

Nieces

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Nieces

by [Y_Eleanore_Y](#)

Summary

Svetlana lets Ilya know that Alexei had another daughter.

He has two nieces.

And they need him.

****COMPLETE****

Notes

I'm not even attempting Russian, I know I wouldn't do it justice. If something is in italics, it's in Russian.

Chapter 1: Before

Sveta: *Alexei and Maria had another baby.*

Ilya: ...

Sveta: *I see you typing and then not. I gave him some money. You don't have to worry.*

Ilya: *I'll pay you back.*

Sveta: *No, I'm telling you this so you don't have to send that sack of shit anything. It's taken care of.*

Ilya: *Thank you.*

Sveta: *They are beautiful, your nieces. They don't look like Alexi was involved at all. Blonde curls, hazel eyes.*

Ilya: *Like Mama.*

Sveta: *And you. They named her Irina.*

Ilya: *Thank you for letting me know.*

Sveta: ❤️

“I need to set up another trust.” Shane looked up from the stove where he was cooking something that smelled good for once. “What are you making?”

“Gnocchi with lemon and dill”

“Carbs?”

“Shut up, I eat carbs.” Ilya made a face that expresses his doubts.

“Do you?”

“It's also got a ton of tuna and kale in it. Well balanced. I made enough for both of us if you want some.” They didn't always eat together, what with Shane's history of obsessing over eating “healthy” and Ilya's love of McDonalds. But the gnocchi smelled delicious.

“I do love dill...and carbs.” He cozied up to his husband and tried to snag a bite directly from the skillet. Shane swatted him away.

“You'll burn your tongue and then how will you kiss me?”

“Very carefully.”

Shane plated the meal and they both took seats at the counter. After a few moments of silent chewing and waiting for Ilya to be ready to talk, Shane asked the question. “Why do you need to set up a trust?”

“What? Oh, Alexei had another baby.” Ilya tried to sound flippant, unbothered. Shane saw right through him.

“You talked to Alexei?”

“No. Never again will I talk to him. Sveta told me.” Ilya took a deep breath, a tell that he had more to say. Shane braced for what was next. “They named her Irina.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.” Shane reached over and took Ilya's hand. “I know that she was his mother too. But...”

“But we wanted to name our daughter Irina.” Shane finished, a little wistfully.

“Mhh.” Ilya wiped at his eye with the back of his hand, “Is stupid. We are years away from having kids, if we have kids at all. It's just a name.” Ilya pushed his gnocchi around the plate, all interest in food gone.

“You will be such a good dad some day.” Shane tucked a lock of golden curls behind his husband's ear, “And we can still name our daughter Irina if you want. It doesn't change anything.”

“I know.” He breathed. “It just feels like Alexei taking from me... again.”

“He didn't take anything away this time. Not really. He gave you a niece.”

“One I'll never meet.” Russia was off limits now for both of them. Not that Ilya ever wanted to return, but knowing he could not see him sometimes.

They were silent again, Shane giving Ilya the space to process his thoughts. Ilya surreptitiously slipped a piece of tuna to Anya and rubbed her furry head. He knows he spoils her. She's worth spoiling. He catches Shane doing the same sometimes. It makes him happy that Shane loves their dog. He knows that Shane would love his nieces too.

“I miss Annika. She was six the last time I was in Moscow. That would make her what, 10 now? So old.”

“Same age as Hayden's twins.”

“Hayden.” Ilya sneered in mock resentment. While they'd pretty much made peace with one another, Ilya couldn't imagine actually liking the man, even if he adored his children.

“Svetlana says she looks like Mama...and me.”

Shane pushed back from the counter as wrapped his arms around his husband's shoulders. "Let's call Mom and get the trust set up for Irina. Just get it done. You'll feel better."

Ilya doubted he would feel better, not really. But Shane thrived on accomplishment and checking this off the to do list sooner than later would be good. Plus it would be good to see Yuna before they headed to the rink for a game against Columbus. And David. Family that loved him. That didn't take from him.

"Happy Anniversary." Shane nuzzled at Ilya's cheek, loving the feel of the rough stubble Ilya decided to keep after they brought the cup home to Ottawa.

"One year already? It went by so fast. All the others were so slow." He laced their fingers together, watching the morning light making their skin glow golden.

"That's because we were together the whole year. For the first time, you never had to miss me."

"Hmm, must be." Ilya reached back and kissed Shane tenderly, then a wide smile crossed his face. "Somehow your constant boring made the days fly by."

"I am not boring." Shane protested.

"So boring." Ilya faked yawn, "Can not stay awake with all this boring."

Shane started tickling Ilya and peppering him with kisses, "I'll show you boring!" They dissolved into laughter.

This year will be filled with laughter, Ilya vowed to himself. Maybe not every day, but more days than not.

It seemed like their phones would not stop buzzing all morning. They went off in tandem from the constant well wishes from friends. It made Ilya feel well and truly cared for. He had friends, friends that cared for him, who loved him, and Shane. Both individually, and as a couple.

Max: Happy Anniversary!

Leah: Dammit he beat me to it, I was hoping to be the first! Oh well, HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

Ryan: "Kindred spirits are not so scarce as I used to think. It's splendid to find out there are so many of them in the world." Happy anniversary, you two. I'm glad you have each other.

Harris: Troy and I can't wait to celebrate with you tomorrow! Enjoy your day alone today!

Troy: We are still on for dinner at our place tomorrow, right? I promise not to set the grill on fire this time. (And Happy Anniversary!)

Bood: Happy Anniversary! Make sure you eat that slice of cake Cassie stuck in the back of your freezer. She says it is important to eat it on your 1st anniversary. She made me do it on ours, now you must also suffer freezer burnt cake. She says it brings good luck.

David: Happy to get to celebrate a full year of having two wonderful sons. We love you!

Yuna: We love you so much. And we promise not to swing by today. But tomorrow morning we are coming over with presents!

Dykstra: Happy first you two!

Hayden: Happy Anniversary! Although the girls want to remind you that your real anniversary was months ago. All the Pike's love you.

