

To Do What We Cannot

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To Do What We Cannot

by Anonymous

Summary

Alpha's don't get pregnant. Or at least, they don't normally get pregnant. Most of the time an Alpha interested in getting pregnant will opt to transition to an Omega (or get themselves Bitched) in order to have a baby. But after retirement... Shane really wants a baby. He wants Ilya's baby. There's nothing stopping them now, no modeling no hockey, nothing. And Shane is so fixated on it. He knows there's an extremely low chance that he'll ever take, but Ilya's been down to help make Shane's dream happen.

Notes

Thanks so much for giving my series a chance! This fic isn't necessarily in the same universe as the first one but they're both canon-adjacent.

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

The thing about being married to Shane Hollander for five years is that Ilya has learned to read the subtle shifts in his husband's moods like he once read plays on the ice. The way Shane's scent changes when he's anxious, going sharp and citrusy. The particular furrow between his brows when he's overthinking something. The exact cadence of his breathing when he's working himself up to ask for something he thinks might be unreasonable.

Right now, Shane is doing all three.

They're in their den—the bedroom they've carefully scented and nested over the years, with blackout curtains and a mattress so large it barely fits through the doorway. Ilya is sprawled on his back, one arm tucked behind his head, watching Shane pace at the foot of the bed. His husband is wearing one of Ilya's old Bears jerseys and nothing else, and the sight would be distracting if Ilya wasn't so focused on figuring out what's got Shane so wound up.

The jersey hangs to mid-thigh on Shane's frame, the number 81 stretched across his shoulders. Every time he turns, Ilya catches a glimpse of bare skin, the curve of Shane's ass just barely covered. It's one of Ilya's favorite sights—Shane drowning in his clothes, surrounded by his scent. But tonight, there's something else in the air. Something nervous and *wanting* that makes Ilya's instincts sit up and take notice.

"Sweetheart," Ilya says finally, when Shane makes his fourth lap. The floorboards are old, original to the house they bought after retirement, and they creak slightly under Shane's weight. "You're going to wear a hole in the floor."

Shane stops mid-stride, turning to face him. His scent spikes—nervous citrus mixing with the warm honey-cedar that means he wants something. The combination is almost overwhelming in the enclosed space of their den, and Ilya has to fight the urge to go to him immediately.

"I need to talk to you about something," Shane says, wringing his hands.

"Obviously." Ilya pats the bed beside him, watching as Shane's throat works around a swallow. "Come here."

Shane doesn't move. His jaw works, and Ilya can see him gathering his courage like he's about to take a crucial face-off. It's endearing and concerning in equal measure. They've been together for over a decade now, married for five years. There's very little Shane should be nervous about telling him.

Unless.

"I want a baby," Shane says, all in one breath, the words tumbling out like he's been holding them in for too long.

Ilya blinks. Of the things he'd been expecting—another dog, maybe, or a spontaneous trip overseas, or even a confession that Shane had secretly learned some new, bizarre skill—this wasn't it. Though in retrospect, he probably should have seen it coming. SHane's been

spending more time with Hayden and Jackie's kids lately, and every time they video call, there's this look on Shane's face when he watches Amber or the twins. Soft. Longing.

"Okay," Ilya says slowly, sitting up properly now. He swings his legs off the bed, bare feet hitting the cool hardwood. "We've talked about this before, yes? Adoption agencies—"

"No, I want—" Shane's hands curl into fists at his sides, and the sharp edge of his scent intensifies. Anxiety. Fear of rejection. "I want to carry. I want to be pregnant."

Oh.

Oh.

The words land between them like a puck dropped at center ice, and for a moment, Ilya can't process them. SHane wants to be pregnant. Not adopt, not hire a surrogate, but carry a baby himself. Carry *Ilya's* baby.

Ilya's heard of this, of course. In the years since presentation became more fluid, since the medical community started understanding secondary gender as a spectrum rather than rigid categories, he's heard stories. Alphas who transitioned to Omega specifically to carry children. Omegas who transitioned to Alpha and started families as the non-carrying parent. Beta surrogates who helped Alpha/Alpha couples have biological children.

But Shane isn't talking about transitioning. Ilya can tell by the set of his shoulders, the way his scent hasn't shifted toward the mulled-spice smell that indicates an Alpha considering bitching. Shane is saying he wants to get pregnant *as an Alpha*.

Which is—

"Shane," Ilya starts carefully, swinging his legs off the bed and standing. He needs to be closer for this conversation, needs to be able to see every micro-expression on his husband's face. "You know the statistics—"

"One in ten thousand," Shane interrupts, and there's a defensive edge to his voice that tells Ilya he's been thinking about this for a while. Researching it. Obsessing over it in that particular Shane Hollander way. "I know. I've done the research. I know it's basically impossible. But Ilya—"

His voice cracks, and the citrus in his scent turns almost painful. Ilya's instincts roar at him to fix it, to make his husband happy, to take away whatever's causing this distress. But he needs to understand first.

"I keep thinking about it," Shane continues, the words spilling out now that he's started. "I can't stop thinking about it. About being pregnant with your baby. About *us* having a baby, not adopting or using a surrogate, but *us*. About carrying a part of you inside me, about—"

He cuts himself off, shaking his head. His hands are trembling, Ilya realizes. Shane is terrified that Ilya is going to say no.

There's something raw and desperate in Shane's voice that makes Ilya's instincts surge protectively. He closes the distance between them in two strides, pulling Shane against his chest without a word. Shane comes willingly, almost stumbling in in his haste, burying his face in Ilya's neck and breathing deep. His whole body is tense, coiled tight like he's waiting for a blow.

