

I love you over and over again

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I love you over and over again

by [azraelriego](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander loves two things: hockey and his infuriatingly clingy husband.

When Ilya slams into an unexpected rut on the ice, Shane's the only one who can get him home before things turn feral.

What starts as a very intense, very ill-timed rut turns into late-night guilt, broken pride, and an impossible wish for a family Shane will never be able to carry—until a specialist, an ultrasound, and a tiny heartbeat say otherwise.

Notes

I previously wrote a RWRB x Heated Rivalry crossover where these two had a brief cameo, but I realized I wasn't ready to let them go yet. I just had to write a one-shot focused entirely on them and baby Wyatt. 🙄

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

Shane wakes up before his alarm, which is typical. What isn't typical is the heavy weight pinning him to the mattress. Ilya is sprawled halfway across him, his face buried in the crook of Shane's neck. He radiates heat like a furnace, which is nice in the drafty Ottawa winter, but less nice when Shane needs to pee. Shane tries to shift, just an inch, but Ilya lets out a low, warning rumble in his chest and tightens his grip.

"Don't," Ilya mumbles against Shane's skin.

"I have to get up," Shane says. "We have practice."

"Practice is stupid."

"You love practice."

"I love sleep." Ilya takes a deep, loud inhale, nosing right at the scent gland behind Shane's ear. It is a possessive, instinctive thing—scent marking. He does it every morning, like he has to remind the rest of the Centaurs's roster that Shane belongs to him before they even leave the house.

Shane rolls his eyes at the ceiling, but he doesn't push him away. He runs his hand through Ilya's messy curls. "You're clingy today."

"I am affectionate. You are cold and unfeeling." Ilya rubs his cheek against Shane's neck one last time, coating him in that distinct scent of dark roast coffee, before finally rolling away.

Shane shivers at the loss of contact. The air in the bedroom feels heavy, though. Thick. It smells like Ilya, but amplified.

Downstairs, Shane makes the coffee because Ilya's version of coffee is essentially sludge, and Ilya makes the oatmeal because Shane always burns it.

It is everything Shane has ever wanted. No more hiding in hotels. No more sneaking around. They drive to the rink together in Shane's Jeep Cherokee, they play on the same line, and they come home to the same house. It is perfect.

Except Ilya is weirdly quiet in the car.

Usually, Ilya spends the drive to the Canadian Tire Centre chirping Shane about his driving or complaining about the radio station. Today, he just stares out the window, his jaw tight. He is wearing a hoodie with the hood up, which he never does unless he is hungover or pissed off.

Shane glances at him. "You okay?"

Ilya doesn't look at him. "Fine."

"Your ribs bothering you?"

"No."

Shane frowns at the road. He can smell Ilya from across the center console. Burnt sugar and ozone. It makes the hair on Shane's arms stand up, his own alpha instincts pricking with a low-level anxiety.

"You're acting weird," Shane says.

"I am thinking."

"About what?"

"Hockey," Ilya snaps. "Drive the car, Hollander."

Shane tightens his grip on the steering wheel. Okay. Grumpy Ilya. He can deal with Grumpy Ilya. He's been dealing with Grumpy Ilya since they were teenagers.

But it doesn't get better at the rink.

The locker room is loud, guys laughing and taping sticks, but Ilya goes straight to his stall and starts stripping his clothes off with aggressive, jerky movements. He doesn't say a word to anyone. He doesn't make fun of Boodram's shoes. He doesn't even look at Shane.

The air around his stall is suffocating. It rolls off him in waves—hot and aggressive.

Shane sits in the stall next to him—because of course they sit next to each other—and tries to catch his eye. "Ilya."

Ilya whips his head around. His eyes are glassy, the pupils blown wide. He looks like he hasn't slept in a week.

"What?" Ilya rasps.

"Dial it back," Shane murmurs, leaning in so the rookies won't hear. "You're leaking pheromones all over the place. You're gonna choke everyone out."

Ilya blinks, like he doesn't quite understand the words. He looks at Shane's mouth, then back up to his eyes. He inhales sharply, nostrils flaring.

"You smell like detergent," Ilya accuses.

"I... what?"

"You don't smell like me." Ilya looks genuinely distressed about this. He leans into Shane's space, ignoring the room full of teammates, and presses his nose into Shane's shoulder. "Fix it."

Shane feels a flush of heat travel up his neck. He puts a hand on Ilya's chest and pushes him back gently. "Ilya. We're at work."

Ilya makes a frustrated noise in his throat and turns back to his gear.

Practice is a disaster.

Ilya is usually a puck hog, but today he is a menace. He is skating too fast, hitting too hard. During a simple flow drill, he nearly takes Dillon's head off with a slap shot that rings off the crossbar so loud it echoes through the empty arena.

"Rozanov!" Coach Wiebe barks. "Save it for the game!"

Ilya ignores him. He is skating circles near the blue line, chest heaving. He looks like a caged animal.

Shane watches him from the bench, a knot of worry tightening in his stomach. This isn't just a bad mood. Ilya is sweating more than usual, his face is flushed a dark, angry red.

When the whistle blows for a water break, Shane skates over to him. Ilya is leaning on his stick, staring at the ice, breathing hard.

"Ilya," Shane says.

Ilya looks up. He looks wrecked. "Too loud," he mutters. "It's too loud in here."

"It's just practice, Ilya."

"Smells wrong." Ilya shakes his head, sweat dripping from his chin. "Everyone smells wrong."

He looks at Shane then, and the expression on his face makes Shane's knees go weak. It is raw, unfiltered hunger. It is desperate.

"Shane," he whispers. It sounds like a plea.

And then it clicks.

The heat in the bedroom this morning. The aggressive scent marking. The silence in the car. The burnt sugar smell that is currently overpowering the smell of the Zamboni exhaust.

Shane's eyes widen. "Oh."

"Home," Ilya grinds out. He grips his stick so hard his knuckles are white. "Need to go home."

"Oh, shit," Shane says.

It is a rut.

Ilya is going into a rut. Here. On the ice. In front of the coaches and the media and the entire roster.

Panic spikes in Shane's chest. He needs to get Ilya out of here immediately. If he doesn't, Ilya is going to end up fighting someone, or worse, trying to fuck Shane right here on the center

ice logo.

“Okay,” Shane says, his voice dropping to that calm, captain tone he uses when the refs are being idiots. “Okay. We’re going.”

“Can’t,” Ilya says, his voice cracking. “Practice.”

“Screw practice.” Shane grabs Ilya’s jersey sleeve. He can feel the heat radiating off him even through the equipment. “Come on. Off the ice. Now.”

Ilya doesn’t argue. He just follows Shane toward the gate, his eyes glued to Shane’s back like Shane is the only thing anchoring him to the earth.

Shane signals to the trainer, pointing vaguely at Ilya’s skate to fake an equipment issue, and steers his husband down the tunnel.

“Don’t look at anyone,” Shane instructs, walking fast. “Just keep your head down.”

“Shane,” Ilya whimpers behind him.

“I know,” Shane says, his heart hammering fast. “I know. We’re going home.”

The drive to the house is a blur of gray highway and white-knuckled tension. Shane drives faster than he should, the engine of the SUV whining in protest, but he can’t bring himself to care about speed traps.

Beside him, Ilya curls in on himself in the passenger seat, his forehead pressed against the glass of the window. He’s making low, distressed noises deep in his throat—sounds that tear right through Shane’s composure. The car is suffocating, filled with the thick, cloying scent of burnt sugar and ozone that pours off Ilya in waves. It’s heavy enough to taste, coating the back of Shane’s throat like syrup.

It makes his own instincts misfire. His Alpha brain wants to challenge the aggressive pheromones filling his territory, but his heart just aches. When he pulls into the driveway, he doesn’t even bother to park straight. He kills the engine and is out the door before the silence settles. He runs around to the passenger side, yanking the door open.

Ilya spills out, stumbling. He’s heavy, dead weight against Shane’s side, burning up with a fever that radiates through his parka.

“I’ve got you,” Shane grunts, wrapping an arm around Ilya’s waist to haul him toward the front steps. “We’re here. We’re home.”

Ilya is trembling. It’s a terrifying thing to feel—Ilya Rozanov, who is usually as solid and immovable as a mountain, shaking against him.

“Shane,” Ilya gasps, his face burying itself in the crook of Shane’s neck again. His nose is wet and hot against Shane’s skin. “Inside. Now.”

Shane fumbles with the keys, his hands shaking, but he manages to get the front door open. They stumble into the foyer, kicking off snowy boots in a chaotic tangle of limbs. As soon as the door clicks shut, locking out the cold Ottawa air, the dynamic shifts.

The sanctuary of the house seems to snap the last thread of Ilya's control. He shoves Shane back against the wall—hard. Shane's head thumps against the drywall, breath whooshing out of him. Before he can recover, Ilya is on him. He's everywhere at once, his hands tearing at Shane's coat, his mouth devouring Shane's jaw, his throat, his mouth. He bites down on Shane's lower lip, hard enough to bruise, his tongue sweeping into Shane's mouth with a possessive arrogance that makes Shane's knees buckle.

"Mine," Ilya growls against his mouth. The word is guttural, wrecked. "Smell wrong. Fix it."

