, he also does not look like he is about to jump Ilya's bones which is well.. it sends mixed signals to Ilya's brain.

Ilya does not even have time to get excited about fucking Shane in his bed, before he is taken to the massive living room, with a huge TV, a huge couch, and a huge kitchen counter, while Shane is lingering behind.

The scent is nice though, Ilya wants to admit. It's domestic, and it has the notes that belong distinctly to Shane. Ilya looks at the couch and sees the piles of blankets and pillows put together like a little fortress.

Ilya almost smiles, but catches himself, before he does something stupid like admire Shane's little living room nook.

"So," Shane clears his throat and Ilya turns around to meet him. He is quiet and has no desire to make it easy on Hollander. He raises his brows, expecting, watching the omega fiddle nervously with the sleeves of his sweater. Ilya's sweater.

How did he not notice it when he came in?

The scent is almost completely washed out and it looked old, Shane must have put it through the laundry a couple of times, but, perhaps Ilya was so used to having their scents mixed together that he did not even notice that Shane smelled like him.

"Thank you for coming," Shane tells the floor, his eyes seemingly unable to meet the alpha's gaze. "I- I want to talk to you. Privately. No one else knows, but I think you deserve to be the first I can speak about this."

Ilya tenses. What the fuck? Is this Hollander's fucked out way to break up with him? Or telling him that he has a secret girlfriend or boyfriend that could help him better than Ilya can? He almost curses out loud, but something in Shane's fragile face makes him hold his mouth.

"Tell me what?" The words are too harsh for the silence of the room.

Shane takes a deep breath. And another. He blinks and for a terrifying moment, Ilya realizes that the omega is about to cry.

"I am sorry. I don't know how it happened, I thought we were careful, but I- fuck, I am so stupid, and-" Shane raises a hand to his eyes, and Ilya is next to him at an instant. He thinks,- fuck, fuck, fuck,- bit instead of panicking he holds Shane close and brings the omega to his chest, rubbing his back with the palm of his hand.

"It's okay," Ilya whispers somewhere at the top of his head. Shane's breath is staggered, and he is hyperventilating, but, Ilya does his best to keep his scent calm and comforting, so that Shane will start breathing, instead of shedding wet tears against the fabric of his shirt. "It's alright, baby, whatever it is you can tell me."

"You will hate me."

"Never," and Ilya means it. He cups Shane's face in the palms of his hands and raises it up. Fuck. His omega always looks good when he cries.

His.

Ilya can step up.

He can take responsibility.

He wipes Shane's tears with his thumb.

At the end of the day, perhaps it would always come down to this. To Shane looking up at him with those sweet doe-like eyes, and a parted mouth and Ilya willing to break him down and put him together again.

They were stupid.

Ilya was stupid.

He knotted an omega, when he was in heat.

He never did it with anyone. But with Shane.. fuck, with Shane he wanted it so much, he had no regrets.

"You can tell me, Shane," Ilya's voice is a low murmur. Shane's breath hitched but at least he stopped crying. His scent is sticky sweat and Ilya wants to bask in it.

Shane is nodding in his hands, and Ilya lets himself smile a little.

“Ilya,” Shane wraps his hands around his torso, and his eyes are huge and dark, and Ilya hopes their children will inherit them from him. “I am pregnant.”

Chapter 2: March-April

Chapter Notes

Did I expect this chapter to get so long? No!
Am I excited to share it with you guys? Yes ofc please enjoy!!

March, 2016

Shane is trembling when he takes a glass of water from Ilya's hands.

His throat is dry, and he drinks it in one gulp.

The alpha is staring at him from above, and Shane wishes, that he would at least sit down.

"Thanks," Shane mutters and looks away, at the walls or at the TV, anywhere but Ilya, to be honest. He takes a deep breath and drops his eyes on the empty glass in his hands, his head hanging between his shoulders. "Will you please sit down and stop glaring at me?"

Ilya's frowning makes him nervous.

The alpha only stepped away to grab water from the kitchen, but his presence is always at the periphery of Shane's mind.

Now, Ilya is staring at him, his expression unreadable but his eyes are piercing through the omega's skin, almost as if he is trying to untangle the nervous mess that is Shane's emotions.

The attention is unnerving. Nothing about Ilya's glare or his controlled scent, makes it easy for Shane to try and put the reins on his racing heart and staggered breathing.

The alpha is silent, and Shane doesn't want to dwell on what Rozanov could possibly be thinking about.

Is he disgusted with him? Does he imagine Shane stupid for not using the proper pills to keep things like this from happening? Does he wish he had never arrived at Shane's address, to have such crazy news dropped on him, from practically nowhere?

"I am not glaring," Ilya does, however, take a seat on the opposite side of the couch, too cautious of the distance between them, which is stupid, since they were both hugging each other, not even ten minutes ago.

Shane is tossing the glass from one hand to another not knowing what to say to break the deafening silence.

At least he stopped crying, he thinks, his eyes dry, but still red and itchy from tears.

Only when Ilya is near does Shane feel that he can let go of his emotions, which is dangerous, because with his hormones causing a hurricane inside him, the last thing he wants is to be vulnerable before the alpha.

Since the day the doctor told him he was three months pregnant, and Shane got proof by watching the two sticks appear on the pregnancy tests he bought, Shane imagined this exact scene countless times inside his head.

He tried to think only of the worst-case scenarios, because then he could prepare himself, at least mentally, for the hurt that inevitably came at the end.

Ilya lashing out.

Ilya making Shane delete his number and telling him to never call again.

Ilya banging the door close as he storms out of his apartment, leaving Shane alone, cold and feeling small, in the middle of his living room.

Shane sort of expected it would be easy for Ilya to turn his back on him and walk away, leaving Shane to deal with the aftermath on his own. Maybe he would even threaten him to stay quiet and tell no one that Ilya was the reason he got pregnant in the first place.

The stigma surrounding male omegas is strong, so Shane would not be surprised if Ilya suddenly decided that he wants nothing to do with the baby.

Even when this *thing* between them started, Shane saw how hesitant Ilya was to get close to him. He kissed him and touched him, but everything about the way he explored Shane's body was slow and careful, almost as if being physically attracted to a male omega repulsed him at the core.

If Ilya decides to abandon him, Shane can handle it. He can bury his feelings somewhere deep, and dark and never think about them again. Shane would raise the baby on his own, perhaps alongside his parents if they don't turn their back on him.

He could keep Ilya out of this mess and end their relationship for good.

"When did you find out?"

Shane almost drops the glass, startled by the alpha's question.

He raises his eyes, but instead of anger, Shane finds Ilya tilting his head to his shoulder, his expression curious. The alpha does not look like he is about to leave, either.

Ilya is studying Shane in a way that makes the omega squirm on the couch. There is a question in his gaze, and, if dug deeper, there seems to be a sort of tenderness, that Shane does not want to selfishly trace to himself.

"Two weeks ago," Shane puts the glass down.

It is good quality, his mother said when she gifted him the set, Japanese glass doesn't break easily, but he is so anxious and, his hands are still shaking, so he does not want to take his chances.

Shane takes in a measured breath, and the alpha is patiently waiting for him to speak.

"I was.." his voice breaks and he clears his throat, "I was not feeling well in the past two months, and I thought it was something to do with my suppressants or with my hormone levels. When I went to do a routinely check-up at my clinic, the doctor told me I was three months pregnant."

"Oh," Ilya sort of leans forward, "three months? So, since January? It happened during your heat."

Shane is bright red, and he nods, his cheeks burning hot.

"I have not been with anyone since then. I mean," Shane sort of wishes he could hide under the countless cushions on his couch, but if they are being honest with each other now would be the perfect time to say everything that is not his chest, "you are the only alpha I have been with. And I know we both were trying to be careful, but, the doctor said that even with protection the chances of getting pregnant during your cycle are very high."

"I knotted you," Ilya states bluntly, and if Shane was not blushing before, he is definitely flushed now. He also does not like the pleased tilt in the alpha voice, but he does not comment on it. "I am your only alpha. I did not know you were saving yourself for someone special, Hollander."

Shane is fuming but when he looks at Ilya his smile is enough to make something warm curl in his chest.

"I was not saving myself. It just happened," Shane grips the fabric of his pants between his fingers, "I told you, I don't trust someone else to take care of me during heats."

"Right," Ilya's voice is strained, "I am sorry. I was stupid. No biting, no knotting, those were the rules, no? And I broke them," the alpha's hands clap on his knees, and his biceps tense under the thin t-shirt. "I know it's mine. It was my fault. I shouldn't have done it. The knotting, I mean. I made a mistake and I feel responsible for it."

"My child is not a mistake," Shane does not know what prompts him to say it, but his arms move instinctively to wrap around his torso.

The alpha's scent thickens, and he quickly shakes his head at Shane's voice.

Shane is protective of himself and his body, and even if deep down he knows what Ilya is trying to say, it still makes him angry that the alpha is trying to make everything seem like an accident.

"I am not stupid enough to not remember what I do during my heats, Rozanov. I asked you for it. I begged, if you remember, and you agreed because you saw how much I needed it,"

Shane does not want to ponder on the reasons as to *why* he was so desperate to feel Ilya's seed inside. He was so drunk on the alpha's scent, and he needed him so much, that even now Shane feels the knots twist into something intangible inside his gut. "It was all consensual so don't make it look like you took advantage of me."

"I know! I know, I just.. I mean.. fuck, this was not.. not my intention to offend you," Ilya's voice is too strained and Shane winces.

Ilya blinks and he meets Shane's gaze with the softness he is not prepared to face. "But do you think you are ready to be a mother? Do you even want to keep the child?"

Shane's blood turns cold. His scent must have gone haywire, because Ilya is suddenly very close, their knees touching, and Shane is feeling a massive lump growing at the back of his throat.

"Hollander, I mean- Shane," Ilya's voice is slow and steady, clearly thinking about his next words carefully, sensing how on edge Shane already is. "It is a big decision. Like a huge fucking decision. Have you made up your mind that you are ready for it?"

Shane is breathing, he thinks. Slow and steady, like his mother taught him when he was having those panic attacks as a kid before the big games. He counts to ten and backwards.

"Get out."

"Hollander.."

"I said get out."

"Okay, Jesus, I just want you to know that you have a choice," Ilya throws after him, but he does not hold Shane back, when the omega springs up from the couch.

"I know what I want," Shane paces from one corner of his living room to another, "and I don't expect you to feel the same. I had to tell you and I did. If you wish to have nothing else to do with me or the baby you are free to leave. Nothing is holding you back."

"I am not fucking leaving," Ilya growls, like the idea alone is offending him. "I just want to know what the fuck is your plan. To turn up to your team, all round and heavy, and declare that you can no longer be in the play-offs.. until when? Next season? And how are you going to tell them about us, because everybody and their mother will ask you about who the father is, because, Shane Hollander, you are not even mated," Ilya shakes his head, "and your parents? Have you thought about what you are going to tell them?"

"I can figure everything out on my own," Shane stops in the middle of the room. His heart is beating fast against his chest, and he is suddenly drained of energy, and he wants to head to bed. He wishes Ilya would stop asking him the questions that give him a nauseating headache. "I am keeping the child. And I am not planning on telling them about you, or anything that has happened between us in the past five years, because none of it matters."

Ilya is silent for a while. He is looking at him, hard, and Shane wants to crumble under his cold stare.

“None of it matters?”

Shane drops his gaze, and takes a deep inhale to steady himself.

“Unmated omegas give birth all the time. I know this is not ideal, but I would rather have the people talk about a stranger and me, than think that I got pregnant because of another hockey player in the league.”

The words hang uncomfortably in the air.

Shane does not have to look at Ilya’s face to know that his expression is completely blank.

Fuck.

That seems a bit too harsh, Shane thinks, but he does not wish to take the words back.

This is better for everyone. Even if Ilya doesn’t understand it now, in the future, he will be grateful that Shane is keeping his identity a secret.

“Okay. So what, you want everyone to think their little superstar got knocked up by accident because he was too desperate during his heat?”

“I can lie and say I don’t wish to speak about my partner right now,” Shane does not let the words sting. “It is a privacy thing.”

“And reporters have always respected your privacy.”

“Look, I am trying to keep you protected! Why are you even mad about this?”

“Because you did not ask me what I want.”

Shane frowns. Ilya is dangerously calm when he rises from the couch, and Shane does not move away, as the alpha starts to approach him slowly.

“What do *you* want, Rozanov?”

Ilya is close, so close that Shane can trace the notes of his scent at the tip of his tongue. He leans forward, and their foreheads touch together. Shane closes his eyes, because he is tired, and because the alpha’s scent always manages to smooth the rough edges in his mind.

“I want you,” Ilya whispers, against his lips. “And I want the baby. I want to have you both in my life.”

“But that means we have to tell everyone about us,” Shane whispers back, and Ilya presses a kiss on his cheek.

The idea is rattling inside his brain. He cannot imagine it. But the thought, of holding Ilya's hand in public and kissing him without being freaked out about the cameras catching them off-guard does make him almost *purr*.

"Then we will tell them. Not now. Maybe later," Ilya makes it sound so easy that somehow Shane relaxes into the inevitable but vague promise of later. "But I want to have you both. Don't cast me aside because I don't fit into your ten-year life plan, Hollander."

Shane almost smiles. He leans into Ilya's touch and does not pull back when the alpha kisses him gently on the lips.

"Okay," he says softly.

He is so, *so* tired. He wants to settle into that feeling of comfort, despite how fragile it seems.

He does not want to let the warm feeling consume his brain because if it does Shane is afraid there will be no going back from it.

*

Ilya stays the night even though it is a sort of dangerous territory that neither of them has crossed before.

Shane does not know why he is allowing it to happen. All he knows is that his body is exhausted, both from the game earlier that day and the emotional turmoil the conversation with Ilya had put him through.

When the alpha suggests he stays the night ,Shane does not immediately hate the idea. It is late, and Ilya smells especially nice. Shane already made up his mind, but Ilya manages to make him chuckle by saying something along the lines of how 'it is not healthy for the baby to go long without their father's scent'.

"Who told you that?" Shane frowned, while Ilya was rifling through his closet trying to find his own clothes to wear to bed.

"An old Russian saying," was all the alpha dropped over his shoulder with a smirk before disappearing into the bathroom.

It is terrifying for Shane to wait inside his own bed, when the alpha is still brushing his teeth just a couple of meters away. Shane keeps extra toothbrushes for the guests and the last thing he expected was for Ilya to use them.

This is seriously dangerous, Shane thinks, because he might actually get used to it. To the comfort of Ilya's scent lingering in the air, and the sound of the sink rushing in his bathroom, while he is lying in bed, ready to go to sleep. Shane is confused, he does not know why Ilya is so insistent on staying, and honestly, he just wants this whole day to be over, even if that means having the alpha in the dangerously close vicinity of his apartment.

"Your toothpaste smells like peppermint," Ilya announces when he returns. "I hate it."

“What kind of toothpaste do you use?” Shane watches the alpha across the room who seems too comfortable wearing almost nothing in the middle of Shane’s bedroom.

The omega is perched up on his pillows, glasses on his nose, and an unread book open on his lap.

“A sweet one,” alpha shrugs, “with cinnamon in it.”

His boxers hang low on his hips and Shane tries not to stare at the soft bulge of his crotch. Ilya drops onto the bed, his side pressed against Shane’s.

“A Guide to Omega’s Motherhood.’ Huh. Should have known you would be a nerd about his too.”

“It is for research purposes,” Shane flushes and shuts the book down. Ilya is humming, his eyes steady on his profile and Shane takes off his glasses feeling stupid. “Go to sleep.”

Shane turns off the bed light and settles under the blanket, when he feels Ilya turn around, staring at the back of his head.

“I didn’t know you wear glasses.”

“Rozanov,” a low warning.

“I like your nest.”

“Shut up.”

“And your pyjamas. And here I thought you wear lacy lingerie to bed.”

“Go to sleep, Rozanov.”

“I am kidding,” Ilya presses his naked chest and Shane’s back. “Although I must say you won’t look very hot in maternity clothes.”

“I swear if you won’t shut up you will be sleeping in the hallway.”

Ilya laughs, and Shane does not let his stomach flip at the sound.

They lay like this for a while. Ilya’s even breathing is surpassingly calm, and Shane is relaxing into the pillows, his thoughts drifting lazily, and he does not even mind the alpha’s arm, thrown over his stomach or the palm, snuck underneath his shirt, rubbing soothing circles across his bare naval.

“Hey, Hollander. I meant it. Every step of the way I want to be there. It is my child too. I want to take part in their life,” Ilya’s voice drops and he must think that Shane is asleep because his last words are too raw for the silence of the night, “even if that means I can’t be part of yours.”

*

April, 2016

Ilya's knee twitches, and Shane puts a hand over his thigh.

"Hey. You've got to stop it."

"Sorry," Ilya does not sound sorry at all. "This is taking forever."

Shane agrees, but he does not want to say it. He looks at the time on his wrist watch and tugs at his bottom lip.

He did rush Ilya to come early after all. He was afraid they were going to miss their appointment, since Ilya was taking his sweet time getting ready.

The alpha stayed over at his apartment last night, something he started doing since last month when he slept in Shane's nest, after he told him about, well, the baby.

Having Ilya around is great, despite how insane it actually feels to wake up to the familiar scent of the alpha at his nostrils. Ilya is surprisingly gentle, when he asks Shane about the changes happening daily to his body. He tried to help once, when Shane woke up with the front of his shirt drenched from milk, but, it was too mortifying, to have the alpha's heated gaze anywhere close to his swollen chest, so Shane narrowly escaped behind the closed bathroom door and they never spoke about it again.

They still have not told anyone, but having at least Ilya by his side is enough for Shane to feel a slight burden lifting off his shoulders.

Shane was terrified about telling Ilya about the pregnancy. He half expected to have the alpha walk out on him, slamming the door and threatening Shane to never see him again, but, instead, here they both were, sitting at the doctor's office, ready for Shane's second round of check-ups.

Shane lets go of Ilya's knee, his body a tense knot of nerves.

"Where is your stupid doctor?" Ilya takes Shane's hand in his and squeezes. The touch sends sparks down Shane's skin. The contact is new. Sure, they are spending more time together than before, but they have never been so .. tactile with each other.

"Dr. Richards is not stupid," Shane tries to avoid the warmth in his belly when Ilya interlaces their fingers together. "He will take us in ten minutes."