JJ even called and wished them a happy anniversary.

Ilya's phone buzzed again, and again. "It's too much. So much love from everyone. Even Hayden."

"That's because you are worth loving."

"We are worth loving." Ilya nudged his husband and started kissing down his chest. Ilya's phone buzzed again with another text he ignored. He was mouthing Shane's balls when it started ringing.

"Right now I am not enjoying being so well loved." he grumbled. Shane squirmed, wanting Ilya's mouth back.

"They will leave a voicemail."

"You know I never check that."

The phone rang again and buzzed with another text. Shane let out an exasperated sigh, "just answer it, or turn your phone to silent. Then get back here. I need you to finish what you started."

Ilya made a very Russian sound as he grabbed his phone from the far end of the coffee table. "We will still be married tomorrow. They can wait." He started to silence the device, but saw it was Svetlana calling, and he had several missed calls from her and a slew of texts. She

wouldn't call like this just to wish them a happy anniversary, especially since she was in Moscow this summer. His blood ran cold as he answered the call, "*Sveta, what's wrong?*"

Shane looked up at Ilya's use of Russian. All the joy leached from the room in an instant, as he watched a range of emotions cross his Ilya's face. Shane crawled across the couch to sit next to him and squeeze his hand. Ilya squeezed back; holding on like a lifeline. Shane couldn't make out everything Svetlana was saying. She was speaking too swiftly for his brain to translate, his Russian still unsteady at best. He thought he heard "*attack*" and "*dead*" and then the only words he knew for certain - "*Annika and Irina*".

Shane froze. Were Ilya's nieces dead? They were his nieces too. He'd never met them. He hadn't realized until this moment how much he'd wanted to meet them. They were Ilya's family. He met Ilya's panicked eyes and tried not to panic himself. He didn't even know for sure what was going on, he just knew that whatever it was, it wasn't good.

"I love you Sveta. Thank you for being the one to tell me."

"What happened?" Shane blurted out the moment the call ended.

Ilya just stared into the middle distance. Shane could see him trying to process. To put it into english.

"Alexei," he started. Then shook his head, "my brother..." he paused and took a breath before starting again. "My brother and his wife are dead."

Chapter 2: During - Part One

Chapter Summary

What about the girls?

Chapter Notes

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

“What about Annika? Irina?” Shane asked, holding tight to Ilya's hand.

“Svetlana can't find them.” His words were eerily calm.

“She can't find them? Where are they? Children don't just disappear.” Shane implored.

Ilya looked at him with dead-eyes, “Children disappear every day.”

“No.”

Ilya gave a slight nod to his head, eyes never leaving Shane's, “Da.”

"Oh my love. She will find them." Shane attempted to soothe in Russian.

“No. No Russian.” Ilya brought his finger to Shane's lips. “It makes it real.” Then Shane watched in agony as his husband broke apart. Cracked in half before him. “I need this to not be real.” He keened between great wracking sobs, “Make this not real.”

Shane couldn't do that. He wished he could. More than anything, he wished he could. He held on to Ilya as he cried, tears slipping down his own cheeks. Mourning the loss of people he didn't even know. He wanted to offer comfort, but there was none to be had. So he just held Ilya close while he sobbed. Ilya eventually cried himself into a fitful sleep. Shane pulled a blanket over him and slipped outside as he pulled his phone from his pocket.

“Mama. We need you.”

Shane thought he had seen his mom in ‘Full Yuna Hollander Mode’™ before. But nothing had prepared him for this. She was a force as he'd never seen.

Overnight Yuna and Svetlana had become a unified team. One in Canada, the other in Moscow. One singular goal - find Annika and Irina and get them to Ottawa.

The two of them kept Shane & Ilya updated the best they could. But the news was frustrating and frustratingly little.

No one seemed able to locate the girls. All they knew for certain was that their bodies had not been found next to Alexei and Maria.

Ilya was convinced they were dead and had gone nearly catatonic. He lay on the couch where he'd fallen asleep the night before. Clutching his crucifix, he mouthed words Shane couldn't hear. He suspected he was praying to his mother.

"I've been to three morgues," Svetlana said in clipped English for the Hollanders. "They weren't there. I will find them. I will bring them to Ilya."

"Agreed, we operate like they are alive until we have proof otherwise," Yuna stated in a voice that brooked no argument. Shane nodded, and looked over at Ilya, who still hadn't moved, eyes unfocused.

Yuna spent the day drafting emails and reaching out to every contact she ever had. Speaking with the Russian consulate. Endless conversations with lawyers and diplomats. All the while David provided her snacks and supportive kisses to the top of her head when she was getting too worked up, or looked too exhausted. David kept both Yuna and Shane fed. David knew his job and did it well.

Shane's job was keeping Ilya from losing his mind. And he was pretty sure he was failing at it.

Shane had sent an SOS message to Galina while Ilya was sleeping that first tear-filled night. But so far, no response. His heart sank as he looked at the calendar today and the next 8 were marked off "Galina on Cruise". Fuck.

Shane tried to coax food into Ilya. Sips of water. David's famous chicken parm went untouched. Harris and Troy dropped by with McGriddles that morning, but even pancakes as bread couldn't tempt him.

"Maybe hand pies?" Harris suggested with a shrug. Shane and the couple stood by, unsure what to do next.

"Ilya, buddy?" Troy knelt down in front of his best friend, "You wanna take Anya and Chiron on a walk with me?" Ilya didn't respond. Troy rubbed his friend's shoulder, "Ok, I'll take them on my own. You try to..." he looked around helplessly, "...breathe?"

Troy leashed up the dogs and took them out the front door. Shane and Harris followed.

"Thanks for trying." Shane offered, hugging him. "And thanks for looking after Anya while we try to figure this out."

"Of course.

Harris opened the truck door and pulled out his backpack, "I won't put anything out on Social Media, but I am very adept at the interwebs. I'll see if there is anything I can do to help." He

went back into the house to talk to Yuna.