"I'm trying," Shane pants, struggling to get his arms free of his jacket. "Let me—Ilya, let me get this off."

The suggestion hits Ilya like a live wire. He steps back, his chest heaving, his eyes black and blown wide. He watches, predatory and unblinking, as Shane toes off his shoes and shucks his coat.

Shane's fingers fumble with his belt. The sheer force of Ilya's rut pheromones is making him dizzy, a heady cocktail of lust and submission pooling low in his gut. He's an Alpha—he knows he should be fighting this, posturing, asserting dominance—but with Ilya, the wires always get crossed. With Ilya, submission feels like a different kind of power.

Shane gets his pants down, kicking them away. He's left in his compression shorts and dress shirt, shivering not from cold, but from the intensity of Ilya's gaze.

Ilya makes a noise—a low, hungry whine—and drops to his knees.

Shane gasps, his hands finding purchase in Ilya's hair as Ilya presses his face into Shane's crotch. The heat of his breath seeps through the fabric. Ilya inhales deeply, his hands gripping the backs of Shane's thighs, fingers digging in hard enough to leave bruises.

"Better," Ilya mumbles, his voice thick. "Mine."

He rips the fabric of Shane's compression shorts. Tears the waistband until it gives, dragging the material down Shane's legs with frantic, clumsy hands. When he takes Shane into his mouth, Shane's head falls back against the wall with a thud.

"Fuck," Shane breathes, his hips snapping forward instinctively. It's wet and hot and overwhelming. His husband isn't being gentle. He's servicing him with a frantic, single-minded devotion, his tongue swirling over the head, his throat swallowing Shane down. Teeth graze the sensitive skin, a suction that feels like Ilya is trying to draw the very soul out of him.

Shane tangles his fingers in Ilya's curls, tugging. "Ilya. Stop. Wait."

Ilya pulls off with a wet pop, looking up with glazed, furious eyes. "Why?"

“Bedroom,” Shane manages, his voice wrecked. “Bed. Lube. Unless you want to break me.”

Clarity flickers in Ilya’s gaze for a second. The biological imperative to breed and knot is overriding everything, but the protective instinct toward Shane is still there, buried deep under the haze of the rut.

Ilya stands up, effortlessly scooping Shane into his arms like he weighs nothing. Shane wraps his legs around Ilya’s waist, burying his face in the fever-hot crook of Ilya’s neck as Ilya carries him up the stairs two at a time.

The master bedroom smells like them, but mostly it smells like rut. It’s been building in here since this morning, trapped in the sheets. Ilya dumps Shane onto the bed and immediately crawls over him, a heavy, suffocating blanket of muscle and heat. He pins Shane’s wrists above his head with one hand, his weight settling between Shane’s spread legs.

“Hurry,” Ilya rasps. He’s fumbling with his own belt now, his movements jerky and uncoordinated.

Shane reaches for the nightstand, blind, his hand closing around the bottle of lube they keep there. He pops the cap. “I’ve got it. Let me.”

Ilya freezes, watching Shane pour a generous amount into his palm. The sight of it seems to short-circuit something in Ilya’s brain. He drops his forehead to Shane’s chest, panting, his hips already snapping forward in phantom thrusts.

Shane works quickly. He knows they don’t have time for a slow warmup. Ilya is a ticking bomb. Shane slicks himself up, his own body trembling with anticipation. He stretches himself, wincing slightly at the intrusion, but his body is eager, pliable. He’s been wanting this—needing this—since the moment he smells that burnt sugar scent in the car.

“Ready,” Shane whispers. “Ilya, I’m ready.”

Ilya lifts his head. He shoves his pants down, kicking them off his ankles. He’s fully hard, leaking pre-come, his cock thick and angry-looking, the knot at the base already swollen with the force of his rut.

He doesn’t ask. He doesn’t hesitate.

He lines himself up and pushes inside.

Shane cries out, his back arching off the mattress. It’s too much, too fast—a stretching, burning fullness that borders on pain. But it’s Ilya. It’s Ilya, filling him up, claiming the one place in the world that belongs only to him.

“Look at me,” Ilya demands, his voice a growl. He grabs Shane’s chin, forcing their eyes to meet. “Look at me, Hollander.”

Shane forces his eyes open. Ilya looks devastating. His face is twisted in a mask of pleasure and possession, sweat dripping from his temples.

"I love you," Shane chokes out.

That breaks the dam.

Ilya starts to move, and it's ferocious. He pounds into Shane with a rhythm that has no finesse, just raw, animalistic drive. He's trying to get as deep as possible, trying to bury himself inside the deepest part of Shane's body.

Shane wraps his legs around Ilya's waist, locking his ankles, pulling him deeper. He matches Ilya's rhythm with his own desperate bucks, chasing the friction. The sounds in the room are wet and harsh—skin slapping against skin, the creak of the bed frame, the guttural, broken noises tearing out of Ilya's throat.

The scent is blinding now. It's a forest fire, consuming everything.

"Shane," Ilya groans, his hips stuttering. "Shane, Shane, Shane." He drives in one last time, hilt-deep, and stays.

Shane tastes the salt of his own sweat on Ilya's lips, tastes the blood where Ilya bit him earlier. He opens his mouth wider, inviting it, needing the invasion. He sucks on Ilya's tongue, his hands sliding up to grip the back of Ilya's neck, his fingers tangling in the damp curls at the nape there.

"Mine," Ilya mumbles against Shane's mouth, his lips sliding slick and hot over Shane's. He nips at Shane's lower lip, soothing the bruise he made earlier only to bite down on it again, sharp enough to make Shane hiss. "You taste like me."

"Always," Shane gasps into his mouth.

The friction is unbearable. Inside him, the base of Ilya's cock swells rapidly, the knot expanding, locking him in place. It's an intense, overwhelming pressure, stretching Shane to his absolute limit. A whine of pure sensitivity escapes Shane's throat, vibrating against Ilya's lips. He feels full—impossibly, perfectly full.

Ilya groans at the sound, swallowing the noise whole. He deepens the kiss, grinding his mouth against Shane's, messy and uncoordinated. Saliva slicks their chins, their heavy panting mingling in the small space between their faces.

Shane feels the knot pulse, a heartbeat inside his own body. It pushes him over the edge.

"Ilya, please," Shane begs, his hips bucking uselessly against the weight pinning him down. "I'm gonna—fuck, I'm gonna—"

Ilya pulls back just an inch, staring right into Shane's soul. He looks wrecked. "Come for me, Shane. Do it."

Shane cries out, his back arching off the mattress as his orgasm hits him like a slapshot to the chest. It's blinding. He clamps down around the knot, his muscles spasming violently, milking Ilya to the brim.

Ilya throws his head back and roars, a guttural, broken sound that fills the room. He pulses inside Shane, hot and heavy and endless. Shane can feel every spurting wave of it, filling him up, claiming him in a way that no ring or contract ever could.

He shudders through the aftershocks, his vision graying out. He feels sticky and stretched and completely boneless.

Ilya collapses again, burying his face in the pillow next to Shane's head, his breathing coming in ragged gasps. He's heavy, but Shane wouldn't push him off for a million dollars.

"Got you," Ilya mumbles, his voice slurred and delirious. "Caught you."

"Yeah," Shane whispers, his hand coming up to stroke Ilya's sweat-damp hair. The pressure of the knot is intense, a heavy ache that radiates through his entire pelvis, but it's grounding. It's the ultimate claim. "You got me."

For the next twenty minutes, they are inextricable. The knot holds them together, forcing them to just be. The aggression drains out of the room, replaced by a heavy, sated exhaustion.

Ilya's fever seems to break, the burning heat of his skin cooling to a comfortable warmth. He nuzzles Shane's neck, licking the salt from his skin, making soft, contented chirps that he would deny to his deathbed.

"My Shane," Ilya drawls against his pulse point.

Shane smiles blissfully. He feels sore, and stretched, and completely, utterly at peace. "Just yours."

He lies there, staring at the ceiling fan which is spinning a lazy, useless circle above them. His body feels like it's been disassembled and put back together in a slightly different shape. Everything hurts in a dull, throbbing way, but it's the good kind of hurt.

He can feel the knot slowly starting to deflate inside him, the pressure ebbing away by degrees. It's a strange, hollow feeling, losing that fullness. He instinctively tightens his legs around Ilya's waist, trying to keep him close for just a minute longer.

Ilya stirs, lifting his head. He looks like a disaster. His hair is sticking up in every direction, his lips are swollen and red, and there's a bruise blooming on his cheekbone where Shane must have ground his chin during the kiss.

Despite it all, Ilya looks beautiful.

"You okay?" Ilya asks sleepily.

Shane nods, too tired to speak. He reaches up and traces the line of Ilya's jaw with his thumb. Ilya leans into the touch, turning his face to press a kiss to Shane's palm.

"I hurt you?" Ilya asks, his brow furrowing. The post-rut clarity is starting to set in, bringing the guilt with it.

"No," Shane says softly. "You didn't. I needed it."

And he did. God, he did. He spends so much of his life being Captain Hollander—being in control, being the leader, being the one everyone looks to for answers. Even with Ilya, Shane is usually the one managing the logistics, the schedules, the PR.

But here? Pinned to the mattress by his husband's weight, stuffed full and claimed so thoroughly he can still feel the ghost of the knot pulsing inside him? Here, he doesn't have to be anything but Shane.