"You were the one who told us we are running late," Ilya grumbles, without much bite. His eyes are soft when they meet Shane's. "You sure you don't want me to stay tonight?"

Ah. Shane's tongue is thick in his mouth. Ilya is flying back to Boston later today, which is fine, since he has his game on Saturday. He flew in two nights ago, and Shane will be lying to himself if he says, that he does not want him to stay, because he does.

But Ilya has responsibilities and his own life to go back to. Shane is here to see if he is even allowed to play hockey, now that he is entering his fourth month of pregnancy, but for Ilya,

nothing in his life will really change. He has the season to complete, and a team to lead.

And then there is Shane, whose life is about to flip forever, and he has yet to tell his parents about a baby growing day by day in his stomach.

“It’s alright,” Shane forces himself to take his hand away from Ilya’s warm touch, “you already did so much for me. I don’t want to keep you in the city for longer than necessary.”

If Ilya has something to say, he doesn’t have time to speak out, because the doctor is coming to them from his office, a familiar smile settled on his lips.

“Mr. Hollander! Please, come inside.”

Pregnancies are much harder for non-mated omegas, Shane knows. Since he was young he sometimes imagined what it would feel like to be mated to an alpha, have a family of his own and a little pup, or two, to raise.

Never in his life did he think he would become pregnant by his rival.

Shane is lying still on the examination bed, and, as Dr. Richards looks at the monitor, his hand is prodding Shane’s still flat but soft stomach.

Ilya is standing on the other side, strangely tense, but Shane is trying his best to avoid making eye contact with him. He is not used to showing his vulnerable side yet, and everything about this situation is far out of Shane’s comfort zone.

“The baby is looking healthy, Mr. Hollander,” the doctor says, and that alone makes Shane visibly relax into the bed. “I would say any sort of physical activity is advisable until the fifth month. Then I would recommend a bit more rest and definitely no more extreme forms of exercise.”

Shane was expecting something like that, but it still makes him exhale with tension. In the past month he was thinking of a way to tell his team about his pregnancy, but knowing well, that he has to announce it to the entire world, was terrifying.

Shane tries to collect himself. Omegas get pregnant all the time. There were plenty of professional sportsmen, who got pregnant and then, went back to performing at the highest standards. Shane will be gone for a couple of months, and then he will be back to playing hockey and raising a little pup of his own.

It is not a bad thought.

He is content with handling it without other people’s help.

“So what kind of rest would you recommend, doctor?”

Ilya’s thick voice pulls Shane out of his thoughts.

Shane is half-listening to the doctor’s advice. Most of his attention is captivated by the alpha. In truth, he still is not sure what exactly Ilya is doing here.

Sure, he insisted he wants to be there for the baby, but Shane does not know what he truly means by that. They are not mated. Ilya can go back to Boston, without putting himself through the trouble of tending to the pregnant omega. Shane is not even his mate.

So why does Ilya keep acting like he is?

“I would recommend having the familiar alpha’s scent and touch close at all times. It is important for the mother’s well-being since omegas are heavily reliant on physical forms of affection.”

Shane is flushing, but Ilya is only nodding along with a sombre look on his face.

Shane does not know what to make of it. He wants to pull his sweater on and head back home, to his nest, instead of being so vulnerable before the alpha.

“If there are any vitamins he needs, please, write them down, I will make sure to buy them,” Ilya’s straightforward way of speaking does not help at all. He is talking to the doctor like they are the best of friends, and Shane wants to both hide in the corner and preen because of how attentive and caring his alpha is.

Shane shakes his head and gets dressed when the doctor lets him go.

Not *his*.

“Perhaps that guy is not so bad after all,” Ilya gets in the car, when they head out of the clinic. “He seems to know what he is talking about.”

“I would hope so,” Shane turns on the engine. “He is the doctor. He told me to see the gynecologist next week, so I booked another appointment for a check-up. Just to make sure that everything is alright.”

“Of course it is,” Ilya nearly smirks, “you worry too much. It is not good for you.”

And whose fault is that? Shane nearly snaps but holds himself back.

They drive in silence for a while and Shane sort of forgets that Ilya is sitting beside him, until he asks: “So have you decided when you are going to tell them?”

Shane switches gears when they get on the highway.

“Tell who?”

“Your teammates. Your parents,” Ilya shrugs, “the world.”

Shane stares at the alpha beside him through the mirror. The car smells like the mix of their scents and it is strangely comforting, despite the rapid panic attack Shane is feeling inside his chest.

“Tell them about what?”

Ilya's jaw is tight and Shane sees the tick on his cheekbones. "About us."

Shane almost laughs, but Ilya looks deathly serious.

Shane wants to bang his head against the steering wheel. "It is not simple. And there is no 'us.' So stop trying to make it look like you.."

Like you care, Shane does not add, but the words hang heavily inside the car.

Rozanov looks away, staring somewhere at the window, but his scent is so heavy that Shane almost wants to pull the windows down and let cool spring air in.

"I think I will talk to my parents soon, though," Shane tries to break the tension, trying to soothe it with his own scent. "My mum and dad deserve to know before everyone else, I think," at least before Shane looks visibly pregnant he has to tell them the news. "What about you?"

"What about me?" Rozanov mumbles, still sulking in his seat.

"Have you thought about telling your parents?"

If Ilya was tense before it is nothing compared to the rigid way his body turns at the question. "It is complicated. Between my father and me."

"Right," Shane nods to no one in particular. An ugly feeling grows in his stomach, but he ignores it, choosing to stare at the road ahead. "If you don't even want to speak to your family, how are you going to tell the world about us?"

Ilya does not give him an answer, and Shane shakes his head in disbelief. "You are ashamed of me."

"I never said that."

"I just wish you were honest."

"My father has Alzheimer's, and my brother is a fucking loser who cares about nothing, but money and whores, here, does this sound honest enough for you?"

That.. that is not what Shane is expecting to hear. He is grateful that he is driving because he does not think he can handle looking at Ilya's face without trying to comfort him. Ilya is leaning against the car seat, agitated, and, Shane curses himself for being so blunt when the alpha is clearly dealing with something he is not ready to share.

"Sorry for shouting."

"I am sorry," Shane mutters, "about your dad."

"It's fine," Ilya watches him from his seat, "we are not close. I can tell him, if that is what you really want, but it won't change anything. My family is the one I built for myself, and right now it is you and that pup in your stomach."

Shane's knee almost bumps against the rear when Ilya puts a warm hand on his thigh. "I am not ashamed of you, Shane. I want everyone to know how great you are and I would never let my child be born thinking they are not loved by both of their parents."

Shane is nodding, trying to focus on the road instead of the warm touch on his knee. "Yeah. For the baby. I can handle people talking shit about me, but I would never let anyone speak badly about my child."

"Our child," Ilya corrects him, and Shane allows himself to smile a little.

It's fine.

They are fine.

They just have to be patient and take it one day at a time.

There are so many things Shane still does not know about the alpha, and despite how strongly it hurts, it makes him soft, knowing, that there is much they can learn about each other.

"I just," Shane tightens his lips, "I want to keep the pup away from all this bullshit. From the rumours and nasty press. I want to have power and agency, and I don't want anyone to take it away from me. You know? It sounds stupid, but, I just want to have a good life and give the baby a good future, without having to worry about the stupid comments of being an only omega on the team who got pregnant. Alphas have children all the time, and they still win Stanley Cups. Why can't I do the same?"

Ilya hums, his eyes a warm touch on Shane's flushed cheek.

"I can imagine you winning the Cup with a child at your tit."

"Stop it."

"Too bad you will be six months pregnant when I win. Might have to dedicate it to the pup during my speech."

"You are such an asshole, Rozanov," Shane says but he is smiling and Ilya is laughing at his seat. He checks the map, and it says, there are thirty more minutes until they reach the airport.

He feels bittersweet letting the alpha go, but he does not let himself dwell on it.

They settle into a comfortable silence, and, it is only when they are two miles away from the airport that Ilya speaks again, his voice careful and measured.

"Hollander?"

"Yeah?"

"Next time I see you, we have to talk to your parents. Together."

Shane sucks a breath of air through his teeth. He sees the airport sign appear soon and his palms are sweating.

Next time.

How soon would that be?

“Yeah, whatever.”

“Hey,” Ilya’s voice makes Shane look up at him again. “Promise me. When you speak to your parents, I want to be there too. I don’t want you to fucking do it alone.”

Shane swallows a harsh lump in his throat.

This is so stupid.

He is so stupid.

Instead, he nods, and feels hot ugly tears well up at the corners of his eyes, which Rozanov wipes away with his rough thumb.

“Yeah. Fuck. Yeah, I promise.”

*

It should have not come as a surprise to Shane that his mother was the first one to sense that something was wrong.

She brings it up on their call, about a week after Shane’s doctor’s appointment.

“I watched your game the other day you know,” she says, “I can tell you are not feeling your best.”

Shane wants to argue, because in truth he had been feeling in his best form ever. Yes, he gets tired more easily nowadays, but regardless he is in great shape, and, he scores the goals he needs to make sure his team gets further into the playoffs even when he knows that soon he has to drop the ball on them about having to be away for the start of the next season.

He hopes to continue playing into May, but his stomach is getting rounder, and, he knows there is no hiding the scent of pregnancy that sort of radiates from him even when he uses the (doctor-approved) scent patches.

“I promise you I am fine, mum,” Shane is making himself breakfast when she calls. He nearly drops the scrambled eggs on his pants when he tries to put them on his toast. “Fuck. Sorry. Just making some breakfast.”

“At twelve in the afternoon?” his mother’s surprise rings in his ears. Shane checks the clock on his oven.

“Ugh- Yeah. I just overslept a little,” Shane tries to laugh it off, but it comes out weak. His mother is silent for a while on the other side of the line and Shane is mildly freaking out. “Hi? Mum?”

“Why don’t you come over for dinner sometime next week, darling?” is all she says and Shane feels chills creeping down his spine.

Darling.

Oh, this can’t be good.

“Yeah! Yeah, that sounds like fun. I would love to, I mean.. I miss you guys,” Shame stumbles over his words, and he thinks he is palpitating.

“Perfect,” his mother’s voice is terrifying and soft. “How does Thursday sound for you?”

Thursday.

“You mean this Thursday?”

“You don’t have a game scheduled this weekend, do you? I will book you a flight for Wednesday night. You can stay with your father and me for a couple of days, I am sure.”

Shane is trying to come up with an excuse but his head is completely blank.

Instead, he stares dumbly at his scrambled eggs and sourdough toast and nods. “Yeah. Sure. I can do that.”

His mother does not linger on the call for long. Yuna wishes him a good day and says she can’t wait to see him soon.

Shane does not think twice when he pulls out Ilya’s name in his contact list.

‘Mom wants to see me this weekend.’

‘I think she suspects something.’

He knows, strictly speaking, he is not obligated to tell Ilya anything. But Shane gave him his word, that he would share everything with the alpha regarding his pregnancy because they had promised each other that they would do it, together.

The reply comes in not even two minutes later, when Shane is about to eat his breakfast, watching the replay of his latest match on his iPad.

‘She is coming to Montreal?’

Shane whips his fingers with the tissue before texting: ‘No. She wants me to go to Ottawa to stay with them for the weekend.’

Shane is not particularly excited about it, but he does not have a good enough reason to refuse.

His belly is slowly growing, and he can tell that soon it will be incredibly difficult to hide the changes in his body. Soon he needs to announce his time off, and he is lucky that they are a couple of weeks away from summer break so technically he does not have to speak out until August.

With the birth falling on the first days of fall Shane is not sure how soon he will be able to get back into playing hockey.

He muses over the idea, that he might have to skip a season entirely.

He knows that on the larger scale of things, it is not the end of the world, but it still leaves a sour taste in his mouth.

'Will you tell them? In Ottawa?'

Shane contemplates it. He *really* should tell them, but he also does not think he is ready to speak to them about Ilya. Dropping two bombs on them at once seems cruel.

They already worry so much about him and they are so proud of what he accomplished, but if they found out he was pregnant by his rival of all people?

Shane has no clue what they would say or how they would react.

He thinks, a trail of thought is running through his mind slowly, that perhaps he should just tell them about this pregnancy first. And then, once they accept this idea, he can slowly start to introduce them to Ilya so they won't freak out all at once.

'Yeah. I think so.'

Shane's fingers are stiff when he types the words. He does not know why he is worried. He nearly jumps out of his chair when he sees the incoming call on his phone.

Shane has about two seconds before he decides to pick up.

"Hi?"

"What is your parents' address?"

The gruff voice on the other side makes him frown. "Excuse me?"

"I asked, 'What is your parents' address in Ottawa?'"

Shane stares at the wall of his apartment in disbelief. "What.. Why would I give you my parents' address?"

Shane can practically see Ilya rolling his eyes. "Because I am coming to see them with you, Hollander. You gave me your word, remember? That we will tell them about the baby.

Together."

Shane holds back a heavy sigh and leans against the chair.

"Ilya.. I don't think it's a good idea. I will tell them about the baby. And I promise I am not keeping you a secret. I will introduce them to you, but I have no idea if they will freak about the whole thing first," Shane is worried about the sudden silence, and, he softens his voice without meaning to do so, "I mean what do you expect to do, just show up at their house and tell them you knocked me up? We are not even.." Shane bites on his lip, "we are not even dating."

The silence is too loud. Shane does not like the sound of laboured breathing on Ilya's receiving end but endures it for long enough to hear: 'Send them their address by tonight,' before the call grows silent.

Shane drops his forehead on the table. His hands curl instinctively around his stomach, feeling the comforting presence of the tiny bump.

He can do this. He is strong. He will not cry over some stupid fucking alpha.

Does Ilya even want to be in Shane's life? Does he know how hard it is for Shane to keep his boundaries and not let his own feelings sweep him off his feet?

He wants to feel comforted by the warm scent and strong arms, and kisses that make his insides melt.

He does not want to deal with the confusion and anger that the alpha feels whenever Shane tries to push him away.

So instead, he types his parents' address on his phone, texts it to Ilya, and, proceeds to finish his breakfast, hoping, that the alpha won't do anything stupid with that information.

*

Shane always enjoyed coming back to his parents' house.

He was young when he started living alone, so it does make him feel safe, when he sets foot into his childhood home. Even knowing he has to tell them about the baby, Shane still feels comforted by the familiar scents of citrus and yuzu in the air when he walks in.

His father greets him first, his arms tight around Shane who lets out a strained laughter.

"Come in, bud. Long time no see. How have you been? Let me grab your stuff."

Shane is ushered forward by David, who holds the luggage in his hands and does not seem to take Shane's reluctant "it's okay, dad, don't worry, that stuff is heavy anyway" for an answer.

His mom is unloading groceries in the kitchen when Shane walks in. They must have just gotten back from the mall, with all the bags spread around them.

“We were thinking about having a barbecue since the weather is getting nice!” Yuna explains, hugging Shane close. “Oh love, you must be exhausted from your trip. No turbulence on the plane?”

Shane is glad she is not prying too deeply into him. It almost seems like having Shane close and at home is already making her calm down. She ruffles his hair and tells him they did some renovations to his bedroom.

Shane is swarmed by their attention but he does not mind.

In fact, when his dad asks him what he wants for lunch, Shane almost cries. He does not know what it is, the hormones, or the fact that he is hiding something from his parents perhaps for the first time in his life.

They must suspect something, Shane thinks.

They know him better than anyone else, and they must know there is a hidden meaning behind his baggy shirts and large pants to hide the bump on his stomach and the swell of his aching chest, but, they never say anything to him, not to his face anyway.

When they watch a movie later that night, Yuna is reading her book on her Kindle and Shane, for the first time since he was a pup, cuddles close to her side, pulls the blanket to his chin, and rests his head on her shoulder.

His mother does not say anything, but gently brushes his hair, with her hand.

“You will be alright, sweet thing,” she mutters, and even though she is not looking at him, Shane knows she means well with how soft her voice sounds, as to not to disturb his father half asleep on the other side of the couch. “Whatever it is you are going through, we will always be there for you no matter what, baby. Always.”

“Even if it makes me a bad son?”

“Nothing you would ever do will make you a bad son, Shane. You are the bravest, the kindest and the most handsome boy, I know.”

“I am just so scared, mum,” Shane whispers and his mother coos, holding him close. She presses a kiss against the top of his head.

“You can tell us when you feel ready. But I want you to know you can always come to us. Your dad and I will never let anything hurt you.”

Shane sniffles. He wants to tell her. He wants his mother to know about the baby growing in him, but instead, Shane silently nods and lets her soft scent carry him through the rest of the movie.

*

Saturday

Ilya used to imagine Hollander's parents living in the middle of fucking nowhere and turns out he was right.

The drive takes him about an hour or so out of the city. The whole time, Ilya is trying to convince himself, that he is not going to turn around and head back, straight to the airport.

Terrified is not exactly the word he is looking for but it is close. His palms are sweating and he keeps thinking what an absolutely disastrous idea it is.

He dropped by the store and got a couple of things but the entire time he was thinking about how he should have at least called Hollander and warned him that he was on his way to his parents' place,

He kind of assumed Shane would be expecting him, after Ilya had practically forced the address out of the hesitant omega.

Shane promised him, that they were going to tell the news together. His word means something right?

Ilya was asking himself that question the whole ride to the Hollanders' house.

Or is he being too dramatic? Is it actually dramatic to want to meet your mate's (not yet) parents?

Ilya does not know, but when he pulls up to the front door of a pleasant-looking house he still does not have an answer to his question.

Ilya was at the gym when Shane texted about his mother. Back in Boston, where his team had a break before their next games it did not take him long at all to decide to fly to Ottawa for the weekend. Hollander's reluctance to meet his parents was frustrating, but Ilya did not let it get to him.

He stares through the front window of his car at the house.

If Hollander truly did not want him here, he would not give him the address right?

He wouldn't have told him about his mother and her 'suspicions' either. Perhaps it was his twisted way of asking Ilya to come and be by his side while he broke the news to his parents.

Ilya groans and picks up the bag with groceries and a massive bucket of flowers he bought at the store. He has to get going before his head explodes from his thoughts.

It is closer to five, and Ilya's heart is racing like crazy. He kind of wishes he could come earlier, but this was the only flight coming into Ottawa from Boston, and, he somehow convinced himself, that if he shows up for dinner, at least it won't be as awkward as him, popping into the house, in the middle of broad daylight.