Ilya wraps his arms around Shane's waist, one hand sliding up to cup the back of his neck. "This is what you want?" he asks quietly, lips brushing Shane's temple. "Not transition, not surrogate, but this?"

"Yes." Shane's breath is hot against Ilya's throat, and Ilya can feel the rapid flutter of his pulse. "I know it's stupid. I know it probably won't work. I know the odds are terrible and it might take years and it might never happen at all, but I just...I want to *try*. We're retired now. There's nothing stopping us. No hockey, no modeling, no press tours, no team doctors telling us what we can and can't do with our bodies. Just us. And I want..."

He trails off, but Ilya understands. Shane wants something that's just theirs, something private and precious and entirely separate from their public lives. Something they can build together in the safety of their den, away from cameras and commentary and the weight of expectation that's followed them their entire careers.

For seven years, they hid their relationship. For another three, they navigated coming out and all the complications that came with being the NHL's most high-profile same-secondary sex couple. They've given so much of themselves to the public—their coming out, their wedding, their entire relationship dissected and discussed by millions of strangers.

This could be different. This could be just for them.

"Okay," Ilya says, and feels Shane's entire body jolt against him.

"Okay?" Shane pulls back, eyes wide and disbelieving. His hands are fisted in Ilya's shirt, knuckles white. "You—really? Just like that?"

"We try." Ilya cups Shane's face, thumbs brushing over his freckles. They're lighter than they used to be, fading a bit now that Shane isn't spending hours on outdoor rinks, but Ilya has them memorized. He could map every single one in the dark. "If this is what you want, we try. Even if it takes years. Even if it never happens. We try, yes?"

The sound Shane makes is somewhere between a sob and a laugh. He surges up to kiss Ilya, desperate and grateful, and Ilya kisses him back just as fiercely. His own scent shifts, flooding with pleased-protective-*mine*, and Shane shivers against him. The anxious citrus is already fading from his scent, replaced by something warmer. Honeyed. Happy.

"Thank you," Shane breathes against his mouth, punctuating each word with another kiss. "Thank you, *thank you*—"

"Shh." Ilya walks them backward toward the bed, hands sliding down to grip Shane's hips. "No more talking. If we're doing this, we're doing it right."

Shane's answering laugh is giddy, almost punch-drunk with relief. "Right now? We should—I have spreadsheets, I've been tracking my cycle, there are optimal times—"

Ilya silences him with another kiss, deeper this time, tongue sliding against Shane's until his husband melts against him with a low moan. When he pulls back, Shane's pupils are blown wide, his lips spit-slick and red.

"Spreadsheets later," Ilya says, nipping at Shane's bottom lip. "Now, I want to touch you. Want to scent you. Want to make sure you know how much I love you."

Shane's breath catches, and his scent spikes with arousal. "Okay," he whispers. "Yeah. Okay."

The first time they try—really try, not just fucking for the pleasure of it but with the intention of making a baby—it's gentle. Almost reverent.

Ilya takes his time undressing Shane, peeling the oversized jersey up and off with deliberate slowness. His fingers trail over Shane's sides as he does, feeling the slight shiver that runs through his husband's body. The late afternoon light filters through their blackout curtains, soft and golden, casting everything in a warm glow that makes Shane's skin look honey-touched. Ilya pauses to just look at him—Shane in nothing but plain black briefs, flushed and wanting, beautiful in the way only Shane can be.

"You're staring," Shane says, but there's no heat in it. Just fondness.

"I'm allowed to stare at my husband," Ilya replies, running his hands over Shane's shoulders, down his arms, across his chest. Mapping him out like it's the first time all over again. "Especially when he looks like this."

Shane is softer than he was during his playing days—not out of shape by any means, but without the relentless training schedule and dietary restrictions, his body has settled into something more comfortable. More lived-in. There's a slight softness to his stomach that Ilya loves, loves to grip and squeeze when he's fucking into Shane from behind. His thighs are still thick with muscle, though, powerful and strong, and when Ilya slides his hands up them, Shane's legs fall open automatically.

The trust in that gesture never fails to make Ilya's chest tight. Even after all these years, the fact that Shane opens for him so easily, so willingly, feels like a gift.

"Lie back," Ilya murmurs, hooking his fingers in the waistband of Shane's briefs. Shane lifts his hips obligingly, and Ilya drags them down slowly, watching as Shane's cock springs free. He's already half-hard, flushed at the tip, and Ilya can't resist leaning down to press a kiss to the inside of his thigh.

Shane's breath hitches. "Ilya—"

"Shh. Let me take care of you." Ilya kisses his way up Shane's thigh, across his hip bone, up his stomach. He takes his time with it, pressing his mouth to every freckle he can find, tracing the lines of Shane's muscles with his tongue. Shane's scent is already starting to shift, the honey-cedar going thick and warm with arousal.

By the time Ilya reaches his mouth, Shane is panting. "You're killing me," he gasps against Ilya's lips.

"Good death, though, yes?" Ilya grins and kisses him properly, deep and thorough, until Shane is squirming beneath him.

When he finally pulls back, Shane's pupils are blown wide, his lips spit-slick and red. "Please," he says. "I need—"

"I know what you need." Ilya reaches for the lube on the nightstand, warming it between his fingers before sliding his hand between Shane's legs. Shane's thighs fall open wider, an invitation, and Ilya accepts it gladly.

He starts with one finger, pressing in slowly, watching Shane's face for any sign of discomfort. They've done this hundreds of times, thousands maybe, but Ilya never takes it for granted. Never assumes. Shane's body is precious cargo now, even more than it was before, and Ilya treats it accordingly.

"More," Shane breathes, hips rocking down onto Ilya's finger. "Come on, I can take it."