Ilya hums, unconvinced. He carefully withdraws, and Shane has to bite his lip to keep from making a sound at the friction. It feels like losing a limb.

Ilya rolls off him, but he doesn't go far. He immediately pulls Shane into his side, tucking Shane's head under his chin. He drags the duvet up over them, cocooning them in the dark, musky scent of the bed.

"We missed practice," Shane mumbles into Ilya's chest.

Ilya snorts. "Wiebe will live."

Shane roll his eyes, letting the darkness take him. The alarm is going to go off way too soon, and they're going to have to deal with the fallout of skipping practice, and the media, and the endless grind of the season. But right now, in the dark, Shane has everything he needs. He buries his nose in Ilya's chest, takes a deep breath of birch and spice and home, and lets go.

He wakes up an hour later, his stomach growling loud enough to startle the cat sleeping at the foot of the bed. The room is dim, the heavy blackout curtains holding the afternoon sun at bay.

Ilya is dead to the world. He's sprawled on his stomach, face smushed into the pillow, one arm hanging off the side of the bed. The fever heat has dampened down to a manageable warmth, but the scent of him is still thick and possessive, clinging to the sheets like smoke.

Shane shifts carefully, wincing as his muscles protest. His hips feel loose, his insides stretched and tender in a way that makes him flush when he thinks about the mechanics of it. Being knotted by another Alpha is... a lot. It's a biological stalemate, a clash of biology that shouldn't work, but with Ilya, it's the only thing that makes sense.

He needs food. Ilya needs food. A rut burns calories like a marathon, and if Shane doesn't get some protein into his husband soon, the next wave of the fever is going to be brutal.

Shane slides out of bed, shivering as the cool air hits his skin. He grabs a pair of sweatpants from the floor—Ilya's, judging by the length—and pulls them on, leaving his chest bare.

The kitchen is quiet. Shane drinks a glass of water in one long gulp, then starts pulling ingredients from the fridge. Eggs, spinach, the leftover steak from last night. He's just flipping the steak strips in the pan when he feels the temperature seems to drop, or maybe

spike—Shane can't tell. The hair on the back of his neck stands up, a primal warning system that screams predator.

He turns around.

Ilya is standing in the doorway. He's naked, glorious and unashamed, leaning against the doorframe with his arms crossed over his chest. His hair is a disaster, wild curls sticking up in every direction, and his eyes are fixed on Shane with a laser focus that makes Shane's breath hitch.

The burnt sugar smell is back. It's fainter than before, but it's there, curling around the smell of cooking meat.

"Hey," Shane says, his voice a little raspy. "I'm making food. You need to eat."

Ilya doesn't answer. He pushes off the doorframe and stalks across the kitchen. He stops right behind Shane, pressing his chest against Shane's bare back. He wraps his arms around Shane's waist, his hands splaying wide over Shane's stomach, fingers digging in possessively.

"Smells good," Ilya rumbles, but his nose isn't pointing at the pan. It's buried in the curve of Shane's neck, inhaling deeply.

"It's steak," Shane says, trying to keep his voice steady as Ilya's teeth graze the sensitive skin over his scent gland. "Your favorite."

"Mm." Ilya slides one hand down, slipping it inside the waistband of the sweatpants, his palm hot against Shane's lower belly. "Not my favorite."

Shane's grip on the spatula tightens. "Ilya. We need to eat. You're going to crash if you don't."

"I am not crashing." Ilya bites down on the junction of Shane's neck and shoulder, hard enough to sting. "I am hungry."

He spins Shane around, crowding him against the counter. The granite digs into Shane's lower back, but he hardly notices. All he can see is his husband.

Ilya's eyes are blown wide again, the hazel swallowed by black. The clarity from earlier is gone, replaced by the haze of the rut. He looks at Shane like he's something to be devoured, something to be conquered.

"Ilya," Shane warns, putting his hands on Ilya's chest. The skin is heating up again, the fever spiking. "Food first."

"No." Ilya grabs Shane's hips, lifting him effortlessly. He sets Shane on the counter, shoving the plate of raw spinach aside. "Now."

He steps between Shane's legs, spreading them wide. His cock is already hard, heavy and leaking, pressing against Shane's thigh. The scent of him is overwhelming now, flooding Shane's senses, drowning out the rational part of his brain that knows this is a bad idea, that they're both exhausted, that Shane is still sore from the last time.

But Ilya will always be his greatest weakness. His kryptonite.

Shane wraps his legs around Ilya's waist, pulling him in. "Fine," he breathes. "Okay. Do it."

Ilya lines himself up and pushes in, a slow, thick invasion that makes Shane's head fall back with a gasp.

It's different this time. The first time was frantic, a desperate need to release the pressure. This? This is deliberate.

Ilya buries himself to the hilt, his hands gripping Shane's waist so hard Shane knows there will be bruises tomorrow. He starts to move, a slow, grinding rhythm that hits every sensitive nerve ending Shane has.

"Mine," Ilya grunts, driving deep. "Mine to breed."

Shane's heart stutters.

It's the rut talking. Shane knows that. It's the biological imperative wiring Ilya's brain to fill and knot and impregnate. It doesn't matter that Shane is an Alpha. It doesn't matter that Shane doesn't have a womb. To Ilya's rut-addled brain, Shane is just mate, and mates are for breeding.

Ilya pounds into him, harder now, faster. He's chasing something Shane can't give him. He's trying to plant a seed in salted earth.

"Take it," Ilya growls, his voice guttural. He leans down, pressing his forehead against Shane's, their eyes locking. "Take my knot. Take my pups."

They've talked about kids. In the abstract, mostly. Someday, they say. When we retire. They talk about adoption, about surrogacy. They joke about whose nose the kid would get (Shane prays it's not his) or whose temper (definitely Ilya's).

But in the dark, when Shane is alone, he thinks about this. He thinks about the biology he was born with, the Alpha designation that makes him strong and fast and aggressive, but denies him this one thing. He thinks about how much Ilya loves family, despite his own being a disaster. He thinks about how good Ilya is with the rookies, with Hayden's kids.

And right now, with Ilya driving into him with a desperate, primal need to create something that binds them together, the reality of it stings like an open wound.

Tears prick at the corners of his eyes. He wraps his arms around Ilya's neck, holding on for dear life.

"Yeah," Shane lies, his voice trembling. "Yeah, Ilya. Fill me up."

The surrender seems to snap the last tether of Ilya's restraint. He just grips Shane's thighs, his thumbs digging into the muscle, and lifts him.

Shane gasps, his arms locking around Ilya's neck, his legs wrapping tight around Ilya's waist to keep them connected. It's an awkward, shuffling journey to the living room, a few steps that feel like miles, with Ilya's cock twitching inside him with every movement.

Ilya drops him onto the couch. The leather is cool against Shane's back, a shock against the fever-heat of his skin, but then Ilya is following him down, covering him, a blanket of muscle and sweat and overwhelming want. He drives his hips down, burying himself so deep Shane thinks he might feel it in his stomach. It's a relentless, punishing rhythm. Snap. Grind. Pull.

Shane's head falls back against the cushions, his vision swimming. The ceiling beams blur. All he can smell is Ilya—that thick, cloying burnt sugar scent of a rutting Alpha, mixed with the sharp tang of their mingled sweat. It's intoxicating. It's a drug, and Shane is overdosing.

Shane drags his eyes open. Ilya is hovering over him, bracing his weight on one arm while the other hand keeps Shane pinned. His face is a ruin of pleasure—lips swollen, cheeks flushed dark red, sweat dripping from the tip of his nose to land on Shane's chest.

"Take it," Ilya pants, his hips never stopping that brutal, grinding pistoning. "Take every inch."

"I am," Shane whimpers. "I am, Ilya."

"More." Ilya leans down, crushing his mouth against Shane's. He pulls back just enough to speak against Shane's wet lips, his breath hot and ragged.

"Gonna fill you," Ilya whispers, the words slurred with the rut-haze. "Gonna put a baby in you, Shane. Right here." He thrusts hard, hitting that sweet, aching spot deep inside that makes Shane's toes curl. "Is that what you want? My pup? In your belly?"

"Yes," Shane sobs, his hips bucking up to meet Ilya's drive. "Yes, god, yes. Give it to me."

"Good Alpha," Ilya praises, nuzzling into Shane's neck, biting the tender skin there. "Taking it so good for me. Making space for it."

His hand fumbles down between their sweating bodies. It's a tight squeeze—Ilya is pressed so flush against him—but Shane manages to wrap his fingers around his own cock. It's leaking, slick and painfully hard.

Ilya notices. He pulls back slightly to watch. His eyes track the movement of Shane's hand.

"Yeah," Ilya growls. "Work it. Show me how much you want it."

Shane starts to stroke, matching the frantic rhythm of Ilya's hips. It's too much sensation—the stretching fullness inside him, the burn of Ilya's stubble against his neck, the slick heat of his own hand.

"Ilya," Shane gasps, his head thrashing on the cushion. "Ilya, I love you. I want—I want your baby. I swear to god, I'd carry it if I could."

It's the truth he hides in the daylight, the secret wish he buries under stats and training schedules. If he could reshape his very DNA to hold a piece of Ilya, he would do it in a heartbeat.