Hollanders are probably your kind of family, who went to farmers' markets on Saturdays, had things like brunch and hosted barbecues for their endless relatives and neighbors. Ilya can

smell it in the air, and in the well-maintained courtyard with all their greenery and cherry blossoms blooming.

He hesitates, lingering awkwardly in the front yard, and he curses silently to himself for his own cowardliness and presses hard against the doorbell on the side of the front door.

There is a lot of shuffling and shouting behind the door, and Ilya's skin feels tight over his body, when the door opens with a swish, a voice shouts behind it: "I got it, mum, don't worry!"

It closes just as fast as it opens and Ilya can only blink at the flushed expression staring at him.

"What the hell are you doing here, Rozanov?"

Oh well. At least his omega is not overreacting.

"I came here to meet your parents, no?" Ilya nods at the flowers. "These are for your mum. Or your dad. Perhaps both, I have not decided."

"Are you crazy?" Shane is not even trying to hide his turmoil at the sight of the alpha. He looks sweet, almost domestic, in his sweatshirt and matching pants, and he smells of milk and yuzu which makes Ilya's mouth water. "I.. How the hell did you even get here?"

Ilya tries to shrug, but the grocery bag is a little heavy.

"You sent me the address. I thought you wanted me to come."

"I-"

"Shane, baby, who is it?"

Hollander looks torn between flustered, annoyed and ... relieved.

His scent is definitely filled with the latter. Ilya wants to smile, but he knows the omega will take it the wrong way and he did promise himself in the car that he would be on his best behavior tonight.

"Give me a moment, mum!" Shane shouts back, and then whispers, angrily: "You cannot be here."

"Why not?"

"Because.." Shane ruffles a hand through his hair, "because I have not told them about you yet."

"Good," Ilya is getting tired of carrying the damn bag, "then let's tell them together. About us, and about the baby."

"Did you not hear what I just said? There is no 'us'!" Shane's eyes go comically wide.

Ilya does not let the phrase sting him. “Then let’s just tell them about the baby. Together. Unless you already have-?”

“No,” Shane shakes his head. “I didn’t. I.. I don’t know how.”

Hollander looks … deflated. Ilya squishes down the feeling where he wants to hug him, and erase the pout off his lips. “Okay. But do you want to? Tell them?”

Shane breathes heavily through his nose. He must come to a decision in his head, because soon his frown is replaced by a certain determination that Ilya has only seen in their matches against each other.

“I do,” he moves aside, and lets Ilya past, opening the door, “come on in.”

*

The house is .. nice. Ilya shuffles uncertainly in the foyer, when Shane hisses at him to take his shoes off, which he does, slowly.

“Who is it, Shane?” Ilya guesses it’s his mother’s voice that comes to him through the hallway.

Shane looks pale but he does not lose that spark in his eyes when he speaks: “Over here, mum. I want you to meet someone.”

Ilya does not think he has been this nervous even when he played in his first playoffs. In fact, he does not think he has been this nervous in his whole life.

A woman comes from the corner and just as fast as she appears, she stops at the instant.

“So, mum this is Ilya, and, I have invited him to have dinner with us tonight-”

“This is for you!”

“And I know it looks a little sudden but I promise he is very.. he is excited to meet you and dad, and I am sorry I did not tell you sooner that he was coming.”

Yuna Hollander, Ilya thinks that’s her name, stands in the middle of the hallway with a huge bucket of flowers and Shane rumbling nervously beside her.

She looks away from the flowers towards Ilya and he has to swallow, because his throat is dry and he is freaking out.

“Yes. I know who Ilya Rozanov is,” she says pointedly and turns to look at Shane just as measured. “What I don’t understand, is what he is doing it in my home.”

“I am-”

“Why don’t we head inside, mum,” Shane might not realize it but he is scenting a whole lot with his pheromones, a reaction to the two tense alphas staring at each other across the room.

His voice is gentle when he turns to his mother, and soft, and Ilya is getting swooned by it too because he always calms down when Shane talks to him that way, “Ilya is our guest and we should be nice to him. I know we don’t have a very good history but I swear, I invited him on purpose because I want both you and dad to meet him. Please be kind to him for me- please?”

Ilya watches in awe as the woman’s face softens and she nods curtly.

“Definitely not the sort of friendship I expected,” she sends a quick glance at Ilya, “Shane’s guests are always welcome. You must have come a long way, from Boston, I believe?”

“Uh, yes,” Ilya nods. He is sweating, and he is unsure of where to go because even though the house is not large it has a lot of hallways and a whole second floor. He follows Shane like a dog, and he is too nervous to let him out of sight. “I landed this afternoon.”

He is shown towards, what he senses, is the dining room. It is connected to the kitchen with large windows and a view of the backyard. The airy space is meant to feel welcoming, but, instead, Ilya feels suffocated, standing in the open room, between nervous Shane and his tense mother.

He seeks an opening when he can pass the bag along, with some pastries and desserts he got on a whim and a bottle of wine inside and some cheeses and meets for the charcuterie board (he thinks Shane’s parents would appreciate fancy things like that), but, he does not feel welcome enough to do that.

“David just ran out for paper towels,” Yuna speaks from behind the kitchen island. “He will be back shortly.”

“My father,” Shane tells him quietly, answering Ilya’s silent question.

Ilya nods, studying the interior trying to find something to do. It’s a nice house. Of course it would be. Ilya never had any doubts that Shane grew up in a household with a kitchen island and five fucking bathrooms.

“Shane did not mention to us that he was bringing any guests along,” Yuna speaks politely, and Ilya stills, “but he most certainly never gave the impression that it would be you, Ilya. Can I call you that?”

He is nodding, with a quick “of course.”

“Very well,” Yuna seems to make a certain decision in her head. “We are happy to have you here. Shane, would you kindly help your guest with his bags?”

Shane is quick to grab the bag from Ilya, who tries to pull it away but, instead ends up almost ripping the paper fabric apart. Shane sucks in a harsh breath through his teeth and sends Ilya a silent glare, which he takes as enough sign to let the omega do as his mother told him.

The table is set for three, but Yuna tells Shane to get the cutlery from the cupboard and soon there is an extra set on the table, of plates and forks, placed beside the omega.

“I can help,” Ilya tries to speak, just so he is not standing in the middle of the room like an idiot.

He does not let a strange feeling settle in his stomach. It is not that he feels unwelcome (which he does) but what stings more is that he feels *out of place*.

Amidst the baby pictures, and marble kitchen counters, and heated floors and ceramic vases and a wine fridge (who owns a wine fridge in their kitchen?), Ilya feels like a foreign object that simply does not fit into the idyllic image of the household.

The fact that Shane is avoiding to even look at him does not make anything better for Ilya. It is almost as if the omega is ashamed before his mother for letting Ilya come over unannounced.

So, yeah, the whole thing fucking sucks.

Ilya feels the buzz growing beneath his skin, but he pushes it down.

“Oh, it's alright,” Yuna smiles but it hardly reaches her eyes. “I think we can all have a seat now. I am dying to know what brings Ilya Rozanov to Ottawa tonight.”

“Mum,” Shane’s voice is a soft warning which the alpha takes with a glare of her own. “Maybe we should wait until dad gets here.”

Yuna takes a deep breath but she doesn’t argue. “Alright. Let’s wait for your father.”

If the silence before was maddening it is definitely nothing in comparison to the ringing tension of the dining room. Ilya tries to meet Shane’s gaze, but the omega is staring intently at his arms, while his mother is pouring herself a glass of wine in the kitchen.

“I don’t think she likes me very much,” Ilya tries to laugh it off but it comes out too rough. He sits beside Shane on the couch, but far enough so that the omega does not flinch at his presence.

“No, she.. I mean, yes, she is not your biggest fan, but she is just protective,” Shane whispers back, “she will come to like you eventually.”

“Right,” Ilya hardly believes it.

He feels almost grateful for the slap of the front door and the cheerful “I am home!” that ripples through the air. Ilya never met Shane’s dad, but he is somewhat relieved that at least one person in this house does not flinch when he sees him. Well, not too outright at least.

“Oh!” David Hollander stumbles, as he walks into the living room. “I was not aware we were having company.”

Yuna puts the wine glass on the counter and the sound of it made Ilya wince.

“Me neither. But we do!” she gestures at the table. “Now that we are all here, let’s have a talk.”

*

Ilya is tense when he looks at the grilled mackerel in front of him. He doesn't think he should eat but Shane reaches for it first, and he doesn't think much before adding steamed broccoli and brown rice to his plate.

"Shane's appetite has increased so much lately," Yuna notices, when Shane cuts through the pieces, "almost like he is eating for two."

"Alright, mum," Shane drops the fork and the knife almost as fast as he reached for them. Ilya does not know whether it is his sign to speak, but he remains silent because no words that he can possibly say could soften the blow. "I know you are not happy that Ilya is here, but I wanted him to come, because he and I have news to tell you. To the both of you."

"Something exciting I hope," David tries to break the silence with a hesitant smile, "perhaps the two of you are teammates in the next season!"

Yuna gives him a long side look and shakes her head. "What news would you and Ilya have to share with us, Shane?"

Shane takes a deep inhale, but Ilya thinks it is a signal that he can prove to be his support, someone reliable to stand by his side and not face this fear alone.

"I am-"

"We are having a baby."

'asking your permission to court your son', dies without being spoken and Ilya deflates into the chair.

What a way to rip the band-aid off, but Shane does not look away from the stunned look on his dad's face or the soft, tired and utterly tender eyes of his mother.

"Ilya and I shared my heat in January and I know we did not plan for it to happen that way, but I am not regretting my decision. I found out in March, and I was not sure how to tell you so I invited Ilya because it is fair, if both of us are present when you find out."

Ilya is not prepared for the words coming out of Shane's mouth. He must have rehearsed them countless times before the mirror, since they flow so fluid and natural, and yet the omega is nearly shaking with nerves.

"Oh, baby, we didn't.. I mean, you know, your mother and I will always, no matter what, put you and your wellbeing first," Shane's dad reaches out over the table, his scent calming when he puts Shane's hand in the palm of his own, "but sweetheart are you sure you are ready for such responsibility? I mean you are young, and I understand it feels like a lot but I want you to know that you always have plenty of choice when it comes to your body."

"I want to keep the child," Shane does not think twice before the words come out of his mouth but his parents' eyes remain soft when he speaks. On his flight over, when Ilya was thinking about their reaction, the last thing he thought about was how … calm they would be

about Shane's expectancy. "This is my decision and I have made up my mind when the doctor told me about.. my condition."

"And are you certain that Ilya is the father?" Yuna's eyes do not even flicker to the alpha who sits silently in his seat, as if he is intruding on the family conversation.

"Yes, mum," Shane stutters. Ilya can hardly hear his voice when he followed with a soft: "There was no one else."

Ilya does not let the satisfaction of the omega's confession curl in his stomach, but it does make his alpha purr. He sort of knew, that Shane was not seeing anyone, judging by his crisp scent and unblemished nape, but, Ilya felt especially elated knowing that he was the first to sort of claim the omega for himself.

"And what of Ilya's parents?" Yuna keeps asking him, like Shane were a suspect on a trial. "Have you both told them yet?"

"I mean-"

"I am not telling my father about this."

Shane is tense beside him and Yuna presses further, her mouth a thin line. Ilya does not waver away from her hard stare.

"You will not?"

Ilya shrugs, trying to keep his voice steady.

"He is sick. And we are not close. My mother is dead and I don't keep close contact with my family."

This is not the way Ilya wanted Shane to find out about her, but he does not have much choice. There will be a chance in the future when he tells him the whole story, but, for now, he tries to keep his head steady and look anywhere but Shane's parents who seem eerily silent, or the omega who watches him with a mix of pity and worry.

Shane is the first to move, his arm twitching almost as if he wants to touch the alpha beside him. "I am sorry, I didn't know.."

"It is fine. It is better this way," Ilya feels suffocated by the air around him, "I don't like talking about it."

"All families face their share of difficulties and I am sorry about your mother, Ilya," Yuna nods slowly. She is calculating him, and Ilya has a feeling that whatever checklist she has in her mind, Ilya is not gaining points there. He feels almost grateful though, when she decides to change the subject.

"I understand why Shane feels responsible, but what about you Ilya? Do you want to be a part of the child's life?"

Ilya blinks at the alpha, his scowl mixed with disbelief. “Of course. I want to be there when they are born. And I want to be present for Shane whenever he needs me.”

“Well Shane is well taken care of by me and by his dad, and from what I am gathering there is not much relationship outside of purely physical, excuse my language, which is keeping the two of you together.”

“Mum!”

“What? I am saying the truth, no?” Yuna’s voice is unreadable when she speaks to Ilya, “I suppose you and Shane are not officially mated, are you?”

Ilya is silent when she asks him. Shane is quiet too, and it is painful to see how Yuna’s expression hardens into something Ilya immediately dislikes.

“I understand you feel a certain level of blame for this, Ilya, I truly do. But you must also understand that as a mother I have the right to know what exact relationship ties the two of you together.”

“There is no relationship, mum,” Shane speaks before Ilya gets a chance to explain, “Ilya helped me with my heats a couple of times, and I- and I helped him during his ruts. It works because we are compatible, but we are not exclusive. I mean I know Ilya dated other people in the past.”

Ilya wants to laugh, hysterically. “Now you want to bring it up?”

“You never wanted to date me,” Shane’s voice rises a higher, “you only showed up when you felt like it and you did not even.. You don’t want to be stuck with me further, Ilya.”

Stuck with me.

Ilya’s head is spinning. What are they even talking about right now?

“I know relationships between two young people are complicated,” David tries to break the tension by speaking out, “but this is not just about the two of you now, Ilya. Shane is trying to say, that he wants to know what your intentions are going forward. Are you willing to only be present as the father of the child, or are you also willing to, I suppose, be romantically involved, with Shane?”

“Oh this is ridiculous,” Shane stands up from the chair so fast he almost trips over. “I am not here to talk about my love life. I am pregnant and Ilya is the father. Now excuse me, I need to breathe some air before I suffocate from your scents. Sorry mum.”

Shane leaves the dining room without turning around, and Ilya is faced alone with two pairs of eyes watching him go with nearly identical levels of worry.

“Excuse me,” Ilya stands up to follow him.

“Ilya,” Yuna calls him out as he puts the chair under the table. “I know you are a good man and a responsible one too. You are a solid captain and a great hockey player,” Ilya does not

think this sentence is going to end very well for him. “But you must understand that you are not the sort of person Shane needs right now. He needs something stable, something reliable, a support a loving partner can provide. If you are not able to give him those things, as a mother, I would advise you to take a step back and give him space and time to figure things out on his own. I know it feels difficult right now, but I definitely want you to consider how far, you are willing to go, because if you are not serious about this, both of you can get incredibly hurt.”

Ilya grits his teeth.

“I understand,” he heads to the door slowly, before he turns around to speak to the table: “And so you know I wanted to ask you permission to court him. I am serious about this. About Shane. And about our child. I know you are telling me to walk away, and I will, but I will never be the person who breaks Shane’s heart. Not unless he tells me that he does not need me anymore.”

Both watch him leave when Ilya closes the door, but they don’t stop him from going further into the house.

*

Ilya has no idea where Shane would be. He checks the bathroom, but both are empty and he wants to see, if perhaps he stepped outside, but a soft voice calls him from the top of the stairs.

“I’m here.”

Ilya snaps his head and breaths out. Shane is sitting on the stairs, his arms folded on his knees, and his eyes wet, and red.

“Were you crying?” Ilya walks up to sit beside him and feels warm when Shane’s head leans on his shoulder.

“What a shit show huh,” Shane chuckles, humorless ignoring his question.

Ilya attempts to shrug. “Could have gone worse.”

“Really? I think this is worse,” Shane mumbles. “I am sorry. For inviting you and for having it go down like this.”

“Hey,” Ilya tries to turn, but it is difficult with the omega plastered at his side. “It’s fine. Really. At least they know now. And they didn’t try to kill me for getting their precious baby well.. with a baby.”

“Mum was kind of close to grabbing that kitchen knife though,” Shane tries to smile and Ilya thinks it is a good sign that at least he is trying to be funny. “They are so- embarrassing. Talking about mating and all that stuff. I am sorry you had to hear that.”

Ilya tenses, a little. “Why are you sorry?”

“Because I know that you don’t want to,” Shane explains as if he knows what is going on inside Ilya’s mind. “Even during the heats you never tried to bite me.”

Dumbass, Ilya almost shakes his head. Does he think Ilya is that stupid to bite an omega in heat without his consent?

“A claiming mark must be done when both of us have talked about it,” Ilya tells him seriously. “Not on a whim.”

“Right,” Shane sighs. “Fuck. If you want to go- I think you should head out now.”

Ilya’s stomach drops. He really does not like it when the omega insists that Ilya has somewhere better to be than beside him. “Why would I want to go?”

Shane turns his head, a question building in his eyes. “Because you don’t want to be here. Because my mother had said all those bad things to you and because you think I am- because they want us to mate if we still want to continue seeing each other.”

Ilya takes a shaky breath, to steady himself.

“And why would that be a bad idea?”

Shane’s expression turns into one of awe, and Ilya wants to desperately kiss him. “Why? You can’t mate me just because I am having your baby. You don’t even like me.”

“Hollander,” Ilya is speaking painfully slow, like Shane is dense which perhaps he is, “if I didn’t like you I wouldn’t give you my clothes. I would not share your hearts. Trust me, I would not even knot you and cum inside you during your heats.”

Shane is so stunned that his mouth is parted and Ilya leans in slowly to speak against his lips. “I want to have a family, Shane. I want us to try and make something good together even if it is hard. Please. It shouldn’t be so complicated, should it?”

For a moment, Ilya thinks he will give in. He has that look in his eyes, silent and pleading, and Ilya savors it for a moment.

“I can’t do it,” Shane hits the back of his head against the wall. “I.. I fucking can’t, Ilya. This is.. this is so sudden and I can’t just- I want to but you have no idea how hard it has been with the baby, and my parents, and now you telling me this, I just- I think I might explode, like my head might actually blow up. I don’t sleep, I feel nauseated when I eat chicken, I am lying to my teammates, and my stomach is getting bigger, and, my chest hurts, and, now I need to think where I will live with my baby, and how I am going to tell the world, and..”

Ilya sort of knows how much is on his plate but it hurts that he still considers Ilya just a stranger in all of this. He wants to be a part of it, he wants to be there with Shane when he makes those big decisions, but he can’t figure out how to push past those massive walls Shane has built around himself.

It is getting harder and harder to try, and Ilya is getting frustrated with his own uselessness.