"I know you can." Ilya adds a second finger, scissoring them gently, watching as Shane's eyes flutter closed. "But we're not rushing this."

"We've been trying for three months, I think we've done enough not-rushing—oh, *fuck*—"

Ilya's found his prostate, crooking his fingers just right, and Shane's whole body jolts. His cock is fully hard now, flushed dark and leaking against his stomach, and Ilya wants to taste it. Wants to get his mouth on Shane and take him apart completely.

But that's not what this is about. Not tonight.

"Third finger," Ilya murmurs, adding another and working Shane open with patient thoroughness. Shane is loose and wet now, practically dripping around Ilya's fingers, and when Ilya presses against his prostate again, Shane's back arches off the bed.

"Please," Shane gasps, one hand flying down to grip Ilya's wrist. Not to stop him, but to ground himself. "Please, I'm ready, I *need*, I need you inside me."

Ilya pulls his fingers out slowly, ignoring Shane's whine of protest. He reaches for the lube, slicking himself up with efficient movements, his cock already hard and aching. He's been half-hard since he started undressing Shane, and now, watching his husband spread out beneath him, flushed and wanting, he's almost painfully erect.

"Come here," Shane says, reaching for him with both hands. His legs fall open wider, an invitation Ilya has never been able to resist. "Please, Ilya. Need you."

Ilya goes, settling between Shane's thighs and lining himself up. He takes a moment to just feel it—the heat of Shane's body, the wet give of his entrance against Ilya's cockhead. They've done this countless times over the years, know each other's bodies better than their own, but tonight feels different. Weighted with meaning.

"You're sure about this?" Ilya asks, even though he can see the answer in Shane's eyes. "Really trying? No more just... hoping it might happen?"

"I'm sure." Shane's hand moves to his own stomach, pressing gently like he's already imagining what might be growing there. "I want your baby, Ilya. I want to carry. I want—" His voice cracks. "I want this more than anything."

Something in Ilya's chest cracks open at those words. He leans down to kiss Shane, deep and thorough, trying to pour everything he's feeling into it. When he pulls back, Shane's pupils are blown wide, his lips spit-slick and red.

"Then I'll give you everything," Ilya promises, and pushes forward.

The first slide inside makes them both gasp. Shane's entire body shudders, his hands flying up to grip Ilya's shoulders hard enough to bruise. His head falls back against the pillows, throat working around a moan, and Ilya has to force himself to go slow. To not just slam in and take what he wants.

"*God*," Shane breathes, and Ilya can feel the word against his skin where their chests are pressed together. "So good. Always so good."

"Yes." Ilya's voice is strained as he pushes deeper, inch by inch, feeling Shane's body stretch and accommodate around him. The heat is incredible, the tight wet grip of him, and Ilya can feel every clench, every flutter of Shane's muscles. "So perfect for me, sweetheart. Always perfect."

"More," Shane demands, legs locking around Ilya's waist. His heels dig into Ilya's ass, trying to pull him deeper. "All of it, come on, give me—"

Ilya bottoms out with a groan, buried to the hilt in Shane's body. For a moment, he just stays there, feeling Shane adjust around him. Shane's breathing is ragged, his chest heaving, and Ilya can feel the rapid flutter of his heartbeat where they're pressed together.

"Okay?" Ilya manages, fighting every instinct that's telling him to move, to take, to claim.

"Yes," Shane gasps. "Yes, perfect, so perfect—move, please, I need—"

Ilya pulls out slowly, watching Shane's face, then pushes back in. Shane's mouth falls open on a moan, and Ilya does it again. And again. Finding a rhythm that's deep and deliberate, angling to hit Shane's prostate with every thrust.

Shane's scent explodes around them—honey and cedar mixing with the sharp musk of arousal and something else. Something deeper. Instinctive. *Fertile*, Ilya's hindbrain supplies,

even though he knows it's probably just wishful thinking. Alpha bodies don't really work that way, don't have obvious fertility cycles like Omegas. But Ilya lets himself believe it anyway.

He buries his face in Shane's neck, breathing deep, and starts to fuck him in earnest.

"Yes, yes, just like that—" Shane's nails rake down Ilya's back, leaving burning trails in their wake. "*Fuck*, Ilya, so good—"

Ilya can already feel his knot starting to swell, pressure building at the base of his cock. It's too soon—they've barely started—but his body knows what this is. Knows what they're trying to do. Every instinct is screaming at him to knot Shane, to lock them together, to breed him properly.

"Not yet," Ilya grits out, fighting against his own biology. "Want this to last."

"Don't care," Shane gasps. His legs tighten around Ilya's waist, holding him in place. "Want your knot. Want everything."

"Shane—" Ilya's thrust stutters, and he has to stop moving completely or risk losing control. "If I knot you now, we'll be stuck for twenty minutes minimum. Maybe more."

"Good." Shane rolls his hips, grinding down onto Ilya's cock, and the sensation makes Ilya see stars. "Want that. Want to feel it. Want to be full of you."

Ilya groans and gives up fighting it. He pulls almost all the way out, then slams back in hard enough to make Shane cry out. Then he does it again, and again, picking up speed and force until he's fucking into Shane with abandon.

Shane is babbling now, a stream of desperate nonsense. "Yes, yes, fuck, so deep—can feel you everywhere—gonna make me—*oh fuck*—"

His whole body goes taut, back arching off the bed, and then he's coming. Untouched, just from Ilya's cock inside him, and the sight of it pushes Ilya over the edge too. His knot swells rapidly, catching inside Shane and locking them together as Ilya's orgasm crashes through him.

He comes harder than he can remember coming in years, grinding deep and spilling inside Shane while his husband shakes apart beneath him. Shane's hole clenches rhythmically around his knot, milking him, and Ilya has to brace himself on his forearms to keep from collapsing completely.