When Shane and Troy returned from the short walk with the dogs, they saw that Harris had his laptop set up next to Shane's mom's, both clicking away. Doing what, Shane didn't know. It all felt useless. I am useless.

"You are not useless," Troy said, shoulder-checking Shane, as they looked through the plate-glass windows. Ilya still on the couch, Yuna and Harris at the kitchen table, David at the stove.

"Did I say that out loud?"

"Nope, it was all over your face. I may be an asshole, but I know how to read people pretty well."

"You are not an asshole. You're a good friend."

"I can be both. Just like Ilya."

Shane took a deep breath as he unhooked Anya from her leash; Troy did the same for Chiron. "I need him to be an asshole right now." Shane felt tears coming on and leaned into Troy, who wrapped his arms around him, "I need him to be something, anything, right now." It felt good to be held up by someone. Shane hadn't realized how much he needed a hug from a friend. "I'm really worried he might not come back to us if something really has happened to the girls."

"I know." Troy didn't offer platitudes. Just calm strength that Shane could borrow.

They stood together, the dogs playing around them until Shane was able to pull himself back together. "Thanks."

Troy just nodded back. In silent agreement that they would be there for each other. The roots of their friendship forging deeper, intertwining.

Eventually, Troy and Harris went home, promising to check-in tomorrow and that Harris would keep their friends informed so Shane wouldn't have to worry about anyone but Ilya - and the girls - wherever they were.

As the sun set that evening, out of sheer desperation, Shane fished out the pack of cigarettes Ilya kept 'hidden' in the vase on the entryway table. He squatted down next to Ilya and held out the pack and a lighter to his husband. "I'm not condoning this, but at this point I need a cigarette."

Ilya looked up for the first time all day and gave a half-hearted smile as he took the offering. "Don't you dare smoke these. Is so bad for you."

“But not bad for you?” Shane said wetly. So thrilled to be getting any response from his husband.

“Not right now.” Ilya sighed and stood up on shaky legs, letting Shane lead him from the house. They made their way down to the dock.

Ilya lit up as soon as they sat down, feet dangling in the water. He inhaled deeply, "I think this is my fault." He said, blowing out a long stream of smoke.

“It's not.” Shane countered.

“Mmh, I would not give him more money.”

“Still not your fault.” Matter of fact. No room for debate.

“The police say it was retaliation for someone he arrested.” Shane knew this. It was one of the first updates they received.

“Definitely not your fault.”

“Svetlana says it was because of his debts. I believe Sveta. So, my fault.” Ilya looked over at Shane, braced for the condemnation he knew he deserved.

Shane put his palm to Ilya's cheek, “Still not your fault.” he kissed Ilya sweetly.

Ilya turned away not willing to accept any affection. The rejection unfairly sliced Shane. “I could have paid them off.”

Shane was not having it. “He would have racked up more.” He put steel into this voice. “It is not your fault.” Shane only knew bits and pieces about the time before Ilya's father passed, but he knew Ilya had sent tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars, back to Russia. It would have never been enough.

“And I could have paid it again.” Ilya exploded. “He is dead because of me. The girls are missing because of me.” Each phrase harsh, cutting, brutal. Shane let him rage, as bad as this was, it was better than the catatonia. Ilya's voice dropped almost to a whisper. “They are alone, and scared, and may be dead because I failed them.”

Shane hated that his beautiful, tenderhearted husband put so much on himself. “Ilya, it is not your fault.” Ilya shook his head. “Look at me. Look at me.” Shane took a deep breath when Ilya finally met his eye. He brought his hands up between them, palms out, the way his mom did for him when he was spiraling and needed to reset. “Enough.”

He breathed deep, and Ilya did same.

“Enough,” Ilya repeated. They held each other as the sun dipped below the water.

“Boys?” David called out from the deck, “Yuna has an update. You’ll both want to hear this.”

Ilya ran up from the lakeside, Shane close on his heels. “What, what is news?”

Yuna held out her phone, “They found them! They are alive!”

Chapter End Notes

I feel bad for making things so hard for them. It will end happily I promise! Just stick with me. ❤️

Thanks to @DoubleDecker for the phrase "Full Yuna Hollander" go read their fics!
(Sorry I don't know how to link that correctly)

Chapter 3: During - Part Two

Chapter Summary

In which there is a lot of hugging.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the delay in getting a new chapter posted. I fell down a beautiful rabbit hole of fics and it took me awhile to crawl back out to return to my own story.

Seriously, how is a girl expected to stop reading long enough to write anything? I blame all the wonderful writers on AO3, you are amazing. 🥹

Ilya grabbed the phone from Yuna and immediately began a rapid-fire conversation with Svetlana that Shane didn't even try to keep up with. This time, thankfully, the few words he did catch included "safe" and "good". Right now, all he wanted in the world was for these two girls he'd never met to be safe and good. Knowing on a bone-deep level that his husband would never be safe or good if they weren't.

Shane looked to his parents. The relief coming off all of them was palpable. David, one arm already wrapped around Yuna, opened his other, beckoning his son in for a hug that they all desperately needed. The Hollanders embraced as the tight unit of three they had always been. But now it felt wrong to Shane. It wasn't enough. Shane looked up to see Ilya ending the call with Svetlana. He saw the light in Ilya's eye dim as his husband took in the family hug he wasn't a part of.

David noticed too. "Stop being an idiot and get in here," pulling his arm from Shane and making space for Ilya. Shane loved his dad so much at that moment. He was endlessly thankful that his parents had made space for Ilya in their family from day one. Ever since that first fraught conversation at the kitchen table when his parents saw the love between them, they had chosen to love Ilya too. Wholeheartedly and without exception. Shane wondered how long it would take for Ilya to fully trust that love after all he'd been through with his own fractured family.

Yuna was the one to break the group hug. She reached across and wiped the tear streaks from Ilya's cheek. "We need to have a family meeting."

They arranged themselves much like they had that first day. Ilya across from David, Shane positioned across from his mother. Shane's foot finding Ilya's in silent support.

“I need to know what is happening. Where are Annika and Irina?” Shane burst out. Now that he knew his husband was on more solid footing mentally, he was desperate for information on the girls.