“You don’t have to do it on your own,” he simply says. “If you let me, I can do it alongside you. It does not have to be difficult, Shane.”

“It already is,” Shane shakes his head. “I will think about what you said. About mating, but I don’t think it is a good idea.”

“Why..” *the fuck*, Ilya swallows down a curse, “why not?”

“Because mum is right! What if you regret it in the future! What if you get tied with me now, but in five, ten, or twenty years down the line you will regret it? What if you make this impulsive decision and then you are forever blaming yourself for letting me ruin your life?”

Ilya is.. he is angry now. Very much so and he knows it because Shane is looking at him differently and because he feels his gums twitch which is never a good sign.

“You are such a fucking idiot, Hollander,” Ilya stands up, “it is like you are fucking deaf I swear. You won’t listen to my words? Fuck it, I just have to prove it with actions. You tell me to go? I will leave. But I am not taking back my word. I will ask you, again and again, until you get tired of hearing it, and I will be there when the baby is born because both of you, are mine, whether you like it or not.”

Ilya does not look back when he stumbles down the stairs, nor does he turn around when he hears a very soft: “Ilya” spoken behind him.

Fuck this omega.

Fuck Shane Hollander.

If he wants to do this on his own then so be it.

He will come back to him.

He always does.

Ilya just has to be patient and let Shane move on, overcome his little freak out, and when the omega goes back to his senses Ilya is willing to take him with open arms.

Only this time, he plans to never let him go.

Chapter 3: May-July

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

May, 2016

"Hockey Star Shane Hollander announces he will be taking a break from competing in the next season"

"Will Shane Hollander's disappearance from the rink cause the shift in the next season's playoffs?"

"Uncovering the truth behind Shane Hollander's disappearance: trouble on the rink or love life turmoil?"

Ilya puts down his phone and slams it against the kitchen counter.

Three weeks have passed since the disaster of a dinner at the Hollander's and this is what he has to wake up to.

Shane has not called him once, and Ilya has left five texts in the span of ten days all worrying about the omega and his health, but, Shane did not respond to any of them, so now, here they are, on square fucking zero.

The news dropped out of nowhere.

Ilya was making breakfast when he received dozens of texts from his teammates, with the tabloid headlines varying from, 'shocking news of Shane Hollander's decision to take a season off' to 'guessing the reasons for Shane Hollander's rapid disappearance from the Ice Rink'.

His team was kicked out of the playoffs, just a little over a week ago, but Hollander was not in that game. He probably already spoke to his teammates about his upcoming break, and it makes Ilya's chest tight knowing that Shane is already making big decisions, without having to give Ilya the heads up first.

He understands that Shane will always have the final word. He is carrying the baby, and he has to make sacrifices that could cost him his career, and, what about Ilya? He cannot even grow balls to call his father and tell him that Ilya got an omega pregnant.

He has to tell him, Ilya knows. He has to speak to Alexei and his father. He is not ready for this kind of conversation at all, but, if Shane Hollander can go on the news and announce his break from hockey, then Ilya can grow a backbone and talk to his family about his pregnant omega.

Because everything concerning Shane is serious to Ilya. Their relationship, if you can call it that, always felt like a heavy weight on the alpha's mind. He wants it. He wants to have

Shane close, to hold him, to protect him, to take care of him and the baby.

When Shane spoke to him in the car after his doctor's appointment back in March, his words stung because they were *correct*. If Ilya can't even open up to his family, how is he ready to admit to the rest of the world that Shane is his mate?

The summer break is coming and Ilya knows that he has to go back to Moscow.

He wants to break the news to his family, and if that is his last chance, he will not be a coward and back out of it.

Ilya only wishes that Shane would start answering his texts.

He gave him time and space, and they have not spoken for weeks, but Ilya craves to hear the sound of his voice.

What is it, that they always say to each other before the break? 'Have a good summer'?

Ilya considers typing it out, but when he opens the messages, there are already three texts waiting for him, sent less than a minute ago:

'Hey'

'Sorry for the radio silence'

'These weeks have been crazy'

Ilya thinks his eyes might pop out of his head.

He can't believe what he is seeing, but the proof is right there in front of him.

Shane is texting him again, and the reality of the situation comes crashing down on Ilya with full force.

He considers his options. Three minutes pass, then four. Shane sees that Ilya read the messages, and now he thinks Ilya is making him wait, and, who knows what other thoughts are running through his mind at this point, but, Ilya is too tired to care anymore.

He is strung up and he wants to hear Shane's voice again. He misses Shane, period. Which is why it comes naturally to him, to press the call icon and wait for the rings to end, until the omega's pretty face fills up his screen.

"Hi?"

Shane must be at his apartment because he looks .. domestic. His hair is all fluffy and he has a crewneck stretched over his collarbones. Ilya is going to pass out because the crewneck is black and has golden stitching so it must have been his, left at Shane's place from the times they shared their clothes to spend their cycles with. Shane is lying on his couch, reading glasses low on his nose, and, he is staring at the screen mirroring the same disbelief, that Ilya feels at the exact same time.

“Hey,” Ilya squirms in his seat. He wants to slap himself on the head. Three weeks of silence, and that is what he has to say? *‘Hey’*? Ilya clears his throat. “Just saw the news. About your break.”

“Ah. Yes,” Shane’s eyes dart to the side but he doesn’t look uncomfortable with the question. Ilya tries to find any signs of discomfort in his face but he can’t. Shane’s skin is glowing, and his eyes have this healthy glimmer in them that never fails to make Ilya’s heart flutter.

“I released the statements to the media. The world did not end after all,” Shane lets out a low chuckle, “I mean obviously I couldn’t tell the whole thing yet, but, I sort of spoke to my team and everybody was really understanding. They don’t know why, just that it has something to do with my health. I mean.. I do want to speak to my friends about it, more closely, but Mum thinks I should lie low for a bit. She sort of managed the whole thing, my mom, that is, which made it easier. She is great, so I just have to make sure that I get enough sleep and eat well, to you know, have enough nutrients for both of us.”

Shane’s smile melts away, replaced by a curl of his lips. He goes quiet, and his eyes focus on something outside of the screen, and Ilya wants, so badly, to pull Shane close and to hold his warm body against his chest. Shane looks like he is weighing his next words, and Ilya gives him time, to collect himself.

“Sorry for not answering your texts,” Shane says simply, “for ignoring you and for being a dick to you back home. Mum feels bad too. She thinks we kicked you out, and she really wants to make it up to you. I think she really likes you, she just wasn’t sure how to react to both, my pregnancy and well, to you being my, not-quite boyfriend.”

Ilya tries to keep his head steady, despite the sudden dizziness in his body. “It’s alright. Not a big deal. Your mum was a little scary though,” he looks at Shane through the screen, his voice turning low when he speaks, “I mean.. they think I am not good enough for you.”

“What?” Shane is trying to laugh it off, but he can’t hide the strain in his voice. “That’s not true. My mum might come off as harsh, but that’s just because she doesn’t really know you. Trust me, once they spend more time with you, they will understand why I made my choice.”

Ilya can’t hide the crease between his brows. “Your choice?”

Shane looks flushed and he simply shrugs. “What are your plans for the summer?”

He is avoiding the question. Ilya wants to keep pressing him about the meaning of his words, but he knows, that there are certain things that both of them need to discuss in person, rather than through the phone.

“Probably going home. To see my dad,” Ilya clears his throat. “I was thinking I should tell him. About you. And about us.”

“Oh,” Shane cannot even hide how stunned he is. “I mean.. Are you sure you want to do it? I know you said he has some health issues, but if you don’t want to do it, you don’t have to.”

“But I do,” Ilya insists, because he believes it is better if his father finds the news from him, rather than through the media. “I want to tell him about the baby. And that I am serious about starting a family with you.”

“I mean..” Shane stutters, but there is a soft look in his eyes and Ilya is glad he is not freaking out. “Yeah. I think that’s for the best. How long are you going back to Russia for?”

Ilya shrugs. “I don’t know. A month? I think I will be back in August.”

“Right,” Shane looks visibly deflated, but, the look in his eyes makes Ilya grow rigid in his seat, “I sort of.. the reason I am asking is that, I will be going back to my cottage for the summer. Mum thinks it is healthy for the baby to stay close to nature, and I like how quiet it is. I mean mum and dad are only ten minutes away so they can always stop by in case I need anything, but I was just thinking if you want, I would love for you to come and stay with me.”

Ilya is panicking. There is no better word to describe how he is feeling. Shane is looking at him through the screen, with those large nearly begging dark eyes and he probably has no clue how much it makes Ilya’s heart ache.

“Are you.. are you sure you want me there?”

Ilya’s head is spinning. Shane nods, and he looks so hopeful, and also terrified, and, Ilya can’t believe that he is about to say ‘yes’ to something that could perhaps flip their relationship upside down.

“It is very private. No one will know and it can be just the two of us,” Shane smiles, awkwardly, “well, us and the baby.”

Ilya is struggling to get a hold of his breathing. He is sweating, and, his head is aching, from the pressure of having to make such a large decision, in such a short amount of time.

If he says ‘no’, Shane will not pester him about it, but then Ilya would feel like he is denying him something larger than a simple stay over the summer. Shane’s disappointment would be unbearable, and Ilya does not want to see the omega bawling in tears over him.

Ilya already had Shane running away from him once. He really doesn’t want to go through it again.

So he says yes, and he is ready for the full wreck that his emotions become when Shane smiles at him giddily from his phone.

“When do you want me to come?”

*

June, 2016

It is raining when he lands in Moscow. The traffic in the city is brutal, and it takes Ilya around two hours before, he can actually get into his apartment.

He ignores the three text messages he receives from his brother and lets his father know, that he will be at his house by tomorrow morning, at the earliest.

Ilya is tired but the jet lag keeps him awake for a while. He scrolls mindlessly on his phone, even if it makes his growing headache worsen.

Only three weeks, that's how long he promises his family to stay with them.

His screen lights up. Ilya smiles even before he gets to read it, because there is only one person who could be texting him at this time of the night.

'Did you get home yet?'

He should probably call, but he knows that Shane is busy with his check-ups today, and, he is packing to get everything ready before moving to the cottage for the summer, so he doesn't have much time this morning to listen to Ilya's growing list of problems.

Shane has enough things on his plate already.

'Yeah. Was just heading to bed.'

This is new. Whatever they are doing. Texting each other and calling whenever they feel like it.

Ilya is getting used to having Shane just a couple of types away, and it is not good for his heart to constantly think about the omega. He wants to be close, but he knows his conscience will keep bugging him if he leaves his business in Moscow unfinished.

Shane's reply comes in, not even two minutes later.

'How are you feeling?'

Fucking exhausted, Ilya wants to type. *Because I don't want to be here and I miss you*.

But he knows Shane shouldn't worry. This is like the number one rule during pregnancy.

It physically aches not being there with Shane. Ilya wants to be a good dad, and a good mate in the future. When Shane asked him to spend the summer with him, he said yes, but on the inside, he is terrified that he will fuck everything up.

Because that is what he is. He messes things up, his own family one good example of it already.

Ilya realizes that he has not been texting back for a while, and he curses under his nose.

'Good. Going to see my dad tomorrow.'

And then: 'I miss you.'

It feels good to get some things off his chest, and not worry about Shane freaking out. It makes his stomach warm, knowing that somewhere across the ocean there is an omega, carrying his child, smiling at the screen and waiting for Ilya to come back to him.

‘Call me when you wake up tomorrow.’

Shane follows up: ‘You should rest.’

‘And yes. We miss you too!’

Ilya’s face is warm and he thinks it's ridiculous, because he is blushing over a simple text, and, suddenly all his worries and headache melt away with the warmth filling up his chest.

*

“You must take your pills.”

“That shit makes me nauseous.”

“You won’t get better if you don’t take your medication,” Ilya wants to scream because it feels like arguing with a toddler. “This is the doctor’s orders, Dad. I am not making you do anything that is not in your prescription.”

It is hard, Ilya thinks, grabbing the empty bottles away after his dad reluctantly swallows his dose.

It is harder because Ilya is constantly searching for the right moment, when, he can speak to his dad about Shane.

Two weeks go by in a blur and Ilya has yet to drop the news.

Nothing feels right. His dad is either going through one of his states of childlike anger or he is so completely out of it that he forgets his own age. Everything is a mess, and Ilya tries to navigate their new dynamic but it's hard.

He is growing distant and they are all noticing it.

Ilya is not going out with any of his past friends. He hardly leaves the house and he is constantly on his phone. Even his father notices, when he sees Ilya checking the notifications:

“Who are you talking with all the time?”

It bugs him that he has to tell them. Ilya lies awake at night trying to figure out what is stopping him. He is not ashamed of Shane, nor does he want to keep the omega a secret. But he knows the moment he tells his family he got someone pregnant their instant reaction would be: was it an accident or is Ilya willing to take responsibility? Was it his mate? Male omegas are rare and Ilya knows there would be questions about his identity.

His father would assume Ilya is just telling them about the omega because he feels, like it is his fault, but, for Ilya, that is not the reason at all. It is not an accident or a mistake. He wants Shane, he always did, and he loves him, a scary feeling and he wants to build a family with him.

A wedding, perhaps, a couple more pups in the future.

This, is what his family won't understand. They could never possibly grasp the depth of Ilya's feelings for Shane.

How could they? For them it is never about love, it is always about family duty and respect. Showing emotions is a weakness, and following your own heart is seen as selfish. Ilya doesn't want to suffer anymore. He hates himself when he is around his family. He grows destructive and loud, angry with the feeling bottling up inside his chest.

He has to put an end to it.

He will tell them, out of respect for Shane, and their child.

"Alexei is coming for dinner tonight," Ilya tells his father who sits up like a tight string on the chair. "He is bringing his family along. It could be nice," Ilya swallows harshly, "to have us all here together."

His father hums quietly, in a what Ilya thinks is an attempted reply. He leaves him in the living room, he will probably head to bed for his afternoon nap anyway, the pills always making his father drowsy, but Ilya has too much energy to do anything close to rest.

He heads to the gym to run it off. Sweating always does it for him. The workout manages to put his thoughts in some attempt at order, and even if not completely, it softens their rapid flow inside his head. Ilya runs on the treadmill, then bench presses until he feels the burning in his arms and chest. He tries to think about nothing, but he fails, because he is sort of spiralling.

He spends two hours at the gym before he takes a shower.

He curses the different time zones. Now is the time he would call Shane, and calm himself down just by listening to the sound of his voice, but, Shane is probably asleep, cuddled in his nest, since it is early morning on the East Coast.

Surprisingly, taking a shower helps. Ilya takes his time getting ready, because the small rituals tend to calm his mind.

It is around six when the guests start to arrive, and Ilya can hear them from upstairs. Their family is not the one for big gatherings, but, once in a while, when Ilya gets home, they tend to all have dinner together, at their father's house, a sort of tradition that leaves a sour taste in his mouth.

A family tradition, and yet it is when his brother drinks too much, his father too, but, these days he tends to just sit quietly, hardly eating any food before him, while Ilya is doing his

best to block out all the useless noise surrounding him, and trying to go through the evening without causing a fight.

He doubts he would be able to do the same this year.

He drinks, in his bathroom, to calm his nerves but it doesn't really help. Instead, the alcohol makes his body heavy and drowsy, and Ilya stumbles towards the dining room on shaky legs.

"Took you long enough to show up," his brother says instead of the greeting.

There is an empty chair on the left side of his father and Ilya takes it. He nods curtly to Alexei's wife, mumbling a coarse 'hello' to his brother. He wishes he drank more but despite how much he dreads it, he still needs a clear head.

There is not much conversation except for the casual, "pass me this plate" spoken from one person, to another. Ilya's hands are shaking when he is cutting through the meat, and the movements catch his father's eye, because Ilya is shaking the whole table with how rough he is being with the knife.

His eyes are on the food when he is violently reminded of the whole other dinner scene from just a couple of weeks ago. Expect that house was warmer, and he could still feel the brush of omega's thigh against his own where they touched under the table, and the concerned eyes of the parents that still looked softly when they gazed at their child.

The mix of yuzu and honey scents in the air and the protectiveness of the alpha who stands up for her cub, and Ilya is hit with the memory so hard, the sound of his dropping fork is loud in the thick air.

"What is wrong with you?" his father asks, and suddenly there are four pairs of eyes staring at Ilya from across the table.

Ilya leans down to pick up the fork and puts it on the table, his hands steady, and his breath controlled and slow.

"I have to tell you something," he says, and the words tend to come naturally to him, after a barrier in his mind has been lifted. "I am going to start a family. Back in Canada. My mate is pregnant and he and I are having a baby in September."

Ilya is looking at no one in particular when he says it. His voice is solid, but his eyes are blank when he looks at the wall in front of him. "I love him very much, and I don't expect your approval, and I am only telling you this because of the respect I have for him. We have been together for almost seven years, and he is the only person I want to spend the rest of my life with."

The silence is so loud Ilya thinks he can hear the breathing of every single person in the room. He can definitely hear it from his father, his laboured gasp for air.

"He?" a single word uttered from his dry lips.

Ilya nods, his eyes now drifting from his brother's horrified expression to his father's stunned face. "Yes."

He doesn't think telling Shane's identity is a good idea. His brother might go to the press, or worse, but there is no harm in telling them that it is a male omega. His brother is too shocked to speak, and his father's mouth keeps closing and opening, and Ilya knows nothing good will come out of it, so he continues.

"I don't think I will come to Russia next year. I will leave the money with my lawyer and if there is anything you need I will have it in the trust fund with him under my name."

"You ungrateful pig-"

"Why the fuck did you not tell us sooner.."

"You should have known before getting a whore knocked up!"

The words sort of merge into one incomprehensible mess. Ilya tries to block it out but it is hard when it comes from almost all around him.

"You are leaving your own family for some bitch we never met," his brother shouts from the opposite side of the table. "What about our father? After everything he has ever done for you?"

Ilya stands up, and it physically hurts to hear him say it. But he doesn't care. Alexei is practically frothing at his mouth and Ilya knows why. Because he can see the finality of Ilya's decision in his eyes, and the calmness with which Ilya rises from his seat.

He feels light. He almost smiles even, because nothing holds him back here anymore, in his dark room and dim lights hanging from above.