"Holy shit," Shane gasps when he can finally speak. His eyes are glazed, unfocused, and there's come splattered across his stomach. "That was—*fuck*."

"Language," Ilya says automatically, which makes Shane laugh.

"You just fucked me into next week and you're worried about my language?"

"Always worried about you." Ilya carefully shifts their positions, rolling them onto their sides so he's not crushing Shane. His knot is still firmly locked inside, pulsing with aftershocks,

and Shane makes a pleased sound at the movement.

They lie there, pressed together in the warmth of their den, breathing in sync. Ilya can feel his come inside Shane, held there by his knot, and the possessive part of him rumbles with satisfaction. *Mine*, it says. *Breeding him. Filling him. Making him ours.*

Shane's hand finds Ilya's over his stomach, still flat and toned. "Maybe," he whispers, so quietly Ilya almost doesn't hear. "Maybe this time."

Ilya kisses his temple and says nothing, but he hopes. God, he hopes.

Three Months Later

It doesn't happen the first time. Or the second. Or the twentieth.

Shane tracks everything obsessively—his cycle, his temperature, every possible sign that his body might be receptive to pregnancy. He buys ovulation kits designed for Omegas and tries to adapt them for his Alpha biology, even though the results are inconclusive at best. He researches diets and supplements and old wives' tales about conception.

Their bathroom counter becomes a pharmacy. Prenatal vitamins. Fertility supplements. Hormone-regulating herbs that smell terrible and probably don't do anything. Shane takes them all religiously, washes them down with water every morning while Ilya watches with growing concern.

"Shane," Ilya says one evening, catching Shane's wrist as he reaches for his tablet again. They're in bed, supposedly winding down for the night, but Shane has been scrolling through medical journals for the past hour. "You're driving yourself crazy."

"I need to understand why it's not *working*." Shane's voice is tight, controlled in that way that means he's barely holding it together. His tablet screen casts his face in harsh blue light, making the circles under his eyes look even darker. "There has to be something I'm doing wrong. Some factor I'm not accounting for."

"You're not doing anything wrong." Ilya tugs the tablet away and sets it on the nightstand, ignoring Shane's noise of protest. "Bodies are complicated. Especially Alpha bodies trying to do something they're not designed for."

"I know that!" Shane snaps, then immediately deflates. He scrubs a hand over his face, and Ilya can see how exhausted he is. How much this is taking out of him. "I'm sorry. I just—I want this so *badly*, Ilya. And every month that passes, every negative test, it feels like..."

"Like what?"

Shane's voice drops to barely a whisper. "Like maybe I'm broken. Like maybe there's something wrong with me."

"Ey, no." Ilya pulls Shane into his lap, wrapping around him completely. Shane comes easily, folding himself against Ilya's chest like he's trying to disappear. "Listen to me. You are not broken. Your body is not broken. This is just hard, yes? Very hard. But we keep trying."

Shane buries his face in Ilya's shoulder, and Ilya can feel the dampness of tears against his skin. "What if it never happens?" The words are muffled, but Ilya hears them clearly enough.

"Then we find a different way," Ilya says simply, pressing a kiss to the top of Shane's head. "Adoption, surrogacy, whatever you want. But right now, we're not giving up. Not unless you want to."

"I don't want to," Shane says fiercely, pulling back to look at Ilya. His eyes are red-rimmed, but there's determination there too. "I don't. I just—I'm scared. That I'm putting us through all this for something that might be impossible."

"Hey." Ilya cups Shane's face, thumbs brushing away the tear tracks on his cheeks. "Nothing is impossible if we do it together, remember? We've beaten worse odds than this."

Shane's laugh is wet but genuine. "Pretty sure the odds of me scoring a goal against you in overtime were better than this."

"Ey, fuck you," Ilya says, but he's smiling. "That was one time."

"*One* time?" Shane's grin is watery but real. "Should I pull up the statistics?"

"No, because you're mean and I love you." Ilya kisses him, soft and sweet. "We try for as long as you want. And if it happens, wonderful. If not, we adapt. Yes?"

Shane nods, some of the tension finally leaving his shoulders. "Yeah. Okay."

Eight Months Later

Shane's rut suppressants have worn off completely by now—he stopped taking them when they first started trying, wanting to give his body every possible advantage. It means his ruts have come back, though they're different than an Omega's heat. More aggressive. More desperate.

Ilya loves them.

The first sign is always Shane's scent—the honey-cedar going thick and cloying, almost overwhelming in its intensity. Then comes the restlessness, Shane pacing their den like a

caged animal, touching everything, rearranging pillows and blankets in the nest they've built over the years. And finally, the need.

"*Fuck*," Shane gasps, riding Ilya's cock with single-minded intensity. They've been at it for hours, Shane coming twice already but refusing to stop. Sweat drips down his spine, plastering his hair to his forehead, and his thighs are shaking with effort. But he won't slow down. Won't stop. "Need it, need you to—*ah*—"

"I know, sweetheart." Ilya's hands are bruising on Shane's hips, guiding him down harder with each thrust. His own knot is already starting to swell, has been for the past ten minutes, but Shane keeps pulling off before it can catch. Ilya doesn't know if he's doing it on purpose or if his rut-addled brain just can't focus. "Going to give you everything. Going to fill you up so good."

Shane's answering moan is filthy, his scent flooding the room with desperation and want. "Yes, yes, *please*—" His hands scrabble at Ilya's chest, looking for purchase, and Ilya can see the moment his brain finally catches up. "Knot. Need your knot."

"Then take it," Ilya growls, thrusting up hard. Shane sinks down to meet him, and this time when Ilya's knot swells, Shane doesn't pull away. He bears down on it, taking it deep with a choked cry.