Ilya freezes for a microsecond, his expression shattering into something unguarded and devastatingly tender. Then he groans, a sound of pure emotional overload, and drives into Shane with renewed, desperate force.

"You would," Ilya chokes out, slamming into him. "I know. My Shane. My beautiful Shane."

He catches Shane's lips again, kissing him deeply, swallowing Shane's cries. He murmurs filthy, impossible promises against Shane's mouth—about their family, about the knot he's going to tie, about the life he's pouring into Shane's body.

"Coming," Shane warns, his hand moving faster, his hips stuttering. "Ilya, I'm—"

"Come for me," Ilya commands, grinding down, hitting that prostate with lethal precision. "Breed for me."

Shane shatters.

It's a white-hot explosion behind his eyes. He cries out into Ilya's mouth, his back arching off the couch, his hand working furiously as he spills his own seed over their stomachs, useless and messy and spent.

But Ilya isn't done. His muscles are locking up, and drives deep one final time. Shane feels the terrifying, wonderful expansion of the knot flaring to life again, bigger this time. It locks them together, an anchor in the storm.

Ilya pulses, his rut-climax hitting him like a freight train. He pours himself into Shane, wave after hot wave, filling him until Shane feels his belly curved and stuffed and completely, utterly claimed.

Ilya collapses, his heavy frame crushing Shane into the leather. They are both panting, slick with sweat. Shane wraps his arms around Ilya's broad back, his fingers tracing the damp valley of his spine. He feels hollowed out and filled up all at once. A tear tracks hot and slow into his hairline.

He can't give him this. He can't give his husband a baby. But he can give Ilya this moment. He can give him his body, his submission, his love.

The post-rut clarity is supposed to be the moment the fog lifts, the fever breaks, and the world returns to its distinct form. But for Ilya, three days out, the edges are still blurred.

He sits in his stall, half-dressed, watching Shane tie his skates across the room. Shane looks fine. To anyone else—to Boodram, to the coaches, to the media—Shane Hollander is exactly the same. He is efficient, focused, perfect. He answers questions with that polite, media-trained smile and leads the stretches with his usual precision.

But Ilya knows better. He knows the map of Shane's body and the weather patterns of his moods better than he knows his own.

And Shane is... dim.

That is the only word for it. The usual spark, the low-level hum of competitive energy that usually vibrates off him, is dampened. His scent, usually a crisp mix of pine and cold air that makes Ilya's chest expand, has turned muted. Sour. Like milk left out too long.

Ilya tightens his grip on his stick, his knuckles cracking.

I hurt him.

The memory of the rut is fragmented, a fever dream of heat and slick skin and an overwhelming, blinding need to fill. He remembers the kitchen counter. He remembers the couch. He remembers the way Shane screams, the way he begs, the way Ilya pins him down and drives into him with no regard for anything but his own biological imperative.

He has knotted him. Twice. He has treated his husband, his Alpha husband, like a breeding mare.

Ilya feels a wave of nausea roll through him. He stands up abruptly, the motion drawing a few glances.

"You good, Roz?" Boodram asks, looking up from his phone.

"Fine," Ilya snaps. He walks over to Shane, stopping just inside his personal space.

Shane doesn't look up. He is taping his stick, his movements mechanical. Rip. Smooth. Rip. Smooth.

"Shane," Ilya says.

Shane's hands pause. He doesn't look up. "Yeah?"

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine. Ready to go."

"Your hips," Ilya presses, his voice dropping to a rough whisper. "Are you sore?"

Shane finally looks up. There are dark circles under his eyes that weren't there a week ago. He offers a tight, brittle smile that doesn't reach his eyes. "I'm fine, Ilya. Drop it."

He stands up and brushes past Ilya, heading for the ice without a backward glance. The rejection stings, but the scent trail Shane leaves behind is worse. It smells like distress.

The drive home is suffocating.

Usually, post-practice drives are filled with debriefs—complaining about Wiebe’s drills, analyzing the power play lines, arguing about what to eat for dinner. Today, the silence in the Mercedes is heavy enough to crush a man.

Ilya drives, his hands tight on the wheel. He keeps glancing at Shane in the passenger seat. Shane is staring out the window at the slushy Ottawa streets, his arms crossed over his chest as if he is physically holding himself together.

He looks smaller. Shane Hollander, who skates like a giant, looks small.

Ilya can’t take it anymore.

“Stop it,” Ilya says, breaking the silence.

Shane doesn’t move. “Stop what?”

“Stop hiding. Stop... disappearing.” Ilya turns onto their street, taking the corner too fast. “You have been quiet for three days. You don’t look at me. You don’t touch me.”

“I’m tired, Ilya. The rut is exhausting. You know that.”

“Is not just tired.” Ilya pulls into the driveway and kills the engine. The silence rushes back in, deafening. “I hurt you. In the rut. I was too rough.”

Shane lets out a short, harsh laugh. He unbuckles his seatbelt but doesn’t open the door. “You didn’t hurt me. Physically.”

“Then what?” Ilya unbuckles his own belt and turns in his seat, reaching out to grab Shane’s shoulder. He needs to touch him. He needs to bridge the distance that has opened up between them in the last seventy-two hours. “Shane. Look at me.”

Shane flinches at the contact. It is minute, a tiny twitch of his muscle, but Ilya feels it like a slap.

Ilya recoils, his hand dropping. “Fuck. I did. I hurt you.”

“No,” Shane says, his voice cracking. He opens the door and scrambles out into the cold. “Let’s just go inside. Please.”

Ilya follows him, anger and panic warring in his chest. He storms into the house after Shane, kicking the door shut behind him. Shane is already halfway to the kitchen, fleeing.

“Shane!” Ilya barks, his Alpha voice slipping out, commanding.

Shane stops in the hallway. His shoulders hunch. He doesn’t turn around. Ilya stalks up to him. He can smell the distress coming off Shane now—it is acrid, filling the hallway, choking out the lingering scent of their domestic life.

“Talk to me,” Ilya demands, stepping in front of him to block his path. “You are scaring me. Did I... did I make you do something you didn’t want? The knotting? I know it is... intense. I

know you are Alpha. I know it hurts your pride.”

Shane looks up then, and his face is ravaged. His eyes are red-rimmed, wet with tears he is refusing to shed.

“My pride?” Shane says. “You think this is about my pride?”

“I don’t know!” Ilya throws his hands up. “You won’t talk to me! You act like I am monster! I know I was out of my mind, Shane. The rut... it takes over. I was trying to... I don’t know. My brain was broken.”

“You were trying to breed me,” Shane says and Ilya instantly stalls.

The shame crashes over him, it’s sickening. “I know. I’m sorry. Is instinct. Doesn’t mean anything. I know you can’t... I know we can’t.”

“It doesn’t mean anything to you,” Shane chokes out.

Ilya stares at him dumbfounded. “What?”

“It was just biology to you,” Shane says, his voice rising, trembling. Tears finally spill over, tracking hot paths down his cheeks. “Just the rut talking. Just a biological dead end.”

“Shane...”

“But for me?” Shane pokes himself in the chest, hard. “For me, Ilya, it was everything. You were there, on top of me, telling me you wanted to fill me up. Telling me you wanted to put a baby in me. And for twenty minutes... for twenty minutes, I let myself believe it.”

Ilya feels the blood drain from his face. “Shane, baby...”

“I wanted it,” Shane sobs, the dam finally breaking. He wraps his arms around himself, doubling over as if he’s been punched in the gut. “God, Ilya, I wanted it so bad. I laid there and I felt you inside me, felt you knotting me, and I just... I pretended. I pretended that we were normal. That I could give you that. That we could make a life together.”

Ilya reaches for him, but Shane takes a stumbling step back, hitting the wall.

“And then you pulled out,” Shane cries, his voice raw. “And it was just... a mess. It was just a mess on the sheets. It wasn’t a baby. It was never going to be a baby. It was just waste.”

He looks up at Ilya, his expression shattered.

“I can’t give you that,” Shane says weakly. “I’m an Alpha. I am broken. I can’t give you what your instincts want. I can’t give you a family.”

“No,” Ilya says strongly. He crosses the distance between them in a second, ignoring Shane’s flinch, and grabs him. He pulls Shane into his chest, wrapping his arms around him so tight it probably hurts. “No, no, no. Shane. Stop.”

Shane crumbles against him, sobbing into Ilya's hoodie. He feels small and shaking, and the scent of his misery is breaking Ilya's heart.

"You are not broken," Ilya murmurs into Shane's hair, rocking them slightly. "You are everything. You are my family. You are my family, Shane. Just you."

"But you wanted it," Shane weeps. "You said it. You said you wanted to breed me."

"I wanted to bind you to me," Ilya confesses, his voice thick. "Rut... makes me crazy. Makes me terrified you will leave. It wants to make something permanent so you can never go away. Is not about a baby, Shane. Is about keeping you."

He pulls back, framing Shane's wet face in his hands. He forces Shane to look at him.

"We talked about adoption," Ilya says firmly. "We talked about surrogacy. We will have kids. We will have a hundred kids if you want. But I don't need you to carry them. I don't need you to be anything other than what you are."

Shane sniffs, wiping his nose on his sleeve. He looks so young, so vulnerable. "It felt so real."