"I think it is best if father spends the rest of the year at the place where he can be looked after by the medical professionals rather than us," Ilya says, his gaze dropping on his father's silent figure. "A countryside perhaps. It would be good for you, to stay away from the city. Your condition grows worse day by day, and if we cannot help you at home, then we need to hire nurses and a full-time doctor to keep you in check. I can send you the address for the hospital, and they are happy to have you starting in September."

"An elderly house," his father snarks, but Ilya shrugs.

"Alexei is busy with his family. I am abroad. Who else is going to look after you?"

"You can't make decisions like that on a whim," Alexei howls. "He is never here, and when he arrives he thinks he can act like a King and we are his servants."

"I stayed with father for two weeks, Alexei, and I think it is for the best," Ilya shakes his head. "If he doesn't want it, then it's fine, but I think it would be best for everyone if he stays at the place where everything is suited for his condition."

His father doesn't look like he hates that idea. Which is already a good enough reaction, and yet Ilya sighs when he doesn't look at him.

"Think about it," Ilya tightens his lips. "I should get going. Thank you for dinner."

Ilya thinks his brother will follow him, but his father shouts a harsh 'Alexei' and he sits down, and, he says something else, something muted that Ilya doesn't get to hear well because he is outside, walking over to his car.

Even on his drive back to his apartment he can't see himself spending another week here. The city became his prison, and now that nothing holds him back here, Ilya wants to desperately get out of its confines.

His apartment is dark when he arrives. It is strangely cold too. Ilya is still wearing his dress shirt and pants when he pours himself a drink and stumbles over the couch.

He presses call, because he did some math, and it is supposed to be nine o'clock in the morning in Quebec.

"Hi?" Shane sounds sleepy and Ilya smiles a little, thinking of how adorable he looks when he just woke up.

"Did I wake you?" Ilya asks, noticing the bedhead hair of the omega on his phone screen.

"No," Shane lies. "Just lazing around. Are you okay?"

Ilya has no idea. He thinks he is definitely better now, but there is a strange feeling swirling in his stomach that he cannot quite put a label on.

"Yes," he nods, and then thinks for a bit, "actually, no. Fuck that. I feel like shit."

He can see Shane's eyes trace his face warily and Ilya hates to make him worry. "You do look tired."

Ilya relents. He sinks deeper into the couch, taking a sip of his drink and swallowing it down without letting it leave a trace in his mouth. "I told my family. About us."

Shane's eyes grow wide. "Oh. I thought you said.."

"I know," it comes out too harsh, and Shane visibly flinches on his screen, so Ilya softens his voice, "I know what I said, but I would be a coward if you could talk to your parents, and I fucking didn't. I don't regret it though. I just- I just don't want to be alone right now, I guess."

Shane sits up against the pillows, and nods, looking so serious that Ilya wants to squeeze his cheeks.

He knows he should probably brush his teeth and get undressed, but he doesn't want to move for the comfort of his couch, or stop speaking to the omega on his phone. He feels a pleasant buzz and Ilya lets out a long breath.

“Stay with me until I fall asleep?” the alpha mutters and Shane makes a soft noise, that makes Ilya’s chest rumble.

Shane is on the call, his presence feeling like a soothing balm. He doesn’t talk but it is nice to listen to the sounds of his even breathing and when Shane chirps, Ilya opens his heavy eyelids in alarm.

“What is it?”

“Oh,” Shane's blush is bright even through the screen. “Nothing. Just.. just the baby.”

Ilya frowns, but Shane doesn’t sound like he is in pain. Quite the opposite he looks charmingly shy.

Still, Ilya can’t hide the protectiveness cutting through his voice. “What about the baby?”

Shane’s lips form a soft pout that Ilya wants to kiss away. “The pup kicks sometimes. The doctor says it's good, but still, I don’t think I can get used to it.”

Ilya is suddenly wide awake. He stares wide-eyed at the face of the flustered omega, and he is so warm and lightheaded he feels almost drunk. “Did the pup kick? Just now?”

Shane laughs, a little awkward. “I guess they like the sound of your voice.”

Ilya relaxes into the pillows. He is smiling he thinks, and Shane is smiling back.

This is good, he thinks. This *is* his home.

Ilya listens to Shane rumbling about his doctor’s appointments, and, his meal plans, and how his mum insists he should get a bigger place and move to Ottawa so he can be close to them when the baby is born, and how he is not sure if it too early to build a nursery, and Ilya nods and listens, because he cares, because he wants to take a part in it, and because he won’t let anyone take this away from him.

He must be nodding off, but when he falls asleep, it is to the soft sound of Shane’s voice murmuring comfortingly beside his ear.

*

July, 2016

Shane is a nervous wreck.

He paces around the living room, one hand tugging at his hair, and another resting on the top of his stomach.

He made his bed, did the dishes and cleaned out the fridge, but, no matter how hard he tries to distract his thoughts, he continues to fail miserably because the only sentence swirling inside his mind is: Ilya is arriving today.

A week earlier than planned but it is okay.

Shane can be calm about it.

Ilya did not really tell him the exact reason for his abrupt change of plans, but, Shane is not going to complain because the sooner he can get the alpha into the cottage the better. When the alpha texted Shane a couple of days ago, Ilya said he was in Boston and, later on the call, he asked Shane, somewhat tentatively, if he could come and stay with him a bit earlier than they originally planned.

Shane wanted to know the details, but Ilya did not sound like he was going to tell him much, anyway. Shane thinks privately it has something to do with Ilya's phone call, which he made from Moscow, the suddenness of which left Shane shaking, and needing to have Ilya teleport right into the safe embrace of his arms.

Anyway, it was never Shane's intention to reject Ilya's request, hence, now, Shane is pacing around his house, feeling unsettled, with a palm running soothing circles against his stomach.

He picked up the habit when he started showing, a sort of reflex to calm himself down and to feel the roundness of his bump.

Has it truly been nearly three months since he saw the alpha? That night in April was the last time the two of them spoke face to face. He feels bad about it, he still does, and having Ilya walk away like that, so perhaps the alpha coming in earlier is a good sign.

Shane can talk to Ilya. About his feelings and about the pup, who started kicking around in May. The first time it happened Shane nearly freaked out, but he won't lie, feeling the baby growing day by day does something soft to his heart. The weeks he had spent in the cottage were both incredibly long and horribly fast.

The whole media thing took him by storm in May and his mother's decision to take it slow and lay low in June, proved to be the right one since now, in the early days of July Shane could finally breathe freely again.

He feels bad about keeping Hayden and his friends a secret. Hayden especially since the alpha keeps bugging Shane with details on his sudden disappearance, and Shane hates having to keep him in the dark. But he knows Hayden will understand. He just has to figure out the whole situation with Ilya first, and then he can tackle the rest.

One day at a time, or whatever it is that book he is reading, says.

It doesn't help that he grew to rely on Ilya so much, he can hardly imagine not having the alpha around. He blames it on his raging hormones, but he knows it was always this way, even when he was close to his heats. Ilya is like a solid ground that keeps Shane away from crumbling. The calls, and the texts help, but Shane craves that feeling, the physical touch, so when Ilya announced he could come earlier Shane's stomach flipped in excitement.

He won't mess things up again.

He can tell Ilya the truth, because he cares, and because he never wants to see the alpha's hurt expression again.

Ilya is supposed to arrive by eleven, and it is a quarter to, when Shane hears the knock. He was supposed to text him when he was close, so Shane is not prepared to see the alpha, leaning against the doorframe, holding a duffel bag over his shoulder and wearing sunglasses, pushed up against his hair.

"You are early," Shane says, after a long silence, breaking away from Ilya's long gaze.

"You are," Ilya's eyes drift to his stomach, and even if the alpha is trying to hide it, there is no way to disguise the grin on his lips, "uh, large."

"Shut up," Shane is beet red, his ears are burning as he grabs Ilya's arm to tug him inside.

Ilya is laughing and it sounds like music to Shane's ears. "No, I'm serious. Look at you. When did you get so round?"

Shane looks down shyly at his stomach. Sure, it has gotten bigger, but to him it was a gradual growth, feeling the baby taking up more and more space in his body. It must be a whiplash for Ilya, who has not seen him since April, and Shane can't hide away from the wave of sudden sadness that hits him at full force.

He was so selfish. It is Ilya's baby too. He can't keep the alpha away from his child. Ilya wants to be there for all these moments that Shane takes for granted, like the first kick or the sound of their child's heartbeat. Because if they are going to do it right, they have to make things work, together.

"Hey," Ilya drops the bag, and he crosses the room in two strides before he is standing before Shane, hovering over the omega anxiously, "I didn't.. You know I didn't mean it in a bad way."

He must sense his anxiety, because Ilya is unsure if he should touch him, but Shane moves first.

He wanted it so much for so long. His arms move around Ilya's torso, his bump pressing slightly over the alpha's rigid stomach, and he is taking a long, deep inhale of the scent of pine and smoke through his nostrils.

He longed for it. He missed being held like this. Ilya is hugging him back, and his scent softens and mellows, and Shane purrs contentedly into it.

"I am sorry," Shane mutters, somewhere in the juncture of Ilya's collarbone. "I am sorry for pushing you away. Sorry for keeping you from the pup. I want to have you, please, in this cottage, for a month, or two, or until you get tired of me. I can't do it without you, Ilya," Shane's voice grows wet, and he is clinging tighter against the alpha's body, afraid he might disappear into small particles, which is ridiculous, since Ilya is warm and solid, and he is here.

“I think.. I think I want you to become my mate.”

It is easy to say those words when being comforted by Ilya’s scent. Shane has been thinking about them for a long time, and, he is terrified to hear the words of rejection, but, his mum and the therapist she made him see, when she noticed how difficult it was for Shane to handle his separation from Ilya back in May, both recommend that he should start communicating his feelings more clearly.

No one might know the extent of Shane and Ilya’s relationship except for themselves, but, Shane does want him to know how much Ilya means to him. At least he won’t keep his feelings under the lock and key, and if Ilya is going to tell him n—

The kiss is sudden. It is soft, and Ilya is tilting Shane’s chin up with his fingers, and suddenly his mouth is full of Ilya’s tongue and his head is swimming in their mutual scents. Shane is dizzy, but in a good way. His body is lit up like a Christmas tree, for the first time in three months, and Ilya is hugging him and whispering soft words in a language that Shane still doesn’t understand.

“I want it,” Ilya says, so clearly that Shane can’t even pretend he doesn’t hear him. “I want us to be mates. To put my claim on your neck, and to have you smell like me. I want it so much.”

“Yeah?” Shane is smiling and he feels a little stupid. “Now? Should we do it now?”

Ilya is laughing, but it comes out as soft and gentle, and Shane blushes, realizing how desperate he must sound to the alpha.

“Yeah, we can do it whenever you want, baby,” Ilya says, kissing him on the temple, and Shane leans into the touch, like a purring cat. “I am not going anywhere, I promise, Shane. You have me completely. I am truly yours. So how about I make you both some breakfast first?”

Chapter End Notes

what an emotional rollercoaster of a chapter (my thought when i was writing it)! So many feelings and I really wanted to get into Ilya’s head for a bit to see his perspective on everything so i hope you enjoyed!!

Thank you once again for all the support!

And Happy Holidays <3

Chapter 4: July-August

July, 2016

Ilya makes breakfast and the food smells so good, Shane shuffles excitedly on the barstool behind the kitchen island, watching Ilya cook with rapid attention.

He was nervous, impatiently waiting for the alpha to arrive the whole morning, and he forgot to have his usual yogurt bowl, which he knows isn't good for him, but he sort of doesn't regret it now. He can hold back his hunger if that means watching Ilya make himself comfortable behind Shane's stove.

Shane almost feels bad for making Ilya do all the work. He drove nearly two hours from the airport to the cabin, and, he must be exhausted from the road, but, Ilya insisted on making them food, so now, Shane is sitting back and relaxing, watching Ilya's biceps flex under the thin cotton fabric of his t-shirt as he flips the eggs on the pan.

Ilya meets his gaze across the kitchen counter and Shane flushes, when he gets caught staring.

"What?"

The alpha studies him with unreadable expression and Shane feels, that even his ears turn red, from the examining look Ilya gives him.

He *knows* he looks different.

His stomach is no longer a bump, but a round balloon, growing larger day after day.

Every month Shane tries to get used to the changes happening constantly to his body, like his full bladder, or the heavy weight of milk building up in his chest, or how his nipples, all swollen and irritated, brush angrily against even the softest materials of his shirts.

Shane is trying to hide his body behind the oversized t-shirt, hoping that Ilya won't notice how embarrassingly round he looks all over.

He *feels* different too. Pregnancy makes him sensitive and highly alert to even the smallest changes happening around him such as the whiff of foreign scents or the shifts in his daily routine.

He is especially hyperaware now, with the alpha's presence prominent in his kitchen. Ilya's scent makes itself present by spreading steadily throughout the cottage and Shane can feel how affected he is by having a familiar alpha nearby. Shane tries to hide his excitement, but he is scenting the whole room, and the omega is just grateful that Ilya doesn't say anything about Shane's needy pheromones heavy in the air.

It is not like he was oblivious to Ilya's scent before.

Even before they started sharing their cycles together, Shane tended to subconsciously seek out the calming scent of pine and smoke whenever the alpha was close to him, but now, in the vast space of his kitchen, and watching Ilya move with practiced ease between Shane's kitchen island and the fridge, the omega's inside are burning, his senses telling him that he is at home, his mate is here, and he is safe.

Ilya notices Shane's flushed face, and the alpha's scent turns musky and heavy.

"It's been a while," Ilya explains, picking up the plates and putting one before Shane and one in front of himself, "since I last saw you. You look .. different. Softer."

Shane's stomach drops.

"Are you calling me fat?" Shane deadpans, but Ilya laughs and shakes his head.

"No! No, of course not," his teeth are showing, when he smiles, "pregnancy makes you look sexy. And you smell nice too, like warm milk with honey. I like it. My mum used to make it for me all the time as a kid."

Shane doesn't know what to do with such a confession. Ilya hardly talks about his mother and being compared to a childhood dessert is definitely the last thing he expects the alpha to say.

Shane also hardly thinks of himself as *sexy*. He is a stranger in his own body, and, Shane feels self-conscious of how much weight he put on, and, of his overly sweet scent, but, when Ilya looks at him, there is so much adoration in his gaze that Shane believes in whatever image Ilya is seeing in front of him and his worries simply melt away.

"You look beautiful," Ilya insists, his eyes twinkling, clearly amused by Shane's scandalized expression. "Your scent makes me want to eat you whole."

"Stop it," he tries to hide from Ilya's knowing smirk but it's not use.

The alpha is right there, taking up all the space in the kitchen and leaning over the counter, and when their eyes meet Shane feels a rush of goosebumps running down his back.

"Hey," Ilya is soft, his voice a gentle rumble. "I mean it. You look wonderful. Looking at you, with your stomach, and your scent.. it truly makes me feel like you are mine."

There are so many words Shane wants to tell him. Of how much time he spent, imagining moments that are exactly like this, of late morning sun basking the room in its warm light, and of Ilya, standing here, being with him, his scent, so familiar and close, and his touch grounding when he reaches out and brushes his knuckles against Shane's cheekbone.

"Yours," Shane is smiling, and he leans into Ilya's touch.

He used to imagine things like that, but now it is his reality, and Shane doesn't want to let it go. He nuzzles into Ilya's warm palm, and he almost purrs when his nose brushes against the insides of Ilya's wrists, where the curl of his scent is the strongest.

His leashes flutter, and he spots something dark cutting through Ilya's gaze, but, it is gone before Shane can put a word on it, and, in an instant, Ilya turns around and plates their breakfast, and pushes the scrambled egg, toast and a side of avocado under Shane's nose, with a low grunt "eat."

Ilya's cheeks are a little red and Shane's chest is warm knowing just how affected the alpha is by him.

Shane is watching him from the corner of his vision, and he feels like a schoolgirl with a crush whenever Ilya meets his gaze.

This is ridiculous. He blames it on his raging hormones, and Shane can't push down the pleasant tugging at the bottom of his stomach, when Ilya's scent grows thick and heavy coiling around him like a protective barrier.

The food is delicious, and they eat in a comfortable silence.

Shane tries to distract himself and pull his mind out of the gutter. He can hardly think of anything rational, when his eyes drop on Ilya's mouth or at the glimpse of his collarbones peaking through the neckline of his shirt. He imagines Ilya pinning him down against the counter with his arms wrapped around Shane, or his mouth sucking on the tender skin of the omega's neck, or how good it would feel if Ilya lowers on his knees and puts his mouth on Shane's—

"How was your flight back from Moscow?"

Get a grip, Hollander.

Ilya shrugs at the question. He doesn't look particularly thrilled to be telling Shane about home, and yet he retells everything with careful detail. About his father's illness, and the family dinner, and how angry his brother got, and how much he loathes going home.

Shane knows about Ilya's difficult relationship with his father, but, now, when he talks about his family, there is none of his persistent scowling, Ilya is calm almost as if he made peace with a deep part of himself that he never showed to anyone, not even Shane.

"I don't think I will go back there," Ilya says gravely, staring down at his plate nearly empty. "There is nothing left for me there. My place belongs next to you now."

Ilya's voice doesn't waver and Shane feels a warm pool in his stomach, which tends to happen, at all times, when Ilya speaks of him with such a possessive tone.

Of course, the idea of starting a family with Ilya has crossed Shane's mind before, but, it was always something fleeting, hardly taking any concrete shape, like a fantasy, but, now, with the raw way Ilya is looking at him, Shane knows he is absolutely certain about what he wants.

"You want me. As someone.. someone to stay with you for the rest of your life."

“Yes. I do,” Ilya doesn’t stutter and he reaches across the table to take Shane’s trembling palm in his own hand. “I meant every word. I want to claim you and be with you. I am tired of running away. It physically hurts staying apart from you, so if you let me, I want to show you how much I need you.”

Shane tries to breathe through his nose, but his heart is beating so fast, he is afraid it might jump out of his chest. His scent is strong and Shane is embarrassingly needy, feeling that even Ilya’s warm touch is not enough to calm the raging fire under his skin. He wants to feel Ilya’s palm caress his stomach, or rub against the swollen gland of his neck.

His mate, sitting so close, yet it feels like they have miles between them.

Shane lets out a low keening noise, his palm holding Ilya’s hand in a tight hold, and he is so wet between his thighs, and his—

“Shane?”

Ilya’s voice is laced with concern and Shane tries to figure out why his alpha sounds (and smells) so strange.

“Yeah?”

“Your, *fuck*, your chest, baby. I think you are leaking.”