“Per Svetlana, she knows where the girls are, but doesn’t yet have custody of them. But they are safe and apparently unharmed.” Yuna stated in her no-nonsense tone. She softened, turning from Shane. “Ilya, sweetheart, what did she tell you?”

“The police have the girls. They have had them the whole time. Well, not the whole time, but for several hours before they told Sveta.”

“The longest hours of my life.” Shane muttered.

“Yes, mine too. Well, second longest.” Ilya tapped his head and looked meaningfully at Shane.

“I was fine.”

“But I did not know that.” They held each other's eyes, remembering that terrible game.

Shane wanted to know the plan, “So the police have the girls. How do we get them? We are assuming Ilya is their closest relation, but do we know that for sure? Will he have to go to Russia to get them? Is that safe for him?”

Yuna reached over and squeezed her son’s hand. “Yes, Ilya is not only their closest relation, he was actually listed in Alexei’s will as their guardian. I get the feeling Alexei knew something like this could happen.”

“How on earth do you know that?” Shane asked.

“She’s a witch.” David responded with a smile.

“Not a witch, just very well connected. So is Svetlana. And more importantly, so is her father.”

“Sergi is involved?” Ilya asked in astonishment.

“Yes, it was the Minister pulling some strings that really made this happen.” Yuna went on, “I’ve been assured that the girls will be handed over to Svetlana and the Minister today.”

“Yes, Sveta said she would have them today.” Ilya confirmed, he looked at the time on his phone, it was nearing Midnight, very early morning in Moscow. Svetlana must have been up all night fighting for them. He owed her more than he could comprehend. “She didn't mention her father.”

“His presence is really making all the difference. But I won't feel confident until they are on Canadian soil, or at the very least on a plane.”

They were all in agreement there. Everything felt tentative. A loon cried in the distance making Ilya start. He never got used to that howl, the tattoo didn't change that.

“Legally it would be better if you could go collect them yourself, Ilya.” Yuna explained.

“I’ll go.” He abruptly stood up from the table, knocking over his chair in haste. Shane grabbed his husband’s hand before he could dash to the car and start driving to the airport in depression-rumpled clothes and no shoes.

Yuna raised her voice, ignoring Ilya’s outburst, “but, we’ve all agreed that that is not a safe thing for you to do. And could in fact make things more difficult and potentially dangerous for the girls.”

Ilya’s new found energy deflated at once. “I would make things worse for them. I already made things worse. I’m the reason they are alone.”

“Ilya,” David rose, concerned father energy radiating from him. “None of this is your fault, and you are not making anything worse. Come here.” He wrapped the taller man in a tight hug. “You understand that right? That none of this is your fault?”

“But it is.” Ilya’s voice was muffled against David’s shoulder.

“Sweetheart, no it’s not.” Yuna stood too, rubbing Ilya’s back. “Absolutely none of this is your fault. You are going to provide them a safe haven. A safe home, right Shane?”

“The safest.” Shane readily agreed as his parents set Ilya down in David’s recently vacated seat. They were catty-corner from each other now, but they still managed to find each other’s feet under the table. Connected.

“The plan as it stands,” Yuna went on, as if nothing had happened. “is for Svetlana to take temporary custody of them. There is a bunch of paperwork I’ll need you to sign, Ilya. And we will need to go to the Embassy, probably a few times.”

“I’ll start packing and closing up the cottage for the summer. We can head back to Ottawa in the morning.” Shane started going through his ‘Closing The Cottage’ check list in his head. It was something he could do.

“I’ll do the same at our place.” David looked like he was going through a similar mental list as he righted Ilya’s chair.

“I like this plan.” Yuna agreed before attempting to stifle a yawn.

Shane realized how exhausted his mother was, how exhausted everyone was. “It’s late. No one has slept. Is there anything that we can do right now?”

Yuna shook her head, “No, nothing. Not until in the girls are handed over. And that is probably still hours away.”

“Time for sleep.” David said, “I’m taking my wife to bed. I suggest you do the same with your husband, Shane. They both look ready to drop.” He led his wife by the hand to the downstairs guest suite.

“Get some sleep.” Yuna looked at both her sons. “I love you and I’m proud of you.”

“Love you too.” Shane and Ilya responded in unison.

Shane pulled Ilya up the stairs through their bedroom and into the en suite. “You need a shower.”

“Will you be joining me?” Ilya gave a cheeky grin that Shane knew and loved all too well.

“I could be convinced.”

A long and steamy shower later Shane wrapped himself around Ilya. Usually Ilya was the big spoon, but tonight Shane wanted to wrap himself around his husband, protecting him.

“Thank you for taking care of me.” The Russian slurred in sleepy tones.

“I feel like I did a pretty terrible job.” Shane admitted, “You were so far away today, and I didn't know if I'd be able to bring you back if we'd gotten different news.”

Shane felt Ilya nod but he said nothing.

“Don't ever leave me.” Shane whispered, holding Ilya a little tighter. He didn't get the wholehearted agreed he so desperately wanted.

Instead Ilya kissed Shane's chest over his heart. “I will try.”

Shane listened to the rhythmic breathing that signalled Ilya had fallen into a deep sleep. He knew he should sleep too. Holding on felt more important right now.

The relatively calm chime of Ilya's phone signifying a call from Svetlana might as well have been an air raid siren. Both men bolted awake.

“I have them.”

Chapter 4: During - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Something a little lighter.

Group Chat

Harris: Update from Yuna! She and the guys left the cottage this morning. David is staying back to close up the houses since they will need to stay in Ottawa for the summer. The girls are on a plane with Svetlana and are expected to land in 8 hours.

Hazy: Thank fuck.

Bood: Great update Harris. How were they doing?

Troy: Frazzled. We are keeping Anya at our place for a few more days.

Hayden: Guys, you realize that in a few hours they are going to basically be parents of a 10-year-old and an infant. I have 10-year-olds....they are not ready for what's coming. You need the 9 years leading up to it.