"I know," Ilya whispers. He leans his forehead against Shane's. "I know. I am sorry I made you want something we can't do. I am sorry."

Shane lets out a long, shuddering breath. "I just... I love you so much. And I hate that I can't do that for you."

"You do enough," Ilya says fierce and low. "You love me. That is enough. You are enough."

He kisses Shane then, tasting the salt of his tears.

"We will figure it out," Ilya says against Shane's lips. "When we are ready. But right now? I just want you. Just my husband."

Shane nods slowly, his hands coming up to grip Ilya's waist. The sour scent of distress is fading, replaced by the damp, exhausted smell of rain after a storm.

"Okay," Shane whispers. "Okay."

Three weeks post-rut, and the guilt still sits in Ilya's stomach.

They are back to the grind. Wake up, coffee, rink, video, workout, eat, sleep. Shane says he is fine. He smiles that tight, media-trained smile when Ilya asks, and he kisses Ilya with a desperation that feels less like passion and more like reassurance. I'm here. We're okay.

But Shane is not okay.

It starts with breakfast.

Shane's diet is a religion. It is a terrifying spreadsheet of macros, anti-inflammatory ingredients, and joyless fuel. Ilya has spent years trying to introduce chaos into Shane's food intake—a bite of a burger here, a sip of a milkshake there—but Shane protects his intake like a goalie guarding a shutout in Game Seven.

So when Shane stares at his plate of egg whites and steamed spinach like it is a pile of radioactive waste, Ilya notices.

"Eat," Ilya says, nudging Shane's foot under the table. "We have a back-to-back this weekend. You need the fuel."

Shane swallows, his throat clicking audibly. He looks pale. His skin, usually a warm tan even in the winter, has a gray, clammy undertone that Ilya hates.

"I'm not hungry," Shane mumbles. He pushes a piece of spinach around with his fork.

Ilya reaches over and steals a piece of Shane's dry toast. "Eat the eggs. Leave the green shit if you want."

Shane picks up his fork. He brings the eggs to his mouth, and then his hand stops. His nostrils flare, inhaling the steam, and he goes green. Ideally, he stands up and walks calmly to the sink. In reality, he scrambles out of the chair, knocking it over, and bolts for the powder room down the hall.

Ilya is on his feet instantly. "Shane?"

He finds Shane kneeling in front of the toilet, heaving nothing but bile and water. The sound tears right through Ilya's chest. He drops to the floor, his hand finding the back of Shane's neck. Shane is trembling, his skin cold and damp.

"It's okay," Ilya murmurs, rubbing circles over Shane's spine.

Shane spits into the bowl and flushes, collapsing back against the wall. He looks exhausted. Not just tired—drained.

"It's the spinach," Shane rasps, closing his eyes. "It smelled... metallic. Rotten."

Ilya frowns. He bought that spinach yesterday. "It was fresh."

"It smelled wrong," Shane wraps his arms around his stomach. "I'm just... I think I caught a bug. From the rookies."

"Maybe." Ilya presses the back of his hand to Shane's forehead. No fever. But the scent coming off Shane is confusing.

Shane used to smell like mint, clean Alpha. But lately, under the sickness, there is something milky and sweet, like vanilla cream. It clashes with the sharp tang of bile. It smells... wrong. It smells weak.

Ilya's protective instincts flare, a low growl building in his throat. Is his husband sick?

“Come,” Ilya says, standing and pulling Shane up. “No practice today.”

“I have to—”

“No.” Ilya uses his Captain Voice. “You are sick. You stay home. I will tell Wiebe you have the flu. If you skate like this, you will get hit and die.”

Shane doesn't argue. That scares Ilya more than the vomiting. Shane always argues.

The next week is a nightmare of food negotiation.

Shane's disordered eating, usually a controlled, rigid beast, has gone feral. He rejects everything. Chicken makes him gag. The smell of brewing coffee—Shane's lifeblood—sends him running to the guest room with the door slammed shut.

Ilya feels helpless. He watches Shane lose weight, the sharp angles of his cheekbones getting sharper. He watches Shane stare at the fridge with a look of genuine fear, as if the food inside is a threat he can't calculate.

“Please,” Ilya says one night, sitting on the counter while Shane paces the kitchen. “Tell me what you want. I will get it. Anything.”

Shane stops pacing. He looks at Ilya, his eyes huge and dark. “I want... toast.”

“Toast?”

“White bread,” Shane says, like he's confessing a crime. “Not the grain stuff. The... the Wonder Bread kind. With the butter that has salt.”

Shane hasn't eaten white bread since 2011.

Ilya is out the door in ten seconds. He drives to the 24-hour Metro, buys three loaves of the most processed, chemical-laden white bread he can find, and a block of salted butter.

When he gets back, he toasts two slices. He butters them thick. He watches Shane eat them standing over the counter, devouring them with a ravenous, shaking intensity that makes Ilya's chest ache.

“Good?” Ilya asks hopefully.

“Oh my god,” Shane moans, licking butter off his thumb. “Yeah.”

He eats four slices. He keeps them down.

Ilya watches him, a cold knot of worry tightening in his gut. Shane smells like milk and butter and distress. He smells soft. His scent has changed so much that Anya has started sleeping on Shane's head, kneading his hair like a kitten, purring loudly.

And Ilya... Ilya can't stop touching him. He finds himself constantly checking Shane, his hand drifting to Shane's stomach when they sleep, his nose burying itself in Shane's neck to

find that strange, sweet new scent.

His instincts are screaming Protect. Guard. Nest. But his brain is saying Cancer. Parasite. Dying.

The breaking point comes on a Tuesday.

They are at the rink. Shane has been managing the nausea with ginger tea and the white toast, enough to get back on the ice. He's skating through a drill, a simple breakout pattern.

Ilya is watching him from the blue line. He sees the moment it happens.

Shane pivots to take a pass. It's a standard turn, nothing high-impact. But Shane wobbles. His face goes slack, all the color draining out of it in a second. And he just... sinks. He goes down to one knee, one hand coming up to clutch at his midsection.

Ilya is there before the whistle blows.

"Shane!" Ilya skids to a stop, snow spraying. He drops to his knees, grabbing Shane's shoulders. "Shane, look at me."

Shane is gasping, his eyes squeezed shut. "Dizzy," he wheezes. "Cramp. Hurts."

"Where?"

"Lower." Shane curls forward, protecting his stomach. "It feels... heavy. Pulling."

Ilya looks at the trainer, who is running across the ice. "Doctor," Ilya barks. "Now. Not the team doctor. The specialist."

The specialist's office is quiet, private, and expensive. Shane is sitting on the exam table, wearing a paper gown that makes him look fragile. His scent is souring the air. Ilya stands between Shane's legs, his hands resting on Shane's thighs.

"It's probably an ulcer," Shane says, his voice high and tight. "Stress ulcer. Or a hernia. I've been lifting heavy."

"We will see," Ilya says, though his own heart is hammering against his ribs like a bird in a cage.

Please let it be an ulcer. Please let it be fixable.

Dr. Aris walks in. She is a tiny woman—barely reaching the middle of Ilya's chest—with shoulder-length brown hair cut into heavy bangs and pearl hoops. She's a Beta, calm and professional, holding Shane's blood work on a tablet. She looks at the chart, then at Shane, then at Ilya with dark, knowing eyes that suggest she suffers no fools. Her expression is... complicated.

"Shane," she says. "We ran the full panel. Hormones, blood count, metabolic function."

“Am I dying?” Shane asks, half-joking, half-terrified.

“No,” Dr. Aris says. “But your hormone levels are... unusual. Your testosterone is suppressed, and your estrogen and progesterone are spiking. Significantly.”

Shane frowns. “So... what? Do I need supplements? Is it a pituitary thing?”

“I’d like to do an ultrasound,” she says gently. “Of your abdomen.”

Ilya stiffens. “Why? Is it a tumor?”

“I want to rule out a few things,” she says evasively. “Lie back, please.”

Shane lies back. He grips Ilya’s hand so hard his knuckles crack. Ilya strokes Shane’s hair, keeping his eyes on the doctor as she squirts the cold gel onto Shane’s flat, hard stomach.

She presses the wand down, just above Shane’s pubic bone. She moves it around, frowning at the monitor. The screen is a blur of gray static to Ilya.

Then, she stops.

“There,” she says softly.

She turns the monitor so they can see. In the center of the gray fuzz, there is a distinct, small shape. A bean. A blob.

And in the center of the blob, a tiny, rapid flutter.

Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

The sound fills the room, amplified by the machine. It’s fast. Strong.

Shane stops breathing.

So does Ilya.

“What is that?” Shane asks, staring intensely at the monitor. “Is that... is that my heart?”

“No, Shane,” Dr. Aris says. She looks at Ilya now, her gaze assessing. “That is a fetal heartbeat.”

The silence that follows is absolute. It rings in Ilya’s ears.

“That’s impossible,” Shane says. His voice is flat, devoid of emotion. “I’m an Alpha. I have... I have a knot. I don’t have a uterus. That’s impossible.”

“It is extremely rare,” Dr. Aris says. “But not impossible. In rare cases, when an Alpha of a very high potency—an Enigma—mates with another Alpha, the biology can... adapt. We call it spontaneous recoding.”