Shane can’t hold back a mortified yelp when he looks down at his shirt. He is bright red and his face is hot when he notices the two small wet dots growing on his chest.

This is mortifying, and his mind scrambles trying to find an escape, but Ilya stands up and before Shane can run away and hide in his bedroom (or at least change into a dry shirt), Ilya pushes his way between Shane’s thighs and tilts his chin up so that Shane looks up at him with too-wide eyes.

“Does this happen often?” Ilya’s voice is low, and dangerous and Shane doesn’t know why it excites him so much.

He doesn’t really like doing *omegan* things in front of Ilya. Shane knows that the alpha loves it a bit too much, the nesting, and the scenting, and how dependent Shane grows on Ilya during his heats, but this is nothing like the force of instincts that took over his brain in the past.

His pregnancy really took a toll on Shane’s body, and now, in such close proximity to the alpha, it reacts in the most embarrassing ways.

“Not.. not *too* often,” Shane wants to protest, and wrap his hands around his chest to hide away, from Ilya’s staring but he can’t. Ilya is holding his arms, and he is so close that Shane simply cannot twist away from his grip. “I need to change Ilya. I’m all wet. It is very uncomfortable.”

He tries, but fails, to make his protest sound less like a whine. Ilya’s nostrils flare and Shane stills, alert by the looming body of the alpha. He tries to call the alpha, but he doesn’t get far,

his soft “Ilya-” getting lost in a muffled whimper.

“Do you want me to help you?”

“Help- help me?”

“Yeah. To get the milk out,” Ilya nods, like it is the most obvious thing in the world. “I can suck on your tits.”

Shane nearly passes out when he watches Ilya’s pupil dilate as they narrow down on the wet fabric of his shirt.

The alpha looks hungry. And it shouldn’t look as ridiculously hot as it does. Ilya’s scent is heavy, and Shane can taste its smoky aftertaste at the back of his throat.

He wants it, he thinks, desperately. He wants to feel the alpha’s mouth sucking on his chest, and Ilya’s hands tugging at the swollen flesh. He can feel himself leak more at the idea.

Ilya rumbles, low and predatory, and Shane startles awake from the vivid image.

“Yeah,” he hears himself say, like he is taking through a fog of heavy pleasure. What is it he is worried about again? He is almost shaking with need, but Ilya doesn’t move, waiting for Shane to say *something*. Shane swallows harshly, and he tilts his chin, baring his unmarked (*yet*) neck. “Will you take care of me, alpha?”

It appears, Ilya does not need much convincing, not when he presses his mouth against Shane’s lips, and, his hand finds a familiar path, under Shane’s t-shirt to brush carefully over his stomach and then press meanly against his swollen chest.

*

Shane is starving for the alpha’s touch. He knew it before, with all the restless nights he spent with a hand stuffed between his legs and images of Ilya flashing in his mind, and yet the nights they share together at the cottage are a proof good enough.

He simply cannot get enough of Ilya.

He hardly lets the alpha out of his sight. He blames his growing dependency on his pregnancy but he knows its is not entirely true.

The attraction he feels towards Ilya is not new, it is just his hormones, which are wrecking havoc on his body, that make his neediness ten times more amplified.

It was like a dam broke lose when Ilya made Shane cum just from his mouth latching on to his swollen tits. Shane thought he knew pleasure before, but he had never felt a stronger orgasm pulse through his body when Ilya sucked him dry, his chest overly sensitive to the touch and his eyes wet from spilled tears begging the alpha to never stop.

It feels like Shane is at the state of constant heat, and yet he remains lucid enough to eat the meals Ilya cooks for them and cuddle close, when they stay awake into the late hours of the

night.

“You should fuck me,” Shane mutters one of these nights. He is spent, sweaty and naked, but there there is still a buried need in his body demanding for more.

His head is resting on Ilya’s chest, and he purrs when he feels the alpha’s hand rubbing soothing circles around his stomach. *‘I remember when you were so flat,’* Ilya laughed when he kissed his belly button the other day, *‘but now you have such a pretty bump it makes me want to keep you pregnant forever’*.

Ilya tenses under him. “I don’t think it is a good idea.”

This is not a straight up *‘no’*. Shane thinks he can work with that.

He tilts his chin, giving the alpha his best clueless eyes, which Ilya likes to say make him look like a doe, although, words the alpha used were something like, ‘the deer, from that cartoon, you know, Bambi!’.

“Why?”

They have done pretty much anything apart from that. Ilya fucked his thighs, and his throat, gently at first, but when Shane convinced him he could take it, the alpha gave him the best throat fucking that the omega swallowed with pleased hums.

Ilya’s obsession with his growing breasts made Shane wants to constantly press his chest into Ilya’s waiting mouth. The alpha ate him out for hours, settled comfortably between the omega’s thighs, and pressing kisses against his stomach, but he is yet to give him his knot.

“I am worried about the baby,” the alpha replies tentatively, his eyes meeting Shane’s. “Don’t want to hurt you or the pup.”

Shane is torn between feeling smitten by his alpha’s carefulness and mild frustration. Sure, Ilya is worried, but Shane knows his body the best, he knows he can take him. He has no doubts that the itch in his core will subdue when the alpha will finally put his dick inside, but his alpha is too cautious and he truly adores him and the baby to do anything that could put both of them into the slightest bit of harm.

“I am sure we will both be fine,” Shane tries to soften his voice, nuzzling in the crook of the alpha’s neck.

Ilya is tense, but he doesn’t push Shane away, even when the omega is nearly straddling his lap. It takes him a bit of time, with his belly being in the way, but Shane manages to perch himself atop of the alpha’s thighs, looking down at his with his best hooded eyes.

“Come on. Think of how good it will feel,” Shane lowers his voice to a purr, “to feel me inside, to spill knowing that you bred me so well.”

Ilya’s nostrils flare dangerously but Shane is high on excitement and he knows that his alpha needs only the slightest push to cross over the thin line. He needs Shane too, the omega can fill it, and the alpha needs him badly, judging by the hardness swelling beneath his ass.

Shane bats his eyelashes in a way he hopes is seductive.

“Please. I need you, alpha.”

The words seem to push Ilya out of his haze. In an instant Shane is lying on his back, laughing, and Ilya is both gentle and persistent, when his teeth brush Shane’s throat and his cock is pressing against his wet entrance, and even when Ilya pushes inside and his teeth nearly breach the unclaimed mark on his neck, Shane feels exhilarating pleasure, his chest and his womb both worm, knowing that he is exactly where he wants to be.

*

“Mom wants us to have dinner with them tonight,” Shane says one afternoon, bathing under the shade, because it is too hot to be under the direct sun.

Ilya’s head pops out from behind the balcony doors, and soon the alpha steps out onto the patio, standing over Shane, the look on his face completely unreadable.

“She knows that I am here.”

Shane is not sure, if that is meant to come out as a question, but the alpha makes it sound like he is making a statement, so Shane nods. He told his mother about Ilya, almost as soon as he came to the cottage, but, he was selfishly trying to keep the alpha purely to himself.

He knows it is stupid, but there is so little time they shared when it is just the two of them, that Shane wants to treasure it as much as he can.

“Will you be okay with it? Stopping by their place in the evening?”

Shane’s heart is beating so fast, he is scared it might pop out of his ribcage. He hopes his scent is not betraying how nervous he is about Ilya’s answer. He doesn’t know why really, Ilya has been so good to him and they have been talking, really talking lately, about the birth of the pup in September and about how Shane wants to move to Ottawa for the time when he will be off during the season.

Ilya wants to be his mate. He wants to start a family with Shane. They want to live together.

Shane still can’t believe it. Everything feels like it is moving so fast, and yet the pieces of the puzzle fall together in perfect synchrony.

Ilya shrugs his shoulders and replies ‘why not’ to the idea of spending dinner at his parent’s house and Shane feels like a massive weight is lifted off his chest. Shane smiles and says they should probably leave by six, and Ilya suggests that he drives, even though Shane is in perfect condition to sit behind the wheel.

“We have to tell them after all,” Ilya says, joining Shane on his tanning bed. “About me moving to Canada.”

Shane worries his bottom lip, but he nods, pushing away a nervous feeling. “You really thought about it? Ottawa is very different from Boston.”

“I don’t care where I live,” Ilya’s hand is warm when he rubs Shane’s bare stomach, “as long as it's near you and the baby my home can be anywhere in the world.”

Shane’s heart skips a beat. He doesn’t think he can ever get used to Ilya saying such tender things with so much sincerity in his eyes. He nods and tries to hide his bush but the alpha sees it anyway and coos, kissing Shane’s warm cheeks.

It is only a ten-minute drive to his parents’ house, but Shane is a tight string of nerves the entire ride. If Ilya notices it he doesn’t show, and it is only the palm of Shane’s trembling thigh that keeps him grounded.

Shane tries to give Ilya clear directions, but when they arrive at the house, Shane sits quietly for a second trying to gather his breath.

He is not sure why he feels so nervous. Ilya already met his parents, and despite how disastrous the first visit was, the second time cannot go that badly.

Right?

“It will be okay,” Ilya tries to soothe him, but rubs circles over Shane’s knuckles. “Everything will be fine. I promise I will not leave that house until your mother accepts me as your mate.”

“I think she sort of did,” Shane laughs, slightly nervous. “I mean not entirely, but she won’t be so shocked seeing you this time.”

“Shane,” something in the way the alpha says his name makes Shane look up at him, “I am here. Your parents are here. Nothing bad will happen to you. I promise.”

Shane swallows a hard lump in his throat and nods. Ilya is right. He is safe. Nothing bad is happening to him. The familiar scent of pine wraps around him and Shane takes a deep inhale to let it swirl inside his lungs.

“Yeah,” he nods, tilting his chin a little to accept the warm kiss of the alpha on his mouth, “let’s go.”

There is a comforting scent of dinner spreading through the house when Shane walks in. Ilya follows him close behind, but they barely manage to get through the door when his mother greets them from the living room.

“You made it!”

Shane tries not to shy away when she hugs him, but he can’t hide from her embrace. “Hey, mum.”

“Hello to you too, Ilya,” Yuna smiles, although he hesitates to give Ilya the same sort of hug she embraced Shane with. “How are you?”

“I am well,” Ilya says, clearing his throat. “How are you doing, Yuna?”

It feels sort of surreal to watch his mother and Ilya make small talk. Without the barrier of hesitance between them, Yuna and Ilya actually tend to get along pretty well. Shane feels content just observing them, the two parts of his life, fitting so well together, that Shane's chest squeezes tight from simply watching them talk.

He can see it, clearly how much love the little pup he is carrying is going to receive, from the two alphas dotting on them. The family he or she is going to be born into, loving and protecting them. Even if the outside world will not be able to accept them, there is still a smaller world, that Shane created for himself, which will look after him and the pup no matter what. He can trust Ilya, his mother and his dad to surround him with so much love, that no hurtful things said by strangers will be able to touch him, and he will make sure to bring his child with that love too.

“Are we all set for the food?”

His father’s voice tears Shane away from his daydreaming and he blinks, stumbling. Ilya and his mother both look at him with equal concern and Shane is blaming his hormones for how full his heart feels.

“Yes. We can head to the table dad.”

His parents have an outdoor patio set up because the summer night air feels fresh and cool and even the buzzing of mosquitoes cannot distract Shane from his excitement. Dinner is smoked salmon and stuffed shells, and Shane mildly wonders how did his dad managed to cook all of it by himself.

Ilya sits beside him and Shane is almost instantly transported back to another time when he and his parents sat opposite each other, and, he had Ilya by his side. Things are different now, Shane reminds himself, and he can actually breathe with his whole chest without worrying about having a panic attack right in the middle of their dinner.

His parents are much more agreeable too. It is truly fascinating to watch them make an effort to get to know Ilya. Of course, Shane tells them a lot of things about the alpha, but, it is different when his mother asks Ilya about his favorite hockey player growing up, and his dad quizzes Ilya about Russian food.

It is sweet. The scene is so domestic Shane melts completely into the warm buzz in his head, feeling comforted by the familiar scents surrounding him.

“So have you given it much thought?”

Shane sort of loses track of the conversation and he blinks, when his mother asks Ilya bluntly, “What are your plans when Shane is going to have the baby?”

Shane nearly chokes on his food. He wants to scold her, telling her that she shouldn’t ask Ilya questions like this so bluntly, but Ilya puts his fork down and nods, seriously.

“I want to move in with Shane next month,” Ilya replies calmly as if he were expecting her to ask something like this. “Shane thinks he should live in Ottawa and I don’t want to be too far

away. Of course, the final decision is made by Shane, but I want us to talk to the media sometime next month. Which is why," Ilya takes a deep breath, but when he speaks he sounds certain and committed to his words, "I ask for your permission to become Shane's mate."

They spoke about it and yet it still feels surreal how easily the words slip off Ilya's tongue.

"I believe it is Shane who makes these decisions," his dad answers slowly, but he can't hide the pleased glimmer in his eyes. "If you and Shane are ready for this next step I don't think why me or his mom would be against it."

"I think it is important for Shane to hear your approval," Ilya notes, and Shane blushes because no matter how hard he tries to hide it, it is true. He does want his parents to like Ilya, because he wants them to see how special the alpha is, but, he also wants them, in their own way, to give blessings for their relationship.

"Well, I suppose we are all family now. I know how happy you make him, and if you made your decision to stay in his life, then we won't stand in your way," Yuna smiles and Shane's heart feels too large for his chest when she says, "Of course, we would love for Shane to be happy and loved. He clearly feels the same way about you, and as a mother, there is nothing more important for me than Shane's happiness. You have my permission, Ilya."

"Thanks mum," Shane hides a small smile behind his outgrown hair, his thighs bumping against Ilya's, and, he is suddenly warm everywhere, his skin tight, and, his stomach flipping in excitement, "that means a lot to me."

When's breath hitches when he finishes speaking, his breath hitches, and he feels a bump against the tight skin of his stomach. Of course, he felt the baby move before, but it is the first time when the force of the push makes Shane gasp in surprise.

"Everything okay?" Ilya's palm is on his and Shane meets his eyes with a smile.

"Yeah. Just the pup," he rubs a hand carefully over his bump, and, Shane joins, their fingers interlacing over a tiny patch of skin where the fabric of his shirt rode up on his belly, "feeling a bit active tonight."

Shane still can hardly wrap his head around the fact that he is going to meet them soon. He doesn't want to know the gender yet, but he is certain that he will love the pup no matter what. With his parents' support and with Ilya by his side, Shane doubts there is anything that could break the equilibrium he built inside himself.

Ilya holds his hand for the rest of the dinner, his palm warm and secure, and Shane finds that he doesn't want to let it go.

*

By the time they leave his parents' house, the sky is the darkest shade of indigo, and Shane can spot the stars shining from above. Yuna suggests that they stay overnight, but Ilya insists that he doesn't want to cause any trouble, and, the cottage is only a short ride away, and,

Shane suspects there is a hidden meaning behind the careful words the alpha picks, but, he doesn't want to dwell on it.

For the entire ride back, Ilya's leg is bumping up and down and Shane wonders what got his alpha so strung up. Shane feels a little tired, the delicious food he ate at his parents' place making him drowsy and pleasantly full, and the entire drive back to the cottage, he is trying his best not to doze off at the passenger seat.

"We are here," Ilya parks, and soon Shane walks behind him, his head nodding off as his blood turns warm with the thought of the hot shower and the familiar softness of his nest.

The routine feels familiar. Shane is absorbed with washing up and changing out of his clothes, failing to notice the tense alpha following him quietly behind, at every single step through the house.

"What is wrong?" Shane yawns when he settles under the comfortable weight of his duvet. Ilya stands in the doorway, chest bare, and wearing only the sweatpants that sit low at his hipbones. Shane wants to beckon the alpha close, wrap his hands around those wide shoulders and inhale his smoky scent but Ilya keeps standing by the door, his face twisted in a strange scowl. "Ilya."

"Shane," the alpha retorts, but he walks inside, as if waiting for the omega's permission to settle into the nest, which is stupid, since Shane never fails to make sure Ilya is welcome in it.

"Seriously. What is going on with you?" Shane sits up, his lower back pressing against the pillows. He wishes the alpha would stop acting so strangely and get into bed, so that he and Shane can cuddle before the omega falls into a deep sleep.

"I want to ask you something," Ilya blurts out after a stretch of long silence. Shane raises his eyebrows waiting patiently, and Ilya finally exhales. "Can I bite you?"

Shane blinks, and Ilya's eyes dark to the open stretch of skin between Shane's collarbone and his chin. "Bite me?"

"Yes," Ilya nods, "I want to put a claim on your neck. Please."

Shane wants to laugh at the alpha's timid expression but he doesn't because he knows it will only spook him away. Shane chooses to smirk instead, settling comfortably against the pillows, and lets out a soft humming noise. "Come here."

The alpha doesn't need much convincing. Shane opens his arms and in an instant, the omega huffs and snorts when he feels Ilya's weight pressing down on his, their skin on skin contact making Shane warm and elated. He is wearing only Ilya's shirt to bed, and when their shins touch Shane doesn't feel like letting the alpha go even for a second.

Ilya rumbles something incomprehensible into the crook of his neck, and soon Shane feels a trail of feather-light kisses peppering the column of his neck.

I love you. Gorgeous. Beautiful. My omega.

I love. You.

The alpha says those words, like a prayer and Shane believes him. He tilts his chin, letting the alpha graze the tender skin with his teeth, and Shane's breath gets stuck at his throat when he senses how close Ilya is to his gland.

"Please claim me alpha," Shane whispers, and, he is so wet, and needy, and, the alpha's weight presses so right between his thighs, being careful with his stomach, but also rubbing it gently, caressing Shane like he is something precious, "I love you."

"Mine," Shane hears before he feels the sharp teeth sink into his gland. A mating bond, so sharp and painful, but at the same time so perfect that Shane's eyes roll at the back of his head, his scent so overly sweet and warm swirling around the room.

He is purring, and the alpha keeps biting into his neck, his claim turning rough, but Shane bathes in this feeling. It feels so intimate, to have the alpha so close, and to be so aware of his scent and his body pressing on top of his own.

Shane wants to feel him inside, feel Ilya's knot with his teeth sinking into his neck, and the alpha only growls in excitement, sensing the omega's slick sliding between his thighs.

"Mine," the alpha growls, and Shane nods, tilting his chin to meet Ilya's lips.

"Yours," he replies, sincerely, and seals the words with a kiss.