Bood: Shit yeah, I needed the full 9 months to prepare mentally for Milo's arrival. I can't imagine having a baby dropped on you with what, 3 days notice? I'm freaking the fuck out for them.

Troy: This is not helping. Do not tell them they should be freaking the fuck out.

Hayden: I'm sure they are doing that without our help. Shane hasn't had time to make a checklist for having kids. I can only imagine the way he is absolutely losing his shit. And he should be. If someone dropped Ruby at our doorstep today, I don't know what I would do.

Cliff: Shut the fuck up, Pike. Not helping. No wonder Roz thinks you're crap.

Bood: 100

Troy: Also not helping.

Harris: Enough. How do we really help? How many of you are actually Dads?

Bood: Me - Milo is 2

Hayden: ME (clearly) twin 10 year olds, then 6 and 4.

Wyatt: None of my own, but I have a kick ass nephew.

Cliff: Uh, one on the way...

Troy: What?! Congratulations man.

Hazy: DUDE!

Cliff: I'm not really talking about it yet. And this group is for Ilya and Shane support, but I really get the freaking the fuck nature of things right now.

Harris: Congrats! If you would ever give up playing for Boston and come to Ottawa, we would throw you a shower!

Oh!!! Should we throw one for Shane and Ilya?! 🤔🍼🚿🎁🥳

Troy: Harris, sweetie, I think a party might be more than they can handle right now. There is literally a countdown clock.

Harris: Fair. But a shower gets them all the things they will need. And I get the impression from Yuna, these girls are coming with nothing. So our boys are going to need EVERYTHING. Fast.

Bood: I have some baby stuff from Milo we were keeping in case we decide to have more kids. High chair, bouncy seat.

Hayden: We finally got rid of everything after Jackie got fixed. But I have clothes that will probably fit Annika. Ruby and Jade just hit a growth spurt, and it will be a few years before Amber catches up.

Hazy: Car seats! They will need car seats! I had to buy one when my sis came to town.

Cliff: I'm looking at the list Nova is putting together for our registry. Diapers, bottles, breast pump, onesies, swaddling blankets, pacifiers.

Bood: Pretty sure the breast pump isn't going to be needed. 🤔🤔🤔

Cliff: I was just going off the list! Fuck I don't know. I'm not a dad yet. Jeez.

Hazy: No worries, man. You tried.

Troy: Hayden get Jackie to send Harris a list of what they will need for Annika. Bood, have Cassie do the same for Irina. I no longer trust you to do it on your own.

And for fucks sake no one says anything to freak the guys out.

Harris: The ONLY thing you text them are messages of support. Hayden, this means NO HORROR STORIES.

Hayden: He lived through all my horror stories in real time. He knows. It's why I'm sure he is losing his shit right now.

7 hours until he becomes a parent. My dude is fucked.

Shane was weirdly calm standing in front of the baby aisle. He knew he should be freaking out. If he checked in with his brain there was a possible freak out brewing. But mainly he just felt good. Like lacing his skates up heading into a playoff game, good.

"We can do this." he said to himself and he put a few more cans of formula in his cart along with two different types of bottles before he went to find his mom and husband. Splitting up had probably not been the best idea.

He found Yuna looking at the cribs, indecision on her face. "It's been so long since I've looked at these. They've changed."

"30 years?"

"35. We had a nursery set up for years before you finally came along. By then I was so happy to have you, I barely let you sleep in it. I just kept you with me all the time."

Shane hugged his mom tightly. His parents didn't speak often about the losses they had before and after him, but he knows enough.

"Do you think the girls are OK? Really?"

Yuna shook her head slightly, face drawn. "Svetlana hasn't told Ilya yet, but she's worried, especially about Irina. She's really small and hasn't cried at all, just sleeps and barely eats. She texted me during their layover in Brussels when it started to concern her."

Shane closed his eyes. "What do we do?"

"What we were always going to do. Buy a crib, diapers, and some changes of clothes for them. Be at the airport when they land. Give them a safe and stable home. That's what they will need the most. And get them into a pediatrician as soon as possible just to be safe."

He nodded, "I talked with Bood earlier today. He said Cassie will give them a preliminary look over and then make official recommendations for a doctor. They will be by tomorrow morning with some things from Milo too."

"See, you are already fantastic at this." Yuna squeezed her son's arm with pride. "I think this is the best crib. Help me load it into the cart?"

"Look at all the things I found!" Ilya practically sang with manic energy as he turned the corner pushing his own cart. This one overflowing with clothes, books, toys, and a giant stuffed animal. Shane thought it could be a hedgehog?

"Ilya, we literally talked about not going overboard on the drive over here. Essentials only."

“But Shane, look at this cute outfit!” Ilya held up a sleeper that looked like a fuzzy brown bear, complete with ears.

Shane melted, imagining bundling a little baby into the costume and smiled, “Ok, you can get that one.” Then he remembered what his mom had said, “What size is it?”

“6-12 months. Irina is 8 months old, so should fit perfectly, right?”

Shane shrugged, “I don’t know. Let’s get it anyway. And make sure to get a wide size range of diapers. I remember Hayden complaining about how the sizes are all crazy and you just have to see what works.”

Yuna smiled as the boys bickered over the rest of the items, most of them completely unnecessary, that Ilya had picked out. She plucked a wrap off the shelf and slipped it into Shane’s cart, happy to see these were popular now. Carrying Shane in one during his babyhood was one of her favorite things. She had kept him close in those early years, always slightly afraid he would vanish if she didn’t. It must have worked. 30 years later they were still close, and she was so proud of the man he had grown up to be, and excited to see how he would be with the girls.

Shane made sure they had some clothes in every size from infant to 12-months, “We just don’t know baby sizes, and the last thing we want is to have to run out and get something different immediately.” They did the same for Annika. Grabbing a few shirts, leggings, and dresses in sizes 6X to 14s. “Hayden says his girls are in 14s, and they are 10 too. So apparently the tags mean nothing.”

“This is very sexy.” Ilya drawled from the doorway, a basket of clean and folded laundry for the girls in his arms.