She points to the screen. “You have developed a pseudo-womb. It’s created from the lining of the abdominal cavity. It happens during the rut, if the hormonal spike is strong enough to trigger the dormant recessive genes.”

Ilya stares at the screen. At the flutter.

His rut. The fever. The desperate, blinding need to breed. The way Shane had cried, the way Shane had begged for it, the way Ilya had poured everything he was into him.

He didn't just knot him. He changed him. He rewrote Shane’s biology with the sheer force of his need.

“I’m...” Shane chokes. He tries to sit up, but Ilya pushes him gently back down. Shane looks at Ilya, his eyes wide and terrified and filled with a dawning, impossible wonder. “Ilya. You’re an Enigma?”

“I... I didn't know,” Ilya stammers. He feels lightheaded. He looks at the screen, at the tiny, pulsing life inside his husband. “I thought it was a myth. A story.”

“It’s very real,” Dr. Aris says, smiling slightly. “You’re about eight weeks along, Shane. The fetus is healthy. The heartbeat is strong.”

Eight weeks. The timeline lines up perfectly with the rut.

Ilya’s hand travels to Shane’s stomach, sliding through the gel. His large hand covers the entire area where the baby is.

Our baby.

The realization hits him with the force of a slapshot. That sweet, milky scent he’s been smelling? That wasn't weakness. That was life. That was their baby growing.

“We’re having a baby,” Shane says, the words tasting strange and heavy in the air. “You... you actually did it.”

“I told you,” Ilya says, his voice thick with tears he can't stop. He leans down, pressing his forehead against Shane’s temple, never taking his hand off the tiny pulse on the screen. “I told you I was talented.”

Shane lets out a wet, hysterical laugh that turns into a sob. “You absolute asshole.”

“My asshole,” Ilya corrects, kissing the wet track of a tear on Shane’s cheek. “And our baby.”

Shane is used to statistics. He builds his life on them. Face-off percentages, time on ice, caloric intake, sleep cycles. But there are no statistics for this. There is no playbook for telling your parents that their Alpha son is pregnant with his rival-turned-husband’s baby.

They do it at Sunday dinner.

Yuna cries immediately. It's a happy, overwhelmed cry that involves a lot of hugging and fussing over Shane's nutrition. But it's David's reaction that breaks Shane.

His dad, the man who spent decades in arenas, who taught Shane to be tough, to be a leader, just stares at the ultrasound picture. His hands shake.

"A grandbaby," David says, smiling proudly through the tears. "I never thought... we assumed, with you and Ilya..."

"We did too, Dad," Shane says, his throat tight.

David looks up, tears streaming openly now. "You're giving us a grandbaby."

Telling the friends is louder.

They gather Hayden, Jackie, Harris, Troy and everyone else at the house. When Ilya drops the news, delivered with a casual smugness that masks his terrifying anxiety, the room goes silent for exactly three seconds.

Then Hayden screams.

"I knew it!" Hayden yells, which is a lie, but nobody calls him on it because he's already tackling Ilya into a bear hug. "I knew you were a freak of nature, Rozanov! You super-sperm son of a bitch!"

"Get off me, peasant," Ilya laughs, but he's holding on just as tight.

Stepping back from hockey is harder.

It's the hardest thing Shane has ever done, physically. He calls a press conference to announce he's taking a "medical leave of absence" for the remainder of the season. They don't say why. Not yet.

Cleaning out his locker at the Canadian Tire Centre feels like a funeral. He runs his hand over his shoulder pads, the scuffed leather of his gloves. He's been Shane Hollander, Hockey Player, since he was four years old.

Who is he without the ice?

"You are still you," Ilya says, leaning against the doorframe of the equipment room. He's watching Shane with that intense, unwavering gaze. "You are just... playing a different position for a while."

"I feel like I'm quitting on the team."

"You are not quitting. You are injured. Sort of." Ilya walks over and puts a hand on Shane's stomach, which is still flat but feeling firmer, different. "You are growing a center. Or maybe a goalie. It is hard work."

Shane covers Ilya's hand. "If he's a goalie, I'm sending him to boarding school," he jokes.

“Agreed.”

When they finally announce it to the world, just after the twelve-week mark, the internet essentially melts. The photo is simple: a pair of tiny baby skates hanging between Shane’s massive skates and Ilya’s. The caption is just: *New recruit coming in November 3, 2027.*

The shock is global. The confusion about the biology is rampant. But mostly, the love is overwhelming. As the weeks turn into months, Shane falls in love with his husband all over again.

He thought he hit the ceiling of loving Ilya Rozanov years ago. He thought the day they got married was the peak. But watching Ilya prepare for this baby is a different kind of intimacy.

It’s not just the nursery or the gear. It’s the way Ilya looks at him.

Shane is used to being looked at with desire, with respect, with challenge. But now, Ilya looks at him with reverence.

One morning, Shane wakes up to find Ilya reading a book on infant sleep training. Another day, he finds Ilya in the garage, aggressively sanding down a vintage crib he found online because he doesn’t trust the “cheap factory paint.”

But it’s the way Ilya manages Shane’s new reality that kills him.

Shane can’t tie his own skates anymore—not because of the belly, not yet, but because bending over compresses his stomach in a way that makes him nauseous. So, before every skate—because Shane is still skating, gently, at private rinks—Ilya kneels.

He kneels on the rubber matting, his massive frame curled over Shane’s feet, and ties the laces with care.

“Tight enough?” Ilya asks, not looking up.

“Perfect,” Shane says. He looks down at the top of Ilya’s head, the messy curls, the powerful shoulders, and his heart swells so painfully he thinks it might burst.

The nursery is a masterpiece of compromise and history. They didn’t want pastel animals. They wanted it to feel like them. They painted the walls a deep, moody navy blue. It feels safe. Like a den.

But the focal point is the wall opposite the crib.

“I want him to know,” Ilya had said, holding a stack of framed photos. “When he wakes up. I want him to see his pack.”

They created a gallery wall. It’s not just artistic prints; it’s faces. There’s a black-and-white photo of Shane’s parents laughing at their wedding. A picture of Ilya’s mother, holding a very small Ilya. There’s Hayden and Jackie with Ilya and Shane on their wedding. There’s a candid shot of the team celebrating a goal.

Every morning, their baby will wake up surrounded by the people who already love him.

For the décor, they chose “something borrowed.”

On the back of the rocking chair—a sleek, modern leather thing that Ilya insists is the “Cadillac of chairs”—drapes a quilt. It’s faded, the stitching slightly uneven. Yuna made it for Shane when he was seven. It still smells of Shane’s childhood.

On the shelf above the changing table sits a puck. It’s not a game puck. It’s a beat-up, chipped piece of rubber that looks like it’s survived a war.

“From Omsk,” Ilya explained when he placed it there. “The first puck I ever stole. From the older boys.”

“You stole it?”

“I took it back. They stole it from me first.” Ilya had run a thumb over the jagged edge. “It reminds me. You have to fight for your spot. But now...” He looked at the crib. “He won’t have to fight. We fight for him.”

By month seven, Shane is struggling.

He stands in front of the full-length mirror in the bathroom, fresh out of the shower. The steam is clearing, revealing a body he doesn’t recognize. His abs—his famous, rock-hard, eight-pack abs—are gone. In their place is a curve. A distinct, undeniable roundness. His skin feels tight, stretched to its limit. His hips look wider. The definition in his obliques has softened into something pliable.

He feels heavy. He feels slow. He feels... soft.

In the brutal, masculine world of hockey, soft is the worst thing you can be.

“I look like a pear,” Shane mutters, poking at his side. “A soft, useless pear.”

Ilya appears in the mirror behind him. He’s wearing nothing but boxer briefs, his own body as hard and sculpted as ever. The contrast makes Shane want to cry.

“You look like a god,” Ilya says, staring at him through the mirror seriously.

“I look fat, Ilya. My muscle mass is deteriorating. I’m going to have to start from zero in the offseason.”

Ilya wraps his arms around Shane from behind, his large hands splaying over the swell of Shane’s belly. He pulls Shane back against his chest, resting his chin on Shane’s shoulder.

“You are building a human,” Ilya says into the shell of Shane’s ear. “You are making a skeleton. A brain. Do you know how much energy that takes? Who cares about abs? Abs are boring. This?” He rubs his thumbs over the curve. “Is miracle.”

“I miss my body,” Shane says.

“This is your body,” Ilya corrects. “And is doing something stronger than lifting weights. And you are beautiful. You are so beautiful like this, Shane, makes me crazy.”

Ilya turns him around. He drops to his knees on the bathmat. He plants a kiss to the center of Shane’s stomach, then another to his hip, then another. He worships the changes. He treats the stretch marks like battle scars and the softness like a luxury.

By the time they make it to the bed, Shane doesn't feel like a pear. He feels cherished.

At Eight months, the sex is different now. It has to be. There’s no frantic wrestling, no pinning against walls. It’s slow. It’s side-by-side, or with Shane propped up on pillows.

Tonight, it was slow and deep and agonizingly sweet. The sheets are tangled around their legs. Shane is lying on his side, his back pressed against Ilya’s chest, nestled in the spoon position that has become their default. Ilya’s arm is draped over Shane, his hand resting protectively on the high, hard curve of the bump.

Shane reaches up, his fingers finding the silver chain around Ilya’s neck. He traces the links, playing with the small cross that rests there.