*

August, 2016

Ilya doesn't care much for Ottawa. The city is boring and he can understand why Shane likes living here.

Shane's house is large. It stands isolated in the middle of the forest, and, when Ilya saw it for the first time he thought, that Shane truly loves spending as much time away from civilization as possible. There are three floors and five bedrooms, and Ilya finds himself growing used to being surrounded by Shane's scent. He likes the house, and he goes on long walks and runs down the forest trail towards the massive lake, which runs near, but apart from that there is not much to do. The city is a forty-minute car drive away, and Shane must enjoy it a lot, because he is incredibly peculiar about his privacy.

Shane keeps Ilya busy enough that the alpha doesn't have time to sit idly around the house.

They are putting together a nursery. Ilya spends most of his time building furniture, like he is some sort of Bob the Builder, starting with the baby crib, which takes nearly half of the baby's future room, and the dresser, which gets stocked up with diapers and all the many things the babies need, apparently.

With his pregnancy wearing him down, Shane hardly leaves the house, unless he needs to get some fresh air or stop by his parents' house. The only reason for him to head downtown these

days is when Shane has to attend his doctor's appointments. Ilya suggests he tags along but Shane freaks out so much that Ilya almost regrets giving him the idea.

"They will see you," Shane says, in that accusing way that never fails to make Ilya's stomach twist unpleasantly. Even after all these weeks they spent together, Shane is still anxious about the media, or the press, snapping a photo of them, but, honestly, Ilya is fed up with hiding. Shane has grown especially paranoid, since they came back from the cottage and settled into the city. Shane's house is on the outskirts of the town, and yet he grows worried every time he or Ilya leaves the house, to get groceries or run some errands. "Please, I know we talked about this but I don't think now is the right time."

"You will never think it is the right time," Ilya groans. He hates being the reason for Shane's distress but his mate is being silly. He is wearing Ilya's mark and he smells like the alpha from head to toe; there is hardly any hiding from the tabloids now that Ilya has moved to Ottawa and made every source outlet wonder about his sudden decision. "People will take pictures and talk no matter what you try to tell them. It's just the way they are."

Shane worries about the inside of his cheek. He is all dressed, ready to head out and yet when Ilya is about to sigh and go back to putting together the crib he exhales sharply through his nose. "You are right. It's just- these things were scary."

Ilya nods because he knows exactly what Shane is talking about. He hugs him, and they stand in the middle of their hallways, embracing for a long stretch of time.

"You don't have to do them alone. We are in this together, remember?"

Shane nods tentatively and slowly relaxes into Ilya's arms. The alpha takes his silence as a reluctant yes, when he asks: "Does this mean I can come to the appointment with you?"

Shane smiles and gives in, because he needs Ilya by his side, almost as much as Ilya needs to be present in the omega's life.

Getting used to the new routine is difficult. Ilya has to adjust his schedule, and he is grateful that Yuna and David are only a short ride away to help Shane with his needs. There is no denying that Shane is close to his due date, his stomach growing large and difficult to conceal, and no matter how flushed Shane gets when Ilya pays the bump increased attention, the omega never pushes him away.

He knows Ilya has a soft spot for him. Shane gets sweet and pliant, and even when he asks for some crazy food requests in the middle of the night, Ilya still drives half an hour down the road if Shane wants junk food from the closest fast food chain. He cannot say no to his mate.

Not even when Shane and he and Shane are having breakfast, and the omega casually says:

"Hayden is coming over for dinner tonight."

Ilya nearly chokes on his omelette. He should have known that sooner or later Shane would want to tell his friends, but, he did not expect to be told so bluntly about it in the middle of his breakfast. "Tonight?"

“Yeah,” Shane shrugs, “I sort of told him on the call that I am taking a break because some big changes are happening around me, and he honestly freaked out when I brought it up. I think he was worried I was dying or something,” Shane snorts, shaking his head. “Everyone is fine and healthy, but I said I will give him more details in person. I told him I met someone, too, and that I want to introduce them to him. I mean he will probably lose his shit when he sees me, but it's Hayden. He will come round to it eventually.”

Shane keeps talking entirely oblivious to Ilya’s tense body, sitting in front of him. “I can imagine he will probably be very pissed that I hid my pregnancy away from him for that long, but he will understand why I had to do it. It wasn’t easy for me, you know, to stay away from my friends. I keep thinking about the words you said yesterday, and, I think you are right, sooner or later we have to tell everyone about us, and, I don’t want to keep you or the pup a secret any longer.”

Ilya meets Shane’s eyes and his heart skips a bit. He never met Hayden, not outside of the rink at least, but if it is so important to Shane, Ilya can act his part.

“Of course,” he rises from his seat to take his and Shane’s empty plates to the sink. When he comes back Shane is strangely nervous but Ilya kisses him on the top of his head, and asks softly, “Do you want me to cook tonight?”

Ilya doesn’t know much about Hayden, but from the little times Shane spoke of him, he must mean a lot to the omega. Ilya has no idea why it turns his stomach to think that Hayden is close enough to dial Shane’s number and invite himself over to their house for dinner, but, Ilya tries to tell himself that it is not jealousy.

He is just.. protective.

He also doesn’t care if he makes a good impression or not. But Shane is so thrilled about tonight, and, he is practically buzzing with excitement about the idea that Hayden will meet Ilya (outside of the rink), that Ilya wants to make the night special for him. He gets the groceries and cooks, while Shane does some work in the nursery and takes a long nap in the afternoon.

The omega complains that he is getting lazy, but, Ilya thinks that it is natural for him to feel tired and rest more, especially being eight months pregnant. He does insist on setting up the table and Ilya likes having Shane close, doing the little domestic things, that make his chest grow warm.

Shane smells so good, of milk and something sweet, that Ilya can hardly focus on the meat he is frying in the pan, instead of wrapping his hands around Shane’s middle and nuzzling into the claiming bite on his neck.

Ilya loves mouthing at his claim, and judging by the coy scent coming off from Shane the omega bathes in the attention too. Swollen, and claimed, and it is all Ilya’s fault. He smiles in the crook of Shane’s neck, and, he can already imagine how wet the omega is between his thighs and how good his milk will feel when he sucks on the swollen breasts, hidden beneath the fabric of the long sleeve that Shane definitely took from Ilya, when the doorbell rings loudly across the apartment.

“Hayden!” Shane exclaims, gently pushing Ilya’s head away from his neck, and rushing across the hallway to get the door.

Ilya huffs but he tells himself to calm down. Be nice and pleasant, even if that means having to tolerate the presence of another alpha in his den who is not a part of his family.

“Oh God, Shane!” the voice exclaims loudly enough to make Ilya flinch, “wow, I mean- this is, you are so-!”

“Yes, yes, he is growing bigger by the day,” Ilya walks slowly round the corner, and if Pike’s expression was of cheerful surprise before it definitely drops into something stunned when he meets Ilya’s eyes, “hello, Hayden.”

“Come inside,” Shane ushers the frozen alpha inside, Hayden’s scent a strong mix of worry and surprise, when Shane closes the door behind him. “Hayden this is Ilya. I know you guys have met, but Ilya is also that person I was telling you on the phone about.”

Hayden nearly chokes on his words. His eyes don’t know where to settle, on Shane’s stomach or on Ilya, who is leaning over the door frame, wearily watching the foreign alpha. “Your boyfriend?”

“My mate,” Shane corrects him with a nod, a small smile tugging at his lips. “I hope you are hungry. Ilya is a great cook. I tried to help but he really takes a lot of control in the kitchen.”

“Does he,” Hayden mutters but when he walks past Ilya he nods curtly even if the suspension doesn’t leave his eyes. “Shane this is- I mean you are pregnant! I thought, fuck, when you took a season off I was worried it had something to do with your health but this-,” Hayden’s eyes grow comically large when he looks at Shane, “this is, I mean, I never even thought about you with a baby, I mean, congratulations! I can’t believe I didn’t realize it sooner.”

Hayden is loud and Ilya doesn’t really know how to feel about it. Shane turns into a soft, giggling mess when he is around him, and proceeds to tell Hayden how hard it was to keep it a secret and how sorry Shane is for not telling Hayden soon, the alpha doesn’t fret and only nods warmly and gives Shane a long hug that makes Ilya almost roll his eyes.

“I understand. I wish you had told me of course, but I know how difficult these past months must have been for you.”

“Mom and Dad have been great. And also Ilya. I don’t think I would have done it without him.”

Hayden’s mouth falls open. You can see the gears twisting in his head, just from thinking hard about the idea of Shane and Ilya together. When he turns to Ilya, he can see for the first time a spark of warning in his eyes.

“Right. How long did you guys.. I mean.. this looks serious.”

“I think it happened in Los Angeles,” Shane stutters, before Ilya gets to speak. Shane leans back against the chair, his fingers brushing the stretched fabric of the shirt against his belly.

“My heat broke, and Ilya and I have spent it together. We were seeing each other before, for almost five years, but-”

“There were moments before that too,” Ilya notices when Shane grows quiet, “when Shane left his scent matches and I scented him before the awards ceremony, and when he asked for my clothes for his nest I gave it to him. Shane has been in my life for so long it feels hard to imagine it without him.”

“We had to keep it a secret,” Shane tells Hayden whose stunned expression adds to Ilya’s amusement, “because I know it is dangerous. Omegas are still treated harshly in sport, and I wanted, still do, be the best. I hated any attraction to my gender, but Ilya never treated me as less than I am. He always saw me as his equal. I could let my guard down around him and I trusted him. So when I got pregnant, I guess I knew, instinctively that I should keep the pup, even if neither of us planned for it to happen that way.”

“And your parents know?” Hayden asked quietly, his eyes fixed on Ilya holding Shane’s hand over his bump.

“Yeah,” Shane nods, his voice a little wet, and Ilya hums, his thumb brushing over the knuckles of Shane’s hands. “We told them back in spring. They were a little hesitant, you know, with the rivalry and all, but, Ilya and I have not been seeing each other as rivals for a long time. They really do like Ilya now. He stayed with me at the cottage for the summer.”

“And I plan to stay in Ottawa now,” Ilya says, his voice sombre. “I am serious about Shane. I love him and I want to be with him and raise a pup with him. I never doubted my decisions, and I won’t do anything to make him doubt how much he means to me.”

Hayden is silent but he grows more relaxed, his scent mellow. “Thank you for telling me. Seriously. I mean.. fuck, Shane are you crying?”

“No,” Shane replies, but there is no denying the welling in his eyes, “it's just the hormones! Sorry. I get so pent up these days,” Shane laughs, and wipes the corner of his eyes with the back of his hand. “I am just grateful you are here, Hayden.”

“You know I will be here always. If you have not decided on the godfather I can definitely take that role,” Hayden smiles sincerely and Ilya cannot hold back a grin when he sees Shane bursting into a soft laughter.

“We have not told the media yet,” Ilya says quietly, when Shane goes back to the kitchen to fetch the dessert from the fridge, “because Shane cannot be stressed about anything, but people still talk. There are pictures of us together, and with me moving to Ottawa, everything will eventually come to the surface.”

“I know,” Hayden nods, his voice hushed. “Whatever you guys need from me I will always be there.”

Ilya hums. Yuna thinks it is best to release the statement after the baby is born, and Ilya agrees. Perhaps in a couple of months, when Shane has recovered from the pregnancy they

can announce it to the world. For now, even having support from his friends and his parents is enough to keep the omega happy, and that is all that matters to Ilya.

“Sorry the ice cream melted a little, but I also have donuts! Ilya got them from the bakery down the street. Help yourself!”

Ilya smiles, when Shane sits down, and lets himself be carried away by Hayden’s and his omega’s idle chatter, and, he watches Shane smile, and, beam, his cheeks warm and rosy, an,d when he puts the spoon before Ilya’s mouth to let him try the ice cream he brought to the table, Ilya eats from it, eagerly.

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Hayden stays until around ten, and then Ilya tries to shoo him away because he knows how much Shane needs his beauty sleep. Shane doesn’t tend to say ‘no’ to Hayden often, but, he looks so happy to have his friend and catch up with the latest news regarding his team that Ilya doesn’t have it in his heart to force him out.

It is only when Shane starts yawning that Hayden gets the sign that he should probably head out.

“I mean it. Let me know if you need any help. Having a baby is tough, trust me, I have about five of them.”

“You have three,” Shane laughs, but he is blushing, so the words must mean a lot to him. “But yeah. I promise you will be the first person I will ask if I need help raising a baby.”

Ilya suggests he will help Hayden on his way out because it is late and Shane is getting tired judging by the frequent yawns and the way he slowly nods when Hayden stands up to get his shoes and coat.

“I can help with cleaning up,” he tries to say, but Ilya shakes his head.

“It's okay. I got it,” Hayden gives Ilya a nod but he keeps lingering at the door, almost like he has something on his mind and Ilya raises his brows. “What is it?”

“Well, I just.. I don’t want to sound like a jerk because I am not,” Hayden squirms and Ilya raises his brows. He wishes Pike would hurry, because Ilya has dishes to do and a kitchen to clean, and a pregnant mate to tuck into bed, “but I really care about Shane. And I know you do too, but if anything bad ever happens to him.. I will literally hunt you down Rozanov.”

Ilya tilts his chin. His scent is measured but Pike still tenses when Ilya speaks to him. “I will always look after Shane. And I wouldn’t let anything happen to him or our pup. I can promise you that.”

Pike clears his throat and nods. “Tell him I said good night.”

“Bye-bye Pike,” Ilya says and closes the door. He snorts and when he comes back to the living room, Shane is sprawled on the couch, his stomach absently rubbing the stomach and his eyes fixed on the phone screen.

“Did Hayden want something?”

“No,” Ilya shrugs. He plants on the couch, even when Shane makes a sort of muffled noise, when Ilya leans his head on his lap. “You have good friends.”

“I am happy he didn’t freak out too much when he saw you,” Shane mutters, his fingers brushing through Ilya’s hair. “I sort of feel bad about not telling him sooner but I am glad he understands that it wasn’t really a good option at the start.”

Ilya hums. He knows how paranoid Shane can be about those things. He pushed Ilya away just because he was in his head too much, it is no wonder it took him time to slowly come out to his friends and family too.

“I was thinking,” Shane says slowly, “if you wanted to talk about the baby names. I realized we keep calling the baby ‘pup’, but we need to have some sort of idea on the name, when they are born.”

Oh. Ilya hums, “I haven’t thought about it.”

“Right. But say,” Shane’s grip tense in his hair and Ilya winces, “if you had to pick a boy’s name and a girl’s name. Do you have any ideas?”

“Are you looking at baby names right now?” Ilya realizes, but when he takes a glance at Shane, the omega looks almost guilty up from his phone and Ilya huffs. “Figured. I don’t know, I like all names. Anya has a nice sound to it. For a boy Misha or Alex, are both decent I suppose.”

“But do you have a preference?” Shane asks, and it almost feels like there is a hidden meaning behind those words. “Do you.. Do you want the pup to have a Russian name?”

“I don’t mind. It would be nice, I guess, but it could be anything to be honest. A Canadian name or a Japanese name,” Ilya thinks, “do you have one in mind?”

He probably does. Ilya imagines Shane has a spreadsheet of all the names he can choose from, so when Shane keeps silent, his eyebrows pointedly raised, Ilya guesses he is right.

“I like Mila,” Ilya gives in, after a while. “For a girl. And I will stick with Misha if it is a boy.”

“Thank you,” Shane says, and he means it, leaning down to kiss Ilya on his cheek. “For telling me. I cannot wait to meet them soon.”

Ilya nods. Just a couple more weeks. Ilya can’t believe he will hold the baby so soon, and, get to hear the sound of their heartbeat. He leans into Shane’s touch and lets his eyes rest.

The cleaning up can wait. He wants to savor the feeling of Shane’s scent and enjoy the gentle way he is playing with the curly strands of his hair just a little while longer.

Chapter 5: September-November

September, 2016

The girl was born on September 18th, 2016.

She is a tiny bundle of joy and Shane cries when he holds her in his arms for the first time.

Her weight is both light and heavy. Shane is anxious because she won't stop crying, but, when she calms down and falls asleep, her chubby cheeks pressing against his breast, Shane's heart starts beating so fast he is afraid it might explode.

She is the most beautiful thing in the world, Shane thinks, studying her sleeping face. Her lashes are long and her mouth is a pink pout, tuft of black hair soft like feathers on her little head.

She is perfect.

His little treasure.

Shane is barely awake, too tired to hold his eyes open, but he can't stop looking at the bundle in his arms. She is resting now, her belly full, and Shane should rest too, but he can't look away, too afraid of *something*. His anxiety is groundless but Shane cannot put Mila down ever since she was born. He craves to feel her in his arms, her weight a solid reminder that she is his, and Ilya's, and that their little pup is truly *here*.

The nurse tells Shane that he needs to rest, and that the baby is not going away she will stay just beside him, all wrapped up in her blankets and Shane lets himself fall into a dream.

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It is sunny when he wakes up, so it must be already later in the afternoon. He hears soft cooing noises beside his bed, and he smiles even with his eyes still closed.

It is the distinctive scent that reaches him first. The words that follow turn his cheeks warm.

"Who is Papa's girl? Look at you, eyes like you mama's but I know you got that little mouth from me," the crooning is so gentle that it makes Shane's chest squeeze tight. He turns his head, the light soft through the pushed curtains of the windows, and it falls directly on the standing figure, holding a cooing bundle of fabric to his chest.

"We should let your mama rest," Ilya whispers, and something about the way the words slip naturally off his tongue turns Shane into a puddle on the bed. He says 'mamma' in such a distinctive Russian accent that it almost makes Shane laugh, but instead he lets out a soft snort that is enough of a sign to show that he is awake.

Ilya's head turns comically fast. "Oh. Shit. Sorry. Were we too loud?"

Shane yawns. He still feels drowsy, but he slowly sits by the pillows, his eyes adjusting to the light around him. Ilya is watching him like a hawk, the baby secured safely in his arms.

This must be their first time meeting, Shane realizes softly.

He can't get enough of the picture in front of him, the man he is in love with, holding the little pup in his arms, being so careful and tender with her that Shane cannot comprehend how much he needs to have this in his life.

"Hey," Shane says, and he smiles when Ilya sits down on the bed with the baby pressed against his solid chest. He should probably feed her soon, but he doesn't want to take her away from Ilya's hands, not when she is being so sweet and quiet in his grasp. "Mila."