"Yes, yes, *please*—" Shane's hand flies to his own cock, working himself frantically. His hole clenches around Ilya's knot, tight and perfect, and Ilya can't hold back anymore. He comes with a roar, grinding up into the tight heat of Shane's body.

Shane follows immediately after, coming so hard he nearly blacks out, slumping forward onto Ilya's chest. They're both panting, locked together, Shane's body still clenching rhythmically around Ilya's knot.

"Breed me," Shane mumbles against Ilya's shoulder, still half-lost to heat. "Fill me up, make it take, please *please* please—"

"I am, sweetheart." Ilya runs soothing hands down Shane's spine, even as his hips give little involuntary thrusts. They're going to be locked like this for at least twenty minutes. "Gave you everything. So good for me."

Shane makes a satisfied sound, nuzzling into Ilya's neck. His scent is already calming, the desperate edge fading into something softer. Sated.

They lie like that for a long time, locked together in their nest, and Ilya lets himself hope that maybe this time, it worked.

One Year Later

The next negative pregnancy test shatters something in Shane.

Ilya finds him in the bathroom, sitting on the floor with his back against the tub and the test clutched in one hand. His scent is wrong—sour with grief and sharp with self-loathing. There's no citrus anymore, no honey-cedar. Just bitter disappointment.

"Shane." Ilya drops to his knees beside him, moving slowly like he's approaching a spooked animal. "Sweetheart—"

"Don't." Shane's voice is hollow, empty in a way that terrifies Ilya. "Don't tell me it's okay. Don't tell me we'll keep trying. I'm so fucking tired of trying."

The words hit Ilya like a physical blow, but he doesn't let it show. "Okay," he says carefully. "Then we stop."

Shane's head snaps up, eyes red-rimmed and disbelieving. "What?"

"If you're tired, we stop." Ilya reaches out slowly, telegraphing the movement, and carefully takes the test from Shane's hand. He sets it aside without looking at it, keeping his focus on his husband. "I don't want to see you like this. Heartbroken every month. It's killing me too."

"But I want—" Shane's breath hitches, and fresh tears spill down his cheeks. "I want your baby. I want to carry. I want—"

"I know." Ilya pulls Shane against him, letting his husband cry into his shoulder. He scents him on instinct, rubbing his wrists and neck against Shane's skin, trying to replace the sour disappointment with something better. "I know what you want. But not at the expense of your happiness, yes? Not like this."

They sit there for a long time, Shane shaking apart in Ilya's arms while Ilya holds him and murmurs reassurances in Russian. Meaningless words, soothing sounds, anything to help. Eventually, Shane's tears slow, leaving him hiccupping and exhausted against Ilya's chest.

"I'm not ready to give up," Shane says quietly, voice rough from crying. "Not yet. But maybe... maybe we take a break? A few months, just to—to breathe?"

Relief floods through Ilya so intensely it makes him dizzy. A break isn't giving up. A break is smart. "Whatever you need," he promises, pressing a kiss to Shane's temple. "Whatever you want. I'm here."

The break lasts three months before Shane brings it up again.

They're having breakfast on the porch of their house, watching the sunrise over the lake, when Shane says, "I want to try again."

Ilya looks up from his coffee, studying his husband's face. Shane looks better than he has in months—the dark circles are gone, his scent is back to its normal honey-cedar, and there's color in his cheeks again. But there's something else too. A determination that Ilya recognizes from their playing days.

"You're sure?" Ilya asks.

"I'm sure." Shane reaches across the table to take Ilya's hand. "I know it might not work. I know the odds. But I can't—I can't not try. Does that make sense?"

It does. God help him, it does. Because Ilya can't imagine not trying either. Not when there's still hope, however slim.

"Okay," Ilya says, squeezing Shane's hand. "We try again."

Eighteen Months Later

They fall back into the rhythm of it—tracking cycles, timing sex, hoping against hope. But this time, Shane seems calmer about it. More resigned to the possibility that it might never happen.

Ilya doesn't know if that's better or worse.

"I'm thinking about adoption," Shane says one night, curled against Ilya's side in their den. They've just finished having sex—not the desperate, purposeful kind, but the lazy, affectionate kind they haven't had time for in months. "Maybe we should start looking into agencies. Get our names on some lists."

"Okay," Ilya says carefully, running his fingers through Shane's hair. "If that's what you want."

"It's not about wanting." Shane's fingers trace idle patterns on Ilya's chest. "It's about being realistic. We've been trying for almost two years. Maybe it's time to accept that this isn't going to happen."

Ilya hears the resignation in his voice and hates it. Hates that Shane has had to give up this dream, that his body won't cooperate, that Ilya can't fix this for him.

"We can look into adoption," he agrees. "But we don't stop trying, yes? Not unless you want to."

Shane is quiet for a long moment, his breath warm against Ilya's skin. Then: "No. We don't stop."

Two Years Later

They're in Bali when Shane starts feeling off.

It's nothing major at first—just a persistent nausea that Shane blames on something he ate, and a bone-deep exhaustion that they attribute to jetlag. They're used to traveling, have done it their entire adult lives, but retirement has made them soft. A fourteen-hour flight feels different when you're not used to it anymore.

"Maybe we should go home," Ilya suggests on the fourth morning, watching Shane emerge from yet another bout of morning sickness. Shane's face is pale, his scent off in a way Ilya can't quite define. "See a doctor."

"It's probably just a bug," Shane says, but he looks uncertain. He's been feeling off for over a week now, and it's not getting better. "Everyone gets sick when they travel."