“What is?” Shane asked, pushing his hair back before fitting the Allen wrench into what should be the last bolt.

“You, building furniture.”

“I’m assembling a crib that we will need in,” he looked at his watch, “Fuck. Thee hours.”

“Is still sexy.”

“Help me turn it right side up. Let’s make sure I did this right.”

“Of course you did. You are Shane Hollander, and those were very detailed directions.”

Shane rolled his eyes as they set the crib up and added the mattress Ilya had already covered in a pink floral sheet.

“It looks right.”

Ilya began to climb in, “What are you doing?!” Shane all but screeched.

“Making sure it is strong enough.” He bounced lightly. “Seems strong.”

“Asshole! If you break this crib we don't have time to go get another one.”

“No, it's good. You did a good job.” Shane helped Ilya climb out. Shaking his head at him.

They looked around the room the girls would be sharing for tonight at least. Fresh sheets on the king sized bed that was purchased for hockey players to crash on, not children. Stark white walls, the only decoration was some framed jerseys. It did not feel welcoming for kids, even with the giant hedgehog sitting on the bed.

“We could put them in the Pike's room.” Shane suggested.

“Ruby would kill us, and Jade would be sad. Where would they stay when they visit?”

“Fine, this is just for tonight anyway. We will let Annika pick out her own room later and decorate it. For right now, this works, right?”

Ilya pulled Shane down to sit on the edge of the bed. “Shane?”

“Huh?” he was still occupied with a mental room remodel.

“We have not talked about if we are ready for this.”

“Look at this room, we are absolutely not ready for this.”

“Always Mr. Real Estate.” Ilya gave a slight chuckle, “But are you...ok with this. With them. Coming to live with us. I never asked you. It just happened. I don't want you to have to do something you don't want to do.”

“Ilya.”

“They are my nieces. My responsibility. It does not have to be yours.”

Shane saw the genuine concern in Ilya's eyes. “Ilya, the moment I married you they became my family. I'm in this with you. Completely.”

“You are sure.”

“I am so sure.” Shane closed the distance between them, bringing his lips to his husband's in a kiss. “We wanted to have kids eventually. We even wanted a baby named Irina. It is just happening a little sooner than we had planned.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Ok, the car seat is installed in the Mercedes. We can put another one in the Range Rover tomorrow.” David said as he entered from the garage. “Everyone ready to go?”

Shane looked at the clock over the oven, 7:38. Svetlana and the girls should be touching down in a little over an hour. It was time.

Shane squeezed Ilya's hand over the gear shift as they pulled through the gates of their Ottawa home, "Let's go get our girls."

Chapter 5: After - Part One

Chapter Summary

They have them. ❤️

Chapter Notes

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

Suddenly, there they were. A very tired-looking Svetlana with a bundle of blankets in one arm, the other holding hands with an equally tired-looking little girl. Shane couldn't move, the linoleum beneath his feet turning to quicksand - or cement. He just stood there watching them cross the arrivals gate floor. Luckily, the change in the floor's chemical makeup hadn't caught Ilya. He raced to their side, gathering Annika up into his arms.

"Oh my sweet girl, I missed you." Annika didn't say anything but buried her face into her uncle's shoulder and wrapped herself around him, locking her legs around his waist. She was holding on so tightly, Shane wasn't sure if Ilya would be able to take a full breath. He didn't seem to mind as he began conversing with Svetlana.

"Shane, come take Irina," he called over his shoulder.

Yuna, who had been standing back with David, gave him a nudge. "Go on, you've got this."

Shane took a step, and then another, and then Svetlana was handing him a baby while she kept talking to Ilya. He didn't hear a word as his eyes met hers. His whole world refocused to her tiny, perfect, face. "Hello Irina."

Somehow, they ended up back at the car. David loading suitcases into the back of the Range Rover. Yuna coaxing Irina out of Shane's arms and buckling her into the car seat. Shane couldn't take her eyes off her. "I think I should sit back here and make sure she is ok."

"Ilya is doing the same with Annika in the other car. I'll drive. You sit with her."

Svetlana joined Yuna, Shane, and Irina in the Mercedes. David took driving duty in the Range Rover with Ilya and Annika in the back.

The drive home was surreal for Shane. His mother and Svetlana kept up constant chatter, which Shane heard none of. His sole focus on the tiny baby that had fallen asleep almost the instant they started driving.

Shane was no stranger to kids. His best friend had four of them after all. He'd held babies, changed diapers, made bottles. Babies didn't scare him. This one scared him. She looked like she was made of the finest china. Far too breakable. He suddenly felt too big, too uncoordinated, and completely incapable of taking care of her.

He tried to take a breath, but it got stuck in his chest. He brought his head down between his knees, the seatbelt pulling at his shoulder. His fingers had started going numb, and it felt like there was no air in the car.

"Shane? Honey, are you ok?"

"I'm fine, mom, just back here freaking out a little."

"I've been freaking out for days," Svetlana said in a voice that showed no sign of distress. "I'm just holding it all in until I'm alone with a glass of vodka and hopefully a hot bath."

"That's how I like to do my freak-outs, too. But sub the vodka for wine." Yuna smiled at the young Russian woman. "The bathtub at Shane and Ilya's is huge. I'll make sure there is vodka and fluffy towels for you. Tonight we will take care of everything. You take a bath, freak out, and get some sleep, ok?"

"That sounds amazing." Svetlana's voice sounded a little watery this time.

"And Shane? You are allowed to freak out until we get home. As soon as I pull into the driveway, you have to pull it together. OK?"

"Mhm." He waved her off hoping the panic would subside soon, apparently there was a time limit to freak outs when you were in charge of a baby.

Svetlana cackled, "Yuna, you are a queen."

"Well, you are a lifesaver. We can't thank you enough for getting the girls here safely. Right, Shane?"

"Yep, totally." He panted, his breathing still uneven. He wasn't alone he reminded himself. He had his parents, he had Ilya. Ilya, who was probably having his own backseat freak out right now, too. The thought calmed Shane a little, and by the time they passed Willa and Andrew's house, he had himself under control again.