Ilya shifts, pressing a kiss on Shane’s shoulder.

“He is kicking,” he murmurs against Shane’s skin.

“He’s practicing,” Shane says drowsily. “I think he’s trying to skate his way out.”

“He will be a power forward. Like me.”

“Or a playmaker. Like me.”

“As long as he isn’t a defenseman,” Ilya jokes. “They are weird.”

Silence settles again, comfortable and warm.

“We have to decide,” Shane says softly.

“On the name?”

“Yeah. We can’t keep calling him ‘The Recruit’.”

They’ve cycled through dozens. Russian names that Shane couldn't pronounce. Traditional names that Ilya thought were boring. Hockey names that were too cliché.

“I still like Nikolai,” Ilya says.

“It’s too long. And you know everyone will just call him Nick. I don't want a Nick.”

“True.” Ilya’s hand moves in slow, soothing circles on Shane’s belly. The baby pushes back against the pressure, a distinct thump. “What about the list from yesterday?”

“Liam? No. Noah? Too popular.”

Shane turns in Ilya's arms, shifting carefully until he's facing him. The belly presses between them, a solid presence. He looks at Ilya—the sharp jaw, the hazel eyes softened by sleep and love, the messy hair.

“Wyatt,” Shane says.

Ilya props himself up on one elbow to look down at Shane. The sheet slips down to his waist, revealing the broad, tattooed expanse of his chest. "I know you two are friends now, but this feels... aggressive."

Shane rolls his eyes fondly. "I just like the name."

"Mm-hmm." Ilya smirks, leaning down to nip at Shane's shoulder. "You always did have a soft spot for him. Remember the All-Star game? You two were chatting in the corner for twenty minutes. I was very jealous."

"You were jealous of the mascot," Shane reminds him. "And Hazy is a great guy. He's one of the only other out guys in the league. It's a good association."

"He is a good guy," Ilya concedes, his hand splaying possessively over the baby, as if to shield their son from becoming a goaltender by sheer force of will. "But if our Wyatt asks for pads instead of skates, I am blaming you."

"Deal." Shane covers Ilya's hand with his own. "So, Wyatt. Wyatt Hollander-Rozanov."

"Very long," Ilya muses. "But powerful."

"What about a middle name?" Shane asks. He's been thinking about this too. "I was thinking maybe David? After my dad? Or maybe something... I don't know. Something simple."

Ilya frowns, his brow furrowing in confusion. "Middle name?"

"Yeah. You know. Wyatt James. Wyatt Alexander."

"No," Ilya says, shaking his head. "He is Russian boy. Half Russian. In Russia, we do not do middle names like that. We have patronymic." He sits up a little straighter, looking suddenly very serious. "It comes from the father's name. It means... he is son of Ilya. He belongs to me."

Shane's heart does that treacherous little flip it always does when Ilya gets territorial. "Okay. So... how does that work? Wyatt Ilya?"

"No." Ilya smiles, a soft, proud thing. He plants a soft kiss on Shane's hair. "My name is Ilya. So his patronymic is Ilyich."

"Ilyich," Shane repeats, trying to get the pronunciation right. The 'ch' sound is soft, rolling off the tongue. It is a mouthful.

Ilya looks anxious. "Is it too much? Is it too hard to say?"

"No," Shane says immediately. He reaches up and cups Ilya's jaw, his thumb brushing over the stubble there. "It's perfect."

"You think?"

"I know. It means he's yours, Ilya. It means he comes from you." Shane swallows past the lump in his throat. "And you're going to be the best Dad I know."

Ilya's eyes shimmer. "Wyatt Ilyich," he murmurs, booping Shane's nose. "Son of Ilya. Son of Shane."

"Wyatt Ilyich Hollander-Rozanov," Shane says. "That's a hell of a name. He's going to need a really big jersey."

"We will get him a big jersey," Ilya says, and kisses him.

It's Thursday afternoon when Shane's water broke and now they're camping at the fifth floor of The Ottawa Hospital (General Campus). They've been given one of the end suites with a lockable door and a tiny sitting room; security lingers by the elevators to keep the curious out.

"VIP," the staff calls it.

But Ilya hate it.

He hates the beeping of the monitors. But mostly, he hates the sound Shane is making.

His husband lets out a ragged hitch in his breath every time a contraction rolls through him, gripping the bedrails hard.

"Make it stop," Ilya snarls, turning on Dr. Aris. "Do something."

"Ilya," Shane gasps from the bed. He is sweating, his hair plastered to his forehead in damp spikes. "Stop yelling at the doctor."

"I am not yelling!" Ilya literally yells. "You are in pain. They are standing there doing nothing."

"We are monitoring the fetal heart rate, Mr. Rozanov," Dr. Aris says calmly, though she keeps a safe distance from Ilya. "Shane is handling the contractions well, but as we discussed, because of the... unique anatomy, we cannot wait for full dilation. The pressure on the abdominal wall is becoming dangerous."

She looks at Shane. "It's time, Shane. We need to move to the OR for the cesarian."

He knows this is the plan but they are going to cut his husband open.

"Okay," Shane breathes. He looks pale, small in the hospital gown. "Okay. Let's get him out."

The team moves efficiently, unlocking the wheels of the bed. Ilya moves with them, his hand clamped over Shane's forearm.

"I am coming," Ilya states. It isn't a question.

Dr. Aris stops at the double doors of the surgical wing. "I'm sorry, Ilya. You can't."

Ilya stops dead. "What?"

"This isn't a standard C-section," Dr. Aris explains gently. "It's a complex abdominal reconstruction. There are higher risks of hemorrhage. We need a completely sterile environment, and frankly, we need zero distractions. You have to wait here."

"No," Ilya says, his voice dropping to a dangerous, low register. "I do not leave him. He is my husband. I go where he goes."

"Ilya," Shane says. His voice is weak, but it has that steel core that made him a captain at twenty-two.

Ilya looks down. Shane is reaching for him, his hand trembling.

"You have to stay," Shane says.

"I can't," Ilya chokes out, panic clawing at his throat. "I cannot let you go in there alone. What if... what if something happens?"

"If something happens," Shane says, squeezing Ilya's hand with last bit of his strength, "they need to focus on fixing me, not managing you. You know you'll try to fight the surgeon if you see me bleed."

Ilya opens his mouth to argue, but closes it. Shane is right. If Ilya sees a scalpel touching Shane's skin, he will tear the room apart.

"I will be scared," Ilya admits, the words tearing out of him. "I will be terrified."

"Me too," Shane says, tears standing in his eyes. "So be brave for me, okay? Be the Captain. Wait for our son. I'll see you on the other side."

Ilya leans down. He kisses Shane hard. "I love you. You come back to me. You hear me, Hollander? You come back."

"Always," Shane promises.

The orderlies push the bed forward. Ilya walks alongside them until the very threshold of the surgical corridor. He watches the doors swing shut, cutting off the view of Shane's dark hair and the white sheets.

The lock clicks.

Ilya stands there for a second, staring at the brushed metal. Then, his legs simply stop working. He slides down the wall, collapsing onto the cold linoleum floor. He pulls his knees to his chest and buries his face in his hands, gasping for air that won't come. His chest feels like it is caved in. Shane is in there. Shane is being cut open.

And Ilya is out here, useless.

His phone buzzes in his pocket. He ignores it. It buzzes again.

He pulls it out with shaking hands. *Yuna.*

He swipes accept and puts it to his ear. He can't speak. He just breathes, a ragged, broken sound.

"Ilya?" Yuna's voice comes through, sharp with worry. "Ilya, is it time?"

"They took him," Ilya sobs. He doesn't care that he sounds pathetic. "They took him to surgery. I couldn't go in, Yuna. I could not go in."

"Oh, honey," Yuna's voice softens instantly. "It's okay. Breathe. He's in the best hands."

"I am scared," Ilya confesses the thing he can't say to anyone else. "What if I lose him? I can't... Yuna, I can't live without him. I don't want the baby if I don't have Shane. I don't want any of it."

"Listen to me," Yuna says firmly. "Shane is the strongest person I know. And he loves you too much to leave you. He is fighting to get back to you right now. You have to be ready for him. You have to be ready to introduce him to his son."

Ilya squeezes his eyes shut, tears leaking out. He pictures Shane's parents—David and Yuna—who welcomed him without hesitation, who love him like a second son.

"I am useless," Ilya confesses.

"That's okay," Yuna says soothingly. "David sat passed out twice when Shane was born. You're doing fine, Ilya. Just stay on the line with me. Tell me about the weather. Tell me anything."

Ilya sits on the floor of the hallway for forty-five minutes, listening to Yuna's voice anchoring him to the earth, while his entire world is being rearranged behind a set of double doors.

The doors open.

Ilya scrambles to his feet so fast he almost trips. Dr. Aris steps out. She is wearing surgical greens, a mask hanging around her neck. There is a smear of blood on her shoe.

Ilya stares at it, his heart stopping.

"He's fine," Dr. Aris says immediately, holding up a hand. "Shane is fine, Ilya. He's in recovery. He's asleep, but his vitals are perfect."

The tension wire that has been holding him up snaps, and he has to lean against the wall.

"And?" Ilya asks. "The... baby?"