"Not for this long." Ilya helps Shane back to bed, tucking the sheets around him. Shane goes willingly, which is how Ilya knows he really must feel terrible. "Humor me. One doctor's visit, just to be safe."

Shane must feel worse than he's letting on, because he agrees without argument.

They cut their vacation short and fly home two days later. Shane sleeps for most of the flight, curled against Ilya's side while Ilya runs his fingers through his hair and tries not to catastrophize. It's probably nothing. Just a bug, like Shane said. They'll go to the doctor, get some antibiotics or something, and everything will be fine.

The doctor's appointment is scheduled for the day after they land. Ilya drives them there, one hand on Shane's knee, while Shane stares out the window and says nothing. The silence between them is heavy with unspoken worry.

In the exam room, the doctor—a kind-faced Beta woman named Dr. Reeves who's been their physician for years—takes one look at Shane and immediately orders a blood test.

"Just to rule some things out," she says, which makes both of them tense.

The waiting is the worst part. They're sent to a private room while the labs process Shane's blood, and the silence is oppressive. Shane sits on the exam table, legs dangling, while Ilya paces. Back and forth, back and forth, until Shane finally snaps at him to stop.

"You're making me nervous," Shane says.

"I'm already nervous." Ilya stops pacing but can't make himself sit down. "What if something is seriously wrong?"

"It's probably nothing—" Shane starts, but he's cut off by Dr. Reeves walking back into the room.

The doctor has a strange expression on her face—somewhere between shocked and delighted. She's holding a printout, and her eyes keep flicking between Shane and Ilya like she can't quite believe what she's seeing.

"Well," she says slowly. "I have some... unexpected news."

Ilya's stomach drops. Shane goes rigid on the exam table, one hand gripping the edge hard enough to turn his knuckles white.

"What is it?" Shane's voice is barely above a whisper. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong." Dr. Reeves sets the printout on the counter and turns to face them fully, and Ilya sees it then—the smile breaking across her face. "Shane, you're pregnant."

The words hit like a physical blow.

For a moment, neither of them moves. Neither of them breathes. The world seems to tilt sideways, reality rearranging itself around this single impossible fact.

"What?" Shane's voice cracks. "That's—that's not *possible*. I'm an Alpha. Alphas don't—"

"Alphas rarely get pregnant," Dr. Reeves corrects gently, and there's something almost excited in her voice now. "But it's not impossible. Extremely unlikely, yes, but not impossible. And according to these results, you're about six weeks along."

"Six weeks," Shane repeats numbly, and Ilya watches as his hand unconsciously moves to his stomach. Still flat, no sign of anything, but— "Ilya. Ilya, *I'm*—"

He can't seem to finish the sentence, but he doesn't need to. Ilya is already moving, crossing the room in two strides to pull Shane into his arms. Shane comes willingly, practically falling off the exam table into Ilya's embrace.

"You're pregnant," Ilya breathes against Shane's hair, his own voice unsteady. "Sweetheart, you're pregnant. We did it."

Shane makes a sound that's half-sob, half-laugh. His hands fist in Ilya's shirt, and Ilya can feel the wet warmth of tears soaking through the fabric. "I can't believe it," Shane gasps. "I can't—after two years, I thought—"

"I know." Ilya pulls back just enough to cup Shane's face, thumbs brushing away tears. His own eyes are burning, vision blurring as the magnitude of it all settles into his bones. Two years. Two years of trying, of hoping, of slowly losing faith that this would ever happen. And now— "I *know*, moy pomidor. But it happened. You're pregnant."

They're both crying now, clutching each other in the sterile brightness of the exam room while Dr. Reeves tactfully busies herself at her computer. Ilya can smell the shift in Shane's scent—that strange sweetness he's been noticing finally making sense. His body's already changing, already preparing to nurture the life growing inside him.

"We're having a baby," Shane whispers, wonder bleeding into his voice. His hands move to his stomach, pressing gently like he's trying to feel something that isn't there yet. "Ilya, *we're going to have a baby.*"

"Yes." Ilya kisses Shane's forehead, his cheeks, his mouth, tasting salt. "Yes, we are. Our baby."

Dr. Reeves clears her throat gently, and they both turn to look at her. She's smiling, genuine and warm. "I know this is a shock," she says. "And we're going to need to discuss next steps, monitoring, what this means for you as an Alpha carrier. But first—congratulations. Truly. This is remarkable."

Shane laughs, the sound breaking into another sob. "Remarkable. Yeah. That's—that's one word for it."

The drive home was a blur. All Ilya could remember was Shane's iron grip on his hand the entire way, knuckles white around Ilya's fingers like he was afraid to let go. Like if he released his hold for even a second, everything would disappear. The printout from Dr. Reeves sat folded in Shane's lap, and every few minutes, Shane would unfold it and stare at the numbers like they might have changed.

"Still says pregnant," Ilya said gently after the third time.

"I know," Shane replied, but he didn't stop checking.

They didn't speak beyond that. Ilya kept glancing over at stoplights, watching Shane's profile. His husband's free hand stayed pressed to his stomach, fingers splayed wide like he was trying to feel something that wasn't there yet. His scent was doing something complicated—joy and terror and disbelief all tangled together into something that made Ilya's Alpha instincts go haywire. *Protect*, they demanded. *Comfort. Keep safe.*

When they finally pulled into their driveway, Shane was out of the car before Ilya even killed the engine. He fumbled with his keys at the front door, hands shaking so badly that Ilya had to gently take them and unlock it himself.

Inside, Shane made it exactly three steps before he stopped.

Just... stopped.

He stood in their entryway, one hand braced against the wall, the other still pressed to his stomach. His breathing was getting rapid. Shallow. The printout had fallen from his hand and lay forgotten on the floor.