"Yeah," Ilya nods, sitting carefully on the side of the bed. "She is gorgeous. Just like you."

"Just like us," Shane says, and immediately flushes. Ilya is smiling down at Mila's blubbering sounds. She is watching Ilya with her large black curious eyes, so calm and peaceful, as if she already knows that her father is here and that, she is safe in his arms. Ilya lulls to her softly and they are talking to each other, or at least that's what it looks like to Shane, Ilya talking in Russian and Mila replying in newborn's gibberish.

It is still hard to wrap his head around the idea that this view is his reality. Shane still feels like he is dreaming. "I can't believe she is really here."

"Our pup," Ilya nods, his scent soft. "Two more days and I can take you both home."

Shane can't wait. The hospital, with its sterilized scents, is starting to make his nerves tight as a string.

Ilya's voice turns serious. "Do you need anything? I know you have your bag, but I can bring extra stuff if you need it."

Ilya was getting ready for Shane to go into labour almost as if he was preparing for war. He had an extra duffel bag packed with Shane's clothes, and with his toiletries, in case he had to rush to the hospital. He kept asking Shane how he was feeling and he had to look up what to do if Shane's water broke in the middle of the night. By the time the end of the month was nearing, Shane kept laughing, because he was strangely calm, and the alpha was pacing around their apartment, as if it were he, who was going to give birth, and not Shane.

It was definitely a stressful month for both of them. Ilya wanted to make sure everything would go smoothly, but, it was late afternoon when Shane realized that his contractions were shortening, and, after they rushed to the hospital, Shane did not give birth until three hours later in the early morning of the following day.

Ilya was outside waiting with Yuna, but Shane was so exhausted that he did not get to see the alpha until a full day later. The pup, Mila, was asleep, so Ilya only watched her quietly, with an expression so soft that Shane will hold it in his heart for the rest of his life.

“It is fine. We have everything we need, don’t we?” Shane reaches out to brush Mila’s cheeks, and she responds with a soft sucking noise. “She eats well, the doctor says, but I am worried I might be overfeeding her. She is just small and fragile. I never know what to do when she cries.”

“Perhaps it is the hospital. She will feel better once you get her to your nest. The familiar scents and all. She will love her little crib.”

“Of course she would. Daddy spent a whole month making it,” Shane laughs, and Ilya rolls his eyes, his face flushing.

Mila makes a soft sound, and Shane reaches out his arms to take her. Ilya watches as Shane tries to undo the buttons on his slipping shirt, and brings the mouth of the baby to his swollen chest. Breastfeeding is still so new to him, and Shane is afraid to do it wrong, but, even in the hospital bed, it feels easier, because he is surrounded by his alpha’s sent. Ilya’s palm rubs soothing circles over the blanket, and Shane relaxes into the touch.

Mila starts sucking on his tit slowly and Shane slowly exhales. “Two days feel so long.”

“They will go by in a blink,” Ilya says. “You won’t even notice.”

Ilya is looking at both of them, his expression tender. He is reaching for his phone, and Shane frowns slightly confused when he feels the camera pointed at him. “I want to remember you both like this.”

Shane always gets shy when someone takes his pictures which is odd for someone who spent nearly his whole adult life in front of the camera. But Ilya has grown incredibly fond of taking snapshots of Shane, especially during his last month of pregnancy. He is not surprised that Ilya is keen on taking one now, even with Shane looking disheveled from the nap, and the pup sucking tenderly at his breast.

Ilya hums, when he puts his phone away, and smiles, his eyes glimmering. “Can’t wait to bring you home. The house is lonely without you.”

Shane melts when Ilya leans down to press a soft kiss against Shane’s lips, which he accepts with a sigh. Mila makes a soft whimpering noise, getting distracted and turning her head away to meet Ilya’s eyes, and Shane laughs.

“Guess she needs her daddy’s kiss too,” and Ilya nods, his face all seriousness, when he presses his lips against the chubby cheek, and Shane’s heart has never felt so full.

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October, 2016

Having a baby is like living inside a hurricane, Shane decides after having Mila for only one month. It is disorienting. Shane feels, like he needs to be at five different places at the same time.

Ilya is away in Boston for the game and Shane tries to pretend that he has it all together without needing his alpha's help. He knows he can call his mom and dad and in a second they will be right at his doorstep but calling them every single day because he doesn't know what to do when Mila is crying feels ridiculous.

And she cries. A lot.

Shane is running out of options. He failed at feeding, and he tried to make her go to sleep, he played with her favorite toys, and it seems the only thing that calmed her down was lying in his nest, surrounded by Shane's scent, so now he is taking a two-hour-long nap with the baby, without being able to move and finish doing the laundry.

Ilya is supposed to arrive tonight, but, he has yet to text Shane to let him know if he managed to get on the flight back to Ottawa. It is snowing heavily in Michigan, and Shane saw that a bunch of flights got cancelled or delayed, so he doesn't know if Ilya is even going to get home tonight.

Mila looks, like she is deep asleep so Shane tries to get up without bothering her.

It doesn't fail to amaze him how in a span of a month his baby grew so much. She is lying on her stomach, holding her blanket and plush teddy tightly in her little hands, and, Shane had to physically force himself to stay away, or he would spend his entire day cocooned in her scent, and, he had so many things to do.

He tries to focus on doing laundry and the dishes, when his phone rings. Shane rushes to pick it up and he exhales softly when Ilya's name pops up.

"Hey," Ilya's voice sounds raspy through the speakers and Shane can tell that he is exhausted. "This is bullshit. The flight is cancelled."

Shane leans against the kitchen counter, his phone pressed against his cheek. He sort of expected that, with the snowstorm and everything, but it still makes him sigh heavily.

"Can you catch one tomorrow morning?"

"Fuck yeah. I am not spending another day in here," Ilya was gone for a week in cold Michigan, and it was only his luck that the snowstorm happened on the last day of his stay. It makes sense why he is eager to get home. "How are you? How is Mila?"

Shane closes his eyes. He is exhausted, but he cannot say that, because it will make Ilya worry. Ilya has already cut back on a lot of games this season, and despite how much Ilya says Shane shouldn't worry about it, he simply can't. Ilya is the captain, his responsibilities lie with his team, and Shane should pull him away from it.

And yet he selfishly wants Ilya here, in Ottawa, with him.

"We are good," Shane smiles tentatively into the speaker, "just put her to down for a nap. I think we will take a short walk before dinner and cook bolognese with meatballs tonight. Nothing too exciting."

Ilya is breathing heavily on the other line, and Shane doesn't like the long stretch of silence. "I wish I were there with you."

"You will arrive tomorrow."

"No I mean.. I am thinking of taking the season off. At least till January. I tried to do this, but fuck Shane, I don't think I can."

Shane tries not to let worry show in his voice. Ilya's contract is not up until the end of this year, and he doesn't like how stressed Ilya sounds on the other side of the line. He tries to be reasonable but he can hardly conceal the worry in his voice. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," Ilya takes a deep breath, "I need to be there, with you. I feel like an asshole leaving you two behind and I hate being gone for even a week. I can't concentrate on the game, nothing matters, I just keep thinking of you. Please, at least until we get used to parenting on our own. I think I should focus on the only priority in my life. My family."

Shane's voice is trembling when he nods even when there is no one to see it. "We will talk about it tomorrow. You are tired and you want to get home. I understand but it is a big decision to make, Ilya. Alright? I don't want you to do anything you might regret."

"Shane," the omega tenses because he knows Ilya becomes deathly serious when he uses this tone with him, "there is not a single decision I regret when it comes to you or Mila. I would have hoped you learnt that by now."

Shane lets out a long breath. "I know, Ilya. Come home soon. We miss you."

"I miss you too baby. Kiss Mila for me, please."

Shane does. His heart beats a little faster when he turns off his phone, but the stupid smile does not fall off his face the entire evening until he settles into bed.

*

Shane is dreaming that something is moving on top of him. He is sleeping so poorly these days, without Ilya's familiar scent to envelop him that he grew sensitive to the smallest changes around him.

The room is dark, and Shane makes a soft whine when he smells the familiar notes of musk and pine and he frowns because Ilya shouldn't be here until tomorrow.

"Shush," the alpha nuzzles into his neck. "Sorry. Didn't mean to wake you."

Shane's voice is rough from waking up so abruptly. "Ilya?"

"It's me. Go back to sleep. I am sorry, I wanted to sleep on the couch, but you smelled so good I wanted to be with you."

"What happened to your flight?" Shane tries to get up, leaning back against his elbows, but Ilya pushes him down, his arm a heavy weight across his chest. "I thought everything got

cancelled."

"I have my ways," Ilya kisses him on the temple, "the pup is asleep?"

"Yeah," Shane yawns and falls back against the pillows. He is too tired to be figuring things out and his chest feels swollen so he lets out a pleasant moan when Ilya's fingers grip the flesh over the fabric of his t-shirt. "Wait- Ilya.."

He is wet between his thighs too. It was embarrassing because Shane thought he needed more time to recover, but, he felt so needy and wound up after the conversation with Ilya. He didn't know what possessed him at the moment but once Mila fell asleep in the room beside his, he reached for the deepest part of his drawer to pull out his vibrator. It is pink and discreet, something that Shane didn't use often, but, he helped himself to come on it before falling asleep, and, now when Ilya's mouth traces the curve of his neck, and his clever fingers find a way between the omega's legs he can practically taste the smirk on his face.

"Did you really miss Daddy so much, baby?"

"Don't call yourself that," Shane groans, but his heartbeat is embarrassingly loud and he doesn't want to think about the reason why. Ilya's fingers gather the slink gathering between his thighs and when he presses inside Shane can't hold back a needy whine, "Ilya."

"I am here, my love. Not going anywhere I promise."

The alpha was only gone for a week but this was the longest they had been apart since July and Shane feels like an eternity has passed since they last saw each other. He doesn't want to go through the separation again.

He bathes in the familiar scent around him, and he savors the weight of Ilya's hands on his body. They have been so busy, raising the pup and taking care of the apartment, and with Ilya's games, Shane feels like it has been forever since they last touched each other.

Ilya's kisses turn his head heavy but Shane is holding the alpha close, not willing to let even an inch of their skin stop them from touching.

"Please fuck me," Shane begs, and Ilya doesn't keep him waiting. It feels too much, and perfectly overwhelming to come together for the first time in two months, and Shane forgot how good it feels to have Ilya spread him apart.

Ilya doesn't stop even when Shane's moans turn into soft mewls, and, he kisses him so hard, it leaves Shane breathless, and it feels like he is making a promise, that Shane knows, his alpha is intending to keep.

*

November, 2016

Ilya is sweating bullets in his jacket and Mila is starting to make soft whimpering noises in her stroller which are fueling Ilya's irritation. "I can't find her hat!"

“It is in the second drawer,” Shane shouts back from upstairs and Ilya tries to look for it, while Mila, all bundled up and warm, is growing impatient with Ilya’s meddling. The longer Ilya keeps looking for the damn hat, the faster she loses her temper, and soon there is a whole lot of crying coming from the doorway and Ilya almost curses out loud.

They cannot go on a walk without her hat.

It is cold in Ottawa, autumn ending far too quickly, and the first, fresh layer of snow fell upon them just two nights ago. It is almost just as cold as it is back in Russia. Ilya is getting overstimulated from the combination of the layers of his heat tech clinging tightly to his skin, and the heaviness of his jacket. He can’t be bothered to take it off.

Finding a hat should be a two-second thing but instead it is taking longer than a minute.

Mila’s crying is growing louder, and Ilya still cannot find the damn hat.

“Did you find it?” Shane asks, tying up his scarf. He looks unbothered by all the whimpering Mila makes, and Ilya is jealous of his composure.

Ilya nods, picking up the grey hat with a little pom pom on it. Shane’s tranquil facade crumbles almost instantly as he looks at the item in Ilya’s hands. “No, Ilya, this one is her going-out hat, the going on a walk hat is red, the one with the teddy on it.”

Ilya’s eyelid twitches. “There are ten different hats. How am I supposed to know which one is the right one?”

“Because they are all different! This one is too thick, and she will always try to tug it off, so I make her wear the red one because it has strings and she doesn’t pull it off as easily,” Shane explains, as if it is the most obvious thing in the world.

Ilya doesn’t know if he is a bad parent or if Shane is overthinking it but he doesn’t argue.

“The red hat is,” he grumbles, and they finally manage to leave the house, before Ilya would actually explode in his stuffy puffer. Mila stops crying when they step outside, so perhaps, she was frustrated with the heat too.

She is bundled up like Shane is sending her to the North Pole, only her chubby cheeks are visible from the layers of clothing wrapped around her.

Mila has more winter coats than Ilya ever owned in his life, and he feels slightly lightheaded thinking about it. Shane likes to take control of the things she wears, or the toys she plays with. Ilya keeps losing track of the different strollers and interactive toys that keep appearing, as if out of thin air, in their house.

Ilya tries to remember his own childhood, the toys he used to have or the clothes that he used to wear, but it doesn’t come even close to the way Shane spoils Mila. Ilya doesn’t mind it, but sometimes, even he gets overwhelmed with how fast things are changing.

The two months he was away put a gap between him and Mila, and he was stunned to realize, how fast toddlers can grow in such a short time. She is needy, demanding Shane’s attention,

and Ilya feels like a bad mate for not realizing that he needed to be there too, to help Shane lift the burden off his shoulders.

Shane is being incredibly patient with him and Ilya feels grateful. He doesn't stop him from having alone time with Mila, and Shane gets excited every time Ilya asks if he can put her to bed or take her along on one of his walks.

Even simple things like changing diapers or bathing make Ilya feel afraid like he is doing something wrong. Shane jokes saying that he is scared of Mila, which is not true, he loves her, but sometimes he does get worried around her, as if he is anxious he might fuck up if he makes a mistake in getting her dressed or holding her.

Shane suggested taking it slow but it is easy for him to say. He is perfect. A perfect mother, a perfect omega. When Mila cries he always knows a way to make her laugh, or, when he doesn't want to go to sleep Shane lulls her to bed with practiced ease.

Ilya takes Mila on walks these days. Their neighborhood is pretty quiet, and Ilya likes going on slow jogs while pushing the stroller ahead of him. He started looking forward to those moments, just him and the pup, walking across the trails in their park. Shane comes along sometimes, but Ilya knows he feels grateful too, because with Mila it is hard for him to carve out the time Shane could spend by himself.

Building a routine is important. It is difficult, Ilya won't lie, but he feels that they managed to make the most of it, one day at a time.

"Mum thinks we should do something fun for Christmas," Shane says as they start walking down the familiar trail. The air is chilly, but it is finally sunny, the golden light of late afternoon settling over the snowed-in branches of the pine trees around them. "We could take a little trip down the country. She thinks the West Coast is the best, because it doesn't snow there as much. The climate is softer and better for the baby."

"West Coast?" Ilya asks, because he doesn't travel across Canada that often, not for fun anyway. He has lots of free time now so he doesn't see how it would be a bad idea to take a little family trip.

"Yeah. Vancouver, perhaps, and maybe Victoria? We could rent a cabin up in Whistler for the holidays. The mountain air could be good for us. And the ocean is near which is nice," Shan nods. "What do you think?"

Ilya pushes the stroller down the snowed-in paths. Shane's cheeks are rosy and pink and Ilya leans down to press a kiss on them. "I think it's a good plan. Vancouver is nice. Good food."

Shane blushes hard and hides his face in the collar of his puffer. He looks so young like that, Ilya thinks, and he is reminded violently of the time he saw Shane for the first time. He looked almost the same, with his beanie tugged down his head and his puffer jacket zipped up to the top, cheeks flushed and eyes shining with a challenge that Ilya could not help but accept.

He can't believe that was nearly ten years ago.

Shane is talking about Christmas and New Year's, and how they could also start thinking about renovating Mila's room because she is growing fast and needs more space. The third floor in their house is empty so it would be good to invest in another children's bedroom, just in case. Shane's little hints are cute, and he is shy when he mentions styling that it would be nice to have more room if their little family keeps growing and Ilya can't hold back but looks smug.

"I can keep you round and pregnant forever baby," but Shane rolls his eyes, but he doesn't look like he is against it at all.

"Maybe in a couple of years," he says softly, and Ilya agrees.

Breaking the contract a full year before it expired fired a whole lot of news in the media. Ilya doesn't regret his decision. His only wish is that he had probably done it sooner rather than so early into the new season. He is technically unemployed right now, and he should probably start looking for a new team, if one would take him after all the drama he went through last month.

Ilya had to pay a fat fine, but he would do it again if that meant staying with Shane until they both decided to get back into playing. Getting on the private jet in Michigan last month during the snowstorm to get to Shane was his last straw, so Ilya knew it was the best for him to move to Ottawa permanently so he won't let down the team or his mate.

For Ilya, it might take a while to find a good team, but Shane does want to get back into it by the next season, so perhaps they might return to their version of 'normal'. The media is still raving about their mating and about the pup, but Ilya doesn't want to go down that rabbit hole. He trusts Yuna to handle the media for Shane, and, she does a splendid job keeping him out of the crossfire, and Ilya feels incredibly grateful to her for that.

"The sun is setting," Shane says softly, when they walk down to the lake. Ilya hums, watching it across the water. The light is soft and golden, and Ilya is so fixed on it that he startles a little when Shane leans his head on his shoulder. "Looks pretty.

Ilya hums. Mils is fast asleep. Shane's arms brush him and Ilya takes his palm in his hand.

"I love you," Ilya says bringing Shane's hand to his lips and kissing the back of his palm. "I know things are difficult right now. But we can go through this together, I promise."

"I know," Shane smiles, "I honestly thought it would get worse. But with you and mom, I sort of.. I feel very taken care of. And I want Mila to feel that way too. I want her to never worry about anything, and even if she does, I want her to know that we are always going to be there for her."

"You are a good parent, Shane," Ilya tells him and he means it, but he is surprised when Shane kisses him on the lips and whispers back, "You are the best dad Mila could ask for."

He doesn't know why his heart skips a beat when he hears it. Ilya doubts himself all the time, if he is doing a good enough job, if he is a good mate or a good dad, and, he sometimes lies

awake at night thinking what if he fucks everything up, but, Shane is so good to him, he never wants to lose the life they keep building together.

“I love you,” Shane says and Ilya nods. His eyes feel itchy, but he ignores it.

The sun goes down, and the cold November air hits his face, but Ilya doesn’t feel its bite, only the soft, glowing warmth spreading in his stomach.

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