Dr. Aris smiles. "He's big. And he has quite the set of lungs. Come meet him."

She leads him not to recovery, but to a small nursery room adjacent to it. Ilya walks in, and instantly notices a clear plastic bassinet in the center of the room. He approaches it slowly, as if it might explode. He looks over the edge. Inside, swaddled tightly in a hospital blanket with little ducks on it, is a baby. He is red. He is scrunchy. He has a shock of dark hair that is unmistakably Shane's, and a scowl that is unmistakably Ilya's.

He is tiny. He is massive. He is the most terrifying thing Ilya has ever seen.

"Hi," Ilya whispers.

The baby shifts, letting out a small, bird-like squeak.

Ilya reaches out a finger. He hesitates, afraid his rough, calloused hands—hands that break sticks and punch faces—will hurt this fragile human.

"You can touch him," a nurse says softly from the corner. "He knows your voice."

Ilya touches the baby's cheek. The skin is impossibly soft. The baby turns his head, rooting instinctively against Ilya's finger.

"Wyatt," Ilya says gently. "Wyatt Ilyich."

The baby blinks his eyes open. They are dark, unfocused, struggling to make sense of the light. But he grips Ilya's finger with a tiny, surprisingly strong hand. And just like that, the last piece of Ilya's heart—the piece he didn't even know was missing—slots into place.

He falls. He falls harder and faster than he has ever fallen on the ice, harder than he has fallen for Shane.

"Papa got you," Ilya promises, leaning down to press his forehead against the plastic rim. "I am your Papa. And your Daddy is a superhero. We got you."

A door opens behind him. A gurney is being wheeled in.

Ilya turns. Shane is there, asleep. The silver cross he carried into the OR now taped to the bed rail so it won't disappear. Ilya walks alongside the gurney, his hand resting on Shane's shoulder—the only part of him not covered in wires or blankets—until the nurses transfer Shane into the bed in the VIP suite.

Shane doesn't wake up during the transfer. The anesthesia holds him deep under, his face slack and pale, his eyelashes stark against his cheeks.

"He'll sleep for a few hours," the nurse tells Ilya as she checks the IV drip. "The spinal block is wearing off, but the sedation was heavy. Try to rest, Mr. Rozanov."

"I am fine," Ilya says, dragging a heavy leather armchair right up to the bedside rail.

He is not fine. His adrenaline is crashing, leaving him jittery and cold, but he can't close his eyes. Every time he blinks, he sees the operating doors swinging shut.

For the next six hours, Ilya busies himself with the neurotic maintenance of his territory.

He rearranges the pillows around Shane's legs three times. He checks the monitors every four minutes. He texts Yuna and David updates he doesn't really have (He is sleeping. He looks good. No, do not come yet, let him wake up first). He texts Hayden (Baby is here. Shane is out. If you post on Twitter I will kill you).

He goes to the bathroom only when his bladder screams, and he leaves the door open so he can see the bed.

The room grows dark, then light again as the Ottawa dawn bleeds gray through the window blinds. It is 6:00 a.m. when the rhythm of Shane's breathing changes. It hitches, then deepens. A low groan scrapes out of his throat.

Ilya is out of the chair instantly, leaning over the rail.

"Shane? Baby?"

Shane's eyelids flutter. He frowns, his brow furrowing in confusion. He tries to shift, but the moment his abdominal muscles engage, he gasps, his eyes flying open.

"Ow," Shane croaks. "Fuck. Ow."

"Don't move," Ilya orders gently, putting a hand on Shane's chest. "You have hole in your stomach. Do not crunch."

Shane blinks, his eyes trying to focus on Ilya's face. "Ilya?"

"I am here."

"Did we..." Shane licks his dry lips. Ilya grabs the cup of ice chips the nurse has left, holding a spoon to Shane's mouth. Shane takes it greedily. "Did we win?"

Ilya lets out a wet, incredulous laugh. "Yes, Hollander. We won. It was a blowout."

Clarity slowly seeps back into Shane's gaze. He looks down at his flatter stomach, which is covered in thick bandages and a compression binder. Then he looks at the empty clear plastic bassinet in the corner of the room.

"Where?" Shane rasps, panic spiking in his scent.

"He is in the nursery," Ilya assures him quickly, stroking Shane's hair back. "They are doing the tests. Measuring him. Washing the goop off. He is perfect, Shane. He is big."

Shane slumps back against the pillows, exhaling shakily. "Okay. Okay. Bring him? Can I see him?"

"I will get the nurse."

Ten minutes later, a nurse—a sturdy, short red haired kind woman named Elena—wheels the bassinet in. Shane tries to sit up again, and again, the pain cuts him down. He hisses, his face going gray.

"Easy, easy," Elena soothes. She presses a button on the bed, raising the back up mechanically so Shane doesn't have to use his core. "Mr. Rozanov, I need you to support his side with pillows. We're going to do a football hold. It keeps the pressure off the incision."

Ilya follows her instructions. He packs pillows under Shane's left arm, creating a soft ramp. He sits on the edge of the bed, his hip pressed against Shane's hip, offering his own body as a brace.

"Ready?" Elena asks.

"Yeah," Shane breathes. His eyes are locked on the bundle.

Elena picks up Wyatt. He is swaddled tight, sleeping peacefully. She lowers him carefully into the crook of Shane's arm.

Ilya watches the air leave Shane's lungs.

Shane looks down. His expression shatters. The tough, snarky, unshakeable center of the Ottawa Centaurs dissolves, leaving behind something raw and pure adoration.

"Hi." Shane gently touches Wyatt's nose with his pinky. "Hi, Wyatt. I'm your Dad."

Wyatt stirs. He smells the milk—the scent coming off Shane is overpowering now, sweet and rich—and his instincts kick in. He turns his head toward Shane's chest, mouth opening, making little seeking noises.

"He's hungry," Elena says, smiling. "Do you want to try? It might be a little clumsy at first."

Shane nods, fumbling with the snaps of his hospital gown. Ilya helps him, pushing the fabric aside to bare Shane's chest.

"I got him," Ilya murmurs. He slides his large hand under Wyatt's head, supporting the weight so Shane doesn't have to strain.

With Elena's guidance, they position the baby. Wyatt roots for a second, frustrated, and then—latch. It isn't perfect, but it is strong. Shane inhales sharply, his back arching slightly against Ilya's arm, but then he relaxes. He looks down at the tiny creature drinking from him, growing from him, and a look of pure, unadulterated peace settles over his face.

Ilya stares.

He feels like an intruder, witnessing a miracle. He doesn't have any memories of this. He doesn't know if his mother had ever held him like this, if she had looked at him with this kind of earth-shattering devotion when he was born. He has always assumed love was something you earned, something you fought for. But looking at Shane—exhausted, in pain, hair a mess, gazing at their son with all the love in the world—Ilya realizes he is wrong.

This isn't earned. This is just... given. It is absolute.

"Look at his hands," Shane says, breaking Ilya's trance. "They're huge. He's going to have your grip strength."

Ilya doesn't answer. He can't. His throat is closed tight.

Shane looks up, tearing his eyes away from the baby. He sees Ilya's face. His expression turning into that teasing affection.

"Oh," Shane coos, reaching out his free hand to touch Ilya's cheek. "My big baby is crying."

Ilya realizes with a start that his face is wet. He lets out a ragged breath and presses his palms into his eyes, trying to stem the flow.

"I am not," Ilya lies, his voice wavering. "Is just... the lighting. Is very bright."

"Come here," Shane murmurs soothingly, opening his free arm.

Ilya quickly crumbles. He buries his face in the crook of Shane's neck, careful not to jostle their baby. He hugs Shane carefully, breathing in the scent of milk and sweat and life.

"I am so proud of you," Ilya murmurs into Shane's shoulders, shaking with silent sobs. "You did this. You are incredible. I love you so much."

Shane holds him tight, stroking the back of Ilya's neck. "We did it."

Ilya pulls back after a moment, wiping his face on his sleeve. He looks down at Wyatt, who is happily oblivious, his cheeks puffing in and out as he drinks. He reaches out and traces the curve of his son's cheek with his thumb.

"He has your nose," he says softly. "I am glad. My nose has been broken six times. He does not need that."

"He has your pout," Shane counters, smiling down adoringly at their son.

"I hope he gets your freckles," Ilya says, brushing his thumb over the dusting of spots across Shane's nose. "I want him to have the freckles."

Shane looks at him, his eyes dark and warm and full of everything they have fought for. "And your eyes," Shane whispers.

They stare at each other, the silence of the room heavy with the magnitude of the shift. They aren't just Shane and Ilya anymore. They are this. *A family.*

"This is going to be a disaster," Shane says softly, glancing down at Wyatt. "We have no idea what we're doing. It's going to be a really stressful week."

"Yes," Ilya agrees. "We will be tired. We will smell like vomit. You will cry. I will probably cry."

Shane smiles, exhausted but radiant. "I love you."

Ilya leans down, kissing Shane's forehead, then Wyatt's, then Shane's lips.

"I love you," Ilya murmurs in between kisses. "I love you. Over and over again."

End.

End Notes

Hello!

I hope you enjoyed this little slice of domestic life!

English is not my first language, so if you spot any odd grammar, thank you for bearing with me! Much love!

Thank you so much for reading!

Love,

Azi 

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