"Shane?" Ilya closed the door behind them, concerned. "Sweetheart, what—"

"I can't breathe." Shane's voice was thin, reedy. His chest was heaving now, each breath coming faster than the last. "I can't—Ilya, I can't—"

"Hey, hey." Ilya was at his side immediately, hands on Shane's shoulders, trying to ground him. "You're okay. You're having a panic attack. Look at me. Shane, look at me."

Shane's eyes were wild when they met Ilya's, pupils blown wide. "Two years," he gasped out. "Two years of trying and failing and I thought—*I thought it would never*—but now it's *real* and what if I lose them? What if my body can't—what if I'm not—"

"Stop." Ilya cupped Shane's face in both hands, firm but gentle. "Stop. You're spiraling. Breathe with me. In—" He demonstrated, breathing in slowly through his nose. "And out."

Shane tried to follow but his breath caught, stuttering in his chest. A sound somewhere between a sob and a gasp tore out of him. "I'm so scared," he admitted, and tears started streaming down his face. "I'm so fucking terrified, Ilya. I finally got what I wanted and I'm so scared I'm going to lose it."

"I know." Ilya pulled Shane against his chest, one hand cradling the back of his head. "I know, sweetheart. But you can't think about that right now. Right now, you're pregnant. Our baby is growing inside you. That's what matters."

"But Dr. Reeves said—"

"I know what she said. And we'll deal with whatever comes. But Shane—" Ilya pulled back just enough to look his husband in the eye. "You've already beaten impossible odds. You're already six weeks pregnant when they said it would probably never happen at all. Your body is stronger than you think."

Shane's breathing was starting to slow, but the tears weren't stopping. "What if I'm not enough? What if I can't—"

"You are enough." Ilya wiped at Shane's tears with his thumbs, even as his own eyes started burning. "You've always been enough. And you don't have to do this alone. I'm here. I'm going to be here for every single moment. Every appointment, every symptom, every worry. You and me, yes? Like always."

Shane nodded jerkily, and Ilya could see him trying to pull himself together. Taking deeper breaths. Letting Ilya's scent wash over him—leather and cardamom and something distinctly *Ilya* that always calmed him down.

"I'm sorry," Shane said after a moment, voice rough. "I don't know what—I just—"

"Don't apologize." Ilya pressed a kiss to his forehead. "You just found out you're pregnant after two years of trying. You're allowed to fall apart a little. Come on. Let's go to our den."

He guided Shane down the hallway to their bedroom, one arm around his waist. Shane moved like he was in a daze, and Ilya realized this was probably the shock finally catching up with him. They'd been running on adrenaline since Dr. Reeves gave them the news, and now that they were home, safe, it was all crashing down.

In their den, Ilya closed the door and pulled the curtains, dimming the afternoon light to something softer. Shane stood in the middle of the room, still trembling, and Ilya went to him. Started undressing him slowly, carefully, pulling off his shirt and jeans until Shane was down to his boxer briefs.

"Lie down," Ilya said gently.

Shane obeyed without argument, crawling into their nest and curling up on his side. Ilya stripped down to his own underwear and climbed in behind him, pulling Shane back against his chest. He wrapped around his husband completely, one arm around his waist, hand splaying protectively over Shane's still-flat stomach.

"I've got you," Ilya murmured into Shane's hair. "I've always got you."

Shane's hand covered Ilya's on his stomach, and slowly—so slowly—Ilya felt him start to relax. The panic gradually bled out of his scent, replaced by something warmer. Safer. The honey-cedar mixing with Ilya's leather-cardamom until their scents were completely intertwined.

They lay like that for what might have been minutes or hours. Just breathing together. Ilya pressed occasional kisses to the back of Shane's neck, his shoulder, anywhere he could reach. Grounding him. Reminding him he wasn't alone.

"I can't believe it's real," Shane finally whispered.

"It's real." Ilya's hand moved in slow circles over Shane's stomach. "You're pregnant with our baby. In here." He pressed gently. "Growing."

Shane made a choked sound and rolled over in Ilya's arms, burying his face in Ilya's chest. "I want this so much," he said, voice muffled. "I want this more than I've wanted anything. More than hockey, more than winning the Cup, more than—"

"I know." Ilya held him tighter. "I want it too. So much."

Shane pulled back, and Ilya was struck by the intensity in his eyes. The fear was still there, but there was something else now. Something that made Shane's scent shift, going warm and honey-thick.

"Fuck me," Shane said.

Ilya's breath caught. "Shane—"

"Please." Shane's hand came up to cup Ilya's face. "I need—I need to feel you. Need to know this is real. Need to—" His voice broke. *"Please, Ilya."*

There was such raw need in Shane's voice, such vulnerability, that Ilya couldn't have said no even if he'd wanted to. And he didn't want to. He wanted to worship Shane, to celebrate this impossible miracle, to make his husband feel how much Ilya loved him.

"Yes," Ilya breathed, and leaned in to kiss him.

It was different from their usual kisses. Slower. Sweeter. Ilya poured everything into it—all his love, all his joy, all his fierce protectiveness. Shane kissed him back with equal intensity, his hands sliding into Ilya's hair and holding on.

When they broke apart, both breathing hard, Shane's pupils were blown wide and his scent had gone thick with arousal.

"I'll be gentle," Ilya promised, already imagining all the ways he could take Shane apart. "So gentle, sweetheart."

"I'm not going to break," Shane protested, but there was a tremor in his voice.

"No, but you're carrying something precious." Ilya's hand moved to Shane's stomach again, reverent. "The most precious thing in the world. So I'll be careful."