When Ilya emerged from the car Annika was still clutching him like a spider monkey and showed no signs of letting go. Shane watched him effortlessly carry her into the house, all the while rubbing her back and speaking softly to her in Russian.

"I'm going to need to improve my Russian. I don't know what he's saying to her." Shane unbuckled the carseat and eased Irina out as the reality hit him, "Oh God, I'll barely know what Annika is saying to me."

“You might have time to learn. I've been with her for the past 24 hours and haven't gotten a single word from her.”

Shane stared at Svetlana, “Not at all?”

“Nothing. Silent. But maybe she'll talk to him. He's always been so good with kids.”

Shane hoped so.

He carried a still sleeping Irina into the house. “When did she eat last? Should I make her a bottle?”

“Always make a bottle. That baby needs to eat. David, can you show him how to do it?” Yuna called to her husband as she led Svetlana to the back of the house, presumably to their lush bathroom for some well-deserved freak-out time. “Oh, and grab the good vodka from the freezer and leave it outside the bathroom door.”

“On it!” Shane followed his dad to the kitchen and watched as he turned on the kettle, poured distilled water into the bottle, added the powdered formula, shake it up and then placed the bottle in a mug and poured the not-quite-boiling water around it in the mug. “The trick is to get the water hot enough, but not too hot. It's all about timing.”

“How did you do that so fast?”

“Practice. Like riding a bicycle. Some things are just muscle memory. I'm going to run this up to your mother” he slid a bottle of Ilya's best vodka from the freezer and grabbed a glass from the cabinet. “In a few minutes, we can test the temperature. You should change her diaper and get her in a clean sleeper while we wait.”

“Uh...sure.” Shane, still in a bit of a daze, brought the baby to her room. “This is where you will be sleeping tonight. I know it's not much to look at right now, but I promise it will get better.”

He set her on the changing table atop the dresser, being sure to keep one hand on her at all times. He remembered the night Arthur rolled off the changing table, Hayden calling him in a panic on the way to the ER. Shane was not going to let something like that happen on his watch. He went through three diapers before finding a size that fit. “It's been years since I've done this,” he told Irina. “I promise to get better, too.”

Shane kept up a constant conversation with her, narrating everything he was doing. He knew she didn't understand him, she was a baby afterall, and had probably heard very little English even if she wasn't a baby. But it felt right to talk to her. To explain what he was doing as he wiped her off, lotioned her up, and found a sleeper that fit. 3-6 months, and it was still a little big.

She looked at him with eyes that were achingly familiar. Ilya's eyes. So strange to see them in her tiny face.

“You are such a perfect, tiny little thing. I'm your Uncle Shane, and I'm going to take such good care of you.”

Irina only took half the bottle. “It's ok, we will do it again in another hour or two. Can I take her for a minute?” David asked, arms outstretched to receive her, “You should check on Annika and Ilya.”

Shane didn't want to hand Irina over, but he knew his dad would take good care of her. And he really did want to see how Ilya was doing. He placed Irina into his father's care somewhat reluctantly. His arms instantly felt empty in a way they never had before.

Shane found his husband on the back patio, walking back and forth with Annika still spider-monkeyed around him.

“She got much heavier about a few minutes ago. I think she's asleep. Can you check?”

Shane walked up and slowly brushed the matted golden curls out of the little girl's face.

“Yeah, she's asleep.”

"OK" he continued his pacing anyway, rubbing her back.

“How is Irina?” Ilya asked softly. Shane could hear that he was afraid of the answer.

“She's OK. Beautiful. My dad has her now, and she ate a little.”

Ilya nodded, “Good. David is...he is a good father.”

“The best.”

They stood there together on the patio, looking out at the dark river at the edge of the yard.

“I'm scared,” Ilya whispered into the darkness.

“Me too.” A beat later, Shane added, “But also really happy.”

Ilya met his eye, a wide smile breaking across his face. “Me too.”

Chapter End Notes

First off THANK YOU so much to every who has subscribed and commented and kudosd. I am delighted and so appreciative.

This is not the end, but it is where I had initially planned on ending it.

I think I have one more chapter brewing....maybe two.

Thanks for coming along for the ride! 🎢

Chapter 6: After - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Cassie comes to check on the girls.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for references to past child abuse and neglect.

Be safe, friends, but know they are safe now. ❤️

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

Harris: Everyone is frothing at the mouth to check in on you guys. I can only hold them off for so long.

Shane: Cassie is coming over this morning. I'll let you know after that.

Thanks for being our communication Team Captain. It helped.

Harris: Stop, I'm blushing. Anything you want me to let the guys know?

Shane: Tell them we are fine. And some of us are even getting some sleep. (Photos attached)

PHOTO 1 (Ilya asleep in a recliner holding Annika, her limbs still wrapped around him)

PHOTO 2 (selfie of Shane holding a sleeping Irina, a goofy grin on his face and very tired eyes)

Harris: SQUEEEEEEEEE!

“Okay I need you to know this is not a formal diagnosis, and more testing - in an actual doctors office with a practitioner assigned to her - will be needed,” Cassie said gently as she

finished her examination of Irina. Shane felt like he was going to pass out, was something actually wrong with Irina? He'd had her for 12 hours and already he was ready to do absolutely anything for her. "But at first glance, this looks like a pretty clear case of FFT."

"What the fuck is that?!" Ilya all but roared. His outburst startled Annika who stirred in his arms, "*Shh, sorry my love, you are ok, I didn't mean to scare you.*"

Cassie's face was all sympathy, "Failure To Thrive. It basically means that she's not growing and developing the way she should. Most likely from neglect, but it could be something else. That's why she will need to be really looked at."

"Neglect? FUCK, if Alexei wasn't dead I would kill him myself." Ilya seethed, still soothing the older girl.

"Failure?" That was a word Shane always hated, "Like it's her fault?" Shane bundled Irina back into his arms protectively, "It is not your fault" he told her with conviction, before looking back at Bood's wife. He was thankful she was a doctor and willing to come over this morning, even if he hated her saying Irina was failing. "So what do we do? How do we help her?"