He stripped Shane's boxer briefs off slowly, tossing them aside, then did the same with his own. When they were both naked, Ilya took a moment to just look. Shane spread out on their sheets, flushed and wanting, one hand unconsciously resting over his stomach where their baby was growing.

"You're so beautiful," Ilya said, voice rough with emotion. "Always beautiful, but now—" He couldn't find the words in English. "Прекрасный," he tried in Russian. Beautiful. Perfect. Mine.

Shane's cheeks went even redder. "I'm not showing yet. There's nothing to see."

"I can see." Ilya crawled over him, settling between his legs. "I can see everything."

He started with Shane's mouth, kissing him until Shane was squirming beneath him. Then he moved lower—pressing kisses to Shane's jaw, his neck, his collar bones. He paid special attention to Shane's chest, licking and sucking at his nipples until Shane was gasping and arching up into him.

"Ilya, please—"

"Shh. Let me." Ilya kissed his way down Shane's stomach, feeling the slight softness there. He pressed his lips to Shane's belly button, then lower still, mouthing over the barely-visible muscle definition.

When he reached Shane's cock—hard and flushed and leaking against his stomach—Ilya bypassed it entirely. Shane made a frustrated sound.

"Ilya—"

"Not yet." Ilya pushed Shane's legs wider, settling between them. "Want to open you up first. Want to take my time."

He reached for the lube on their nightstand, warming it between his fingers. Shane's legs fell open automatically, and Ilya felt his heart clench at the trust in that gesture. After everything—after two years of trying, after all the disappointment—Shane still trusted him like this.

Ilya pressed one slick finger inside, watching Shane's face carefully. Shane's eyes fluttered closed, his mouth falling open on a soft moan. Ilya worked him slowly, thoroughly, adding a second finger and then a third. Shane was loose and wet by the time Ilya pulled his fingers out, his hole clenching around nothing.

"Please," Shane gasped. "Please, I need—"

"I know what you need." Ilya slicked himself up, positioning himself at Shane's entrance. "I've always known."

He pushed inside slowly, inch by inch, watching Shane's face. The stretch was always intense—Ilya's knot made him thick even when it wasn't swollen—and he gave Shane time to adjust. When he was finally seated fully inside, they both groaned.

"God," Shane breathed. "You feel so good. Always so good."

Ilya started moving, setting a slow, deep rhythm. Each thrust was deliberate, purposeful, angled to make Shane feel every inch. He watched his husband's face, cataloguing every expression—the flutter of his eyelashes, the part of his lips, the flush spreading down his chest.

"I love you," Ilya said, the words falling from his lips like a prayer. "Love you so much. You're everything to me."

Shane's eyes opened, meeting Ilya's, and the emotion in them made Ilya's chest tight. "I love you too," he gasped. "Love you, love you—"

Ilya's hand moved between them, wrapping around Shane's cock and stroking in time with his thrusts. Shane's back arched, a broken moan tearing from his throat. His hands scrabbled at Ilya's shoulders, looking for purchase.

"That's it," Ilya encouraged. "Let me see you. Let me see you come apart."

He picked up the pace slightly, still careful but more insistent. His knot was starting to swell, and he could feel Shane's body responding to it, clenching around him. Shane was making these desperate little sounds now, high and needy.

"Ilya, *I'm*—I'm gonna—"

"Yes, sweetheart. Come for me. Let me see."

Shane came with a shout, his whole body going taut as he spilled over Ilya's hand and his own stomach. The sight and the feeling of Shane clenching around him pushed Ilya over the edge. His knot swelled fully, locking them together as his orgasm crashed through him.

He ground deep, as deep as he could get, and came with Shane's name on his lips.

They lay there afterward, locked together and panting. Ilya's hand moved back to Shane's stomach, and Shane covered it with his own.

"Our baby," Shane whispered, and his voice was full of wonder now. The fear had receded, leaving only joy. "We made a baby."

"Yes." Ilya pressed his forehead to Shane's, their breath mingling between them. "We made a baby. And in seven-and-a-half months, we're going to meet them."

Shane's laugh was watery but genuine. "God, I hope so. I hope—"

"No more worrying tonight," Ilya interrupted gently. "Tonight, we just celebrate. Tomorrow we can worry. But tonight—tonight we're just happy."

Shane nodded, and when he smiled, it was bright enough to rival the sun. "Yeah. Yeah, okay."

Ilya kissed him again, soft and sweet, and held him close as his knot slowly deflated. When they could finally separate, Shane immediately curled into Ilya's side, one hand still protectively over his stomach.

"Thank you," Shane murmured, already starting to drift. The emotional exhaustion was catching up with him. "For everything. For doing this with me."

"Always," Ilya promised, pulling the sheets up over them both. "Always and forever. You, me, and now—" His hand joined Shane's on his stomach. "Now our baby."

Shane's answering smile was sleepy but content. "Our family."

"Our family," Ilya agreed.

He watched as Shane's eyes drifted closed, his breathing evening out into sleep. His husband looked peaceful now, the panic from earlier completely gone. In the soft light of their den, with Shane's scent—sweet and warm and pregnant—surrounding them, Ilya felt something settle in his chest.

This was real. After two years of trying, of hoping, of heartbreak—it had finally happened. Shane was pregnant with their baby.

And no matter what came next—no matter how hard it might be, no matter the risks—they would face it together.

Just like they always had.

Ilya pressed one more kiss to Shane's temple, then let his own eyes close.

"Thank you," he whispered to the universe, to fate, to whatever force had given them this impossible gift. "Thank you."

And surrounded by the warmth of their nest, with his pregnant husband safe in his arms, Ilya finally let himself believe.

They were going to be *fathers*.

End Notes

Kudos and comments fuel the soul! (And also encourage me to add 200 words to my bitching fic)

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