"If it is from neglect, then doing just what you are already doing will help. Feed her, change her, talk to her, hold her. Physical closeness really helps." She rubbed Shane's shoulder, "Look up kangaroo care, it's had good results."

"Kangaroo care, ok." Shane made a mental note to look it up, along with FFT. Refusing to use the full name.

"Ok Annika, it's your turn." Cassie lightly touched the girl's back. She tensed and clung tighter to her uncle.

Ilya glared at Cassie as if she'd struck her. She immediately held her hands up. "I just need to take a quick look. Let her know I'm not going to hurt her."

"*Annika, Dr Cassie isn't going to hurt you, can you sit on the table so she can make sure you are ok?*" The little girl shook her head, fisting his shirt. "*I'll keep holding your hand, I'm not going anywhere. Can we try? Please, my darling. I need to know you are alright.*"

Reluctantly she peeled herself off of her uncle, grabbing his hand, holding tight with white knuckled intensity.

The smell hit them all at once. Shane had noticed it earlier, but it was more pronounced now. Unwashed mixed with old urine. He was now sure she had soiled herself earlier while Ilya held her, refusing to leave the one place she felt safe even for that basic need. How Ilya had stayed strong while it happened he didn't know.

As soon as Cassie finished the exam Ilya picked the girl back up and began soothing her shaking body again.

Cassie looked pensive. "She needs food and a bath."

“We’ve tried to get her to eat, but she hasn’t.” Shane admitted feeling like they’d already failed at parenting. So much failure only 12 hours in their care, “She also hasn’t said anything. She just holds onto Ilya.”

“It has made things difficult.” Ilya admitted.

Cassie nodded. “We need to clean her up. Fresh clothes.”

They all agreed but Shane voiced his concern. “What are the rules with girls and men and bath time?” Even saying it made him uncomfortable but he knew this was something they needed to talk over.

In the end, they decided that Cassie would help this time.

Shane reluctantly handed Irina to his parents, who had stayed quiet during the exams, letting Shane and Ilya be the parents. “Just be extra careful with her ok?”

“Honey, we will take good care of her.” Yuna soothed, “We have handled babies before.”

“I know, but...”

“Shane.”

“Yes, ok, I’m going.” Then to Irina, “I’ll be right back. I’m just in the very next room. If you need me, you’ll get me. Right?”

“Yes.” They said in unison, shooing him off so they could snuggle Irina.

“He’s worse than you were.” Shane caught his dad saying lovingly to Yuna as he left the room.

Shane rifled through the drawers in the girls room. Happy that they had bought such a wide range of clothes. He found a simple, cozy dress and leggings, in a size he thought would fit.

“This should work.” He said setting them on the bathroom counter.

In the end Cassie bathed Annika, taking a soft washcloth to her body and carefully lathering up her hair. Ilya sat next to the tub talking to her the whole time in Russian. Telling her stories about their lives as hockey players, why Ilya loves it here on Ottawa and why she will love it too. Shane tried to follow along from his place in the doorway, catching his own name in the stories more than once.

Cassie spoke to him in hardly more than a whisper while Ilya kept Annika’s focus.

“There are old bruises. And clear signs that she’s been chronically underfed. There is also blood under her fingernails that I don’t think is hers. Do you know what happened to her?”

Shane shook his head. “No, but I don’t think it was good.”

“Me either. She's going to need a lot of support, which means you and Ilya are going to need a lot of support. I'm telling you this as a friend. Ask for help when you need it, and take help whenever it is offered. OK?”

“Ok”

“That goes for you too, Ilya. I know you heard all that. You can't do this alone.”

“OK,” he paused his story to reply.

Cassie finished rinsing the conditioner out of Annika's hair. “She's all clean. Let's get her in fresh clothes and see if we can tempt some food into her.”

“My darling, could you stay here with Shane and Cassie while I also get cleaned up?” The girl's eyes went frantic again. *“What if Shane holds you? And you can stay in the room with me, I'll talk to you the whole time.”* She gave a reluctant nod and when Shane bent to pick her up, she went willingly into his arms. The waves of relief that crashed through Shane nearly knocked him down.

“I have you.” He said in unsteady Russian, as Ilya slipped behind the shower curtain, dropping his soiled clothes. True to his word Ilya kept talking as he showered in record time.

Cassie had wisely slipped out and returned with track pants and a fresh shirt for him.

They ended up back in the kitchen. Everyone clean and in new clothes, with bowls of soup that David had made. Svetlana sitting on the counter with a cup of coffee, talking to David. Annika on Ilya's lap cautiously taking a few spoonfuls of the chicken and rice. It felt like they could breathe for the first time.

Shane took Irina back from his mother who gave a slight protest at losing the baby snuggles.

Cassie looked at the two men, each holding a child like they would burn down the world to keep them safe, and smiled. “They are so lucky to have you. You are already so good at this.”

Shane: We aren't ready for visitors, yet. But I think it's time for the radio silence to end.

Tell everyone our phones are no longer off limits. I can't promise we'll reply fast, but Cassie reminded us it's important to have support.

Harris: Communication Captain reporting for duty. I'll spread the word.

Group Chat

Harris: We have a green light for communication!

Troy: Thank fuck

Harris: Operation Bombard Them With Love is a go!

Over the next days and weeks, as they adjusted to life together, between doctors appointments, meal times, naps times, and story times their phones were a constant buzz of messages and offers to help, many of which they took their friends up on.

Ilya's phone buzzed again as he brushed Annika's hair before bed, "So much love from everyone."

Shane smiled as he rocked Irina, "So much."

Chapter End Notes

I cannot say thank you enough to everyone who has read and commented on my story.

It's kind of been in the back of my head since I saw the quick cut of his niece at the table during the funeral scene in episode 4. She looked so sad. I wanted him to scoop her up right then.

Anyway, I hope to write more in this timeline. But for now this story is complete!

This is actually the first story I have taken to completion on AO3 or FF mainly because you all. This community is wonderful.

Remember there is so much love in the world. ❤️

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